Litters Part 2: Procedures

Course Description:

- *This section provides the techniques and procedures to ensure the safe transport of a patient by litter, and to enable the bearers to work efficiently and without injury to themselves.*
- *Note: Course is designed to be part 2 of 2 total courses on litter evacuation.*

Litter Teams and Communication

When out in a real event, the commands are only to coordinate the team's movements. After training together, a team can perform evacuations very efficiently.

Litter bearers are usually teams made up of two to four members, but many hands make for light work. Each litter team has a leader who gives commands to coordinate carrying patients safely and prevent injury to the team members.

When in marching and drilling or with carrying a litter, there are always two parts to a command: preparatory (the first part; to tell what is coming) and execution (the second part; the action to be done). For clarity purposes, the case of the command parts will be lower for preparatory part of the command and UPPER for the EXECUTION part of the command. Also, for the purposes of this training module, a prefabricated litter is assumed to be used. It is important to adjust as necessary to the situation.

Commands Part 1: Litter Preparation

Procure, Ground, Post, Open, Close, and Return are the six different commands for preparing a litter.

A. Procure, LITTER

Bearer number 1 carries the litter diagonally across the body with the left wrist in front of the left shoulder, and the right wrist at the right hip. He returns back to the team, positioning the litter in an upright position on his left side.

Litter team in formation after bearer number 1 returns to the litter team.

B. Ground, LITTER

Upon command of Ground, LITTER, bearer number 1 lowers the litter to the ground. The litter is resting on stirrups by his left foot.

C. Litter, POST

Upon this command, the other three bearers move into their positions at the sides of the litter. Bearer number 2 moves to the right front, bearer 3 moves to the left rear, and bearer 4 moves to the left front.

D. Open, LITTER

All bearers turn and face the litter. Then bearer 2 and 3 pick up the litter from the ground and support it, while bearers 1 and 4 undo straps and pull handles apart. Then all set litter on the ground.

E. Close, LITTER
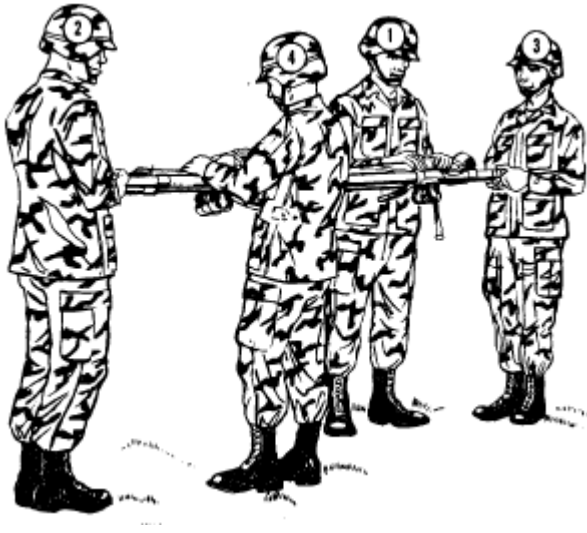
The reverse procedures are done. All pick up the litter, bearers 1 and 4 fold the canvas on top of the poles, bearer 3 releases and stabilizing bars. The litter is handed to bearer 1, while the team resumes formation.

F. Return, LITTER

Bearer 1 returns the litter to supply or site of origin.

_____Practice Litter commands as teams

Commands Part 2: Patient Preparation

Post, Lift, and Lower are the three different commands for loading and unloading a patient onto or from a litter. Note: patient transportation is done only after the patient has received emergency treatment. It assumes the litter is open and positioned near the patient. Usually, a 4 member team is lifting, but 2 and 3 member teams will also be shown.

Four Member Lift

    A. Right/Left, POST

At the command, Right (left) side POSTS, bearer 2 stands at patient right ankle, bearer 3 at right shoulder, bearer 4 and 1 at the hips.

    B. Lift, PATIENT

At this command, each bearer kneels on the knee that is nearest the patient's feet. Bearer 2 passes his forearms under the legs, bearer 1 and 4 place arms under the small of the patient's back and thighs without locking hands. Bearer 3 passes one hand under the patient's neck to the farther armpit and uses the other hand to support the nearer shoulder.

