

INTERCULTURAL COMMUNICATION IN THE CIVIL-MILITARY ENVIRONMENT (RULES OF MILITARY COURTESY)

Prof. Elvira Mihaela TUDOR*, Ph.D.

"Carol I" National Defence University

Secondary Foreign Language Centre of General Staff

Military courtesy consists of a set of rules meant to facilitate and harmonize the relationships between individuals belonging to military communities. It also represents the ties which unite them, namely the courtesy and mutual respect. The rules of military courtesy are simple. Each military needs to know and apply them. They are constantly compelled to behave as living examples of modesty, temperance, and high education, they are meant to defend their dignity and to respect the dignity of others. Judging the behavior of the military means not only an evaluation of their conduct, but also of the honor of the Armed Forces as a whole.

An article about the basic rules of military courtesy is always welcomed, as it may be addressed to young officers, non-commissioned officers or other categories of military personnel who make the first step on the way of their careers. Never could we say enough about the importance of the first impression on the way we are perceived as persons and professionals.

Keywords: military courtesy; rules; greetings; behavior; dress code.



In 1981 the schools of Coëtquidan printed a guide entitled "Manuel de tenue, savoir-vivre et correspondance", which is still valid, especially through the chapter about the rules of military courtesy. Article 48 of the French regulation called "Règlement de Discipline Générale des Armées" states that "Military politeness shows the commitment to the military community and the solidarity of its members. Observing these rules one can figure out a certain position in the military hierarchy, the spirit and the education of the military".

* e-mail: elvamiras@yahoo.fr

If some exceptions can be accepted as a consequence of ignorance, it will be difficult to forgive the deliberate transgressions of the basic decency code due to indolence or relaxation. These two states are, by definition, incompatible with the military status.

The rules of military courtesy, behavior and the military greeting is compulsory to the retired military, if they wear the military uniform. They are bound to comply strictly with the military requirements. While outside the military unit for rest or medical treatment, the military are allowed to wear civilian clothes.

Greeting is one brand of the military courtesy. The greeting is rendered only once a day to the same person. All rank superiors, regardless of branch, must be greeted, as well as all the people wearing a uniform or medals on civilian clothes.



Types of Greetings

In the land and air forces, officers greeted mentioning their rank, preceded by the word "Mon", the short form of "Monsieur". Women officers are greeted mentioning only their rank, without "Mon" or "Madame". As for the representatives of the Navy, we may notice some differences. An admiral and a commodore and will be called as "admiral". The commander of a ship, frigate or corvette will be called "Commandant". Non-commissioned officers in charge of a unit are called "commandants", regardless of their rank. In addition, officers whose ranks differ from those in the Land forces, Air Force and Navy are called "Monsieur le..." or "Madame le ou la..."

We should also note another example of hierarchical authority. Generals will get "les respects" from their subordinates, and not "les devoirs" a formula that is no longer in use. Military wives will use "Général ", "Colonel" and "Commandant" without being preceded by the term of "Mon". For their lower ranks the term of "Monsieur" will be used. The French greeting "Mes hommages, madame" may be used systematically when a military renders the greeting to the wife of his superior. In time, if she agrees, a less formal greeting can be used mentioning her name accompanied by the pronoun of politeness.

Finally, the topic of getting systematically on the first name bases should also be approached. We discuss here about the situation when a

superior addresses a lower rank. Regulations do not allow this form of address. However, if it is natural, sincere and friendly it will not constitute a problem. Everyone should note the addressing forms in his environment so that one would know which their position, seniority, rank, or shared experiences are and would adopt an appropriate communication style with his subordinates.

The military salute has a double meaning. On the one hand, it is a symbol of belonging to the armed forces. On the other hand, it is a sign of mutual respect paid to a superior by a subordinate. As a sign of politeness and consideration, the lower rank officer welcomes the higher rank officer and will receive the same greeting in return. The greeting should be rendered at a distance that grants the superior the time to greet back. It is customary that the superior be greeted even if he wears civilian clothes. In an informal meeting or after the working hours, the subordinate welcomes its superior without exaggerating the tone of his voice or the position called in French *Garde -à-vous – Attention*. Avoiding the superior could be regarded as rudeness.

