



# CompanyCommand

## Building Combat-Ready Teams



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

## Reflecting Upon Six Years Of Professional Conversation

The cutting-edge knowledge of the Army resides in leaders at the tip of the spear. Connecting these leaders in conversation brings together the Army's greatest knowledge resources, unleashing the power of the Army profession to improve combat effectiveness. For the past six years, CompanyCommand has featured selections of conversation taking place in the CompanyCommand online professional forum. Through these pages, hundreds of company commanders

have shared their hard-earned experiences and insights with the wider profession of arms. This month, we take a short halt to consolidate and reorganize the knowledge that has been generated thus far. Read, learn and leverage samples of these articles—2005–2010—to develop your leaders and to advance our profession.

All of the articles can be publicly accessed at <http://cc.army.mil/pubs/armymagazine>.

### 2005

**Redeployed—Now What? (March 2005)** Given the world situation, we need to keep improving how fast we make the transition from retrograde to refit to training again. This begins while still deployed: Conduct “in-stride” AARs [after action reviews] that capture your lessons learned and focus your future training.—*Pat Work, B/1-23 IN (SBCT) & C/2-75 IN (RGR)*

**Training for War—What We’re Learning (April 2005)** Here’s an addition to Murphy’s Laws of Combat: “Contact with the enemy or an IED will be made by your most junior, newest Soldier.” So train him and his immediate leaders to handle the situation.—*Eric Lopez, C/1-87 IN*

**Reflexive-Fire Training—Taking Marksmanship to a New Level (May 2005)** Once I was comfortable with our Soldiers’ reflexive-fire techniques, we integrated individual and team movement into the drill. We rehearsed breaking contact while firing live rounds, mounting a truck and letting the gunner finish off the target set with bursts from his M249.—*Jerry Diamond, A/312th MI*

**The Company-Level Leadership Newsletter (June 2005)** Pull your leaders together to talk about the unit’s purpose and how that purpose fits into the bigger picture. Be open. Solicit input. Listen and be a catalyst for conversation rather than the “answer man.” Conversations transform, and it is critical that you create an ongoing conversation about purpose in your unit.—*Tony Burgess (A/2-35 IN and LRS, 25th ID) and Nate Allen (A/2-5 IN)*

**Prepare for Command (July 2005)** To prepare mentally,

I talked to many successful commanders and absorbed their thoughts, I immersed myself in my trade—reading and knowing details in key field manuals and mission training plans—and I visited with as many NCOs as I could. After that, I was confident that I was prepared for the challenge ahead.—*Rob Griggs, C/2/504 PIR*

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**Relinquishing Command (August 2005)** Plan on getting the incoming commander to the qualification ranges at some point during inventories to allow him to evaluate the battery in a tactical environment as well as ensure that he is qualified upon taking command.—*Rich Scott, B/6-32 FA (MLRS)*

**Developing the “Killer Instinct” in Your Soldiers (September 2005)** As for instilling the “aggressive spirit,” it can be done through tiring, realistic training. We shouldn’t hurt our troops in training, but we can create combat-like training experiences in which they are cold/hot, tired, hungry, have to carry their comrades and are under pressure to make aggressive decisions.—*Anthony Flood, SPT Co., 2-20th SFG (A)*

**Making Sense of Killing (November 2005)** After an engagement in a training exercise, do not bring the OPFOR [opposing force] “back to life” right away for the AAR. Walk the fire team, squad or platoon through the engagement area. As you come upon a group of “dead” OPFOR, ask your Soldiers, “Who killed them?” When Soldiers step forward to say they did, then ask, “Why?” Make Soldiers tell you why they killed the OPFOR. By incorporating this into training, you will have the Soldiers think through why it is okay to kill.—*Jon Silk, C/1-72 AR & A/1-353 IN (SFS-CA)*

**The Leadership Legacy of John Whyte (December 2005)** I think we all have to constantly work to give subordinates the opportunity to try something in training, possibly fail and learn from it. I’ve always recognized and fought my tendency to be too directive or prescriptive. It often seems that training opportunities are too precious to waste an iteration of an event by letting a subordinate leader do something you’re pretty sure won’t work. If you are that sure that it won’t work, then you’re better off letting them try it—you’ll never truly convince them any other way, and they’ll learn from it. Who knows, you could be wrong and it might work! When you give them some latitude in training, it will pay off as initiative in combat.—*John Whyte (RIP), A/1-30 IN*

