

Lesson 8

American Military Traditions, Customs, and Courtesies



Key Terms

cannon salutes
courtesies
customs
dress
esprit de corps
mess
position of honor
reporting
ruffles and flourishes
salutes
self-propelled
traditions
uncasing
uncovered

What You Will Learn to Do

- Explore the purpose of military traditions, customs, and courtesies

Linked Core Abilities

- Treat self and others with respect

Skills and Knowledge You Will Gain Along the Way

- Distinguish among the types of personal salutes
- Relate Army ranks to their proper titles
- Determine situations requiring a salute
- Identify forms of respect to senior officers
- Define the key words contained in this lesson

Chapter 1

Key Note Terms

traditions – the passing down of elements of a culture (such as knowledge, beliefs, or customs) from one generation to another

customs – A long-established practice followed as a matter of course among people, oftentimes considered an unwritten law or repeated practice

dress – to attire with a certain degree of uniformity; an appearance appropriate or peculiar to a particular time

esprit de corps – the common spirit or feeling of pride found in the members of a group and inspiring enthusiasm, devotion, and strong regard for the honor of the group

salutes – signs or forms of exchange used to greet or to show respect and recognition

cannon salutes – the firing of a salute by a battery of guns or cannons to honor a person of military, national, or civic importance or to honor a significant national event

ruffles and flourishes – a drum and bugle salute, usually to honor military or civil officials

self-propelled – to have the ability within itself to move

Introduction

The purpose of military traditions, customs, and courtesies is to develop pride in the military service and to establish strong bonds of professional and personal friendships—patterns of behavior that enhance the military way of life. This lesson familiarizes you with these traditions, customs, and courtesies.

Traditions and Customs

Two of the more common military **traditions** and **customs** are dress and ceremonies. **Dress** sets the branches of the armed forces (the Army, Air Force, Navy, Marines, and Coast Guard) apart. Each branch has formal, semiformal, black tie, white tie, informal, and casual dress codes appropriate for various occasions and settings. All branches have a standard of dress that they require their members to follow.

Throughout history, military ceremonies represent the pride, discipline, and teamwork of the armed forces. Some of the more common ceremonies include parades, reviews, inspections, occasions that honor and recognize individuals with awards for outstanding service, and formal dining. Ceremonies help preserve tradition and to build **esprit de corps**.

Personal Salutes

Personal **salutes** are honors given to dignitaries, civil officials, and military officials. They include **cannon salutes**, **ruffles and flourishes**, and a march or anthem, depending on the official.

Cannon Salutes

A cannon salute honors civil or military officials from the United States or foreign countries. A commissioned officer directs the firing of the cannons, whether they are towed, **self-propelled**, or tank mounted. The time interval between rounds is three seconds. Usually, the U.S. armed forces does not fire a cannon salute on Sunday, between retreat and reveille, or on national holidays. Independence Day and Memorial Day are exceptions to this rule and have special cannon salutes.

The number of guns fired depends on the position of the official. For example, the military fires a 21-gun salute for the president, members of a reigning royal family, and the chiefs of state of foreign countries. The vice president receives a 19-gun salute, as do ambassadors and the Speaker of the House of Representatives. Secretaries of the Army, Navy, and Air Force, and generals of the Army and Air Force also receive a 19-gun salute.

What is the origin of the 21-gun salute?

The use of gun salutes for military occasions is traced to early warriors who demonstrated their peaceful intentions by placing their weapons in a position that rendered them ineffective. Apparently this custom was universal, with the specific act varying with time and place, depending on the weapons being used. A North African tribe, for example, trailed the points of their spears on the ground to indicate that they did not mean to be hostile.

The tradition of rendering a salute by cannon originated in the 14th century as firearms and cannons came into use. Because these early devices contained only one projectile, discharging them once rendered them ineffective. Originally warships fired seven-gun salutes, the number seven probably selected because of its astrological and biblical significance. Seven planets had been identified and the phases of the moon changed every seven days. The Bible states that God rested on the seventh day after Creation, that every seventh year was sabbatical, and that the seven times seventh year ushered in the jubilee year.

Land batteries, having a greater supply of gunpowder, were able to fire three guns for every shot fired afloat; hence the salute by shore batteries was 21 guns. The multiple of three probably was chosen because of the mystical significance of the number three in many ancient civilizations. Early gunpowder, composed mainly of sodium nitrate, spoiled easily at sea, but it could be kept cooler and drier in land magazines. When potassium nitrate improved the quality of gunpowder, ships at sea adopted the salute of 21 guns.

The 21-gun salute became the highest honor a nation rendered. Varying customs among the maritime powers led to confusion in saluting and return of salutes. Great Britain, the world's preeminent seapower in the 18th and 19th centuries, compelled weaker nations to salute first, and for a time monarchies received more guns than did republics. Eventually, by agreement, the international salute was established at 21 guns, although the United States did not agree on this procedure until August 1875.

