



# CompanyCommand

## *Building Combat-Ready Teams*



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

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## Tips for Working Effectively with our JIIM Partners

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Have you ever lived on a forward operating base run by Marines? Had a Navy explosive ordnance detachment (EOD) team embedded in your unit? Relied on an Air Force joint tactical air controller (JTAC) for your fires? Pulled security for State Department personnel? Coordinated with a World Food Program worker? We don't receive joint credit for it, but we sure are interacting often with other-than-Army people and organizations in our respective battle spaces.

For the sake of this discussion, assume that your younger brother just took command of a company deploying to Afghanistan. You know from experience that he is going to have a steep learning curve working with sister services, government agencies and nongovernmental organizations. What advice do you have for him about effectively working with the many JIIM (joint, inter-agency, intergovernmental, multinational) people and organizations with whom he'll be partnering?

**Brandon Soltwisch**  
**D & HHC 1-77 AR**

As a company commander in Iraq, I was "partnered" or worked with Department of State, provincial reconstruction teams [PRTs], police transition teams, military transition teams [MTTs], the U.S. Agency for International Development [USAID], contracted civilian police trainers, law-enforcement professionals and Air Force explosive ordnance detachments [EODs]. This is my advice based on my experiences with that very diverse group.

**Drop the ego, company commander, it isn't about you.** Many times you will have to make the extra effort to initiate and cultivate relationships. If you know that up front, it shouldn't be a surprise. Many people you work with will outrank you and will demand respect; give it to them. Accept the fact that sometimes you will have to take a back seat and put another agency forward. Support them and they will likely support you; don't worry about who gets the credit. Candid and respectful conversation will eventually lead to mutually beneficial relationships that will keep things moving in a positive direction. As soon as finger-pointing starts, you are done.

**Nobody likes to be the odd man out; bring everyone in and put them on your team regardless of rank, position, service or agency.** The best units are inclusive, not exclusive. At the end of the day, your partners are all there for a reason; it helps to understand that reason from their perspective. Invite them to your company meetings, ask for their input in setting goals and priorities, include them in

decision-making, and above all else, treat them with respect. Once they are in "your world," try and become part of theirs.

**Develop a combined vision for operations and success.** At the company level, sit down with the leaders of all partnered units and have an honest conversation about expectations. It's not easy to talk to a colonel or civilian senior executive about the world as you see it, but if you keep the discussion focused on the business at hand, most people will respect you for it. Setting expectations up front about attending patrol briefs, preparing manifests 24 hours before movements, etc., will pay huge dividends later. That way, when one of their subordinates and one of your subordinates have a dispute prior to or during a patrol, you will be only one office visit or phone call away from getting things straightened out from both ends in a hurry. Don't be the guy who has to have the brigade or battalion commander adjudicate your squabbles.

**Listen more, talk less.** There is a wealth of experience in these enablers, and probably a lot of continuity in your area of operations, too. You are missing the boat if you don't ask the right questions and use them to their maximum potential.

**Trevor Voelkel**  
**C/2-2 IN**

I was an Infantry company commander in Afghanistan from 2008–2009. Our company was on our own combat outpost and we had an Air Force EOD team, a USAID team,

CPT Trevor Voelkel (right) and two of his lieutenants meet with U.S. Agency for International Development representatives attached to his Infantry company in Afghanistan.



U.S. civilian police mentor and Canadian Civil Military teams. We also had other State Department, Drug Enforcement Agency and FBI personnel at different times for shorter periods. Here are my three biggest lessons learned from this experience.

**Understand the goals of the attached/partnered individuals.** Why are they here? What are their motivations for being here? What makes their bosses happy? What rewards and incentives exist in their organization to help you motivate and inspire them? If you can look at their situation from a 360-degree perspective, it will help you facilitate a positive relationship and mission success.

