

Chapter 4

Customs, Courtesies, and Traditions

The Army is an organization that instills pride in its members because of its history, mission, capabilities, and the respect it has earned in the service of the Nation. A reflection of that pride is visible in the customs, courtesies, and traditions the Army holds. Adherence to them connects us with soldiers throughout America's history.

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For more information on Customs, Courtesies and Traditions see Army Regulation 600-20, *Army Command Policy*, paragraph 4-3; AR 600-25, *Salutes, Honors and Visits of Courtesy*; DA Pam 600-60, *A Guide to Protocol and Etiquette*; and FM 3-21.5, *Drill and Ceremonies*.

For more information on Department of the Army policy for unit and individual flags, guidons, and streamers see AR 840-10, *Heraldic Activities—Flags, Guidons, Streamers, Tabards, and Automobile and Aircraft Plates*.

CUSTOMS

4-1. The Army has its own customs, both official and social. Some have been handed down from the distant past while others are of comparatively recent origin. Those customs that endure stand on their own merits. As a long established social organization, the Army observes a number of customs that add to the interest, pleasure, and graciousness of Army life.

Often it is these customs and traditions, strange to the civilian eye but solemn to the soldier, that keep the man in the uniform going in the unexciting times of peace. In war they keep him fighting at the front. The fiery regimental spirit fondly polished over decades and centuries possesses him in the face of the enemy. [The soldier] fights for the regiment, his battalion, his company, his platoon, his section, his comrade.

4-2. A custom is an established practice. Customs include positive actions—things you do, and taboos—things you avoid. All established arts, trades, and professions, all races of people, all nations, and even different sections of the same nation have their own practices and customs by which they govern a part of their lives.

4-3. Many Army customs compliment procedures required by military courtesy, while others add to the graciousness of garrison life. The breach of some Army customs merely brands the offender as ignorant, careless, or ill bred. Violations of other Army customs, however, will bring official censure or disciplinary action. The customs of the Army are its common law. These are a few:

- Never criticize the Army or a leader in public.
- Never go “over the heads” of superiors—don’t jump the chain of command.
- Never offer excuses.
- Never “wear” a superior’s rank by saying something like, “the first sergeant wants this done now,” when in fact the first sergeant said no such thing. Speak with your own voice.
- Never turn and walk away to avoid giving the hand salute.
- Never run indoors or pretend you don’t hear (while driving, for example) to avoid standing reveille or retreat.
- Never appear in uniform while under the influence of alcohol.
- If you don’t know the answer to a superior’s question, you will never go wrong with the response, “I don’t know sir, but I’ll find out.”

COURTESIES

4-4. Courtesy among members of the Armed Forces is vital to maintain discipline. Military courtesy means good manners and politeness in dealing with other people. Courteous behavior provides a basis for developing good human relations. The distinction between civilian and military courtesy is that military courtesy was developed in a military atmosphere and has become an integral part of serving in uniform.

4-5. Most forms of military courtesy have some counterpart in civilian life. For example, we train soldiers to say sir or ma’am when talking to a higher ranking officer. Young men and women are sometimes taught to say sir to their fathers or ma’am to their mothers and likewise to other elders. It is often considered good manners for a younger person to say sir or ma’am when speaking to an older person. The use of the word sir is also common in the business world, such as in the salutation of a letter or in any well-ordered institution.

4-6. Military courtesy is not a one-way street. Enlisted personnel are expected to be courteous to officers and likewise officers are expected to return the courtesy. Mutual respect is a vital part of military courtesy. In

the final analysis, military courtesy is the respect shown to each other by members of the same profession. Some of the Army's more common courtesies include rendering the hand salute, standing at attention or parade rest, or even addressing others by their rank.

THE HAND SALUTE

4-7. The salute is not simply an honor exchanged. It is a privileged gesture of respect and trust among soldiers. Remember the salute is not only prescribed by regulation but is also recognition of each other's commitment, abilities, and professionalism.