Greetings apply not only to people but also to the flag, the national anthem and at the military commemoration ceremonies. It is performed in the same manner, head covered when outside and uncovered when inside.

A modern formula of greeting is "Bonjour mon ..." addressed to a superior that replies proposing a handshake after his greeting return. Any other actions or gestures such as kissing are strictly forbidden.

Meetings at the military and civilian level

The addressed words and the attitudes that should be taken during a short and unexpected meeting between two military of different ranks will always be polite and adapted to context, location, and the type of work they perform.

When in uniform, the soldier must salute his superior in the manner set by regulations and present his homages, only if the distance between the two is short enough to do that. The homage is not given in high pitch.

It is strictly forbidden to salute while talking on the cell phone. In this situation, the military should drop the conversation, take the proper position and greet respectfully. A superior that receives the subordinate's salute should answer it. During a sport activity, like running or jogging, it is often difficult to salute a superior officer. In this case, it is better to refrain from any move and pay the respect through a sign of politeness such as nodding.

A military is always a representative of the military institution and is always subject to the requirements of the military hierarchy. He should pay particular attention to his conduct. Sometimes it is better to be reserved than exuberant.

It may also seem strange to have the same gestures and attitude outside the military environment. A simple and polite nodding can sometimes be enough. You must, however, wait for the superior to put forth his hand first. When the superior is in civilian clothes, special attention should be given to the possible presence of other family members. If the wife is present, it is advised that you introduce yourself and greet her by saying "mes hommages" before greeting the superior.

The conduct in military areas

While in a military location, besides the proper attitudes that every military should normally have, it is compulsory to have a respectful and retained behavior. When for the first time in a military unit, one must arrive 10 minutes before the assistant officer so that one will be in time for the meeting with the commander. Right the same day or no later than the next one, the military will go to greet all the officers of a higher or equal rank.

For a young lieutenant, a courtesy visit should be paid to the president of the non-commissioned officers. Regardless of rank, this gesture will be appreciated. More appropriate attitudes will be taken throughout the military career. Among other things, if you are called by your superior while you wear a sport outfit ... you should estimate if you have time to change or you should apologize before the time of the meeting by saying, "Mon colonel, je suis en tenue de sport, souhaitez-vous que je me change ou dois-je venir dans la tenue du moment ? " - "Sir, I am in my sport outfit, do you want me to change my clothes or I am allowed to come as I am?" Often, he will accept your present outfit.

The mess hall brings together all the officers and sometimes all the soldiers of the same unit. Upon arrival, the newcomer will introduce himself to all the officers that he hasn't met yet. Generally speaking the uniform must be worn and punctuality is to be respected. In case of delay, even justified, apologies must be offered to the officer who presides the table or to the one who leads the meeting.

Apologies for delays to certain events must always be presented. Do not forget that it is polite (in French- *bon ton*) to ask for permission leave the table earlier. At a lunch or dinner held in the presence of authorities, the youngest person takes the initiative to offer water or wine to the people in his vicinity. When walking next to a superior, one is requested to be on the superior's left side. When two people accompany a superior, the highest in rank walks on the superior's left side, and the other is on his right, a few steps backwards.

Behavior in places of worship

Clearly, all places of worship are meant for meditation and peace. Avoid visits during the religious service. Requested dress may vary with religions and it is necessary to get prior information about the customs of those places of worship.

For example, a man will enter the church bareheaded, while in a synagogue or a mosque he will cover his head and off his shoes. When attending a religious service the person sharing the same religion must comply with the typical rules and needs to have the proper attitude for the event. Clear distinction must be made between wearing the uniform for a ceremony organized by military or civilian clothes for other religious services. Do not forget that the presence of the military represents secular state and involves the attention and respect of others during the religious service.

Behavior on public transport

The main feature of public transportation (bus, subway, train) is promiscuity. The distance between individuals is small and it is worth paying attention to their behavior.

Generally, rules of conduct are as follows:

- a man will offer the seat to a woman, especially when she is pregnant;
- a young persons will offer the seat to older persons;
- a healthy person will offer the seat to a disabled person;
- respecting the others, stay unnoticed.

