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on Infantry

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PREFACE

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CHAPTER 5

The Functioning of the Infantry Staff

(AN INFANTRY SCHOOL TEACHING)

Staff officers are assistants to the commander. Therefore, if we are to understand the underlying principles governing staff organization and function, a clear conception of command responsibility and the command function is absolutely necessary. The controlling head of a military organization is the commander. He alone is responsible to his proper superior for everything his command does—or fails to do. He alone is responsible for all basic decisions, plans, and policies that emanate from his headquarters. This responsibility cannot be shared and it cannot be delegated. In this the staff has no part. It is one man's responsibility, and in order to meet this responsibility the commander must be able to make his authority felt and his will obeyed by each and every member of his command.

Yet it is obvious that personal contact between a commander and the individuals that make up his command becomes more and more difficult as the size of the unit increases. In addition, experience has proven that the number of individuals which a commander can personally supervise and control is extremely limited. How then can the commander—this single controlling and responsible head—effectively direct each of the many individuals composing his command and make his authority felt and his will obeyed by each individual? Manifestly, he cannot do this by personal supervision and direct orders to each

individual, as can a corporal. The commander must have some framework of organization by means of which he may impose his will on a few subordinates, each responsible directly and only to him, so that through them he may be able to make his authority felt down to the last private.

This framework is provided by organizing into successive subordinate groups, each under its own commander, and making each subordinate commander responsible to his immediate superior for all that his subdivision does or fails to do. This succession of subordinate commanders, through whom the commander of the whole exercises his authority and control, is known as the *chain of command*. This is the vital artery of the command system. All authority and all responsibility flows through this artery, and through it alone. Cut it anywhere throughout its course only at the peril of seriously interrupting or diverting the normal flow of command authority—the only thing that insures the effective execution of the will of the commander.

As we ascend the steps of the military hierarchy of command, we eventually reach a point where the number of units grouped under a single responsible commander imposes upon him numerous and exacting details. These he cannot possibly have the time and physical endurance to attend to in person if, at the same time, he is to give his attention to the broader phases of his duties. Therefore, at this point in the chain of command, the commander must be provided with staff assistants to relieve him of the burden of details connected with the issuance and distribution of orders, the evaluation of information, and the supply and movement of his troops.

We believe that this point is first reached in the battalion. Here, then, is the lowest echelon in which the commander must have staff assistants. Staffs are not a recent introduction into the military system, nor does the role the staff plays alter in any way the basic principles of command responsibility. *Staffs are no part of the*

chain of command. The commander retains as full responsibility and exacts as complete responsibility from his subordinate commanders as though these assistants—the staff—never existed.

From the above, it can be seen that command, responsibility, and organization are interdependent. Not only must this be clearly understood by prospective commanders, but it must be understood by prospective staff officers. The latter are assistants to the commander, performing in his name such of the details pertaining to the commander's functions as he may delegate to them. In the performance of these details they must keep in mind the responsibility of their commander and the means by which their commander holds his subordinate commanders to their responsibilities. The line of authority and responsibility passes direct from superior commander to subordinate commander. It does not pass through the staff nor can the staff with impunity assume any of the authority or responsibility pertaining to the chain of command.

Staffs, in some form or other, are as old as command and may be said to go back to the period when armed hordes were first grouped into definite military organizations. Commanders have always employed assistants: first as criers to deliver oral orders; later as military secretaries, with the primary duty of reducing the commanders' orders to writing; and still later as assistants in the performance of administrative and tactical duties.

There is nothing to be gained by attempting to trace the historical origin and development of the staff as an institution in military organization. It is sufficient to say that when armies were small, commanders with a few assistants could work out the details of plans and orders. Fighting formations, and questions of supply were comparatively simple. Battlefields were restricted and troops usually fought under the eye of the commander. As armies became larger and more complex, a commander was compelled to shift more and more of the

burden of administrative detail on the shoulders of assistants in order to conserve his own time and energy for the maneuvering of fighting units. Thus was developed what may be termed the *special staff*,—such as adjutants, quartermasters, and so forth. As weapons improved and fighting formations became more dependent upon specific tactical situations and less on fixed geometric tactical formations, commanders found the need of a new type of assistant—one who could take over some of the burden of tactical detail. Thus was developed the staff group that may be called the *tactical staff* or in large units the *general staff*. The *unit staff* of our modern battalion, regiment, or brigade is an outgrowth of this evolution. In it are combined some of the functions of both the tactical and the administrative staff.

