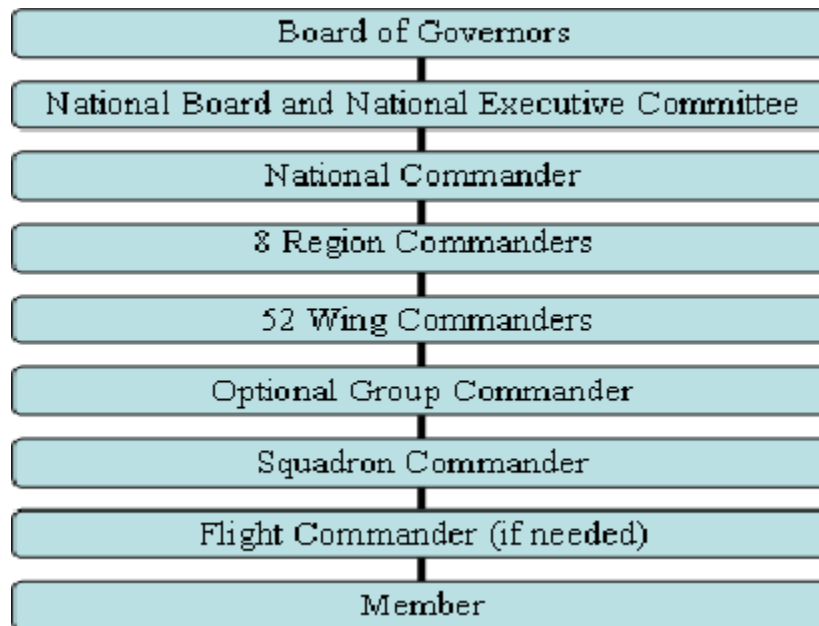


CAP Chain of Command

CAP Officer Basic Course

Introduction

The Level 1/Foundations Course described the chain of command to be arranged as shown by the chart at the right. Our organizational plan is published in The Organization of Civil Air Patrol, CAPR 20-1, which has detailed organizational charts for every level of command along with job descriptions for every duty assignment. Your official job description and where you fit on the organizational chart. It can be found at http://members.gocivilairpatrol.com/media/cms/R020_001.pdf



Very few units have exactly the right number of people, and the right people to fill out organizational charts perfectly. So in this lesson we will talk about the theory (CAPR 20-1) and the reality (temporary chains of command and wearing multiple hats) of the CAP Chain of Command.

1. State why CAP uses the chain of command it does.

There is a management concept called **Span of Control**. It describes the maximum size of an efficient working group. Most people cannot effectively supervise more than five to eight people. Using this concept allows the eight Region Commanders to supervise five to nine Wing Commanders. In a case when a wing has numerous squadrons, they are "grouped" geographically into Groups so the Group Commander can typically supervise five to eight squadron commanders. This concept is applied in cadet and composite squadrons who often have deputy commanders for cadets and seniors who supervise members of the staff which probably includes you. If you have not already done so, get a copy of the 20-1 (see above for web address) and see where you fit in your squadron's organizational chart.

The composition of the regions stems from the original Department of the Army organizational plan set forth during WWII. The Department of the Army formed Armies (First Army, Second Army, etc) geographically. We were grouped that way for coordination and have stayed that way ever since. Our wings are organized by states for better liaisons with state government,

particularly legislatures, emergency management agencies and National Guard commands. Groups are formed to improve span of control in large geographic areas or population centers. The squadron is a functional unit. It gets the missions done. It is organized in a community and draws people from the surrounding areas. Volunteers tend to join a unit close to home and work to better the community in which they live.

This organization plan also enables CAP to efficiently utilize resources, accomplish missions, ensure quality of service and solve problems at the lowest level possible. Can you imagine trying to run all ES missions from National Headquarters or decide which units get the new van? They just don't have the local knowledge of people, geography and needs, to do it effectively. Delegating those responsibilities to Wings and Groups makes effective use of Span of Control. Regions provide assistance on larger issues such as training at the level of Region Staff College, executing a multi-wing practice SAR mission or coordinating the equitable allocation of resources across a region.

