

## **Company Command Interview cao 15 Mar 2018**

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### *1. How did you prepare for command?*

I was blessed to get to know the commander before me for almost a year before I took command. I was able to observe the commander, ask questions, and get to know the battle rhythm. The more you know about a potential command the better prepared you are to take over. However, that is a luxury not everybody gets. I also had a chance to look at the property book, the personnel that were in the unit, and to see what expectations existed for the commander.

### *2. How did your first 90 days in command go (or if within 90 days how is it going)? Did you make any major changes? Why or why not?*

The first 90 days is kind of like a honeymoon period. Soldiers are generally excited about the potential of a new command, and a commander is excited at the opportunity. However, very quickly complacency can set in. While I made few changes to the operating procedures for the unit, I personally made a point to apply the best things that I saw my predecessor do. My biggest concern wasn't changing everything, but rather ensuring that the initial path, and plans setup in preparation for my taking over were brought to fruition. I did this because the commander before me was highly successful, and any changes that I made would largely be tweaks on the generally fine-tuned operating environment that existed. As a new commander it is important to acknowledge what is working well in a unit. It is also important not to try and change things too fast, but to focus on influencing fellow leaders, and working through your subordinate leaders to accomplish change while sustaining current success. Any success of the commander depends entirely on the unit and its leaders. So the influencing part of leadership is as important as the motivational aspect. Ultimately, inspiring purpose and providing direction are the basics of taking over, and this depends on commander who is purpose driven and operating under a proper and clear set of motives.

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

As a headquarters company commander the biggest experiences for me involved the progress, and or transition of military members. I enjoyed seeing Soldiers achieve personal career success, and also enjoyed seeing Soldiers successfully retire, and or separate and go on to successful post-military careers. I enjoyed our unit events, and training, but the biggest moments for me was the major milestones that I got see my Soldiers reach.

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

Our leadership development program consisted of a list of topics that my commander, command sergeant, first sergeant and I thought important to address with our leaders, and junior Soldiers. However, I considered my role in leadership development a daily responsibility. Some time ago the Army adopted a physical, mental, and spiritual spectrum that Soldiers should attempt to master as they seek to become better Soldiers, and leaders. I truly believe physical, mental, and spiritual fitness (whatever your faith background) is the foundation for healthy leaders. Upon that solid and health core the other leadership competencies can be developed. Whenever I have a chance I seek to enhance the overall fitness and thus leadership foundation of unit Soldiers. Everything becomes easier when a Soldier has healthy understanding of what they believe, why they are serving, what they value, and how their family, and personal health all interact with their decision making. I encourage leaders to practice “self-care”, master their limits, while also seeking to expand their skills, character attributes, knowledge and overall awareness of their role, responsibilities in conjunction with the unit’s overall mission. As a leader comes to understand themselves better they will be in a better position to understand, motivate, and lead Soldiers. Motivation is the key to successful leadership. A leader that is confident, motivated, and inspired to serve can lead a team to accomplish what others thought was impossible.

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

Training is what we do when we are not at combat. Every day is a training opportunity. You don’t have to be in the field to train, and you don’t have to have a lot of equipment to train. As we seek combat readiness the most important things are those that relate to combat readiness. Training readiness isn’t just weapons proficiency and field exercises. Training readiness starts with once again physical, mental, and spiritual fitness. I’ve seen fellow units spend a lot of time “training”, and conversely struggle with the basics... what is most important?... they are both important. However, the finely tuned balance depends on a keen understanding of the commander’s intent and the unit personnel and objectives as a whole. I try to look at the unit and what are the biggest needs, and go from there. I bounce everything off of trusted advisors if I have a chance, and in particular query my commander as frequently as possible to make sure that I’m not falling off azimuth. I hate to say it but “checking” all of the blocks and missing the commander’s intent or having Soldiers who are drowning in personal problems without prioritizing their basic fitness is a great way to develop a culture of “looking right” while simultaneously combusting inside.

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

The toughest leadership challenge for me involves knowing what to do with Soldiers who have problems that I haven't faced, i.e. a spouse with cancer, legal problems etc... Knowing what I can do and can't, and knowing my limits is a daily challenge, and building a culture of trust, tactical patience, and persistence all relate to the overall leadership challenge of knowing my Soldiers, and trying to discern the right leadership steps. It also relates directly to knowing when I've done enough, and when other resources and guidance are required. Ultimately, when in doubt seek guidance.

