



# CompanyCommand

## *Building Combat-Ready Teams*



**To:** Company Commanders  
**From:** Company Commanders

## **Relief in Place: The Challenge of Continuity at the Company Level**

Almost every time we rotate in or out of an area of operations (AO), we execute a relief in place (RIP) with our company-level counterparts. The information that we exchange with our fellow commanders during these RIPs is crucial to our collective success. After all, the local populace is not rotating; the enemy is not rotating. Therefore, to gain and maintain the support of the people, as well as to retain the initiative on the enemy, our transitions of units must be as seamless as possible.

We all know, however, that too often our RIPs leave open seams that the enemy exploits. The stakes are too high to accept this state of affairs. As professionals, we can come together, share our experiences and lessons learned, float ideas and improve the effectiveness of our company-level RIPs. Listen in as commanders from recent deployments reflect on their own experiences and lessons learned from rotating into their AOs.

### **Andre Rivier**

**Commander, B/2-502 IN**

About three weeks before arriving in Iraq, I was told that my company would be tasked out to support the Iraqi elections, but I didn't know to what unit or where. When we arrived, I found out that my company was attached to 1AD, with the unit split between two battalions. In fact, at one point in that first month, my Soldiers (and our equipment) were tasked out to six different companies in two different battalions in a different division. Working under an unfamiliar

chain of command as I RIP-ed in was tough, and property accountability became an issue.

With the two platoons I retained control of, I actually had a very effective RIP with my predecessor, Brian Borakove, who was a very good CO of a Maryland National Guard company. When he had RIP-ed in a year earlier, he'd received nothing from his predecessor, and he wanted to make sure that our RIP was better. He and his unit handed over a thorough, written intelligence packet, and he and I talked about informants, targets and the like. A written

product is so much more helpful than a verbal brief, because you can continue to refer to it long after your predecessor is gone. He also linked me up with the CO of our partnered Iraqi Army company, and the three of us conducted several days of joint patrols. All three of us went out together to meet the key personalities. The IA



*Capt. Andre Rivier, left, and Capt. Brian Borakove, right, talk with their Iraq Army partner-unit commander, Lt. Col. Khalil (center, facing away), during the relief in place (RIP) between Borakove's and Rivier's companies. They are meeting inside Patrol Base Alamo in Saba Al Bor, a city 20 miles northwest of Baghdad.*

commander knew a lot of people, and the continuity he provided to the RIP was very helpful. The two months I had in sector partnered with that IA unit were the two most effective months for my company in our yearlong deployment. Partnering U.S. and IA companies is the way to go, and we should stagger unit rotations so that either the U.S. or IA unit is always familiar with the AO.

About two weeks after arriving in Iraq and in sector, I took control of the sector. Because of my company's task organization, I had available only half the troops and half the equipment of the company I replaced. Still, thanks to the quality of the intelligence handover, within a month we captured two of the main targets from the intel packet—AQIZ (Al Qaeda in Iraq) guys who were making IEDs. We accomplished this by integrating old and new intelligence to identify aliases, and that's really a testament to the outgoing commander and our partner IA commander.

### Larry Sharp

Commander, B/1-68 AR

I had a pretty decent RIP. I took over from a very dynamic officer who wasn't afraid to make his guys work to get a good product for us. All the COs in my battalion moved north ahead of our units to attend the COIN (counterinsurgency) academy, and then we linked up with our counterparts two weeks before our units arrived. So I had two weeks of free RIP time with my predecessor, during which I was able to get a good feel for the AO without any other distractions. The coin of the realm there is information, and what he handed over to me was enormous—all their missions, AARs (after action reviews), intel from their entire year. The format was really good, too; it gave us something to build on.

One challenge we had with continuity came just after the RIP. Local national translators, or terps, are an important source of information and continuity. My translator had been the previous CO's translator, and he—like most of the terps we fell in on—had been working with Americans for several years. When we drove down streets, he would be pointing things out, saying, "We've raided that house two times, one successfully, one not.

.... In this house lives the mother of an insurgent leader who we captured last year. Next door is his cousin," and so on. Well, my unit arrived just as FOBs (forward operating bases) were being consolidated, and we had to move to a larger, brigade-sized FOB. Some of the terps, who had come to see our current battalion-sized FOB as their home were more fearful about the new location and were unwilling to make the move. Other translators became insulted by the new FOB's rules—they were no longer trusted to carry a sidearm or cell phone—and they quit. I lost my last two experienced translators when higher HQ came to my TOC (tactical operations center), arrested them and held them overnight before releasing them. After this affront to their honor, they quit. So, within a month of the move, I lost all my translators, who had until then been invaluable sources of information on the AO.

