

SP4 Lavern "Vern" Edmund Pax

**U.S. Army, E Company, 1st Battle Group,
3rd Infantry Regiment, also known as the
Sentinels of the Tomb of the Unknowns**

MHS CLASS OF 1953

***Inducted into the St. Marys MHS Alumni Hall of
Fame for Military Service in 2025***



HERE RESTS IN HONORED GLORY AN AMERICAN SOLIDER KNOWN BUT TO GOD"

This inscription is etched on the West panel at the Tomb of the Unknown Soldier in Arlington National Cemetery. Standing watch at the Tomb 24 hours a day, seven days a week, is a Sentinel or honor guard. It is considered the hardest and rarest of jobs in the Army, with a strict schedule

and even stricter requirements for a soldier to be hand-picked to serve. One such soldier, SP4 Lavern E. Pax, a 1953 graduate of St. Marys MHS, attained this honor and served as a Sentinel for 18 months in 1957 and 1958.

Lavern was born November 17, 1935, the 11th of 15 children to Edmund J. and Frances K. Meyer Pax. In high school, he was active in Future Farmers of America and played varsity football and basketball. After graduating in 1953, Vern worked at Goodyear Tire & Rubber Company for several years. He received notice that he was about to be drafted, so he enlisted in the Army on October 1, 1956, at the age of 20. He completed 16 weeks of Basic Training with the 9th Infantry Division at Fort Carson, Colorado. There, a colonel picked him out as a possible Sentinel based on his physical attributes. He passed a series of rigorous interviews, met the demanding physical height and weight requirements, and was selected to walk the Army's top post at Fort Meyer, Virginia – the residence of Army Chief of Staff Maxwell D. Taylor. This assignment was a two-week trial to see if he was a good fit to guard the Tomb. During this time, Vern – like others who seek to be a Sentinel – was required to memorize the

