



## Lesson 4: Customs and traditions of the service

**Reference:** *The Officer's Guide*, 1944 edition.

**Study assignment:** Lesson text, attached.

### What do we mean by a “tradition?”

A custom or tradition as implied by this source is a respected habit of behavior that is accepted within the profession and is of long acquaintance. Sometimes “traditions” fall by the wayside as the social context or the needs of the Army change, but when they die out they die slowly, and they are mourned as a lost guidepost to correct and benevolent life.

The Army is an institution that changes slowly, and such institutions tend to honor customary gestures and rules. Most have origins in the civilian world of the time, others are simply honored for practical reasons.

With the rapid expansion of the Army in the war years, thousands of new officers had to be accommodated—some from West Point or ROTC, some from the enlisted ranks through Officer Candidate Schools, and some directly from civilian occupations and professions that supplied vital skills during the expansion. These new officers found themselves strangers in a strange land, and adapting to customs came hard.

*The Officers' Guide* defines a custom as “an established usage.” It also points

out that these customs can be positive actions (ways to welcome new officers) and taboos (officers do not carry umbrellas). These customs are unwritten, at least in regulation and law, but are usually of such long standing practice and acceptance that they comprise a sort of social “common law” for the military.

### The officer's code

**Duty, honor, country:** “The code of duty well performed, of Honor in all things, of country above self is the unwritten unspoken guide on which the official acts of officers of the entire Army are based.” (*The Officers' Guide*, 1944, p. 307)

*Your guidepost stands like a beacon in the night: Duty, Honor, Country.*

—Douglas MacArthur

*Duty then is the sublimest word in the English language. You should do your duty in all things. You can never do more, you should never wish to do less.*

—Robert E. Lee

*I love the name of honor more than I fear death.*

—Caius Julius Caesar

*Our country – In her intercourse with foreign nations may she always be in the right, and always successful, right or wrong.*

—Stephen Decatur

**Sanctity of official statements:** An “official statement” is a statement made in the conduct of an officer’s duty, with the explicit qualification that knowingly making a false official statement is a crime. When this principle is accepted broadly in the Officer Corps, an officer’s word is accepted without question, and if it proved to have been false it will generally result in the loss of officer status by dismissal from the service.

We say “official statement” because some shadings of truth are inevitable in nonofficial situations. When you are invited to dine with the commanding officer’s family and the main course (prepared with care by the CO’s wife) would gag a jackal, you are permitted to say “ma’am, this is (choke) just delicious.” We call this “social honor.” But when we strap on our officer duties, we tell the truth.

An example from personal experience: long years ago, while I was commanding a tank company in Viet Nam, I became accustomed to being “cross-attached.” My company was attached to an infantry battalion (which swapped one of its companies to the tank battalion). Things roll downhill, and I had to trade one of my tank platoons for a mech infantry platoon. The turnover was high, and it seemed as if I started every day with a different infantry platoon leader, some better than others.

Our habit was to move to a prescribed “AO” (area of operations), set up a defended patrol base and dismount the mech infantry platoon to run patrols, cloverleaf fashion, from the patrol base to detect signs of enemy movement. Now, this isn’t a lot of fun for the infantry—it was hot and dry or chilly and rainy, depending on the season; there were mines and booby traps, the odd tiger, and of course the enemy. But it was the job we were given.

Because of the difficulty of the patrol plan, it was my habit to accompany the platoon leader on his first patrol with me. If he was squared away, I did it just the once and left him to do his job. If he was a doofus, I would stick with him and at the first opportunity ask for a new platoon. Because of the high turnover, this meant I was out on infantry patrol quite a lot.

Now, it happened that I got a new platoon and its proud lieutenant one day and because I was having some problems with, shall we say, the functions of the lower intestinal tract—and the lieutenant came highly recommended by his CO—I just gave him the order, did a radio check, and let him go.

Well, this idiot was tired and feeling sorry for himself, so he just marched his platoon out of the lager (my patrol base) about 300 meters into the brush, sat down, and started calling in phoney coordinates.

