



Virginia Defense Force Virginia Department of Military Affairs



Initial Entry Training (IET) Military Customs Courtesies

Field Manual No. 7-21.13
Chapter 4
Customs, Courtesies, and Traditions

Customs

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Pride

The VDF instills pride in its members because of its history, mission, capabilities, and the respect it has earned in the service of the Commonwealth.

A reflection of that pride is visible in its customs, courtesies, and traditions.

MILITARY Customs

Definition

A custom is an established practice that include positive actions (things you do) and taboos (things you avoid.)

Purpose

Many customs complement procedures required by military courtesy. Violations of some customs will bring official censure or disciplinary action. Customs are common law.

- Never criticize the VDF 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.”

Military Courtesies

Definition

Military courtesy means good manners and politeness in dealing with other people. Courteous behavior develops good human relations.

Purpose

Military courtesy is respect shown by members of the same profession.

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.

Hand Salute

- The salute is a privileged gesture of respect and trust among soldiers. The salute is not only prescribed by regulation but is also recognition of each other's commitment, abilities, and professionalism.
- The junior extending the greeting first is a point of etiquette. A salute extended or returned makes the same statement.

- The hand salute may have begun in Roman times when assassinations were common. A citizen approached a public official 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.
- In early American history, the salute 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.

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).

Salutes will be exchanged between officers (commissioned and warrant) and enlisted personnel, and with personnel of the Armed Forces of the United States (Army, Navy, Air Force, Marine Corps, Coast Guard), the commissioned corps of the National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration (NOAA), and the commissioned corps of the Public Health Service entitled to the salute.

When salutes are required:

- U.S. National Anthem, "To the Color," "Hail to the Chief," or foreign national anthems
- To uncased National Color outdoors
- On ceremonial occasions
- At reveille and retreat ceremonies
- During the sounding of honors
- When pledging allegiance outdoors
- When turning over control of formations.
- When rendering reports
- To officers of friendly foreign countries

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

Other Courtesies

- 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
- 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
- The junior ranking soldier is the first to enter a vehicle and the senior in rank is first to exit
- When outdoors, greet the NCO by rank, e.g., "Good morning, Sergeant"
- First person seeing an officer enter a dining facility gives the order "At ease," unless a more senior officer is already present
- When command "At ease" is given in a dining facility, remain seated, silent and continue eating unless directed otherwise.

Reporting

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."

Rendering Honor to the Flag

- **Reveille:** When the flag is raised in the morning, stand at attention on the first note of "Reveille" and salute.
- **Retreat:** In the evening "Retreat" is played before "To the Colors." At the first note of "Retreat," come to attention and face the flag (or the direction of the music.) Salute at the first note of "To the Colors."
- When you are passing or being passed by colors that are being presented, paraded, or displayed, salute when the colors are six paces from you. Hold the salute until the colors are six paces beyond you.