



Lyndon Baines Johnson Library

2313 Red River Street Austin, Texas 78705

5/19/93 MEMO FOR THE RECORD FROM Ret'd Prof. Paul F. Boller, Jr.:

The following Presidents did not return the salutes of military personnel with salutes of their own:

Harry S Truman
Gerald R. Ford
John F. Kennedy

The following Presidents did return the salutes...:

Dwight D. Eisenhower
Jimmy Carter
Ronald Reagan
George W. Bush

No need to salute the troops, sir! You're the civilian boss

Paul Boller

Soon after entering the White House, Ronald Reagan learned that it was customary for men and women in the armed forces to greet the president with a salute but that because the president was a civilian he did not salute in return. The tradition bothered Reagan.

"I think there ought to be a regulation that the president could return a salute," he told a Marine commandant, "inasmuch as he is commander in chief and civilian clothes are his uniform."

"Well," said the commandant amiably, "if you did return a salute, I don't think anyone would say anything about it."

The little chat emboldened the former Hollywoodian. From that moment he began returning salutes with the precision and dash of a professional, and, upon leaving the White House, he encouraged his successor to do the same. President George Bush happily obliged. In January 1989, when the two men parted after Bush's inaugural ceremony, they exchanged brisk military salutes that looked awesome on television. (Apparently an ex-president may salute, too, in his capacity as ex-commander in chief.)

Well, George Washington and Thomas Jefferson seem to have gotten along nicely without saluting when they were in the President's House. So did John Adams, for all his love of ceremony. James Madison ventured into the field when he was president during the War of 1812 (and was almost captured by the British), but he did no saluting while inspecting the troops. Neither did Abraham Lincoln when he visited one of the forts defending Washington during the Civil War (and almost got himself killed). Woodrow Wilson did no saluting, so far as I know, during World War I nor Franklin Roosevelt during World War II. Harry Truman did plenty of saluting when he was in the army during World War I, but when he visited West Point (celebrating its bicentennial) in 1952, it never occurred to him as president to return the salutes of the

high-ranking military officials he encountered there. Dwight Eisenhower, like George Washington years before, apparently quit saluting when he quit the army and became president.

When William Clinton became president a few weeks ago, he continued to behave like a civilian at first, the way our earliest presidents had done. Then, possibly because one prominent journalist chided him for failing to return the salutes of military personnel, he decided to adopt President Reagan's innovation after all. But his performance had none of the impressive showbiz panache that Reagan brought to the act. "Oxford University isn't the best place to learn American military habits," teased *Time* magazine. "Word is that President Clinton's sloppy salute is drawing wincing from the Pentagon. Aides are subtly suggesting that he work on it."

Clinton's aides might better advise the new president that he doesn't need to return salutes; that, in fact, it would be wiser for him to abandon them once for all. He is, to be sure, commander in chief of U.S. armed forces, as the Constitution provides, but he remains a civilian all the same and an important symbol of a basic principle established by the Founding Fathers: the supremacy of the civilian branch of government over the military. In an age in which the Pentagon plays so influential a role in American life, it is more important than ever before, it seems to me, for the president by his behavior to remind Americans of what President Eisenhower called "the necessary and wise subordination of the military to civil power."

Paul F. Boller Jr. of Fort Worth is emeritus professor of history at Texas Christian University. His is the author of *Presidential Anecdotes*, *Presidential Campaigns* and *Presidential Wives*.

Fort Worth Star-Telegram, March 27, 1993,
p. 27, Sect. A



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x (7)

May 18, 1993

Tina Houston
Supervisor, Archives
LBJ Library
Austin, Texas 78705

Dear Ms. Houston:

I appreciated your call.

Where is the column I wrote on presidential salutes for the Fort Worth Star Telegram. When I wrote it, I took Ronald Reagan at his word that his predecessors in the White House had not returned military salutes in kind. I turned out to be wrong in my reference to Eisenhower, for as I told you over the phone Ike and Carter both did execute salutes. But JFK didn't; nor did Ford. Someone told me that Calvin Coolidge returned salutes when he was President, but I find this hard to believe.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in cursive script that reads "Paul F. Boller, Jr.".

Paul F. Boller, Jr.

5-20-93

March 19, 1993

To: TLH

From: EPS

Re: Oral reference request, *Did LBJ salute military personnel?*

I have gone through the entire "Armed Forces" category of the WH photo card file index, which contains several hundred cards with images of LBJ interacting with service personnel, often during his visits to military bases.

I did not find even a single instance of LBJ saluting, while there were shots in which other people in the frame are saluting when LBJ is not (xeroxed examples attached). Clearly it was his practice not to salute the colors, but to place his hand (or his hat) over his heart instead; that suggests that he did not salute military personnel either.

Conclusion: It was definitely not LBJ's custom to salute, and I found no evidence that he did so, even very rarely.

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SEP 12 1967
CLINT

ARMED FORCES
TRAVEL DOMESTIC - Louisiana - New Orleans
SPEAKING, At the podium

SEPTEMBER 8, 1966
JOHNSON, Lynda Bird
ROSTON, James
WILK, General and Mrs. Ne - Burma
SYMINGTON, James
JOHNSON, Mrs. Lyndon Baines
SCHERER, Ray - NBC
DEAKIN, James - St. Louis Post Dispatch
COMNY, Col. J. B.
ROBINSON, Major Hugh

VISITORS - Foreign
Burma
PRESS
SECRET SERVICE
ARMED FORCES
CROWDS
AIRCRAFT - Helicopter

C-3032-10



C-2491-30A



JULY 23, 1966
STERNBERGER, Major Gen. Ben
JOHNSON, Gen Harold K

TRAVEL - Domestic
Fort Campbell, Kentucky
ARMED FORCES
AIRCRAFT - Helicopter

C-3561-07



OCTOBER 21 1966
TAYLOR, Bob
YOUNGBLOOD, Rufus
CATSON, Marvin
COMNY, Col. J. B.
ROBINSON, Major, Hugh

Australian War Memorial, Laying of Wreath

TRAVEL - Foreign
Canberra, Australia
PRESS
SECRET SERVICE
ARMED FORCES
CROWDS

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SEPTEMBER 8, 1966
JOHNSON, Lyda Ruth
POZDNY, James
WILL, General and Mrs. Ne - Burma
SMALINGTON, James
JOHNSON, Mrs. Lyndon Baines
SLINGER, Ray NBC
DEAKIN, James - St. Louis Post Dispatch
COMNY, Col. J. B.
ROBERTSON, Major Hugh

VISITORS - Foreign
Burma
PRESS
SECRET SERVICES
ARMED FORCES
CROWDS
AIRCRAFT - Helicopter



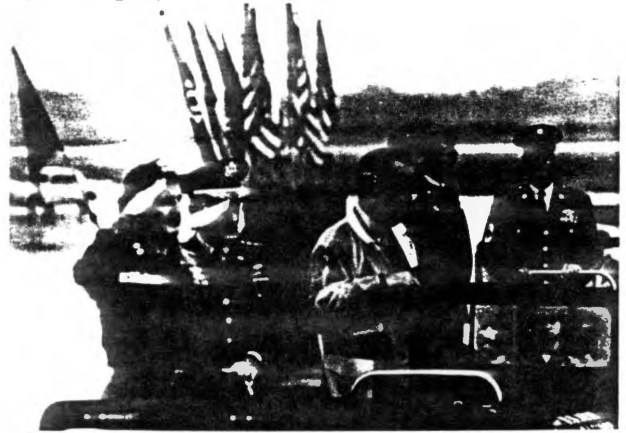
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