



HARD LESSONS

BY THE COMMAND SERGEANTS MAJOR OF
OPERATIONS GROUP, NATIONAL TRAINING CENTER



APPROVED FOR PUBLIC RELEASE
DISTRIBUTION UNLIMITED



PUBLICATIONS

10 Meade Avenue
BLDG 50
FORT LEAVENWORTH
KANSAS 66027-1350



**@CENTER for ARMY
LESSONS LEARNED**



@USARMY_CALL

CENTER for ARMY LESSONS LEARNED



MISSION:

The Center for Army Lessons Learned leads the Army Lessons Learned Program and delivers timely and relevant information to resolve gaps, enhance readiness, and inform modernization.

DIRECTOR

..... COL Christopher Keller

CONTRIBUTORS

..... Operations Group, The National Training Center

CALL ANALYST

..... Mr. Kevin Kreie

PLANS DIVISION CHIEF

..... Mr. Eric Hillner

PUBLISHING AND DIGITAL MEDIA CHIEF EDITOR

..... Mrs. Diana Keeler

EDITOR

..... Mr. Zack Shelby

ILLUSTRATOR

..... Ms. Joyce Burnett

SECURITY

..... The National Training Center

REQUEST FOR INFORMATION

DNS 552-9533

COMMERCIAL 913-684-9533

EMAIL:

usarmy.leavenworth.mccoe.mbx.call-rfi-manager-mailbox@mail.mil



Table of Contents

FOREWORD.....	1
CHAPTER 1: A Role Often Forgotten.....	3
CHAPTER 2: Noncommissioned Officer Managing Friction at the National Training Center.....	7
CHAPTER 3: Command Sergeant Major Presence.....	11
CHAPTER 4: Letter to my First Sergeants.....	17
CHAPTER 5: Managing Personnel in a Brigade Combat Team Formation	23
CHAPTER 6: Reimagine Your Promotion Board	27
CHAPTER 7: Reporting the Climate	31
APPENDIX A: Acronyms	35

Figures

Figure 2-1. Command and control warfighting function	8
------------------------------------------------------------	---



FOREWORD

Sergeants major,

This handbook was inspired by the book, *66 Stories of Battle Command*, written by Adela A. Frame and James W. Lussier. The book includes stories written by commanders about their experiences during rotations at the National Training Center (NTC). The book features stories with titles such as *Pressure to Decide*, *Rock Drills for a Common Picture*, and *Leadership in a Composite Brigade Combat Team (BCT)*." Each story provides "a way" to other commanders before they have to make a decision for a specific situation.

The sergeants major (SGMs) of Operations Group at NTC have the same intentions with the publication of this handbook. We acknowledge from our experiences that we are often judged as an SGM or command sergeant major (CSM) during stressful situations. These situations are not exclusive to combat operations. Other applicable situations may include mentoring subordinates, managing organizational systems, or just maturing as an SGM.

We understand some of the stories provided will create differing opinions, but are only intended to share our experiences with those that may experience the same or similar situations. The stories include experiences as an operations SGM and CSM at the battalion and brigade levels. In each rotation, we observe SGMs who, once exposed to a situation, produce extraordinary results. These stories are not meant to expose any unit; they are meant to unearth possible solutions. As always, we are here to help leaders mentor the most important assets in your formation, American Soldiers. For anything you may need, please do not hesitate to contact us.

Quentin (FEN) Fenderson
Outlaw 40
Operations Group
The National Training Center

CHAPTER 1: A Role Often Forgotten

**By CSM Quentin Fenderson, Outlaw 40,
National Training Center Operations Group Command Sergeant Major**

In the role of a command sergeant major (CSM) or sergeant major (SGM), you must establish yourself as the role model for your team. You must ensure the expected and perceived roles you play are also the roles you personify. Furthermore, you must build a cohesive team by setting a tone for effective communication and positive feedback. The team is made with leaders building trust, confidence, loyalty, and respect in each other. This mutual example of team leadership influences the entire unit and enables the entire unit to operate as an efficient, cohesive, mission-oriented team. Unfortunately, these points, along with others identified throughout the following passage, were forgotten in my first 60 days as an SGM.

