Lesson 1.3:
The Chain of Command
Intro:
Welcome to the lesson The Chain of Command. The chain of command is extremely important to the effective functioning of the military. Every Soldier, from the newest recruit to the long-time veteran, has a specific role and must follow specific guidelines to give and receive orders and information. In this lesson we will describe in detail the way the Army is organized and how you or your Soldier fit into that organization.

In This Lesson
This lesson explains the military chain of command through the exploration of rank, discussing the various branches of the Army, and exploring the Army’s organizational structure.

By the end of this lesson, you will be able to:
• Differentiate between military ranks.
• Identify different branches of the Army.
• Identify the organizational structure of Army units.

The Chain of Command
Every Soldier has a job, and every job fits into the Army organizational structure or its chain of command. The type of job a Soldier has is dependent upon his or her rank, specific branch, and the type of unit in which he or she serves.

Why is the chain of command or structure of the Army important to you? Just where does your Soldier fit into this large organization called the Army? And why do you need to know this information? The answers to these questions and many more will be provided to you in this lesson.

The Chain of Command: Definition
The Chain of Command is the structure used by the military for:
• Command and control
• Flow of information

The Chain of Command begins with the President of the United States, who serves as the Commander-in-Chief of the Armed Forces, and reaches down to the newest, most junior-ranking Soldier. So every member of the military is included in the Chain of Command. Where your Soldier fits in the chain of command is dependent upon his or her rank, grade, and position.

Family Members and the Chain of Command
Family members are not part of the chain of command. Information generally passes from the Chain of Command to Family members through the Unit’s Family Readiness Group (FRG).

You can find out more information concerning the FRG in the AFTB class, 1.7 Introduction to Family Readiness Groups. It’s important to understand the rank structure of the Army to better identify Soldiers and their responsibilities within the Chain of Command, have a better idea of who to address questions and concerns to, and better understand the promotion structure within the Army. By knowing your Soldier’s rank, you will better understand and appreciate his or her position and responsibilities. Just as the military has a grade structure, so do the Department of Defense civilians.
Rank and Grade

Rank and Grade are dependent upon the required level of experience and responsibility the Soldier has attained. The rank structure is based upon Enlisted and Officer status. The Officer Corp is comprised of Commissioned and Warrant Officer ranks. Within the military grades we have equivalent ranks, which are worn on the uniform.

Rank and Grade: Difference Between Rank and Grade

When discussing military grades and ranks, it is important to remember that grade refers to the pay scale, while rank is the form of address. For example, while people frequently will refer to a military member as E5 Smith, this is incorrect. SGT Smith is the correct and respectful way in which to refer to the military member.

You will notice that at times the grade is the same, but the rank is different. In the pay grade E-8 there is both a MSG and a 1SG. They receive the same pay, but the rank and responsibilities of each are different.

Military promotions to a higher rank are based on a Soldier’s demonstrated potential for assignment to positions that require increased service and responsibility. In recognition of this, promotion also brings increased pay and privileges. However, a Soldier’s responsibilities may sometimes increase without a corresponding promotion. As a Soldier is promoted, he or she may move up in the Chain of Command.

Rank and Grade: Military and Civilian Grades

As previously discussed, the Army is composed of Soldiers and Department of Defense civilians. Keep in mind that within the unit structure, we may see military members reporting to a civilian and vice versa. Just as rank is important to understanding where your Soldier is within a chain of command, you must also be aware of the type of job or Military Occupational Specialty (MOS) they possess.