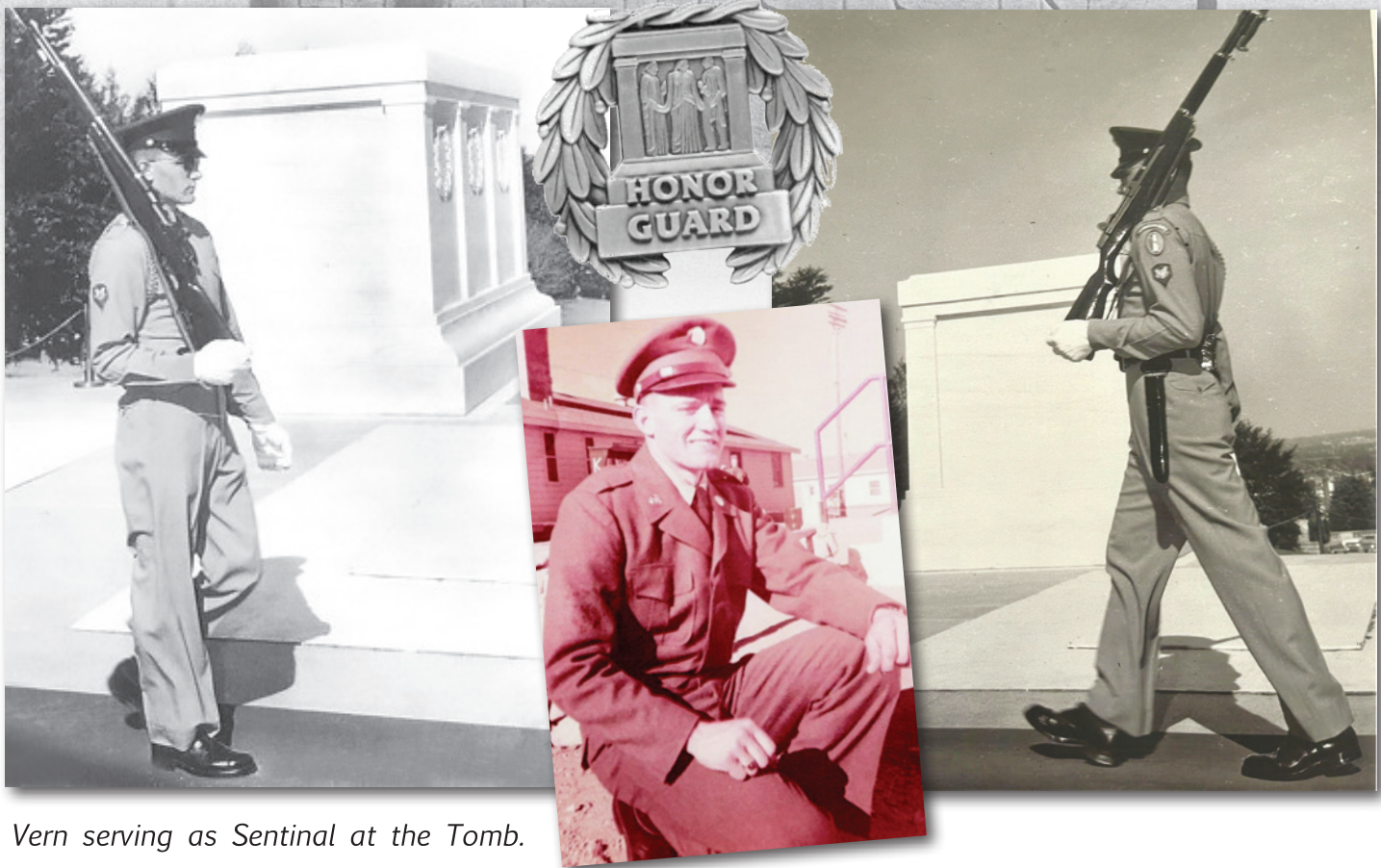


*Vern's MHS Basketball
photo from the 1953
yearbook.*



*Vern's Senior
Portrait in the
MHS Mirror.*

Lavern "Vern"
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Vern serving as Sentinel at the Tomb.

Arlington National Cemetery history and repeat all seven pages of the history verbatim. If an applicant passed this trial period, they were granted a ceremonial walk.

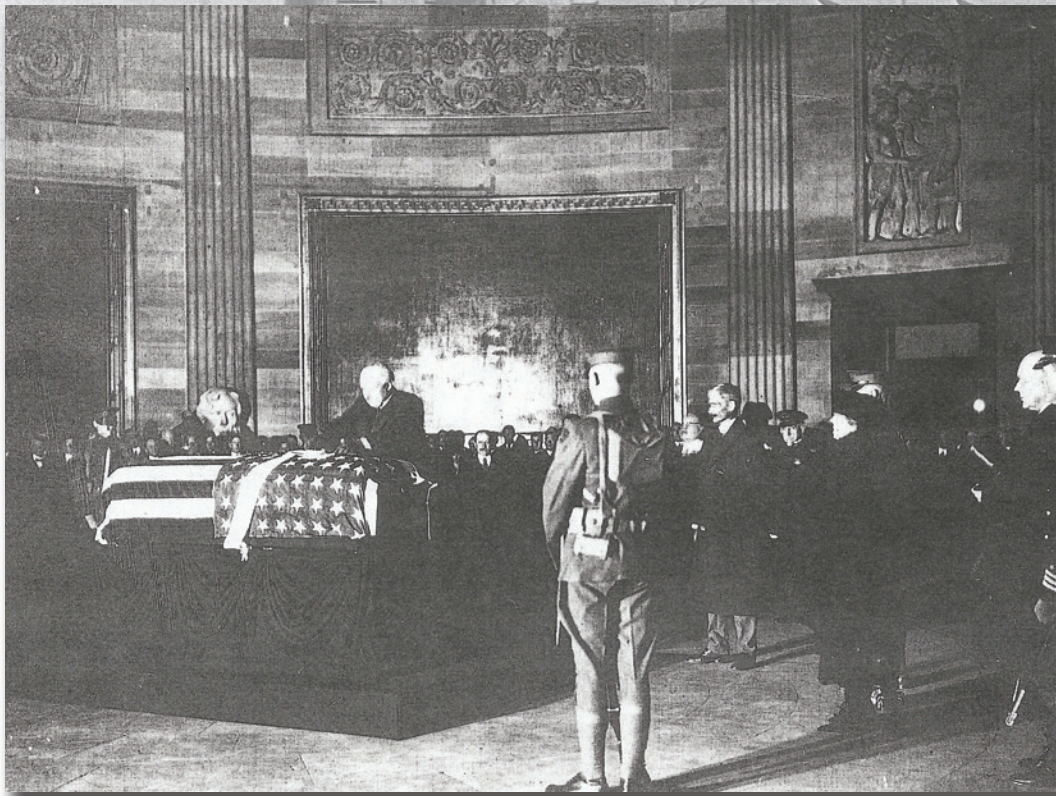
Many soldiers aspire to be a Sentinel, yet there have been fewer than 700 who have been selected since the Army began guarding the Tomb of the Unknown Soldier in 1926. This is approximately ten soldiers a year who earn this highest of honors. To be a Sentinel, a soldier must be between 5'10" and 6'4" tall and their waist must be no more than 30 inches. In addition, the soldier must have an unblemished record. They undergo rigorous, extensive training to learn the steps and cadences of the walk and the ceremony of changing of the guard. In addition, they learn how to take care of their uniforms to this unit's high standard, learn the location of hundreds of graves at Arlington National Cemetery, pass difficult tests about the history of the cemetery and memorize dozens of pages of facts. Throughout the training process, most soldiers washout or fail, and they are sent back to their Company. Only 20% of applicants are accepted.

