

Veterans and the National Emblem

Saluting in Lodge: The Law and Other Flag Etiquette

By

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ABSTRACT: The National Ensign of the United States is an epitome of patriotism and one of, if not, the greatest symbols of freedom and democracy. You have seen many variations of respect rendered to the Colors as they move about the Lodge, presented at the altar, during the reciting of the Pledge of Allegiance, posted in the East, and during the National Anthem. Proper rendering of respect to the great Emblem of the Nation is very important. This paper will attempt to provide you with the information necessary to honor the sacrifices of the thousands of servicemen and women who have secured American freedom for centuries. If you are like me, you will want the proper rendering of respect due to the greatest Emblem of our country. Providing service is a selfless honor - one that veterans are very proud of. So, it makes a lot of sense to have this discussion.

Thank you for taking this journey with me!

I come to you as someone with a few years of experience in the art of military honors, customs, courtesies, and ceremonies. I retired from the United States Coast Guard after 21 years of service in 2018. The aspect of my career that prepared me for this paper is rooted in my five years of service in the U.S. Coast Guard Ceremonial Honor Guard, which is one of the five service Honor Guards with the responsibility of providing honors and ceremonies in the Military District of Washington. Three of those years were at the beginning of my career as a Seaman, serving as a Platoon Seaman, Firing Party Seaman, Joint Service Color Guard member, and member of the Silent Drill Team – the Coast Guard version of the U.S. Marine Corps Silent Drill Team. The remaining two years were as the Company

Commander. So, I have seen honors and ceremonies from the deck plates to leadership in just about every venue and circumstance – from State funerals to Presidential inaugurations. I was even on speed dial for the Protocol Officer to the Commandant of the U.S. Coast Guard to provide advice and contributed to the U.S. Coast Guard Protocol Manual. One might say I am a subject matter expert, well, at least in my own mind!

How many of you have been in Lodge or other venues and have seen brothers conduct a ripple salute at various times when Colors are paraded, or on the move? Some brothers salute as soon as Colors are picked up, others when Colors pass them, and others still when Colors are presented at the altar. None of these scenarios are essentially incorrect; many of our actions are driven largely by our personal experiences – whether in school, as scouts, and especially for those of us who are veterans. The military salute is one of the ultimate forms of honor and respect rendered to whomever, or whatever it is raised for, and it deserves to be rendered appropriately in Lodge and everyday life.

The National Ensign, also known as the “Stars and Stripes,” is the term used when speaking of the flag of the United States. It is referred to in several contexts: as an “Ensign” when displayed on a vessel or facility; “Colors” when carried by foot; and as, “Standard” when displayed on a vehicle or aircraft¹. There are many occasions when you will render honors to the Ensign. Yes, I am offering this for all situations, not just in the lodge. You might as well know because the manners of respect should follow us everywhere. The usual rule is to face the

flag if it is displayed and face the music if the flag is not displayed. You should hold your salute until the Anthem, Pledge of Allegiance or TAPS ends or, if there is no Anthem, Pledge, or TAPS, until the flag has been hoisted or lowered, or has passed your position. In the past, when the National Anthem or Pledge of Allegiance was going on, all personnel were expected to stand, face the flag, and personnel in civilian attire would stand, face the flag, and render the right-hand-over-heart salute, if not covered, and removed the headgear with their right hand and place the hat and hand over their heart.² However, we now have new laws that permit the military salute, covered or uncovered, for veterans not in uniform.

The salute, what is it, and where does it come from? It is a courtesy that has been observed for centuries by military personnel of every nationality.³ It exists by more than the force of custom. There are various schools of thought on the origin of the salute. Many military historians believe the hand salute might have begun in Rome. In regular society, citizens had to demonstrate they were not armed and would approach with the right hand made visible or raised if they wanted to meet with a senator or other public officials. Another theory suggests the practice stems from knights in armor, who traditionally raised the visors of their helmets with their right hand to friends for

the purpose of identification. Another possible origin of the salute goes back to the days of the Borgias, a notorious Spanish family when assassinations by dagger were not uncommon. It was customary for men to approach each other with raised hand, palm to the front, to prove that no dagger was concealed. However, from the earliest days of military organization, the junior uncovered when meeting or addressing a senior.

Gradually, the act of uncovering was simplified into touching the cap and, finally, into the present-day salute, which means, "I greet you."⁴ Whatever its origins, the salute has come to be a sign of respect.

