

## **Establishing and Maintaining Flight Alignment**

*By Lieutenant Colonel Buddy McCormick, COWG Encampment Commander*

This document is one of several documents that discuss drill problems that need improvement at COWG Encampment. The official reference for all drill and ceremonies procedures is AFMAN 36-2203, also known as the D&C Manual. The new CAP Pamphlet 60-20, CAP Drill & Ceremonies is CAP's equivalent to the Air Force Manual.

**Read it, Teach it, Do it!** We face a major drill problem, throughout CAP. Many cadets, teaching drill, have not read the D&C Manual. A lack of understanding or lack of knowledge of correct procedures results in incorrect instruction. This leads to the perpetuation of drill mistakes.

We will not allow this to happen at COWG Encampment. The encampment flight staff must be, or become, experts. We will require that cadet line staff obtain and read the D&C Manual thoroughly, teach procedures as described in the manual using the six-step process, and execute the maneuvers correctly. This process must begin *before* encampment. We will **READ IT, TEACH IT, DO IT!**

Properly establishing and maintaining flight alignment is an ongoing problem at encampment and throughout Civil Air Patrol. The problems with alignment are

1. Misunderstanding the procedures,
2. Inadequate training of the procedures,
3. Failure to correct mistakes as they occur, and
4. Lack of understanding of, or not knowing the reasons for maintaining proper alignment. This document will address all of these problems.

### **Alignment While Stationary**

There are several procedures for flight alignment when the flight is at a halt. Use the **Dress Right, DRESS** command, **Dress Left, DRESS** command, and **COVER** command.

How are the **Dress Right, DRESS** or **Dress Left, DRESS** and **COVER** commands different? When do you use each of these commands?

#### **Dress Right, DRESS**

Use the **Dress Right, DRESS** Command to align the flight *only* when halted in line formation. In line formation, the element leaders are at the right side of the formation. This is the normal formation used when a flight falls in.

#### **Dress Left, DRESS**

If the flight is in *inverted* line formation, use **Dress Left, DRESS** to align the flight when halted. In *inverted* line formation, the element leaders are at the left side of the formation.

In each case, the flight is dressed in the direction of the element leaders.

#### **COVER**

Use the **COVER** command *only* when the flight is at the halt and in column formation (guide/element leaders in front) *or* inverted column formation (guide/element leaders in rear).

From the D&C Manual:

*“To align the flight in column, the command is **COVER**. On this command, everyone except the guide adjusts by taking small choppy steps, if needed, and establishes dress, cover, interval, and distance. The leading individual of each file (excluding the base file)*

*obtains the proper interval (normal or close). The base file establishes and maintains a 40-inch distance. All others align themselves beside the individual to their right and behind the individual in front of them”.*

The **COVER** command does not involve extending arms or head turning. Individuals adjust interval (side-to-side) and distance (front-to-rear) *visually*, by taking small shuffle steps to align directly behind the person in front and use *peripheral vision* to align with the person to their right.

The **COVER** command is not a *disaster recovery* method. Take the example of a Column Left or Column Right maneuver during which part of the flight turns one direction and the rest of the flight turns another. **COVER** is not the correct command to correct this type of mess. The proper solution is to have the flight Fall Out and then Fall In.

### **Alignment While Marching**

A Common Question During Drill at Encampment: “*Why is my flight never aligned properly when we are marching?*”

Question. Is there a requirement to maintain alignment while marching?

Answer: Yes, the following is from the D&C Manual, Paragraph 3.10, Forward March and Halt:

*“If applicable, proper dress, cover, interval, and distance will be maintained; and cadence will be adhered to.”*

Now, we will look at the original question and discuss some possible answers.

Question. *First of all, are the student cadets even aware that there is a requirement to maintain alignment while marching?*

Assertion: Most are not. Most have never read the D&C Manual and few are being specifically trained at home units to maintain alignment while marching.

