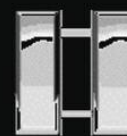


CompanyCommand

Building Combat-Ready Teams



To: Company Commanders

From: Company Commanders

SFAAT: Creating New Challenges & Opportunities for Army Units

Many company commanders are deploying to Afghanistan on Security Force Assistance Advisor Teams (SFAAT) whose mission is to assist Afghan National Security Forces. The SFAAT mission requires many key leaders, but not many soldiers. As a result, commanders are going to war and leaving most of their soldiers behind. This begs a number of questions, such as: What responsibility do deployed company commanders have to their soldiers at home station? How can they organize the

main body to keep operating effectively in the absence of so many key leaders?

A number of us are engaged in a conversation about this in the CompanyCommand forum (<http://CC.army.mil>). One challenge with this topic is that the advisor mission is ever-evolving and each unit approaches it differently. With that in mind, this article captures some important insights and can serve as a conversation starter for units that are undertaking the SFAAT mission.

Future Company Commander

We are currently planning how to man a SFAAT deployment, and these are some of the exact questions that have driven debate within my unit. Another question we have is: "How do we fairly rate key leaders if there is a nine-month block that they spent away from the supervisory role for which they are charged?"

Salvador Zuniga

With most of the unit leadership heading over to perform the SFAAT mission, the remainder of the unit needs to continue to train to perform its Title 10 mission. But how can this be done if the HQ and most of the senior leaders are on SFAATs?

Noah Truax

I was part of an intra-theater security and partnership mission in Kuwait and re-deployed at the beginning of November 2012. We had a strong and well-resourced team at home station (what was formerly known as Rear-D) with full authority and responsibility. I would not have been as effective in my mission if I'd had to worry too much about what was happening back at home station.

Mark Whitehead

I am currently deployed on a SFAAT and previously deployed on a MiTT in 2008. The difference is that with the SFAAT concept, we are pulling folks from key and developmental positions—company commanders or, in my case on this deployment, brigade S2 duty. This creates concerns

about how promotion boards will view the advisory missions. As always, we will get through this. As my mother told us growing up, "If it were easy, then everyone would be doing it."

Jeffrey Wright

My battalion fielded seven SFAAT teams, which included the battalion commander, executive officer, and operations officer, along with the majority of lieutenants and sergeants first class. Some of the best staff sergeants were also deployed. Fortunately, only one battery commander deployed. He signed over all property to a 1LT who became the provisional HHB commander for the battalion. The deployed HHB commander is a SFAAT team leader and has no responsibility or accountability duties for soldiers/equipment at home station.

The solution for the home detachment leadership was to place a former battery commander (me) and a former first sergeant in the roles of HD CDR and command sergeant major. Many junior officers and NCOs who did not deploy have been required to step up. For example, the battalion XO is a captain and the S3 is a warrant officer 1.

It's a challenging mission. However, we are successful because NCOs are stepping up to maintain discipline and help out the smaller officer corps. Also, we have good systems in place for discipline, PT, administrative functions, etc. Lastly, we're realistic with what we can and cannot do for priorities and training. Our priorities are discipline and standards, establishing/maintaining systems, physical fitness, maintenance/services, and property accountability. The training that we accomplish is focused at the individual level.

A 1st Infantry SFAAT debriefs a mission at Fort Polk, La. The eight-day Security Force Assistance Advisor Course was held in November 2012.



Jon Roginski

I recently worked on a division staff that ran the numbers for two brigades getting ready to field security force assistance brigades. My assessment is that the situation is not as bad as it looks for the units and personnel that are not deploying. Do the analysis of your unit's particular situation, and engage with your higher headquarters to fill critical deficiencies. Provide a concise laydown of the resources you need to accomplish the mission. The higher headquarters will either resource you or accept the operational risk. That's what senior commanders get paid to do. This is important: Articulate your shortcomings based on fact. Do it in good faith, and the right things will happen.

