



By SGM Paul Ellis

Since its creation, the Army has undergone numerous evolutions, ranging from everything such as the way we fight to the weapons we bring to the fight. In recent years, the Army also seems to be transitioning to a culture where it appears that customs, courtesies, and traditions are slowly becoming a thing of the past. In today's Army, there seems to be a lack of effort to practice or preserve Army customs, courtesies, and traditions.

Are Army customs, courtesies, and traditions becoming a thing of the past?

This is one question I have pondered and frequently visit in conversations with other senior

leaders. There was a time in our Army where we would not dare to incorrectly address a Non-Commissioned Officer (NCO) or an Officer by the incorrect rank. There was a time in our Army when an individual did not have to be told to assume the correct position when addressing an NCO or an Officer. There was a time in our Army when junior Soldiers were taught the very basics of our customs and courtesies. There was a time in our Army when traditions were widely practiced at all levels.

Today, Soldiers appear to lack the basic understanding of the Army's customs, courtesies, and traditions. NCOs seem to forego their core responsibilities of imparting the rich legacy of what makes the NCO Corps the most revered NCO Corps among our allies. Moreover, Soldiers and NCOs alike lack pride, discipline, and commitment to the importance of maintaining our fundamental responsibilities as leaders and Soldiers.

I have personally witnessed the withering of basic customs in several units. In many cases, Soldiers failed to recognize enlisted or commissioned officer ranks accurately, failed to give the greeting of the day, failed to render the proper hand salute, and failed to assume the appropriate position when addressing an NCO or an Officer until told to do so. Units also are not upholding traditions, such as conducting induction ceremonies or even attempting to pass on the history of our Army let alone the history or their organization's lineage.

While these might be isolated instances of individuals failing to demonstrate proper customs, courtesies, and traditions, it leaves me to ponder: Are might observations just anecdotal or is this becoming the new norm? Since 2001, our Nation has been at war. Could this be a contributing factor to the diminishing focus on our rich customs, courtesies, and traditions or are units/leaders so overtasked that they have less time to focus on teaching the very essence of customs, courtesies, and traditions of our Army. One could also argue that these issues have always plagued our Army, but are they more rampant today than they were in previous years?

To help illustrate these trends, I've conducted an unofficial survey and asked nine questions to see what others thought about the topic. I conducted my survey on social media across four forums comprising of Soldiers and NCOs of various ranks. Of the members of these forums, 523 personnel responded to the survey.

Below are a few representative snapshots from this survey:

**Question 1 Comments (Yes - 48%, No - 52%).** Are induction ceremonies conducted within your organization?

- "Believe the OPTEMPO of the unit makes it difficult to conduct these ceremonies."
- "It seems to always get put on the back burner for whatever "
- "To keep tradition, it's important for young NCOs to understand that they are entering another level in their military "
- "Waste of time, take your rank and do your "
- "I have not seen any NCO induction ceremony in the past 5 "
- "I have never been part of an organization in 11 years that has done any. I don't really think of them as an actual custom or tradition. Definitely not in any regulation. Audie Murphy inductions are closest, but not really run as a unit "
- "It is important to keep up with the traditions of the NCO "
- "I was told by the 1SG it wasn't necessary. I ended up putting one together on my I spent my own money made the programs books. I even had to travel to another location to borrow the arch."
- "To foster esprit de corps amongst the NCO ranks and a rite of passage for our junior NCOs."

**Question 2 Comments (Yes - 69%, No - 31%).** Do you practice drill and ceremony within your organization?

- “We do it every day it’s part of who we ”
- “Only before a ceremony or as needed, not practiced ”
- “Unfortunately, we do not conduct D&C. I feel that it is because the leadership does not put emphasis on ”
- “Vital to promoting good order and discipline ”
- “We do it for 20 minutes after PRT to ensure SMs fixing to go to school can march a formation.”
- “It’s a dying art and we are too caught up to conduct ”
- “Because the leadership has no pride and can’t uphold ”
- “No reason at all it’s just lost and it’s not really taught in the schoolhouses ”
- “Too many tasking, not enough time, don’t do much SGTs time ”
- “Too busy doing details than our actual jobs, yet alone trying to teach DNC to Soldiers. I’m a former Drill ”
- “No one cares ”

**Question 3 Comments (Yes - 66%, No - 31%).** Does your organization conduct NCODPs?

- “Senior leadership ensure that we are kept current on military subjects and within our own MOS.”
- “My CSM drives this train, she has NCODP every 3rd Thursday of the ”
- “Four years I have been in Korea not once were there a NCODP conducted, but LPDs are frequent.”

- “Sporadically and none are ever on the training schedule/calendar as they should ”
- “My organization conducts NCO DP one Thursday every month. The other Thursdays are given over to Sergeant’s Time ”
- “Not a priority for the ”
- “It is a must! Junior NCOs are often embarrassed to speak up when they don’t know something. Having this program in place allows everyone to learn something if they choose to take it ”

**Question 4 Comments (Yes - 66%, No - 34%).** Are Customs and Courtesies enforced in your organization?

- “Yes, but the junior enlisted come from basic and AIT all relaxed.”
- “It’s a senior command and depending on who you are, the NCO or Officer does not enforce it. Wrong answer, I ”
- “NCOs are friends with Soldiers so they feel they don’t have to.”
- “I’ve started to bring them back but many customs/ceremonies were non-existent.”
- “Some leaders do not conduct themselves professionally, which in turn tells the juniors it’s ok not to follow proper customs and ”
- “Climate is too relaxed. Only a few of us enforce ”
- “Every time you try to enforce the standard, you’re accused of being mean or picking on them and the command does nothing.”
- “Not always. Some leaders feel that a more relaxed approach makes them approachable and more ”

**Question 5 Comments (Yes - 59.7%, No - 40.3%).** Are NCOs within your organization

enforcing discipline and standards?

