



CompanyCommand

Building Combat-Ready Teams



To: Company Commanders
From: Company Commanders

Combat: What Will You Remember?

Being leaders in war introduces us to a vast number of unique experiences. In many cases, the experiences that we remember most are a combination of what we choose to remember and those events that are so intense that we can't help but remember them. What we remember reflects a lot about who we are, and can substantially impact who we become. In some ways, they can define who we are. Sharing those memories in conversation is a powerful way to connect with other leaders—it allows others to learn from us, and it forces us to process our experiences in a much more meaningful way. Many company commanders are writing down what they are learning about commanding in combat, and they are sharing those insights in the CC forum—creating a resource that is helping to improve our effectiveness in leading Soldiers in battle.

The “Combat-Leader Interview” is one way company commanders are choosing to contribute to the cause. One interview question in particular asks us to reflect upon our time in combat and to describe a memory that especially stands out in our minds:

What image or event do you think you will remember most clearly in 50 years?

In this article, company commanders respond to this question. The responses provide us with a unique glimpse into the minds of our peers. Moreover, the stories will likely elicit our own memories and connections and, for those of us preparing to deploy to combat now, can serve to focus our thoughts on what lies ahead.

J.P. Berner

E/101st FA, 42nd ID (M)

The sound of 107mm rockets flying overhead, detonating less than 100m away, and then Soldiers calling out, “Medic!” for the wounded Soldiers. Although the sound of rockets sailing overhead and explosions nearby was common, we only heard the cries for medic once, two weeks after we got to our Forward Operating Base. I think it was the first time I realized that there were people out there trying to kill me.

Jerry Diamond

A/312th MI, 1st CAV DIV

When I think about Iraq, I think about the kids, and how big and bright their eyes are, how happy they are to see us, and how impoverished they are. I think a lot about the kids here who lack clothes, or shoes, and who bathe in sewer water. Yet there is so much hope in their eyes. They're the ones who will make Iraq a great nation once again. They're the ones we're fighting for here.

Chris Altavilla

B/1-14th IN, 25th ID (L)

Seeing all the children who come running out and waving towards our patrols. They don't yet know right from wrong, and are not yet tainted by the years of hatred and deceit. It sometimes served as a rallying point for “why are we here.” At times when we knew the strategic mission would take a long time to accomplish, seeing those kids gave hope for the future.



Photographs provided by CompanyCommand

Scott Taylor

E/7th FA 10th MTN DIV (L)

The children I met on my second deployment to Afghanistan will always stick with me. I was impressed that these seven and eight year-old children spoke two or three languages. I would use the children to interpret in an emergency because they spoke English as well as most of my interpreters. They are the future of Afghanistan. If democracy is ever to take hold and replace the current political structure, then it will start with the children.

Ryan T. Kranc

Quickstrike Troop, 4/3rd ACR

Watching the Iraqi Army (IA) platoon organic to my Troop, who almost collectively quit on the first day of training, conduct an air mobile operation along the Iraqi/Syrian border to interdict smugglers. When they all jumped off the Black Hawk, took two steps, and dropped to the prone just like they had done in training, I had to laugh to myself and say, "Hey, they're getting it!" To watch their daily movement towards independent operations has been rewarding. The IA preparation and troop leading procedure process leading up to the Iraqi National Elections has been phenomenal. Their processing of information and thinking through the major issues regarding force protection and their ability to ensure a safe and secure Iraqi election is an enormous improvement over even two months ago. I'll be able to say (soon) that I observed the IA operate independently for one mission without input, guidance or prodding. Then they'll get it.

Wendy Merz

416th Trans Co (POL), 3rd ID (M)

I will never forget being in the OR with my Soldiers after they were in accidents, IEDs or landmines. You can never fully prepare yourself to hold their hands and comfort them. Each time you walk into the OR and watch them leave on a MEDEVAC will be different.

Nick Ayers

B/1-34th AR, 1st ID (M)

Most likely, it will be each time that we lost one of our Soldiers.

