

THE FOURTH CLASS SYSTEM

1978 - 1979

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West Point, New York

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1. This circular contains information and instructions for all cadets.
2. This information and instructions supplement Regulations for the United States Military Academy and Regulations for the United States Corps of Cadets.
3. All references to he/him/his refer equally to she/her/hers throughout this circular.
4. Command/unit suggestions for improving this circular or the Fourth Class System are welcomed. Comments should be addressed to the S3, USCC, USMA, West Point, New York 10996.

(MACC-C)

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CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTION

1. MISSION OF USMA. To educate, train, and inspire the Corps of Cadets so that each graduate shall have the character, leadership, intellectual foundation and other attributes essential to progressive and continuing development throughout a career of exemplary service to the nation as an officer of the Regular Army.

2. DEFINITION. The Fourth Class System is part of the leadership development system and concentrates on setting high specific standards and enforcing those standards in a demanding environment. The transition from civilian to military life is initiated by providing opportunities for evaluation from both superior and subordinate viewpoints. Inherent in this system are the learned attributes of duty, honor, and country; so essential in the profession of arms.

3. PURPOSE AND OBJECTIVES. The Fourth Class System exists to support the mission of the United States Military Academy. It does so in the following manner:

A. It teaches new cadets the customs, traditions and heritage of the Military Academy and the United States Army so that they will be prepared for acceptance and recognition by the Corps of Cadets.

B. It provides an environment in which first year cadets learn, through the use of high standards of duty performance and multiple requirements, the need for planning, organization, and efficient utilization of time and effort so that they will develop a sense of responsibility, self-discipline and pride in themselves and the military profession.

C. It contributes to the sense of identification and motivation of the individual as a member of the military profession.

D. It provides a practical system for the efficient administration and functioning of the Corps of Cadets.

E. It establishes minimum standards against which the fourth classman's performance may be evaluated.

4. PROFESSIONALISM: A NOTE TO THE UPPERCLASSES.

A. A Conceptual Definition of Professionalism.

(1) What is "professionalism"? You upper classmen memorized a definition of it as a plebe. Whether you can recall it word for word now or not is not important. Memorizing a few lines of print will not make you a professional officer, for it is an idea, a concept gained through experience more than anything else.

(2) Just exactly how you develop is almost entirely up to you. While the Military Academy establishes minimum standards for conduct, performance, and the like, which no cadet is expected to fall below, there is no ceiling. Compliance with minimum standards is enforced, but the achievement of higher ones is urged, encouraged, and hoped for. Thus, it is essentially up to you to decide how professional you will become. The opportunity is there.

(3) The essence of the leadership challenge we face as upper classmen is to instill professionalism in ourselves and our subordinates, especially the fourth classmen. To do this, upper classmen eventually must fall back to the bedrock of leadership, setting the example. They must provide a model of professionalism for the fourth classmen who find themselves entering the process of professional development. For professional objectives to become precise, the upper classman must live and demonstrate what may be unfamiliar concepts to the essentially civilian-oriented fourth classmen. Upper classmen must be particularly conscious of the impression they are leaving during their initial contact with plebes, who are then at their most impressionable stage of development. Be aware that you are under close scrutiny; the fourth classmen are watching you perhaps more acutely than you are watching them. This is the optimum time for upper classmen to best imprint the professional attributes--habits, attitudes, ethics--simply by personal example.

(4) There are certain aspects of the Fourth Class System which have been abused to varying degrees by the upper classes in the past; universal standards and equal treatment. These are so fundamental to a good professional code that any deviation from the idea cannot be allowed. Where rules or regulations apply to all, they must be equally applied to all regardless of class, position, or relationship. Any exception which might be allowed must be specified in written regulations or policies.

(5) Abuses, when they occur, are obvious and spark instant resentment from those in the disadvantaged position. This is true at the Military Academy and even more so in Regular Army units. A truly professional officer must be absolutely fair and impartial in all situations.

(6) Professional development at West Point is a continuous process from R-Day to Graduation. However, the influence of the first year's transition from civilian to soldier will be reflected throughout an officer's career. Our responsibility as upper classmen acting as role models places a heavy burden upon the depth and resolve of our own professionalism, for we are saying essentially: "Be like me; follow me."

B. Professional Development and the Fourth Class System.

(1) The professional officer has always been the foundation of America's armed forces. It is around this core of professionals that the military expands in time of war and contracts in time of peace. As you are commissioned in the next few years, you must be aware that you are becoming a part of that core. How capable and effective a force will be built when the need arises depends to a large extent upon you and your colleagues in today's volunteer Army. Your outlook, attitudes, and ability will play a vital role in shaping and maintaining this Army.