United States Army Sergeants Major Academy Graduation

So there I was (yeah, I said it) energized, educated (at least I thought so), and ready to assume my duties as an operations SGM at the Joint Multinational Readiness Center (JMRC) in Hohenfels, Germany. Our family just completed permanent change of station (PCS) leave. Despite not wanting to leave our children, (two daughters in college and a son in Atlanta), we packed up from our house in Fort Bragg, NC, and looked forward to my responsibility as an SGM.

Just two months earlier, I was enjoying the relaxing aroma of the “master bedroom” at the United States Army Sergeants Major Academy (USASMA). Suddenly, my wife, our dog, and I were flying across the Atlantic Ocean. I remember the entire trip. I was thinking about all the tasks I needed to complete to ensure my organization would be successful. Because of my experience as a battalion master gunner, I witnessed previous operations officers and operations SGMs run a successful operations cell shop. In my mind, there was nothing preventing me from doing the same thing.

Upon arrival, I recognized that the battalion commander and I previously served together, which further increased my comfort level. I also flew to Germany with the incoming CSM, and from our initial conversation, felt that this was going to be a positive experience.

Shortly after being assigned to the battalion, I was enjoying myself. Each day was a new adventure and I was responsible for keeping the organization synchronized and tasked accordingly—a natural strength of mine. Daily challenges were part of the fuel I used to keep me rowing. One day, the CSM came down to my office and informed me he was retiring and recommending me to assume CSM duties (the following week).

The approval of his decision changed my world. Suddenly, I became categorized as “them” and “they.” I became the person everyone looked to for answers and came to for advice and recommendations. I quickly realized I was in over my head. For the first time in my career, instead of acting in the role for which I was currently assigned, I reverted back to the previous leadership position I served in—a first sergeant (1SG).

Of course this did not go over well for anyone, including the commander. I found myself micromanaging not only the process, but the actions. I provided inputs to the 1SGs to get specific outputs. I offered minimal mentorship other than harsh backlash when tasks were not completed to a standard I envisioned. When it came to recommendations to the commander, there was rarely much thought involved. I provided what I felt he wanted to hear. I quickly became the SGM everyone avoided and made jokes about when I walked away. Although I was knowledgeable as an infantryman, I was performing terribly as the CSM. The results were there, but only because of the officers and noncommissioned officers (NCOs) in the formation. I added nothing of value to the organization.

Leadership Graduation

*As an SGM, you do not command anything,
but you are the one who makes the team work.*

My wife shared stories she heard from others who came in to her work (housing office). They said I was difficult to work with, and a micromanager.

I was devastated and decided there was only one way to fix this image I created. I had to get feedback from those who I interacted with daily—the 1SGs. As one could imagine, tension was rampant and some of the comments shed light on how I was failing the organization in those first 60 days at something I always felt was my strength—building teams.

USASMA offers many opportunities to gain experience on strategic requirements you may or may not come in contact with during your tenure as an SGM. As I said before, it provided me a reenergized level of confidence. It also provided me with an opportunity to be a part of a team. After spending 10 months with more than 700 other master sergeants, I forgot the importance of being on a team. Sixty days passed after graduating the academy and I realized my mistake.

Maintaining a solid team requires never letting go of the professional values and ethics that helped develop that team. Consideration of the following is critical to achieving success as an SGM:

- Always be loyal to the ideals of your country and unit.
- Take personal responsibility seriously and demonstrate selfless service, an element that takes teamwork.
- Continue to show the four soldierly values that earned you the distinguished honor of being an SGM: courage, candor, competence, and commitment.
- As an SGM, you do not command anything, but you are the one who makes the team work.
- It is important to forge relationships with the commander, field grade officers, staff members, subordinate command teams, and your higher headquarters, both commander and CSM.
- You are not the commander.
- Relationships and team building is a continuous process.
- Set the example.
- Take care of your Soldiers and their families.
- Do not forget where you came from.
- Do not abuse your position.
- Do not forget you are a trainer.
- You must train, teach, and mentor your 1SGs.
- You will not win all battles; however, do not fall on your sword too soon or often.
- Coordinate to ensure you are not conflicting efforts.
- Know and understand customs and courtesies, including ceremonial standard operating procedures (SOPs).

