



# Company Command

*Building Combat-Ready Teams*



**To:** Company Commanders

**From:** Company Commanders

## **Battling Complacency**

The day-to-day grind of prolonged deployments can dull our edges and give us a false sense of security. Complacency can slip into our ranks, putting our missions and our Soldiers at risk. Complacency has many causes and reveals itself in many forms, but at its core, complacency can be defined as a *feeling* of confidence or security that is unwarranted because it overlooks actual shortcomings or threats. No unit is immune from the subtle attacks of complacency. Even units with high standards and morale can be susceptible, for Soldiers in a “well-oiled machine”

may perceive little reason to change what is working, thereby ceding the initiative to the enemy.

Battling complacency may not be written on our METL, but it is a mission-essential task for all of us leading Soldiers in war. On Groundhog Day, appropriately, a CC member started a conversation on ways to battle complacency in our units. We hope that this sampling of comments increases our collective understanding of complacency and generates additional professional conversation on this tough leadership challenge.

**Brian Sweigart**

A/1-27 IN, 2/25 ID

### **Adapting TTPs Based on SIGACTs**

I just recently deployed to Iraq with my unit, and after only a month and a half I can already see complacency setting in. I hear it when the Soldiers talk, especially when they come off guard. The best way I have found to fight complacency is to constantly communicate the bigger picture with them, either directly or through the platoon leaders. Almost every day there is at least one significant activity (SIGACT) somewhere in the brigade area of operations. Each of those SIGACTs typically has a few nuggets of wisdom to be gleaned from it. I pass these on to my Soldiers, and then talk with them about it. The real measure of success is when one of the platoon leaders or squad leaders hears about one of these events and then recommends some minor but important adjustment that breaks up the routine of what we are doing, addresses a current enemy TTP, and gives the Soldiers something to focus on over the next few days. These small adjustments are making it hard for the enemy to target us and have aided in some of the positive results we have had on the ground so far.

**Jason Cole**

W Troop, 6/2 CR; B/202 BSB, 4/2 ID

### **Enforcing Standards and Swapping Missions**

Combating complacency is a leadership issue. Before we deployed, my unit’s leaders held discussions about complacency several times. Based on our collective experience, we decided that discipline plays a *huge* role combating complacency. We’re talking about enforcing the standards on *everything*. Our NCOs make this happen by living



*Capt. Brian Sweigart, commander of A/1-27 IN, talks with a local sheik while conducting a route clearance operation near Taji, Iraq.*

### **Robert Rowe**

**G/307th FSB, 82nd Abn Div**

Here are some of the tenets we've used to combat complacency during our mission in Iraq.

- Breed being "adaptable" into all the Soldiers in your unit. Do it by always displaying an attitude that "we can accomplish anything together." Teach them "we can" through numerous challenges in training and during missions. Pat them on the back for their successes, and set goals for improvements.

- Keep the pulse of your organization and plan changes in its calendar/battle rhythm.

- Continue to train while deployed! One of our most successful methods to fight complacency while in theater is to keep training, such as monthly weapons ranges, counter-

IED training, medical and communications skills. Keep Soldiers focused on improving and "keeping skills sharp."

- Physical Training! Strong Body = Strong Mind. Don't neglect it.

- Standards & Discipline. Always demand and enforce the highest S&D from your troops.

- Talk to your Soldiers about why we're here and what we're trying to accomplish.

- Set large goals with a series of subset goals and train/develop continually.

- Give Soldiers a break occasionally for personal rejuvenation.

- Get Soldier buy-in by asking their thoughts and ideas about how to fight the enemy and/or accomplish the mission.

up to the NCO Creed. It is amazing what good NCOs will do for a unit by enforcing the standards.

To fight complacency, I get with my fellow commanders and ask to swap some missions every now and then. A change of terrain, scenery or units supported seems to invigorate my Soldiers into continuing to provide quality support. Most risks that you incur by making a change like this are mitigated by moving around only complete sections or platoons (don't break teams) and by having good leaders who are enforcing standards. Making periodic changes to my Soldiers' conditions has helped get rid of the "Groundhog Day"-type feelings my Soldiers have felt since we've been in Iraq.

### **Nathan Wilder**

**HNB/1-101 FA, MA National Guard**

#### **Striving for a 'Continual Improvement' Attitude**

I insist that my leaders do not even mention the word *complacency*. Instead, we discuss "continual improvement," not only amongst ourselves, but more importantly with all our Soldiers. Get everyone involved! Complacency is a state of mind. If everyone is thinking continual improvement, then complacency will not be afforded the opportunity to creep in.

