



# CompanyCommand

## Building Combat-Ready Teams



**To:** Company Commanders

**From:** Company Commanders

## Switching Gears in the Counterinsurgency Fight

The battlefield faced by our Soldiers today can be chaotic, complex and volatile. We are often called upon to operate independently, and we face the challenge of waging a counterinsurgency (COIN) fight that requires the successful and simultaneous accomplishment of two overlapping objectives—to kill the enemy and to win the support of the local population. An ongoing conversation on the CompanyCommand professional forum is focused on how the conduct of COIN operations affects the nature of leadership, and conversely, how leadership, for better or for worse, can impact the COIN fight. As company-level leaders, how do we aggressively kill insurgents yet at the same time win the support of the local population? How do we reconcile the apparent contradic-

tion that is frequently presented by these two objectives? And, how do we help ourselves and our units ramp down emotionally after an intense firefight so that we can interact with the local populace in an effective manner?

This is a timely and relevant issue in the current fight. All Soldiers and junior leaders need training in COIN, to include handling one's emotions when transitioning from the assessment/intelligence collection phase of an operation to making enemy contact and then back again to interacting with people within the immediate area of contact. Listen in as CompanyCommand members share openly about the need to switch gears mentally and emotionally in a COIN environment, and about the importance of training this capability.

### Company Commander

OIF III

We knew he wasn't going to make it. First Sergeant was there looking at this soldier as his life was slipping away. That was the first time I've ever felt this intense hatred for all Iraqis. And you have to work through that. The thing that really held me together was I knew my Soldiers were feeling all of the same things. If I'd given the order to destroy every house in that area, they would have done it. The platoon sergeant was bawling. I told him, "You have to hold it together." The thing that gets you through is you are focused on getting everyone else through it. Then when you get back, the world collapses in around you. Like, this has to be a bad dream, but it isn't. You kind of forget a lot of these guys are young kids. These are people you love ... We had a day down and then we were back at it. I talked to my guys, "We are angry but we are professional soldiers. We won't do anything immoral or unethical." You want to deal with that anger, but it would not honor the lives of those men to commit murder in their names.

*Cpl. Jared Jenkins and 1st Sgt. Arthur Abiera, Apache Troop, 1st Squadron, 33rd Cavalry Regiment, 3rd Brigade Combat Team, 101st Airborne Division, search a home during a presence patrol on the outskirts of Sadr City, Iraq.*

### Jason Pardee

Killer Troop 3/2 ACR

Leaders must understand how to fight a counterinsurgency and get their men to understand it as well. The "kill 'em all" mentality certainly won't help the Army or the United States complete its mission in Iraq or Afghanistan. The ability to understand and get your Soldiers to understand the fact that actions at platoon level can affect things at levels



Photographs: U.S. Army

*Top, Lt. Col. Jeffrey Martindale, commander, 1-8 Combined Arms Battalion, 3rd Heavy Brigade Combat Team, 4th Infantry Division, Task Force Band of Brothers, makes a gift of a soccer ball to an Iraqi child. Bottom, Iraqi soldiers from 1st Battalion, 66th Armored Regiment, provide security for fellow soldiers preparing for counterinsurgency operations in Tarmiya, Iraq.*

way above the BN, BDE, DIV and even CORPS is key to the COIN fight. Educate yourself on COIN, teach your NCOs and get your NCOs to give classes to your Soldiers.

**Michael Eliassen**  
**E Company, 51st IN (LRS)**

What is also important, yet often overlooked, is a cooling off period for Soldiers after an event takes place where you must use force with the enemy. This is important before going right back into a neighborhood when the kids want to play soccer with you. I learned a great lesson over here in 2003 from my old BN CDR; when a vehicle is damaged in an attack, you stay up until it is fixed. That way the psychological impact on the other Soldiers is lessened. It should be the same way with Soldiers who are in a raid or an attack that produces casualties of the friendly, enemy or LN persuasion; you mentally “repair” them so they are not spreading an unwanted emotional charge throughout your unit.

**Jonathan Dunn**  
**Killer Troop 3/2 ACR**

Killing the insurgents is certainly the 25 meter target, and most tend to equate “winning the hearts and minds” as the 300 meter target. However, it is probably better described as the 25, 50, 100, 200 and 300 meter targets—it is a continuous objective. More to the point, it is the more important objective, because it is what will ultimately bring success. Contrary to what many junior soldiers think, it can actually enhance our ability to kill insurgents through the increased cooperation of the local population, their indifferent neutrality, or at a minimum, less active opposition towards us. I think a lot of it comes down to basic leadership, in that you must set the example and know your subordinates. You should be able to know which soldiers are more apt to be weaker at emotional control, based on off-hand comments, prior engage-



ments and actions, etc. First and foremost, we need to provide tough, realistic training with scenarios that replicate going from “hot” (high intensity) scenarios to “cold” ones. This can and is currently being done at the combat training centers (JRTC, NTC, CMTC) right now as they prepare units for deployment. This addresses the tactical problem and can be trained extensively, both at home station and at the CTCs. However, it only addresses half of the problem, and quite bluntly, the easier half of the problem. The more difficult aspect, and also much more difficult to train, is the emotional side. At the end of the day, one’s ability to “wear two faces” is dependent on the ability to control one’s emotions. We can never truly replicate one’s battle buddy being wounded or killed, nor of course would we want to. However, we need to be able to throw “emotional challenges” at ourselves and our soldiers. Here, the limit is truly our own imagination.