All bearers lift the patient slowly and carefully and place him upon the knees of the three bearers who are on the same side.

When firmly supported on the knees, the number 1 bearer reaches for the litter to position it under the patient and against the ankles of the other bearers.

C. Lower, PATIENT
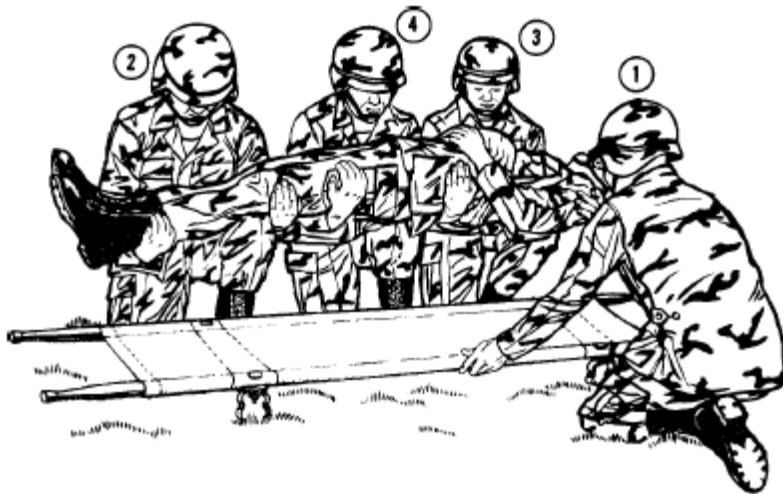
Bearer 1 is kneeling to help carry the patient weight down to the litter, and all bearers place the patient onto the litter.
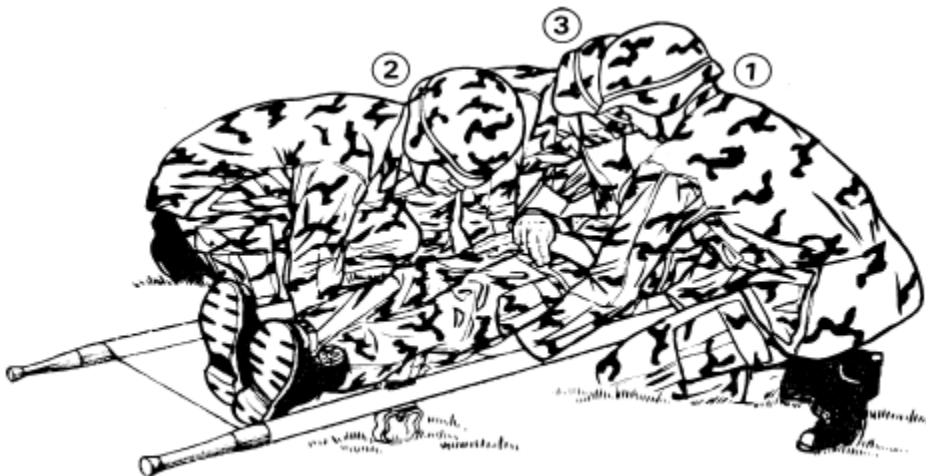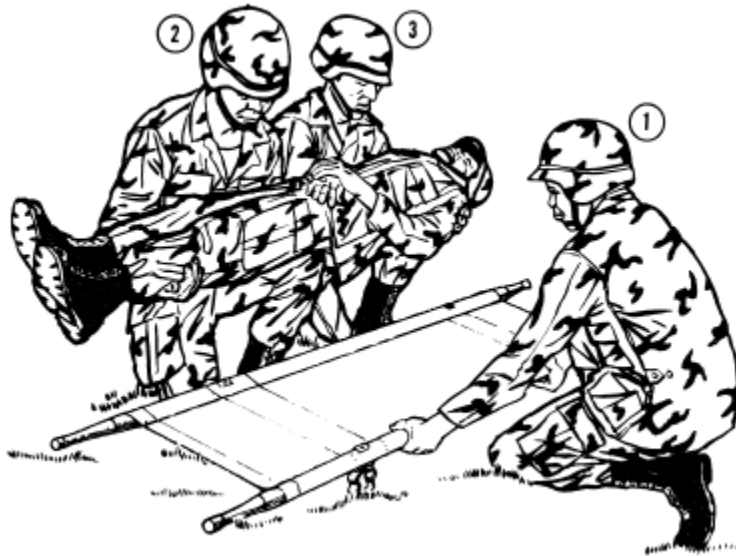
All bearers can now resume positions at Litter, POSTS