I focused on the aforementioned areas to change how I interacted with my organization and become a more valuable asset. Along with understanding what it takes to build a team, developing in these areas allowed our unit to grow. We were moving as one team. Although we still faced challenges, we handled them as one. We did not allow ego and arrogance to tear us apart. More than anything, I realized what a great opportunity it was to serve our nation's sons and daughters, and to never make light of that afforded responsibility.

Allowing feedback does not negate your position as an SGM; it gives you an opportunity to provide valuable feedback to your commander. Because we are another lens of today's society, we have to take into consideration the possible personal experiences found in our formations. Is there anything better than getting to know subordinate leaders and the Soldiers they are serving? Allow them to be a part of the team and so the organization can grow. Do not allow a lack of shared interests and age differences to stunt growth, which could be vital to a successful assignment.

CHAPTER 2: Noncommissioned Officer Managing Friction at the National Training Center

**By CSM Quentin Fenderson, Outlaw 40,
National Training Center Operations Group Command Sergeant Major**

There are three definitions for "friction." One definition is "the resistance that one surface or object encounters when moving over another." A second definition describes "the action of one surface or object rubbing against another." These definitions have similarities to words such as "abrasion," "abrading," "rubbing," "chafing," etc. The term often used at the National Training Center (NTC) is common with a third definition, which is "conflict or animosity caused by a clash of wills, temperaments, or opinions." This definition is in concert with words such as "discord," "disharmony," "disunity," "disagreement," and "conflict." These are all words that have been used to describe disconnected efforts during large-scale combat operations (LSCO) at NTC.

Either just before or during a rotation, sergeants major (SGMs) ask me about the different successful tactics, techniques, and procedures (TTP) used in prior rotations or home-station training events. Honestly, I appreciate the request because it allows our team (Operations Group) to gain some insight into a unit's training proficiency level. I often want to ask units, "What are the friction points in your formation?" As a command sergeant major (CSM), I have been the training audience at a combat training center (CTC) four times. I have also had the pleasure of serving as an SGM in an opposing forces (OPFOR) battalion for 13 rotations. I have found that my CTC rotation was usually somewhat a reflection of my unit's home-station training.

Often, when asked about the friction points that CSMs/SGMs need to focus on, I assume a proper assessment was not done during home-station training or the SGMs were not involved in home-station training events (possibly for multiple reasons). Senior noncommissioned officers (NCOs) should be aware of friction points in their formations. If you struggled with subordinate leaders turning in maintenance reports at home station, you will typically struggle at NTC. If you have an issue with Soldiers staying in uniform at home station, the same friction inevitably occurs during your CTC rotation ... especially when you encounter NTC's harsh desert environment.

Friction is often a reflection of struggles already taking place in a formation. I have spoken with 10 brigade combat team (BCT) CSMs before their rotations and every area they requested observer coach/trainers (OC/Ts) to focus on have been the areas they identified before their deployment. These friction points frequently revolve around basic standards and discipline throughout the formation. A CSM/SGM who struggles or lacks the ability to assess their organization properly during the unit train up fights an uphill battle overcoming friction once on the ground at NTC. A CSM/SGM who understands friction points in their formation, but does not address them, becomes part of the problem.

There are three phases units will execute during the operations process: planning, preparation, and execution. Each phase will carry friction if NCO roles and responsibilities are not defined during training events. The following are examples by phase:

Planning:

- Capabilities (standard/nonstandard casualty evacuation [CASEVAC] vehicles)
- Maintenance status for all equipment (for example, does the equipment status report [ESR] capture all assigned equipment?)
- Personnel status (for example, how many deployable/nondeployable Soldiers are assigned?)