It has been previously stated that after a command reaches a certain size it is impossible for the commander to perform, personally, all the duties which devolve upon him, and that it is necessary to delegate or assign certain of these duties to his assistants. In considering what duties will be delegated to these assistants we must divide the functions of the commander into two general classes. The first class embraces those duties which are inherent in the person of the commander and which either cannot, or should not, be delegated. Let us call such duties *command duties*. The second class of duties are those which the commander finds it possible to delegate to his assistants. These may be referred to as *staff duties*. In general, they consist in handling details in conformity with the plan or policy of the commander which has previously been announced. These so-called staff duties may be functionally classified into: (1) personnel, (2) military intelligence, (3) operations and training, and (4) supply. This functional classification of staff duties has come to be recognized as the underlying principle of all staff organization, from the battalion to the general headquarters.

This grouping must not be construed as implying that staff details can be neatly classified as pertaining exclusively to one, and only one group. It is not as easy as that. Seldom, if ever, will a question come up that will not in some vital way affect all staff groups. Battles are fought with personnel and, therefore, personnel affects tactics. Tactical plans affect supply and supply, in its turn, affects tactics. Moreover, both have a marked effect on personnel matters. Enemy information is vital to proper tactical plans. As a consequence it is common for one item to need the consideration of several staff sections before a sound decision can be reached. Thus all things interlock to make a battle pattern. From all this it is easy to see that there can be *no water-tight staff compartments* into which we may dump these various details of operations. Furthermore, since staff sections interlock and overlap, it is apparent that a coordinating head must be provided to effectively insure that the many related questions that are delegated to the staff are properly handled. This coordination could, of course, be effected by the commander. But that would, in itself, defeat the very purpose of a staff—that of freeing the commander of the burden of detail, in order that he may have the time and opportunity of discharging his broader functions of command. The commander, therefore, obviously needs one principal assistant, to act as his chief advisor. A person who can represent him when he is absent, and who, while coordinating the overlapping staff functions referred to above, also insures that staff and subordinate commanders function in accordance with the orders of the commander.

From the foregoing we see that the command functions that are ordinarily delegated to assistants and known as staff duties may be classified into four functional groups and one coordinating group. This functional classification of staff duties and the necessity for a coordinating head

is recognized in the organization of the unit staff of our battalions, regiments, and brigades.*

It is not enough to learn the written principles of staff procedure—anyone who reads can do that. The staff is not a machine, neither is the commander nor the troops, both of whom the staff must serve. All are human beings—commander, staff and troops. Only by recognizing this fact can staff officers acquire sufficient background for the application of the principles and practice of staff operation. Only with this knowledge, ever present in the background, can the staff be a help to the commander and the troops. Without it they become an instrument of discord and meddling interference, causing disorganization, distrust, and lowered morale.

It may be asked, "Just what are the relations of the staff to the commander?" The cardinal principle that governs all activity of the staff officer is: The staff neither commands nor executes, for it has no element subordinate to its authority. It only assists the commander in preparing, transmitting and following up *his* orders and in so doing *recognizes no authority save that of the commander.*

Good commanders usually resent any usurpation of their authority, especially by staff officers. The staff officer who attempts it will quickly find that he has forfeited the confidence of his commander and that his usefulness as a staff officer is at an end. Even the appearance of usurpation must be studiously avoided. The phrases: "I desire—", "I direct—" or even "we wish" must never be used. It should be: "The colonel directs —", "The general desires—" or the like.

No two commanders follow the same methods of command. If you would assist the commander you must know his methods. If you would know his methods you

* The physical organization and functioning of the infantry staff may readily be obtained in Chapter 1, Part One, Staff Officers' Field Manual.

must know the man. Therefore, the staff officer must endeavor to learn the commander's personal characteristics, so that he can adjust himself and his actions to them. This will require a close study of the commander's way of doing business, to ascertain his peculiarities and his idiosyncrasies—if any. This is done, not with the idea of *reforming* the commander, but with the idea of *doing business his way*. For instance, some commanders require a mass of detailed data concerning problems presented them for decision, while others require only the essential facts. The rule is to find out what the commander wants, and the way he wants it; then give it to him exactly that way. This subordination to the commander's method of working in no way implies that the staff officer is to become a "yes man". Quite the contrary, the staff officer must have well defined ideas and thoughts and the personal courage and integrity to present them, when requested, irrespective of the known opinion of the questioner. The lack of this quality is a serious defect in any staff officer.

