

BASIC HONORS TO BE PAID BY THE TROOPS

Notes on “Saluting” for Reenactors

by Kevin O’Beirne

Author’s Note: This article is geared toward Civil War-era Federal infantry portrayals. While much of it is applicable to other Civil War-era portrayals, the author makes no representation of its completeness for use by Confederate impressionists or those representing other branches of the service.

Attention!

All members of the United States Army, both of the 1860s and today, were and are expected to know and provide basic “honors”, which many reenactors think of only as saluting. Unfortunately, basic honors paid by the troops are one of the “methods” aspects of living history that are either poorly executed or missing entirely in many portrayals.

Proper salutes and rendering of honors at living history events can contribute to the “back in time” feeling that many reenactors seek. Conversely, few things can ruin a reenacting “moment” quicker than seeing a fellow who is incapable of understanding and presenting this most basic military behavior. While attending several garrison-scenario events in 2002 and 2003 my comrades and I observed that few reenactors, regardless of their apparent position on the authenticity scale, know how and when to properly salute and render basic honors.

“Saluting” is more complex than many reenactors may initially think — it involves a lot more than the simple hand salute and the “Sergeant’s Salute” (e.g., the salute often rendered while bearing a long-arm). Various types of salutes and actions to show deference to and acknowledgement of higher-ranking individuals and bodies of troops are required and should be known by everyone in reenacting, from the private up through the general officer.

Some reenactors choose not to salute officers they do not know, and many elect to put little effort into saluting, often giving a lazy hand-wave in lieu of a military salute. To repeat the old truism: *salute the office, not the man*; in other words, salute the rank, not the individual wearing it. And yes, reenactors should certainly provide a fairly snappy salute to officers with whom they are unfamiliar. Consider what would have happened to a Civil War soldier who elected not to salute a commissioned officer simply because the officer was unknown to him.

While it is well-documented that there was often a good degree of familiarity and, on occasion, even fraternization between commissioned officers and their men in many volunteer regiments¹, basic

military honors were known by everyone in the Civil War army and were used, particularly by guards, when in garrison, and when the regiment was not on campaign.

This article attempts to summarize the basic honors to be paid by the troops in a brief, outline format, and tries to answer the questions of how to salute, who gets saluted, who is supposed to be doing the saluting, and when and how often one should salute, both for day-to-day honors to be paid by individuals and for more-specialized situations such as guard duty or when a soldier is called into the quarters of a commissioned officer.

Citations to references are presented in each of the following paragraphs. Abbreviations of source names are provided in the list of references at the end of this article.

Types of Salutes and How to Salute

- Without Arms
 - o Hand Salute – “When a soldier without arms or side arms only meets an officer he is to raise his hand to the right side of the visor of his cap, palm to the front, elbow raised as high as the shoulder, looking at the same time in a respectful and soldier-like manner at the officer, who shall return the compliment thus offered.” (Reg., pg. 42,



Para. 256). A volunteers’ manual from 1861 suggested, “*First motion.* — Extend the arm horizontally to the right, palm down. *Second motion.* — Carry the hand to the visor of the cap. *Third motion.* — Carry the arm back to the horizontal position. *Fourth motion.* — Drop the hand quickly to the side.” (Viele, pp. 20-21). In 1867 Upton’s

manual changed hand saluting to the “palm down” method; however, Army Regulations did not delete the “palm to the front” specification until 1881. Hand salutes should be rendered when the commissioned officer being saluted is distant approximately six paces.

- o Left Hand Salute – Some sources (Viele, pg. 21; Upton 1867, pg. 15, Para. 89) suggest that left-hand salutes may have been rendered in the Civil War era. Both Viele and Upton state that a left-hand salute was performed similar to the right-hand salute, and that left-hand salutes should be rendered when the person being saluted is on the soldier’s right (i.e., salute with the hand on the side opposite the person being saluted). However, because the actual use of left-hand salutes is not included in the U.S. Army Regulations of the Civil War years and is not otherwise well documented, reenactors should carefully evaluate whether they wish to render honors with the left hand. Left hand salutes are probably “more acceptable” when the right arm of the man presenting the salute is “occupied” (i.e., carrying something, in a sling, etc.).
- o When indoors, a soldier shall remove his cap and stand in the Position of the Soldier until recognized (Kautz, COS/NCO&S, pg. 23, P



soldier is in full or undress uniform, *with his musket or with only his side arms*, he would not remove his cap but rather would use the Sergeant’s Salute (when bearing a long arm) or the hand salute (e.g., touching his cap) when bearing side arms only. (Jaeger, A&NJ, March 19, 1864 and May 21, 1864)

- With Arms:
 - o The Carry (shoulder arms) (Reg., Para. 420, pg. 64; Casey Vol. 1, pp. 35-36 etc., Paras.