(2) As an upper classman, you are in a position to develop and practice your leadership in a professional manner. The fourth class provides a body of subordinates with which this may be partially accomplished, and as you pass through your four years at West Point more opportunities are provided in dealing with subordinates other than the fourth class. The degree of professionalism you employ in your interactions with these groups and individuals will, in all likelihood, be similar to that you use once you are commissioned. Whether you realize it now or not, the outlook, attitudes, and abilities you take away from here will be the principal ones you will continue to possess as an officer.

(3) The importance of your role in the Regular Army has already been stressed. The importance of using your experience at West Point, especially your involvement with the fourth class system, for developing yourself professionally for that role cannot be underestimated.

C. The Cadet Fourth Class System Officer.

(1) The role of the Fourth Class System Officer in each company will be crucial to the proper administration and functioning of the Fourth Class System. He will interact with fourth classmen on a daily basis and will monitor the relationship maintained between them and the upperclass. This cadet officer will provide a model for other upper classmen in their behavior and attitude towards the fourth class.

(2) In light of this, the Fourth Class System Officer must be thoroughly familiar with the tenets of the Fourth Class System and must ensure that they are complied with in a fair and uniform manner. The scope of his duties and the very nature of his job should require that he not only strictly enforce the system, but that he also remain sensitive to the legitimate concerns and/or suggestions of the fourth class and thus complement the chain of command in obtaining feedback. After all, communication is only effective if it works in both directions. Furthermore, it needs to be emphasized that the Fourth Class System Officer is a staff assistant to the company commander and, as such, is directly responsible to the company commander.

D. The Upper Classman's Role in the Fourth Class System.

(1) In the past there has been considerable confusion among upper classmen about just what their role in the Fourth Class System is. Included in the Fourth Class System Circular are sections concerning the duties of individuals, Fourth Class System Officer, squad leader, plebe chaser, and the like. These are either very general or concerned with specific administrative tasks.

(2) A lack of real identification of a useful role has led some upper classmen to opt for as little as possible to do with the Fourth Class System. It is this apathetic attitude among members of the upper three classes that poses the greatest threat to the effectiveness of the system.

(3) It cannot be overstressed that there is no place for a division among the upper classes as far as commitment is concerned, and that every individual DOES have an important part to play. Depending on your position and responsibilities, your role in the Fourth Class System will vary. You need to have a clear understanding of exactly what your own personal role is. Once you know where you stand you can become usefully involved, gaining the benefits in terms of leadership and professional development that the Fourth Class System offers you.

(4) The structure of the Fourth Class System--that is, requirements in terms of conduct, duties, knowledge, limitations, and restrictions, is laid out in the Fourth Class System Circular and subsequent memorandums issued by the chain of command. The structure is not meant to be a step by step procedure on how to deal with the fourth class. It is a general set of guidelines and boundaries for you to work within. Your task is the administration of this system, and in order to administer it, you must be familiar with the specific points detailed in each of the areas it encompasses. You will certainly not be carrying a Fourth Class System Circular wherever you go, and will rarely be able to refer to it when interacting with the fourth class. It therefore becomes necessary for you to study the Circular thoroughly at the beginning of the detail. This will ensure that you can make proper corrections or compliments about the way the plebes are conducting themselves and carrying out their duties. It will help you avoid making improper corrections based on last year's system or on inaccurate knowledge of the present one. It will also give you a better understanding of where you fit into the structure itself.

(5) Most of the identification of the part you play will be based on your desire for involvement with the Fourth Class System. As has been stated, the system is what the upperclass makes it. You will have to step back and look at yourself, your company, and the system from an overall perspective. Decide where you fit in and then decide how best to participate. It will be largely your own decision, based upon your own perceptions. These general guidelines may be helpful in determining your role.

E. As a Squad Leader.

(1) You have been told time and again that the squad leader is the most important part of the Fourth Class System, and the key and vital link between the individual and the chain of command. As you gain experience in this position, you will learn that this is all true. You have a number of crucial tasks to accomplish which only you, because of your close and continuous contact with the members of your squad, can perform effectively.

(2) The most important of these is to teach the concept of professionalism to your subordinates. You will be the dominant image in their field of vision and, as such, must above all provide an example of professional performance, conduct, and attitudes. You must become a model of professional behavior, establishing goals your subordinates can work toward. The standards you demand of them should be the standards you have demonstrated yourself.

(3) Second only to setting the example comes transferring your own professional concept in such matters as describing the experiences you have undergone at West Point and in the Army, personal interpretations of the fundamentals of the military profession, and utilization of the tools provided by the Fourth Class System. The lessons you learned, the knowledge you brought back from CTLT can be used to spark your subordinates' interest in the Regular Army and their own future careers.

(4) On this foundation you can build the frame that your squad members will rely on as they rise to more responsible positions. The fundamentals - Duty, Honor, Country, Discipline, and Professionalism - are only words until you communicate the ideas behind them to your plebes.

