

# Section 1



## ARMY RANK, STRUCTURE, DUTIES, AND TRADITIONS

### Key Points

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- 1 Army Rank
- 2 Army Unit Structure
- 3 Military Courtesy
- 4 Reporting to a Superior Officer

The badge of rank which an officer wears on his coat is really a symbol of servitude to his men.

GEN Maxwell D. Taylor

From P. G. Tsouras, ed., *The Greenhill Book of Military Quotations*

## Introduction

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Although the Army includes a wide assortment of equipment—including weaponry, vehicles, electronic and communications technology, and thousands of facilities from small outposts to huge training areas—it is primarily a social organization. The most basic, most important, and most precious resources of the Army are its Soldiers.

In carrying out the mission of defending the nation, people in the Army, both Soldiers and officers, must work as a closely bonded team to execute complex tasks under difficult, dangerous conditions. Success in training and combat requires a common culture, including three critical components:

- A system of **rank** reflecting a person’s responsibilities and experience
- An organizational structure in which people know their responsibilities
- Military courtesies, customs, and traditions that serve to bond military professionals together.

The following paragraphs discuss how these three components provide an efficient environment for all the Army’s people—from the most junior Soldier to the most senior officer—to become a part of a high-performing team.

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### rank

*an official position  
or grade*



## Army Rank

### chain of command

*the system by which authority passes down from the top through a series of military ranks in which each person is accountable to a superior—the top of the chain of command is the President of the United States, the commander in chief*

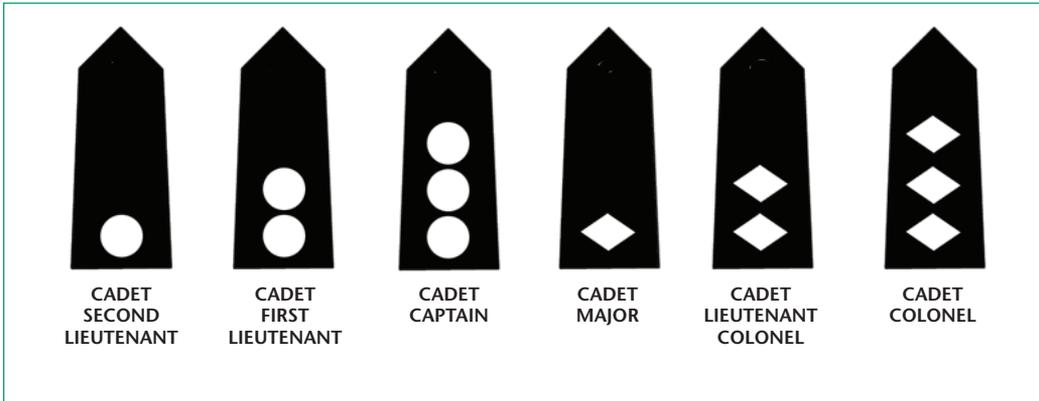
Army rank, and military rank in general, binds all military personnel together as a team. In the Army, this relationship is called the **chain of command**. As a cadet, and later as an officer, you are responsible for following the directions, guidance, and example of those who are above you in rank. From the day you begin to progress up the chain of command in ROTC, you are also responsible for building teams that bond strongly within the framework of a hierarchy of ranks, duties performed within unit structures, and a tradition of customs and courtesies.

- Army rank identifies who is in charge—whom to look to for orders, guidance, and leadership. Historically, as military structures became larger and more complex, rank and insignia became increasingly important.
- Rank has existed for thousands of years. The US Army has adapted much of the rank structure from European traditions, and the British Army in particular.
- Your current military rank in ROTC, and later, in the Army, is a visible message of your level of responsibility and degree of experience. Your rank shows where you fit into the Army structure that binds individuals together into teams.