127-132, etc.)

- o Present Arms (Casey Vol. 1, pp. 39-40, Paras. 150-151)
- o Sergeant’s Salute – “Sergeants... will salute... with muskets, by bringing the left hand across the body, so as to strike the musket near the right shoulder. Corporals out of the ranks, and privates not sentries, will carry their muskets at the shoulder as sergeants and salute in like manner.” (Reg., page 42, Para. 255). Regarding how the



used. However, in 1866 a correspondent to a military magazine suggested that the U.S. Army Regulations be revised to explicitly state that the back of the hand should be to the front when the hand strikes the piece, which lends some weight to that method. (A&NJ, July 14, 1866)

- Commissioned Officers and Sergeants with Swords, Sword Salute – “[from *Shouldered Arms*]: Three times (or pauses). One. At the



hand is to strike the musket, evidence is inconclusive whether the hand was *typically* oriented so that the open palm struck the piece or whether the palm was down; probably both (and variations) were actually



distance six paces from the person to be saluted, raise the sword or sabre perpendicularly, the point up, the flat of the blade opposite to the right eye, the guard at the height of the shoulder, and the elbow supported on the body. *Two*. Drop the point of the sword or sabre by extending the arm, so that the right hand may be brought to the side of the right thigh, and remain in that position until the person to whom the salute is rendered shall be passed, or shall have passed, six paces. *Three*. Raise the sword or sabre smartly and place the back of the blade against the right shoulder.” (Casey Vol. 1, pg. 224; also see Dal Bello’s Sword Manual). Upton’s 1867 manual stated that when the blade is dropped in the second motion, “with the edge to the left, by extending the arm so that the right hand may be brought to the side of the right thigh, the back of the hand down”. Reenactors should consider that Upton’s manual is a post-war work. There were variations on this method; one late-war source states: “*First Motion*.--Bring up the right hand, as high as the breast, sword pointing up between the eyes and four inches from them, edge turned to the left. *Second Motion*.--Drop the sword by extending the arm, making as nearly as possible a straight line from the shoulder to the point; the sword directed at the ground eighteen inches to the front and right. *Third Motion*.--Bring the sword to the shoulder.” (Jaeger/A&NJ, January 9, 1864). Upton’s 1867 manual also clarifies: “In saluting with troops, the first time will be executed at the command *present*; the second, at the command *arms*; the third motion will be executed as the arms are brought to the carry.”

- Duration of Salute – It is unclear whether a man rendering a salute in the Civil War era held the salute until it was returned. Common sense dictates that it was. (CRRC Article III.5)
- Stand – “A noncommissioned officer or soldier being seated, and without particular occupation, will rise at the approach of an officer, and make the customary salutation. If standing, he will turn toward the officer for the same purpose.” (Reg., pg. 42, Para. 257) A post-war manual added, “Soldiers, whether standing or sitting, will, when an officer approaches, take the position of the soldier [e.g., stand ‘at attention’], face toward him, and salute. If walking, they will salute an officer as they pass him, commencing the salute, when approaching from

opposite directions, at six paces from the officer.” (Upton 1867, pg. 15, Para. 90)

- Upon Entering an Officer’s Quarters – “When a soldier enters an officer’s quarters he remains standing in the position of the soldier until invited to sit down. When soldiers are in a room and an officer enters, they should rise and remain standing until invited to sit down.” (Kautz, COS/NCO&S, pg. 24, Para. 57)
- When Mounted – When a soldier is mounted and is to salute a dismounted officer of superior rank, he shall first dismount before rendering the appropriate salute. (Kautz, COS/NCO&S, pg. 24, Para. 56)
- Color Salute – Color bearers carry the colors “whether at a halt or in march... [with] the heel of the color lance supported on the right hip, the right hand generally placed on the lance at the height of the shoulder... When the color has to render honors, the color-bearer will salute as follows: At the distance of six paces slip the right hand along the lance to the height of the eye; lower the lance by straightening the arm to its full extent, the heel of the lance remaining on the hip, and bring the lance back to the habitual position when the person saluted shall be passed, or shall have passed, six paces.” (Casey Vol. 1, pg. 225) ²

Who Salutes?