*7. 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.*

Losing my father while I was in my first command, and struggling with coworkers, and leadership that I didn't understand helped shape my personal resilience, and determination to serve as a passionate, empathetic, and sincere leader wherein in times past I was focused primarily on "success", now I'm focused on the welfare of Soldiers in general, and what guidance, and inspiration they need to potentially turn the corner on their own challenges. Also further understanding "free will", and emphasizing that with Soldiers, and the incumbent responsibility that comes with choices, and the importance of making informed decisions in light of personal, family, professional, and unit goals/missions.

*8. 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 been blessed with several good First Sergeants. The relationship between the First Sergeant and company commander will make or break command time. Relationships in general will make or break a command time. The relationship is what you make of it.... Taking the time to build rapport is largely dependent on a commander...very rarely a breakdown will occur and very rarely the breakdown will be attributed to the first sergeant. The onus is on the commander to build the relationship. New commanders are often younger, less experienced, and more ambitious. First sergeants are often more experienced, patient, and committed to the long haul. The ability to be flexible, patient, listen, and to follow a first sergeant's advice, and or always deeply consider it is a hallmark of a commander who is willing to put ambitions and personal motives aside in respect for the overall unit health, and in respect for the experience and wisdom that a first sergeant typically has. If there are problems with the first sergeant it will be evident to everybody. If there is a problem with the commander, the commander's only hope is that they will be smart enough to listen to the first sergeant and correct themselves.

*9. What is one piece of advice unique to your command that will help other commanders in your branch/command situation? (HHC, Branch, Garrison, Recruiting etc).*

I command an HHC for a Garrison. I've never had to be more patient. However, I've never been so blessed to have such a blend of experience and the opportunity to impact more lives. Impacting lives, developing leaders, and seeing them achieve success has been the best opportunity that I've had to date in the Army.

*10. In your view, what separates a good commander from a great commander?*

A great commander is a commander who realizes that he or she has a role in an overall organization. He or she plays that role, and doesn't get out of that role just like a player on a basketball team. I think of a commander in comparison to a basketball point guard. A great commander develops an understanding and a relationship with each player on the team, and distributes and delegates tasks in accordance with each player's role, and each player's ability and potential. However, even in a Soldier has many challenges, the commander doesn't cease to try and inspire that Soldier, and to give them opportunities to succeed understanding that it is up to each Soldier to choose to pursue an opportunity to excel. The commander facilitates the team success by being a role model, a positive and energetic leader, a hard worker, and yet a balanced individual who cares more about the players and their success than their own success. A great commander is willing to go the extra mile when appropriate, and knows when to trust a leader to accomplish something. A great commander also knows when they've done enough and when a Soldier and a leader must pick up the ball and do the rest.

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

Get rid of expectations, take one day at a time... drop the ambitions for the future, and focus on today. Today is only opportunity that we can be sure of... enjoy today, prepare for tomorrow, and don't obsess over the little things to the point that you miss the big things. Be thankful for the opportunity, and treat it like it might be your last opportunity to lead. Keep your priorities, work, family, and personal life in balance with health expectations for each. Get to know your Soldiers...take the time to talk with them in their various shops and sections... Accept responsibility for unit problems, in general, but hold Soldiers, and leaders responsible for their individual choices by directly talking to them and emphasizing the importance of making informed and patient choices. Emphasize the importance of healthy life balance incorporating physical, mental, and spiritual fitness as they see fit. Don't assume you know better than anyone at their specialty, even if you were enlisted and held their MOS. Smile. Smile some more. Joke, and laugh whenever possible. Show your Soldiers that a tough job can be made easier when you enjoy doing what you do, and you enjoy the little things. Work must be done, hard things must be accomplished, but do we have to punish ourselves while we do it, or can we have fun while we work? Stress is important to incorporate to

make training effective, right? So on the other side of the spectrum shouldn't teambuilding, and knowing how to appropriately have fun be an important exercise for leaders? Far too often I think we adopt the mindset that everything must be stressful, and we aren't working unless life is painful. There must be balance to stress and fun. Just like there must be a day and a night. Know when to be serious, and be consistent so Soldiers know when fun is over, and when critical work must be done. Be serious about the commander's intent to the point that it is fully adopted as your own. Own it fully. Discuss and ask questions face to face in private with the commander, and when the decision is made, make it your own. Far too often rifts occur in the chain of command, and far too often it is simply pride getting in the way of things. When it comes to your personal goals, simply set a goal of having better health, and better relationships with those you work with and your family by the end of command. Always be ready to learn, grow, and enjoy each day for what it is, an opportunity that might not last much longer.