As part of continual improvement, set goals with your Soldiers and work to achieve them. For example, if a recovery drill takes 90 seconds, challenge your Soldiers to find a safe way to reduce the drill to 80 seconds. Continually refine TTPs and battle drills, applying lessons learned and cross-training. Finally, in all your efforts, get buy-in from your NCOs. I found my E-6s to be such a critical point in the fight. They hold a wealth of knowledge about the Soldiers you command and the ground you maneuver on.

### **Chris Toner**

**A/2-187 and HHC/2-187; TF 2-87, 3/10 MTN**

#### **Safety-Related Training and Maintenance**

I required all platoons to conduct a Safety Stand-down Day every month for 16 months. We identified early on that platoons could easily get overconfident (complacent) as they became more comfortable with the OPTEMPO (which was intense) and SOPs. We wanted to prevent the situation

where a leader or Soldier would unconsciously skip safety-related precombat checks (PCCs) and inspections (PCIs) due to an assumption that they were done to standard or no longer important. OPTEMPO alone often presented leaders and Soldiers with situations where they felt compelled to disregard safety measures. Additionally, we operated mounted in vehicles most of the time, in terrain that would meet the criteria for any professional off-road competition.

During the Safety Stand-down Day, the platoon would spend the entire day conducting safety-related training and safety maintenance—all supervised by one of the big three (CO CDR, XO, 1SG). We would update the task list weekly with safety messages from Division or big Army that directly related to what we were doing in country. Especially important were safety-related incidents that had occurred in other units in country. Mechanics were surged to the platoon on this day and focused on safety-related maintenance—e.g., seat belts, combat locks, seats, weapons. I firmly believe that this one day per month of directed training resulted in lives saved and injuries prevented during our 16 months of combat operations in Afghanistan.

### **Jeff Barta**

**G Troop, 2/1 AD**

#### **Setting Individual and Organizational Goals**

Robert brings up a great point. Goal setting and progress give your Soldiers something to look forward to every day. Goals can be organizational or personal, and everyone should probably have both. Example goals could be securing our AO, capturing a specific high-value target, passing the board, maxing the PT test, completing college classes, being a better father or learning more songs for the guitar.

Organizational goals can be arrived at by brainstorming with leaders in your company to revise or update your mission, key tasks and end state. You and your leaders can help your Soldiers support unit goals as well as identify and achieve their own goals through counseling—both formal and informal—as well as through regular discussions with them at their combat outposts, on patrols, in the chow hall, etc.





Soldiers from Capt. Jeff Barta's unit—SSgt. Jason Derrick (right) and Spc. Jason Marsh—interact with Iraqi National Police at FOB Justice in Baghdad.

**Brian Mennes**

B/1-5 IN; A/3-75 RGR; TF 1-508, 4/82 Abn Div

**Channeling Positive Energy Through Goal Setting**

One thing 1-508 PIR has done as we get closer to the end of our combat deployment to Afghanistan is to work with our Soldiers on personal goal setting. A small shift in attitude can make a big difference, and there is something powerful that happens when a Soldier has focus and personal objectives to keep his mind from drifting into negative thinking. It can be the difference, for example, between a Soldier saying: "Crap, I can't believe I have 45 more days to survive this place" and "Crap, I only have 45 more days to bench-press 300 pounds." When Soldiers have specific objectives they are working to achieve—and milestones along the way—their energy is channeled in a positive way.

**Jason Raub**

B/3-82 GSAB, 82 Abn Div

**Forcing Changes that Upset Complacency**

Great topic! Complacency is common to any unit regardless of branch, deployment status or any other circumstance. Just recently we redeployed from Afghanistan, where I discussed complacency in detail with my unit's key leaders. Our main approach was to insist on high standards in everything. My 1SG and I knew that high standards had to start with us. The high standards worked their way down through the platoon sergeants and platoon leaders to every Soldier. When leaders set the example, peer pressure works for your unit.

Our second technique to mitigate complacency was to force change. I agree with Jason Cole's point about maintaining continuity within teams. I would change a team only



*Lt. Col. Brian Mennes (fourth from right, first row), commander of 1-508 PIR, stands with his company commanders and key staff officers in Musa Qal'eh after they liberated the city from the Taliban.*

**Bruce Bredlow** (D/1-7 ADA; HHB/108th ADA BDE) works at the Army's Center for Enhanced Performance at West Point, which teaches mental-fitness skills to improve combat effectiveness. Bruce offers this framework for leaders who want to encourage goal setting in their units.



Maj. Bruce Bredlow

### Fostering Goal Setting with Your Soldiers

**Step 1:** Identify the goal. Figure out what gets Soldiers excited, what motivates them, what they really want to achieve. What is worth the effort to them? Once they've figured this out—and only when they've figured this out—move on to Step 2.