Daniel Rullo

I am a company commander six-and-a-half months into a SFAAT mission in southern Afghanistan. The brigade commander, battalion commanders, company commanders, first sergeants, platoon leaders and platoon sergeants were pulled from their leadership positions to fill the teams. The battalion XO and CSM along with one "true" company com-

mander and first sergeant run the battalion back at Fort Carson, Colo. My company XO and one platoon sergeant remain at Fort Carson to run my company. My XO and I speak once a week, but he is signed for the property and has command authority over the company to include UCMJ authority. The soldiers at Carson continue training to include crew live-fire exercises and tank gunneries. My understanding is that when we return, those with limited command time prior to deploying will remain in their command slot. Those like me, who have been in command for a while, will PCS. I'm not sure how I'm being rated, whether as a commander or a SFAAT XO.

One of the biggest issues with the SFAAT concept is the multiple reporting chains. We fall under the SFAAT leadership while at the same time answer to the battlespace owner. The SFAAT wants to build capability and capacity while the BSO wants results now. The two don't always align. This has been exacerbated by changes in OER rating schemes.

As far as the mission, we're a 12-man team that partners at the *kandak* (battalion) level to help them solve problems like logistics, reporting, fuel, leave and so on. We are limited by the experience on the team. Our S1, S3 and S6 are tank platoon leaders with little to no prior experience in these positions. While my PLs have done an incredible job learning and advising in their current positions, they lack experience and, most important, the rank to successfully advise. The incoming SFAAT seems to have addressed the rank issue. Most positions are filled by majors instead of lieutenants, so it will definitely help. One more recommendation: Bring your own security detail.

Brian Derickson

I'm the commander of the company at Fort Polk [La.] that is training the surge SFAATs. The question of who runs what is universally a friction point when the teams come through the course.

Aaron Lee

I'm the HHC Stryker commander for 5-20 IN (TF Regulars). I'm currently an ad hoc commander—a battlespace owner—which has been painful and challenging. I'm inte-

CompanyCommand Glossary

ANA- Afghan National Army
BSO- battlespace owner
CDR- commander
CSM- command sergeant major
EFMB- expert field medical badge
EIB- expert infantryman badge
FRG- family readiness group
HD- home detachment
HHB- headquarters and headquarters battery
HQ- headquarters
KD- key and developmental
MOS- military occupational specialty
MRX- mission rehearsal exercise
NCOER- noncommissioned officer evaluation report
OER- officer evaluation report
OPFOR- opposing force
PL- platoon leader
PCS- permanent change of station
SCO- squadron commander
SXO- squadron executive officer
UCMJ- uniform code of military justice
WFX- warfighter exercise
XO- executive officer

grated with a SFAAT. Who is in charge? As the BSO, I'm in charge of the SFAAT. Though the team is controlled by an O-5, the BSO is still responsible overall. Since all the SFAAT teams have an active duty higher HQ, things like equipment issues, etc., go through their HQ. You can imagine that we have some issues.

Colby Krug

Initially, I thought this concept was a recipe for disaster. Now I know that it can work, but only if you leave behind a strong footprint of leadership. In my case, I left behind my XO, who was a mature, strong leader and my first sergeant, along with my training guidance. The main body cannot be treated as a Rear-D or even called a Rear-D. It is the company and where the guidon should stay, while the company commander and a small element deploy forward. The XO is the pseudo-commander, the primary hand-receipt holder for all equipment left at home station, and holds UCMJ authority for Soldiers under his supervision. The company commander becomes the XO's senior advisor and makes decisions that he needs to from downrange, mostly those involving UCMJ and evaluations. I believe company commanders should stay engaged with and accountable for their unit and also execute their SFAAT mission.

Mark Buckley

My unit is on the tail end of a SFAAT mission. All company XOs, including myself, were left back as acting company commanders once the SFAAT mission kicked off. When I took over as acting commander, I signed for all the company's property, thereby releasing the actual commander from that responsibility. The commander transitioned to a SFAAT team-leader role, essentially leaving all company matters to me. Every couple weeks I updated the commander on the situation at home (training, discipline issues, personnel problems). Besides the updates, the commander rarely had anything to do with company matters at home. Due to the SFAAT mission, my company operated at about

Evolution of Terms

Military Transition Teams (MiTT)—outdated term
 Embedded Training Teams (ETT)—outdated term
 Stabilization and Transition Teams (STT)—outdated term
 Security Force Assistance Advisor Team (SFAAT)
 Security Force Assistance Brigade (SFAB)

70 percent strength. However, this did not inhibit my company's ability to shoot two gunneries, accomplish all individual warrior tasks, and conduct section STXs. All acting commanders dealt with company discipline matters to include Article 15s and chapters. The only training restriction was no training above the section/squad level, which was a good call given the reduced manning and leadership.

