



CompanyCommand

Building Combat-Ready Teams



To: Company Commanders

From: Company Commanders

Prepare for Combat

Preparation for combat—the act of making Soldiers and equipment ready— evokes images of assembly areas, ranges, duffel bags, and alert rosters. There's nothing quite like the energy you feel in the company area as a deployment draws near. This month we bring you commanders' feedback on their preparation for combat, as they contributed through CC's "Combat Leader Interview" question:

What was most helpful in preparing you for the challenge of leading Soldiers in combat?



Chris Altavilla

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

Hard, realistic training that builds the team and the confidence in each man that we could accomplish any mission. You will fight as you train, so train hard.

Greg Ford

C/311 MI, 101st ABN DIV (AASLT)

My fellow Company Commanders. Being part of the Brigade Combat Team (BCT) I could rely on Infantry, Engineer, ADA, and other branches to give me tips and advice. My brother was a Rifle Company Commander in the same BCT, so I always had a person I could turn to for help.

Wes Morrison

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

We developed a "combat focused PT" program that included road marching and squad competitions that raised morale and improved overall physical fitness. This PT was "focused" on wearing all your gear: IBA, Kevlar, and personal web gear. It gave the guys the real "feel" of moving with everything on and tested how fit they really were.

Orlando Cosme

D/3-325th AIR, 82nd ABN DIV

When we deployed to the National Training Center (NTC), we took it very seriously; it wasn't just another NTC rotation. Also, as a company, we conducted some very specific mission rehearsals and developed a lot of SOPs from scratch. We sat down with leaders who had been to Afghanistan and incorporated some of the TTPs and SOPs. There's nothing that can get you 100 percent prepared for the challenges of leading in combat. However, once on the ground, quickly confirm your unit SOPs and battle drills, get a read on how the enemy operates in your sector, avoid potential ambush routes, avoid establishing a pattern on your patrols, and never get complacent.

Eric Lopez

C/1-87th IN, 10th MTN DIV

Joint Readiness Training Center (JRTC). Dealing with the abbreviated orders process, maintaining Soldiers' disci-

pline under stress, and dealing with adversity and a thinking enemy were great preparation for Afghanistan.

Anthony Flood

SPT CO/2-20th SFG (A)

Ranger School. Ranger school is the Army's best leadership school. Leadership is leadership whether it's an Infantry squad or running the mess tent. Again, given the type of conflict we faced, all Soldiers are in the Infantry now as it were. Ranger school is a short, intense "crucible" of experiences which will last a lifetime. I learned as much about myself as I did about others, especially the leadership part.

Wendy Merz

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

Convoy Live Fire exercises are a great addition to garrison training. We've learned that everyone can be engaged by the enemy, not just combat arms. We have to instill a warrior mentality in all Soldiers. I learned that talking to anyone with experience in combat can help me better prepare my Soldiers for the rigors of Iraq. Don't be afraid to ask questions and be aggressive in getting answers.

Jason Hester

C/5-158th AV

Knowing the Soldiers. Every company has unique individuals and differing social dynamics. The fact that you may be on staff waiting for command does not preclude you from learning a good deal about the collective and individual personalities of your future company in many cases. I

deployed to Kuwait for the subsequent invasion nine days after I took the guidon. Luckily, I had already been flying with my future company for some months beforehand as a staff aviator. During those interactions prior to my command, I strove to learn as much as I could about the individuals, the perceptions about peers within the company, the groups that worked well together, what drives them, what is important to them, what their weaknesses are, etc.

Paul Voelke

A & HHC/4-31st IN, 10th MTN DIV

For me personally, there was the pre-deployment briefing, when I looked every spouse in the eye and told them that I would do everything that I could to bring everyone home in one piece. There is no greater motivation than the faith that your Soldiers' spouses and parents place in you. Tactically, I told my leaders that I wanted the company to be calm, intelligent, rehearsed and efficient under any conditions. What I meant was: take a moment to figure out what you're going to do; know what the second and third order effects of your actions are; think and talk through contingencies; don't waste your or (more importantly) your Soldiers' time, effort, or bullets. I wanted my guys to be surgeons, not cowboys. Not cocky and reckless, but smart and precise.