**Step 2:** Identify their current status. What do they bring to the table, what do they do well, what tends to trip them up, what don't they do well? This allows them to play on their strengths and target their weaknesses when they develop a plan. They must ask tough questions and give themselves honest answers if they want the plan to be effective.

**Step 3:** Determine how they are going to accomplish their goal (based on strengths/weaknesses in Step 2). Start by picking four or five main areas that they can focus their energy on. These are the subgoals.

**Step 4:** Make a plan. Identify tasks that they can do today, tomorrow and this week to accomplish the subgoals identified in Step 3. Be specific and make them measurable, so that at the end of the week they can look back and say either they did or did not accomplish that task. These are the "action statements." Each subgoal should have about four action statements. Next is to identify "affirmation statements." This seems weird at first glance, but they're very effective in achieving the goal. The action statements identify what a Soldier is going to do to

achieve the goal; the affirmation statements identify their attitude or state of mind while achieving the goal.

Example action statement: "I do 125 push-ups every night before bed." (It is very quantifiable.) Example affirmation statement: "My body is strong as steel, and I execute my push-ups with perfect form." (It's not quantifiable, but deals with attitude.) Typically, have two affirmation statements per subgoal.

**Step 5:** This is a weekly action. Identify specifically what a Soldier is going to do that week to fulfill the action statements. For example: "My roommate and I are going to the gym every morning this week before work and doing upper body on Mon/Thur, core on Wed/Fri." These weekly actions may change every week but should always fulfill the action statements on the goal sheet.

**Step 6:** Commit yourself to the goal sheet. Remember, the Soldier came up with his goal, the Soldier came up with his strategy to complete his goal and now must commit to what he came up with. We often print out goal sheets that Soldiers can post up on their wall as a visual reminder of what they want to do and how they want to do it.

**Step 7:** Be flexible. Don't throw a goal away when encountering a challenge—issue a FRAGO. Adjust the goal sheet, keep moving forward. It's okay to make goals tougher or easier depending on the situation, as long as they're still focused on achieving the goal.

This is pretty easy to implement in your unit. Don't underestimate the effectiveness of the affirmation statements or printing out the goal sheet. They both make the process more effective. I hope this helps. Example goal sheets are available in the CC forum.

as a last resort to fight off complacency—but that last resort happened about four times in my last deployment! I started with rearranging the command post. Then I rearranged our flight planning room. I never let the same crews fly together all of the time. I would change out personnel, attaching them temporarily to other units. The Soldiers would get upset by the changes. Platoon leaders would come and say, "Sir, the Soldiers are mad about this change," but I knew that the effects of the changes were good for my Soldiers, because the changes undermined complacency.

**Kyle Henson**  
HHC, 4/1 CAV

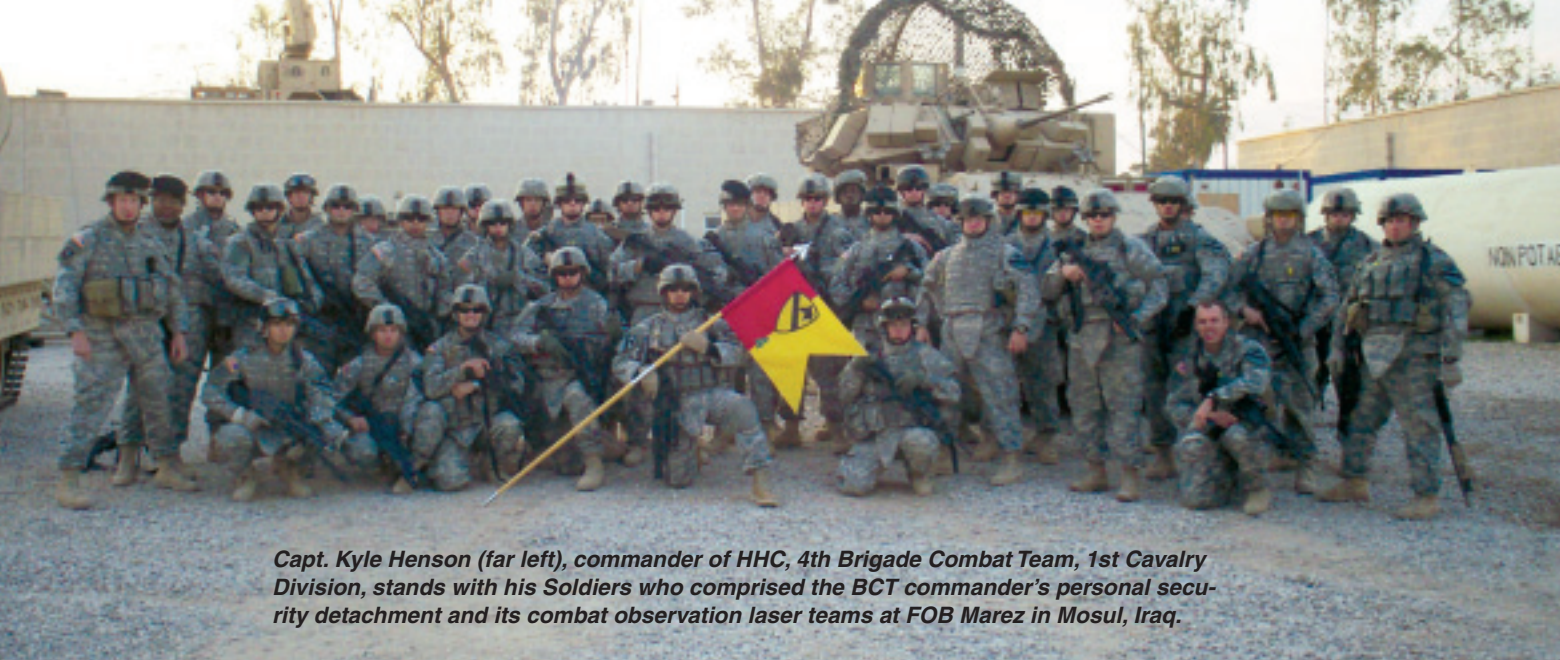
### Keeping Soldiers Productively Active