Adam Gittleman

My name is 2LT Adam Gittleman, and I am currently in command of C/1-9 CAV at Fort Hood, Texas. Our squadron is pushing forward about 100 senior leaders on a SFAAT mission—to include the SCO, SXO, CSM, S3, all the Troop Commanders, XOs and PLs. Staying behind are lieutenants in command of the Troops (along with first sergeants to help), and a new lieutenant colonel to take over as the Squadron Commander. We are going to take the time while the SFAAT guys are downrange to train up and actually be able to conduct recon missions—something we have not been able to focus on previously.

I cannot speak for the rest of the squadron, but the captain I am replacing has told me that I am in charge, hands down. If I need advice while he is gone, I should feel free to ask, but he will not be running the Troop. Personally, I feel that this is the best way to go about it. Granted I am a young officer, but I think this will allow me to develop and him to focus on his difficult mission. I have the benefit of an outstanding 1SG and a squadron command team who will back me up and help me along the way.

Kevin Smith

I am an Active Guard Reserve officer currently serving as the S3 of an infantry brigade that is providing personnel for an upcoming SFAAT mission. With Na-



First lieutenant Adam Gittleman (second row looking at the camera) commands Troop C, 1-9 Cavalry at Fort Hood, Texas. Here, the squadron participates in a brigade run in December 2012.



A number of lieutenants, like Matt Brooks pictured here at Fort Carson, Colo., are assuming command from company commanders tasked with the SFAAT mission.

tional Guard, the individual state has flexibility in how the SFAAT mission is manned. In the case of my brigade, this amounted to almost 100 officers and senior NCOs overall. We lost battalion S3s, company commanders and primary staff officers. This had a huge impact in a year with a brigade warfighter exercise scheduled. From my foxhole it is painful, but it is not without opportunities. Other officers and NCOs are being forced to step up and play in the big league, rather than lurk in the shadows. Think about the helicopter scene in “We Were Soldiers.” “He’s dead, what do you do?” “Take charge!” is the correct answer.

The way we handled the OERs/NCOERs is to transfer deploying leaders to a deployment manning document and off of our books. We close their OERs/NCOERs and they move out. In short, they are transferred and will return to us when the mission is over. Eleven years of deployments in the Na-

tional Guard in this state have taught us that this is the most effective option.

It’s not an ideal situation, but that’s what our leadership has tasked us to do. Let’s focus on making sure the guys going downrange have everything they need and turning operations CONUS into training opportunities. What if a 1LT gets the opportunity to command sooner, or the deputy S1 the chance to be the S1? How about letting the engineer officer have the chance to be the Chief of Operations at a WFX or allowing that stud company commander to serve as a battalion S3? Let’s focus on what positive can come out of this, rather than stewing on whether it was a good decision or not. I sound like a cheerleader, right? Those that know me well know I could have been a founding member of the “League of Disgruntled Majors.” I am not a party line guy; however, at this point of the mission for my unit, my job is to figure out how to make it work. I challenge all of you to do the same.

Leisa Dixon

I am a signal company commander, currently in Afghanistan on a SFAAT mission. My brigade provided personnel to man 30 teams, which means the majority of the officers—from the brigade commander down—were pulled to support this mission. Once the officers on the teams were identified, the brigade solicited assistance from the division to provide additional officers to fill those slots that were vacant. Keep in mind the brigade did not select any 2LTs for these teams. Once the teams were filled, the next step was to identify which 1LTs would be Provisional/Rear-D commanders. Once the officers on the teams were identified, we conducted change-of-command inventories, and the 1LTs signed for all property via the property book office. During this time, we transferred many soldiers to various units throughout the installation. Most companies were down to 20–30 soldiers, just enough to maintain the basic functions of the company.