After about thirty minutes, one of my tank commanders, who was detailed to watch the perimeter, detected movement about 300 meters out. I was about to call in artillery fire, but as

was SOP, I called the infantry lieutenant, asked for his position. He gave me a set of coordinates. I then (thank God) informed him that we had movement at a given location (which, as you must have guessed, was his actual position). The lieutenant had no option but to ‘fess up and shuffle back in to deal with me. I sent him up the chain, recommended for a general court martial; I lost track and have no idea what finally became of him. But his lie almost cost the lives of his soldiers.

This is why official statements must be sacrosanct.

So, what does this mean to you as a reenactor? Okay, here’s an example. It’s end of exercise at the Gap, in the snow and bitter cold. You are a team commander, and team commanders are directed to do a head count and verify all present. You shrug and say “yeah, I guess they’re all here” and report all present. Joe Shlabotnik from your team is lost in the woods and snow or has had a heart attack and is lying in the bushes, groaning.

We find out later, when people are back in barracks and somebody says “say, where’s Shlabotnik?”

*This is why official statements must be sacrosanct.*

**Readiness for increased responsibility:** Receiving a service ribbon (e.g., ETO ribbon) is a “participation trophy:” all you have to do is be there. Being an officer, and being promoted through officer ranks, explicitly indicates an *increase in responsibility*. The more authority an officer possesses, the greater his responsibility.

“Pygmies are pygmies still, though perched on Alps.”

There are no guaranteed promotions in the Army, and much of an officer’s time at his present grade is taken up acquiring and perfecting the skills in the next.

This seems creepily alien to hobby customs and expectations. There is no “career path” for reenactors, nor are there any commonly agreed expectations about qualification or fitness for rank. In some units, positions are based largely on merit—on logic, skills, and leadership. It’s generally easy to identify such units without even knowing who the leaders are: the quality of leadership is manifest in the appearance, attitude, and teamwork of the unit.

Unfortunately, the reverse is also true. In the Army, a bad unit is regarded as an indicator of bad officer leadership, and there is a mechanism to change that: *relief from authority* (“you’re fired”). No such mechanism is available in the hobby, where units are independent stand-alone organizations, each with its own standards and expectations.

Some time ago I had a conversation with a hobby leader I respect, and asked what the most important qualification for leadership in the hobby should be. Without hesitation he replied “personality.” I understood quite well what he meant. Leaders in the hobby have no legal standing to give orders. There are no Articles of War, no inherent power attached to reenactor rank. This made the qualities of personal leadership even more important and much more elusive than in the service. The ability to persuade is a critical attribute in our case (as in every case!).

But the other essential attributes are *knowledge and skills*. A warm and convincing personality can lead, but there is no guarantee it will lead us to the right destination. Lip service is applied to this (we called it “technical and tactical proficiency”), but many potentially successful leaders seem to shy away from

An effective leader does not dumb down the mission requirements to his comfort level; he raises his knowledge and skills to fulfill his responsibilities.

learning how to do critical things and how to teach them to others. There is a reflexive clinging to “reenactorisms” instead of learning how the Army in WW II actually did it. This is not a worthy practice even for a “pretend” officer.

**Tact.** The armed services have been forced after nearly twenty years of war to turn to a growing problem: *toxic leadership*. This is not an exercise in political correctness, but an effort to correct bad habits acquired through fatigue, family stress from repeated deployments, and—probably most of all—a system that has emphasized “fire fighting”, the practice of dealing with endless short-term problems and responses while ignoring long-term challenges. We rewarded officers for their ability to go somewhere and quickly “straighten things out”, and never seeming to notice the wreckage left behind and the problems the short term solutions might cause down the trail.

*Sobel's law: if your energy is spent impressing people above you about your competence and confidence, you will be noticed and rewarded—at first. But sooner or later the men you lead will notice that you are using them instead of leading them, and the truth will come out. Yelling discloses weakness, not strength.*

Interpersonal skills often tend to be downplayed, dismissed as “pop psychology.” The screamer and the flamer can get results right now, but there is damage to deal with sooner or later: a lack of trust, lack of respect, reluctance to be honest and truthful (since these habits are not always rewarded), and a widening gap between the leaders and the led.

The Army as an institution has always understood the value of tact. In the *Officer's Guide* it was defined as “a nice discernment and delicate skill in saying or doing exactly what is expedient or suitable in given circumstances.” It is even more important in the hobby, where no one has a sworn duty to listen to high-volume bullshit. Don't try to be a movie martinet. You all have the same rank: *reenactor*. “Rank” does not equal “leader.” The best you can do is to rise as a man and see that you deserve the honorary rank.

