Commanding a headquarters and headquarters company (HHC) provides unique challenges not inherent in other line companies. Because of its organizational structure and diversity of personnel, leading an HHC requires deliberate preparation and effective learning. Adequately preparation will ensure you have success early and often.

**5. What were/have been some of your major experiences as a company commander? (e.g. deployment, CTC rotation, gunnery, loss of a soldier)**

In terms of training and achieving, our Battalion FTX and our multi-national exercise Vigilant Pacific (VIGPAC) sit at the top of my experience list. Both events tested our mission command as well as our planning and execution abilities. The collective training events built a sense of teamwork and comradery. On the other hand, in the second day of command I found myself in the Psychiatric Wing due to a Soldier issue. Working through the intricacies of the medical field without a dedicated medical officer was difficult to say the least. However, establishing communication with key stakeholders to synchronize information was helpful.

**6. How did your first 90 days in command go? Did you make any major changes? Why or why not?**

Fast and Furious. The first 90 days encompassed multiple visits to the Psyc Ward and supporting a multi-national exercise. I was fortunate to obtain good read-ahead documents on the CC Forum prior to taking command. During my change of command inventories, I took advantage by conducting an informal climate assessment with the hand receipt holder. I was surprised by the blunt remarks from the ranks throughout my inventory. Most complaints revolved around the “lack of teamwork and cohesion” in the unit. I realized I was in a “change” situation and had to devise a plan to achieve quick wins. One of the major changes was developing PT competitions and family oriented events focused on building a cohesive team. Having an awesome FRG Leader (my wife) definitely helped. I also worked with the battalion commander to ensure all Staff officers and senior NCOs were present at PRT (this was a major complaint). Competition enhanced our unit pride and fostered teamwork.

**7. Can you describe the leader development program in your company? Describe your role in the process of designing and executing the program.**

Our leader development program, developed by my 1SG, revolved around the tenets of mission command. I provided the overall plan and guidance while the 1SG executed it. We tried to emphasize leader development in “everything we do” beyond the typical monthly LPD sessions. From PRT to AWT we emphasized the 8-step training model and leader development. There are leader opportunities in routine events that can be utilized to instill the tenets of mission command. Other LPD topics included: Writing an NCOER narrative (in preparation for the new NCOER), Career Progression (discussing SOF, Drill Sergeant assignments etc), and time managements skills. As an HHC with a diverse set of MOS, it was imperative that our LPDs were broad and leveraged multiple experiences.

**8. How did you approach training management? Do you have anything to pass on to help other company commanders?**

Start with the BDE and BN Training Guidance and then think horizontally as well. The Army Training Network and CC Forum are also great resources. You will find these are great foundations for understanding training management. Also, prioritize the Soldiers and the unit’s mission. Focus training on why the unit exists (METL), not on the “cool” training you want to do. Utilize training meetings to get buy-in from leaders. As an HHD/HHC, flexibility and balance were the key to success. I often informed the XO and S3 of upcoming Company training events to obtain support from the top. I also realized that every section has their own priority so offering multiple iterations of training helped the sections.

**10. What has been your toughest leadership challenge? How did you address it?**

As an HHD/HHC, flexibility and balance have been key to success. The on-going leadership challenge is having two field grades, the BN Command team, and other staff officers in the same company. Everyone has their own priorities and opinions on how to accomplish their mission. After a year in command of an HHD/HHC, I completely understand why an HHD/HHC is a different type of command. Every staff officer and staff section have their own agenda. Upon taking over I gave a notecard to each of the staff OICs and had them list three sustains and improves for the unit. This helped me gain their perspective on how I can help them overcome challenges. Working directly with staff OICs and letting them know that I was responsible for their training and welfare helped build trust and relationships.

**11. As you look back on all of the things you did prior to taking command, is there one experience that prepared you for the responsibility/challenges of command more than any other? If so, please share a little bit about that experience and why it stuck with you.**

My experience in the 75th Ranger Regiment as well as the Maneuver Captains Career Course (MCCC) adequately prepared me for command. While in Regiment, I had experience of leading a robust and diverse intelligence team. I learned that if you try to please everyone you already lost. I also learned the importance of leadership, self-improvement, and caring for Soldiers. The MCCC did a great job grounding students in regulations, policies, and doctrine. I have found in command that you will not know everything, but you can always rely on regulations, policies, and doctrine. Command will pull you in various directions and therefore one must prioritize. Finally, I owe my peers and CC Forum for assistance. As I prepared for command, I reached out to several of my friends who were already in command.

Having a deliberate plan while not feeling like I had to take action was also key.

**12. Describe your relationship with your 1SG. Do you have anything to pass on to help other company commanders in regards to CO CDR-1SG relationships? What's the story behind it?**

I have had two different 1SGs with equally different relationships. For CDRs about to take command, I recommend you draft your 1SG counseling and prepare to abide by the 30-day initial counseling timeline. You would be surprised at how many Senior NCOs have not received their counseling. I also recommend prioritizing getting to know your 1SG in the first 30-90 days. Have lunch together, PT together, etc. The Soldiers have to see the CDR and 1SG have no daylight in between them.

**13. Is there anything else you'd like to share with future company commanders?**

I’d like to recommend the following prior to taking command:

1. **Prepare for Command by conducting effective learning.** As a junior officer with command aspirations, you should immediately begin learning about what the position entails. Efficient and deliberate learning is key. Taking the Guidon is great primer and one of many resources that provides junior officers tried and tested tactics on approaching the complexities of command. The JO blog is also a great resource. Develop what kind of leadership and commander your organization requires. One size does not fit all! You have to adapt to your situation.

a. What challenges does your company face? What challenges are on the horizon (30,60,90 days)? Use both formal and informal channels to answer these questions. Command climate surveys, OIP, previous AARs are all good resources to gauge your company’s previous performance. Also, the change of command inventories also provide a great opportunity to gauge the company.

b. What/where are the most important opportunities for improvement? How can you influence these opportunities?

c. Where should you place your focus/ energy?

2. **Develop relationships with key stakeholders.** As an HHC CDR, relationships are critical to your success and advancing any initiatives. Developing both vertical and horizontal relationships are equally important. Use your time prior to assuming command in getting to know your organization. Don’t fall into the action imperative and feel like you have to change everything.

3. **Develop a transition plan.** The plan must encompass, pre-command (30-days), 1 week, 30 days, 60 days, and 90 days. In essence, the quicker you learn the better your transition will be. If I had to command again, I would have developed a more deliberate plan.

4. **Meet with your boss and establish expectations early and often.**  As a Commander, you will have enough rope to hang yourself. Upon reflection, I should have established more fluid communications with my BN CDR, the S3, and the XO.

5. **Do only what a commander can do, delegate everything else (except responsibility).** By doing and making decisions only a commander can, you empower your subordinates. Build working relationships with the BN CSM and staff leadership. You do not have to like them but work with them. Have fun, you are only a company commander once!