The staff must keep the commander informed on all important matters affecting the command. Nothing embarrasses a commander more than to discover from an outside source that something has been going on in his organization for some time and his staff has failed to inform him of it. Questions of this nature are a real test of the judgment and common sense of the staff officer.

Yet where shall he draw the line? Is the subject one the commander must be informed of at once, even though the staff officer is unprepared to present him with the essential facts bearing on it? Is the subject one which he may withhold from the commander until such time as he is able to gather the essential facts and is prepared to make a definite recommendation? Is it a matter that may be classified as an unimportant detail that need not be presented to the commander? The answer cannot be found by the use of any rule or formula. Good judgment and common sense will usually lead to the right answer.

If there is any rule that is applicable, it is this: resolve every reasonable doubt in favor of informing the commander.

This brings us to the question of how matters should be offered to a commander for decision. This, of course, will depend on the staff officer knowing the manner in which the commander wants his problems presented. Usually a commander wants facts. Whenever possible, the staff officer must marshal all the facts bearing on the subject. He should analyze these facts and their bearing on the problem at hand. He must either arrange all these facts in a logical manner in writing or be prepared to present them orally. The arrangement and consideration of these facts should enable him to arrive at a conclusion. This he should give to the commander in the form of a definite recommendation. If time permits, the papers required to put this recommendation into effect—if approved by the commander—should be prepared and submitted with the recommendation. This saves time, for as soon as the commander indicates his approval the matter is ready for signature and quick dispatch.

Should the commander fail to approve the recommendation, or modify it in any way, then the staff officer must cheerfully accept the change and proceed to carry out the commander's wishes with the same energy as though his original recommendation had been approved in full.

Before we leave the relations of the staff to the commander, it is desired to refer to two personal matters that are very important. *First*: In his position as advisor to the commander the staff officer must remember that his opinion as to the ability of other officers may carry considerable weight, therefore petty personal differences must be put aside. *Second*: The staff should beware of gossip and avoid gossipers as it would be a pestilence. The staff officer who indulges in or even listens to gossip is a menace to the harmony of a com-

mand, for inevitably such practices lead to discord and distrust. The staff officer who permits gossip to color his reports to his commander or who gossips about his commander, immediately impairs his value to that officer.

There is no place on a staff for the officer who by nature or habit is temperamentally antagonistic toward those about him, or who gives this impression. Staff duties frequently overlap. Conflicts arise which must be adjusted in the interest of the command as a whole. This calls for the exercise of tact, forbearance, and unselfish self-effacement by all, if the staff is to be an effective, helpful team. Friendship and loyalty within the staff play an important part in team work and should be fostered. The physically close and mentally intimate association resulting from personal conference greatly facilitates coordination. For this reason staff coordination is best effected by direct relations between officers of the different sections. In this way ideas are crystallized and plans adjusted in a minimum time before commencing the solution of a given problem, or the drawing up of an order. This system gives free scope to the staff officer's initiative. Written memoranda and so-called "buck slips" delay action.

Memoranda between staff officers should be needed only to supplement personal contact methods. This applies particularly to infantry staffs which are relatively small. Too great a use of this system between staff sections indicates either indolence or a lack of confidence in associates, shown by the desire to get an associate committed in writing. An example of the results produced by written memoranda may be quoted, since it is rather typical of what may be expected from the system.

A civic body of a certain city where one of our Regular Army regiments is stationed called on the commanding officer and requested a military parade for the delegates to a convention then in session. The commanding officer agreed and set a date of three days later. He sent for S-3 and directed him to make the necessary arrangements

for a parade of the entire regiment, including the trains.

This headquarters was well organized. It had its own Message Center. Although S-3 could confer with S-4 by walking across the hall, he sent him a note, written on an office form, called a "buck slip". The efficient Message Center functioned well enough to deliver the buck slip to S-4 the next afternoon at 2:00 o'clock. Unfortunately, that very morning, S-4, acting on the authority given him by the commanding officer—prior to the conference with the committee of civilians—had stripped the wagons of his train for painting. In fact, painting had already begun. We can picture the commander's state of mind when he found out that his plan could not be carried out in full because of a failure in staff cooperation?

Another case: S-3, as everyone knows, is charged with planning troop movements. When this involves marching, S-3's plan also includes the time and place of the bivouacs. S-1 is charged with the supervision of quartering and sheltering arrangements. A simple requirement in elementary coordination, surely, but let us see how it worked out in one case. The situation is not uncommon.