**Personal appearance.** Since you don't have the Articles of War at your back, your most powerful tool is *personal example*. “The officer must establish the example the soldier is to follow.” (*TOG*, 1944: p. 305) That is just as important—perhaps more so—in the hobby.

The Army Regulations prescribe the wear of the uniform. Remember that *uniform* comes from Latin: “in one fashion.” Everybody the same.

The commonest mistake made by reenactors in an officer impression is to look conspicuous—scarves, flight jackets, crusher caps, and other gee-whiz items are not appropriate for officers of the ground forces. What *is* appropriate is adherence to regulation and proper care and wearing of the uniform. *Always set the example*. (See Lesson 3 of this instructional block for details.)

Besides proper wear of the uniform, personal appearance is a key to the impression. Hair should be properly trimmed (as in wartime), and officers are clean-shaven, an occasional pencil mustache would be appropriate, but not extending beyond the corners of the lips. Yes, a rougher appearance would be seen in the field after long combat duty, but such periods would be brief; as units rotate off the line, they would see to personal maintenance. In any case, we have events—particularly large ones like the Gap and Conneaut—that are conducted under cantonment conditions. Living unshaven and in muddy uniforms in barracks is a flawed impression.

## Customs of seniority

There are points of etiquette within the officer corps that relate to senior-subordinate relations, reflecting the matter of respect (which works up or down). These separate the individual and the rank he holds; rank has its privileges, but also its responsibilities. We never list the privileges of rank without noting that the rest of the customs of the officer corps are designed to connect the rank a person wears and his fitness to wear it.

**The place of honor is on the right.** When a junior officer walks or sits next to a senior officer, he stays to the left.

**Use of “sir.”** This is obviously less important in the hobby than in the profession it seeks to portray. It derives from various sources. Warriors in the European middle ages were generally lesser nobility and a horde of commoners with weapons (men at arms). The former (knights) were a contentious lot, promoted for loyalty and body count. They were also very self-conscious and inclined to take offense at almost anything and fight it out. This was discouraged by the lords who led them because it reduced available skilled personnel when they were most needed. An elaborate set of customs evolved to keep everyday interactions from turning bloody. Use of “sir” in all directions was a rule.

As a matter of military courtesy, the rules are fairly straightforward: the junior addresses the senior as “sir” (the word itself is derived from an Old French word for “my lord”). However, there are cases where it is dispensed with, as between a platoon leader and his platoon sergeant, at the discretion of both.

I’m embarrassed at being called “sir” by reenactors unless it is a living history situation. But units will have different standards.

## What the officer does *not* do

There are quite a few taboos that apply to officers more than others. Most of these do not have much impact in the hobby, but some are worth knowing.

**Do not defame the uniform:** In the matter of strict behavior, an officer represents not only himself, but the officer corps to which he belongs. Some behavior is considered “unbecoming an officer and a gentleman,” and can result in dismissal from service. (Officers are “dismissed”; others are “discharged.”) Conduct unbecoming is detailed in the Articles of War and the Manual for Courts-Martial. This article covers offenses that would be punishable if any soldier committed them, but are grounds for dismissal from service if an officer acts in such a way.

### NINETY-FIFTH ARTICLE OF WAR

#### CONDUCT UNBECOMING AN OFFICER AND A GENTLEMAN

**Discussion.**—The conduct contemplated may be that of an officer of either sex or of a cadet. When applied to a female officer the term “gentleman” is the equivalent of “gentlewoman”.

Conduct violative of this article is action or behavior in an official capacity which, in dishonoring or disgracing the individual as an officer, seriously compromises his character and his standing as a gentleman, or action or behavior in an unofficial or private capacity which, in dishonoring or disgracing the individual personally, seriously compromises his position as an officer and ex-

hibits him as morally unworthy to remain an officer of the honorable profession of arms.