## 2006

**Expeditionary Fitness (January 2006)** We also conducted combatives training before deploying. Here in Iraq, when we are in physical contact with the anti-Iraqi forces (AIF), it’s usually not one-on-one. It’s often three-on-one—a fire team getting one guy into zip-ties or pulling people out of vehicles. So we worked on that during our combatives sessions.—*Matt Adamczyk and 1SG Jack Love, A/2-325 AIR*

**Training Iraqi Forces (March 2006)** Always be a teacher and leader by example in everything. Keep it simple in all approaches. Let the Iraqis lead their own training. Do “train-the-trainer” on everything. Empowering the Iraqi leaders in front of their men is essential. Prepare them beforehand as much as possible and then step back during their limelight training time.—*J.C. Stroh, C/1-75 CAV*

**Air-Ground Integration (April 2006)** For the ground guys who are in units that do not have frequent access to OH-58D aircraft or pilots, do some research. Make some calls and put together some kind of OPD [officer profes-

sional development] to get your junior leaders to understand the capabilities and limitations of the aircraft. We were able to get in the aircraft for familiarization flights, and the pilots were able to ride around in our Bradleys and tanks. It was a blast, and we had a much better understanding of the constraints that the aviators were under; they could get the same from us.—*Chris Danbeck, F/2-2 ACR*

**Prepare for Combat (May 2006)** I spent my first three months in Iraq on staff. During that time, I always paid close attention to what was happening in sector, TTPs [tactics, techniques and procedures] that worked and those that did not, and how commanders dealt with the ever-changing environment. I kept notes on all of these so that, when the time came for me to take command, I had a reference point from which to work.—*Trent Upton, A/2-5 CAV*

**Company-Level IPB (June 2006)** Remember that you know your area of operations better than anyone else—data that may be seemingly unimportant in the scope of a battalion operation may be very critical to your area of operations.—*Paul Stanton, B/1-502 IN*

**Leadership and the Death of a Soldier (July 2006)** Soon after notification, my battalion commander and I both called the Soldier’s family. I followed up a few days later, as they prepared for the funeral back home. Of course, the parents are experiencing a lot of emotion and are going to blame you at some level, but they really appreciated the calls. We talked about what a great person their son was. I wrote them a pretty long letter, aware that they’ll likely keep it their whole lives.—*from a composite response*

**Switching Gears in the Counterinsurgency Fight (September 2006)** I think a lot of it comes down to basic

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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 offhand comments, prior engagements 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.—*Jon Dunn, Killer Troop, 3/2 ACR*

**Leading our Soldiers to Fight with Honor (November 2006)** The most difficult aspect of training is that it can never evoke the emotions that occur during combat—especially when friendly casualties are involved. You can never underestimate the importance of leading by example in these situations. If you completely lose control, verbally or emotionally, the Soldiers will view that behavior as acceptable. It is important to set the example—because every Soldier will remember the leader’s reactions.—*Josh Bookout, C/2-5 IN & C/3-4 CAV*

**The Art of Rewarding Soldiers (December 2006)** I took the approach that the best way to recognize a warrior is to praise him to his family. During my first tour in Iraq, I wrote to specific Marines’ families. During my second tour in Iraq, I wrote thank-you letters to each Marine’s family in my unit. In the letter, I explained that their Marine was doing a great job, how he was making a difference and how much I appreciated the support of his family. In addition, I made sure to keep their families informed of significant events and other happenings through my family readiness group. I found that recognizing a Marine to his family was rewarding to both the Marine and his family.—*Chris Douglas, K/3-25 IN (USMC)*