Three Member Lift

The series of commands for three member lift are the same as if a four member lift. However, the positioning of the members and thus their corresponding movements are different.

To lift with three bearers, bearer 2 places arms under the legs and thighs of the patient. Bearer 3 places arms under the small of the back and shoulders. Bearer 1, opposite side of the patient, places arms under the knees and back, lifting the patient to number 2 and 3 knees. Then bearer 1 places the litter in position.

The patient is lowered and secured on the litter. Bearers resume positions on the litter POSTS.

Two Member Lift

The series of commands for two member lift are the same as if a four member lift. However, the positioning of the members and thus their corresponding movements are different.

Further variation is added in the instance of having a litter team of two members. Different movements are followed depending upon the state of consciousness of the patient.
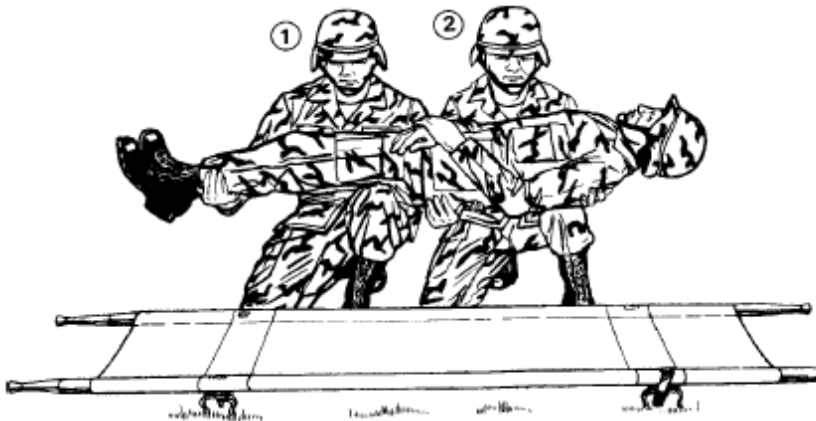
Two Member Lift Variant 1: Unconscious Patient

Bearers take position at the patient's right thigh and shoulder. The litter is already positioned on the opposite side of the patient.
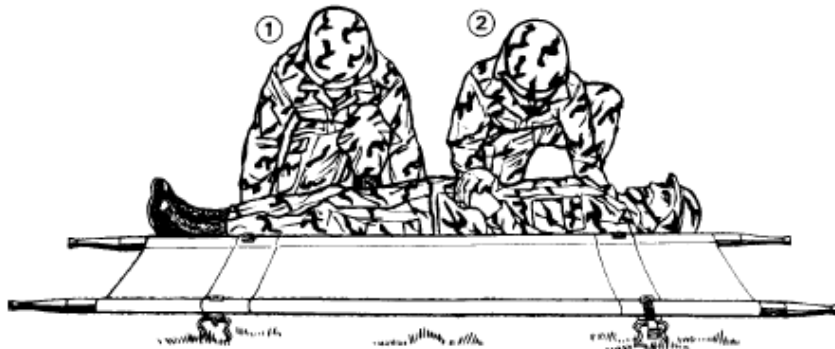
At the preparatory command, Lift, both kneel beside the patient and pass arms under the patient's hips and knees, the small of the back and shoulders.

At the command, PATIENT, the bearers lift together, rising to move as close as possible to the litter. The command Lower, PATIENT, moves the patient to the litter.

Two Member Lift Variant 2: Conscious Patient

The bearers stand facing each other at the patient's hips. In response to the command On Each Side, POSTS.

Lift, PATIENT

The bearers rise together after the patient is positioned and walk to the litter.

