

Imperial Palace Guards, An Elite Unit

The Imperial Palace Guards is a small unit comprising only 843 guardsmen, but is a colorful combination of horses, motorcycles, police bands and even firemen. A newly appointed foreign envoy proceeding to the Imperial Palace in a horse-drawn carriage guarded by mounted Palace Guards in full dress is a familiar sight in Tokyo.

These Palace Guards had been under the jurisdiction of Home Ministry before 1945, but they are now under the National Public Safety Commission. Selection of the guards is a strict affair, and only one out of every ten applicants passes the screening. Since their assignments cover a wide range, they are trained to do any job under

any circumstances in addition to their principal duties.

Veteran guardsmen with 10 years of service or more are found particularly in the First Guard and Second Guard Sections, which are directly assigned to the protection of all members of the Imperial Family. The personnel of these two sections are judo experts who hold black-belt ranks of the 5th Grade or above. They are also well trained in horseback-riding, tennis, skiing, rowing, etc. One of them, Guardsmen Hiroshi Wada, represented Japan in the modern pentathlon event at the 1960 Olympic Games in Rome. It is expected that a Palace guardsmen will be among the Japanese participants in this event at the forthcoming Tokyo Olympics.

* * *