Complacency is a hazard during combat operations, but it may be even more detrimental to a unit that is not ac-

tively conducting tactical combat operations every day. Too much downtime can be a huge problem for a unit. Life on the FOB can cause many problems for Soldiers and their families. We have all experienced these problems firsthand. We can lose Soldiers to pregnancy, drug use or accidents. Morale starts to decline over time.

I have seen units use the gym facilities located on the FOBs to break up the monotony. Push-up contests, weightlifting contests and Ping-Pong tournaments are simple ways to change the daily grind. My 1SG and I tried to emphasize the Army correspondence course programs and college courses to keep Soldiers engaged in productive activities. We soon realized that family members could take the courses with their spouses online, and this served as another way for deployed Soldiers to interact with their spouses back home.





*Capt. Kyle Henson (far left), commander of HHC, 4th Brigade Combat Team, 1st Cavalry Division, stands with his Soldiers who comprised the BCT commander's personal security detachment and its combat observation laser teams at FOB Marez in Mosul, Iraq.*

**Jeremy Smith**

226th QM Company, 87th CSB, 3ID

**Train for the Unexpected, Learn from Mistakes**

As I was preparing for command, I learned that my company would be deploying for OIF-3. Knowing that most of my future Soldiers would be returning to Iraq for the second time in less than 15 months, I had a new question to answer: How was I going to keep my Soldiers from becoming



complacent before and during our upcoming deployment, since they had already “been there, done that”?

Pre-deployment training was paramount to preventing complacency. My first sergeant, executive officer, platoon leaders, platoon sergeants and I spoke with our Soldiers at every opportunity to point out the differences between our upcoming missions in OIF-3 and their tasks during the early stages of OIF. We impressed upon everyone that the only similarities between the deployments were the physical characteristics of terrain and climate. We reinforced this message by conducting tough, realistic training, and we actively looked for ways to get Soldiers accustomed to expecting the unexpected.

Although our Soldiers were prepared to accomplish their various support missions by the end of train-up, my 1SG and I soon realized during our outload inspections that key leaders were the first to become complacent. A number of first-line leaders had failed to conduct pre-combat checks, and equipment was not secured according to load plans. Fortunately, 1SG and I discovered these discrepancies early, made the corrections and treated the incident as a learning experience for everyone to stress the importance of avoiding complacency.

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*We hope that this article raises awareness on battling complacency, but it only scratches the surface of this complex challenge. There is so much more to understand about complacency—how it develops, ways to prevent it, ways to counteract it, etc. If you are a CC member, log on to <http://cc.army.mil> and join this important conversation. If you are not a member and wish to contribute your experiences and ideas, e-mail your thoughts to [peter.kilner@us.army.mil](mailto:peter.kilner@us.army.mil). When we connect in conversation about the things most important to our profession, we become more effective leaders as we advance the profession of arms.*

*Capt. Jeremy Smith, commander of the 226th Quartermaster Company, overlooks MSR Tampa from a guard tower at Camp Taji.*