Lifting patient with two bearers, on one on each side, centering patient over the open litter.

The command Lower, PATIENT places the patient on the litter and he can release his hold on the bearers necks and lie down.

_____Practice as teams the 4 man lift loading techniques

_____Practice the 3 man loading onto a litter

_____Practice the 2 man unconscious and conscious loading the litter

Commands Part 3: Loaded Litter

Lift, Lower, MOVE, Steady, HALT, Litter Post, and ROTATE are the different commands used for motion of patient. The various litter bearer positions are also found in their corresponding commands of Four man carry, Two man carry, and Litter post carry. Finally, the commands for transporting patients Uphill, Downhill, Low Obstacle, High Obstacle, and Narrow Stairs are described.

   A. Prepare to Lift, LIFT (4 member carry)

Once the patient is loaded, the bearers resume their position at POST, facing the direction of travel.

At the preparatory command Prepare to Lift, each bearer kneels on his knee closest to the litter. He grasps the litter handle with the hand nearest the litter and places his other hand on his raised knee.

At the command, LIFT, all bearers rise together keeping the litter level. When lifting, bearers should use leg muscles, not their back.

B. Lower, LITTER
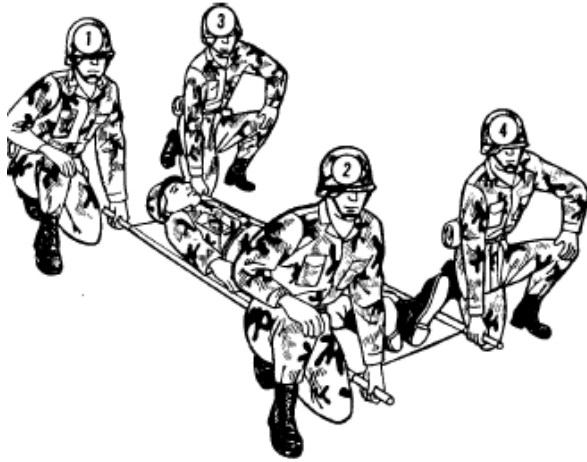
At the preparatory command Lower, all the bearers resume the four-man carry position on the liter. At the command LITTER, each bearer slowly kneels on the knee closer to the litter and gently places the litter on the ground. The free hand is placed on the knee which is upright for added stability. The team members can stand back up without a command when the litter is securely on the ground.

C. Ready, MOVE

After Prepare to Lift, LIFT has been called, the command Ready, MOVE can be called.

The four man carry positioning is for relatively level terrain with few obstacles or obstructions.

Note, Ready, MOVE as a command is to provide an indication of forward motion in general and can be called from many positions.

D. Steady

Steady is a preparatory command that can be called by the litter team leader to ensure that all litter team members are paying attention. It can also be used as a word of caution or to slow the team.

E. Ready/Prepare to Halt, HALT

Ready, HALT is a command that can be called by the litter team leader to stop the litter team from walking forward. However, it is very important for litter teams to not jerk the patient too suddenly when stopping. Therefore, calling Steady first to slow the litter team is recommended.

Also, Litter Post, CARRY can also be used as a halting command but depending on the circumstances may be used while still moving. Ready/Prepare to Halt always stops motion.

F.   Two Man Carry, MOVE
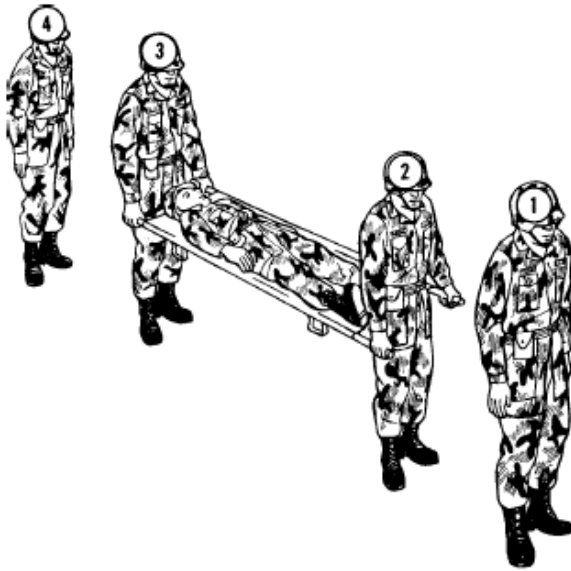
Carrying a litter with four people is quite wide and can be difficult for navigating through obstacles. The command Two Man Carry, MOVE is designed to serve as the command for transitioning from 4 to 2 Member Carry.