4-8. Some historians believe the hand salute began in late Roman times when assassinations were common. A citizen who wanted to see a public official had to approach with his right hand raised to show that he did not hold a weapon. Knights in armor raised visors with the right hand when meeting a comrade. This practice gradually became a way of showing respect and, in early American history, sometimes involved removing the hat. By 1820, the motion was modified to touching the hat, and since then it has become the hand salute used today. You salute to show respect toward an officer, flag, or our country.

4-9. The salute is widely misunderstood outside the military. Some consider it to be a gesture of servility since the junior extends a salute to the senior, but we know that it is quite the opposite. The salute is an expression that recognizes each other as a member of the profession of arms; that they have made a personal commitment of self-sacrifice to preserve our way of life. The fact that the junior extends the greeting first is merely a point of etiquette—a salute extended or returned makes the same statement.

The Salute

1LT Thompson and his platoon's newest NCO, SGT Jemison, were walking toward the orderly room one morning. As they turned the corner and approached the building, PFC Robertson walked out carrying a large box. PFC Robertson said, "Good morning, sir," and kept walking past the two. As his hands were occupied, he didn't salute.

But 1LT Thompson saluted and replied with the unit motto, "First Tank!"

After the soldier had passed, SGT Jemison asked the lieutenant why he saluted since the soldier did not.

"He did by rendering the greeting of the day. If I had been carrying something and he wasn't, he would have saluted. It's a privilege, not a chore," said 1LT Thompson. "It's just as important for me to return a salute as for a soldier to render it."

4-10. The way you salute says a lot about you as a soldier. A proud, smart salute shows pride in yourself and your unit and that you are confident in your abilities as a soldier. A sloppy salute might mean that you're ashamed

of your unit, lack confidence, or at the very least, that you haven't learned how to salute correctly.

4-11. In saluting, turn your head and eyes toward the person or flag you are saluting. Bring your hand up to the correct position in one, smart motion without any preparatory movement. When dropping the salute, bring your hand directly down to its natural position at your side, without slapping your leg or moving your hand out to the side. Any flourish in the salute is improper.

4-12. The proper way to salute when wearing the beret or without headgear is to raise your right hand until the tip of your forefinger touches the outer edge of your right eyebrow (just above and to the right of your right eye). When wearing headgear, the forefinger touches the headgear slightly above and to the right of your right eye. Your fingers are together, straight, and your thumb snug along the hand in line with the fingers. Your hand, wrist, and forearm are straight, forming a straight line from your elbow to your fingertips. Your upper arm (elbow to shoulder) is horizontal to the ground.

4-13. All soldiers in uniform are required to salute when they meet and recognize persons entitled (by grade) to a salute except when it is inappropriate or impractical (in public conveyances such as planes and buses, in public places such as inside theaters, or when driving a vehicle). A salute is also rendered:

- When the United States National Anthem, "To the Color," "Hail to the Chief," or foreign national anthems are played.
- To uncased National Color outdoors.
- On ceremonial occasions such as changes of command or funerals.
- At reveille and retreat ceremonies, during the raising or lowering of the flag.
- During the sounding of honors.
- When pledging allegiance to the US flag outdoors.
- When turning over control of formations.
- When rendering reports.
- To officers of friendly foreign countries.

4-14. Salutes are not required when:

- Indoors, unless reporting to an officer or when on duty as a guard.
- A prisoner.
- Saluting is obviously inappropriate. In any case not covered by specific instructions, render the salute.
- Either the senior or the subordinate is wearing civilian clothes.

4-15. In general, you don't salute when you are working (for example, under your vehicle doing maintenance), indoors (except when reporting), or when saluting is not practical (carrying articles with both hands, for

example). A good rule of thumb is this: if you are outdoors and it is practical to salute, do so. Outdoors includes theater marquees, shelters over gas station pumps, covered walkways, and other similar shelters that are open on the sides.