**Rehearse, rehearse, rehearse!** Before every patrol, ensure all non-Army personnel arrive early since they will be less familiar with your unit's SOP. Don't just tell them, "If we make contact, just stay in the vehicle or just get behind me and you will be okay." As we know, situations are fluid outside the wire, so have a plan and rehearse it with them. Speak in terms that they understand, and make sure you get some form of confirmation brief or acknowledgement that they are comfortable with the plan and actions on contact.

**Build the team.** Include them in everything you do, whether a pickup football game or mission debrief. Once they become attached to your unit, they are your unit. Make them feel at home while taking into consideration their unique perspectives on the world. They are experts in their field and will add value to every discussion.

It is nothing new for Army leaders to manage different personalities in an organization. Use those skills and always maintain a positive attitude towards the relationships and situations.

*Army National Guard CPT Justin Oliver (right), who has deployed three times working with task-organized joint task forces, says, "If you don't ... work well with others, you're in for a short-lived career."*

**Justin Oliver**  
A/1-150 AHB

I'm in the National Guard and have deployed three times. All three times, I worked in task-organized joint task forces that included Special Operations Command [SO-COM] units, Navy units, USAF JTACs, and/or lots of State-Department types.

My number-one recommendation is: Get to know the people who are really in charge in those units. Know that NMCB [Naval Mobile Construction Battalion] teams are run







*As HHT commander for a brigade headquarters that included State Department, Air Force and media embeds, CPT Olivia Nunn treated the lead members as equal members of the team and made it clear "that they were required to follow the same rules as those given to the troops."*

by the Chiefs, and 1st Classes do all the supervising and actual execution for any building or fighting. That's important when you need something built—anything—they build it all. For the most part, SOCOM teams run the same way—if you work well with the senior NCOs of that unit, you'll have success tied to theirs. JTACs work directly with the team leaders; they want to know who has the direct line (communications) to fires.

We're an Army Guard Aviation unit stationed on a Naval air station [NAS]. The NAS is part of a joint base with the Air Force in charge of the whole show. We're joint in organization naturally (the Guard is a joint USA/USAF team), but this is pretty extreme. If you don't—or won't—work well with others, you're in for a short-lived career. Know your role; complete your mission within your boss' intent. But know this: If you work well with others, you'll be given the opportunity to exploit their resources to help you. They'll do the same for your organization, so it's a win-win. And get used to it. The joint fight is here to stay.

#### **Olivia Nunn**

**HHT, 1 BCT, 1 CD**

I was an HHT commander for the brigade headquarters, which included State Department, Air Force and media embeds. Most of the State Department representatives worked on one of the three PRTs that were in our BCT's [brigade combat team] operational environment.

I treated the lead member or OIC [officer in charge] as a full member of my company team. I ensured that they received all email updates, requests for information and property-book-accountability tasks from me. I spent an hour with each of them, getting to know them and finding out what their expectations of the unit were.

I laid out the same rules of engagement to them as I did for any of my platoon sergeants. I did 10 percent cyclic inventories with them. I had them at the weekly training meet-

ings. I also ensured they understood the request-for-movement procedures. I made it clear that they would be treated as equal members of the team and that they were required to follow the same rules as those given to the troops. They were not to be given special privileges and were not allowed to request or demand special treatment.

This went rather well, and I developed a great relationship with the team members. Most seemed happy to comply and were willing to work and make requests for assistance within the system. The key is getting their leader in on your plan; in turn, they get their personnel onto the same sheet of music.

#### **Paul Maxwell**

**M/3/2 ACR**

My battalion was attached to two different Marine regimental combat teams over the course of 15 months in Anbar Province. My recommendations are the following.

First, realize they have a different mind-set and different lingo from yours. As quickly as possible, pick up their vernacular and try to learn how they train and fight. The organization of these units is very different from that of the Army, and their tactical procedures are geared towards their service's requirements and equipment.