Preparation:

- Precombat checks/inspections (PCCs/PCIs) (for personnel and equipment, which leader is responsible for conducting them and when?)
- Reinforcing the commander's intent (including good order/discipline)
- Shared understanding (mission orders/task and purpose)

Execution:

- Disciplined initiative (identifying and addressing gaps)
- Leading through identified friction (physically/mentally)

These are some examples where many NCOs fail to insert themselves, creating challenges to accomplish the mission. Often, Operations Group sees this in the sustainment warfighting function (WfF), and not necessarily from Soldiers with logistician career management fields (CMFs). NCOs who fail to insert themselves in the operations process may include Bradley (fighting vehicles)/tank commanders who do not ensure their crews conduct proper preventive maintenance checks and services (PMCS), first sergeants (1SGs) who do not ensure company executive officers (XOs) receive logistics statuses (LOGSTATs) from platoons, or even CSMs who do not verify with brigade support battalion (BSB) CSMs that their unit has provided accurate reporting to shape future support requirements.

NCOs should display as much ownership of their unit as their officer counterparts. When this does not happen, units find that their initial issues have become impossible to correct during the rotation. See figure 2-1 describing the areas (elements of combat power) in which staff members and commanders typically focus. The other areas (not circled), often neglected (friction points), are typically where NCOs can provide assistance.

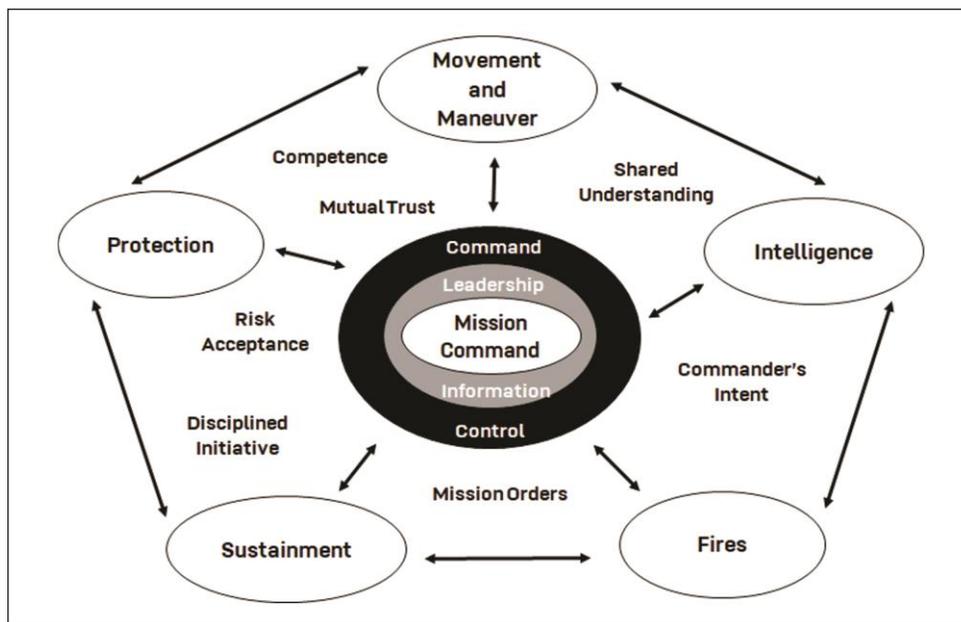


Figure 2-1. Command and control warfighting function.
Source: Modified from ADP 6-0, Mission Command: Command and Control of Army Forces, introductory figure-1, pg. x, figure 1-2, pg. 1-20.