OTHER COURTESIES

4-16. Military courtesy shows respect and reflects self-discipline. Consistent and proper military courtesy is an indicator of unit discipline, as well. Soldiers demonstrate courtesy in the way we address officers or NCOs of superior rank. Some other simple but visible signs of respect and self-discipline are as follows:

- When talking to an officer of superior rank, stand at attention until ordered otherwise.
- When you are dismissed, or when the officer departs, come to attention and salute.
- When speaking to or being addressed a noncommissioned officer of superior rank, stand at parade rest until ordered otherwise.
- When an officer of superior rank enters a room, the first soldier to recognize the officer calls personnel in the room to attention but does not salute. A salute indoors is rendered only when reporting.
- When an NCO of superior rank enters the room, the first soldier to recognize the NCO calls the room to "At ease."
- Walk on the left of an officer or NCO of superior rank.
- When entering or exiting a vehicle, the junior ranking soldier is the first to enter, and the senior in rank is the first to exit.
- When outdoors and approached by an NCO, you greet the NCO by saying, "Good morning, Sergeant," for example.
- The first person who sees an officer enter a dining facility gives the order "At ease," unless a more senior officer is already present. Many units extend this courtesy to senior NCOs, also.
- When you hear the command "At ease" in a dining facility, remain seated, silent and continue eating unless directed otherwise.

4-17. When you report to an officer of superior rank, approach the officer to whom you are reporting and stop about two steps from him, assuming the position of attention. Give the proper salute and say, for example, "Sir, Private Smith reports." If you are indoors, use the same procedures as above, except remove your headgear before reporting. If you are armed, however, do not remove your headgear.

Parade Rest

PV2 Robbs was new to the company and was on his way to see SGT Putnam, his section leader, for reception and integration counseling. SFC Stone, the platoon sergeant was present to monitor the counseling.

PV2 Robbs entered the room and immediately assumed the position of parade rest but before he could report, SGT Putnam said, "You don't have to do that."

But SFC Stone interjected, "Go ahead and stay at parade rest, Private, you're doing the right thing." He continued, "You both need to know we don't want to lower any standards, here. Standing at parade rest is what junior enlisted soldiers do when speaking with or being addressed by an NCO. And by the way, Sergeant, we NCOs stand at parade rest when speaking with NCOs of superior rank. Besides, you know the proper command would be 'at ease,' 'stand at ease,' or 'carry on.' OK?"

"Hooah, Sergeant Stone," said SGT Putnam and turned back to PV2 Robbs. "Welcome, Private Robbs. This is a great unit to soldier in..."

4-18. A soldier addressing a higher ranking officer uses the word sir or ma'am in the same manner as a polite civilian speaking with a person to whom he wishes to show respect. In the military service, the matter of who says sir or ma'am to whom is clearly defined; in civilian life it is largely a matter of discretion. In the case of NCOs and soldiers, we address them by their rank because they've earned that rank.

4-19. Simple courtesy is an important indicator of a person's bearing, discipline, and manners. It is a fact that most people respond positively to genuine politeness and courtesy. Walk down a street in most towns and cities and see the response you get from people when you just say "good morning." It is no different for soldiers. Some units substitute the greeting with their unit motto, such as "Deeds, not Words," or "Keep up the Fire." These reiterate pride in the unit and demonstrate the discipline and professionalism of a unit's soldiers.

When I walk up to a soldier he should go to parade rest. Not because I'm better than he is, but because he respects who he is and who I am based on what we both do. It's professionalism.

SMA Jack L. Tilley

RENDERING HONOR TO THE FLAG

4-20. The flag of the United States is the symbol of our nation. The union, white stars on a field of blue, is the honor point of the flag. The union of the flag and the flag itself, when in company with other flags, are always given the honor position, which is on the right. The rules for displaying the flag are contained in AR 840-10, *Heraldic Activities—Flags, Guidons, Streamers, Tabards, and Automobile and Aircraft Plates*. Some of the rules for displaying the flag are as follows: