

# Chain of Command

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Forum and Features



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The chain of command lays out very clearly the line of legal authority from the President of the United States right on down to you. It spells out who has authority to issue orders to who. It identifies for anyone, at any level, who is in charge. And, finally, it identifies who is responsible for getting tasks done and for taking care of the people who do them.

A chain of command is an absolute essential for getting done, in an organized way, any task that requires the effort of more than one person. That is a flat-out fact of any organized effort. What this should tell you, as a leader, is that here is a leadership fundamental. Knowing how the chain of command works is an absolute essential in figuring out how to know what to do, and how to get it done.

But for now, never mind the links of the chain that run up through those upper levels of leadership to the President. Think instead about the links in the company. And call this the leadership of the unit — the captains, lieutenants, sergeants; the nervous system; the channel of communication that coordinates and controls; the thing that puts together skill, will, teamwork, all that equipment, and all those weapons; the thing that focuses combat power.

Why is the chain of command so important? Well, as with almost anything else in the Army, if you want to know the real reason or purpose of something, go to the battlefield, where the unit fights. The why for anything about the Army must always be answered there.

In the company, on the battlefield, there is no time for silly arguments

and discussions about who takes orders from who, or which orders to follow, or what the objectives ought to be, or what standards should be established. Any of this wastes time, and destroys the quick, smooth coordination that the unit must have if it is to win in the deadly business of delivering steel. On the battlefield, the formal chain has been established by law and TOE; leaders have been appointed by the commander to hold designated leadership positions; and authority, responsibility, and obedience are facts. All that's settled. What the chain of command does on the battlefield is COMMUNICATE.

Somewhere in a leadership class you probably spent considerable time on the techniques of how people communicate. But this is not really that kind of "communicate." This is communicate, as on the battlefield. And there, the chain of command is the main channel, the prime line, of the communications — the information — that must flow among all the parts of the company so that it can fight as a unit, as a whole "thing."

The chain of command coordinates and controls. And to do this, it must move information up and down among the levels of leadership of the unit. The chain of command moves battle information — quick, clear, clean, complete — and only the critical, and only the truth. It is the nervous system of the unit. And if the chain has breakdowns or failures, then the unit will go to pieces, and lose, and die. This simple fact of the battlefield explains many things.

It tells you why there are prescribed hand and arm signals. It tells you why

there is a prescribed language for the radios and telephones, and why experienced leaders will discipline this carefully. It tells you why you should learn, use, and make instincts out of the estimate, the troop leading process, and the five-paragraph field order. These are the main messages in the language of a chain of command communicating in battle. And, finally, it tells you why older, wiser, experienced leaders are always so concerned about "working through the chain." The reason is simple. What these leaders know is that the development, functioning, and maintenance of the chain of command, in peacetime, is the major determinant of whether the unit will survive and win in battle.

## LINK

As a leader, you are a link in the chain of command. You already know this, but it means far more than just a green tab or a position on the organizational chart or a picture on the day room wall. When that unit fights, you do many things, but the most important thing you do is communicate — get, process, and move information, both up and down.

In a smoothly functioning chain of command that is working hard at delivering steel, there are only two kinds of information moving downward in the chain, and two kinds moving up. Flowing downward are orders, the things that control. Once in a while, you might get a whole, written-out, five-paragraph field order, brought by a runner. More often, you'll get a

fragmentary order, coming over the radio from your leader as he makes the inevitable changes and adjustments called for in that final step of good troop leading procedure. The other kind of information moving downward is planning information, the kind that you as a subordinate need for your planning, for coordinating with other parts of the unit, and for figuring out, ahead of time, what to do next.

Moving upward in the chain, there are, first and most important, such reports as enemy sightings, and status reports, and SITREPS, and locations. Reports tell the unit's brain about what's happening inside the unit — what all the parts are seeing and doing, and what kind of shape they're in. More important, these reports moving upward describe the progress in carrying out the orders that came down before.

The second kind of information moving upward are requests for support — which parts of the unit need more of what to carry out their orders. It is these requests that can bring to bear the awesome power of the combat support units.

And so, very simply, that's what happens when the chain communicates and the unit fights: two kinds of information moving down and two kinds of information moving up. Now, this information doesn't just flow along, like through a pipe. It is carried by many things — messages on paper, runners, hand and arm signals, smoke grenades and flares, radios and telephones. And, most often, at your level, by men yelling and shouting and calling to each other.

This is how the chain of command communicates. The chain of command is what tells a unit what to do. And the chain of command is what gets it done.

You, as a leader, are vital, critical, as battle information flows up and down the chain of command. Again, the most important thing you do, as a link in the chain, is COMMUNICATE — get, process, and move information. And right here, let's

develop some how-to's about these three tasks.

First off and flat out, you, as a leader, must be expert in the nomenclature, functioning, operation, and maintenance of any piece of communications equipment and any communications procedure used or likely to be used at your level. This is far more important to you as a leader than being expert with your individual weapon. There is no qualification badge for being expert in communications. That's one of the things that any leader is expected to be.