Conclusion

During training events, we designate our training objectives. These are structured by the unit mission-essential task lists (METLs) and the subtasks that are aligned with them. Expectations are provided by giving clear guidance and using training and resource meetings to ensure coordination of equipment and personnel. Most units do this to create a desired outcome—mission success. Home-station training events provide an opportunity to identify your organization's friction points. As NCOs, we need to acknowledge those areas when advising our commanders during the unit's training progression. If we identify friction during table 1 of the integrated weapons training strategy (IWTS), why would we skip to table 3 expecting success? Friction identified before a rotation at the NTC (unless trained and corrected) will continue to be friction during your rotation at the NTC.

CHAPTER 3: Command Sergeant Major Presence

By CSM Sedrick Brown, Cobra 40, Cavalry Task Force Trainers

The impact of the command sergeant major's (CSM's) presence within the organization through the trusted relationship between the commander and their staff is an essential element of unit success. As an observer coach/trainer (OC/T) at the National Training Center (NTC), my time has been exciting, challenging, and most importantly, a time of learning. Over time, I have observed several brigade combat teams (BCTs) conduct decisive-action rotations. Each organization was unique and brought diverse experiences and capabilities to the table that helped them become adaptable and successful through each phase of training. The success of an organization at the NTC depends largely on the trust and confidence, operational experience, and knowledge of the CSM, and to what extent they were empowered by their commander to be present in areas or points of friction during critical events or moments when the commander could not.

Building the Command Relationship

One of the most important qualities of a leader is their ability to form and maintain a solid relationship with their subordinates. Trust plays a major role in the relationship between a commander and his CSM. Early on, trust is developed through artificial factors such as rank, position, or the number of combat patches, which may be deceiving as they can give an inaccurate reading of a person's experiences or qualifications. In other words, a Soldier should not be judged exclusively by their record brief. Before graduating from the United States Army Sergeants Major Academy (USASMA), I contacted the commander at my gaining unit to introduce myself and perhaps come for an early visit before taking responsibility for the unit. I was already aware the current CSM and the operations sergeant major (SGM) would be departing before my arrival, so I would have minimal transition or continuity of processes with whoever was going to be there to "show me around." I was set to arrive and take responsibility when the squadron would be finishing up its combined arms live-fire exercise (LFX) in preparation for a fast-approaching NTC rotation. I had to quickly build a rapport with my commander and subordinate leaders.

A month before the change of responsibility (COR), while still on permanent change of station (PCS) leave, I was invited to the squadron commander's home for dinner. I met the "top 5" senior leaders (commander, CSM, executive officer [XO], S-3, and operations SGM), except for the CSM who already departed the installation. My goal was to meet and greet the team, socialize, and then have an important, in-depth conversation with the group. Gaining mutual trust and communication between us would be the key to our success as a team.

I wanted the commander to know my loyalty to him and the organization was without question. I would work diligently to ensure our Soldiers were ready for combat. I encouraged him to empower me to fill the gaps where he could not, and carry out his vision and intent. I would uphold and maintain standards, good order, and discipline, and be the ideal role model for our subordinate leaders and Soldiers.

The commander's sentiments were expressed to me in the same manner. He encouraged my professional discussions and collaboration. He welcomed any constructive criticism as I was assured to always have his listening ear and confidence. Like most commanders, he was a firm believer in the power of noncommissioned officer (NCO) leadership, and assured me he would back my decisions 99% of the time; of course, there are always disagreements. We were a command team; and as such, our Soldiers were to never see any daylight between the two of us. He would maintain a 51/49% controlling interest ratio in the vote. It was my job to ensure he never made difficult decisions without me providing him with sound advice and an accurate feel from senior NCO squadron leaders.

Once gaining a person's trust, they have assurance in your actions and decisions. Even when in doubt, they will be influenced by your leadership because they believe you will follow through on anything you say you will do. This was the commander's vision for our relationship.

Presence through Engaged Leadership

The duties and scope of a CSM are different from one military occupational specialty (MOS) to another. Regardless of the type of organization they represent, the CSM is always expected to be present and engaged throughout the formation to ensure leaders and Soldiers understand what is expected of them, and to promote a positive command climate throughout the organization. Part of the CSM's responsibilities is ensuring the commander's vision and intent for the unit are understood and disseminated to the lowest level.