Through the centuries, various types of salutes have been used to honor each other, a nation's flag, and national leaders. For instance, in schools of the late 1800s, the United States once used the "Bellamy Salute" during the Pledge of Allegiance. This salute was widely used across the country by the younger generation of the time. However, this salute looked too similar to the Nazi salute adopted by Adolf Hitler in the early 1930s. President Roosevelt and Congress changed the Pledge of Allegiance salute to be that of a hand over the heart during World War II since the Bellamy salute had largely been adopted by Fascists around the world.⁵

¹ CAPT George E. Krietemeyer, USCG (Retired), *The Coast Guardsman's Manual*, 9th ed. (Annapolis, MD: U.S. Naval Institute Press, 2000).

² US Marine Corps, *Marine Corps Drill and Ceremonies Manual* (Washington, DC: MCO P5060.20, Change 6, 3 May 2003).

³ Krietemeyer, USCG (Retired), *The Coast Guardsman's Manual*.

⁴ Oretta D. Swartz, *Service Etiquette*, 4th ed. (Annapolis, MD: U.S. Naval Institute Press, 1988).

⁵ Swartz, *Service Etiquette*.

Veterans have heard the debate time and time again and everyone believes they are right. Specifically, when do you render the hand salute and when do you place your hand over your heart? Veterans and active-duty military personnel not in uniform can now render the military-style hand salute during the playing of the National Anthem and when reciting the Pledge of Allegiance, thanks to changes in federal law. The National Defense Authorization Act of 2008 (H.R. 4986)⁶ contained an amendment to modify Title 4 of the U.S. Flag Code to allow veterans, military retirees, and military service members not in uniform to render a hand salute during the hoisting, lowering, or passing of the U.S. flag, but it did not allow them to salute the flag during the National Anthem.⁷ Section 595 of S. 3001, the National Defense Authorization Act of 2009⁸, signed by President Bush on 14 October 2009, amends Title 36 of the U.S. Code to allow veterans and service members not in uniform to salute the flag during the National Anthem, making the two sections of U.S. Code consistent.⁹ Let us take a closer look at the various aspects of these changes.

The Flag Code now states the following language specific to the National Anthem:

MILITARY SALUTE FOR THE FLAG DURING THE NATIONAL ANTHEM BY MEMBERS OF THE ARMED FORCES IN UNIFORM AND BY VETERANS. Section 301(b)(1) of title 36, United States Code, is amended by striking subparagraphs (A) through (C) and inserting the following new subparagraph: (A) individuals in uniform should give the military salute at the first note of the Anthem and maintain that position until the last note. (B) Members of the Armed Forces and veterans that are present

but not in uniform may render the military salute in the manner provided for individuals in uniform.

(C) All other persons present should face the flag and stand at attention with their right hand over the heart, and men not in their uniform, if applicable, should remove their headdress with their right hand and hold it at the left shoulder, the hand being over the heart. Part (C) applies to those not in the military and non-veterans.¹⁰

What does that mean to us as Veterans and supporters of Veterans? Any veteran can salute during the national anthem.

Like the actions directed during the National Anthem, the U.S. Flag Code states the following during the Pledge of Allegiance:

PLEDGE OF ALLEGIANCE. When not in uniform men should remove any non-religious headdress with their right hand and hold it at the left shoulder, the hand being over the heart. Members of the Armed Forces not in uniform and veterans may render the military salute in the manner provided for persons in uniform.¹¹

So, the Flag Code states that if you render a hand salute during the Pledge, you must do it as you were in full uniform.

The Flag Code states the following observances during the hoisting, lowering, or passing of the flag:

HOISTING, LOWERING, or PASSING OF THE FLAG. During the ceremony of hoisting or lowering the flag or when the flag is passing in a parade or in review...Members of the Armed Forces and veterans who are present but not in

uniform may render the military salute. All other persons present should face the flag and stand at attention with their right hand over the heart, or if applicable, remove their headdress with their right hand and hold it at the left shoulder, the hand being over the heart...All such conduct toward the flag in a moving column should be rendered at the moment the flag passes.¹²

What does all this mean to veterans? If the flag is entering a room, usually someone will tell you to stand and present arms or hand salute. If you are not in a formal setting like a convention, meeting, or other events where there will be a color guard, you should stand up and salute. If you are not a veteran or current military service member, you remove any hats and place your hand over your heart until the ceremony ends. Another aspect to keep in mind here is concerned with the passing of the Colors. Typically, in a large room, you would salute as the Colors pass you and drop it when they are clear of you and salute again at the appropriate time.¹³

However, given that Lodge rooms are so small compared to large venues, it would make sense to salute when Colors are moving the

whole time, more especially for the Master observing the entire movement from the East.

