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United States Army

Chain of Command (Organization)

I'm often asked what the elements of command are for the U.S. Army.

The basic building block of all Army organizations is the individual soldier. A small group of soldiers organized to maneuver and fire is called a squad. 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.

A company is typically the smallest Army element to be given a designation and affiliation with higher headquarters at battalion and brigade level. This alphanumeric and branch designation causes an "element" to become a "unit."

Squad - 9 to 10 soldiers. Typically commanded by a sergeant or staff sergeant, a squad or section is the smallest element in the Army structure, and its size is dependent on its function.

Platoon - 16 to 44 soldiers. A platoon is led by a lieutenant with an NCO as second in command, and consists of two to four squads or sections.

Company - 62 to 190 soldiers. Three to five platoons form a company, which is commanded by a captain with a first sergeant as the commander's principle NCO assistant. An artillery unit of equivalent size is called a battery, and a comparable armored or air cavalry unit is called a troop.

Battalion - 300 to 1,000 soldiers. Four to six companies make up a battalion, which is normally commanded by a lieutenant colonel with a command sergeant major as principle NCO assistant. A battalion is capable of independent operations of limited duration and scope. An armored or air cavalry unit of equivalent size is called a squadron.

Brigade - 3,000 to 5,000 soldiers. A brigade headquarters commands the tactical operation of two to five organic or attached combat battalions. Normally commanded by a colonel with a command sergeant major as senior NCO, brigades are employed on independent or semi-independent operations. Armored cavalry, ranger and special forces units this size are categorized as regiments or groups.

Division - 10,000 to 15,000 soldiers. Usually consisting of three brigade-sized elements and commanded by a major general, divisions are numbered and assigned missions based on their structures. The division performs major tactical operations for the corps and can conduct sustained battles and engagements.

Corps - 20,000 to 45,000 soldiers. Two to five divisions constitute a corps, which is typically commanded by a lieutenant general. As the deployable level of command required to synchronize and sustain combat operations, the corps provides the framework for multi-national operations.

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