- “There are a lot of newly promoted NCOs and they haven’t learned how to separate themselves ”
- “NCOs are standard bearers and ”
- “Lack of support from CoC when performing on the spot ”
- “We are not allowed to talk to our 1SG.. not even to give the greeting of the ”
- “Some do to an extent and some do not, nowadays junior enlisted have more power and because higher ups are so afraid of the backlash they don’t promote discipline and standards.”
- “Everyone is afraid to either be labeled as “toxic” or just wants to be ”

**Question 6 Comments (Yes - 34.8%, No - 65.2%).** Is Army history and traditions a focus within your organization?

- “The Army’s history is what makes us who we are ”
- “No time, rapid deployment cycle 9 months on, 9 months off ”
- “BN and BDE CSM make sure of ”
- “Not a “focus” but the NCOs are very ”
- “Most leaders don’t know the history themselves.”
- “Our CSM incorporated it into promotion boards instead of a lengthy ”

**Question 7 Comments (Yes - 25.2%, No - 74.8%).** Does your organization conduct military formals (ball/dining-in)?

- “As an Army, this is “highly encouraged” to attend, now with everyone running to IG claiming we force them to do things, the squeeze isn’t worth the ”
- “I have been in the military for 8 years and never been to a ball. Whenever there is one we don’t find out till the day of or it’s during a drill weekend and we can’t ”
- “There’s a holiday ball every year. Unfortunately, there hasn’t been a dining-in in a few years and we don’t have regimental balls in this ”
- “At one time they did, but new leadership is trying to start it back ”

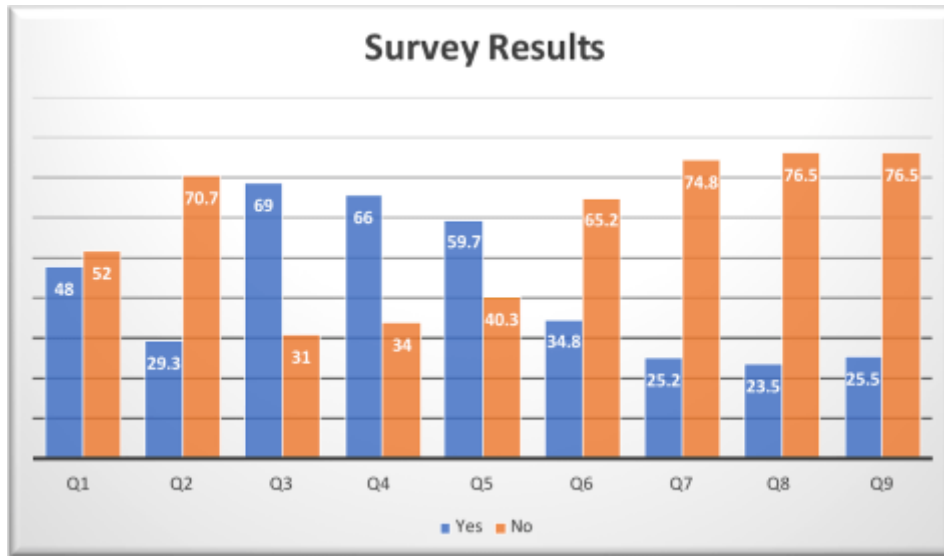
**Question 8 Comments (Yes - 23.5%, No - 76.5%).** Does your organization conduct in ranks inspections?

- “I am an AIT Instructor, we do not conduct in ranks inspections.”
- “Three times a year is fair to say.”
- “Only on pay day activities, in ASU ”
- “We don’t have any formations other than ”
- Quarterly at BN level for payday activities. Weekly at the platoon level.”

**Question 9 Comments (Yes - 25.5%, No - 76.5%).** Does your organization conduct NCO calls?

- “The post has something called right arm night which is the same but same thing about “forcing” them to go.”
- “As an NCO, I have only been to one while attending ALC.”
- “Have been in seven years, three different units and never heard of an NCO ”
- “Most NCOs in my unit have no idea what an NCO call is and haven’t experienced one

at all in their career.”



**Survey Results:** The above chart depicts the percentage of the 523 personnel that responded to each question. The yes represents the percentage of personnel that agree with the question and the no represents the amount of personnel that did not agree with the questions.

For over 242 years our Army has remained the ultimate fighting force, which in my view can be attributed to the discipline of the force garnered through our customs, courtesies, and traditions. The *Center for the Army Profession and Ethics* states

Army Customs, Courtesies and, Traditions are fundamental aspects of Army culture. Army professionals integrate Army Customs, Courtesies and Traditions within their organizations to develop esprit de corps

As a professional fighting force, it is essential that we continue to develop and foster great pride in who we are as an Army, what we represent, and what we aspire to be. The future of our Army depends on the fighting spirit of our Soldiers to stand ready to engage and destroy our enemies.



To remain a formidable force, our customs, courtesies, and traditions must remain at the forefront of our formations, with NCOs leading the way in educating the force. For centuries Armies have stood the test of time through the cultivation of deeply rooted customs, courtesies, and traditions that have formed the backbone of their existence.

In closing, to begin fixing these challenges highlighted above NCOs must be at the forefront of teaching and imparting knowledge to their subordinates. To make a direct impact at every level of the organization, NCOs should ensure that their Soldiers are upholding standards as they should. NCOs must ensure that they are conducting regularly scheduled professional development sessions in which leaders and Soldiers can learn from their experience. Furthermore, leaders themselves must ensure that they are ready to develop the future of our Army by being knowledgeable about various customs, courtesies, and traditions. The future of our Army is in the hands of all leaders, and as such we must uphold those customs, courtesies, and traditions that make us who we are as a fighting force.

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