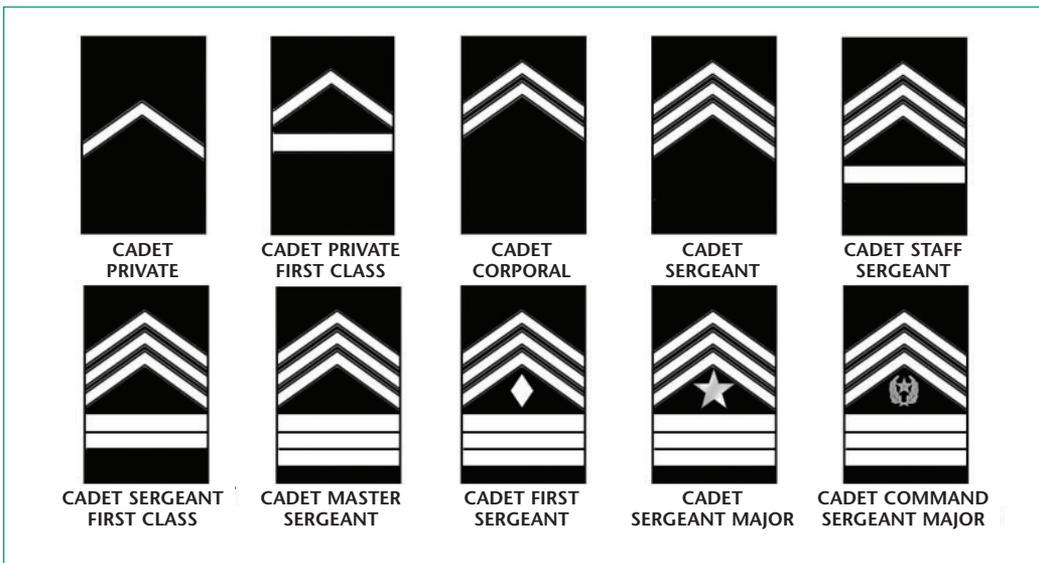
*Military ranks have existed since earliest times. For example, the rank of colonel originated in Roman times: a Roman colonel was in charge of a column—in Latin, columna—of soldiers. The rank of lieutenant comes from the French words lieu and tenant: Lieu means “place” (think of “in lieu of”). Tenant means “holding a position” (think of the landlord/tenant relationship). So a lieutenant is someone acting for a superior: someone acting in place of the person holding the position.*



**Figure 1.1** Army Rank and Insignia



**Figure 1.2** Cadet Officer Ranks



**Figure 1.3** Cadet Enlisted and NCO Ranks

## Critical Thinking

GEN Bruce C. Clarke states, “Rank is only given you in the Army to enable you to better serve those below you and those above you. Rank is not given for you to exercise your idiosyncrasies.” Explain how Clarke’s quote is an important guideline for an inexperienced leader.

## Army Unit Structure

### unit

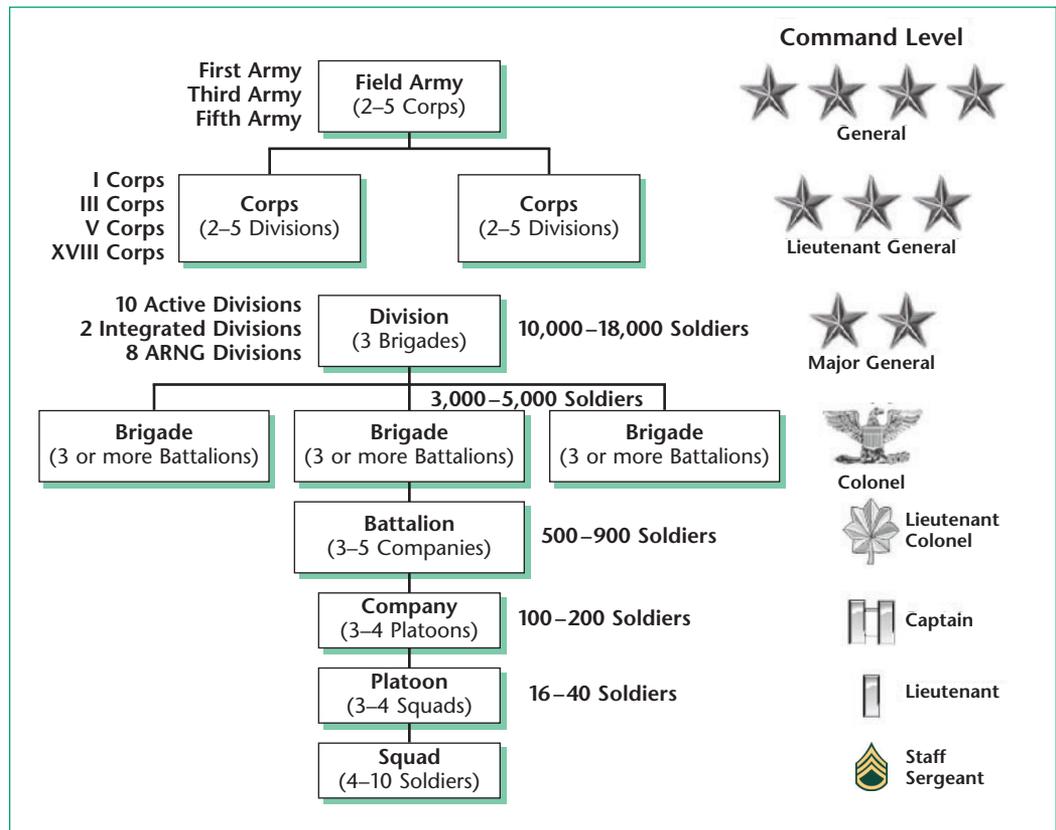
*an Army group or organization ranging in size from a field army to a squad*

