CHAPTER 5: MILITARY CUSTOMS & COURTESIES

GENERAL

Military courtesy is simply the display of good manners and politeness in dealing with other people. Military courtesy conveys respect from both subordinate and senior to each other.

HISTORY OF THE MILITARY SALUTE

Men of arms have used some form of the military salute as an exchange of greeting since the earliest times. It has been preserved and its use continued in all modern armies which inherit their military traditions from the age of chivalry. The method of rendering the salute has varied through the ages, as it still varies in form between the armies of the world today.

In the age of chivalry the knights were all mounted and wore steel armor which covered the body completely, including the head and face. When two friendly knights met, it was the custom for each to raise the visor and expose his face to view of the other. This was always done with the right hand, the left being used to hold the reins. It was significant gesture of friendship and confidence, since it exposed the features and also removed the right hand - the sword hand - from the vicinity of the weapon. Also, in ancient times the freemen (soldiers) of Europe were allowed to carry arms; when two freemen met, each would raise his right hand to show that he held no weapons and that the meeting was a friendly one. Slaves were not allowed to carry arms, and they passed freemen without the exchange of a greeting. In the Middle Ages, gentlemen often went about clothed in heavy capes under which swords were carried. Upon meeting a friend, the cloak was thrown back by raising the right arm, thus disclosing that the right hand was not on the sword hilt. The civilian counterpart of the salutes manifested in various ways such as raising the hand when greeting a friend, tipping the hat when meeting a lady, and using a sign of recognition between lodge members. This sign is always exchanged as a greeting between friends and is given willingly.

The military salute is given in the same manner - that of pride in giving recognition to a comrade in the honorable profession of arms. The knightly gesture, of raising the hand to the visor came to be recognized as the proper greeting between soldiers, and was continued even after modern firearms had made steel body armor a thing of the past. The military salute is today, as it seems always to have been, a unique form of greeting between military professionals.

RENDERING THE HAND SALUTE

When on campus and in uniform, cadets will salute all cadet officers and cadre officers of all services. It is appropriate to accompany the salute with a word of greeting, for example, “Good morning, sir.”

Below are examples of situations where you would salute:

- When walking outdoors in uniform and you approach a cadet officer or cadre officer.
- When outdoors in uniform and when the American Flag is being raised or lowered.
- When in uniform, a cadet reporting to an officer in his office, will make his presence at the door known, enter when permission is given, come to attention, salute and state his/her name.
Example: “Sir, Cadet Jones reports.” He/she will remain at the position of attention until given “At ease.” Upon completion of his business, the cadet will come to attention, salute, do an about face and leave.

- When an officer (to include cadet officer in uniform) approaches a uniformed group outside, the first cadet to recognize the officer will call “Attention” and all cadets will salute and remain at attention until given “At ease”, “Rest”, “Carry on”, another command, or until the officer passes.

- If cadets are performing a work detail, only the person in charge will come to attention and salute. The detail will continue to work.

- When in formation and an officer (to include cadet officer in uniform) approaches, the person in charge calls the formation to attention and salute.

**Salutes are not rendered in the following areas or cases:**

- Indoors, salutes are not exchanged except when reporting to a senior officer.

- When actively engaged in sports or in the middle of training.

- When operating a vehicle.

**USE OF “SIR” and “SERGEANT”**

All cadre and cadet officers are addressed as “SIR”/”MA’AM”. As a general rule, “Sir”/”Ma’am” is used in speaking either officially or socially to any senior. The word is repeated with each complete statement. “Yes” and “No” should always be accompanied with “Sir”/”Ma’am”. All NCOs will be addressed as “Sergeant” with the exception of the First Sergeant and Sergeant Major. They will be addressed by their title.

**THE SENIOR’S PLACE OF HONOR**

Another ancient military custom dictates that you should always walk or sit to the left of your seniors. For centuries men fought with swords, and because most men are right handed, the heaviest fighting occurred on the right. The shield was on the left arm, and the left side became defensive. Men and units who preferred to carry the battle to the enemy, and who were proud of their fighting ability, considered the right of a battle line to a post of honor. Therefore, when an officer walks or sits on your right, he is symbolically filling the post of honor.