SP3 LaVern E. Pax passed these difficult, intense requirements. He later told a reporter that, "I was always going hard. I tried to be No. 1." ("Local



Visitors number close to four million each year at the Tomb of the Unknown Soldier.

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On November 9, 1921 President Warren G. Harding placed a wreath on the casket lying in state in the Capitol Rotunda of an unknown soldier from World War I.. This event established and dedicated the Tomb of the Unknown Soldier.

2, 1957, working a rigorous 24-hour shift, standing guard six times over the course of 24 hours followed by two days off.

After serving nine months as a Sentinel at the Tomb, SP3 Pax was awarded the second least awarded badge in the Army, the Tomb Guard Identification Badge. It is considered one of the rarest and most difficult badges that a soldier can be awarded. The Tomb Guard Badge is worn on

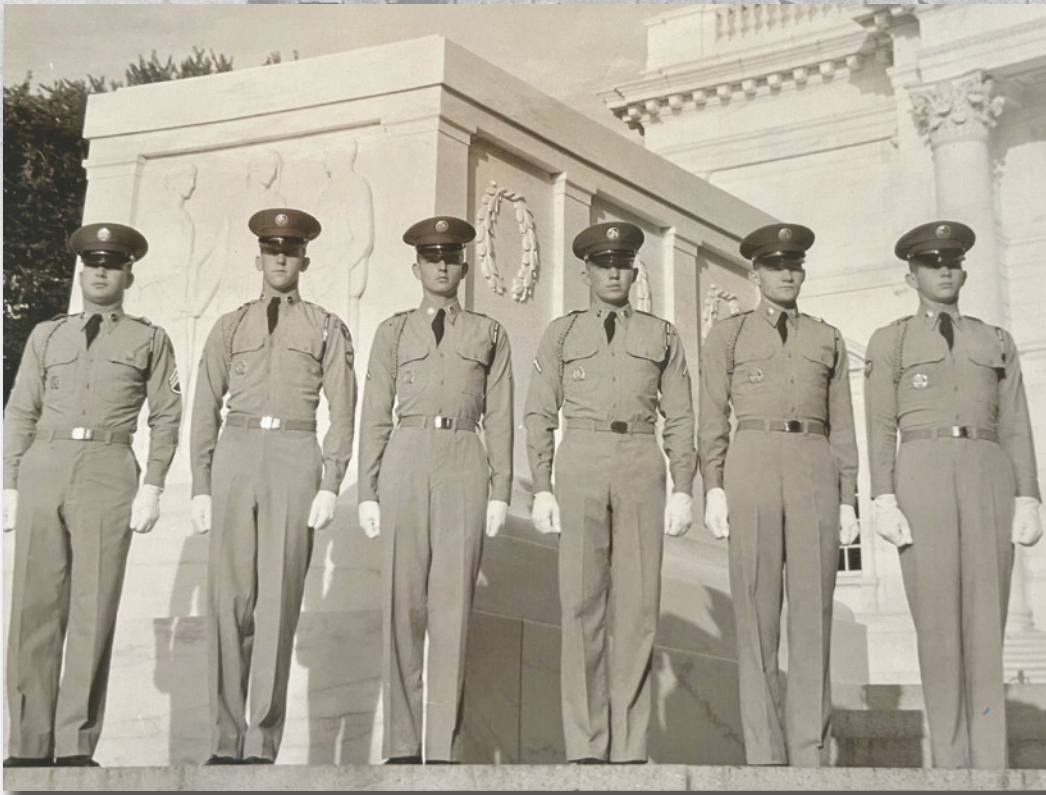


SP3 Pax receiving the Tomb Guard Badge.