There are certain moral attributes common to the ideal officer and the perfect gentleman, a lack of which is indicated by acts of dishonesty or unfair dealing, or indecency or indecorum, or of lawlessness, injustice, or cruelty. Not everyone is or can be expected to meet ideal standards or to possess the attributes in the exact degree demanded by the standards of his own time; but there is a limit of tolerance below which the individual standards in these respects of an officer or cadet cannot fall without his being morally unfit to be an officer or cadet or to be considered a gentleman. This article contemplates such conduct by an officer or cadet which, taking all the circumstances into consideration, satisfactorily shows such moral unfitness.

This article includes acts made punishable by any other article, provided such acts amount to conduct unbecoming an officer and a gentleman; thus an officer who steals military property violates both this and Article 94.

Instances of violation of this article are: knowingly making a false official statement; dishonorable neglect to pay debts; opening and reading the letters of another without authority; giving a check on a bank when he knows or reasonably should know there are no funds to meet it, and without intending that there should be; using insulting or defamatory language to another officer in his presence or about him to other military persons; being grossly drunk and conspicuously disorderly in a public place; public association with notorious prostitutes; cruel treatment of soldiers; committing or attempting to commit a crime involving moral turpitude; failing without a good cause to support his family.

**Seeing the commander:** At battalion or above, an officer does not just drop in to the commander's office. He contacts the S-1/adjutant (among other things, the CO's executive assistant) for an appointment. This is the general rule, and it is a good one, though there will always be exceptions to the rule.

**Do not make excuses:** Results matter; excuses are background noise. The senior may demand an explanation, and you may provide it. But the final responsibility is yours.

**Avoid servility:** Ass-kissing is despised in the service, though it does exist. Most commanders find it annoying and unprofessional, for the person kissing and the person encouraging the kiss.

**Don't jump the chain of command:** This admonition refers to going over the boss's head, circumventing his authority. An officer does this at his own risk, as his immediate commander is likely to take offense. I've also seen this happen in the hobby, where larger maneuver units are created temporarily by combining smaller units not used to being bossed around. It's just as bad as in the Army, and probably more prevalent.

**Watch your mouth:** Don't undermine a fellow officer with slander, gossip, or snark. Long experience suggests that the damage will be to your reputation, not his. A lot of this goes on in the hobby. We're not officers, certainly not in the sense of the WWII Army, but we should act as if we are.

**Really watch your mouth:** Upon assuming command of the Continental Army, General Washington published a general order forbidding profane or obscene speech. I'm not certain it had any effect, soldiers being soldiers, but it's not a good idea to define yourself by using obscenities as punctuation. If it's necessary to use a questionable expression, use it for emphasis. See below on the topic of being a "gentleman."

**Stay out of debt:** An officer who did not pay his bills and could not manage his personal affairs would find himself standing at attention before The Man.

You might think it's just your personal business, but an officer in debt will be constantly distracted from his duties, and may compromise his behavior, neither of which is acceptable. In addition, he is duty-bound to serve as an example to his soldiers.

In my youth, the *Army Times* created some indebtedness problems that absorbed the time of many company commanders. The entire back page of the paper was filled with an advertisement for the ----- Diamond Company, which specialized in tempting young soldiers to buy that special girl a diamond ring before you shipped out to Viet Nam so you could (a) get laid before you left, (b) maybe tempt her to wait for you instead of instantly falling into the arms of your 4F civilian buddy Jody, or (c) at the very least, have something to you remember you by if worse came to worst. The ads included photos of their chief salesperson, a Barbie-like blonde starlet called Chris Noel. Now, diamonds may be forever; but short of forever, they are expensive. Junior enlisted men going overseas were not rolling in money, but their friends in the ----- Diamond Company were happy to sell them the product on generous terms.

Consequently, company commanders were obliged to deal with far too many letters of indebtedness. Real life is *not your friend*. The girl back home married one of your long haired radical high school classmates, and you remember her every time a past due notice arrives to remind you of that ring (which she sent back to you when you were patrolling and burning human waste in a cut off oil drum at some fire support base, but try to sell the damned thing for the price of purchase and watch the potential buyers run from a jinxed diamond ring). This was one of many reasons the expression "m-----r" enjoyed such popularity in that war. The seller, however, was no longer the soldier's friend, and started sending letters of indebtedness to your CO, making two lives miserable.