**ATTENTION**

When an officer enters a room occupied by enlisted personnel or cadets, the room is called to attention. It is not proper, however, for officers to follow this custom at the approach of a senior officer. The question then is how to get officers to attention without the command. Generally, this is accomplished by the individual officers assuming the position of attention when appropriate or one officer announcing the presence of the senior and the other officers then assuming the position of attention. For example, if the classroom were filled only with cadet officers and the PMS entered the room, one of the cadet
officers would announce, “Gentlemen, the Professor of Military Science.” likewise, when speaking to an officer, soldiers and cadets will stand at attention until instructed otherwise by the officer.

PARADE REST

Like “Attention”, Parade Rest is a form of respect given to NCOs by those junior in rank. When a Senior NCO enters an area of junior enlisted soldiers or cadets, the room is called to “at ease”. All personnel should immediately go to the position of “stand at-ease” until told to “carry-on”. Likewise, when speaking to an NCO, soldiers junior in rank or cadets, will maintain the position of “parade rest” until instructed to “stand at ease”, “at ease”, or “rest”/relax.

COURTESY TO THE FLAG AND NATIONAL ANTHEM

When the National Anthem or its counterpart in field music, “To The Colors” is played, when the flag is passing in a parade, when the flag is raised at reveille and when the flag is lowered at retreat, cadets in uniform should face the flag (or music if the flag is not visible) and render a hand salute.

FLAGS

The flag of the United States, national colors, and national standard are not dipped by way of salute or compliment. An exception to this is the rule followed by naval vessels when, upon receiving a salute of this type from a vessel registered by a nation formally recognized by the United States, the compliment must be returned.

The organizational colors or standard may be dipped in salute in all military ceremonies while the National Anthem, "To the Colors", or a foreign national anthem is being played, and when giving honors to the organizational commander, an individual of higher grade including foreign dignitaries of higher grade, but not otherwise.

The U.S. Army flag is considered an organizational color and is also dipped when the National Anthem, "To the Colors", or a foreign national anthem is being played. It is also dipped when giving honors to the Chief of Staff of the U.S. Army, his direct representative, or an individual of higher grade, including a foreign dignitary of equivalent or higher grade, but in no other case.

"Flag" is a general descriptive term for a cloth device with a distinguishing color or design, which has a special meaning or serves as a signal. The flag of the United States, the white flag of truce, and weather flags are examples.

In the military service, the color is a flag of a dismounted unit; an ensign is a national flag; a pennant is a small triangular flag usually flown for identification of a unit; a standard is a flag of a mounted unit; and a guidon is a swallow-tailed flag carried by Army units for identification, especially in drills and ceremonies.

THE FLAG OF THE UNITED STATES

The flag of the United States is displayed at all Army installations. No more than one national flag is flown at any one time. The flag of the United States represents the Union—the 50 stars on a field of
blue. The field is always to the left of the observer because it is the "field of honor," that is, on the right, the sword arm side.

The flag of the United States should never be used as part of a costume or dress or on a vehicle or float unless it is attached as to a staff, nor should it ever be displayed as drapery. Bunting—strips of cloth in the colors of the flag—is used for draping and decoration in general. No lettering or any other kind of object should ever be placed on the United States flag, and its use in any form of advertising is discouraged. Soiled, torn, or weathered flags should be burned. On Army installations, there are three different sizes of U.S. flags flown:

- **Post Flag.** This flag is flown in fair weather, except on those occasions when the garrison flag is prescribed. Its dimensions are 19 feet fly by 10 feet hoist.

- **Garrison Flag.** This flag is flown only on holidays and important occasions. Its dimensions are 38 feet fly by 20 feet hoist

- **Storm Flag.** This flag is flown in lieu of the post flag in inclement weather. It is also used to drape caskets at a military funeral. Its dimensions are 9 1/4 feet fly by 5 feet hoist.

When the U.S. flag and the flags of other nations are flown from staffs, the U.S. Flag is always displayed at the right end of the line. It is hoisted first and lowered last. In a group of flags consisting of state, society, or city flags, the U.S. flag should be placed in the center of the arrangement at the highest point.

**Reveille.** At every installation garrisoned by troops other than caretaking detachments, the flag is hoisted at the sound of the first note of reveille.

