



CompanyCommand

Building Combat-Ready Teams



To: Company Commanders

From: Company Commanders in Afghanistan

Company-level Innovation in Afghanistan

At the company level, the war in Afghanistan can be immensely frustrating. The enemy is smart and elusive; the weather and terrain, harsh and unforgiving. Government officials are corrupt. Security forces are unreliable. People are fence sitters. Higher headquarters' appetite for metrics and slides seems insatiable.

Given these conditions, it is more important than ever that we lead our Soldiers. As their commanders in war, it

is up to us to think creatively and act decisively to seize the initiative from the enemy, to find common ground with our Afghan political and military partners, and to build teams that are resilient in the face of war's inevitable tragedies and frustrations.

This month, we hear some examples of our brothers and sisters in arms doing just that—innovating to lead effectively.

Dan Leard

A/1-26 IN, COP Terezayi, Khost Province

Starting a Youth Shura

My mission here is to secure the population while simultaneously building the capacity of governance and of Afghan security forces in Terezayi District. A big impediment to accomplishing my mission is the tribal elders, who are perceived by many Afghans as corrupt and self-serving. Many of the young Afghan men, especially, have lost faith in their elders' willingness to address the political and social concerns of their villages. This disillusionment strikes the very root of the social structure—the village and tribe—and contributes to anti-GIRoA [Government of the

Islamic Republic of Afghanistan] sentiment and insurgent support because the GIRoA attempts to work with and through the elders. In essence, this failing trust in the local elders is a critical source of instability.

Our idea was to address this “trust void” by connecting the young men directly to the government. Our district sub-governor and the Afghan leader of our combat outpost's Afghan security force [ASF] came up with the idea to start a monthly youth shura at which military-age males could gather at the government district center and directly address their ideas, concerns and grievances to their government and security force leaders. Discontented males would then have an alternative to violence or political abstinence.

The first ever Young Men's Shura in Terezayi was held in March. It drew 70 military-age males from every area of the district. It was a much larger success than we had anticipated. Since then, attendance has fluctuated from month to month, based largely on how aggressively the government advertises the event in advance, but we average more than 100 attendees each month, some of whom walk for hours to attend. This presents a substantial means to engage the most critical seg-



At a monthly youth shura in Terezayi District, Khost Province, Afghanistan, military-age males discontented with the efforts of their tribal elders can apprise the government directly of their ideas and grievances.

Company-level Officers' Top Challenges

Leaders innovate to overcome challenges. The CompanyCommand team surveyed nearly 100 company-level officers in Afghanistan in the summer of 2011, asking: "Which of the following wartime experiences do you have experience with and do you think would be most valuable for our profession to gain a deeper understanding of?"

From a list of 45 options, these were the 12 most commonly cited leadership challenges:

- Training and/or working alongside indigenous security forces
- Not having the personnel to meet troop-to-task requirements
- Dealing with burnout in yourself and others
- Developing your own company-level intelligence cell or processes
- Having a Soldier killed or seriously wounded
- Managing risk, in terms of mission accomplishment versus force protection
- Engaging with the local population
- Adapting your unit's SOPs/TTPs [tactics, techniques and procedures] to counteract the enemy
- Receiving poorly defined or inadequately resourced missions
- Communicating the strategic mission to your Soldiers in terms they understand
- Performing non-METL [mission essential task lists] missions
- Dealing with Family Readiness Group issues

ment of Afghan society: men between 16 and 40 years of age who represent the vast majority of the labor force, almost the entirety of the local insurgency and the future leaders of the country. During the young men's shura in July, we even had attendees from two bordering districts join us, in their words, "for a chance to talk to the government."