An officer can counsel a soldier on indebtedness with great sincerity and eloquence, but if he is in debt himself the words lose authority. And God help you if an LOI with your name on it hits the desk of your regimental commander . . .

Addendum: *skip a payment of your Officers' Club bill at your peril.*

**Don't lean on a superior officer's desk:** It really sends the wrong message. The CO ain't your union shop steward.

In the first half of the Nineteenth Century, duels were common in England and the United States. Though duels were formally prohibited under military law, they still happened. It was a good reason to guard your speech, as there was always some hothead in the regiment who would send a second to your billet to call for an answer. My ancestor Louis Trezevant Wigfall, a South Carolina journalist, fought so many duels he was actually expelled from the state. If *South Carolina* thought your dueling excessive, you were obviously using a lot of ammo. He then moved to Texas, where no such limits obtained as long as you paid to have somebody clean up the mess. Wigfall later became a United States Senator, then a member of the Confederate Senate and a brigadier general in the Confederate Army. I'm not sure what lesson we should take from this, but it's a good story.

**An officer is punctual:** Be on time. Every minute you are late is a minute other people are waiting for you, not taking care of their own business. An Army at war has no tolerance for wasted time, since there is routinely too little time to accomplish the day's (and night's) requirements without having to wait for you to stumble in fifteen minutes late.

**Some things that don't make a lot of sense:** (a) don't push a baby carriage in uniform; (b) don't carry a large package in uniform; (c) don't carry an umbrella in uniform. Why? Some of the reasons are doubtless lost to us, but the general principle is that an officer must not be constrained in returning a salute. (Female officers were allowed umbrellas because of the time necessary to repair their hair if it got wet.) An officer escorting a lady walks on the right (so he won't bump her if he has to return a salute). Don't put your uniform hat on the dining table. (The cooties might escape.)

**Smoking is not a right:** Smoking was far more prevalent then, but it was not always appropriate. Officers followed the general social rule by asking (in an informal or formal social setting) "do you mind if I smoke?" A common reply when trying to engage a woman in conversation was "I don't care if you burst into flames."

### **Officers and gentlemen—the amenities and etiquette**

It's important to remember that societies that value a lack of class distinctions are frequently very sensitive to class. If we're all equal, what use is *noblesse oblige*? But when you became an officer, you entered an elite social fellowship determined, as is appropriate for a democratic society, by merit and responsibility. If you were a farm kid or your father sold used Buicks, as soon as you headed off to West Point or pinned on the gold bars you were supposed to be a gentleman and play by gentleman rules. This was no simple thing—although it has to be said that in those days *everybody* was much more formal in social situations than today. When supper was on the table after a hard day slopping the pigs and tending the tomatoes, the flatware was correctly arranged. Everybody knew the knife was on the left, sharp edge pointed in. The handy bookshelf reference was *Etiquette in Society, in Business, in Politics, and at Home* by the immortal Emily Post—her instructions were so complete, so detailed, so cordial, and so associated with her that the volume was usually just referred to as "Emily Post."

The onset of the war did reduce the complexity of prescribed social interaction and formality, as the input of new officers from all sources exceeded the necessary time and resources to teach and practice many details. But a large proportion of new officers (from West Point or ROTC) already knew many of the customs because they were then widespread in American society. The Army was naturally very conservative about social rules, and was the last segment of society to let many of them go. Personally, I think American society benefited far more than we would acknowledge as we descend into coarseness in an inexorable race for the bottom.

**Calling:** In the Army there were *official calls*, *formal calls*, and *informal calls*. A "call" was a visit of the kind informed by etiquette. Going to visit your buddy in the quarters next door for a beer was not a call in that sense.

When you arrived at a unit, you made an *official call* on your new commander. To make this happen, you reported to his adjutant (who was also the S-1 at regiment and below) for an appointment. You arrived at the Old Man's office a few minutes before game time in your best uniform, and on invitation stood before his desk (hat off) and saluted, saying "Sir, Lieutenant Walker reporting for duty" or, in some circumstances, ". . . reporting as ordered." The CO