A regiment was on a practice march several years ago. When the troops arrived at the bivouac area they were halted with packs on, and kept waiting while S-3 lined up stakes that marked the areas of the units. The companies then started to pitch their tents. S-3 ran up and down the line, moving this tent and then that. S-1, who thought he had a function to perform, had some different ideas. He stepped in and proceeded to make changes. Both ignored the battalion and company commanders. Several hours elapsed before the companies could settle down and rest. The result was growling and grumbling that lasted well into the night and seriously affected the comfort of the troops. Fortunately, the regiment got another S-3 before taking the field the next year.

This new S-3 not only knew his business, but he knew what was not his business. He prepared the plan for the

march, the location of the halts and bivouacs. He turned the S-3 bivouac plan over to S-1, the billeting officer. S-1 went ahead, reconnoitered the bivouac area, and had guides meet the units as they arrived. These guides led the units to their assigned areas. Camp was made under the supervision of the company and battalion commanders and in a few minutes the tired troops were under tents and at rest. It is significant to note that this regiment was rated *unsatisfactory* at its tactical inspection for the first year mentioned, but for the second year it was rated *satisfactory*.

It has been stated previously that the line of authority and responsibility passes direct from the commander to the subordinate commanders. Not only must the staff officer remember that he is not in this line of authority or responsibility, but he must also remember that the subordinate commanders are usually his senior in rank. He must, therefore, be careful to accord all officers the courtesy and consideration due them, even while disagreeing with their ideas. Above all, he must remember it is a command principle that all orders and instructions from a higher unit to a subordinate unit are given to the commander thereof. As a consequence, each subordinate commander is accustomed to look to his immediate superior for orders and instructions. Staff officers acting or speaking in the name of the commander must be sure that the commander has authorized such action.

In those urgent circumstances—which fortunately are not common—where it may be necessary to indicate action without specific authority of the commander, the staff officer must be sure that the orders he gives in the name of the commander are the orders that the commander would give if he were present and acquainted with the facts. To be able to do this the staff officer, as indicated before, must be thoroughly familiar with the policies of his commander and his method of operation. When a staff officer acts without specific authority he must, at the first opportunity, advise the commander of

the action he has taken. For nothing will bring about strained relations between the staff and subordinate commanders quicker than staff usurpation of authority, or the bare suspicion of such a condition.

Cordial, cooperative relations between the staff and subordinate commanders will go far toward securing efficiency in the execution of the commander's will. Therefore, it is a staff responsibility to cultivate this relationship. Such a relationship will bear fruit during the anticipation and preparation phase of a plan when information or suggestions from subordinates may be illuminating. This one thing the staff officer must constantly bear in mind—no man has so firm a grasp on his business as to warrant deafness to the opinions of others, particularly when these others are closer to fundamental items that cannot be ignored.

For instance: the subordinate commanders usually have a better understanding of the powers and limitations of their units than has the staff. Therefore, they should be consulted freely and frankly. Commanders' plans have failed many times, because some subordinate commander, not with sinister intent but because of a feeling that information was unwelcome, has held back data which should have been communicated. Even after the commander's orders have been issued the staff will find that, if a frank, helpful relationship with subordinate commanders exists, there are many difficulties of execution that can be ironed out, and many misunderstandings avoided. To sum all this up we can say: the staff officer must get along with subordinate commanders, and it is up to the staff officer to do most of the *getting!*

The organ of execution is the troops. If the staff officer is to be a helpful assistant to his commander he must know the troops. If he is to further the execution of his commander's orders he must be helpful to the troops. He can do neither unless he is familiar with the capabilities, limitations, and the conditions actually confronting the troops. First-hand knowledge of such factors

is gained by personal visits to the troops and not by sitting at a desk shuffling papers. The staff officer must organize his office so that it can function during his absence. He must not hesitate to leave the office to obtain the intimate knowledge of actual conditions which confront the troops. This is a duty that he owes to the commander and to the troops. He must bear in mind that efficient execution by the troops is, in the final summing up, the thing that will make his commander a success or a failure. The motto for staff officers should be: *He serves his commander best who helps the troops most.*

It appears obvious, then, that the staff officer must have first-hand knowledge of the needs, the conditions, and the situation of the lower echelons; but at the same time he must remember that this knowledge should be obtained without meddling with the responsibilities of the hierarchy of command. To be sure, a commander cannot be everywhere and his staff must be his eyes, but these staff eyes must function wisely and according to a careful system. The visiting staff officer must bear in mind that the needs of the troops are those approved by the successive echelons of command, the respect for which lies at the base of all military efficiency. Therefore, he must be punctilious in his observance of proper military customs and courtesy. For example: he must never visit troops without reporting to intervening commanders—first, on arriving, the object of his visit; second, on leaving, what he has seen and intends to report.