The gun salute system of the United States has changed considerably over the years. In 1810, the national salute was defined by the War Department as equal to the number of states in the Union—at that time 17. This salute was fired by all U.S. military installations at 1:00 p.m. (later at noon) on Independence Day. The president also received a salute equal to the number of states whenever he visited a military installation.

In 1842, the presidential salute was formally established at 21 guns. In 1890, regulations designated the national salute as 21 guns and redesignated the traditional Independence Day salute, the "Salute to the Union," equal to the number of states. Fifty guns are also fired on all military installations equipped to do so at the close of the day of the funeral of a president, ex-president, or president-elect.

Today the national salute of 21 guns is fired in honor of a national flag, the sovereign or chief of state of a foreign nation; a member of a reigning royal family; and the president, ex-president, and president-elect of the United States. It is also fired at noon on the day of the funeral of a president, ex-president, or president-elect.

Gun salutes are also rendered to other military and civilian leaders of this and other nations. The number of guns is based on their protocol rank. These salutes are always in odd numbers.

Source: Headquarters, Military District of Washington, *Fact Sheet: Gun Salutes*, May 1969.

When you are in the audience on such an occasion and in uniform, you should render the hand salute as the official party does. When in civilian clothing, you should remove any head covering to salute.

Ruffles and Flourishes

The armed forces plays ruffles and flourishes together—ruffles on drums and flourishes on bugles. The number of ruffles and flourishes also depends on the position of the official. The president; vice president; the secretaries and assistant secretaries of the Army, Navy, and Air Force; cabinet members; and ambassadors all receive four ruffles and flourishes.

Additionally, a military band may play a march or anthem following the ruffles and flourishes as an honor to special officials. For example, the band may play the national anthem or “Hail to the Chief” for the president, ex-presidents, or president-elect; a march for the vice president; the national anthem of the United States or the anthem of another country for ambassadors; and a march for generals, admirals, and most other armed services officials.

Courtesies

Courtesies honor people with actions or words to show respect, authority, and achievement. The use of titles and salutes are two courtesies that honor members of the military.

Titles

One military courtesy is the use of titles to show respect for superiors. When you are talking to someone in the military, address that person by his or her rank. This form of a courtesy is a standard greeting in the military and shows respect for the responsibility that person has earned. Table 1.8.1 shows the correct titles by which you should address most individuals in the U.S. Army.

If you do not know the person’s name, you may address privates as “Soldier,” all medical officers by their rank, male officers as “Sir,” and female officers as “Ma’am.”

Conversation with others in the military should be formal and correct. Use proper titles to show respect and indicate rank. Senior JROTC cadets may address junior JROTC cadets by their first name, but not the other way around.

Saluting

In addition to honoring those senior in rank with a title, the military requires a hand salute in many cases. By properly executing the hand salute, you show respect for those in positions of authority. A sloppy or poorly given salute can mean a number of different problems, including the following:

- **An inappropriate attitude or possible disrespect for a person who deserves the honor**
- **A lack of understanding on how to execute the salute**

Key Note Term

courtesies – acts of politeness or gracious manners; the use of polite gestures or remarks

Table 1.8.1: Proper Titles

Title	How to Address
All Generals	“General”
Colonels and Lieutenant Colonels	“Colonel”
Majors	“Major”
Captains	“Captain”
Lieutenants	“Lieutenant”
Chaplains	“Chaplain”
Cadets	“Mister,” “Miss,” or “Cadet”
Officer Candidates	“Candidate”
Warrant Officers	“Mister” or “Miss”
Sergeant Majors	“Sergeant Major”
First Sergeants	“First Sergeant”
All other Sergeants	“Sergeant”
Corporals	“Corporal”
All Specialists	“Specialist”
Privates and Privates First Class	“Private”

Hand Salute

The hand salute is one of the most recognizable courtesies of the military way of life. Centuries ago, the salute was a greeting that indicated you were not holding a weapon in your hand. Today, it is a way to show respect.

Whom to Salute

You must render the salute to all commissioned and warrant officers. Generally, you do not salute noncommissioned officers or petty officers; however, there are exceptions. For example, when you act as a squad leader, salute your platoon sergeant when making reports.

How to Salute

When a leader who is in charge of a formation commands “*present, arms,*” you should execute a salute. If you are not carrying a rifle, you can give the hand salute in three different ways depending on whether you are wearing headgear, glasses, or both.

- When wearing headgear with a visor (with or without glasses), raise your right hand sharply, fingers and thumb extended and joined, palm facing down. Place the tip of your right forefinger on the rim of the visor slightly to the right of your right eye. Barely turn the outer edge of your hand downward so neither the back of your hand nor the palm is clearly visible from the front. Keep your hand and wrist straight, your elbow inclined slightly forward, and the upper arm horizontal.
- When wearing headgear without a visor, or you are **uncovered**, and without glasses, execute the hand salute in the same manner as previously described except touch the tip of your right forefinger to the forehead near and slightly to the right of your right eyebrow.
- When wearing headgear without a visor, or you are **uncovered**, and with glasses, execute the hand salute in the same manner as above except touch the tip of your right forefinger to that point on the glasses where the temple piece of the frame meets the right edge of your right brow.