In preparation for NTC, there was plenty to comprehend and grasp in a short amount of time. To create a fresh tone of positive organizational culture, I used face-to-face communication with subordinate leaders and Soldiers to share information and remove as much miscommunication as possible. My primary focus was on NCO professionalism and development. I would accomplish this with personal engagement through presence, while assessing the morale of the organization. Within the first week, I met with each first sergeant (1SG) and their troops to establish the initial pulse of the squadron. Soon after, I conducted short professional development sessions with all NCOs. Discussions included the Army profession, my leadership philosophy, and my expectations of them. I spent countless hours on the weekends at the barracks, conducted lane safety training on the firing line at the qualification range, and helped turn late-night wrenches in the motor pool. I wanted to make an immediate impact that would contribute to my success in leading them.

NCO professional development is the most important responsibility of the CSM. Next to the commander, the CSM is the other half of officer professional development. They must take time to coach lieutenants and captains. Most importantly, they must work to develop a relationship with the XO and the operations officer (S-3). The rapport and camaraderie built with these field grade officers can help extend the CSM's sphere of influence and vice versa, within and outside the organization. Understanding the expectations of each field grade officer and what they bring to the fight helps the CSM properly assess, and provide the necessary advice and feedback to any plans or systems they may produce, respectively. At the same time, the XO and S-3 can assist the CSM in building the NCO/officer team by leveraging their capacity among junior officers.

It is also important the CSM remains in constant dialogue with the commander and staff primaries. In the weeks leading up to our rotation at the NTC, I knew I needed to engage the staff as often as possible to understand the operational procedures of each warfighting function (WfF). Discussions with each staff section were equally important and included the following:

- Personnel strength and personnel requests with the S-1 (administrative)
- An understanding of the NTC operational environment, enemy, and terrain with the S-2 (intelligence)
- Planning and communication between the S-3 and the S-6 (signal)
- Vehicle and equipment sustainment and battlefield replacement with the S-4 (logistics)
- Medical evacuation and casualty assessment with the medical officer
- Addressing the 1SG on how the headquarters and headquarters troop would be sustained throughout the fight
- Timeline implementation between the XO and operations SGM

Taking a proactive approach in these areas helped me identify and address any possible friction points or potential obstacles from the beginning. I was present whenever the commander issued planning guidance to the subordinate commanders and staff primaries. Being present helped cultivate a shared understanding and allowed me to see how the commander engaged with his staff.

Presence on the Battlefield: Points of Friction

The commander and CSM are a team and should be seen together often; however, when unfortunate events negatively affect the welfare and morale of the organization, the commander and CSM should separate to direct, lead, and assess the team to ensure mission accomplishment. Where the commander places themselves on the battlefield is particularly important. They must be in key locations where they can affect the battle and make decisions. The same is true for the CSM, who also needs to understand the operations process and staff capabilities. Having the CSM present during mission analysis to provide input and feedback to staff members can have a positive effect on a mission's outcome.

After arriving at NTC, we began to build combat power. My initial focus was safety and ensuring leaders at every level conducted essential checks regularly to help mitigate the risk of injury or death. I spent the initial days with the commander. He wanted me to contribute to mission planning and execution. The commander needed me to work between the brigade tactical operations center (TOC) and the squadron combat trains command post (CTCP) to stay in touch with the current and future fight. I was empowered to leverage my expertise regarding casualty evacuation (CASEVAC) and resupply.

Whether in training or combat, the CSM is responsible for providing the direction and support Soldiers need daily. On the battlefield, the CSM should always be at or near the point of friction. During force-on-force operations at NTC, friction is almost everywhere. The NTC provides countless ways and numerous places where friction will be encountered. The CSM must recognize they cannot be in the middle of everything or everywhere; and, the commander may not provide guidance regarding where they need the CSM located. Through operational knowledge, experience, and their understanding of the commander's intent, the CSM often figures out the places or events where their level of expertise is needed most.

