



CompanyCommand

Building Combat-Ready Teams



To: Company Commanders
From: Company Commanders

Sharing What We Learn

Given the wide scope and high stakes of our responsibilities, we'd be crazy not to do everything we can to learn from each other's experiences. Our individual experiences may vary based on branch, location and other factors, but at their core, our experiences of command always involve leading our Soldiers to accomplish the mission. Every month, a member of the CC forum steps

up to share his or her particular experiences leading Soldiers. Listen in as two recent CC Featured Members—one who commands stateside, the other who commanded in combat—talk about what they have done and learned as commanders. Laura and Dave are great examples of leaders humbly doing their part to help raise the bar of company command across our profession.

Laura Levillier

Co. A, Walter Reed Army Medical Center Brigade
CC Featured Member, April 2009

On becoming a Soldier. I was born and raised in Grosse Ile, Mich. My parents always set the example of being self-sufficient, working for what you receive and being a good citizen. I attended the University of Toledo in Ohio. After my first

semester at college, I realized that I had lost my discipline. I took Military Science and Physical Training my second semester and found that I really enjoyed them and gained more confidence. The next year, September 11th happened. I sat in the cadet lounge, watching in horror as the planes slammed into the World Trade Center, and I thought, "If I can join the Army that defends the nation, that keeps my family safe and free, what kind of person would I be if I didn't do it?" I haven't looked back since. In my free time I love to cook, travel and get out for a run. Living in Washington, D.C., I love to run by different embassies and quiz myself on their flags.

On her current command. My company falls under Walter Reed's Medical Center Brigade. My Soldiers are exclusively AMEDD Soldiers and officers assigned to the hospital. My folks staff eight different departments composed of 32 different sections and clinics. When I came here, the sheer size of my Soldier mission made me feel like I was in over my head. How on Earth could I command this company when it was bigger than my last battalion and



CPT Laura Levillier, Company A, Walter Reed Army Medical Center Brigade, administers the reenlistment oath to SSG Dudley Walsh at the World War II monument on the National Mall.

From left to right, CPT Levillier and her fellow company commanders in the Walter Reed Medical Brigade, CPT Taira Caldwell, CPT Margaret Solecki, CPT Regina McCants and CPT Tracy Ann Ruglass, work as a team to accomplish their mission.



when two-thirds of its population are field-grade officers? Then I figured that if I was going to be asking them to do stuff for me while they juggled patient demands, I might as well go and say hello to them so they wouldn't think of me as some sort of faceless person who hides behind e-mail.

So, while I was in-processing, I asked for the list of all my clinics and the names of their chiefs; all but three of them were O-6s. After meeting with the NCOs and Soldiers in each section, I mustered all the courage I could and knocked on the door of every chief. I went in, shook their hands and said, "My name is CPT Levillier. I am going to be your company commander, and I am here to help you be responsive to patients." I was totally shocked by their positive responses. One service chief told me he had been at Walter Reed for 18 years and that was the first time a company commander had come to talk to him. That was the starting point of what has been a really positive experience. And, of course, my Soldiers are wonderful. They have to see a lot of difficult things, especially when helping out with medevacs. All of them are tough, talented and compassionate to their fellow Soldiers. They make me proud.

Although no patients fall under my command, I owe a debt of gratitude to all the wounded warriors, especially because I came back intact from two deployments. The gripes I have or the butt-chewings I endure melt away instantly when I see a Soldier who is blind, missing limbs or confined to his bed. All my issues seem so petty compared to theirs and—truth be told—they are. The intestinal fortitude of these Soldiers is amazing; they refuse to feel sorry for themselves, and they never quit. Whenever I am feeling down, I think of one Soldier in particular. At a Purple Heart ceremony I attended, a

young specialist, kind of thin, came up to the stage by himself in a wheelchair. Both of his legs were gone. He received his Purple Heart and his Combat Infantryman's Badge. When they were done pinning his awards on, he was given the opportunity to address the auditorium. Speaking quietly, he said, "I just want to thank everyone in my unit and everyone here at Walter Reed who has helped me. I know I have no legs, but I'm not sorry. I would do it all over again because I love my country and I love the Infantry." I felt like I had been struck by lightning! That young Soldier with no legs told us all exactly why we are here. I told him after the ceremony how much he pumped me up. My only regret is that I don't know his name. I wish I did so I could really tell him what he did for me. He has no idea.

On reenlisting Soldiers. The year I took command, we exceeded 120 percent reenlistment in all categories in three quarters, and we'll smash our goal again this year. Word has spread throughout the company that if someone asks me to be their reenlistment officer, I am going to give them an awesome ceremony. Washington, D.C., offers unique opportunities for memorable reenlistments, and we take full advantage of it. When we go to a monument, more often than not a crowd gathers and watches the ceremony. I take very seriously my role of being a good steward of the Army's image, so I make sure everyone watching knows exactly what my Soldiers are about to do, what their jobs are, any deployments they have been on, where they are from—everything. After the reenlistment, a lot of civilians shake my Soldier's hand and ask for a picture. I think this helps my Soldiers really feel the impact that their commitment has on their fellow Americans. I wish all Soldiers were so lucky.