## 2007

**Force Protection for the ‘Hidden Wounds’ of War (January 2007)** As leaders, we must do all we can to remove the stigma attached to combat-related stress disorder/reaction. We must reinforce the understanding that Soldiers are not “broken” when they manifest various symptoms of acute PTSD or even chronic PTSD. Like physical injuries, mental injuries vary in severity and can heal with time and treatment. Mental trauma can even be seen as a sign of moral health. I pray we will never see a time when our Soldiers are able to kill and see their buddies killed without experiencing some mental trauma. Our efforts as leaders now must be directed to ensuring that future generations of warriors are better prepared psychologically, emotionally and physiologically for the horrors of war.—*Jerry Moon, B/311 MI*

**CDR’s Log: Thoughts of a MiTT Leader in Iraq (March 2007)** Now that I’ve been watching the Iraqi Army battalion commander and his officers for a while, I can tell you that they are better at people problems than we are. We seem to be very linear, and that suits us, given our culture. Some of these guys can balance people problems scores at a time. They don’t have the luxury of just getting rid of guys—too many tribal relations, Ministry of Defense constraints and a need to fill holes—so instead they deal with people.

They do this with local leaders, each other, etc., on a very personal scale.—*Rob Thornton, A/1-24 IN*

**Relief in Place: The Challenge of Continuity (April 2007)** The emphasis of RIP [relief in place] should be on all the personalities that influence your AO [area of operations]. 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.—*Jeff Palazzini, E/1-68 AR*

**Resilient Leadership (May 2007)** I pulled the guys in and told them, “We took one on the chin today, but we are going to get right back out there and get them. We fell off the horse, and we are going to get back on the horse.” I told them, “We need to grieve, but 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 back out there, be professional Soldiers.”—*Ryan Howell, Grim Troop, Sabre Squadron, 3 ACR*

**Third-Generation Leadership (June 2007)** Leaders with a third-generation perspective develop their leaders with future generations in mind. While they influence primarily by role modeling how to lead, they also impart the “why” behind their actions in such a way that their Soldiers are not only inspired but are also equipped to do the same with their subordinate leaders. ... Success is not simply developing great leaders. Rather, success is developing great lead-

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ers who themselves have a personal vision to develop great leaders.—*CCL Team*

**Afghan COIN: In the Words of Commanders (August 2007)** The very first thing we did was ensure that we lived with the people and that we lived in the enemy's backyard. I didn't fully realize its importance until I had done it for a while. You read about it in counterinsurgency theory, but it doesn't really click in your mind until you actually do it. We established three firebases in my battlespace that are literally on the side of the road. They were established with Humvees; we strung out some wire and that was it—that's where we lived. ... In a lot of ways, it endeared the populace to us. You probably can't fully endear them to us because we are Americans and they are Afghans, but to be with them every day is priceless.—*Rob Stanton, C/1-32 IN*

**Leadership Challenges in Iraq (September 2007)** Since deploying, my task organization has changed five times and my battlespace four times. These kinds of changes are necessary in a nonlinear battlefield. The environment is very fluid, and commanders have to be prepared to change with it in order to keep ahead of the enemy.—*Josh Taylor, B/1-73 CAV*

## 2008

**Leading our Soldiers after They Lose One of Their Own (January 2008)** I remember crying with my Soldiers on at least three separate occasions when my guys were killed or seriously injured. Some people think that sharing your emotions will somehow jeopardize your position as a leader by showing your Soldiers that you're "soft" or maybe that you're falling apart and won't be able to lead well anymore because your focus and determination have been compromised. I found that the opposite is true and that shared emotion builds trust.—*Jeff, A/1-24 IN*

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**Leading our Wounded Warriors (February 2008)** Because I know that when you are lying there with IVs sticking out of you, about to fly away to "Uncertainland"—Landstuhl or Walter Reed or San Antonio—you need hope. To look into your commander's eyes and to hear him say, "You're still in this unit, buddy!" I tell you: That will make someone heal. That will give them the motivation to rehabilitate. And that is our duty and privilege as commanders.—*Dave Rozelle K/3/3 ACR and HHT/3 ACR*

**Second-Guessing our Decisions (March 2008)** My worst fear had come true—that I was tested, and when I found myself under great stress and fire, I made a poor decision that got a Soldier killed—and at least one Soldier felt that way, too. I covered up my feelings to everyone around me, and I continued to receive commendation for my actions that night from many sources. Every time they did it, though, I felt worse. However, I realized that I was a commander and didn't have time for second-guessing, so I pushed it all away and kept going.—*Niel Smith, B/2-37 AR*