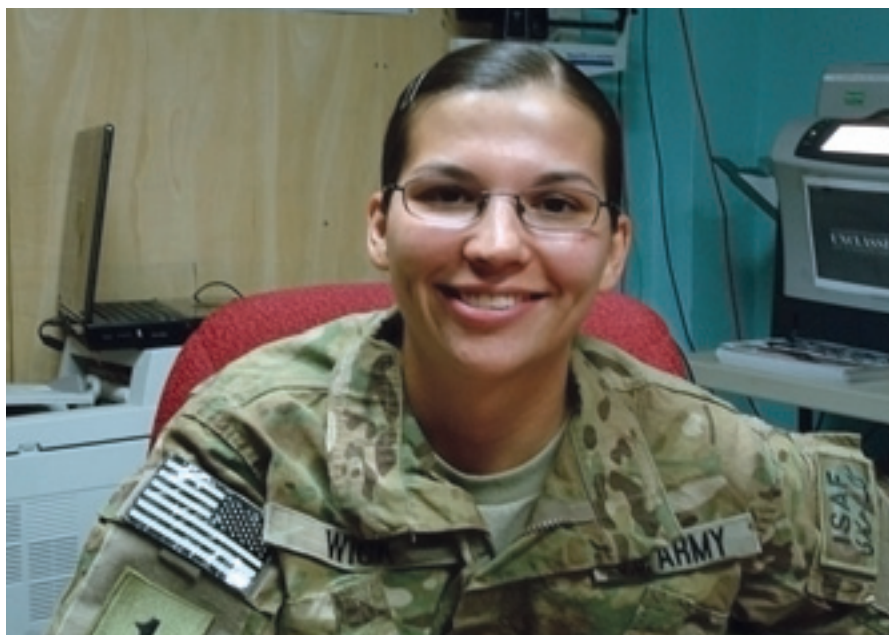
The youth shura is led by the district sub-governor (roughly equivalent to a county executive), who generally takes some time to introduce the younger generation to traditional shura etiquette, teaching them how to address the group and how to raise their issues to leaders with clarity and respect. Afghan security leaders such as the local Afghan border patrol battalion commander and the local chief of police answer questions regarding Afghan law and simultaneously use the engagement to stimulate recruitment. We intentionally limit U.S. involvement. I always attend but speak last, particularly in the larger shuras. I sit at eye

level with the participants to create a sense of equality, and I always introduce myself in Pashto in the traditional shura manner and use as much of the local language and nonverbal communication that I can throughout the meeting. Creating a cultural connection is critical. We always show at least one video. For example, we usually play an informational video titled "Why the United States is in Afghanistan," which is a short, Pashto-language documentary about the brutality of the Taliban regime and the September 11th attacks in 2001. Not one of the first 70 attendees had ever heard of the World Trade Center, let alone that forces based in Afghanistan had masterminded the attack. The shuras also represent an opportunity to expose my human intelligence collection teams and civil affairs teams to a variety of people in a secure setting, which has definitely bolstered our company's lethal and nonlethal targeting.

Crystal Wick

B/3-1 STB, FOB Salerno, Khost Province
Integrating the Soldier-Contractor Team

Given all the technical systems that my military-intelligence company employs when we deploy, we work closely with civilian contractors. In addition to field-service representatives [FSRs] for the different systems, we have an entire platoon of contractors—organized, equipped and employed just like an organic unmanned aerial vehicle platoon—operating our Shadows. So, although there's no doctrine on this, I decided to fully integrate all my civilians, to treat them as full members of the team in every way possible. We in-process them just like Soldiers and provide them administrative and logistical support. My Soldiers and civilians work in the same areas, live in the same billets, even use the same mail



CPT Crystal Wick integrates many civilian contractors into her company team. "It makes sense for our mission," she says, and "it's also the right approach at a personal level."



Soldiers attend a memorial service for a civilian contractor who died suddenly. Crystal Wick and her team had vital information about him at hand and were able to offer comfort to his family.

clerk. This approach paid off when tragedy struck.

