THE PECKING ORDER

As everyone in defence knows, the system works largely because there is a defined rank structure (albeit Roy Bacon’s). In one’s own service, the pecking order will be pretty well understood – after all, it is drummed into you from day one of basic training. But when it comes to relating to people in the other services, protocol may not be quite so obvious. For example, should a major in the Army call an RAF squadron leader? How should a Lieutenant Colonel in the Marines address a Captain in the Navy? Who – if anyone – can safely be called “mate”?

As joint operations become ever more common, such questions are important. MOD civilians also need to understand the military pecking order. A large number of service and MOD establishments are populated by a mix of uniforms and suits, and in operational theatres the mix is truly homogenised.

We hope our guide to ranks will be useful. But beware: it is a broad-brush guide only. We have not attempted to include the special ranks that are peculiar to some regiments, corps and other units (apologies to every corporal of horse and bombardier!). Neither have we included RAF specialist crew and technical ranks for both the RAF and the Navy.

That’s all. As a side note, you are an admiral, general or air chief marshal. In which case you can, with respect, do what you like. Sir. 137