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

feature

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.

These scouts provide a valuable service to the commander of the Army forces in Alaska.

These scout companies are also unique in that they have female soldiers who are authorized to perform medical, supply, administrative, and communication activities but not active combat missions.

The 4th Scout Battalion, located in Juneau and along the southeast Alaska panhandle, is organized somewhat differently. It is similar to a light infantry unit in that it has light crew-served weapons such as M60 machineguns and 81mm mortars. The unit also has six LCM8 landing craft.

The 5th Scout Battalion, in Anchorage and Fairbanks, is a mechanized unit and has both M113 and M577 armored vehicles. This unit has more ground mobility than its sister units and heavier firepower with its .50 caliber machineguns and 107mm mortars. It can be considered a cross between an armored cavalry and a mechanized infantry unit and is responsible for covering the state's interior road network and for helping to defend the various military installations in the interior.

The group headquarters company has a company headquarters, a group headquarters, a communication platoon, an airborne detachment (to perform long range reconnaissance patrols and pathfinder missions), and an aviation detachment (with 18 UH-1 and 4 CH-54 aircraft). Each battalion has an aviation section with two UH-1 and one UV-18 Twin Otter fixed-wing aircraft, and the 4th and 5th Battalions also have combat engineer platoons.

Because of their scattered locations and specialized missions, these scouts have to rely on aerial resupply or live off the land. But because many of the scouts are subsistence hunters, whalers, and fishermen, they are able to live and operate in a harsh arctic environment that usually defeats other soldiers.

All of these scouts provide a valuable service to the commander of the Army forces in Alaska. They perform their military reconnaissance missions every day during their normal activities along the western periphery and routinely report sea and air activities. They also report or turn in items with a possible intelligence value that they find washed up on the beach or floating off the coast.

As members of the Army National Guard system, the scouts have to meet the same requirements their counterparts in the other 49 states and Puerto Rico do, conducting 48 drill assemblies and a two-week annual training period each year. Because of a heavy summer employment cycle and the need to train during the winter months, the Alaska National Guard conducts its drill and AT periods between September and April instead of during the summer, as most Guard units do. This schedule also coincides with the winter training cycle of the Active Army units in Alaska.

During this annual training period, many field training exercises and other joint training maneuvers are conducted that allow the National Guard and Active units to work together. Such cooperation helps to forge the bonds of strength and mutual respect between these units that guard the northwestern frontier.

The members of the Alaska Army National Guard — the Alaska Scouts — are a unique element of the U.S. Army. These soldiers live and operate in a harsh environment that does not forgive human error, and they perform their mission year round in defense of their homeland, their state, and their nation.

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