### Nate Sammon

Commander, A/2-9 CAV

We RIP-ed with 1-15 IN, and they gave us a good initial brief and on-the-ground orientation to our new area of operations. They told us and showed us where they were getting hurt and attacked, the hot spots. They covered the Iraqi personalities—not just the government leaders, but all



*Capt. Nate Sammon and Iraqi Army Lt. "M.", east of Tikrit. Sammon considers meeting your Iraqi partners to be a critically important component of the RIP process.*

### **The Other Side of RIP: A Thought Experiment**

Imagine that you are a high school student in a school where, every year, the entire staff and faculty changes. Your teachers change. Your coaches change. The rules change. Every year, consequently, you have to get comfortable with new leadership. Every year, you have to reestablish your reputation. You never know if the hard work you did in one year will be remembered the next. You never know when a new coach will arrive with a scheme that makes you less important to the team. How would that feel? What would you want and expect the incoming and outgoing staff and faculty to

do, not only to keep the school running smoothly, but also to maintain a sense of fairness? If we think about it, the Iraqi and Afghan people—who are the centers of gravity in the counterinsurgency fights—are like students in such a school. The Iraqi and Afghan peoples have to form new relationships and reestablish their reputations with U.S. forces after each RIP, which often occur more often than once a year. With this in mind, are there things we can do at the company level to reduce our RIPs' negative impacts on the Iraqi and Afghan peoples?

sources of information. We learned who they are, what their religious background is, their relative levels of cooperation. It was more than just an area orientation that said, "70 percent Shia, 30 percent Sunni." It was a personality orientation. They also went over their milestones, their road to success—where they started, where they are now and how they got there. That enabled us to pick up the mission and keep it moving forward.

The most important part of RIP was getting out on the ground with my predecessor and his subordinate leaders (platoon leaders and platoon sergeants). We drove around the AO, talking to each other on the headset. He pointed things out. "This is where so and so lives, this is what he does, this is what's important. This is where one of our soldiers was killed." He broke down the physical and cultural geography of that particular area. The next most important aspect of RIP was learning how to use equipment we were operating for the first time, like M1114 gun trucks for our Bradley-trained crews. The nametag defilade we had trained on, for example, was an insufficient TTP (tactics, techniques and procedures) in our AO. A gunner "up" in the turret is not likely to identify an IED on the highway, but he is very likely to sustain fatal head injuries from an exploding IED. That was a change from the way we had done our crew-level training, but it was good to learn that lesson the easy way from the departing unit.

#### **Jeff Palazzini**

**Commander, E/1-68 AR**

The emphasis of RIP should be on all the personalities that influence your AO. The one thing the outgoing commander knows infinitely better than the incoming commander is the people in the area. It's crucial to know what someone's motives are, who's backing him and why. Knowing whether someone is Sunni or Shia or Kurd is a start, but it's only scratching the surface of what you need to know to be effective. Normally during a RIP, you'll get a name and short biography on key military, police and city council leaders. If you're lucky and have a good MiTT (military transition team), you might get information on Iraqi security forces platoon leaders and platoon sergeants. But for other key players, such as the sheik, imam or mukhtar in an

outlying town, you are lucky to get a name. You need to get to know those people quickly.

Commanders deploying to Iraq need to understand that, if you are not going to Baghdad, you will not have the number of soldiers you need. You are part of an economy-of-force mission. The only way you will be able to cover your AO is by developing bonds with the Iraqi Army and police. That cooperation will be personality driven; you have to develop relationships with leaders in the local Iraqi Army and Iraqi police.

As we continue through OIF rotations, we're getting very few guys in leadership positions who haven't been to Iraq before. That can easily lead to situations where the incoming commander thinks, "OK, I've got it, just tell me the names of the roads, MSRs (main supply routes), buildings and get out of my way. I've been here once or twice already. I've got it." While it's great to have a foundation, you have to take RIP seriously, because things change. I know in my case things changed a lot from OIF-1 to OIF-4. It's probably a new area or a new city. You shouldn't underestimate the wealth of knowledge possessed by the guys who have been living there 24/7. They know the specifics of the AO, even if your unit will fight differently. I know what it's like to be thinking, "I'm done with National Training Center; I'm done with brigade train up; we're experts with our weapons, I'm done with Kuwait; let's get the mission started." But there's information that *only* the people who have been on the ground there know. If you don't take the time during RIP to ask, listen and learn, you're doing your unit and your mission a disservice.

