

Customs and Courtesies

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Published in From One Leader to Another by the Combat Studies Institute in 2013

Dec. 22, 2017



Staff Sgt. Christopher Croslin, 95th Training Division, U.S. Army Reserve, brings a group of Army Reserve Soldiers to present arms during reveille on Fort McCoy, Wisconsin, June 19, 2015. (U.S. Army photo by Sgt. 1st Class Brian Hamilton)

Customs and courtesies have been a part of our Army lifestyle since the beginning of its existence. Like the changing of the guard or staff duty, each generation has added a bit of flavor to an event or custom to make it a little different and relevant for the current time/operating environment, yet upholding to the customs and courtesies that keep our Army and our noncommissioned officer Corps strong. For example, the tradition of commemorating the promotion of a Soldier to the rank of NCO, can be traced back to the Army of Fredrick the Great in the 17th Century.

Before one could be recognized in the full status of a NCO, he or she was required to stand four watches, one every four days. At the first watch, the junior Soldiers of the organization appeared and claimed a gift of bread and brandy from the aspiring NCO. The company NCOs then followed and on the second watch came to claim their gift of beer and tobacco and the first sergeant reserved his visit for the third watch, when he was presented with a glass of wine and a piece of tobacco on a tin plate. It was during the fourth watch that the NCO figuratively crossed the time-honored line and joined the NCO corps. Today, we commemorate this rite of passage as a celebration of the newly promoted joining the ranks of a professional NCO Corps and emphasize and build on the pride we all share as members of such an elite corps. We also serve to honor the memory of those men and women of the NCO corps who have served with pride and distinction.

In ceremonies of the present, all of those items previously described have been replaced so as to reflect the current times but the customs and tradition of the induction remain intact. The Induction is of significant importance because it is the transition from being the led to becoming the leader. However, with the rapid operational tempo of our forces over the last twelve years, these types of ceremonies are not as prevalent as they once were and not given the type of attention as they were in the past. Therefore, the promotion is not given but it is just due. It is up to us, the NCOs, to keep this and other pertinent types of customs and courtesies in front of our Soldiers in order to demonstrate what right looks like.

"Customs and courtesies are important to our NCO Corps as well as the rest of the Army to ensure we remain a professional, self-disciplined, strong, relevant and ready force; full of pride, resourceful and out of the box thinkers."

Another custom is that of the greeting of the day, Army Regulation 600-25 outlines the proper procedures all Soldiers should execute. The senior is acknowledged by the junior Soldier with the greeting of the day or the unit's motto. The greeting is accompanied by the hand salute if it is an officer to which that junior Soldier is addressing. Many Soldiers have a tendency to look the other way or choose to pretend they did not recognize the senior person. Many do not familiarize themselves with the regulation or they simply believe it is an option if the Soldier is having a bad day. This failure to conform displays a lack of discipline and often tells a lot about an organization without even visiting the unit. Moreover, the little things such as these are what we need to refocus on; doing so will help to ensure that the big things will fall in line and help to ensure their success.

Customs and courtesies are important to our NCO Corps as well as the rest of the Army to ensure we remain a professional, self-disciplined, strong, relevant and ready force; full of pride, resourceful and out of the box thinkers. Soldiers must understand that if we are to remain the dominant fighting force, which we are today that we cannot afford to forget the lessons of yesterday. It is not just the combat situations that bond us as Soldiers, but those customs and courtesies, values and beliefs we all share. We must not forget or dismiss any of them, as we contribute our part to this great and powerful Army. This is evident from the successes and shortcomings we have experienced in Iraq and Afghanistan. Many of our young NCOs are not exposed to many of our customs and courtesies and as a result often pay the price for that ignorance. Some are informal norms (customs that are rules not written in any books) that accompany the position or grade for which they hold.

Informal norms come in many forms, like being present for NCO professional development sessions, and ensuring it is the focus when on the training schedule at any level. This is an event freely sharing learning and knowledge. Another is attendance at dining ins/outs, again a location where you get an opportunity to see what customs and traditions look like, before it is your turn to execute one; also supporting the ceremonies of your sister unit through your mere presence. This is a great opportunity to see how others execute ceremonies, traditions, and customs. By doing so, you often find that there is something you can incorporate into the programs within your unit. Informal norms were once explained in older field manuals. Most of these regulations have been updated and some terms we once used have been dropped or renamed; however, the responsibilities of the customs live on through the continuity of our more senior leaders.

My advice is for you to start by educating yourself through reading and getting involved in some of our elite organizations such as the Sergeant Audie Murphy or Morales Club and by doing, not waiting for the schoolhouse or the NCOES system to introduce our history to you. Once you have been educated, share what you have learned. Volunteer to execute some of the events you discover in your unit. Not only do you expose others to our heritage, but you also instill a sense of pride in those around you. You spark curiosity in others and it becomes infectious. Young Soldiers get interested in areas where there was little prior involvement and then we all get better. I have listed just a few areas where you should take the time to educate yourself in some of the more common customs and courtesies that may be alive and well within your organization.

Lastly find a good mentor. There are plenty of senior leaders across our Army who are willing to take the time to coach, teach and mentor good sergeants looking to make a difference in our Army. To preserve what so many have fought to create for us, their knowledge must be passed on. It is incumbent upon you to make the initial step and seek them out. It is the responsibility of each and everyone one of us to preserve the history of our Army.

The following is a list of documents and websites that I recommend you take the time to research on this topic.

- *Army Regulation* (https://armypubs.army.mil/epubs/DR_pubs/DR_a/pdf/web/AR%20600-25.pdf)600-25 (https://armypubs.army.mil/epubs/DR_pubs/DR_a/pdf/web/AR%20600-25.pdf), Salutes, Honors and Visits of Courtesy
- *Field Circular* (https://armypubs.army.mil/epubs/DR_pubs/DR_a/pdf/web/ARN6002_TC%207-22x7%20FINAL%20WEB.pdf) 7-22.7 (https://armypubs.army.mil/epubs/DR_pubs/DR_a/pdf/web/ARN6002_TC%207-22x7%20FINAL%20WEB.pdf), *The NCO Guide*
- *Army Doctrine Publication* (https://armypubs.army.mil/epubs/DR_pubs/DR_a/pdf/adp6_22.epub)6-22 (https://armypubs.army.mil/epubs/DR_pubs/DR_a/pdf/adp6_22.epub), *Army Leadership*
- The Army Publication Directorate at <http://www.apd.army.mil/ProductMap.asp> (<http://www.apd.army.mil/ProductMap.asp>)
- A History of the NCO at http://www.ncohistory.com/files/NCO_History.pdf (http://www.ncohistory.com/files/NCO_History.pdf)
- History of the United States Army NCO Sword at <http://ncosword.com/> (<http://ncosword.com/>)
- History of Enlisted Ranks at http://www.tioh.hqda.pentagon.mil/UniformedServices/Insignia_Rank/enlisted_hisotry.aspx (http://www.tioh.hqda.pentagon.mil/UniformedServices/Insignia_Rank/enlisted_hisotry.aspx)
- The Year of the NCO at <http://www.army.mil/yearofthenco/history1.html> (<http://www.army.mil/yearofthenco/history1.html>).