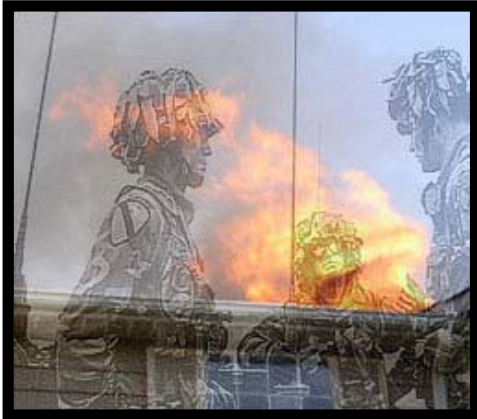


The Brief Back

charles bailey tinhelmet.com 12.21.2005



Over the past few years I have heard too many radio transmissions get acknowledged and the crew to whom the message was sent go off and do the wrong thing. Then I became an officer and told my driver to take the third left, heard him or her say nothing, I assumed they heard me and then watched as they proceeded to take the second left onto a dead end court. I then started this thing I called “closing the feedback loop.” That meant that when I gave an order the person I gave the order to needed to acknowledge that they

received the order. Still I was having problems. So the other day I am standing the parking lot with the arctic wind whipping over my bald head as one of my fellow fire officers complained of the same thing. He told me how he intended to fix the problem and that is what I offer in this short article. But before I wrote the article I read an article about communication in the military and learned of the brief back. It is nothing new. People smarter than us have been doing this sort of thing for some time now but since no one ever bothered to fill me in I offer to you.

A brief back is a short, emphasis on short, statement that confirms to the sender exactly what message you received.

Example:

The order

“Command to Engine 432, stretch a line to back up E320 on the second floor.”

The Brief-back

“E432 copies back-up line to E320 on second floor.”

Again, a simple step that might add one level more of radio traffic but cuts down on the number of mis-communicated messages, and increases accountability. My first step of requiring an acknowledgement still allowed the listener to hear something other than what I said. Using the brief back there is no question that we are on the same page. If the order is not carried out there is someone to hold accountable for the failure to act.