

**THE ENGLISH OF  
MILITARY  
COMMUNICATIONS**

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The English of military communications by William A. Ganoe

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*The* ENGLISH *of* MILITARY  
COMMUNICATIONS

*By*

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## FOREWORD

It is important in military matters that a writer shall express definitely the ideas he intends to convey and in such phraseology that there can be no misunderstanding of the language used. Carelessly or improperly phrased instructions have caused many miscarriages of military plans. The attainment of perfection in the use of language is a matter of painstaking study and the gradual refinement of practice. Merely dreaming of what one will do when responsibility is thrust upon him is not the way to prepare for successful achievement. It is the duty of every self respecting officer to be ready to do not only his best but to do what is right.

When one has qualified himself to write or dictate orders and instructions properly he has already learned to interpret those he may receive from others. Accuracy of language demands discipline of mind. Under our system of raising war armies much has had to be entrusted to men without either discipline of mind or of character. This makes it necessary for officers not only to be qualified themselves to prepare and to interpret orders, but to teach the art to others.

Carelessly written instructions are like contoured maps with the base data omitted, leaving one in doubt as to whether he is observing a hill or a depression. A recent instance of such carelessness, coming under my observation, may serve to illustrate this: orders were received at my headquarters to call out certain reservists for actual service and direct them to report at Fort Wayne, Indiana. In the execution of the order individual telegrams were dispatched during the night. As orders had been received previously to turn over for the training of such reservists several permanent posts, including Fort Wayne, near De-

troit, Michigan, telegraphic inquiry was made to find out if a mistake had been made. The reply established that the Post of Fort Wayne, Michigan, and not the City of Fort Wayne, Indiana, was intended.

Modern warfare of nations-in-arms is vastly different from the campaigns and open field fighting of the smaller armies of past wars. Nations no longer entrust the preparation and solution of their military problems to old type of practical soldiers. Military Academies, War Colleges, and General Staff Colleges have become necessary to insure that only trained men shall be entrusted with the preparation of instructions for the employment of the forces.

To combine the study of tactical problems, the preparation of orders and the correct use of language, as contemplated by Major Ganoe, will afford a great advantage to the student of today, and should make the diaries, journals, and war histories of the future finished writings without necessity for editing. These are the true sources of military history, a knowledge of which is essential to the ambitious officer desirous of perfecting himself in his profession.

(signed) WILLIAM HARDING CARTER,  
*Major General, United States Army.*



## PREFACE

This course of lessons has for its sole object a demonstration to the military man that rhetoric is a big part of his profession. If he sees this advantage early it is hoped that he will not slight his rich language as so many of us have done to our later regret. Vocational training in English! That is practically what this book is. It is recognizing rhetoric for the first time as a separate study in the field service regulations. Just as we take up topography, engineering, sanitation, and supply as sciences by themselves in order to fit our efficiency into the team work of battle later, so here we apply ourselves to that part of field work which helps us state our ideas in a proper military manner.

The course is in no way tactics, but it forms an excellent primer to tactics. It leads up to and aids in the solution of tactical problems by passing over military ground. Because it is a combination of analysis and synthesis, rhetoric, as we know, is, unlike the exact sciences, purely a secondary subject. Its material, whether of poetry, essay, or fiction, is indiscriminate in its selection of matter so long as the matter is good. The idea in this book is to make both the material and the treatment count—to place the emphasis upon the manner of expressing oneself and to let the student see incidentally the interesting military features as he is passing along. He will be learning what he has never before had the opportunity of taking up separately, and what will lead him more easily into intricate tactical paths afterwards.

Some will criticise the book in that the author is not conforming to the principles which he is enunciating. They will say, "He tells us to boil our communications to the clearest minimum while he himself deals in reiteration and

illumination." Although this objection appears just, it is nevertheless cursory. A closer view will reveal the fact that the *purpose* and *readers* of communications are quite different from the *purpose* and *readers* of a text book. One of the first principles we learn in rhetoric is to suit our treatment and diction to our *purpose* and *readers*. Commanders await with interest and expectancy the words of a field message or order. Students await with skepticism or inertia the chapters of their lessons. Although we rightly can prescribe the severest clearness for something which is bound to be absorbed, we cannot be satisfied with one precise, colorless statement of that which is likely to be ignored. The student must be cudgeled and enticed. As a proof of the correctness of this position, this course has been tried with unexpected success upon the Cadets of the United States Military Academy. The very items which have been repeated and highly colored have proven themselves to the instructors to be the very ones which have more easily driven the points home.

Grateful acknowledgment is made by the author to Lieut. Colonel L. H. Holt, Professor of English and History, who made the book possible; to Captain G. Hoisington, Infantry, for drawing a plate; to Captains J. R. N. Weaver, Infantry, R. H. Lee, Coast Artillery Corps, L. E. Moreton, Coast Artillery Corps, C. C. Benson, Cavalry, and J. H. Grant, 24th Infantry, for their valuable criticism; and to Major A. W. Chilton, Infantry, for the revision of the book in order to make it conform to the practical work passed over—by his disinterested correction the whole becomes more valuable as a text.

W. A. G.

## CHAPTER I

### OUR APPROACH TO A CRITICAL MATTER

All military language should be of the utmost brevity and clarity. Death and disaster are the direct results of ambiguity. Throughout all history mistaken directions and information have been the ruin of whole campaigns. Careless wording, like careless shooting, is not only ineffective but often suicidal.

The object of these few lessons is to give practice in putting the language of military communication into form. It is hoped that by means of certain technical and rhetorical principles the student may gain proficiency in expressing his thoughts as he intends them and as military efficiency demands them.

Our Field Service Regulations state that "clear and decisive orders are the logical result of definite and sure decisions." But this statement does *not* imply that if a person arrives at a definite and sure decision, he gains clear and decisive phraseology without effort on his part. General Wagner, a pioneer among American military authorities, divides into completely separate operations the act of deciding upon a definite plan of action and that of drafting or framing orders which will carry that decision into effect. One is purely military and has to do with dispositions of forces; the other is mainly rhetorical and has to do with manipulations of language. Many a military man has decided certainly in his own mind what he is going to do in order to carry out his mission, only to be faced immediately with a harder task. He must set that definite