

2015 ROSE PARADE

Float to honor Tomb of the Unknown Soldier

By Zen Vuong

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PASADENA » Most people in the military protect lives, but Jeff Spangler had a higher honor: He spent three years in the Army guarding the heroic dead.

Spangler, of Los Angeles, was one of the 628 sentinels who has kept 24-hour vigil at the Tomb of the Unknown Soldier in Virginia. For the past 77 years, these guards have stood outside in Arlington National Cemetery even during blizzards and storms.

And on New Year's Day, Spangler will stand in the cold once again. But this time he will ride on the Odd Fellows and Rebekahs Rose Parade float entitled "Always Remember."

As a tomb guard, "what you're doing is protecting those individuals who made the ultimate sacrifice," said Spangler, who is now a Los Angeles Police Department sergeant. "People cry and are very appreciative. Here they lost a buddy. That individual was never recovered and brought home. It's definitely an honor."

"Always Remember" is a 35-foot-long, 16-foot-tall 126th Rose Parade float that is an artistic take on the Tomb of the Unknown Soldier in Virginia. A bald eagle and red-white-and-blue wreath fronts the float, which will have two tomb guards as well as riders from the Air Force,



SARAH REINGEWIRTZ — STAFF PHOTOGRAPHER

Volunteers on Tuesday work on the Odd Fellows and Rebekahs float, which is themed "Always Remember," after the unknown soldier Tuesday.

Army, Coast Guard and Marines.

Congress approved the burial of a World War I soldier in the plaza of the new Memorial Amphitheater in 1921. The tomb, which was not always guarded, sits atop a hill at Arlington National Cemetery and is inscribed with the words, "Here rests in honored glory an American soldier known but to God."

Roberta Prosk, spokeswoman for the Odd Fellows and Rebekahs society, said each year her group goes on a pilgrimage to the Tomb of the Unknown Soldier to honor unsung heroes.

"We recognize what these soldiers have done for us and hold them in high regard," she said in a statement. "Who else or what else has given unselfishly, courageously

and without thought of rewards than the unknown soldiers?"

An unknown soldier from World War I, World War II and the Korean War have been buried in the plaza of the new Memorial Amphitheater in Arlington. An unknown American from the Vietnam War was also buried there once, but he was exhumed in May 1998.

Through DNA testing, Department of Defense scientists determined the man was 1st Lt. Michael Joseph Blassie, who was shot down in Vietnam in 1972. The crypt has remained vacant.

Having unknown soldiers is a thing of the past, Spangler said, because technology makes it highly unlikely that the U.S. military cannot identify its own.