Question. *Are flight staff members **training** cadets to maintain alignment during marching?*

Answer: Either *no training* is occurring or, *no effective training* is occurring. The previous statement *is not* an assertion. I base this on my observations at prior encampments and by observing cadet drill at other events. Cadets are not monitoring and correcting alignment while marching and those conducting drill are making few, if any, attempts to correct the problem.

The previous discussion indicates a significant problem and suggests a likely solution. As with most drill, we must provide motivation for the cadets to improve performance. Experience shows that cadets will perform more effectively if they have a reason to do so. Since cadets are not aware of the alignment requirement, we *must provide training* to address not only the importance of proper alignment but also how to maintain it. At present, we are not doing this satisfactorily. Once we provide the training, we must provide regular critiques of performance. No improvement will occur without follow-up correction.

Address the issue of correcting alignment while marching with the flight halted and AT EASE. When the flight is marching, they will not be able to concentrate on what you are saying. This needs to be a thorough instructional briefing. Much of the following includes *techniques*. Be certain to make distinction between technique and procedure.

One *possible* method to use when discussing how to maintain alignment while marching follows:

As flight sergeant, describe a method of maintaining alignment while marching as a *continual* use of the procedures in the **COVER** command. Tell the flight they always need to use those

procedures while marching, but without the verbal command of COVER. Ensure that you know the procedures in the D&C Manual for the COVER command:

*“... The leading individual of each file (excluding the base file) obtains the proper interval (normal or close). The base file establishes and maintains a 40-inch distance. All others align themselves beside the individual to their right and behind the individual in front of them”.*

More explanation is necessary before trying this process. Be sure they understand the following:

1. What is **proper interval**? In column, proper interval is **arm's length** between the element leaders. Establish the **visually** and not by extending arms!
2. What is the **base file**? In column, this is the element on the right. With three elements, it is the third element. With four elements, it is the fourth element.
3. How does the base file (the one on the right, in column) establish 40-inch distance (distance is front to back)? **Visually!**
4. How do the remaining cadets establish alignment? Directly **behind** the person in front and **directly beside** the person to the right. Use peripheral vision to align beside the person on the right. Do not turn your head. Be certain that the cadets know what the term peripheral vision means. **Do not ask them if they know what it means – describe it!**

As long as the element leaders and base file members are maintaining proper positioning, instruct cadets to “March directly behind the person in front of you and directly beside the person on your right.”

When performing flight drill, **if practical**, give the **COVER** command **each time** the flight halts (in column). This accomplishes two things. (1) It shows the flight that if they are not properly aligned, and (2) Gives the flight a chance to align properly. **We do not use the COVER command often enough!**

One Good Training Technique for Alignment – When needed, use the following technique to improve alignment. If alignment is bad, consider the following just before you halt the flight:

Give the command **Flight, HALT**, and state/ask the following:

“DO NOT MOVE! Stay in your position”.

“You have permission to turn you heads, but do not change your position”

“Elements Leaders, you should have proper arm's length interval”

“Look to your right. You should be lined up beside the cadet to your right”

“Look at the cadet in front of you. You should be lined up directly behind them.”

“Do you know if you are in the base element?” If you are in the base element, raise your arm.”

“If you are in the base element, you should have the correct 40-inch distance.”

At this point, give the **COVER** command. The flight members should move as necessary (shuffle steps) to correct recognized problems. Check and correct all alignment! If you are satisfied with alignment, remind the flight that they must continually monitor alignment **while** marching.

Another Good Training Technique for Alignment - Explain that the initials **D.C.I.D** stand for dress, cover, interval, and distance. Emphasize what each term means. Explain that if you state

**“D.C.I.D.”** while the flight is marching, each cadet needs to check and correct alignment. Use **D.C.I.D.** often, when marching. (This is not as hard as it sounds – and it *will* get results)

Statements or instructions such as "check your alignment" or "fix your dress and cover" are not drill commands, but *are acceptable* to use, while marching, as reminders to make adjustments to dress, cover, interval, and distance (DCID). While halted, use the proper commands.