

SOCIAL CUSTOMS & THE ARMY

A Working Bibliography of MHI Sources

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GENERAL SOURCES

Crocker, Lawrence P. The Army Officer's Guide. Harrisburg, PA: Stackpole, 1988. Chap. 8.
U133.O442.

Culver, Clay K. "O Clubs: Tradition or Contradiction?" Airpower (Winter 1992): pp. 46-59. Per.
Analysis of USAF officer clubs since 1950.

Etiquette. Ft. Benning, GA: Infantry School, 1969. 47 p. U766.E84.
"This handbook on etiquette has been prepared for Officer Candidates and newly
commissioned officers to serve as guidance for their conduct in relation with members of
the civilian community as well as the military community"

Knight, Oliver. Life and Manners in the Frontier Army. Norman, OK: U OK, 1978. 280 p. F593.K56.
Based on novels of Charles King; replete with customs & other bits of social history.

McCandless, Bruce. Service Etiquette; The Guide to Correct Usage on Official and Unofficial Occasions
for Men and Women in the Army, Navy, Marine Corps, Coast Guard, and Air Force. Annapolis:
Naval Institute, 1963. 447 p. U766.M2.

U.S. Military Academy. Official and Social Courtesy, U.S.M.A. West Point, NY, 1951. 44 p.
U353.O332.

AMERICAN MILITARY WEDDINGS

Despite a reputation for prescribing in detail the "correct" way to do things, the U.S. Army does not appear to have a general regulation or manual on weddings. (There may be instructions for chaplains who conduct marriage ceremonies.) See the following unofficial guides to military weddings, which describe customs and "proper" procedures:

Boatner, Mark M., III. Military Customs and Traditions. NY: McKay, 1956. pp. 160-61. U766.B572.

Gross, Mary Preston, & Tomlinson, Mickey. Military Weddings and the Military Ball. Chuluota, FL: Beau Lac, 1983. 62 p. U766.G76.
How to; no history.

Moss, James A. Officers' Manual. Menasha, WI: Banta, 2nd edition (1907): pp. 240-41 & 9th edition (1943): pp. 88-89, respectively. U133M92.

_____. Noncommissioned Officers' Manual. Menasha, WI: Banta, 1916. pp. 382-83. U123.M91.

_____. Origin and Significance of Military Customs. Menasha, WI: Banta, 1917. pp. 7-9.
U766.M6.

The Officers' Guide. Wash, DC: National Service Publishing, 1st edition (1930): p. 125 & Harrisburg, PA: Stackpole, 39th edition (1977): p. 75. U133.A.O03.

Shea, Nancy. The Army Wife. NY: Harper, 1941. pp. 44-68. U766.S5.

Wier, Ester. Army Social Customs. Harrisburg, PA: Mil Srv Pub, 1958. pp. 39-41. U766.W47.

Concise reports of three weddings were found in randomly-searched issues of the Army and Navy Journal, Vol. 19, (24 Sep 1881): p. 163; (26 Nov 1881): p. 358; (25 Feb 1882): p. 659.

On naval wedding customs, see the lengthy chapter in Harrad, Service Etiquette, pp. 366-96 (Annapolis, MD.: Naval Institute, 1963; U766.M2).

See also:

-Bibliographies on Marriage & Army Wives/Spouses in Family Members.

MILITARY BALLS AND DANCING

Experts believe modern social dancing derives from pre-historic rituals. This means that the primitive fertility dance--the form of which is left to the imagination--somehow evolved into folk dancing and then into elegant and graceful of courtly dancing. Further evolution transformed the high pageantry of the court dance into the more democratic ballroom affairs of today.¹

The military profession, of course, shared in the overall cultural evolution of dance forms and added its own variant, the military ball. It fulfilled some of the profession's ceremonial and social needs. One professional soldier even made a dance perform military service, so to speak. The Duke of Wellington, on the eve of Waterloo, deliberately attended a midnight ball in order to calm the local population. Moreover, when notified that Napoleon had begun to march against him, the Duke issued preliminary battle orders on the spot, then continued with the ball.²

For American military balls and dances, many well look back to George Washington, whose diaries record a lifetime of attendance at balls.³ Even with the Continental Army in winter quarters at Morristown (1779-80) and suffering record cold--worse than at Valley Forge--Washington and his officers organized a dancing society. Those Morristown balls must have been popular, because one hapless lieutenant of the 4th Maryland Regiment came before a court martial that cold winter charged with several offenses, including that he had claimed to be ill but had gone to the ball, "...remaining one night and the best part of two days from his regiment..."⁴

The service academies have long held formal and informal dances.⁵ The Marine Corps has for many years made its annual birthday celebration and ball a social highlight.⁶ Even at the isolated frontier outposts of the Indian-fighting Army, dances played a central part of garrison life.⁷

One dance custom noted at those frontier garrisons was the colonel's lady opening the ball by dancing with the senior non-commissioned officer, whose wife in turn danced with the colonel himself.⁸ Another old Army custom, origin unknown, was the New Year's Eve Ball, when the bugler sounded tattoo at ten minutes before midnight and then at midnight the orchestra welcomed the new year by playing reveille.⁹ Many military balls now end with a customary rendition of the National Anthem.¹⁰

Of interest may be the toast often proposed by President George Washington to the Philadelphia Dancing Assembly, 1790-97:

May the members thereof and the Fair who honor it with their presence long continue in the enjoyment of an amusement so innocent and agreeable."¹¹