Getting information does not mean waiting until it is given to you. If it is needed, you get it. From above or below. This says that you, as a link in the chain of command, need to be thinking constantly about what information is needed by the link above you, and by the link below you. Getting does not mean just receiving. What you get, from above or below, may have errors in it. Or you may not understand it. In either case, think, and compare what you get with what you already know and remember. If it does not seem right, or if you do not understand it clearly, go back to where you got it and check.

A remote unit radio set up on a hill somewhere can pass on, unchanged, all the information it gets, going up or going down. But remote units aren't links in the chain of command. You, as a leader, are supposed to process the information to use it and to do things with it. If you get a five-

paragraph field order, you process the information in it by running it through the estimate. Then you move that information on when you issue your own orders.

Most of the time, good processing requires that you cut out some of the information you get before you pass it up or down. This is tricky. Remote unit radios cannot do it. To cut out the right things, and do it right, you have to know the information needs of the link above and the link below. Then you can answer this question: Which information is "need to know," which is "good to know," and which is "nice to know"? If time is critical and things are moving fast, then cut out the nice and the good.

Processing also means that you must often change information. You don't change the meaning or the truth of the information, but you often have to change the words, or the language, or the way the information is carried, so that the next link up above or down below can understand it. In effect, you translate. A fragmentary order comes down to you as a bunch of words on the radio, and you translate that into a hand and arm signal for the next link below. The meaning of the words and the signal is the same. The words on the radio and your arm both say "Attack!"

Moving information means you don't sit on it. If you make a conscious decision to stop some item of information while you are cutting down and translating, that's fine. But, if you know the information needs of the links above and below, then you know what is critical. And if what you have is hot, then it has to move with speed and accuracy, like a reflex action in the nervous system of a well-trained athlete.

Speed is determined mainly by how important you think communication are and by how expert you are with communications equipment, procedures, and techniques. And accuracy — accuracy is determined not by you, but by the link that receives the information you pass on, up or down.

There is one simple, critical rule right here, particularly applicable in the tricky business of moving orders downward: Always check to see that an order is understood. An affirmative nod or a "Roger" on the radio is often not enough. When there is time, and you're moving a critical order, ask the link on the receiving end to say back the information you sent. And further, if you're good, you won't quit there. You'll watch to see what happens as a result of the information you sent.

The chain of command coordinates and controls; orders and planning information flow down; reports and requests flow up; and each link in the chain gets, processes, and moves information. Fighting the battle takes only a short time. Getting ready to fight is a full-time, long-term, every day activity, with a multitude of tasks to be accomplished. The chain of command is what gets both things done. Time spent studying and talking about how the chain communicates will not be wasted.

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# ALASKAN SCOUT



CAPTAIN WALTER E. WRIGHT

Throughout military history many types of scout or reconnaissance units have been organized to gather intelligence information for their commanders. In Biblical times Moses sent scouts into the Promised Land to find out what it had to offer, and every major military unit since has had its scouts working ahead of its major combat units. In the history of the United States, the cavalry scouts of the Indian wars come readily to mind as some who moved swiftly over long distances and under harsh conditions.

Scout units have always been the eyes and ears of the tactical commander. When used properly they have been responsible for many successful operations, but, when misused, for some major military disasters.

Each combat maneuver battalion has organic scout or reconnaissance units and also uses non-organic scout units when they are available. These units, with ground, mounted, or aerial scouts, are highly trained and motivated to see that the commander

gets the information he needs.

In the tradition of these special units, one can be called unique in the total Army force — the Alaskan Scout. These soldiers are members of the 207th Infantry Group (Scout), Alaska Army National Guard, which was organized in 1942 as the Alaska Territorial Guard (ATG).

The ATG, consisting primarily of Eskimos and Indians scattered among the numerous villages along the islands and the coastal periphery of western Alaska, was organized to meet any Japanese threat to the Alaskan territory. These native soldiers served patriotically and, since the ATG was never federalized, without pay from 1942 to 1947. In 1948 the Alaskan units became part of the Army National Guard system with the scout battalions designated the 297th Infantry.

In its present organization there are five scout battalions and a group headquarters. The 1st, 2d, and 3d Battalions are "pure" scout units headquartered in Nome, Bethel, and

Kotzebue, respectively. Each of these units is made up of a number of scout companies scattered over a geographic area equal in size to several of the lower 48 states.

The basic scout unit is the five-man scout team consisting of a team leader, a radio telephone operator, and three scouts or observers. Its missions are primarily reconnaissance oriented rather than combat oriented. For special operations such as ambushes, raids, or direct combat action, two or more scout teams are organized as a patrol to accomplish the mission.

The teams report their observations to their respective company headquarters, which pass the intelligence information to the battalions. From the battalions, the information is passed to the group headquarters and then to the Army Force Commander in Alaska, whose headquarters then sends it to other units within the state.

Each scout company has from 10 to 20 teams, depending upon the population in the company area.