Using a mobile phone on public transportation is always embarrassing for other persons riding the same bus. Wearing of the uniform is not prohibited, it is even encouraged, both during the journeys by train or subway. However, combinations between military and civilian attires are not tolerated.

Soldiers should be polite to civilians, should pay special attention to the elderly, women and children. They also ought to help defend the honor and dignity of the citizens and provide support in case of accidents, fire or disasters.

Behavior on the street

Although the street is a place of freedom and movement, a number of rules must be obeyed so that the others will not be disturbed. Some principles of conduct should also be applied as basic gestures of politeness:

- apology to a person who is bullied;
- a man accompanying a woman or an elderly person will walk on the limit of the lane;
- a person will step down from it if the sidewalk is too narrow;
- a man will offer help to a woman or an elderly person to use the sidewalk or a passage in an area where works are performed;

- do not argue with the person who is travelling with you;
- start by politely greeting a person that you want to ask an information from;
- thank by a gesture made by hand, to a driver who yields you the way;
- do not throw off litter.

In public places, and in trolleys, buses and intercity trains, if there are no available seats, the soldier is obliged to offer the seat to his superior. When meeting a superior, the subordinate must let room for him to pass, especially if the space is narrow and should do this by saluting. At meetings, concerts, shows and conferences held in the military unit the superiors will be seated in the first rows, if not otherwise ordered.

Behavior in stores

When entering a store, a discreet greeting is proper if those present permit that. Inappropriate behavior such as skipping the line order or paying before your turn is not accepted. It is not forbidden to go shopping wearing the military uniform. However, once more, military should pay attention to what they buy, as a cart full of drinks is not appropriate to their status.

Organizing and attending receptions

In the military, receptions, formal or not, are the focus of military relations that each develops with their colleagues, ensuring the link between the private and the professional environment. Even if they can seem dull when held too often, these meetings are both a social duty and a pleasure to spend some free time.

If an invitation is sent specifying *RSVP avant le 20 septembre 2010* (Répondre, s'il vous plaît, avant le 20 septembre 2010) - Please answer before September 20 - followed by a phone number, the answer should be provided by phone and not by a letter or a text message. It is very rude to not respond to an invitation. An answer should be provided even if you can take part in the event or not.

It is not polite to send a printed invitation to a superior. For a general officer or for the commander of the unit, it is necessary to write the text by hand.

In France, meals are the occasions when people socialize, strengthening the relationships. For the guests, they are also a sign of esteem and friendship. A successful dinner needs preparation if the host wants that everything be as he wished for. We need to know to combine formality required with the means at our disposal. We let the participants know that they should be on time and will not leave the reception before the person that is the highest hierarchically.

Receiving guests

Breakfast – may serve as the beginning of a leisure activity. It must be large enough and diverse to suggest the respect shown to the guests. It may consist of a brunch after the Anglo-Saxon model, or it could be traditional for that region or branch of service. The invitation to breakfast is done by phone.

Lunch – excepting those during the service, lunches are rather reserved for the periods of leave and the weekends, involving a relatively small number of soldiers. Even they are formal with the table arranged according to the protocol rules, they are in fact occasions when military socialize and do not exchange opinions about military rules and regulations. In this case, accept the invitation by phone.

Cocktail – it is an easy way to gather a large number of people. Usually a cocktail takes place around 6:20 p.m. and facilitates the meeting among people of diverse opinions, giving each the possibility to choose their interlocutors. A cocktail is perfect to celebrate a person's promotion, departure or even retirement. The invitations for a cocktail are always in writing.

Meeting for a drink – the relaxed version of the cocktail is rather restricted to the professional groups. It allows superiors and subordinates to meet outside the working environment. The dress could be that from work or casual. The place is set by the organizer and who makes sure that the participants will behave properly. The invitations are made orally.

Barbeque – it allows a large numbers of participants to mingle in a pleasant and relaxing area. Everybody should be dressed casually. As it is an outdoor event, it will be scheduled so that the participants can withdraw inside in case of unfavorable weather conditions. The invitation by phone is customary, but the invitation in writing is preferred.

Dinner – it is the most mannered form to organize receptions and should therefore be carefully organized. The starting time is set between 20 and 20.30, preferably on Thursdays, Fridays or Saturdays. Organizers will be careful in choosing the date, menu and meal preparations. The invitations shall be in writing, stating the time and the attire. A dinner can be replaced by a buffet. In this case, the rules stay the same except that the participants are seated at the table.