Key Note Terms

uncovered – to remove a hat or other headgear; to be bareheaded or without a cover

reporting – presenting oneself to a senior

When **reporting** or rendering a courtesy to an individual, turn your head and eyes toward the person and simultaneously salute. In this situation, execute the actions without command. The subordinate initiates the salute at the appropriate time and terminates it upon acknowledgment.

When to Salute

Military regulations on conduct require you to salute, even when carrying a rifle, when you meet and recognize a person entitled to the honor, except under the following conditions:

- When on public transportation, including buses and trains
- When in public places such as stores and theaters



Figure 1.8.1: Hand salute wearing headgear with a visor

Courtesy of CACI and the US Army.



Figure 1.8.2: Hand salute without a visor or glasses

Courtesy of CACI and the US Army.

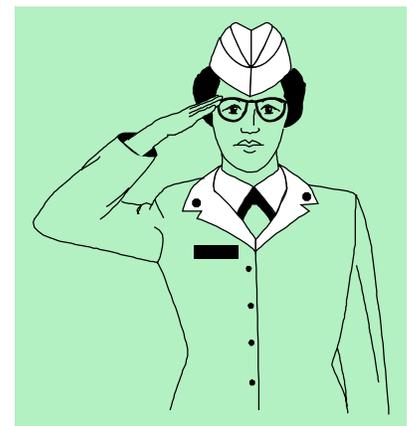


Figure 1.8.3: Hand salute with glasses (without a visor)

Courtesy of CACI and the US Army.

- When giving the salute would be inappropriate or physically impractical (such as when officers are acting as drivers or passengers of civilian vehicles or when both hands are occupied carrying articles)
- While indoors except when reporting to an officer or when on duty as a guard
- When one or both parties are in civilian clothes

Conditions under which you must salute are as follows:

- When you hear the national anthem, “To the Colors,” or “Hail to the Chief” (if you are in uniform)
- When the Colors pass you
- During all official greetings
- During reveille and retreat, when within sight of the flag or the sound of the music and in uniform
- During the rendering/sounding of honors
- When first **uncasing** the Colors or later when casing them
- When pledging allegiance to the flag while outdoors and in uniform. Indoors in uniform requires that you stand at attention and face the flag, but you do not salute. Indoors in civilian clothing requires that you stand at attention, face the flag, and place your right hand over your heart.
- When reporting

Reporting

Reporting is requesting and obtaining permission to speak to a senior officer or being notified that a senior officer wants to speak with you. How you report to that officer may change according to local policy and to the location (in an office or outdoors), situation (under arms), or reason for reporting.

Showing Respect to Senior Officers

When an officer enters an office for the first time each day, the first person to see the officer calls the room to attention. If at any time, another, higher ranking officer enters the office, the first person to see that officer again calls the room to attention. This same practice holds true if an officer enters a barracks; that is, the first person to see the officer calls the room to attention. Everyone rises to attention except those personnel who are on work details; however, they must rise if the officer stops and addresses them directly.

When an officer enters the dining area, the first person to see the officer calls the **mess** to “at ease.” You may remain seated and continue eating unless directed otherwise by the officer. If you are seated at a chair and the officer addresses you directly, rise to attention and respond. If you are seated on a bench, stop eating and sit at attention until the officer has ended the conversation.

Position of Honor

The **position of honor** dictates that those of lower rank walk, sit, or ride to the left of those with senior rank. When entering a vehicle (car or small boat), you should enter first, staying to the left of the officer. When you arrive at your destination and leave the vehicle, the senior officer should exit first.

Key Note Term

uncasing – removing the case from the Colors that are attached to a staff

Key Note Term

mess – a group of persons, usually in the military, who regularly eat meals together; the place where such meals are served

position of honor – a military courtesy of usually keeping senior officers to your right while walking or sitting

Note

The position of honor originated during medieval times when knights fought primarily with their sword in their right hand. Because their left arm held a shield for defense, their right side—the fighting side—was their position of honor.

Conclusion

The pride and respect that come from traditions, customs, and courtesies make for a strong, well-run organization. Taking part in these traditions, customs, and courtesies builds esprit de corps and respect in your organization—indications of what success is all about.

Personal courtesies and good manners are a basic part of military courtesy. By showing proper respect, you gain respect from others and a sense of pride within yourself. Using the proper salutes and actions shows that you are proud of yourself, your unit, and Army JROTC.

Lesson Review

1. Give examples of three common ceremonies.
2. What is the proper form of address to all officers?
3. What is the purpose of the salute?
4. What do you do when a senior officer enters the room?