I want to share an excerpt of a press release by U.S. Senator Jim Inhofe (R-Okla.) on 14 October 2008 that provides some great insight into why these measures were enacted.

Senator Inhofe sponsored the amendment to ensure veterans and all members of the Armed Forces are given the right to render a military salute to the United States flag...Senator Inhofe said, "The salute is a form of honor and respect, representing pride in one's military service. Veterans and service members continue representing the military services even when not in uniform. The U.S. Code is now consistent for veterans and all service members in regards to the symbolic gesture of the military salute...I believe this is an appropriate way to honor and recognize the 25 million veterans in the United States who have served in the military and remain role models to other citizens. Those who are currently serving or have served in the military have earned this right, and their recognition will be an inspiration to others.¹⁴

⁶National Defense Authorization Act of 2008, H. Res. 4986, 110th Cong. Public Law No. 110-181 (January 28, 2008): HR4986.

⁷United States Flag Code, Public Law 105-225, US Statutes at Large 105 (August 12, 1998), codified at *US Code 4 (1998)*.

⁸National Defense Authorization Act of 2009, S. Res. 3001, 110th Cong. Public Law No. 110-417 (October 14, 2008): S3001.

⁹Patriotic and National Observances, Ceremonies, and Organizations codified at *US Code 36*.

¹⁰United States Flag Code, *US Code 4 (1998)*.

¹¹Ibid.

¹²United States Flag Code, *US Code 4 (1998)*.

¹³US Marine Corps, *Marine Corps Drill and Ceremonies Manual*.

¹⁴"President Signs Inhofe Legislation Allowing Veterans to Salute the Flag During the National Anthem," *Senator James M. Inhofe*, last modified October 14, 2008. Accessed September 16, 2019, <https://www.inhofe.senate.gov/newsroom/press-releases/president-signs-inhofe-legislation-allowing-veterans-to-salute-the-flag-during-the-national-anthem>.

Now, let us discuss the history of the flag, which will help frame the importance of the honors and respect due it, particularly for the benefit of those that might not know. The American flag is a powerful symbol that carries with it much history and emotion. Over the generations, we have viewed the Stars and Stripes as an image that represents honor, loyalty, and freedom. As we look to the flag and recite our allegiance to it – and the country for which it stands - it evokes feelings of patriotism, pride, and thankfulness. It causes us to remember those who have served in the military and to think about the many who fought and died to establish and continually protect this nation.

With the onset of the American Revolution, each of the 13 colonies created its own flag, and many colonies had several of them. The

On 1 January 1776, the day the Continental Army came into being, these flags were displayed in the lines of the colonial forces besieging Boston. This famous flag has been called the “Continental Flag” and, later, the “Grand Union Flag.” After the Declaration of Independence, the use of the British Union Jack became inappropriate for obvious reasons, and a new flag was created. On 14 June 1777, the first Act of Congress was to establish the Stars and Stripes. It ordained the present arrangement of stripes and stated that the 13 white stars would represent, “a new constellation” on a union of blue.¹⁷

The Continental Army adopted a design in which the 13 stars were arranged in a circle so that no colony would take precedence. The first Navy version of the Stars and Stripes had the stars arranged in a staggered formation of alternate lines and rows of threes and twos, on a blue field. Variations in the stripes continued, and privateers continued to use the superseded flag with its British Union Jack. A resolution adopted by

flags were symbolic of the country and the struggle for independence and carried a tree, anchor, rattlesnake, or beaver and mottos such as, “Hope,” “Liberty,” or “An Appeal to Heaven.” One bore a coiled rattlesnake and the motto, “Don’t Tread on Me.” Each regiment of the military also had its own colors. Furthermore, naval vessels and privateers fitted out by each colony flew distinctive flags.¹⁵

Eventually, standardization became necessary. On 2 December 1775, the Continental Congress approved the design of a flag, which was first hoisted aboard the ALFRED by Lieutenant John Paul Jones, a name that is probably familiar to most Masons. It consisted of 13 red and white stripes and, the British Union Jack, with its St. George and St. Andrew crosses.¹⁶