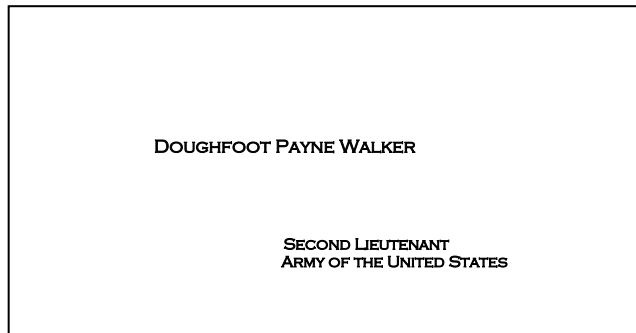
returns the salute. If he has time, and he will usually have the adjutant select a time on his schedule that allowed a brief (one way) exchange of views. Bringing a new officer onto the team was a formal and vital process, even in combat. Experienced commanders know—by experience—that no subordinate will meet your standards if he doesn't know what those standards are. On leaving his firey commander's counseling, the second lieutenant should be proud to belong to the unit, determined to excel, and, if it is done right, scared shitless.

Step two, also handled by the adjutant, was the *formal call*. This was done soon after the official call, and happened at the commander's quarters. The ceremonial ettiquett of the formal call seems quaint and archaic now, but at the time it was an accepted practice in polite American society. The formal call is one of a category called *calls of courtesy*.

The young officer arrived in the specified uniform at the specified time at the commander's quarters (which during peacetime were generally government quarters on post; on a large new mobilization camp, the CO would probably have to rent something off post), took a deep breath, and knocked. The door might be opened by the commander, or the commander's wife, or by the commander's house servant if he had one. At that point, you announced yourself: "Lieutenant Walker, for Colonel Gnash," or whatever. You would be ushered in to the foyer, and would place your calling card or cards in the handy silver dish (called a *salver* from the Latin word for "hello") on a table convenient to the door.

Let's pause a moment. What you are leaving is a *calling card*—not a business card. It is the descendent of the 19th Century *carte de visite*. You're not selling anything. You are formally indicating a polite formal visit. A calling card is rare nowadays, but an essential prop for polite social behavior then. I had a set made when I was commissioned in 1965, and only used three in 26 years of service. But they were used stateside in WW II, so let's examine the custom.

This is a calling card. A civilian calling card usually had only the name unless the bearer was a physician or held some other professional title. It is printed on stiff, smooth white paper, and is 2" x 3.5". When you purchased them, they were usually in a stack of at least 100, probably more, and were delivered with the engraved copper plate used to print them (which allowed you to print more without the engraving cost). The typeface was usually the same (called, cleverly, "copperplate").



There was some variation in style, but this is the commonest format. The styling "Army of the United States" is interchangeable with "United States Army." Technically, the latter is used by officers of the Regular Army only; the Regular Army, the Army Reserve, and the Army National Guard are, collectively, the Army of the United States. But the distinction was not formally maintained in those days.

Below are calling cards placed on the silver salver (usually done as you depart). There is a tricky ceremonial rule about this. You leave one card for the commander (you are calling on him), plus a card for his wife, and one for each adult son or daughter. If you don't have an accurate head count (the adjutant should have warned you), you can cover your bases by folding a corner of the additional card.

In peacetime or on a large stateside post, the officers of the regiment would also make a formal call on the commander on New Year's Day, usually a formal meet and greet consisting of a tired commander, his put-upon family, and a mob of junior officers nursing hangovers.

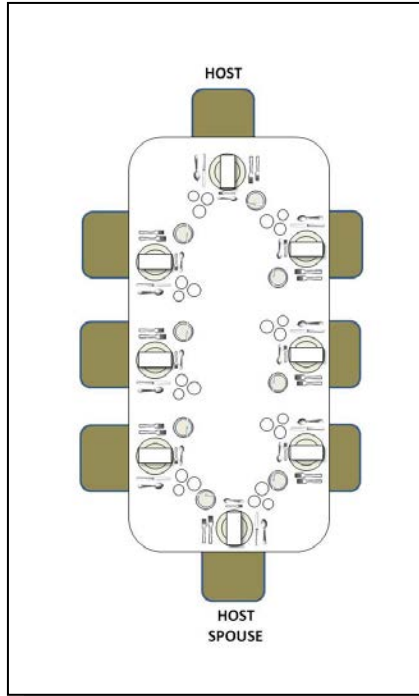


The famous “silver salver.” This happens to be mine, inherited from my Navy father. In the famous film “Fort Apache”, Lieutenant O'Rourke, new to the post, calls on the very formal colonel (played by Henry Fonda), *carte de visite* and silver salver included. The colonel's daughter (Shirley Temple) is incensed to find that the lieutenant is only making a duty call, not coming to see her. (Actually, a male officer would leave one card for every adult in the household; a woman calling would leave a calling card for each adult lady, as a lady does not call upon a gentleman without inviting scandal). In this case, I don't have a body count on the colonel's family, so I fold the corner to cover myself.