man will make tomb walk once more," The Daily Standard, May 24, 2008) He stood 6 foot tall, weighed 185 pounds, and had a blemish-free service record. He was officially made a member of an elite unit known as "The Old Guard," 1st Battle Group, 3rd Infantry assigned to Fort Meyer, Virginia, in March 1957. He later stated that, "I figured my chances of being selected were about 1 in a million." ("Local man will make tomb walk once more," The Daily Standard, May 24, 2008) He began his first assignment as a Sentinel on April

the right breast pocket of the uniform jacket. As a Sentinel, Pax walked 21 steps, turned and faced the Tomb for 21 seconds, then turned to face back down the mat, changed the weapon to the outside shoulder, mentally count off 21 seconds, then step off for another 21-step walk down the mat. This is repeated over and over until the Guard Change ceremony begins. During one hour, the Sentinel walks the mat 42 times. Each step must be 30 inches each keeping the bayoneted rifle on the shoulder away from the Tomb. In the summer months, the Guard Change occurs every 30 minutes. During the winter, it

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Vern with fellow guards. He is pictured second from right.

occurs every hour, and every two hours when the cemetery is closed. They cannot talk to visitors, and they are not permitted to smile or express emotion while standing guard.

On Memorial Day 1958, Sentinel Pax became part of history, standing next to the President and Vice President of the United States and 200 Medal of Honor recipients at a dedication ceremony to World War II and Korean soldiers. SP3 Pax was personally selected to serve as the honor guard out of the twelve soldiers in the honor guard unit.

It was an incredible honor. Pax stood guard as President Eisenhower placed a wreath on the two caskets – one representing the unknown soldier in World War II and one representing the unknown soldier in the Korean War. Pax's role is cemented in history as the last soldier to stand guard for the single unknown soldier from World War I, and the first Sentinel to stand guard over all three unknown servicemen. His parents and many of his 14 brothers and sisters attended the ceremony, and they were undoubtedly proud of SP3 Pax for being selected for this singular honor.

Vern was interviewed decades later about the 1958 Memorial Day ceremony and recalled that the caskets were carried from the Capitol by caissons with thousands of people along the route. It was hot that day, and some observers had to be treated for the heat. Pax said: *"The honor guard unit is accustomed to being out in all kinds of weather – blazing heat, freezing cold, pelting rain, blowing snow and stinging sleet.... Those things don't matter because it's such an honor to walk those hallowed grounds."*

(*"Local man will make tomb walk once more," The Daily Standard, May 24, 2008*)

Vern served 18 months as a Sentinel, completing his last day of service on October 2, 1958. After being honorably discharged from the Army as a SP4, he returned



**Lavern "Vern"
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The Pax family.



Lavern & Shirley Pax.

home to St. Marys and became an insurance agent with Nationwide Insurance Company in 1959. He married Shirley Fischbach on May 6, 1961, and they raised three children in St. Marys -Renee, Dana, and Eric. In 1969, Vern qualified for

membership in the Presidents Club, the highest honor accorded by Nationwide Insurance to an agent. He retired after 32 and a half years, and he and his wife moved to Pickerington, Ohio to be closer to their children and grandchildren.



Vern with his grandchildren.

In 2008, Pax was given another honor – to lay a wreath at the Tomb of the Unknown Soldiers in two separate ceremonies to commemorate the 50th anniversary of the 1958 interment of unknown soldiers from World War II and the Korean War. A 50-member delegation of his family and friends attended the wreath laying ceremony, including his children and some of his grandchildren who assisted with the wreath laying honors. His nephew, Captain Jerry Leugers, was stationed with the U.S. Navy at the Pentagon at the time and hosted his extended family.

SP4 Pax passed away on May 7, 2022, at the age of 86. He was laid to rest at Holy Cross Cemetery in Pataskala, Ohio. The Society of the Honor Guard, Tomb of the Unknown Soldier, noted his passing, posting, “Rest in Peace brother, we have the watch.”

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