The command Two Man Carry, MOVE, has members 1 and 4 pass their handle to members 3 and 2. Members 1 and 4 then move ahead and behind the litter.

G.   Litter Post, CARRY

Here, bearers 1 and 4 move to the sides of the litter and grasp the litter poles to help steady the litter.

Litter Post, CARRY can also be used as a halting command but depending on the circumstances may be used while still moving. Ready/Prepare to Halt always stops motion.

H. Prepare to Rotate, ROTATE

The purpose of the command Prepare to Rotate, ROTATE is to turn the litter with the patient 180 degrees around such that the head of the patient goes from being carried by bearer 3 to being carried by bearer 2.

At the command of Prepare to Rotate, starting from the Litter Post Carry position, the bearers 2 and 3 release the litter handles and step one pace away, allowing bearers 1 and 4 to support the litter at its sides. Then the command ROTATE is given, with bearers 1 and 4 moving 180 degrees counterclockwise, which moves the patient's head where the feet were previously.

When the rotation is complete, bearers 2 and 3 return to the position holding the handles of the litter.

One use for this command in particular is to enable the patient's head to go uphill or upstairs which is desired except for an unstable pelvic/hip fracture.

I.   Uphill/Upstairs Carry, MOVE

From the Litter Post Carry Position, the command Uphill, CARRY is given. Then bearer 4 moves to the foot of the litter and takes hold of the litter handle released by bearer 3. Bearer 1 moves in front of the team. However, there are times that bearer 1 will have to help the head of the litter to support the patient.

At the command of MOVE, the team proceeds uphill.

J.   Downhill Carry, MOVE
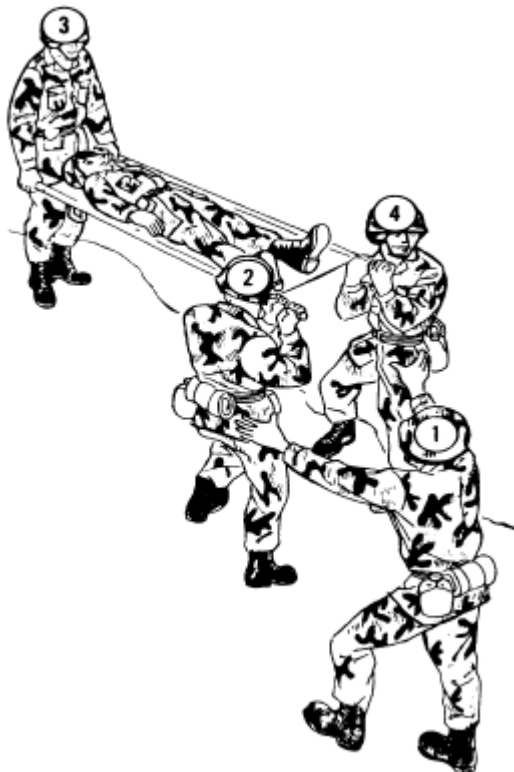
With the litter team in the position of four-man carry, the preparatory command, Downhill Carry, is given. Bearer 3 takes full support of the litter at the patient's head, and bearers 2 and 4 remain at the feet of the litter. Bearer 1 moves ahead and supports 2 and 4 along with maintaining the litter level.

At the command of MOVE, the team proceeds to descend.