**Reflections of a Counterinsurgency Company Commander, Part 1 (June 2008)** Everyone knows that insurgencies can exist only within a given population and that the preferred way to get rid of the insurgency is for that population to deny it safe haven. If you cannot convince the population to get rid of or stop growing an insurgency, you will never win. We looked at our little area, made some assumptions about the insurgency we were fighting and sought to change those assumptions in our favor.—*Jim Keirse, B/2-12 IN*

**Reflections of a Counterinsurgency Company Commander, Part 2 (July 2008)** We had intel from various sources and phone tips that allowed us to map out 40 or so IED hot spots. Over the course of three nights, the entire company dismounted (except for mounted QRF/EOD [quick reaction force/explosive ordnance disposal] escort) and cleared, by hand, every IED. Studs volunteered to dig for these IEDs with screwdrivers and tire irons ... and it really set the stage to teach that neighborhood that we were there to stay and wouldn't abandon them.—*Jim Keirse, B/2-12 IN*

**Scorpion Reflections (August 2008)** In Iraq, I always weighed the balance of taking care of the things that needed to happen on the FOB [forward operating base] 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.—*Rodney Morgan, C/1-12 IN*

**Advice on Wartime Command (November 2008)** From my experience, it is not the fire-and-maneuver aspects of warfare that are challenging. You must be sound tactically, but you do not need a Ranger company or a Delta Force troop to effectively neutralize or destroy our current adversaries. It is leadership—motivating, coaching and directing. It is about shared burdens and risks, making timely deci-

sions with inadequate information, sometimes saying “no” and firing people if they have lost the trust of their men.—*Robert Born, C/3-21 IN & P/2ACR*

**When is Small Too Small? (December 2008)** Which leads me to the friendly situation—*too small* basically equates to *unable to support themselves until help arrives*. Much the same as an obstacle plan (if it’s not covered by fire, it’s a weakness in the defense), COPs [combat outposts] have to be fully integrated into the operational plan of the company. A platoon with enablers—e.g., mortars, TOWs/Javelins, heavy weapons, artillery support—will generally be able to defend themselves for a long time, especially if they have continued to improve their defenses. The most dangerous time is while you are building the COP.—*Chris Nunn, A & HHC/2-87 IN*

## 2009

**Platoon Leaders’ Stories (February 2009)** *BOOM!* The noise and concussion shook Johnston’s bones. *I’m hit.* Then he realized he hadn’t been hit. The explosion had occurred behind him—right where the commander’s truck should have been. Looking back, all he saw was a Humvee door sailing through the air about 30 feet high. *The battalion commander is blown to smithereens.* Johnston jumped out of his truck and started running back along the road. Debris was still falling. The first thing he noticed as he approached the vehicle was the massive crater—15 feet wide and 5 feet deep—that obliterated the raised roadway. Then he noticed blue Diet Pepsi cans strewn everywhere. The blast had blown off the back hatch of the commander’s Humvee, and the contents of the trunk had been jettisoned. Diesel fuel from the vehicle’s cracked fuel tank was dripping over everything and everyone inside the upside-down truck.—*Mike Johnston, HHC/4-31 IN*

**Developing a Great Commander/First Sergeant Relationship (May 2009)** In both of my companies, I made my relationship with my 1SG my number-one priority, ensuring that he and I had the same vision for the company. Once we saw where we were going, we talked about how we were going to get there and the lanes we would work in. We also talked about the company XO and how we would utilize him. Our basic output from this was that the 1SG ran the company so that I could command it.—*Chris Brautigam, D/2-16 IN & HHC, 4/1 ID*

**Sharing What We Learn (June 2009)** 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!—*Laura Levillier, A Co., WRAMC BDE*

## 2009 Contributors

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**Supporting a Combat Veteran’s Family (July 2009)** I figured I was in good shape—I had read all the literature on PTSD and had done my obligatory sit-down with a combat-stress counselor. And everything was going great—until a week later, when I nearly rammed a cop car in a speed trap on the side of the road because I thought he was setting an ambush. I drove home with a bad case of the shakes, barely able to keep the car on the road. I spent the next hour curled up in a ball on my couch, resolutely refusing to believe what had happened to me. I refused to be “one of those guys.” I was not going to be the bad stereotype of the returning vet who jumps at every truck backfire.—*Ray Kimball, F/3-7 CAV*