### Brigade Combat Team

*the Brigade Combat Team will be able to accomplish missions within the full spectrum of operations—it will consist of three combined arms battalions, a non-line-of-sight cannon battalion, a reconnaissance surveillance and target acquisition squadron, a forward support battalion, a brigade intelligence and communications company, and a headquarters company*

In your Cadet command structure, as in the Army, you work simultaneously in both smaller and larger organizations. The most significant of these are the squad, platoon, company, and battalion. As you progress through your ROTC training and on to leading small **units** in the Army, you will have the opportunity to lead progressively larger and more-complex organizations. These will range from the smallest—the team—through the largest, and including the **Brigade Combat Team**—a cornerstone concept of the new modular Army, a unit flexible enough to provide the tactical decisiveness needed in the Contemporary Operating Environment. The Army’s basic unit structures are:

- Individual Soldier
- Fire Team
- Squad
- Platoon
- Company
- Battalion
- Brigade
- Division
- Corps
- Army.



**Figure 1.4** Army Unit Structure

## Military Courtesy

In addition to rank, courtesies and customs visibly distinguish the military from academic, medical, and other professions. When officers and Soldiers display military customs and courtesies, they demonstrate to themselves and others their commitment to duty, to their country and colleagues, and their tradition of service to others.

**Military courtesies** are extended to a person or thing that is due recognition and honor. The most basic of military courtesies is the salute. A *custom* is a traditional social convention. Military rank, as a visible mark of responsibility and leadership, is due recognition and respect. The customary way of recognizing an officer of superior rank is by saluting him or her.

### military courtesy

*the duty—gestures of respect and honor—shown to military traditions, practices, symbols, and individuals*

## Saluting

The military salute's origin probably goes as far back as the Middle Ages or before, as a gesture of trust. Knights in armor raised visors with the right hand when meeting someone to show that they did not intend to use their weapons. Through the years, this gesture became more formalized as a way of showing respect and, in early American military history, sometimes involved removing the hat. By 1820, the motion was modified to touching the hat, and since then it has become the Hand Salute.



*LTG Daham Alassal of the Iraqi Ministry of Defense, and MG Peter Chiarelli, 1st Cavalry Division commander, salute during a Baghdad ceremony.*

## When to Salute

Army personnel in uniform are required to salute when they meet and recognize persons entitled (by grade) to a salute. The exception is when saluting is inappropriate or impractical—in public conveyances such as planes and buses, in public places such as inside theaters, or when driving a vehicle.