This method, while respecting the basic laws of courtesy, gives the staff officer an opportunity to adjust his personal observation to the viewpoints of the successive commanders. Also they will frequently give the staff officer information unknown or unavailable in the lower echelons. Thus his report to his commander will be well rounded and of real value. If he keeps in mind that the purpose of his visit is to find out how he can help the troops and if his subsequent report, or subsequent action,

has been directed toward furthering the needs of the troops, his visits always will be welcome and fruitful.

If, in his preceding visits, he has ascertained the needs of the troops and carried this information to the commander or to the agency that can supply these needs, and afterwards has followed up to ascertain whether the needs are being supplied; then, and only then, will he be doing a real staff job. Moreover, in all his future visits, he will be received with frankness by the troops, be looked upon as a friend, and finally will come to be regarded as the troop representative with the commander. That should be his goal.

Even a staff officer of mediocre professional ability can become a pillar of strength to a command if he is able to establish such a relationship. If, on the other hand, a staff officer, no matter how brilliant, fails to interest himself in the needs of the troops or if, with the mantle of the commander on his shoulders, he play the role of critic only, the troops will heartily dislike him and resent his visits. He will be a depressing influence. He will be a source of more harm than good. He will be a failure, personally and to his commander.

Two contrasting examples will serve to illuminate this matter in a hard, white light. During the war a two-company battalion in Siberia was stationed about 150 miles from its regiment. The troops had been engaged in rather trying operations for over six months. The equipment of the men—for which no replacement had been available—was worn and frayed.

Early one morning the regimental supply officer arrived and reported to the battalion commander that he had been directed by the regimental commander to make an inspection of the command. He said his principal interest was to see the condition of equipment and to find out if there was any way the regimental supply office could be of assistance to the troops. He did not desire the troops turned out, he declared, but would ac-

company the battalion commander about and observe the troops as they were.

In his tour he noticed the worn, frayed state of the men's equipment and told the battalion commander that he would replace it at once as he had just received a shipment of new equipment. He said that his office would prepare the necessary papers for the transaction and forward them with the new equipment, since he knew the company commanders had no facilities to do this work. He listened to the battalion commander's story about the difficulties of getting fresh beef and told him he would find some way of getting it to the troops regularly. *And he did.*

The battalion commander unburdened himself, and the staff officer returned to regimental headquarters. Then he followed up every request to the entire satisfaction of the troop commander. The result obtained from his visit was a better equipped, a better fed, and a happier outfit. That was real staff work.

Two days after he left another staff officer from the same headquarters arrived. He informed the battalion commander that he had arrived to make an inspection. He desired the troops turned out. He was critical of the equipment that had been worn threadbare by actual field service. He did not offer one helpful suggestion, nor even ask if there was anything that regimental headquarters could do to help the situation or in any way further the interest of the command. The immediate result of his inspection was a bad taste in everyone's mouth. Later came a "skin-letter" from regimental headquarters about the worn equipment which left a worse taste. This "skin-letter" was signed by a staff officer and not by the commander. This is staff work at its worst. Such staff officers are of no use to a commander and are a menace to a command.

The second staff officer never came again. Perhaps, he is still waiting for a cordial invitation from the battalion commander.

In conclusion all that has been said might be put into six commandments for the potential—even technically trained—staff officer. There may be more commandments but the officer who follows these will achieve his own official salvation and enhance his commander's reputation.

THE STAFF OFFICER'S COMMANDMENTS

I. The staff must recognize no authority save that of the commander. His wishes and his interests must be paramount.

II. The staff serves the commander best when it assists the troops most.

III. The staff must jealously guard against any violation of the chain of command.

IV. The staff officer must not be tied to the command post. He must arrange his office so that it can function during his absence.

V. The staff must know the troops. They are the commander's engine of execution where execution is most difficult. The staff officer should get out and see them, help them all he can, but avoid meddling with responsibilities of subordinate commanders, and never assume the role of a critic.

VI. Lastly, all good staff work is characterized by respect for the duties and responsibilities of others, respect for the basic laws of courtesy, and a realization that assistance to commander and to troops is the real mission of the staff.