People don't relocate hundreds of miles to "take a job" with CAP so we often do not have units at the ideal personnel strength to produce the perfect organization chart. CAP has adapted to fit the reality of our existence. One way we have adapted is the use of "temporary" chains of command. Members of several units may go on a disaster relief mission or may spend a week serving on a cadet encampment staff. Because these activities are so short it makes no sense to charter a unit and transfer members only to have to undo the paperwork in a few days. Essentially, the member is on loan to the activity and they report (through a chain of command that only exists until the end of the activity) to the IC or Encampment Commander. The activity commander has authority over the "loaned" member solely for the purpose of completing the activity. When the activity is over, the loaned member returns to their home squadron and that chain of command without the necessity of any paperwork changing hands.

The other common adaptation is having more than one job (dual-hatted). In many units the Administration Officer and Personnel Officer are the same person. Ideally, the Logistics Officer would supervise the Transportation Officer and the Supply Officer. In many units one person does all three jobs. It is also common to see a person on Wing staff that has a job in the local squadron. A mission pilot may also be a squadron Aerospace Education Officer. It is admirable when members contribute so much to CAP and ensure we accomplish our missions for America.

It is for these historical, political and practical reasons CAP is organized the way it is.

2. Explain the difference between line and staff officers.

Line officers hold a position in the chain of command. Their titles usually end in the word **Commander**. They have the right to direct and discipline subordinates. Their authority does not extend beyond their part of the organization (Cote, 1977). They set policy and make decisions for their command within the parameters of CAP regulations. In business these people would be the president or department head.

Staff Officers provide assistance, counsel or services to others but do not have the right to direct and discipline. (Cote, 1977) The commander cannot be involved in the routine work in all departments nor can they be expected to be experts in all areas. Staff officers are expected to do those things in their department only. Staff officers are in the position to recommend policy and influence decisions through expertise and persuasions. In a business these people would be the accountant or programmer.

A CAP example of this would be the Group Public Affairs Officer (PAO) wanting to see all press releases before they go out to the press. He can recommend it to the squadron PAOs but not require it. He can also recommend the policy to the Wing or Group Commander who has the authority to order it/make it policy. If the Wing or Group Commander sets the policy,

the Squadron Commanders in that wing/group (but not neighboring groups) are compelled to tell their PAO of the new policy and require them to follow it.

Any member may consult with their counterpart at the next higher headquarters for assistance, guidance, counsel, advice, training or services directly but they can not order you to do something. You should be mindful that they will tell you how things get done (the policy or regulation) and most likely will be the person who will process the task you want to accomplish. So let's say you are the Squadron Finance Officer and the Wing Director of Finance says, "Wing only processes requests for reimbursement on Tuesdays." (He is advising you of the policy set by the Wing Commander.) You can ask them how long it takes to get things to them by mail or why Tuesdays, but if it arrives on Wednesday you will wait a week.

There are three ways officers often get themselves into trouble with authority. First, they try to extend line authority beyond their area of command. They give direction to people who are not under their authority or direct them to violate some regulation or policy. For example, a Ground Team Leader and his team are filling sandbags outside a power plant in order to protect it from rising waters. When asked if CAP can provide more help, he thinks about the three ground teams that had yet to be dispatched when his team left two hours ago. He says, "Sure I can get three more teams here in an hour". The decision to accept a mission is up to the Incident Commander (IC) and which resources to commit to the mission are made by the IC in consultation with the staff. The Ground Team Leader overstepped his authority. You only have authority over those who report to you on the organizational chart and their subordinates (CAPR 20-1). You do not have the authority to order someone to violate the regulations.

The second most common way to get in trouble is staff officers trying to use line officer authority. They try to reassign resources or make policy without approval of their commander or order commanders from subordinate units to do something. For example, the Operations Officer reassigns an aircraft to a different unit and orders the losing commander to fly it 50 miles to the new airport and drive back. The Operations Officer is misusing line authority. It is the Wing Commander who assigns aircraft to units and the Operations Officer then coordinates between the losing and gaining commanders for the delivery of the aircraft.