With the freedom to move throughout the battlefield, the CSM should identify areas, issues, or any concerns that may have adverse effects on the operation. As part of the training unit and as an OC/T, the CSM's involvement in the squadron sustainment planning process and attending the brigade sustainment rehearsal are two areas I found to be important. If there is an area where things can go wrong on the battlefield, the chances of finding it somewhere in the sustainment effort are high. The CSM may not be the technical expert, but being involved and observant helps them understand the plan. During the planning process, the CSM is knowledgeable enough to ask the difficult questions while sharing past experiences and pointing out potential challenges, and removing likely areas of friction up front.

The brigade sustainment rehearsal (the money maker) is critical to success. At the squadron level, key staff attendees include the XO, S-4, forward support company commander, and squadron medical officer. If conducted appropriately, substantial information can be absorbed and shared. The brigade sustainment rehearsal allows the CSM to collaborate with other CSMs to discuss issues, concerns, ideas, any potential drawbacks, and gain insight to the brigade's plan from another's perspective. The CSM can listen in and gain a general understanding of the brigade's entire logistics common operational picture (LOGCOP), including the medical common operational picture (MEDCOP). Knowing the dispositions of other battalions and having a general concept of their scheme of maneuver helps them see areas where, perhaps, their unit may need assistance or where they could support another unit in the same way. It also helps staff members discover areas where they may need to adjust the squadron's logistics plan to alleviate unnecessary challenges. Information and feedback from the brigade sustainment rehearsal are included in the squadron's logistics plan and become part of the squadron sustainment rehearsal.

*Once the battle begins and you cross the line of departure,
points of friction are inevitable.*

Once the battle begins and you cross the line of departure, points of friction are inevitable. As mentioned, the CSM should position themselves in places where they can best support the organization and take care of Soldiers. The following are five areas of interest where the CSM can be functional, and provide inspiration and influence, while maintaining their presence on the battlefield:

- Assist in mission planning at the brigade/battalion TOC or CTCP. Check to ensure logistics status (LOGSTAT) reports and personnel status reports are accurate and on time.
- Move to the brigade support battalion (BSB) or forward logistics element, if established, to check the status of personnel (role 2 casualties and personnel replacement), vehicles, and equipment (evacuations and catastrophic recovery). Ensure all requests from the unit LOGSTAT report have been received.
- Make your way to the field trains command post (FTCP) to ensure the logistics packages (LOGPACs) have returned safely and are prepared for the next mission.
- Locate the medics to ensure role 1 treatment capabilities are operational, standing by, and prepared to execute when needed.
- Move to the logistics release point to link in with the 1SGs or designated representatives to ensure LOGPACs are arriving on time, pass on any information changes, answer any questions, and reinforce the commanders' intent. This is also an ideal place to share insights and provide positive reinforcement.

These areas are not all-inclusive, but are locations where major points of friction can occur and areas where the CSM can focus to eliminate or minimize potential disasters.

Conclusion

Establishing a relationship of mutual trust with the commander and staff members is crucial to the success of any organization. The CSM is the eyes and ears of the commander. CSMs are empowered by commanders to leverage those around them and establish themselves through command presence and positive interactions with subordinate leaders and Soldiers. Positive interaction yields positive results. To achieve mission success, CSMs need to understand the operations process and staff capabilities. They may not always be the subject matter expert, but must be a part of mission planning and engaged enough to provide relevant feedback when needed.

In the end, leadership through presence matters, in training or combat. Points of friction can develop quickly at NTC. CSMs must position themselves in areas that provide the best vantage point possible. Whether in the TOC identifying potential pitfalls during the early stages of planning or coordinating an ambulance exchange point (AXP) to move casualties for role 2 treatment, the CSM should be there, preventing any mishaps or minimizing the damage. There is no substitute for the influence a CSM can exert. Their impact on the mission, organization, or its people should never be overlooked.