On working with fellow commanders. For me, they are a sounding board and a mental “combat multiplier.” I am fortunate to serve alongside five fantastic leaders who have taught me so much about taking care of Soldiers. Our TDA does not authorize company XO’s, so we really had to come together as a team. Everyone has strengths, and we share them with each other so that we all can be successful. Working with them has forever changed how I will work with people. It is one of the biggest parts of being a commander that I will miss.

Dave Gohlich

**I & HHC, 3/2 Stryker Cavalry Regiment
CC Featured Member, March 2009**

On becoming a Soldier. I grew up in northeastern New Jersey, not too far from New York City. I went to the Military Academy at West Point for the education, with no real desire to make the Army a career. I figured I would be a civilian in a few years. Ranger School, combat, the challenge of the job and, most importantly, the Soldiers changed my mind. There is no better job in the world than to be an Infantry company commander.

On training. The most important lesson I could pass on is that your Soldiers will operate under stress exactly how they were trained. If you put them in realistic, challenging and increasingly stressful situations in training, they will do their jobs in combat. If you don’t push them beyond their preconceived limits in training, then many will freeze up in combat when the bullets start flying.

For example, if you are going to run a medical-training lane, once Soldiers are trained what to do, make it the most difficult and stressful event you can. Do not take any shortcuts in training. Every time you put a tourniquet on in training, it should be tight enough to work in real life. By the time you get ready to deploy, your Soldiers should be able to stop the bleeding and start an IV without a second thought—after an 8-mile run with sweat pouring down their faces and their squad leader screaming in their ears. Soldiers should be able to hit a target on the range at 150 meters, kneeling or standing, exhausted, with sweat running in



CPT Dave Gohlich, who commanded “Hammer Company,” 3rd Squadron, 2nd Stryker Cavalry Regiment, in Iraq, stresses the importance of rigorous training prior to deployment.

their eyes and with artillery simulators going off next to them. If your Soldiers can move under a heavy load, hit a target when stressed and tired, treat a casualty the right way and think clearly under the worst conditions, then you have done your job preparing them for combat. Training is not a time to be a nice guy as a commander. Your Soldiers may hate you in garrison, but they will come to respect you in combat for what you did to get them ready and bring them back home alive.



CPT Gohlich also finds it essential for soldiers to have some leisure time every few days.



CPT Gohlich, with his 1SG Rob Bowman at Combat Outpost Aztec in Baghdad, understands that leaders make mistakes and need the support of their COs.

The impact of weather in Iraq. In the summer, Iraq is hot beyond anything I have ever experienced. Wearing all that gear and walking around for 8–12 hours in 120-degree heat will tax even the fittest Soldier. Overweight or out-of-shape Soldiers will quickly become useless in this weather. Soldiers must be in shape when they get there. They need to drink a lot of water. We used the powdered electrolyte mix in every other bottle of water we drank, and it helped. Soldiers need to get into a rhythm of how much water they need to drink on missions and stick to it, and leaders need to work out a cycle of work and rest.

Another factor to consider is adjusting your patrols based on the time of year. In the summer, no one in Iraq moves from 1100–1800 hours due to the intense heat. The early morning and early evening are when everyone is out and about, so we adjusted many of our missions to take place when people were awake. We did find the best time to do raids was around 1400, at the hottest part of the day. You can almost always find your target passed out on a mattress and take him without a fight. In the winter, our missions were during the day, 0800–1730; it is too cold for people to move around much at night. Our raids, however, usually took place around 0200 when it's 20 degrees and everyone, including the lookouts, are usually asleep or inside trying to get warm.

On leader development. Leaders make mistakes. I don't think I can even count how many I made. Leaders need time to develop in combat and need the support of the CO. There are things that cannot be fixed—dishonesty, cowardice, not caring about your Soldiers—but other than that, most mistakes can be fixed. Sometimes we get so busy that we look forward to the next mission and do not reflect back on what we just did. Take time to sit down with the young LTs and talk

through what happened. Many of them are seeing combat for the first time. Talk about what went right and what didn't. Most importantly, talk about one or two things to fix for next time. If you do this a few times a week, it is amazing the sheer number of lessons learned and fixes to mistakes you can make. I tried to be honest about my own mistakes during these discussions, and I learned a lot about things I needed to fix from my PLs and my 1SG.

On mental fitness and physical fitness. The most important thing I found was to give the Soldiers some time every few days to relax. It's different for everyone, but they need something (e.g., watching a movie, working out, reading, playing video games) to help them unwind. On the flip side, when Soldiers have too much time off, they start getting bored and rusty, so balancing mission time and time off is key for a commander. If you can swing it, about three days of hard work to one day off is best.

Staying in shape during continuous combat ops is hard for Soldiers and even harder for leaders. Show up in top shape yourself so that when you start working 20-hour days, your body can take it. Start with a good overall base; as you get closer to deployment, you need to get more combat-focused. I am a firm believer that if you want to get better at running, then you need to run. The same applies to combat ops. The best stuff we did was IMT drills in full kit with CASEVAC training and problem-solving tasks for the leaders. The closer you can get to what you might see (running up stairs for urban combat, climbing rough terrain for Afghanistan) the better.

A fundamental assumption of the CC forum is that every experienced commander has valuable experiences to share. If you are currently a commissioned officer, log on to <http://CC.army.mil> or write to cocmd.team@us.army.mil and share your hard-earned stories and lessons learned. You can make a difference for today's and tomorrow's commanders.

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...becoming more effective.



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Art by Jody Harmon

Have you joined your forum?