#### **Chris Douglas**

**Commander, K/3-25th Marines**

Before my second company command tour in Iraq, I sought the advice of a mentor who had served two tours in Vietnam as a rifle company commander. He gave me some great advice on the importance of a good RIP, emphasizing that I should glean as much information as I could from the outgoing company commander about the enemy, area of operations and training. In addition, he recommended an in-theater training plan, which was something the Marines had done in Vietnam. The outgoing unit would set up and

*Maj. Chris Douglas, center, uses a Marine interpreter to talk with an Iraqi civilian during a cordon-and-knock operation in Iraq.*

conduct training lanes to familiarize the incoming unit on the local TTPs, friendly and enemy.

I arrived in Iraq ahead of my unit, during Operation River Bridge. The company I was scheduled to conduct my RIP with was operating in the city of Hit. The battalion XO arranged my transportation into the city so that I could meet my counterpart company commander. I was able to spend a great deal of time with him during combat operations, watching and learning. During our turnover, we coordinated lane training in preparation for the arrival of my company. His company, C/1-23 Marines, went all out, providing classroom instruction followed by practical lane training that was led by their small-unit leaders.

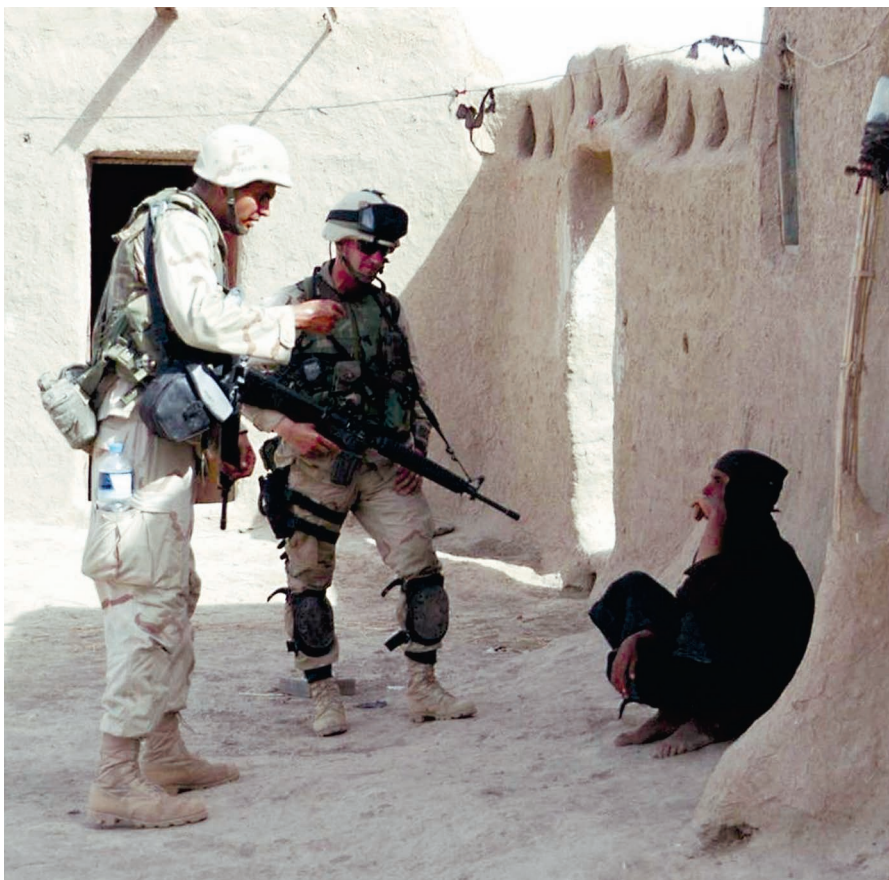
The IED lane they set up for us, out on the actual terrain of the AO, was exceptional. We valued that training so much that, when it came time for us to RIP out, we planned and resourced similar training for our successor unit. Unfortunately, the incoming company commander felt that his pre-deployment training was adequate and declined our offer.