There are obvious challenges. For example, officers that took command prior to deploying will now spend their first nine months of command on SFAAT. First lieutenants and newly promoted SFCs are running companies. Majors, with no senior-rater profile, are sitting in as battalion commanders and, therefore, can’t senior rate the lieutenants remaining behind. Company commanders and first sergeants are being rated in those positions but performing staff advisor duties in Afghanistan. Yet the brigade seems to be operating well. We communicate with those in the rear but are primarily focused on the mission here in Afghanistan. Soldiers in the rear are conducting training on basic soldier skills, MOS-specific training, taking advantage of NCOES schools, and conducting garrison functions. A real positive is the level of learning and development that the lieutenants who are in command positions are gaining, experience that will prepare them for future commands.

Harry (Zan) Hornbuckle

This is a great chance to get back to basics and to develop junior leaders. My BCT received the order to deploy 27

Connect to Doctrine

Army doctrine defines security force assistance as “the unified action to generate, employ, and sustain local, host-nation, or regional security forces in support of a legitimate authority” (FM 3-07). Read more:

- *Commander’s Handbook for Security Force Assistance* (July 2008)
- TC 31-73, *Special Forces Advisor Guide* (July 2008)
- FM 3-07, *Stability Operations* (October 2008)
- FM 3-07.1 *Security Force Assistance* (May 2009)
- JCISFA, *Afghan National Security Forces (ANSF) Advisor Guide* (June 2012)
- JCISFA, *Security Force Assistance Candidate Doctrine Publication* (June 2012)



The SFAB mission creates time for non-deploying soldiers to train critical individual skills—like the 3rd Brigade, 4th Infantry Division soldiers at Fort Carson who earned their Expert Infantryman Badge in August 2012.

sions, with input from U.S. Army Human Resources Command, we carried all officers who fell into this category as in their KD position with an additional duty as a SFAAT leader/team member.

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As our mission in Afghanistan has evolved, so has the way we've task organized for it. Previously, the emphasis was on Brigade Combat Teams owning battlespace

SFAAT (351 personnel) in December 2011. We prepared, trained, executed a JRTC MRX, and deployed the teams in April 2012 for nine months. We did not have a Rear-D. We developed 3BCT (AFG) on the SFAAT mission and 3BCT on the full-spectrum operations training mission. We left 3,538 soldiers and leaders at Fort Carson—to include all CSMs, three of six battalion commanders, and one senior company commander per battalion. Lieutenants became company commanders, SFCs became first sergeants, and warrant officers formed the base of the brigade staff. Designated officers at Fort Carson executed change-of-command inventories and signed for the property from the deploying SFAAT company commanders. We executed a series of Leader Professional Development (LPD) sessions for our new command teams focused on property accountability, legal affairs, care for Soldiers and training management. Our home-station training focused on the fundamentals, including EIB, EFMB, and many other individual-skills events along with gunnery and live-fire training up to squad level.

In addition to leader training, the identification and stabilization of the home station key and essential team are critical. Analyze the potential impact of every MOS. For example, reducing 91-series soldiers to below 50 percent created challenges in services that cannot be overcome without help.

Ryan Morgan

For 2/10 Mountain, we reorganized as a Security Force Assistance Brigade and trained as such prior to our deployment. An SFAB includes the SFAAT teams, along with security and enablers, self-contained under reduced brigade and battalion staffs. This task organization should create better unity of command because everyone is part of the same organic brigade. SFABs are more battlespace "integrators" than "owners." How do you rate officers who are not working in their assigned positions? After many discus-

spaces and partnering with Afghan Security Forces—with teams of advisors embedded with Afghan units; now, that has shifted to Security Force Assistance Brigades with a primary mission of advising and, instead of battlespace owners, we are battlespace integrators. There are obvious challenges with this mission, for both those deployed and those at home station. But as Zan Hornbuckle and others emphasized, the mission brings opportunities as well.

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...becoming more effective.**



Art by Jody Harmon

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