Second, you should brief the gaining unit on your capabilities and limitations as soon as possible. Talk about what you bring to the fight, what logistics requirements you have, etc. They are only vaguely familiar with your TO&E [table of organization and equipment] and its capabilities. You must help them to understand your unit so it can be employed efficiently. For example, most Marine Corps infantry battalions deploy only with rucksacks, duffle bags and small arms. They do not understand why it takes 85 HETs [heavy equipment transporters], 150 HEMTTs [heavy expanded mobility tactical trucks] and 100 milvans [military-owned demountable containers] to move a combined arms battalion.

Lastly, understand that they are a very flexible organization that cross-attaches units frequently. Squads, platoons and companies are interchangeable and move to where they are needed. The Army tends to be a little more resistant to making short-term, frequent cross-attachments. There is obviously much more to discuss, but this is enough to get the relationship rolling.



*CPT Paul Maxwell, attached to Marine combat teams during a deployment in Iraq's Anbar Province, found that learning their vernacular and briefing them on his strengths and limitations early on helped forge a successful relationship.*

#### **Nick Nethery** 722nd EOD

Just a bit of advice from years working with civilian law enforcement and my current mission supporting the State Department: I've had nothing but great experiences with both.

When working with nonmilitary agencies, check the order assigning you the mission to determine if DIRLAUTH [direct liaison authorized] is granted. It helps quite a bit to go direct for coordination, but if it isn't in the order you can raise hackles with green-suiter bosses who view direct liaison as "going around them." It might seem like common sense to go talk to this or that civilian, but if no direct communication without the boss's permission has been granted, it is best to secure that first.

You may be working with young, idealistic naive civil servants who don't understand that there is a cold, harsh world out there looking to kill them. For some of them, you are part of the problem, with your "Neanderthal" warrior ethos and your fascistic devotion to martial spirit. Try to be patient with these types. They are very few, but they are there.

Maintain your professionalism: You might be the first (or only) Army Soldier these people ever work with, so your impression on them will color their perception of our profession as long as they live.

Figure in an extra 25 percent or so on your timeline to complete tasks or execute missions—not because you or they are inefficient but because you speak different lan-

guages, have a different set of regulations, and your parent units (organizations) often have to call and hash out MOUs/MOAs with each other before you can proceed. As time goes by, it will get better as you get used to each other (and as you trust each other more), but at first it will be frustrating. Just be patient and try to give it time.

#### **Jonathan Freeman** HHD, CJIATF-435

I am the headquarters commander at a three-star command in Afghanistan that is a Combined Joint Interagency Task Force. So I need to get along not only with other services but also with civilians from many agencies.

Here is what you can expect: No one is going to understand anything about property accountability. I have lost a lot of hair over trying to explain that even though we are deployed, the Army has paid for all the equipment and the Army wants to keep track of it. You can explain it all day, but unless they have previously been deployed with the Army, *they will not get it!*

Be very, very prepared to manage expectations. The number of times I have needed to explain to civilians or members of the Air Force that we are in Afghanistan and I cannot run down to Home Depot to get a toilet seat ... Well, you get the idea.

In addition, if you have a large civilian contingent you will need to work out how to handle them. Even many that have prior military service will still be in a civilian mind-set and will have different security concerns and a lack of regard for personnel accountability. You are the commander; it is your responsibility to work through and manage those relationships. Do not think that you can command these people, but you will need to figure out a way to work with them.

By and large, though, this is like any other situation in the Army—if you have great NCOs it will all work out.

#### **Jeremy Jones** Past PL, 983rd EN BN

During both of my deployments, I have worked closely with Marines and foreign militaries. I now work for the headquarters of U.S. Army Europe, where I work in an office where I am the only uniformed Army person and my frequent TDY travel has me working with multiple foreign militaries and governments. I say this to set up my two comments for this discussion.