Ryan T. Kranc

Quickstrike Troop, 4/3rd ACR

Leading in combat the first time in OIF 1. As a platoon leader, I had the benefit of a great commander who showed me through example the best way to lead. This





that their actions directly affect the Soldiers, you become less effective as a leader as well as an organization.

Trent Upton

A/2-5th CAV, 1st CAV DIV

Observation and interaction with my fellow Company Commanders as well as my Battalion and Brigade Commanders. Be a "sponge." Listen to what is happening in your soon-to-be AO. I spent my first three months in Iraq on staff. During that time I always paid close attention to what was happening in sector, TTPs that worked and those that

war is a platoon leader, platoon sergeant, and squad leader's war. Allowing junior leaders to make decisions on their own, pursue the enemy, engage the local populace and leadership for partnership and intelligence, and to train the Iraqi Army as they would train their own Soldiers is the key. Having trust in your subordinate leaders to make the correct decision at the critical time and place is essential. Issuing clear guidance, intent, key tasks, and purposes is essential to empowering small unit leaders to lead effectively.

Matthew Reiter

HHT/3-17th CAV, 10th MTN DIV

Knowing the Soldiers, understanding the threat in the area of operations (AO), and being mentally ready for the unexpected. I wouldn't say that I did anything special. I led from the front from day one. Soldiers respect that. I never asked my Soldiers to do anything that I didn't feel comfortable doing. I was able to go out on an area recon a week or so prior to taking command. That helped me understand the terrain better than just doing a map recon. If you have that opportunity, don't pass it up.

Marco Ciliberti

D/2-14 CAV, 1st BDE (SBCT), 25th ID (L)

Listening to my father, a Vietnam vet and retired infantry officer, and recalling my time spent as an armored cav PL.

Brady Sexton

HQ & A/307th FSB, 82nd ABN DIV

Using common sense, the KISS approach to training, and incorporating the junior leaders and junior Soldiers into the mix. Our Soldiers are smart and will make you a better leader. The second-order effect of this technique is that your junior Soldiers will feel that the leadership listens to them and allows them some say on which direction the company is going. It was not a full-blown democracy, but it was more like a "We are all in this thing together so let's make it the best we can" kind of command. When the leadership forgets

did not, and how commanders dealt with the ever-changing environment. I kept notes on all of these, so that when the time came for me to take command, I had a reference point from which to work.

Frederick Toti

B/2-6th CAV

We established an atmosphere of fierce loyalty and trust within the Troop. Because of our six months of training in Kuwait prior to LD, the Soldiers trusted my decisions and we all learned to trust each other as we trained. Also, I would take their input to heart. If someone had a good idea or something a little bit "out of the box" we tried it in training. As a result, we ended up training a lot of high energy tactics that were considered a little bit risky at the time; however, this training saved our lives.

The next best thing we did was make sure our LTs were squared away. I approached their professional development with one goal in mind: they would be tactically interchangeable with me. My instructor pilots played a key role in making this happen. I had extremely high expectations of my LTs from the start. I would often make them lead and brief entire missions. At first they were shy, but by the time we went to combat, I would have trusted either one of them to take the fight if I got shot down. In combat, it was a great feeling knowing that when I told them to execute something with their team or platoon that they would get the job done. I had no doubts in their abilities or decisions.

Jason Pape

B/1-13th AR, 1st AR DIV

I think a lot of the tools that are available now to leaders in the Army (for example, on the internet) were the biggest help in preparing me to come over here (Iraq)—the fact that there are so many guys who have been here recently, or even guys who did this same sort of stuff fifty years ago who share their ideas, experiences, and lessons learned. Just to be able to get access to that so easily on various sites with lessons learned, companycommand.com, all the



different resources out there for people to share information and share experiences so that we don't all have to stumble through the first parts of any deployment or combat action, learning the same lessons again and again.