K. Surmounting a Low Wall/Short Fence/Obstacle

The team leader when approaching an obstacle puts the team into the position of Litter Post, CARRY. Then to counter the obstacle, the command Ready, MOVE is called.
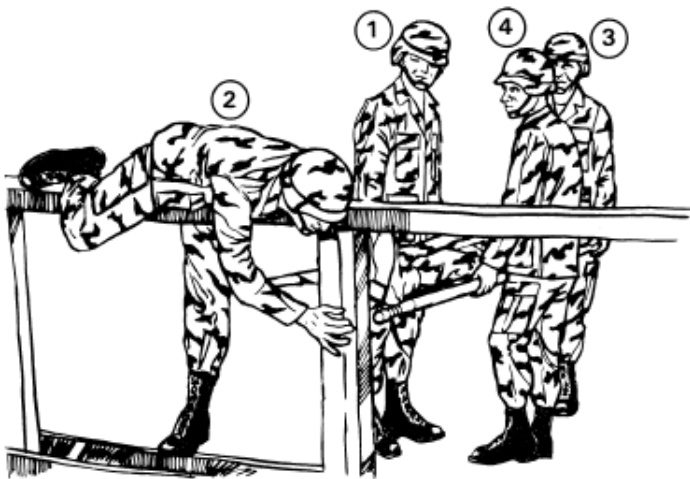
Then bearer 2 goes over the obstacle, and the bearers move the litter forward until bearer 2 can regain the handles of the litter.

The litter can be rested on the obstacle as needed.

While bearers 2 and 3 hold the handles, bearers 1 and 4 surmount the obstacle. Then the litter can be moved over the obstacle (not dragged).
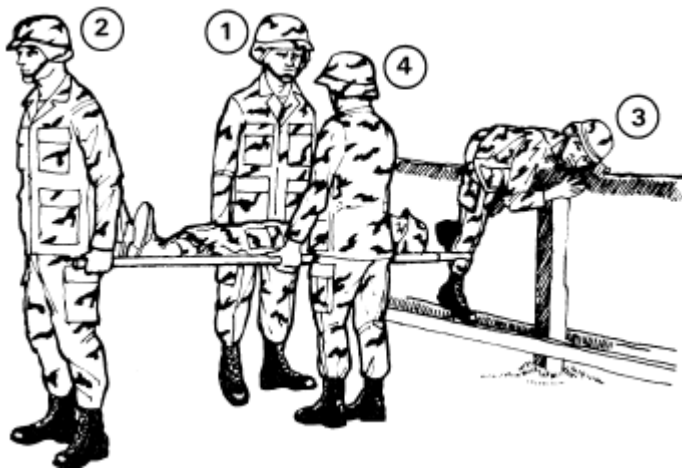
The litter Post position is maintained until the last bearer, number three clears the obstacle and resumes his position at a litter post or four man carry.

L. Surmounting a High Wall/High Fence/Obstacle

With the litter team halted in the position of the four-man carry, the bearers turn and face each other. To counter the obstacle, the command Ready, MOVE is called.

Together they raise the litter approximately chest high, step close to the litter, letting their bent elbows touch their chests. The front bearers place the front stirrups or handles beyond the wall, scale the wall and drop to the other side. All four bearers move the litter (not drag) forward until the rear handles are on the wall. Then the rear bearers scale the wall, and then lift their end of the litter again.

M. Fording streams or culverts
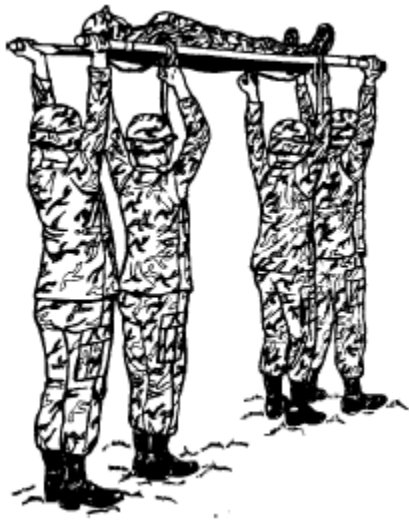
To start a halting command is called such that the litter team is at a halted four man position. Prepare to Lift, LIFT is called to raise the litter up over the head, while keeping it level.

While lifting, the bearers turn to face each other and assess the taller of bearer pairs (bearer 1 vs. 3 and bearer 2 vs. 4). The taller bearer of each bearer pair takes the far end of the handles to bear most of the weight while the shorter of the bearer pairs moves inside.