*Soldiers from the 187th Infantry Regiment, 101st Airborne Division conduct a raid to find an insurgent sniper in Bayji, Iraq.*

### **Jonathan Silk**

#### **Killer Troop 3/2 ACR**

After several weeks of high-intensity combat in every sense of the phrase, the mission may require an operation with a civil affairs or PSYOPs unit less than 24 hours after being in intense combat. This is not easy to do. It becomes even more difficult if the “soft” civil affairs mission occurs in the same vicinity as the preceding high-intensity fighting. This is a leader challenge and a leader responsibility. Leaders need to be able to keep their units aggressive in order to destroy the enemy, but leaders also need to be able to refocus themselves when the mission at hand changes from high intensity to stability operations. Leaders cannot mentally stay in the high-intensity combat fight of yesterday or three days ago. The leader needs to refocus himself and his subordinate leaders—this is paramount to successful mission accomplishment. If leaders cannot refocus, it is certain that no progress will be made at the neighborhood (grassroots) level in improving quality of life. Grassroots progress is essential to obtaining actionable intelligence from the local population on enemy activity. Such intelligence from the local population often directly leads to offensive operations, and is the only way of maintaining the initiative against an elusive enemy. The first time leaders and Soldiers experience switching gears mentally between situations and controlling emotions should not be in combat—it should be in a hard, realistic training scenario. Units have to train to be emotionally intelligent. As leaders in units train together, they will learn about fellow leaders’

emotions. Leaders will learn when their fellow leaders are not controlling their emotions and not switching gears mentally from the last situation to the present situation, and then be able to step in and refocus them. When units are trained through hard and realistic training scenarios, they will develop emotional intelligence.

### **CPT Ryan Kranc**

#### **Quickstrike Troop 4/3 ACR**

Doing the right thing all the time, even when others aren’t looking (I’ve read this somewhere before) is the essence of military leadership in combat—although in combat, someone is watching at all times, whether it’s the kids at the school down the mud path or the insurgent on surveillance duty. We are always seen. Given the fact that perception is individual reality, we try not to give our enemies the silver bullets of poor perception. These values are only reinforced through good relationships with respected local leaders and populations. Combat leaders have to have the ability to switch gears between drive, neutral and reverse, sometimes bypassing the natural progress and grinding the gears in the process. For instance, small units must have the ability to pass out soccer balls in a community that shot at them on the last patrol, where things may have been heavily kinetic a short time ago. Keeping in mind that the eyes of the village, and indeed, the world are on us and our Soldiers, we, as leaders at the junior NCO and officer level, must be the moral compass that our Soldiers will follow when things get bad. Only through dynamic and realistic

training will we condition ourselves into making the right decisions at the critical point. Ethics classes, Law of Land Warfare training, and other seminar-style training events are good to reinforce success in these areas, but cannot be the silver bullet that prevents unethical or immoral action in wartime. Putting the Soldiers in the position in training that would most closely replicate those scenarios is key. It is going to be up to innovative and smart Assistant S-3s to develop the training that will expose the Soldiers to these types of situations. Canning the same training scenario over and over will not help. Changing training to replicate the contemporary operating environment through good research over SIPR as to the TTPs and methods currently being used in theater is essential. Relying on past experience, even from OIF 1, will not prepare soldiers for OIF 5. I remember that many of the TTPs we used in the summer of 2003 did not work at all during OIF III.

Reinforcing success by explaining to your soldiers the concepts of second- and third-order effects is crucial. Having them understand that everything they do or do not do elicits some sort of response and reaction from the insurgents, the populace and the media. Given that the populace has a significant hand in the way things go, the entire concept of counterinsurgency operations can be paralleled to a game of chess. Every move we make precipitates a countermove from the aforementioned factors. Thinking three or four steps down the road and wargaming how your opponent will react is the only way to stay ahead.

#### **LT Raub Nash**

**A/1-24 IN (SBCT)**

It is imperative that you train your squad leaders to recognize when to change gears. Here is a personal example. Our task one day was to conduct Information Operations in the northern part of our company AO in Mosul. While the day started out well—soccer balls and chai for everyone—we were rudely interrupted by a drive-by shooting in which we chased the vehicle with help from our aviation assets all

over Mosul. Once we pinned down the vehicle to a small area, we had to clear about two blocks of homes to find the culprits. We found them and then returned to the neighborhood where the day began. As a leader I knew that my squad leaders would gather themselves and their boys and tone it back down for the IO campaign. As with most things involved with being a leader, I think it boils down to how well you know your squad leaders and how well you have trained them and conveyed the task to them.

#### **Company Commander**

**OIF III**

I pulled the guys in and told them, “We took one on the chin today and we are going to get right back out there and get them. We need to grieve and we have a mission to do. Everyone is going to handle this differently. Don’t let your anger turn towards your buddies. Some will cry, some will laugh, some won’t say anything. We are a family, and if there’s one time we need each other, it’s now. Do what you need to and then when you get out there you be a professional soldier. There will be innocent bystanders out there and you need to treat them with dignity and respect. You need to direct your anger at those who deserve it and direct your compassion at those who deserve that also.”

I wanted to keep the guys focused on the enemy as an outlet for their anger and focused on helping the people as an outlet for compassion. At that moment, I could have put the troops on line and leveled the whole city. I mean everybody was angry that day. I just wanted to make sure the anger the guys had wasn’t misdirected. I guess that wasn’t so much a concern, but it was a reality that I knew was out there.

*Our ability to learn, adapt and become more effective leaders in the counterinsurgency fight will have a huge impact on the war’s outcome and our Soldiers’ welfare. We invite you to log in and join the conversation on COIN taking place in the CompanyCommand professional forum.*

#### **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](mailto:nate.self@us.army.mil).



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

*Art by Jody Harmon*