- Enlisted men salute all commissioned officers. (Reg., pp. 41-42, Para. 254)
- Commissioned officers salute other commissioned officers who are superior to them in rank. (Reg., pp. 41-42, Para. 254)
- Commissioned officers return the salute of juniors who have first saluted them. *This is mandatory* (Reg., pp. 41-42, Para. 254). In 1864 a United States military magazine stated, “The rule is invariable that all salutes should be returned” (Jaeger/A&NJ, August 13, 1864).
- It is unclear whether the Civil War army followed the modern custom of the senior person in a group being the only one in the group to salute a superior officer *when in formation*; it is probably best to follow this procedure until proven otherwise (CRRC, Article III.5). Several period sources (some cited below) appear to support this theory.
- When *not* in formation, all enlisted men in a group should salute upon the approach of an officer, in accordance with modern military procedure, until such time as a period reference is found.

- A post-war source states that Orderly Sergeants salute the Sergeant Major during guard mount ceremony. This is the only time an enlisted man is saluted. (Dal Bello IGP, pg. 16, Para. 39).³
- Inspection – After a battalion is broken into column for inspection, company commanders should salute the inspector as he approaches to inspect their respective companies (Jaeger/A&NJ, August 13, 1864). The reviewing officer should *not* salute the colors when he goes down the line (Jaeger/A&NJ, July 2, 1864).
- Reviews – When passing in review the battalion Sergeant Major should salute the reviewing officer (Jaeger/A&NJ, March 19, 1864). The reviewing officer shall return salutes rendered and shall salute the colors when they pass him (Jaeger/A&NJ, July 2, 1864).

Who Gets Saluted?

- All commissioned officers by men of lesser rank. (Reg., pp. 41-42, Para. 254)
- Commissioned officers *not in uniform* should be saluted by inferior ranks who recognize them to be an officer (Upton 1867, pg. 15, Para. 91). This protocol was apparently unclear during the Civil War era because one year before Upton wrote his manual the *Army and Navy Journal* asserted, “An officer is entitled to the salute due his rank only when in the uniform of that rank.” (A&NJ, July 7, 1866). Apparently during the Civil War era there was confusion on this issue. It may be best to stick with the maxim, “Salute the office, not the man” regardless of the clothing worn until more conclusive documentation of period practice is found.
- Guard Duty – Sentinels shall stop and face their proper front (*not* necessarily toward the officer! Jaeger/A&NJ, October 1, 1864) and render the proper honor. Sentinels *should* salute officers who pass near but *behind* their beat (Jaeger/A&NJ, December 24, 1864). Common sense dictates that salutes by sentinels are not rendered during hours of challenging.
 - o Line Officers (captains and lieutenants who are not the Officer of the Day) – The Carry (per Reg., pg. 64, Para. 420) *OR* the Sergeant’s Salute (per period practice).⁴
 - o Officer of the Day (i.e., captain or lieutenant wearing a sash across his chest) and Commanding Officer of the Battalion or Post – Present Arms (Reg., pg. 64, Para. 420)
 - o Field and General Officers – Present Arms (Reg., pg. 64, Para. 420). Surgeons held the

equivalent rank of Major and therefore should also be saluted by sentinels with Present Arms. (Jaeger/A&NJ, December 5, 1863). “A sentinel should not present arms to a field officer when he passes in *rear* of him.” [emphasis added for this article] (Jaeger/A&NJ, February 20, 1864)

- o While in a Guard Box/Sentry Box, *Any* Commissioned Officer – Sergeant’s Salute Reg., pg. 64, Para. 421)⁵
- o Turning Out the Guard – The Guard turns out (i.e., assembles in formation under arms at the guard tent) at Present Arms once per day for the Officer of the Day and Battalion/Post Commander, and any general officer. The Guard turns out at the Carry all other times (Reg., pg. 65, Paras. 426-427, 431). The Guard turns out and Presents Arms for passing regimental colors and for armed parties commanded by a commissioned officer. The Guard turns out at the Carry for armed parties commanded by a non-commissioned officer. The Guard turns out but does not present at all if the person being complimented passes behind the Guard. During hours of challenging, the Guard turns out only for Grand Rounds. (Reg., pg. 41, Paras. 247-251. Also see Dal Bello IGP, pp. 30-31, Paras. 81-90).