Congress on 1 May 1795 provided for the addition of a stripe and a star for each new state as it joined the Union. After the admission of Kentucky and Vermont, the flag grew to 15 stars and 15 stripes. This flag flew over Fort McHenry when it was bombarded by a British fleet and inspired Francis Scott Key to write, “The Star-Spangled Banner.”¹⁸

Realizing that the flag would soon become unwieldy, Captain Samuel C. Reid, U.S. Navy, who commanded the GENERAL ARMSTRONG during the War of 1812, suggested to Congress that the stripes be fixed at 13 in number to represent the original 13 colonies that had struggled to found the nation, and had become its first states. The suggestion further stated that a star is added to the blue field for every state coming into the Union. This suggestion became the text of a resolution by Congress, effective 18 April 1818.¹⁹ Of note, the colors on the flag have meaning: Red - valor and bravery; White - purity and innocence; and, Blue - vigilance, perseverance, and justice.²⁰

Public Law 94-344, known as the Federal Flag Code, contains rules for handling and displaying the U.S. flag. While the federal code contains no penalties for misusing the flag, many states have their own flag codes and may impose penalties. The language of the Code makes it clear that the flag is a living symbol. The flag represents a living country and is itself considered a living thing. Therefore, the lapel flag pin being a replica should be worn on the left lapel near the heart.²¹ During the hoisting or lowering of the flag or when it passes in parade or review, Americans who are non-veterans should stand at attention, face the flag, and place their right hand over the heart. Uniformed military members and veterans render the military salute. Those who are not U.S. citizens should stand at attention.²² Guidelines call for displaying the flag in public only from sunrise to sunset. However, the flag may always be displayed if it's illuminated during darkness. The flag should not be subject to weather damage, so it should not be displayed during rain, snow, and windstorms unless it is an all-weather flag. It should be displayed often, but especially on national and state holidays and special occasions. It should be hoisted briskly and lowered ceremoniously.²³

The U.S. Flag Code shares protocol with respect to things you should not do with or to the flag. Specifically, you should never drape or draw it back in folds as bunting or decoration. If you are looking for patriotic decorations and want to show red, white, and blue, you should use bunting as decoration, with the blue at the top and red at the bottom.²⁴ Other things discussed in the Code are:

- Never dip it for any person or thing, even though state flags, regimental colors, and other flags may be dipped as a mark of honor.

- Never display it with the union down, except as a signal of distress.
- Never let the flag touch anything beneath it: ground, floor, water, merchandise, and so on.
- Never Carry it horizontally or flat, but always aloft and free.
- Never fasten, display, use, or store the flag in such a manner as to permit it to be easily torn, soiled, or damaged in any way.
- Never use it as a covering for a ceiling.
- Never place anything upon it, nor on any part of it, nor attached to it any mark, insignia, letter, word, figure, design, picture, or drawing of any nature.
- Never use it for holding anything.
- Never use it as wearing apparel, bedding, or drapery. It should not be used on a costume or athletic uniform. However, a flag patch may be attached to the uniform of patriotic organizations, military personnel, police officers, and firefighters.
- Never use the flag for advertising or promotion purposes or print it on paper napkins, boxes, or anything else intended for temporary use and can be discarded.
- Never ground the flag when paying tribute to it. It is

acceptable when the colors are at parade rest or at ease.

- Never retreat, or step backward with the flag.
- Never burn the flag as a symbol of speech. However, the flag, when it is in such condition that it is no longer a fitting emblem for display, should be destroyed in a dignified way, preferably by burning. There are procedures and veteran's organizations that can dispose of flags for you in accordance with U.S. law.²⁵

Now for some situations not necessarily written but practiced by honor guard personnel across the services. What do you do when moving Colors around a space and there is a doorway, low ceiling, or just moving the flag around a room to reposition it before a meeting? Many go to a position known as, "Angle Port." The position is such that the bearer grasps the flagstaff in the middle of the staff with the left hand, while simultaneously placing the right hand at a position about one-third position of the flagstaff from the bottom of the staff. The

right arm should look as though it is pointing straight down toward the floor. The flag should drape over the left forearm and to the left of the flagstaff. How about movements with Colors? Just as Masons like 90 degrees, one should "square" turns or corners at 90 degrees, or 45 degrees. This gives the appearance of crisp movements, which is precisely how Colors should look – it commands respect. When you consider the appearance of a crisp movement and compare it to a not-so-crisp "rounding" movement, one may arrive at the conclusion that the "square" turns do look more professional, even more honorable.