Spence Williams

47th Military History DET

The two interviews I did with officers who were subsequently killed in action. The last one died two days after I interviewed him. It brings home how important my job is to keep Soldiers' stories alive.

Matthew Stapleton

A/1-120th IN, 30th BCT, 1st ID (M)

After deploying as the HHC commander and Battalion S5, I was told one day that I had a couple of hours to pack my stuff—I was replacing the detached A Company Commander who had been killed that morning. The Task Force



Commander gave me a quick briefing regarding the intense contact over the last 24 hours, then said the company could take the day off for maintenance. Shortly after, a radio call changed that to "conduct movement to contact ... insurgents on rooftops firing from several locations ..."

Joseph Kuchan

B/1-327th IN, 101st ABN DIV (AASLT)

As we prepared for our assault into An Najaf, we had a couple of delays for a variety of reasons. To pass the time, 1SG Jeff Smith made himself and me a cup of coffee in our assault position using an ammo can, some diesel and a canteen cup. It was just so bizarre—I'd spent the whole night planning with my PLs, we were finally in our assault position, had done all our checks, and the 1SG just said, "Hey, sir, relax, the boys are ready and we've done all we could do to prepare—let's just sit and talk some things through." And we just sat and talked like it was a normal morning back at Ft. Campbell, although the topic was somewhat different.

Derek Boese

A/299th EN, CBT EN Company (M), 1BDE, 4th ID (M)

Changing command in the middle of the Iraqi Ammunition Supply Point we had occupied. I had commanded my company for just under two years, and to leave my guys after that long a period of time in the middle of a hostile environment was possibly the worst feeling I have ever had. After I changed command, I went to HHC's compound and felt physically ill the rest of the day. Right or wrong, I felt like I had abandoned my Soldiers in a combat environment. It's nothing against my successor—it just didn't feel right, and still doesn't to this day.

Lonnie Williams

SIGO, HHC, 25th BSB, 1st BDE (SBCT), 25th ID (L)

I will never, ever forget the sight of my friend's face lean-

ing over me when I regained consciousness after surviving a suicide bomber.

Wes Morrison

C/1-120th IN, 30th HSB, 1st ID (M)

The day my 2nd PLT was ambushed in a patrol almost 50 kilometers from the nearest FOB. When I arrived on scene, all Standard Operating Procedures were in place and the proper smoke and star clusters had been used to bring me and reinforcements into the fight. My Soldiers saved two lives that day. Their lieutenant and his gunner lost legs, but they lived due to proper rehearsals and Soldiers keeping their heads. Despite the horror of seeing my men wounded, it was wonderful to see why great training and our Army training standards pay off when it counted.

Chris Hossfeld

C/1-24th IN (SBCT), 25th ID

All of the vehicles pulling into the company area after a tremendous firefight. We had vehicles with blown tires, had taken multiple improvised explosive device and rocket propelled grenade (RPG) hits, and everyone was just a little shaken. But, everyone was all smiles, shaking hands, hugging each other, and immediately recalling the most intense fighting that we had been through yet. Everyone had made it through with some minor bumps and bruises, but everyone was still walking and talking. I was extremely proud of everyone in the company, and they were proud of each other.

Larry R. Jordan, Jr.

Crazyhorse Troop, 1-14th CAV, 3/2 SBCT

Anytime that you hear a call over the net that your Troopers are being engaged, it will cause a little knot to form in your stomach. That call hit home hard as one of my platoons was engaged by 40-50 insurgents. As I ran to my Stryker, I could hear and see the explosions of RPGs that were being used against them. Racing to provide support, we were ambushed by another group of insurgents. The fear that I would not be able to get to a position and support my men was horrible.

Mike Dinesman

S2, 3/3 SFG (A)

The prospect of ditching into the Black Sea during infil when our C-130 had mechanical/electrical problems. All I could think of was that the water would be very cold.

