

Company Command Interview

CPT Gavin Hill is nearing the end of his first year as the commander for Charlie Troop, 5-73 CAV, 3 BCT, 82nd ABN DIV. Some highlights of the interview include: *“It was a long road but our dedication paid off and we now have three new Ranger Graduates in our Troop, seven in pre-Ranger and two in RSLC as a March 2018, five scheduled for Sniper in March 2018, and six scheduled for RSLC in April 2018.”*

“Charlie Troop as a dismounted reconnaissance force operating well ahead of the BDE FLOT for 72-96 hours and conduct area reconnaissance of NAI’s critical to the BDE, than fix it” “

1. How did you prepare for command? As an infantry officer with no reconnaissance experience, who was scheduled to command a dismounted reconnaissance troop in the 82nd Airborne, I worked as hard as possible on staff and self-studied reconnaissance doctrine to prepare. Don’t view your time on staff as a burden, it’s not. Working hard on staff fully integrates you into your new unit and allows you time to sharpen your training and resourcing abilities prior to taking command. Good staff officers make good commanders. Additionally, spend some quality time preparing initial counselings, formats, trackers, and what not. Once you get in the hot seat there isn’t time.

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 in command we very smoothly. I must caution new commanders to not fall into a “honeymoon” mindset though. At the 90-day mark, we had a rash of serious incidents that really laid bare some of the underlying issues in the Troop that needed to be addressed. Don’t be scared to make changes. If something’s wrong fix it on the spot.

3. What were/have been some of your major experiences as a company commander? (e.g. deployment, CTC rotation, gunnery, loss of a soldier) During my time in command the Troop conducted a Brigade Joint Forcible Entry (JFE), a JRTC rotation, Troop CALFEX, and a Squad and Platoon LFX density. JRTC was one of the greatest experiences of my command time. The ability to push the Troop to the limits, validate existing SOPs, and develop new ones was invaluable. If you have a TACSOP, ensure that it is updated after every training event. Assign subordinate leaders within your Troop to update individual parts of it, and give a small LPD to relevant leaders over the changes before it goes final.

4. Can you describe the leader development program in your company? Describe your role in the process of designing and executing the program. In C TRP, 5-73 CAV, 3 BCT, 82nd ABN DIV our PLs and PSGs are hand selected. Due to the unique mission set of Infantry-Scouts our PSGs are selected for their prior experience in reconnaissance. Our Platoon Leaders are all second time PLs. Only having two Platoons means our PLs are always over-tasked, this is a good thing. It prepares them

for being an overtasked commander. Once a week the Platoon Leaders and I sit down to discuss various topics. These topics range from how to build Chapter Packets and the Article 15 process to simple tactical decision making exercises.

5. How did you approach training management? Do you have anything to pass on to help other company commanders? Will your experiences deployed change the way you lead and train soldiers? We expect subordinate leaders in the Troop from Squad Leaders and up to be able to plan, resource, and execute training with little oversight. Oftentimes our Squad Leaders will develop their own CONOPs and risk assessments to conduct training independently. Platoon Leaders routinely find themselves resourcing training events similar to how an XO would in a Rifle Company. This gives our second time PLs an opportunity to get their feet wet with some XO tasks and gain experience they will not otherwise receive. Secondly, if you're going to plan training, take the time to make it the best and most realistic training imaginable. There are many training events the Troop has conducted that were so challenging and realistic it made me a little uncomfortable as the OIC. However, the proper risk mitigation measures were in place and everything worked out wonderfully.

6. What has been your toughest leadership challenge? How did you address it? Building morale back in the Troop after a string of alcohol related incidents in the summer of 2017. It was bad, I mean really bad. For a two month period we had serious incidents almost weekly. Luckily no Soldiers were killed as a result of the incidents, but a lot of careers suffered. The incidents really can't be attributed to any one cause. There were several E4s who had soured on the Army and were waiting to ETS who reported to Saturday EIB training drunk. Another Soldier received a DUI on his second day in the Troop. Another Soldier in our Mortar Section went AWOL for a short period of time while we were chaptering him out. The list goes on. 1SG and I stayed focused on getting back to teaching the fundamentals of reconnaissance and motivating Soldiers to attend Ranger School, Sniper School, and the Reconnaissance and Surveillance Leaders Course. It was a long road but our dedication paid off and we now have three new Ranger Graduates in our Troop, seven in pre-Ranger and two in RSLC as a March 2018, five scheduled for Sniper in March 2018, and six scheduled for RSLC in April 2018. It's been truly inspiring to see this unit pull itself up by its boot straps and become stronger than before.

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. Planning the Squadron's gunnery in 2017. As a light infantryman with no mounted experience it was a tall order to plan a Crew Gunnery and Platoon LFX for the Squadron. This opportunity allowed me to work closely with a Master Gunner and learn a great deal. It also taught me the ropes of how Fort Bragg Range Control operates and how training management works in the 82nd. It was an invaluable experience that paid off hugely.

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've had two First Sergeants and both are phenomenal. Remember, it is a two-way street. Neither person is right 100% of the time. My first First Sergeant was a former Long Range Surveillance (LRS) Soldier and RSLC instructor so I came in humble and learned a vast amount about reconnaissance from him. He also showed me the ropes of how the Troop operated administratively and tactically. The biggest tip I can give you is to define your roles (administratively and tactically) and hold each other accountable. Never disagree in front of your Soldiers.

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).

If you are in an IBCT, try to get a Charlie Troop as a second command. I was fortunate to get a Charlie Troop as a first command and have truly enjoyed it. It will teach you a new side to maneuver operations. If your IBCT is properly employing the Charlie Troop as a dismounted reconnaissance force operating well ahead of the BDE FLOT for 72-96 hours and conduct area reconnaissance of NAI's critical to the BDE, than fix it. It is a powerful organization when properly utilized. You'll really enjoy the freedom and autonomy of commanding an organization like this.

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

Enjoy your command. It goes by too fast. Before taking command make a list of what you want to accomplish, then half that, then pick the top three things you want to get done, and focus on those.