Also salute:

- When the United States National Anthem, “To the Colors,” or “Hail to the Chief” is played
- When foreign national anthems are played
- When encountering a Medal of Honor recipient, of whatever rank
- To uncased National Colors outdoors
- On ceremonial occasions as prescribed in ceremonies below
- At reveille and retreat ceremonies, during the raising or lowering of the flag
- During the sounding of honors
- When the Pledge of Allegiance to the US flag is being recited outdoors
- When turning over control of formations
- When rendering report
- When you encounter officers of friendly foreign countries
- When officers drive by in official vehicles.

Salutes are not required when:

- You are indoors, except when reporting to an officer or when on duty as a guard
- Addressing a prisoner
- Saluting is obviously inappropriate—in these cases, only greetings are exchanged (Example: A person carrying articles with both hands, or being otherwise so occupied as to make saluting impractical, is not required to salute a senior person or return the salute to a subordinate).

## Saluting in Formation

When in formation, don’t salute or return salutes except at the command “Present, arms” given by the person in charge of the formation. The individual in charge salutes and acknowledges salutes on behalf of the entire formation. Commanders of units that are not a part of a larger formation salute officers of higher grade by bringing the unit to attention before saluting. When under battle or simulated battle conditions, you do not call your unit to attention.

## Saluting Out of Formation

When an officer approaches a group of individuals not in formation, the first person noticing the officer calls everyone present to attention. All come sharply to attention and salute.

If you are in charge of a work detail, but not actively engaged, you salute and acknowledge salutes for the entire detail.

## How to Salute

When wearing headgear with a visor (with or without glasses), raise the right hand sharply, with fingers and thumb extended and joined, palm facing down. Place the tip of the right forefinger on the rim of the visor slightly to the right of the right eye. The outer edge of the hand barely cants downward, so that neither the back of the hand nor the palm is clearly visible from the front. The hand and wrist are straight, the elbow inclined slightly forward, and the upper arm horizontal.

A well-executed salute is crisp, quick, and immediate, with both subordinate and senior officer making the movement in a professional gesture of respect and recognition of that respect. Saluting should become a reflex to you.

## Reporting to a Superior Officer

### Reporting Indoors

When reporting to a superior officer in his or her office, you remove your headgear, knock, and enter when told to do so, approach within two steps of the officer's desk, halt, salute, and report, "Sir (Ma'am), Cadet Jones reports." Hold the salute until your report is complete and the officer has returned your salute. At the end of the report, you salute again, holding the salute until it is returned. Then you smartly execute the appropriate facing movement and depart. When reporting indoors under arms, the procedure is the same, except that you don't remove your headgear and you render the salute prescribed for the weapon you are carrying.

When a Soldier reports to an NCO, the procedures are the same, except that the two exchange no salutes.

### Reporting Outdoors

When reporting outdoors, you move rapidly toward the senior officer, halt approximately three steps from the officer, salute, and concisely make your report, as you do indoors. When dismissed by the officer, you exchange salutes again. If under arms, you should carry your weapon in the manner prescribed for saluting with that weapon. (See FM 3-21.5, Appendix A.)



### Critical Thinking

What practical value do military rank, customs, and courtesies have to Soldiers in combat?



# CONCLUSION

As a leader, you must view the Army as more than just a large organization. Through its emphasis on the importance of people—as individuals and as members of teams—to the accomplishment of the mission, the Army also resembles a single, focused whole. This focus is possible for two reasons: First, the Army has established a system of rank reflecting a person’s responsibilities and experience that operates through structures—from teams through battalions and larger units—in which people know their responsibilities to each other and their unit. Second, the Army has encouraged courtesies, customs, and traditions that promote a climate in which military professionals bond together toward common goals—whether near-term and local, such as winning a unit competition, or long-term and universal, such as securing American interests in the 21st century.

As a Cadet and later an Army officer, your understanding of Army ranks, the Army’s unit structure, and its customs, courtesies, and traditions will help you better serve those above you and—especially—those below you.

## Key Words

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**rank**

**chain of command**

**unit**

**Brigade Combat Team**

**military courtesy**

## Learning Assessment

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1. What is a squad leader’s usual rank?
2. What is the usual rank of an officer commanding a company, and of his or her NCO assistant?
3. Which rank is higher, first sergeant or sergeant first class?
4. Which rank is higher, major general or lieutenant general?

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