



CompanyCommand

Building Combat-Ready Teams



To: Company Commanders
From: Company Commanders

Scorpion Reflections

Steve Wasilausky and Rod Morgan, both experienced company trainers at the National Training Center (NTC)—and members of the “Scorpion” Combined Arms Battalion Trainer Team—recently took time to reflect on their experiences and to share their thoughts with the profession via

the CompanyCommand forum (CC.army.mil). Steve and Rod have commanded Soldiers in combat; they have also now observed and coached countless company-level leaders preparing units for combat at the NTC. Listen in as they pass along some of their hard-earned insights.

Steve Wasilausky
A/2-37 AR, 1/1 AD

Where Should the Commander Be?

While the NTC rotation is a condensed time period, some things do not lend themselves well to eight months in eight days. Commanders want to push themselves as hard as they are pushing their Soldiers, going out on multiple patrols a day, conducting engagements with key leaders and trying to meet their higher commander's intent. In a high-intensity conflict fight, you always had to be out there, leading from the front. You really wore yourself out because you fought these short-duration, high-intensity battles. In the COIN fight, you have to pace yourself. The hardest thing for a commander to balance is his desire to be out on patrol with his Soldiers and spending enough time with his command post and intel support team, analyzing the intelligence the company is generating and thinking about the bigger picture. Commanders need to think about where they want to be in their areas of operations (AO) in a week, a month, four months. I did not do that as well as I could have as a commander.

Most commanders spend too much time on patrol. This is probably better than too little time on patrol—it is a tough balance. Commanders don't want to be perceived as weak by the Soldiers in the company. They want their Soldiers to see them sharing the same hardships. However, the commander needs to spend time providing guidance and making decisions about where to focus patrols and when to nominate targets to higher. Often, the commander is the only one in the company with a comprehensive understanding of the AO and knowledge of the vast array of systems available to accomplish the mission. Too often, training events like a rotation at the National Training Center are treated like a sprint. A tour in Iraq is a marathon.

During one rotation, I watched a new Stryker company

commander spend a little more (precious) time assisting his intelligence support team analyzing the mortar teams that were targeting the battalion FOB (which also housed an aviation battalion). He explained to his motivated 1st Sgt. that he wanted some pattern analysis done on the previous attacks. He had to make some adjustments on the methods they were using in portraying the data in a visual manner. Once the analysis was completed, several patterns became apparent. The commander then directed some focused patrols into the identified areas at targeted times, eventually killing the mortar team and capturing the mortar tube. If he had simply continued to push out unfocused patrols, he never would have eliminated the indirect fire threat. That company commander is still doing great things, including leading his company in the recovery of SSgt. Matt Maupin's remains.

Developing Junior Officers

Help your junior officers out—they need the mentoring of experienced commanders as they adjust to their roles as leaders in combat. I had 15 different junior officers in my company during a year-plus in Iraq. Every one of them needed different mentoring and guidance to realize his full potential and ensure that his unit was completely effective. And taking over in a combat zone is just that much tougher than doing it in garrison.

When we came back from Iraq, I had a lot of new PLs who had been doing really decentralized and platform-based operations. This was a tank platoon that had been doing Humvee-based ops. We went out and did some terrain exercises and thought through how they would fight a tank platoon on that terrain—something the Army's having trouble with right now because we are so focused on the present fight. We also managed to get some of the general defense plans from the old days in Germany. We used



Second Platoon, C/1-12 Infantry, conducts a dismounted patrol in southeast Baghdad. A company commander must balance his time between patrolling with his soldiers and providing guidance within the area of operations.

those to talk about how hard it was to move to the assembly area on an alert, as well as where LTs' responsibilities for attack or counterattack were. Things like that are pretty good team builders, but also young LTs gain a lot.

I went through a lot of different leaders, both through natural career development as they moved up into positions of further responsibility, as well as through changes in task organization. When you have a new leader, you have to conduct more deliberate backbriefs because he's not accustomed to working with you. You can give an intent-oriented mission without a lot of specifics to a platoon leader who's been through the trainup with you. You can tell him to go into an area and find the key people, and they can run on their own for the next 48 hours. With a new PL, you have to be much more specific—for instance, telling him to conduct these kinds of patrols, to look for these kinds of people to talk to, to execute these kinds of stay-behind missions. Their backbriefs to me helped me figure out if they understood my intent or if I had to be more specific.

The Right Person for the Job

Listen to everything your 1st Sgt. says, but make your own decisions. My 1st Sgt. provided great advice on who to pick as the company Family Readiness Liaison. I was relatively new to the company when we really started figuring out who we were going to leave back. I picked a guy who I didn't like in his current position and figured he could handle it. I mentioned it to the 1st Sgt., and he said, "Sir, I really don't think that's your guy." He came back to me a day later and told me that he thought we needed SSgt. Faulkner to be that guy. He was an extremely capable NCO and a qualified tank com-

mander. Even though it was really tough for me to accept that we were going to pull him out of the deployment for this (and I ultimately had to go to my boss and tell him what I wanted to do), I agreed once the 1st Sgt. explained it to me and I'd thought about his skills beyond just straight Army skills. He was someone extremely approachable, someone the families could really work with. He was very independently capable and required almost no supervision. He did a great job interfacing with spouses on all sorts of random concerns and tackling all the problems the rear detachment needed him to because he was so much more capable than just that narrow focus. He became the S-4 for the battalion and the "commo guy" for the brigade. It was tough pulling an experienced staff sergeant from his tank to deal with family and R&R issues, but we were the only company in the battalion to have no issues that distracted us from our mission during the deployment; fortunately, we later got a backfill of another SSgt. to take that job.