NOTES

- ¹ See articles on dance in Encyclopedia Americana and Encyclopaedia Britannica.
- ² Arthur Bryant, The Great Duke (London: Collins, 1971), pp. 409-10 (DA68.12.W4.B96).
- ³ The Diaries of George Washington, ed by John C. Fitzpatrick, 4 vols (Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 1925), E312.8.
- ⁴ The Writings of George Washington, Vol. 18 (Wash, DC: GPO, 1937), pp. 261-62 (E312.7)
- ⁵ U.S. Naval Institute, Service Etiquette, (Annapolis: Institute, 1963), Chap 3 (U766.U5).
- ⁶ Robert D. Heidl, The Marine Officer's Guide, 4th ed (Annapolis: Naval Inst Press, 1977), pp. 636 & 677-79 (VE153.T5).
- ⁷ Oliver Knight, Frontier Army (Norman, OK: U of OK, 1978), pp. 132-37 (F593.K56).
- ⁸ Ibid.
- ⁹ James A. Moss, Origin and Significance of Military Customs (Menasha), WS: Banta, 1917, p. 7 (U766M6).
- ¹⁰ Heidl, see above.
- ¹¹ The Writings of George Washington, Vol 35, p. 397.

See also:

- Army & Navy Journal, social columns, Per.

HAIL & FAREWELL

A search in pertinent sources here disclosed little information on this particular custom. Published guides for Army officers and wives fail to mention it, including the prolific writings of James A. Moss, who described and prescribed Army customs from 1906 until about World War II. Interestingly, the first edition of The Officers' Guide (Wash, DC: National Service Publishing, 1930; U133A603), p. 121, notes that "a reception, despedida, or other suitable regimental function"...will be given in honor of the officer leaving. If practical, one of the regimental social functions may be used for this purpose. "Despedida" is the Spanish word for farewell. Unfortunately, the Guide notes no similar regimental function for the arrival of a new officer (see pp. 119-20). Hail-and-farewell functions appear to be something less than formal Army custom and more of an informal social practice.

In the U.S. Navy, a hail-and-farewell tradition seems more formalized. Leland P. Lovette's Naval Customs: Tradition and Usage (Annapolis, MD: U.S. Naval Inst, 1934; V310.L68), p. 108, mentions as custom the formal dinner given by the ship's officers whenever their new captain arrives. The second edition of Service Etiquette (Annapolis, MD: Naval Institute, 1963; U766.U5), p. 328, allows such dinners for new and old captains to be held either separately or as a "combined 'Hail and Farewell' party."

The Home Book of Quotations, (NY: Dodd, Mead, 1956), p. 165, attributes the following line to the Odes of Gaius Valerius Catullus (ca 84-ca 54 BC):

In perpetuum, frater, ave atique vale.
(For ever, brother, hail and farewell.)

UMBRELLA TABOO

At present, the uniformed female personnel in all the armed services are permitted to use umbrellas. Only the Air Force allows its male personnel a similar privilege. The uniformed males in the Army, Navy, and Marines remain bound by custom weighted down by tradition--and wet on rainy days. For Army males, regulations do not specifically prohibit umbrellas, but neither do they authorize their use. Where regulations do not specify, custom and tradition dictate. The Officer's Guide points out that appropriate umbrellas (plain and black) are "both authorized and proper" for uniformed women, but men must heed the "longstanding taboo" against umbrellas. How long-standing is this taboo?

The umbrella device itself is of ancient origin and, indeed, has equally ancient military usage. As protection against either sun or rain, umbrellas have been employed by military men throughout recorded history. Assyrian warrior-kings carried them into battle, as did British officers and rankers on the rain-sodden fields of Flanders in World War I. Umbrellas, in fact, became quite fashionable during the Napoleonic Wars. Nearly a century later, U.S. cavalymen were observed in the 1890s carrying cream-colored umbrellas against a fierce mid-western sun. However, in the evolution of American military fashion, custom eventually identified the umbrella as "unmilitary"--possibly even unmanly-- by the early part of the 20th century. "Offenders" faced not court-martial but, worse, sniggers from their peers. As the Army's one-time social arbiter James Moss explained in his 1909 Officers' Manual:

It is considered unmilitary for an Officer or a soldier in uniform to use an umbrella. Several years ago the colonel and some of the officers of a certain infantry regiment used to use umbrellas while in uniform. The regiment was soon jocularly dubbed throughout the service "The Umbrella" - and even to this day it is sometimes referred to in this manner.

In 1930, the first edition of The Officers' Guide appeared, describing itself as "A Ready Reference on Customs of the Service and Correct Procedure in All Situations". In regard to umbrellas, it declared:

The carrying of an open umbrella by an officer in uniform is sure to bring ridicule on the head of the offender against a custom is older than any man on the active list of the army.

Grose, Francis. Advice to the Officers of the British Army.... London: Jonathan Cape, 1946 reprint of 1782 edition. pp. 18-21. U20.G8.

Moss, James. Officer's Guide.... Various editions.

Puleston, W.D. Mahan: The Life and Work of Captain Alfred Thayer Mahan, U.S. N. New Haven, CT: Yale, 1939. p. 101. E182.M256.

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“Rain and Umbrellas.” United States Service Magazine (Jul 1864): pp. 17-20. Per.
Translation from “Esquisses Historiques de l’Armee Francaise”

“Why American Soldiers do not Carry Umbrellas.” Thomas File, #4071. Microfilm.

Yarham, E.R. "The Umbrella Front" Army Quarterly (1942), pp. 75-9. Per.

THE YELLOW RIBBON

Nauroth, Tony. “Yellow Ribbons.” Soldiers (Apr 1991): pp. 32-33. Per.

Prater, Jeffrey C. “John Ford’s Cavalry Trilogy: Myth or Reality.” CGSC thesis, 1989. 167 p.
PN1995.9.W4.P72.

Analyzes three films for historical accuracy of frontier cavalry life; see especially
pp. 16-17 & 103-05 on the “yellow ribbon.”