Stacey L. Lee

169th Port Operations Cargo Company

The core fundamentals of rigorous and constant physical and mental training are a must. I always add to the regimen an extra dose of R&D (Reading and Doing). I've always had a voracious appetite for reading and seem to be hardwired with an inherent drive to be moving and doing. Reading everything I can get my hands on is a key component. The search for innovative ideas and lessons learned from multiple fields has given me the flexibility to adapt to situations as they arise and to overcome challenges. Discussing and debating a broad range of topics with superiors, peers, and subordinates alike provides the perfect sounding board for ideas. Integrating new and fresh ideas into training and operations keeps everyone engaged and doing.

Michael Gonzalez

D/1-504th PIR, 82nd ABN DIV

Truly, it was versing myself in history and learning lessons from those leaders.

Nick Ayers

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

What prepared me the most was taking the time to talk and discuss with my PLs, PSGs, and Soldiers on what we were about to do. We rehearsed different scenarios and discussed the contingencies that could happen. We continued to train and refine SOPs while deployed and in between raids and missions so that when a hostile event did occur, we were all on the same sheet of music. It also gave me a chance to learn from the experiences of others. From these meetings, we were able to build an SOP while in Iraq that was very functional and useful...and saved valuable time when missions did come up.

Matthew Stapleton

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

Contact with people and units already in contact... interacting at sites like this one (CC) is one of the best ways a leader can prepare for the present situation. LTs and CDRs should dig in to any number of books and articles referenced all over CC.com. I read several of the survey histories of Iraq and Raphael Patai book, *The Arab Mind*. I believe this knowledge helps with leading Soldiers because as you interact they sense that you are somewhat of a subject matter expert which builds their confidence in you.

Ken Koyle

E/701st MSB, Main Support Medical Company, 1st ID (M)

Talking to those who had experience in a similar situation, such as Dan Hubbard at the Land Combat Expo, and to senior leaders (like my BN XO) who were preparing for the same mission.

Dan Hubbard

B/4-64th AR, 3rd ID (M)

I knew beyond the shadow of a doubt who I could call on for the tough missions, who I had to direct and guide more, and who could take the ball and run with it. I knew what to say to certain individuals and the company/team during stressful situations that would help calm them and refocus their efforts on the fight.

Bart Johnke

HHC/6-101st AVN, 101st ABN DIV (AASLT)

NTC, NTC, NTC, NTC. The value of learning how to operate in a desert environment was extremely useful, understanding how the sand and heat can affect vehicle and aircraft maintenance. Also, realistic training for an extended period away from the home station forces better planning and flexibility to cope with logistical problems that may arise. NTC also helped me understand the importance of PCC/PCIs.

Dave Polizzotti

B & HHC/1-66th AR, 4th ID (M)

Talking to my peers who were already in command. They helped me understand what to expect, and how to handle a

lot of different situations that could come up. Additionally, Study, Study, Study. Since I knew the area of Iraq I would be commanding in, I had time to do some research on the area, its people and history. That helped tremendously once I was in the job—made interaction with the local populace easier.

Chase Metcalf

C/1-1st CAV, 1st AR DIV

A diverse professional reading program that included military history, leadership, and psychology along with hours of professional discussions with my peers about how to lead in combat. Working with some of the best company-grade leaders in the Army allowed us to share ideas and lessons learned and helped prepare me for the challenges of combat.

We normally view preparation primarily as an activity prior to an event—the word even begins with “pre”—and for the most part, it is. But preparation is also an “after” activity. When we take a close look at what we’ve experienced—whether in an AAR, in writing, in telling “war stories” and their lessons, or in simple reflection—we are preparing for the future.

The “Combat-Leader Interview” is one way company commanders are choosing to reflect, analyze their experiences, and prepare for new ones. A powerful by-product of reflecting and sharing through the Combat Leader Interview is the influence on others’ effectiveness.

A Note to Company Commanders: 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! To see the other 100+ compelling accounts of leaders’ experiences in combat, login to the CC forum and go to the Warfighting topic.

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

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