

## "To Offer ... the Customary Salutations"

By Roberet Braun

While on garrison duty in Louisiana, Captain John W. DeForest of Company "I", 12th Connecticut Infantry recalled that

I am regimental officer of the day. My duties consist largely in wearing a sash diagonally and in keeping quiet. Also, I am solemnly bound to go twice a day to the guard tent...

Immediately the guard bustles forth... and comes to shoulder. When I am within a few feet the sergeant commands, "Present arms!"

I raise the forefinger of my right hand to my cap and the drop it in an impressive manner which would terrify you to see.

(A Volunteer's Adventures by John W. DeForest, p 12)

How often have you been in the tented field and seen salutes (also "salutations" or "compliments" in the jargon of the period) rendered in a manner similar to the (albeit documented) manner of Captain DeForest? And how often in the "tented field" or in the cinema have you seen similar Civil War era compliments rendered in a fashion remarkably reminiscent of the British Army? Or

worse, rendered similar to today's modern army salute?

Who is right? What was the proper Civil War era salute?

No doubt we are all familiar with the Revised Regulations..., p. 42, which states



256. When a soldier without arms, or with side-arms only meets an officer, he is to raise his right hand to the right side of the visor of his cap, palm to the front, elbow raised as high as the shoulder, looking at the same time in a respectful and soldier-like manner at the officer, who will return the compliment thus offered. (Emphasis added)

Frequently when Civil War era hand salute are rendered, they are interpreted from this regulation to be quite similar to modern British Army salutes. This latter salute differs from the Revised Regulations..., in that it is presented in front of the right side of the visor of the cap or other headgear. Period images confirm that the hand salute of the period was rendered quite literally, at the right ear, at or quite near the right-side button that secured the chinstrap of the cap. Further,

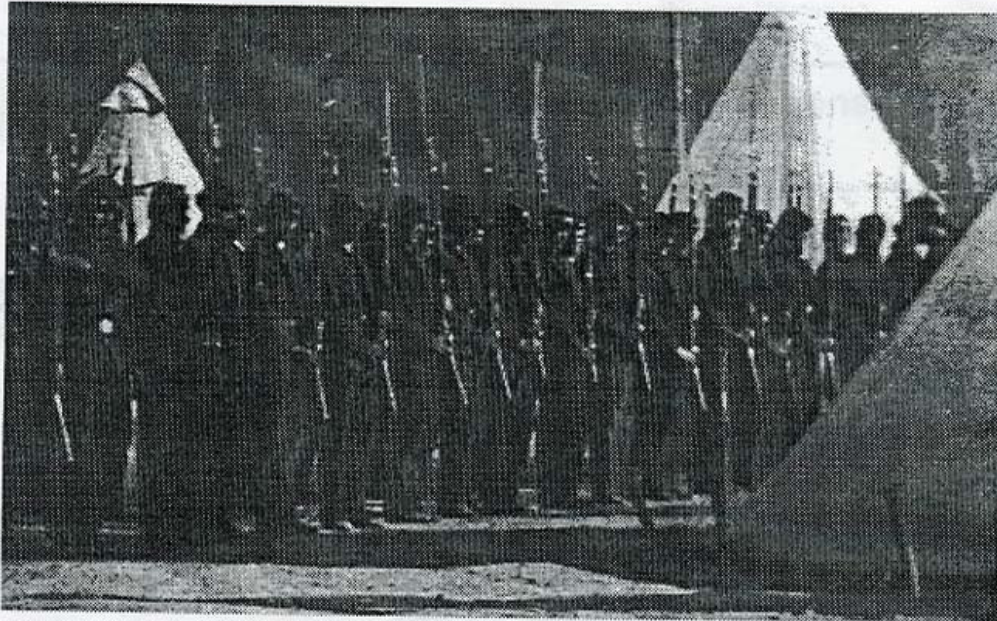
images would suggest that this style of salute was practiced by both Union and Confederate soldiers, and in the manner prescribed by the Revised Regulation...

The regulations do not make clear the issue of whether or not the salute of the inferior is held in the position prescribed until returned by the superior or not, as is customary in the present-day armed services. It is suggested that a case could be made for holding the salute until acknowledged by the superior, who is obliged to "return such complimentary notice." It would seem that the superior should return the salute in a *similar fashion* to the one received, although we have learned from Captain DeForest's writings that wasn't always the case.

The Revised Regulations... are clear on the custom of rising to one's feet in the presence of officers (if seated) or turning to them (if standing) and rendering a salute. When fre-

quently in the presence of officers (as in a headquarters scenario) inferiors are only required to render salute once, that being the first time approached by the officer(s).

Finally, "Sergeants... with muskets,... Corporals out of ranks, and privates not sentries, will carry their muskets at a shoulder as sergeants, and salute... by bringing the left hand across the body, so as to strike the musket near the right shoulder." This was the common salute of soldiers under arms as indicated. I am indebted to member Nels Monson, who brought to my attention an image of a double rank of soldiers at "Present arms," with a non-commissioned officer (designated by a rectangular belt plate; any chevrons are unclear) with his piece at a shoulder, rendering a salute "with musket" as previously described *and while in the ranks*... This form of salute by the orderly sergeant, when the balance of soldiers are formed in two ranks and at "Present arms," is worthy of further investigation.



Notice the rank and file at the position of "Present Arm" while the 1st Sgt. on the right has his weapon at "Sholder Arms" rendering a salute.