**Dining rituals:** Social customs of the day also managed to make a big deal out of formal meals, about which Emily Post had a great deal to tell us. The rules are still the same, but formal dinners are rare. Some things—for example, the formal place setting—are still the rule, but simpler because we generally serve fewer courses.

—Seating is predetermined at an Army formal function. The senior officer sits at the head of the table, his spouse (unless this is a male-only function) opposite him at the end of the table. Assuming the guest of honor (say, new Lt. Doughfoot Walker) has brought his wife, this lady of honor sits to the senior officer's right, and her husband (Lt. Walker) to the right of Mrs. Colonel at the other end of the table; and so on, alternating officer and spouse by rank and sex, meaning that the more junior officers and wives will sit nearer the center of the table. If there turns out to be a couple of unmarried officers—well, we do the best we can short of having a junior lieutenant show up in drag.

A formal dinner is served—under straitened circumstances there could be some family-style elements, but this is a formal dinner, so we will need the services of Gretchen or Imelda or whoever to make it happen. (If it's at the officers' Club, there are servers available.) Now let's learn how to make eating a meal difficult.



Order of service: the guest of honor's wife first, then proceeding counterclockwise to the guest at the senior officer's left (usually the next senior officer) and continuing around the table. Mrs. Colonel is served next to last, the Colonel last. The server places items from the left, removes them from the right.

Let's say this is a four course meal. It would likely be (a) appetizer, (b) soup, (c) salad, (d) main course, (e) dessert. (Yes that's five items; however, the apéritif does not count as a course. A five course meal includes a fish course between soup and salad.) Here's what happens, so you can be prepared.

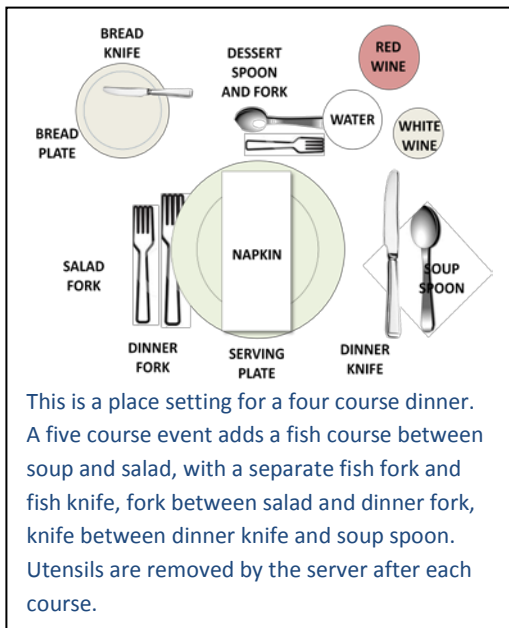
You find your place (because of formal seating, a place card is needed). Stand behind your chair, watching for a cue. When the host's spouse (in this case the colonel's wife) takes her seat, assisted by the officer nearest, everybody else sits as gracefully as possible. You immediately slip the napkin out of its ring and place it on your lap. Seat it securely, as picking it up from the floor during the soup course can be tricky. Fold

your hands in your lap; do *not* grab a fork in your left hand and a knife in your right, points up, as you did when Mom was cooking. Be patient.

You will note an empty plate in front of you. This is called a serving plate or a charger. Rule of a formal dinner: you never have empty space in front of you. But be patient; the server will presently place a bowl of soup on the serving plate. Do not start slurping your soup right away; wait until the last person at the table (the lady to the colonel's left) has been

**How to eat soup:**  
 Find your soup spoon (on the outside right of your place setting). Using your right hand, move the spoon into the soup, slanted away from you, and dip it in, again moving away from you. Lift it to your lips and sip it from the side. Do NOT slurp it and do NOT shovel it.

served.