Each of the military ranks and the corresponding insignia is shown below. For more information on rank, see Resource Item 1: Rank Structure.
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**Officer**
- General of the Army
- General O-10
- Lieutenant General O-9
- Major General O-8
- Brigadier General O-7
- Colonel O-6
- Lieutenant Colonel O-5 (Silver)
- Major O-4 (Gold)
- Captain O-3
- First Lieutenant O-2 (Silver)
- Second Lieutenant O-1 (Gold)

**Warrant Officer**
- Master Warrant Officer (W-5)
- Chief Warrant Officer (W-4)
- Chief Warrant Officer (W-3)
- Chief Warrant Officer (W-2)
- Warrant Officer (W-1)

**Enlisted**
- Sergeant Major of the Army E-9
- Command Sergeant Major E-9
- Sergeant Major E-9
- First Sergeant E-8
- Master Sergeant E-8
- Sergeant First Class E-7
- Staff Sergeant E-6
- Sergeant E-5
- Corporal E-4
- Specialist E-4
- Private First Class E-2
- Private E-2
- Private E-1

No Insignia
Civilian Grades

- Wage Supervisor (WS)
  Levels 1-17
- Wage Leader (WL)
  Levels 1-15
- Wage Grade (WG)
  Levels 1-15

Branches of the Army

There are many types of jobs in the Army. Different military insignias represent the different branches within the Army. Enlisted personnel are assigned to a specific branch and then trained in a particular job called an MOS (Military Occupational Specialty) within that branch. Officers are trained and assigned to a specific branch with no MOS assignment.

It is important to understand that all branches fall within three specific areas:

1. **Combat Arms** which are traditional war-fighting elements
2. **Combat Support** which are direct support branches that assist the Combat Arms in the war fight
3. **Combat Service Support** which assist both Combat Arms and Combat Support in conducting their missions

Units at the company headquarters level and above will usually see different branches assigned to that specific organization. For example, a Soldier may be a mechanic from the Ordnance Branch (Combat Service Support) assigned to an Infantry unit (Combat Arms) whose purpose is to maintain the vehicles and specialized equipment for that unit. Another example could be a Soldier who is a Combat Medic attached to an Infantry squad.

**Branches of the Army:**

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<th>Branch</th>
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<tr>
<td><strong>Combat Arms</strong></td>
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<tr>
<td>Infantry</td>
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<td>Armor</td>
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<td>Field Artillery</td>
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<td>Air Defense</td>
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<td>Special Forces</td>
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Aviation Affairs

Corps of Engineers

Combat Support
Chemical Intelligence

Military Police

Military Intelligence

Signal

Combat Services Support
Ordnance

Quartermaster

Transportation

Adjutant General

Chaplain Corps

Finance

Judge Advocate General
Inspector General

Medical Department (includes six separate branches: Medical, Medical Service, Medical Specialist, Nurse, Dental, and Veterinary.)

The Structure of the Army

The basic building block of all Army organizations is the individual Soldier. Individual Soldiers are placed in elements called Teams. It takes 3 to 4 Teams to make a larger element called a Squad. This structure continues to grow with 3 to 4 squads making a Platoon.

A Company is comprised of 3 to 4 platoons. As elements of the Army's organizational structure become larger units, they contain more and more subordinate elements from combat arms, combat support and combat service support units.

For more information on the composition of the U.S. Army, see Resource Item 2: U.S. Army Structure.

The Structure of the Army: Brigade Size Unit

The chart below illustrates an example of what a Brigade size unit may look like.

Command Structure

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The Structure of the Army: Brigade Size Unit

As you saw on the previous page, a Brigade is made up of smaller units such as a Battalion which is then broken down into Company size units which continues to break down into smaller units, all the way down to teams which all begins with the individual Soldier.

As you can see, each unit/organization has a specific composition and person in charge from the Brigade Commander, who is usually a Colonel, down to a Squad Leader, who is usually a junior Non-Commissioned Officer (NCO), Staff Sergeant.

Civilians working with Army units will fall within the same chain of command. This flowchart reflects a basic structure for the chain of command; however this structure may change some with the current plans for transformation of the Army.

The important thing to remember is that information flows up and down the chain through the leadership at each level. The leaders are responsible for getting the information out to those assigned to them through this chain. All personnel in the Army are assigned to a unit for tracking and administrative support. This unit is usually a company or detachment, and at higher levels is referred to as at Headquarters and Headquarters Company/Detachment (HHC or HHD).

Structure of the Army: Staff Sections

As with all things in the military, there are variations! Within each Battalion or their equivalent and higher element, there are staff sections as well. These are S1, S2, S3, and S4. In some cases there are additional sections as well, but for this lesson we will discuss these four. A good way to remember these four staff sections is by thinking of the acronym PITS.