The last way officers get in trouble is when they try to do something outside their area. A classic example is when the Communications Officer tells the Finance Officer to write a check so she can be reimbursed for batteries for the radio. It is the Commander's job to tell the Finance Officer they have pre-approved the expenditure and the Supply Officer's job to buy the batteries.

Remember, staff officers advise; line officers exercise authority and that authority has limits. Know your role and its limits.

3. Discuss how the Chaplain, Safety Officer and Inspector relate to the chain of command in respect to matters of Core Values and public trust.

There are a few people you can go to directly even if they are not your counterpart at the higher headquarters. They are the Chaplain (HC), the Safety Officer (SE) and the Inspector (IG). Any member can approach their chaplain (or the next higher headquarters chaplain if their unit does not have one) on matters of core values, ethics, integrity, morale or spirituality without going through their commander. The Chaplain may give advice and while exercising confidentiality, go directly to the appropriate person or commander to address the issue. (For a more detailed discussion of the Chaplain's duties, go to the Chaplain Lesson in this course.) You can go to the Chaplain when you believe the commander is not being truthful (integrity is

a core value) about the availability of the aircraft, but not because the commander has chosen to let someone else fly it that day (a command choice).

Any person, at any time can go to the Safety Officer (SE) to point out a potential safety hazard. A hazard may be an item, policy or practice. The SE can stop the use of an item, temporarily suspend a dangerous policy or stop a dangerous practice while it is reviewed by the appropriate commander. In this very limited way they can exercise their commander's line authority. A unit Administration Officer can go to the Safety Officer and recommend that members not be allowed to drive more than four hours at time without a thirty minute break, but it would be the commander who makes it policy. On the other hand, if the Administration Officer sees the Transportation Officer starting to fall asleep while driving, she can make him pull over. In fact any member can stop any activity, at any time, when they feel the risk is too high. (See the Safety Lesson of this course for more information.)

The final person any member may approach outside of the chain of command is the Inspector (IG). Squadrons and Groups do not have Inspectors while wings and regions do. If a member has knowledge of fraud, waste, or abuse (of members or authority) they are obligated to advise the IG or file a complaint. The terms fraud, waste, abuse and complaint are technical terms covered in the Inspector Lesson of this course. The IG has the authority to launch an investigation anywhere in their area of jurisdiction without the approval of the unit commander. In some cases they can even pass the case up to the next higher headquarters without their commander's approval. (For more on this, see the IG Lesson in this Course.) For example, if the Finance Officer is pocketing half of the squadron dues you could file an (IG) complaint. You cannot complain to the IG that you don't like that half the dues are spent buying cadets uniforms.

In the cases of the IG, SE, and HC you can go directly to them about matters directly related to their job and with the knowledge that you have regulations protecting you from reprisal or being accused of breaking the chain of command.

4. State consequences of violations of the chain of command

We have already said that you can go to your counter part at the next higher headquarters for guidance. We have noted that you can go to the IG, SE and HC directly in matters of public trust, safety and core values. But those are the exceptions. Other than that you follow the chain of command. The chain of command is there to efficiently execute the mission, solve problems and exercise span of control. Each commander has been given the authority to do those things. Going outside the chain of command creates a number of problems, is unprofessional, embarrassing and reduces discipline. Finally, there are consequences.

Going outside the chain of command usually takes two forms; going over someone's head or going around them. At work you would not go to the company president to complain about the head of a different department or to get authorization to spend money when the department head could authorize it. The same is true in CAP. If you are the Squadron AE, you would not complain to the Wing Cadet Programs Officer (CP) about the Squadron CP having the cadets drill too much. Nor would you go to the Wing Transportation Officer (LGT) to request a van be assigned to the unit.