### **Mike West**

**Commander, D/1-68 AR**

You always have a plan, and the plan is never what you actually end up doing. Sometimes it is because of friendly elements, sometimes because of enemy elements and, more often than not, it is because of surprises that nobody can pin down. My company was tasked to be the ground convoy security element for the movement of the battalion's vehicles from Kuwait to Baqubah, Iraq, and the plan was for me to be with them. As it turned out, the ground convoys coming out of Iraq were delayed because of route conditions throughout the country, and this caused a major delay in our ground convoy movements into Iraq. This delay affected the equipment movement but did not change the RIP timeline, and the decision was made to move all commanders via air into country to begin the RIP process. Talk about heartburn—the first time my company was going to be in a combat zone, and I wasn't going to be there with them.

My early arrival turned out to help the RIP process, however. It got me into our area of operation with a chance to meet my counterpart company commander and see the way that his company conducted business. I was also able



to knock out inventories before the remainder of my company arrived. This was very useful, because before my arrival, we didn't know what equipment we'd be falling in on. Every day in the weeks leading up to the RIP, we received a new list of what we would or would not be signing for. By being able to take care of the inventory with the company assets that I had on the ground with me (supply sergeant being the key), when my company arrived we were able to focus the RIP on learning the AO, not on inventories.

RIPs have an interesting dynamic. The old guys are ready to get out, ready to go home. They say, "You're here, you can take over." And my guys were very anxious to take over. The time in Kuwait is enough to drive you crazy. Once you get into the RIP, there are so many briefings, so many things you have to do that keep you from getting out and spending time on your land. And the outgoing commander is telling you, "This is how we do things, these are things you have to do." And you're thinking, "Hey, man, I just trained up for a year, I know how to do things." That can be an issue. Of course, after a while, you realize that some of the things he said were right on: "I should have done it that way. If I could do it again, I'd conduct operations the same way the outgoing unit had, at least for the first month or so. After this time I'd step back, see what I had learned about what worked and did not work, and make changes as needed. After all, they've been there for a year."

One thing I wish I'd known ahead of time is which company AO we'd be taking over. We could have had maps made, routes and checkpoints set up and learned the



*Capt. Mike West shakes hands with Col. Abbas, who was the Joint Coordination Center commander for the Iraqi police and Iraqi Army in Khan Bani Saad, the major city in West's company sector. The photo was taken after a March 2006 City Council meeting.*

names and pronunciations of the towns within our area of operation. That way, we could have focused the RIP more on the particulars of the local people and terrain, and in the first week of doing operations on our own, when someone said go to Khan Bani Saad, everyone in the company would know where it was and how to get there. If you're thinking about the route and you have to constantly watch your map, you're not watching for IEDs or seeing what's going on around you.

***How will you approach your next RIP?*** As you read these accounts and reflect on your own combat experiences, if you agree that RIP is important enough to study as part of your profession, step up and share your ideas and experiences. Log onto [companycommand.army.mil](http://companycommand.army.mil) or [platoonleader.army.mil](http://platoonleader.army.mil), or write [Tony.Burgess@us.army.mil](mailto:Tony.Burgess@us.army.mil) and sound off with your RIP experiences and ideas. You'll never know the full impact your sharing could have on your peers who are preparing to deploy or redeploy.

## About CompanyCommand

CC is a place for company-level commanders—current, past and future—to connect and share ideas and experiences. This is YOUR forum—it is voluntary, grassroots, by and for company commanders and is focused like a laser beam on CompanyCommand. By joining, you are gaining access to an amazing community of professionals who love Soldiers and are committed to building combat-ready teams. Collectively, as a profession, we possess the knowledge that can enable us to build and lead our units more effectively. With this in mind, please participate, contribute and tap into the experiences of others. You'll never know the full impact of you taking a moment to share your experience with others!

## Connecting leaders



*Art by Jody Harmon*

## in conversation

The CC space is organized around Leadership, Warfighting, Training, Fitness, Supply, Maintenance, Force Protection and Soldiers & Family.

We also have an area specifically for Professional Reading, as well as the CDR's Log (as highlighted in this article), where commanders are journaling their command experiences. And, if you are preparing for command, we recommend you check out the "1st 90 Days" topic located in the Leadership Section of the web site. If CC is adding value to you, encourage your platoon leaders to check out their forum—a forum that is centered on excellence in platoon leadership—at

<http://platoonleader.army.mil>.

Send article ideas to [peter.kilner@us.army.mil](mailto:peter.kilner@us.army.mil).

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