(5) The Fourth Class System provides a number of tools for you. The requirements in terms of duties, conduct, and appearance help to provide an environment in which plebes can be evaluated. maximum Terms and expressions can be used to focus the thoughts of your plebes on specific concepts inherent in professional behavior, such as: "self-discipline," "initiative," or "timely response." Additionally, there are numerous examples of the traditional professional spirit that has played such a prominent part in our Army's past, in words spoken by men such as Washington, Lee, Pershing, Mac Arthur, Patton, and Bradley, to name only a few.

(6) If you become familiar with these tools for transferring your own professional concept to others, you will achieve much more satisfactory results than if you omit them.

(7) After the teaching of professionalism, your next most important task as a squad leader is to monitor the welfare of your subordinates. You must make yourself familiar with their status in a number of aspects.

(8) The most prominent is academics, including physical education. You should keep yourself up to date on your plebes' current standings, especially if they are having difficulties. You will be able to see that they are getting all the help possible to maintain proficiency; use attendance at Additional Instruction, tutoring from qualified members of the company, or any other permissible means to improve their abilities. Discouragement over poor performance may lead to apathy, from which further inadequate showing results, making recovery almost impossible. Catch this before it is too late; encouragement, interest, and prodding from you can make the difference between apathy and effort.

(9) Another area of concern is making sure that your subordinates are keeping ahead of the "system." You can do much to help them avoid the unpleasant consequences of having it suddenly "catch up" on them. The most basic way is to be SURE that they get the poop on activities, inspections, formations, changes of policies, or anything else which pertains directly to them. You can also help untangle administrative difficulties. You should be familiar with the procedures they need to follow when they are faced with an uncommon situation, such as a special leave request, or simply problems in interpreting regulations. Sometimes you must actively seek out such latent problems. If, while inspecting, you notice damage to the room, or lack of heat, or missing items of clothing, you should make an inquiry and then give them the procedures necessary for getting repairs made or submitting a claim to the cadet laundry. Follow up yourself to ensure that corrective action has been taken.

(10) Personal problems are another area in which you might be able to head off serious difficulties. Try to put such problems in proper perspective so as to prevent overreaction and undue anxiety, or underreaction and misunderstanding of their magnitude. You may be able to point directions toward solutions; difficulties in organizing one's time and in dealing with classmates can often be eased with sound advice from you. Remember, though, that personal problems are just that - personal. Part of a cadet's experience is to learn to solve them on his or her own. Use judgement to refrain from unnecessary meddling in a plebe's personal affairs, and lend a hand only when you can be reasonably sure that it will achieve positive, maximum results.

(11) Ultimately, overall monitoring of the welfare of your subordinates will enable you to help them avoid distractions, or real pitfalls, which could divert effort and concentration from more important matters. In the long run, this becomes one of the most vital things you, as a squad leader, can do.

(12) The next task you will be faced with, while certainly important, has sometimes received undue emphasis in the past, detracting from the other roles you must perform. This is to ensure compliance with minimum standards in terms of specifics such as performance, conduct, and appearance. In fact, this is a responsibility which usually can be spread throughout the squad. As you keep your eye on your assistant squad leader and third classmen, you can encourage them to become involved with monitoring these aspects of cadet training.

(13) At this point, it would be valuable to interject a reminder. You have in your squad a wealth of leadership potential in sometimes untapped resources of assistant squad leaders and yearlings. Utilize them. They must be given an opportunity to develop their own leadership qualities before they assume higher roles in the chain of command. Using them to ensure compliance with minimum standards by your fourth class squad members is the most effective way to achieve this. It gives them a chance to interact with subordinates and sharpen their leadership skills, and gives you the opportunity to concentrate on the other tasks already mentioned. Further, it allows you more time to set and encourage even higher standards for your own squad, and to evaluate your upper class squad members with more concrete variables than "neatness." The usefulness of upper class subordinates in the squad must not be overlooked; utilize them. Acknowledge their presence and their role with the respect it deserves.

(14) These are only a few of the important responsibilities that you, the squad leader, will be faced with. You have the most demanding, most challenging, and most vital position in the chain of command. Your tasks are the fundamental roots of good leadership and future professionalism. If you formulate, develop, and expand them now, you will be in an immeasurably better position further along in the cadet chain of command and, finally, as a commissioned officer.

F. As a First Classman in the Chain of Command.

(1) The chain of command, from platoon leader to brigade commander, has a great variety of duties to perform. One of the most important of these is the overall supervision of the Fourth Class System in your unit. Although each of you has an assistant in the form of platoon sergeant, executive officer or Fourth Class System Officer to aid you in this task, you are ultimately responsible for its effectiveness.

(2) The first thing you should be aware of is the importance of upper class involvement, which has already been covered. Your primary task will thus be to stimulate this commitment and encourage participation among the upper classmen you are responsible for. This applies to all levels of the chain; stressing this concept continuously to your subordinate commanders will be necessary if satisfactory results are to be achieved.