When you go around a commander or over their head you are saying things about the commander, your unit and yourself. You are saying the commander is incompetent to make the correct decision, unaware of the situation or lacks the nerve/ability to take the correct action. Nobody likes to have those things said about them. You are also saying your judgment is better than the commanders. Commanders are in that position because their superiors trust their judgment and commanders are often in possession of the bigger picture and you may not be. By calling into question your commander's judgment you are calling into question the superior who put them there. You have not made any friends by doing this.

You are also saying things about yourself. You say that you lack training. You should know the difference between authority of a staff officer and line officer. You are suggesting you lack self-discipline. It is a matter of discipline to work on a task within the unit, within the rules set by the squadron commander. In many of our missions you will not have the big picture and if you do not have the self-discipline to follow instructions, you can put yourself, others and success of the mission at risk. You are calling into question your loyalty to the unit and the commander by disparaging the commander's and unit's abilities. When you do all these things it makes a commander wonder if you act without considering all the consequences. These things reflect badly on you.

Going outside the chain of command creates a lot of problems. In the field it can put people and the mission in danger. It can embarrass your unit and CAP in the public's eye. It can create situations that have to be undone or waste resources. Let's take a look at two quick examples. The Squadron AE requests the Wing LGT to permanently assign a van to your squadron, and for some reason it does get transferred to your unit. The reaction is, of course, the losing squadron commander complains to the Group Commander who is going to be tied up doing this instead of things he had planned; he will likely end up upset with the Wing LGT; the Group LGT is upset because he was not in the loop; the group Director of Operations (DO) is upset because of degraded mission capability; your Squadron Commander is embarrassed because she did not know about the request. The Wing LGT has some explaining to do, the Wing Commander is distracted by something that should have been handled by Group and you look bad. In all likelihood, volunteers from both units will have to spend their time to return the van. We have wasted a lot of time and effort. Hopefully, there are no losses on a mission because the other unit could not effectively respond to a mission while the wrong squadron had the van. This could be avoided by following the chain of command and making the request through the squadron commander.

In our second case, the poor Squadron AE also complained to the Wing CP that the Squadron CP drills the cadets for hours. The Wing CP is concerned for all aspects of the program and is worried about Cadet Protection issues if the cadets are being pushed too far. The Wing CP asks the Squadron Commander about the drill practice. The Squadron Commander tells him that a local dignitary has asked the unit to provide an honor guard for some local event and only gave them five weeks notice. Thinking this was a good opportunity to develop support in the community, the squadron has been practicing drill an hour a week at the squadron meeting (40% of the meeting) and one other night a week for an hour. The cadets are enjoying it and are talking about competing in the Wing Drill Completion in several months. The Wing CP thinks this is reasonable and suggests that the squadron might want to spend some extra time on AE when the event is over. In this case the Wing CP limited the effect of the Squadron AE going outside the chain of command with a simple question. Had they gotten the Wing AE involved, started talking about cadet abuse, had the Wing Commander ask questions and put it on the IG radar; it could have blown up into a time consuming, embarrassing, resource draining, and stress inducing mess. Had the AE shared her concern with the Squadron CP or Squadron Commander first, all of this could have been avoided.

There are a range of consequences for going outside the chain of command. The consequence will depend on how many levels of command you jump, the severity of accusations or actions, the amount of animosity involved and the amount of time and training you have had in the program. The act can be ignored, but your reputation can be damaged even if no action is taken. This could lead directly or indirectly to promotions in grade or position being effected. You could get a verbal or written reprimand. Privileges could be suspended. In extreme cases membership could be suspended or terminated.

Lesson Summary and Closure

There are historical, political, geographical, and practical reasons that CAP has the chain of command that it does. There are sensible reasons for line and staff authority. Going outside the chain of command creates problems, is unprofessional, reduces discipline, and reflects badly on you, your commander and, indirectly, on your unit. As such it can lead to negative

consequences. There are ethical and mission critical reasons the HC, IG, and SE are exceptions to the rules. The structure of CAP is there for good reasons. Use it, follow it, be part of it

Works Cited

Cote , Ronald, Maj. USAF, presentation (April 1977)

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