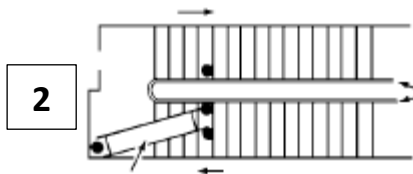N. Carry a Litter Up a Stairwell with Small Landings.

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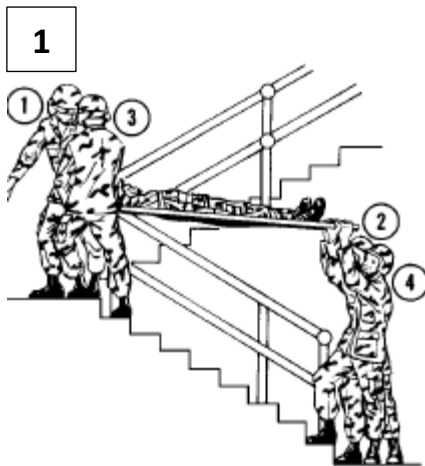
(1) The litter team proceeds upstairs to the landing with bearers 1 and 3 supporting the head of the litter and bearers 2 and 4 supporting the foot.

(2) Upon arrival at the landing, bearer 3 turns facing the head of the litter and supports it while bearer 1 proceeds several steps up the next flight of stairs. Then bearers 2 and 4 raise the foot of the litter until bearer 1 can grasp the handle released by bearer 2.

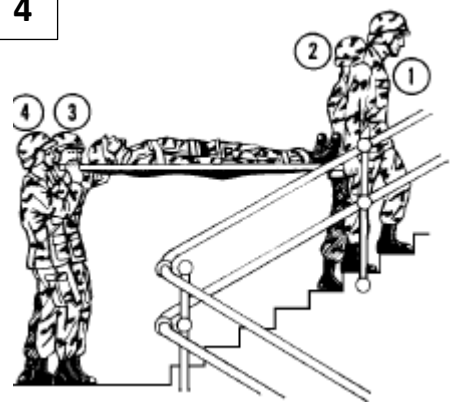(3) Bearer 2 then can move to the side of the litter. Bearer 4 passes the handle to bearer 1 to grasp.

(4) Bearer 4 then moves up the stairs to assist bearer 3 at the head of the litter, while bearer 2 moves up to help bearer 1 at the foot.

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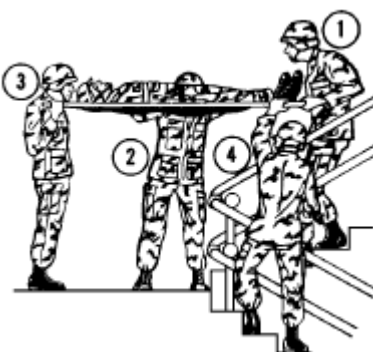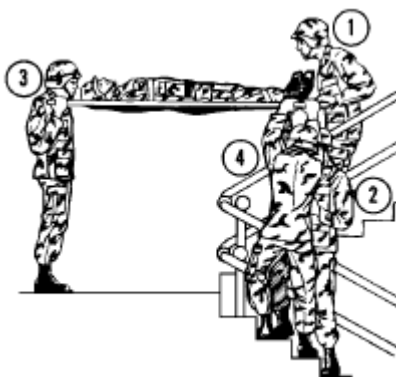
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O. Carrying a litter patient down a stairwell with a small landing.

(1) The litter team proceeds down the steps to the first landing with bearers 1 and 3 supporting the head of the litter and bearers 2 and 4 supporting the foot of the litter.

(2) Upon arrival at the first landing, bearer 4 turns and faces the litter while grasping both handles. Bearer 3 supports both handles of the head, allowing bearers 1 and 2 to descend the stairs and take the head of the litter from bearer 3.