Be friendly and nice to the people you're partnered with. Try hard to form positive relationships from the first time you interact with them; a smile and good conversation will go a long way towards transforming a shaky work relation-



ship into a strong partnership. Try to get to know the other element's leadership on a personal level.

Be competent. You can be the friendliest guy in the world, but if you can't do your job then you won't be a welcomed partner.

### **Ari Martyn**

**B/1-68 AR**

I've been on both ends of this relationship, first as the "attachment" and then later as a commander who received attachments. Fortunately, I learned a lot from my first experiences. Here are some key takeaways and how I used these lessons when I took command.

■ No matter what, the attachment will always feel a bit unwanted. Even with the best of intentions, this cannot be wholly prevented. For administrative issues, for example, the "attached" will have a harder time than his peers reaching back to his parent unit. Civilians, moreover, will always have issues because their organizations were not designed to operate in decentralized combat zones. Knowing this, I instructed my 1SG to always pay special attention to our attached units and personnel. When issues like mid-tour leave came up, we had no assigned responsibility towards our attached personnel, but knowing how sometimes out of sight means out of mind, I had my 1SG track our attachments' personnel and admin issues. That way, if we needed to step in or help them out, we could.

■ As a PL [platoon leader] on my second deployment, I saw firsthand how well-rehearsed SOPs between nonorganic units and all sorts of different flavors of attachments directly saved lives. So, when in command, the first thing that happened with any of my attachments was that the 1SG or I would ensure that they were trained and validated on our SOPs; likewise we learned from them anything that they needed us to know. When it came to standards, they met my company's. In my unit, for example, you wore eye protection [eyepro] on missions—period. So, when we got an attached Army team that didn't have any eyepro, we gave him some. He appreciated this because he knew it was in his best interest. His parent organization didn't have this standard, but we did. There was only one time that we had an attachment complain about our standards and not want to meet them. We put him right back on the next thing smoking to the main FOB (after my 1SG gave his CSM a heads up and I had spoken to my S3). For civilian counterparts especially, I've never run into one who didn't defer to my judgment when it came to combat operations and personal safety.

■ All of these "non-Army" personnel got my personal attention. No matter their rank (or lack of rank), I would be sure to frequently check on them. I made sure that their living conditions were at least equal to what my Soldiers were living in, that they were being enabled to execute their part of the missions, and found out what issues they were having. This did two things. One, it made them feel like they were important and relevant; everyone loves getting face time with "the commander." (Likewise they were almost uni-

versally invited to any meeting or planning we were conducting, regardless of rank.) And second, I set the example for my company that just because you think that a USDA grain-growing expert is not as much of a warrior as you who enlisted to be a machine-gunner, it doesn't matter. He is a good American trying to do his part for the war, and we will treat him as such.

The bottom line is that whether civilian, Air Force, paratrooper or finance clerk, everyone wants to serve with the best possible unit and have the baddest, meanest, scariest and safest guys on their left and right when they leave the wire, regardless of their mission. If your attachments think of you in those terms, then you'll find that they will be willing to work with you. Moreover, word will get around and you'll have people requesting to work with your unit, and you'll get your choice. Meanwhile, your boss will be happy with the good work you are doing and the great feedback he is hearing from his State Department counterpart, for example, and you will start getting more of the toughest, most rewarding missions. All this will lead to the most important benefit: having a greater effect in your area of operations, which is the point of "combat enablers" in the first place. If, however, your attached partners feel that they are wasting their time or they are being unnecessarily endangered by you and your unit, or if you are forgetting about them, then it will be a long deployment. So, bottom line, be competent, be positive and take care of them as well as you would take care of your own troops, and success will surely follow.

*When we engage in conversation about growing and leading combat-ready teams, we become more effective leaders. If you are a currently commissioned officer who is passionate about company-level leadership, log in to your forum at <http://CC.army.mil>. Want to provide feedback? Write the CC team at [cocmd.team@us.army.mil](mailto:cocmd.team@us.army.mil).*