**Retreat.** At the last note of retreat, a gun is fired if the ceremony is on a military installation, at which time the band, drum and bugle corps, or bugler plays the National Anthem or sounds "To the Colors", and the flag is lowered. The lowering of the flag is regulated so as to be completed at the last note of the music. The same respect is observed by all military personnel whether the national anthem is played or "To the Color" is sounded.

**Flag Detail.** Generally, a flag detail consists of one NCOIC, two halyard pullers, and two to eight flag handlers. The purpose of the flag handlers is to ensure correct folding and unfolding of the flag and to ensure that the flag does not touch the ground. Two flag handlers are needed when raising or lowering the storm flag; six handlers, for the post flag; and eight handlers, for the garrison flag. Members of the flag detail are equipped according to local standing operating procedure and letter of instructions. During the ceremony, the NCOIC inconspicuously gives the necessary commands or directives to ensure proper performance by the flag detail. On windy days, the NCOIC may assist the flag handlers to secure or fold the flag.

**Raising the Flag for Reveille**

- The NCOIC forms the detail in a column of twos at double interval between files. He then secures the flag from the storage area and positions himself between the files and on line with the last two men. He then marches the detail to the flagpole.

- The detail is halted in column, facing the flagpole on the downwind side. It is halted so that the flagpole is centered between the halyard pullers. The NCOIC commands *post*. On this command, the
halyard pullers immediately move to the flagpole and ensure that the halyards are free of the pole. The flag handlers face to the center. The NCOIC then directs *unfold the flag*. On this directive, the two flag handlers nearest the NCOIC begin to carefully unfold the flag lengthwise, passing the freed end to the other handlers. When the two handlers nearest the flagpole have firmly secured the flag, the other handlers move away from the flagpole until the flag is fully extended. The flag is not unfolded widthwise. The flag handlers hold the flag waist high with their forearms horizontal to the ground.

- At the appropriate time, the NCOIC directs attach the flag. On this directive, all flag handlers take one side step toward the flagpole. The two handlers nearest the flagpole immediately attach the top of the flag to the halyard. The halyard pullers raise the flag until the bottom of the flag can be attached. When raising larger flags, the NCOIC may command side step, march, and halt while the halyard pullers raise the halyard until the lower portion of the flag is attached.

- At the first note of the music, the reveille gun is fired, and the halyard pullers rapidly raise the flag. The NCOIC salutes. As the flag is raised from the handlers' hands, they face the flagpole and salute. Reveille lasts 20 seconds. At the last note of the music, the NCOIC commands order, arms for himself and the flag handlers while the pullers secure the halyards. The NCOIC then positions himself between the halyard pullers, executes an about face, and commands ready, face. The detail faces in the appropriate direction to depart the flag pole. The NCOIC then marches the detail from the site.

**DISPLAY OF THE U.S. FLAG**

*Following are the proper displays of the U.S. Flag:*

- When displayed over a street the flag should be suspended vertically with the union to the North on an East-West street and to the East on a North-South street.

- When with another flag against a wall with crossed staffs, the U.S. Flag will be on the left as you face the wall looking at the flag. The U.S. Flag will be to the outside.

- When flown at half-staff, it should be first raised to the tip and then lowered back to the half-staff.

- When flown with other flags or pennants on the same halyard, the U.S. Flag will be the highest.

- When carried with other flags, the U.S. Flag will either be out in front or on the right side of the line of march.

- When on stage the U.S. Flag will be on the right side looking out from the stage (the audience will see it to their left side).
U.S. Flag Displayed against the Wall

U.S. Flag Carried with other

U.S. Flag Displayed in Groups with

U.S. Flag Displayed Crossed with another Flag

Folding the U.S. Flag

1. Fold the lower striped section of the flag over the blue field.
2. Fold the folded edge over to meet the open edge.
3. Start a triangular fold by bringing the striped corner of the folded edge to the open edge.
4. Fold the outer point inward parallel with the open edge to form a second triangle.
5. Continue folding until the entire length of the flag is folded into a triangle with only the blue field and margin showing.
6. Tuck the remaining margin into the pocket formed by the folds at the blue field edge of the flag.

The properly folded flag should resemble a cocked hat.