- A post-war source states that Orderly Sergeants salute the Sergeant Major during guard mount ceremony. This is the only time an enlisted man is saluted.³
- Dignitaries – Honors to be paid are per the U.S. Army Regulations, pages 40-41, Paras. 237-246.
- Officers of the Navy and Marines – Are entitled to the same compliments as officers of the Army. (Reg., pg. 41, Para. 252)
- Chaplains – It is unclear whether chaplains were saluted, although they were given the pay and allowances of Captains and were even permitted to wear Captain’s insignia (Reg., pp. 507, 524). Whether or not a chaplain was saluted may have depended upon his standing with the men of his regiment.

When and How Often Do You Salute?

- Salute a given commissioned line officer once per day (the first time you see him, per U.S. Army Regulations, page 42, Para. 257) *unless* you are addressing or being addressed by him, or otherwise encounter him directly (Kautz, COS/NCO&S, page 23, Para. 53). For example, a soldier in town who encounters the same

commissioned officer in the street multiple times would probably be expected to salute the officer each time.

- When spoken to by a commissioned officer, an enlisted man salutes, and salutes again before leaving the officer's presence. (Kautz, COS/NCO&S, pg. 23, Para. 53).
- Sentinels – During daylight hours, sentinels (camp/police guards) salute every commissioned officer who passes them, no matter how many times per day.
- During hours of challenging, no compliments are paid for obvious reasons; however, between Retreat and Reveille the Guard turns out for Grand Rounds. (Reg., pg. 41, Para. 251).
- A modern reference for reenactors (Dal Bello/IGP, pg. 31, Para 90) maintains that courtesies are not rendered on the picket line because drawing attention to a commissioned officer is liable to make the officer the target of an enemy sharpshooter. While this appears to make a good deal of sense, this writer has been unable to locate a period reference for this practice. It strikes this writer that simply “shouldering arms” was a fairly innocuous way to salute, and guards are not supposed to let their weapons touch the ground in the first place.
- Details of Troops Under Arms – The commander of the detail salutes; the men in the detail do not salute unless so ordered (Kautz, COS/NCO&S, pg. 23, Para. 52).⁶
- Fatigue Parties – Do not have to stop working to salute a passing officer. (Kautz, COS/NCO&S, pg. 23, Para. 52)
- While not strictly a form of saluting, commissioned officers should “honor” their men by having their sword drawn *at all times their men are in formation and under arms*, until the command to stack, rest, march at the route step, or dismissal is given. A Civil War military periodical stated, “The rule is invariable that...officers in command of troops should have their swords drawn” (Jaeger/A&NJ, August 13, 1864). All commands to men under arms are given with a drawn sword (Dal Bello Sword Manual “Introduction”, citing Upton’s 1874 Infantry Tactics, Paras. 755-758, 760-761). To not do so may give the appearance of disrespect toward the men. Upton’s 1867 manual also states, “Officers on all duties under arms are to have their swords drawn, without waiting for any words of command for that purpose.”

Other Honors

There are other types of honors to be paid by the troops but they are either a work unto themselves (dress parade, guard mount, etc.) or rare to non-existent in reenacting (funerals, cannon salutes, etc.). Among them are:

- Honors paid during Dress Parade are per the U.S. Army Regulations, pp. 50-57.
- Honors paid during Guard Mount ceremony and when the new Guard relieves the old are per the U.S. Army Regulations, pp.58-61.
- Cannon-salutes to be fired for visiting dignitaries are per the U.S. Army Regulations, pp. 42-43, Paras. 258-270.
- Escorts of honor for personages of high rank (civil or military) are per the U.S. Army Regulations pg. 43, Paras. 271-274.
- Funeral honors are per the U.S. Army Regulations pp. 43-46, Paras. 275-302.
- Others not covered in this article.

Remarks on the Utility of This Article

The events attended by many reenactors typically require that the participants know only the hand salute and the Sergeant’s Salute. For those accustomed to rendering such a fairly un-intensive level of honors much of this article may represent semi-interesting but functionally useless information. However, there *are* events where almost every item presented in this article is essential knowledge. Reenactors who desire a more-realistic representation of Civil War military courtesies, complete with proper honors paid by the troops, should consider participating in such an event.