One of my FSRs had an apparent heart attack. Soldiers living in the same building heard his distress, administered CPR and rushed him to the combat-support hospital, but the doctors were unable to revive him. Because we had a complete in-processing checklist on him, we were able to provide the data that were asked for within minutes. We were able to tell the chaplain that he was Catholic and did want to receive last rites from a Catholic priest. We could answer the hospital's questions about his date of birth and provide a copy of his letter of agreement. We had on hand the contact information for his stateside management agency.

We responded to this loss as we would for any teammate. Soldiers needed and received casualty counseling. The first sergeant, chaplain, some Soldiers and I developed a memorial ceremony for the company. The ceremony followed the template for a Soldier's memorial—with eulogies from the commander, chaplain and those who knew him best—except for a final roll call and playing of taps. We displayed a photo of him up front, and Soldiers and civilians were able to pay their respects, to come forward and salute him, and to add a photo, letter or other memento into a memorial box that we sent to his family. We videotaped the ceremony for his family, so they would know that he was a valued member of a team over here and was doing important work for his country. I wrote a condolence letter to his widow.

Some things were different. I had to call his management agency to inform them of their employee's death. It turned out that the manager there was a longtime friend of the deceased and he became very emotional. That manager informed the next of kin. Mortuary affairs does not handle the remains or personal effects of contractors as it

does for military personnel, but I decided to follow military procedures as best we could. I appointed an officer, on orders, to serve as the Summary Courts Martial Officer, and she inventoried the deceased's personal effects just as she would do for a Soldier, and she escorted the remains, personal effects and all supporting paperwork to a contractor-management representative at Bagram Air Base.

My company treats our contractors as full team members because it makes sense for our mission; it's also the right approach at a personal level. A couple of hours after I had made the notification call, I received an email from the deceased's wife. She wanted to know if her husband had received his religion's final rites. It felt good to tell her confidently that he had.

Ben Daughters

D/2-2 IN, FOB Andar, Ghazni Province

Sculpting the Terrain

The terrain in my area of operations [AO] is composed of complex wadi systems, flat farm fields and built-up villages. The wadi systems run north to south, are one to five kilometers long, and are five to 30 feet deep. There are few crossing points in the wadi systems, which significantly re-



CPT Ben Daughters proactively shaped the terrain in his area of operation in Afghanistan's Ghazni Province to achieve multiple positive effects. Parallel wadi systems limited the company's mobility until his team suggested earth-moving as a solution.



Soldiers from D/2-2 borrowed a high mobility earth excavator from a route-clearance platoon to create a crossing point at a defensible location along a wadi. Their work improved their maneuverability and increased their ability to deter insurgents.

duces our east-to-west mounted mobility and naturally “canalizes” us into choke points.

A robust IED [improvised explosive device] cell operates in my company AO. The insurgents favor targeting the choke points in the wadi systems with pressure plate IEDs [PPIEDs] because they know we are forced to utilize the limited crossing points. The IEDs are typically 40 pounds of homemade explosive [HME] triggered by a simple bicycle-spring pressure plate. Our initial TTP was for my Soldiers to dismount from our vehicles at the crossing points and use the Vallon metal detector to scan ahead of the vehicles for PPIEDs. This worked, and we found and cleared multiple IEDs. However, the insurgents’ tactics evolved. They began targeting the terrain leading up to the choke points, which resulted in three IED strikes on our vehicles. Frustrated by our limited mounted mobility due to the wadi systems and by our inability to defeat the IED emplacements, we began brainstorming solutions.

One of my enterprising platoon leaders recommended we borrow the HMEE [High Mobility Engineer Excavator] backhoe from the route-clearance platoon [RCP] on our FOB [forward op-

erating base]. The RCP gave our Soldiers a lesson on using the HMEE, and then we went to work. We selected points in the wadi systems that we could cover by fire—locations that cleared 120 mm mortar CDE [collateral damage estimate] concerns so we could engage IED emplacements with responsive indirect fire; terrain that would allow us to establish covert SKTs [sniper kill teams] to overwatch the crossing points with direct fire. We focused ISR [intelligence, surveillance, reconnaissance] assets on the new crossing points during suspected emplacement windows.

