

## *The Military Analogy*

I have been thinking recently about how best to describe the traditional martial arts' ranks, titles and general hierarchy to the uninitiated. Even among martial artists, all the titles can be daunting. There is a distinct desire to simplify everything to find who is higher than who.

I have come up with three analogies that may help. One should understand all three to really get a sense of the traditional way of looking at a martial hierarchy. I will use examples from my own Japanese arts since I am most familiar with those, but I think the concepts will apply to other traditional Asian arts that employ ranks. These three analogies are the military, the artisan, and the academic. This installment deals with the military analogy, an analogy that may apply to the least rigid or military-like martial schools.

Within each specific style, one has the following analogies to ranks in the U.S. Army:

***The KYU (or below black belt ranks): are like enlisted soldiers and non-commissioned officers.***

Obviously, a novice or white belt is like a “buck” private in the army (E-1).

After one promotion the beginner is like a full private (E-2).

An “intermediate beginner” is similar to a private first class (E-3).

A more advanced beginner is like a corporal (E-4).

A new intermediate is like a sergeant (E-5).

A seasoned intermediate is like a Staff Sergeant (E-6).

A person new to the upper kyu ranks is like a Sergeant First Class (E-7).

An intermediate upper kyu level student is like a Master or a First Sergeant (E-8).

The most senior of kyu grades is the most senior of “NCO’s” officers, a Sergeant Major (E-9).

***The DAN (or black belt grades) are like officers:***

A first-degree black belt is a Second Lieutenant.

A second-degree black belt is like an “experienced beginning officer” or First Lieutenant.

A third-degree black belt is like a Captain. He has the ability to command (teach) and can have many troops under him.

A fourth-degree black belt is like a Major.

A fifth-degree black belt is like a Colonel.

***KODANSHA (upper black belt levels) are rare in the traditional martial arts and are reserved for mature and experienced martial artists. These equate roughly to the rank of General.***

Sixth degree gives is a Brigadier General (1 star.)

Seventh gives the general two stars—Major General.

Eighth degree gives the general three stars—Lieutenant General.

Ninth degree (hardly ever achieved in traditional martial arts) is like a full General (4 stars.)

And tenth degree (more rare still) is a General of the Army (5 star cluster under an eagle.)

Although the martial art rank structure is comparatively new and actually sprang from a Japanese propensity to rank other skills like flower arrangement and tea ceremony, it is logical that there is some parallels between military ranks and ranks in arts that were originally military in nature and organization.

In the US Army, ranks are earned just as they are in the martial arts, but in the army there are no curriculum requirements as there are in academia. Therefore, next time, we will use a looser Academic Analogy to compare to hierarchies in traditional martial arts.