Some reenactors may believe that an emphasis on saluting and other honors is “too much like the real military”. In response we offer that living history often involves conveying to the public and other reenactors the appearance of a bona-fide military organization, and rendering basic honors is an easy way to represent that the living history scenario does, in fact, portray real soldiers in an army that expected and enforced discipline, particularly while in camp or garrison.

Conclusions

All living history portrayals can *always* be enhanced and this writer has observed that improvement in the way we pay honors while in uniform is one of the most basic areas requiring attention in the hobby today. Further, learning how to properly render honors is fairly easy and certainly costs less than some other ways of improving one’s portrayal, such as buying new uniforms and equipment.

Consider copying this article and referring to it prior to and during events.

Happy saluting!

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Endnotes

- ¹ As examples of familiarity between commissioned officers and enlisted men the writer offers the following: 1) A sergeant wrote to his wife, “I had a conversation with Major Byrne the other day... He wondered why I was making so strange with him. He wants me to call and see him oftener after this.” (Tipping, George, 155th New York Co. I, letter dated February 15, 1864, Catherine Keane Collection, Buffalo and Erie County Historical Society, Buffalo N.Y.). 2) “With few exceptions, there is too little pride and effort at soldierly bearing among the officers, and too much familiarity between them and their men.” (Letter from the Inspector General’s Office of the Trans-Mississippi Department, October 26, 1863, *Official Records, Series 1, Vol. 22, Part 2*, pg. 1050). 3) “It has been brought to the knowledge of the brigadier-general commanding that in some of the regiments of this corps... officers are in the habit of associating on terms of familiarity with the enlisted men of their regiments, even to the extent of playing certain games together.” (General Orders 14, Tenth Army Corps, July 12, 1864, *Official Records, Series 1, Vol. 40, Part 3*, pg. 205).
- ² The modern custom of not saluting with the United States flag did not exist in the 1860s; it apparently started at the 1908 Olympics in London, England. Therefore, when at a reenactment or similar event, the National flag *should* salute. However, when reenactors march in a modern parade or participate in a function with modern organizations (e.g., a color guard ceremony with police or firemen, or modern military units), it may be advisable to observe the modern custom regarding the National color.
- ³ Dal Bello’s assertion that the Orderly Sergeants salute the Sergeant Major during guard mounting ceremony is based on Emory Upton’s *A New System of Infantry Tactics*, 3rd Edition, 1874, Para. 818. Because this source post-dates the Civil War by nine years, further conclusive evidence that the Sergeant Major was saluted at guard mounting during the Civil War is necessary.
- ⁴ Of special note is a letter to United States Service Magazine’s May 1865 issue (see Jaeger/USSM, pp. 5-6) that points out: “Does the last sentence of [Regulations] paragraph 420, requiring sentinels to ‘carry arms’ to all officers below field officers, include the usual salute with the left hand brought to the shoulder, or not?” The inference from the language of that paragraph is, that the sentinel should stand at shouldered arms; but the common practice in the volunteer army is otherwise. This practice is doubtless derived from the requirements as to salutes in other cases. Indeed, it is hardly consistent that the single sentry should simply carry

arms to a line officer, when walking on a beat; because the same sentry, if in a sentry-box, would salute the same officer by raising the left hand; and if not a sentry, but simply a soldier under arms, and not on duty, he would offer the same salute under paragraph 255. From these facts has originated the custom of interpreting the language of paragraph 420, "carry arms," to mean "carry arms and salute as a sergeant."⁵ Another Civil War source (Jaeger/A&NJ, December 24, 1864) explicitly states, "Officers below the rank of Major receive the sergeant's salute from sentinels." However, some regiments did salute per the Regulations (Jaeger/A&NJ, February 6, 1864). Therefore, either "carry arms" **OR** the "Sergeant's Salute" should be acceptable at living history events, *with the Sergeant's Salute being preferred*, because it was apparently common among volunteer troops.

⁵ When posted in a sentry box, the only salute rendered is the Sergeant's Salute, regardless of the commissioned officer's rank, because any other salute would generally result in jamming the bayonet into the roof of the sentry box.

⁶ According to *United States Service Magazine's* May 1864 issue (Jaeger/USSM, pp. 2-3), when one regiment is being received by another (i.e., marching past a regiment drawn up in line), *each commissioned officer* of the marching regiment salutes when he reaches a point six paces from the receiving unit's left. The enlisted men of the marching regiment remain at shoulder arms.