Juan Nava

64th MP Co, 720th MP BN

Immediately after an engagement of one of my platoons, one of my Soldiers was injured, having taken the blast of an RPG in his back and upper-backside. When I got to the aid station he had been evacuated to, I got to hold his hand, hug his head and talk to him. As the medics applied iodine to the wounds, he would scream from the burning, but when they weren't cleaning the wounds, he was joking with me and others. His strength and courage is something I will always remember.



Art LaFlamme with an A-10 Warthog in Iraq.

Art LaFlamme

B Co (TES)/302nd MI BN, V Corps

It's an image—an image of Iraqi armor setting into hide spots as the afternoon was coming to a close. It involves my Soldiers and I deciding to do something about it, and walking in some A-10s on this armor unit that thought they would be good to go for the night. For me, it will always remain as one of the great examples of actionable intelligence—from space, through us, across a secure phone to a radio to the pilot, out the barrel of a 30mm cannon and into enemy armor.

Aaron Munz

C/1-12th CAV, 1st CAV DIV

Some events that have made a lasting impression are the memorial ceremonies, and the anger on my Soldiers' faces. The remarkable thing is that when we have conducted missions within hours of the ceremonies, the same Soldiers whose faces were snarled with anger are able to show restraint.

Stacey L. Lee

169th Port Operations Cargo Company

Early in the ground war we were running port operations 24/7, discharging ammunition and cargo from ships in stream to support the push to Baghdad. We were short handed in some key positions, so we cross-trained some of the low density Soldiers as stevedores. One of the company's truck drivers fell into this category.

Earlier in life, he had fallen into a freezing river and spent 16 minutes face-down in the water before he was pulled out and revived. As a result, he was deathly afraid of water. Part of what we did every day was to get in a little

boat, go 1/2 to 1 mile out in the ocean and then climb up the side of a ship. The Soldier struggled even when the seas were calm, but with a lot of encouragement from his fellow Soldiers he managed to keep going.

Prior to a large storm, we went out to the ship in six-foot swells, and getting from the boat to the ship required us to jump off of the boat to a 5' x 5' see-through landing ramp. The Soldier went hand over hand down the safety lines on the side of the boat and watched the landing ramp bobbing up and down with the six-foot swells. After a few false starts, he finally leapt to the ramp and quickly moved up the ladder to the main deck. A little later, I pulled him aside and congratulated him on accomplishing something that a few weeks prior he never would have imagined himself doing, and he simply said, "You and the other Soldiers were counting on me, sir."

Kevin Kugel

68th CHEM CO, 5th BCT, 1st CAV DIV

I will never forget patrolling the streets of Baghdad on Election Day, watching the Iraqi people wait in line to vote as incoming mortar rounds impacted nearby.

James McGahey

B/3-502nd IN & LRSD, 101st ABN DIV (AASLT)

The first is my closer relationship to God. This has been an awesome experience for me to grow closer to my Savior and to serve Him as well as my country. That is the biggest memory I will have.



Kevin Kugel and 1SG Clay Young securing an Iraqi voting site.

Greg Spencer

A/1-13th AR, 1st AD

By far the change in command in the middle of a war. I don't think anybody even got a picture of it, and when the vehicles took off I signed a piece of paper on top of a Humvee that said I was the Company Commander. That would be what I remember the most.

Note to company commanders: To see the other 100+ compelling accounts of leaders' experiences in combat, log in to the CC forum and go to the Warfighting topic. If you have combat experience yourself, we invite you to complete the Combat Leader Interview. It is one great way to capture your experiences and to help advance the profession!

Finally, we would like to thank the leaders who have already completed the interview. Your contribution is making a difference, and it is greatly appreciated by company commanders and those who are preparing to command now.

Connecting leaders

CC is Company Commanders.

The CC forum is a voluntary, grass-roots forum that is by-and-for company commanders. The forum is positive and practical—focused like a laser beam on the practice of company command and those things that are important to company commanders. Send article ideas to nate.self@us.army.mil.



Art by Jody Harmon

Company Commanders, connect at <http://CompanyCommand.army.mil>

in conversation