This is a place setting for a four course dinner. A five course event adds a fish course between soup and salad, with a separate fish fork and fish knife, fork between salad and dinner fork, knife between dinner knife and soup spoon. Utensils are removed by the server after each course.

When the guests are finished with the soup, the server will take each bowl from the right, leaving the serving plate. The next course (salad) will be on a smaller plate and placed, as with the soup, on the serving plate. Find your salad fork on the far left beyond the dinner fork. Rule of thumb: *we use flatware from the outside in.*

Now it's time for the main course. The server will snatch away the serving plates and replace them with dinner plates. The server will bring each item in serving order and shovel it on the dinner plate. This takes a little time; if it's a large table, the host will probably employ more than one server. No problem now which utensils to use: all you have left is your dinner knife on the right and your dinner fork on your left. (Note that the cutting edge of a knife is always

facing toward your plate.) You will also be served a roll or whatever the bread is on your bread plate, upper left of your place setting.

Dessert comes last, on its own plate. The dessert knife and the dessert fork are arrayed just above your plate.

Now, you will not be spending the whole dinner stuffing food into your mouth. You will be expected to maintain conversation with a person next to you. This is controlled by the colonel's wife, in this way:

When the first course had been served, the colonel's wife will turn to the guest next to her—left or right at her discretion, but usually it will be the guest of honor—and invite conversation. All the guests watch for her cue, and will at this point engage the neighbor to the left or right—and *Emily Post will tell you this is important*—as the colonel's lady has chosen. *You must wait and watch for it.*

After a time, the colonel's wife sees conversation starting to lag; she notices that Lieutenant Fairchild has downed two glasses of the reserve red wine and is staring down the front of Mrs. Supply Officer's dress. Time for a change. She gracefully ends her repartee with the one, and shifts to the guest on her other side. Everyone else follows her lead. This trick is known as "turning the table."

Now you know how to navigate a formal meal like an officer and a gentleman.

### **A final few words**

Colonel Glover S. Johns, author of *Clay Pigeons of St. Lo*, was loved and admired throughout his long and illustrious career. His rules for officers were recorded by one of his disciples, Colonel David Hackworth, in his autobiography *About Face*. Here they are. I can say no more.

- Strive to do small things well.
- Be a doer and a self-starter—aggressiveness and initiative two most admired qualities in a leader—but you must also put your feet up and *think*.
- Strive for self-improvement through constant self-evaluation.
- Never be satisfied. Ask of any project, *How can it be done better?*
- Don't overinspect or oversupervise. Allow your leaders to make mistakes in training, so they can profit from errors and not make them in combat.
- Keep the troops informed; telling them "what, how, and why" builds their confidence.
- The harder the training, the more troops will brag.
- Enthusiasm, fairness, and moral and physical courage—four of the most important aspects of leadership.
- Showmanship—a vital technique of leadership.
- There is a salient difference between profanity and obscenity; while a leader may employ profanity (tempered with discretion), he never uses obscenities.
- Have consideration for others.
- Yelling distracts from your dignity; take men aside and counsel them.
- Understand and use judgment; know when to stop fighting for something you believe is right. Discuss and argue your point of view until a decision is made, and then support the decision wholeheartedly.
- Stay ahead of your boss.

**And one final tradition:**



#### LESSON SUMMARY

1. A tradition is a respected habit of behavior, generally outside the formal regulations.
2. The basic officer code derives from the principles of duty, honor, and country.
3. Of particular importance to officers are:
  - The sanctity of an official statement (do not lie in the conduct of your duties).
  - Readiness for increased responsibility.
  - Tact
  - Professional appearance and example of conduct.
4. Officer conduct reflects the maintenance of seniority.
5. The officer must never defame the uniform.
6. Personal speech, avoidance of debt, punctuality, and other traits are essential for an officer.
7. Social etiquette for officers reflects the customs and standards of genteel society at the time.
8. Calls on superior officers follow mandatory rules, and are conducted in a set way.

**9. Many meals within a unit are formal, and followed the accepted rules of the period.**

**Take the self-assessment quiz for Lesson 4.**

**This completes the course on the Army officer.**