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At civil war reenactments it is common to see soldiers salute each other, salute officers, and salute the flag. It is equally common to see this well recognized gesture of respect performed in almost every conceivable way. Where did the military salute originate? Why do we

salute the way we do? As Louisiana soldiers, how should we salute?

According to Wikipedia, the origin of the salute has been lost to time, though three main theories remain. First, that it came from Romans shading their eyes from the brightness and glory of their commanding officers. A second theory is that when men wore armor, it was customary to hold the reins of their horse with the left hand and expose their face for identification by raising the visor of the helmet with the right hand. A third theory is that the salute and handshake, developed from a custom of demonstrating that no weapon was in the right hand. Traditionally, the Boy Scouts shake with the left hand because legend has it that a shield was always carried by ancient warriors with the left hand and the act of moving the shield to the right hand removed one's guard or protection and thus, offering the empty unprotected hand was a gesture of friendship.

By the 18th and 19th century, lifting the front of the helmet had evolved to

tipping of the hat as a sign of social respect. Eventually, the tipping of the hat gesture devolved to a touching of the brim of the hat, with or without a nod of the head. The salute is said to have evolved from the touching of the brim of the hat as a sign of respect. The American salute is thought to have descended from the British Navy salute in which the palm faces down toward the shoulder, rather than forward. This was because working on a sailing ship was a dirty job and it was considered a sign of extreme disrespect to an officer to show a dirty palm during a salute.

The common method of modern military salute is to raise the right hand to the right eyebrow. In the United States, the hand is canted forward slightly, as if shading the eyes so that the palm of the hand is not seen. The British method is to allow the palm of the hand to face forward and the arm is raised in a long, slow, arching motion, culminating in the familiar "snap." The French method is said to be

similar to that of the British but without the arching motion.

So where do the misfits of Louisiana fit in when it comes to the proper military salute? Well, research reveals that the answer to that question is as varied as the salutes witnessed on the battlefield; it's all over the map! It would seem that the Louisiana boys would have employed a French style salute. The French method is described in many places as similar to the British method of raising the arm to the right eyebrow with the palm facing outward and without the long arching motion of the arm. It would then stand to reason that the Louisiana soldiers would have employed a similar method during the War of Northern Aggression.

Searching civil war salutes and Confederate salutes did not turn up much. From the Authentic Campaigner, an interesting article regarding the duties of a soldier taken from August V. Kautz' Customs of Service, 1864, indicates, "When a soldier without arms, or with sidearms only, meets an officer, he is to raise his 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." (Reg. 256.) (emphasis added) This would certainly seem to suggest that a "palm to the front" method was common, at least among Union soldiers. In discussing the salute with some from our unit, it seems that the proper salute for Louisiana boys would have been a French style with palm to the front but with the elbow at the right side; no sweeping arm movement like the British. The arm would be kept at the side and the forearm raised to the brow with the palm forward.

Since there does not appear to be a method for saluting cast in stone, possibly the mighty men from Louisiana could practice the French salute with a dash of our own southern panache. Besides, we Louisiana boys have never been thought of as conformists!