In conclusion, remember that the new changes for saluting are permissible, not required. If you are uncomfortable with saluting, or if you are not certain saluting is the proper response, it is always appropriate to place your hand over your heart – of course after removing any non-religious headgear. We have all likely heard the saying, "When in doubt, salute it out!" It is better to be over courteous and salute, than not salute when you should have. I hope that you found this material informative. Thank you to all the Veterans for their sacrifices and selfless service.

¹⁵Swartz, *Service Etiquette*.

¹⁶Ibid.

¹⁷Swartz, *Service Etiquette*.

¹⁸Ibid.

¹⁹Ibid.

²⁰"The American Flag," *United States*. Accessed September 17, 2019, <https://www.usa.gov/flag>.

²¹A joint resolution to amend the joint resolution entitled "Joint Resolution to codify and emphasize existing rules and customs pertaining to the display and use of the flag of the United States of America.", S.J. Res. 49, 94th Cong. Public Law No. 94-344 (July 7, 1976): SJ49.

²²United States Flag Code, *US Code 4 (1998)*.

²³US Coast Guard, *United States Coast Guard Regulations* (Washington, DC: COMDTINST M5000.3B, 1992).

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ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Jason Himsey has over 21 years of commissioned and non-commissioned military service. Himsey has experience in maritime law enforcement operations, high-seas and inshore maritime security operations, all-source intelligence collection and analysis operations, maritime domain awareness, information/intelligence sharing, state and local intelligence fusion center operations, counter/anti-terrorism analysis and operations, open-source intelligence, a joint military, and law enforcement operation, and public affairs. He is regarded as a leader in the fields of maritime and open source intelligence.

He began his career in the Coast Guard in June 1997, where he enlisted and graduated from Basic Training (INDIA 151) in August 1997. He attained the rank of Yeoman First Class (E-6) prior to attending Officer Candidate School in New London, CT. LT Himsey graduated from OCS in February 2007 (OCS Class 1-07). Himsey's varied assignments placed him in many high-visibility and high-impact situations. Over the course of his afloat tours, LT Himsey led the charge and contributed to the interdiction of over 7,000 kilograms of cocaine, over 2,000 illegal migrants, and 8.5 million dollars in United States currency - the largest such currency seizure in Coast Guard history at the time. He also coordinated over 12 offshore Search and Rescue cases and led over 120 boardings across all Coast Guard districts and mission sets.

During his two tours at the Honor Guard, Himsey completed over 1,800 joint service and Coast Guard missions including 60 Full Honors and Standard Honors funerals; the full honors funeral in memory of General

John Shalikashvili, former Chairman Joint Chiefs of Staff; participated in four Presidential Inaugurations; dozens of national-level joint service parades; over 40 full honors arrivals for foreign dignitaries at the White House, Tomb of the Unknown Soldier, and the Pentagon. During his tour on the Commandant's staff, Himsey coordinated ground transportation and assisted in the protection of the Commandant during an especially busy time following the terrorist attacks of September 11, 2001, the stand-up of the Homeland Security Council, the transition to the new Department of Homeland Security, and the initial phases of the Global War on Terrorism.

Himsey is also involved in contributing to his community through freemasonry. He is the sitting Master at Elmer Timberman Masonic Lodge No. 54 in Annandale, VA. He is also heavily involved in the Valley of Alexandria, Orient of Virginia, Ancient and Accepted Scottish Rite of Freemasonry as a Trustee, Junior Warden in the Order of Rose Croix, recent recipient of the Knight Commander of the Court of Honor, Past Chief of the Knights of St. Andrew, participates in several degrees, and is the Projection Staff Manager during Reunions. He is also a Knight Templar at Arlington Commandery No. 29, a Companion at Royal Arch Chapter No. 77 of Annandale, VA, Captain of the Guard at ABACA Grotto of Fredericksburg, VA, and LMIP at Old Dominion Chapter 364 of National Sojourners.

Himsey lives in Fredericksburg, Virginia with his life-long wife, Vanessa, and his children, Alyssa, and Austin. Alyssa is attending Eastern Mennonite University in Harrisonburg, VA.