**Considerations for Releasing a Detainee (September 2009)** Detainee release is often an emotional time for local-national leaders and the family of the detainee. Some community leaders are eager to receive detainees back into the community; others are not. Regardless of the temperament of the community leadership, I always release the detainee to the local authorities and allow them to execute the release to family members.—*Lucas Yoho, A/1-27 IN*

**Zero KIAs as an Organizational Goal? (November 2009)** It just seems to me that the “zero-KIA philosophy” leads to apparent tactical successes that collectively can add up to a strategic failure. We all hope not to suffer casualties, yes, but a command emphasis on averting casualties seems misguided and, frankly, unattainable.—*Erik Archer, 127th MP Co.*

**Lessons from Task Force Currahee (December 2009)** We were trying to get a local government center built.

Everyone seemed to want it, and it was consistent with the commander's intent along the governance line of operation. It took us a while to figure out what the problem was, but we determined it to be one elder who worked behind the scenes to undermine our efforts. We needed to engage him directly, figure out what he valued and convince him—through our Afghan partners—why it was in his interest to support the government center.—*David Conner, B/2-506 IN*

## 2010

**Partnering with Afghan National Security Forces (January 2010)** The “dirty Afghan” mind-set has to go. The Afghans will fight, and they are not stupid, but they also do not have the experience and training that we take for granted. So, for example, when an ANA [Afghan National Army] soldier puts an 1151 into reverse in order to stop it, or when they don't know what a chem light is, it's not because they are stupid—it's because they've never been taught. It's no different from someone putting me in a space shuttle and telling me to fly it, and then laughing at me because I didn't know how. It's not that I'm stupid; it's just that I was never taught how. When we step back and take the time to train the ANA how to use equipment, they perform well and love it.—*Shilo Crane, B/1-121 IN*

**A Moral Justification for Killing in War (February 2010)** It's helpful to think of killing in war as akin to a doctor amputating the infected limb of a wounded warrior—it's sad and painful, and it takes training and courage to do right, but is the morally right choice among lousy alternatives and therefore ought to be done.—*Pete Kilner, D/2-325 AIR*

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### Is Training Management Still Relevant? (June 2010)

The keys are deciding where to take risks and then talking to your boss about it and getting his buy-in to your methodology. An honest discussion about realistic expectations of where your unit can—and, more importantly, cannot—go from here is imperative. The last part of the puzzle is forcing your subordinate leaders to get you there by using the Eight-Step Training Model and effective training meetings.—*Brandon Soltwisch, D & HHC/1-77 AR*

**Combined Action in Afghanistan (August 2010)** The big breakthrough for me personally was shifting from “I'm here to solve problems and to make it happen” to *helping the Afghans* solve their problems. It was a shift in mind-set, a reframing of my role and purpose. I went from hearing a report of a bomb and immediately taking action to going to the Afghan battalion commander and district governor and asking them how they wanted to handle it. You come at it almost like you are an OC [observer/controller] with combined action. You aren't the one solving the problems; rather, you are developing your counterparts and getting them to think things through.—*Justin Pritchard, A/425 BSTB (EN)*

**Journal of a Platoon Leader in Afghanistan (December 2010)** At 100 meters from the enemy stronghold, my lead squad leader and I looked at each other warily as we crouched in the knee-deep water of an irrigation ditch that afforded us cover. That ditch was the last defensible area up to the enemy compound, and we knew that once we left it we'd be out in the open for 100 meters. I radioed my other two squad leaders, ensuring that both were in position. I radioed my platoon sergeant, who was 300 meters to my rear, to ensure that he was ready to receive casualties and had a helicopter landing zone ready to go. All sent me confirmation; everybody was set. We moved forward, leaving the ditch behind. About 50 meters into the open area, all hell broke loose.—*John Paszterko*

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...becoming more effective.



Art by Jody Harmon

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