Capture the Moment

One of the defining moments in my command was when we paid a local emergency response unit in Ramadi. These were some of the original guys who were part of the Anbar Awakening, and they'd been working for 90 days on promises. Finally, on a day that I told them I was going to make it happen, I showed up with a huge grain sack full of Iraqi dinar—about \$300,000. It was cool to see the looks on their faces when they realized it was actually happening. It reinforces how important the stuff is that you're doing. I wish I had a camera to record the moment. It was a very satisfying feeling.



Two members of C/1-12 Infantry pull security during urban operations on the outskirts of Baghdad.

A CompanyCommand Glossary

BATs—Biometric automated toolset data entries.
HIIDEs—Handheld interagency identity detection equipment data entries. Both are used to record personal data of the local population. **CALL**—Center for Army Lessons Learned.

Rodney Morgan

C/1-12 IN, 4/4 ID

Understanding Doctrine

Get into the doctrine and build a framework for understanding it so that you don't have to relearn the lessons once you get to a training center—you can actually focus on training itself. It's gotten tougher to do that—the average CTT task 15 years ago was Decon Self and Equipment. Now we're talking about asking Soldiers to upload BATs and HIIDEs. That makes it tough on a junior leader, who has to be master of those tasks as well as of his own duties. I don't think I fully understood the counterinsurgency fundamentals until I got to see them from the other side, as a company trainer. I don't think I really understood the actual synthesis of doctrine until I got to see it from the other side. As a company commander, I think I was so overwhelmed at some points that I couldn't see the forest for the trees. Now I have a better understanding of how and why we do things in the Army. And it all seems so easy when you back up and look at it through someone else's eyes. You really start to see things differently.

About two months into my lifetime as an observer-controller, I was snatched up to be the battalion intelligence trainer—which, as an Armor officer, I knew nothing about. That forced me into a CALL manual and doctrine spin cycle. I read and read as much as I could, but there was still a lot of on-the-job training. I was trying to learn what intel was all about at the same time as I was trying to train and help someone else. I feel that I learned so much from having done that job and seeing how intel does business. I brought that experience back into operations—why we do things operationally and how intelligence drives the maneuver piece. All of a sudden, it just kind of codified every lesson I had ever learned—everything just made more sense. I'm sure there are a lot of people who got there a lot quicker than I did, but it took me being forced into a job I didn't want to do in order to get there.

Leader Development in Units

Ideally, the best leader development for junior officers is to lead by example. That is the absolute best selling point—that you care. When you sit in the back of a room watching an AAR being conducted, you might see a guy who's not engaged, who doesn't have a pen in his hand, who isn't saying, "Wow, we really could improve this. I don't want to see my friend die. I would like to change this tactic." The guy who's uninvolved is generally the guy whose sergeant isn't involved. And the sergeant who isn't involved is the guy whose lieutenant isn't involved. As company commanders, we must set the tone and verify that our junior leadership is conducting the kind of training we want them to. I think that's the best kind of leader development. If

A platoon sergeant (left) in C/1-12 Infantry conducts tactical questioning with the help of an interpreter. A company commander must learn how the intelligence the company generates "drives the maneuver."



the company commander isn't sitting in on the PL's orders, it's going to be really hard for him to give any kind of feedback, positive or otherwise, to bring that junior leader around. Establish the standards you want people to live by, live by those standards yourself and enforce those standards among those around you.

Thinking back to the ways that my company and squadron commanders developed me, I remember them breaking out books, giving us reading assignments. Whether we agreed or disagreed with them, it helped us to understand that they were leading by example. I remember when I was an XO (with the NTC back in the high-intensity conflict OPFOR), I was in my BRDM and my troop CDR was in his. He looked at me and said "XO, those guys just need some leadership. Let's go!" and charged his BRDM up to the top of the hill. The OPFOR turned the fight there—it was a good day for the OPFOR. In Iraq, I always weighed the balance of taking care of the things that needed to happen on the FOB with getting out into sector and making sure that I understood what was going on in my area. If I didn't go out, then my lieutenants wouldn't want to—if my lieutenants didn't want to get out, then no one would. Again, to me, it all comes back to establishing your standards, living up to the standards you've imposed and developing others through those standards.

Thousands of company commanders—past, present and future—are connecting and sharing insights with each other via the CC forum. Twelve members of the NTC Scorpion Team, like Steve and Rod in this article, recently

stepped up to the plate to be a part of this flow of knowledge and experience. This article is an excerpt from a larger package we are calling "Scorpion Reflections," which is published in full in the CC forum. Finally, we want to acknowledge Chanda Mofu and the critical role he played in this project. In addition to being part of the NTC Scorpion Team, Chanda is a key leader in the CC forum, where he volunteers as the forum's "Training" topic lead.