(3) Next, bearer 3 moves beside bearer 4 at the foot, while bearer 1 and 2 support the head of the litter. They then move down the stairs to the next landing.
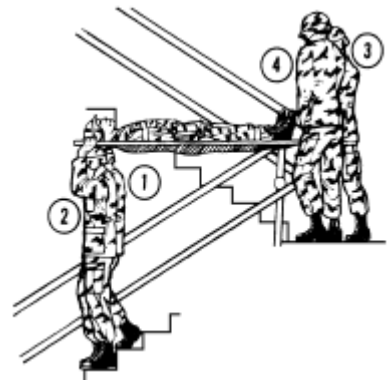
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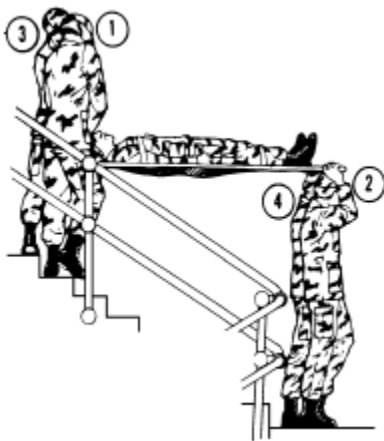
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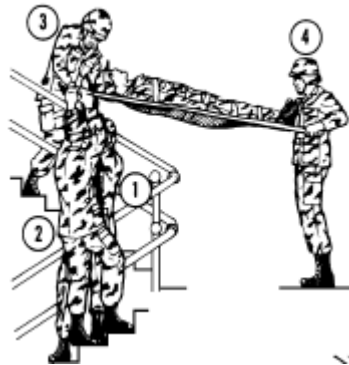
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_____Demonstrate a four man carry

_____Demonstrate a 4 changing to a 2 man carry

_____Demonstrate a four to a Litter Post Carry

_____Demonstrate a Litter Post Carry to a Rotation

_____Preform the Lower, LITTER command

_____Demonstrate the Downhill Carry

_____Demonstrate a low wall obstacle carry

_____Preform the Fording stream or culvert raising of the litter

_____Demonstrate carrying up and down a stairwell with a small landing

Safety Notes

Carrying Litter Commands are not as rigid in purpose as regular drilling and marching commands. The purpose of these commands are to enable communication to safely carry a patient for everyone involved (the patient AND the bearers). Therefore, common sense is employed and if a halting command is not called, for instance, before a wall then the bearers SHOULD NOT walk straight into the wall.

The knee positioning in the Prepare to Lift, LIFT command is important mainly for the litter bearer's health. It is of UTMOST IMPORTANCE to protect against back injuries. Otherwise, two patients instead of one might need to be carried away.

Back and neck injuries require extra care and training. Do not try to be a hero and overstretch your medical expertise. Therefore, before trying to carry a patient and transport them anywhere, the situation should be assessed as to whether the patient is transportable with equipment on hand and training experience.

Litters Part 2: Procedures

For course certification, the form must be filled out.

Member Name (Print) _____   Instructor Name (Print) _____

Member Position Number _____   Instructor Position Number _____

Member FEMA SID _____   Instructor FEMA SID_____

Date of Instruction _____

_____ Define the purpose for Litter Teams and define the communication style used.

_____ Execute the following commands for litter preparation.

      _____Procure   _____Post   _____Return

      _____Ground   _____Open/Close

_____ Execute the proper commands for patient preparation in the following configurations.

      _____Four Man Lift   _____Three Man Lift   _____Two Man Lift

_____ Execute the following commands for a loaded litter.

      _____Lift   _____MOVE   _____Litter Post

      _____Lower   _____HALT   _____ROTATE

_____ Demonstrate the following configurations for a loaded litter.

      _____Four man carry   _____Two man carry   _____Litter post carry

_____ Perform two special circumstances commands for obstacle maneuvering with a loaded litter. Check all that apply.

      _____Uphill   _____Low Obstacle   _____Ascend Narrow Stairs

      _____Downhill   _____High Obstacle   _____Descend Narrow Stairs

_____ Demonstrate correct knee placement for LIFT command and other safety protocols.

With a complete sheet of initials, the instructor's signature signifies certification of completion for the Litters Part 2: Procedures course.

Instructor Signature _____