Rules of conduct for guests

The punctuality is essential and will avoid some possible embarrassing situations for the hosts. It is rude to arrive before the appointed time, but a delay no longer than 15 minutes can be accepted. In case of a longer delay, it is necessary to notice the hosts by phone.

In the particular case of an official reception guests should arrive shortly before the appointed time and never after authorities.

Usually the guests bring a gift. They can get in touch before and bring a common gift or they can order flowers, and have then delivered the same day or the next day, together with a "thank you" message. Guests can try to find out the host's favorite flowers. Do not forget that the lady welcomes the guests and she will be more sensitive to a bouquet of flowers than to a bottle of wine.

As for the dress, we must mention that civilian dress should be of good taste, decency and adapted to the situation. Being invited to lunch or dinner, the military should wear matching trousers and jacket and tie for that event, if there are no other indications on the invitation.

For a cocktail, a military usually wears a suit, white shirt and tie for the best scenario or an appropriate dress for dinner in the worst scenario.

Generally worn off duty or on duty in certain circumstances, the civilian dress¹ is not part of a military regulation. Each military according to their habits and preferences is free to choose clothes that should only be discrete and of good taste. A sporting outfit is worn in a familiar environment while for private or official eccentricity should be avoided. For the mess hall, the regulations prohibit a dress that could be too casual dress, like shirts, shorts or pants, sandals).

The appropriate behavior is a sign of good education. At the table we sit in the right position, with our hands on the table, opened towel placed on the knees and always expecting the host lady to start. In return, she will wait for all the guests to be served in order to begin the dish.

Regarding the serving protocol, women have priority, then men and the male host who will take care of bread and wine.

Discussions on topics that are related to service and could contain military jargon and acronyms should be avoided. It is not appropriate to address controversial topics. A good education requires to carefully listen to the speakers, addressing the right and the left companion, even if you know them or not. Do not interrupt other guests from talking.

¹ Commandement de la formation de l'armée de terre ENSOA, Ecole Nationale des sous officiers d'active, *Guide de tenue, de savoir-vivre et de correspondance*, version 2007, ch. 1.3. La tenue civile:

- city dress: jacket and tie (or suit);
- casual dress: collared shirt unbuttoned, no jacket, with or without a sweater, jean can be worn during outdoor activities but is completely banned from cocktail, even if the invitation specifies the type of outfit;
- casual dress (tenue aérée ou d'hivernage): kept reserved tropical countries - loose shirt, sometimes with short sleeves.

Guests should leave at the right time, they must be careful not to leave early. Only if they have the highest rank, they can leave early. Moreover, it is lack of courtesy to come late. Rules prohibit leaving immediately after looking at your watch. There is no required leaving hour, but the guests should try to know the hosts' habits by watching their behavior during the meal.

The dance parties are often held after a cocktail or dinner, it is important that the superior's wife should be invited to dance. It is generally established that the initiative of an invitation to dance should come from the man. Sometimes the situation may be unusual, as a man could invite a superior or subordinate female. There are no set rules in this regard; everybody should comply with the respective situation.

If the casual dress is specified in writing or verbally the guests must get informed about what the host usually wears on such occasions. Generally, pants, shirts or unbuttoned collars, with or without sweaters are appropriate for the event.

The term "city dress" refers to wearing a suit, or jacket and tie. When the term "casual dress" is mention, you can wear loose, sometimes short sleeved shirts. The A 11 dress can replace the smoking or the evening dress for dinner:

- for male officers – Spencer short jacket and dark blue trousers, epaulets, white shirt, black bow tie, blue smoking belt, lake black shoes;
- for female officers – short Spencer jacket and blue dress, epaulets, white satin shirt, black satin bow tie, purse, black lacquer, black lacquer high heels shoes, possible skin color tights, no hairdo, necklaces, bracelets or earrings.

In conclusion, the military courtesy is expressed through three types of behavior in our daily life as citizens, military and superiors and it can be identified by attire, conduct and oral or written expression. Each of these manners is simply another way of saying "We respect each other".

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