4. S1 handles the Personnel,
5. S2 the Intelligence gathering,
6. S3 handles the Training and Operations, and the
7. S4 handles the Supplies and logistics for the unit.
Structure of the Army: Why is it Important to Know?
It is important to have a good understanding of the military structure because it affects your life on a daily basis. For example, at the PX and commissary, you are often asked to put your sponsor’s unit on a check you have written. When sending letters to your spouse, you may have to include unit information in the address. In the absence of your sponsor, how do you contact the unit in the case of an emergency? Knowing the type of unit your spouse belongs to will facilitate a better understanding of the military mission and your expectations in support of the mission. Civilians working with Army units will fall under the same chain that we have reviewed today.

Structure of the Army: Composition of the Army
This chart reflects the composition of our Army from the Squad up to the Corps. The previous chart depicts the major subordinate commands/units at each respective level and highlights the chain of command. Keep in mind that as our Army is undergoing a transformation process, this picture may be changing and different terms may be added to it.

Structure of the Army: MACOMs
This much larger unit generally falls under one of the Major Army Commands (MACOMS). The Army is divided into major commands. Each MACOM consists of all the Army units within its geographic area or area of influence.
- U.S. Army Europe (USAREUR), Germany
- U.S. Army Forces Command (FORSCOM), GA
- U.S. Army Materiel Command (AMC), VA
- U.S. Army Training and Doctrine Command (TRADOC), VA
- Eighth U.S. Army, Korea
- U.S. Army Corps of Engineers (USACE), DC

Active Divisions: Total = 10
- 7th Infantry Division, Fort Carson, CO
- 24th Infantry Division, Fort Riley, KS

Integrated Divisions: Total = 2
- 3rd Armored Division, Fort Bliss, TX
- 82nd Airborne Division, Fort Bragg, NC

ARNG Divisions: Total = 8
- 3rd Infantry Division, Fort Stewart, GA
- 4th Infantry Division, Fort Carson, CO

Reserve Training Divisions: Total = 12
- 1st Cavalry Division, Fort Hood, TX
- 3rd Infantry Division, Fort Stewart, GA
Major Army Commands may not be the only type of assignment where you will see Soldiers. There are times Soldiers have the opportunity to be stationed in joint communities. This would be an assignment where all the military services (Army, Navy, Air Force, and Marines) are present. The Army Soldiers stationed at these commands are representing the Army within this command.

For more information about MACOMS, see Resource Item 3: Major Army Commands.

**Structure of the Army: Organization of the Army**

On an even larger scale is the Organization of the Army. The Army is composed of the Active Component (AC), to include Department of Defense (DOD) civilian employees, and the Reserve Component (RC) comprised of the Army National Guard and the U.S. Army Reserve.

Note that when RC elements are brought to Active Duty, which is called mobilization, they are considered a part of the Active Component for the duration of their activated service.

Just remember, regardless of component, unit, job specialty or rank, every Soldier has a chain of command.

**Summary**

As mentioned at the beginning of class, the chain of command is used by the Army for command and control as well as to expedite the flow of information. It’s this chain of command that provides the structure and official framework on which the Army is built.

Knowing where your sponsor falls within the chain will enable you to have a better understanding of your Soldier’s environment as well as provide you the invaluable tool of being familiar with how the Army works.

**Key Points**

- Rank and Grade are dependent upon the required level of experience and responsibility the Soldier has attained. By knowing your Soldier’s rank, you will have a better understanding of his or her position and responsibilities.
There are different branches within the Army. Enlisted personnel are assigned to a specific branch and then trained in a particular job called an MOS (Military Occupational Specialty) within that branch.

Within an Army unit, information flows up and down the chain through the leadership at each level.

Resources
- For more information on military insignia visit the DoD Almanac online at: http://www.defenselink.mil/pubs/almanac/almanac/people/insignias/
- PDF: Rank Structure
- PDF: U.S. Army Structure
- PDF: Major Army Commands