We achieved numerous results with our TTP. We increased the amount of wadi crossings, which significantly improved our east-west mounted mobility. We were able to focus our ISR efforts to identify and quickly engage IED emplacements, killing one and wounding another with 120 mm mortar fire. We’ve suffered only one IED strike in the four months since we built the crossings. We also created positive effects with the local national population because they benefited from increased maneuverability. This turned out to be a simple solution that increased Soldiers’ safety and mounted mobility as well as increased our chances of defeating the IED network.

Brad Lovin

HHT/6-4 CAV, Camp Parsa/Clark, Khost Province

Education as a Weapon System

When I arrived in Afghanistan, I took over the base-defense mission at Camp Parsa/Camp Clark, which is a combined Afghan-U.S. camp that has many more Afghan than

The language barrier hinders operations at the combined Afghan-U.S. camp in Khost where CPT Brad Lovin is assigned the base-defense mission. Lovin (right) is teaching English to the partnered forces so they can communicate directly with U.S. Soldiers.





Afghan men attending the Terezayi District's youth shura in Khost watch a Pashto-language video that explains why the United States has forces in Afghanistan and what U.S. goals there are.

U.S. forces. Security is a combined responsibility. U.S. and Afghan soldiers work side by side at two entry control points, three checkpoints, more than 20 towers, and in the course of several daily patrols. They also work alongside Afghan contracted security guards. I soon realized that I was spending more of my day interacting with and communicating with Afghans—soldiers, security guards, construction workers—than I was with Americans. I also noticed that communication between U.S. and Afghan forces was slow, imprecise and prone to error. Put simply, the language barrier is the biggest enemy to conducting operations here, and it can expose Soldiers to danger. Interpreters are the main means of bridging the language gap, but they are not always available when needed. With interpreters in short supply, I realized that the chance of getting more help was highly unlikely.

After talking about this with my interpreter, Ali, we devised a plan to teach English to our partnered forces. I was able to utilize my education degree and my interpreter's previous experience teaching English in Afghanistan to develop a curriculum that would give Afghan soldiers the ability to communicate with the U.S. Soldiers they worked with. We focused on words and phrases that the soldiers will routinely use when working with Americans. After gaining approval from the Afghan garrison commander, we began the first level-1 English class in July. I expected 10 to 20 Afghans to take the course; 30 showed up, including the garrison commander. I am now teaching levels 1 and 2. The long-term goal of the program is to continue teaching higher levels of English to Afghan soldiers. My hope is to educate a few Afghan soldiers to level 4 English, at which point they could become the teachers, continuing English language instruction without the assistance of American forces.

As the classes have progressed, Afghan soldiers have become more and more enthusiastic about learning English. Even with only a basic understanding of English, they are eager to put it into practice. I see more interaction between my students and U.S. forces during their guard du-

ties. I have even found that many of the students are teaching English to their families at home.

The Taliban was able to maintain control of the Afghan people by denying them communication, transportation and education. The more we are able to develop those systems while we are here, the more likely the Afghan people will be able to resist the Taliban. In the

short term, I am confident that the English classes are already making defense operations safer and more effective. Furthermore, I am convinced that education is a weapon system that will have far more long-term effect on the war than any number of bombs and bullets.

Leaders imagine and test innovative ideas; professionals share their successful innovations to advance their practice. We are indebted to Dan, Crystal, Ben and Brad for sharing their ideas. If you have successful solutions to share or want to tap into those of others, we invite you to join the professional forum of Army company-level commanders at <http://CompanyCommand.army.mil>. If you are not a currently commissioned officer, you can contribute your ideas and provide feedback directly to cocmd.team@us.army.mil.