CHAPTER 4: Letter to my First Sergeants

By CSM Wayne Wahlenmeier, Tarantula 40, Light Task Force Trainers

While attending the United States Army Sergeants Major Academy (USASMA), instructors and mentors regularly drove two points home. First, you are part of the top 1 percent of enlisted Army Soldiers; you are special and deserve your parking spot at the commissary (This is patently untrue; you deserve nothing and it is your privilege to lead America's sons and daughters.). Second, what made you successful at the company level does not necessarily translate to success as a sergeant major (SGM). I have succeeded in some areas and failed in others during my time as an airborne battalion command sergeant major (CSM). The purpose of this chapter is to help guide first sergeants so they can navigate similar waters successfully as they assume responsibility as a CSM/SGM.

The transition curve to SGM is steep—like climbing K2 (Mount Godwin-Austen on the border between China and Pakistan) steep. You are expected to represent value added from day one. The tolerance for mistakes dwindles. The following section includes strategies for avoiding pitfalls.

Culture is Everything

The success of your organization will ultimately be decided by what kind of culture you create. In the Army, units succeed, but it comes at a price paid by your Soldier. If you can successfully create a culture of mutual respect, shared hardship, and trust, your Soldiers will work hard just because they are proud of their role in the organization. If you work them hard and they think you do not care about them, they will give minimal effort. They will still accomplish the mission, but you will have failed by not having taken care of your Soldiers. The following are some of my thoughts for creating a positive culture (some I got right, and others I did not):

- When dealing with people who fail to meet the standard, you should start with the premise they voluntarily joined the Army and consider that something may have happened to change their outlook.
- Focus on the top 5 to 10 percent. The Army systems force you to focus on the bottom 5 to 10 percent; however, to improve the Army and your organization, focus on the top 5 to 10 percent. Develop and train your Soldiers. This change in focus will make the Army better in the future.
- Hand pick and build your team. Some people frown on this; however, I believe this leads to success.
- Reward creativity.
- Place your best Soldiers at points of friction and ensure that those who need development have worthy mentors. You will often get this wrong. If you do, do not wait too long to move people. The longer you wait, the harder it will become.
- Be seen around your unit and where people do not expect you.
- Make sure people feel confident telling you when you or your approach is wrong.
- Communication is our greatest strength and weakness. Offer opportunities for everyone to speak to you and allow time to dispel myths and rumors.
- Find a Soldier at every rank whose opinion you value and speak to them regularly.
- Getting people to be honest with you is one of the hardest things about being in a command team (mostly because of rank and fear of failure).
- How do you want to be remembered? Berets? Black socks? Tattoos? Ranger School? Pick your fights. Determine what is essential.
- It takes moral courage to tell your boss when you think they are wrong.
- Being right is not always enough.

- You will be confronted by the immediate issue of the day, but you have to find the important thing and not lose sight of it.
- First reports are usually wrong. Let situations develop. You will find the truth over time.
- Send a message to your troops through everything you do.
- You can do incredibly complex training, but only if you set the conditions correctly through simple, robust training of the basics.
- If you think you should inspect something, trust your instincts and inspect it. Empower your leaders, but do not leave them to their own devices. Ultimately, you are responsible if something is wrong.
- Challenge your leaders to think bigger, question norms, and ask "why."

No One is there to Help You

When things became supremely challenging or complex as a first sergeant (1SG), we often looked for a CSM to give refined guidance and direction. We expected them to know the answer. They were viewed as the responsible adult in the room. The CSM/SGM may get cranky and hand out a butt chewing, but they would mentor you and bring resources to bear on the problem. They were help when we needed it.

As a CSM/SGM, you are now that responsible adult who has the answers and can bring resources to bear. You are the help that is coming.

As a CSM/SGM, you are now that responsible adult who has the answers and can bring resources to bear. You are the help that is coming. There is no help coming for you. CSMs/SGMs are the Army's problem solvers and workhorses. CSMs/SGMs do not get to look around and wonder who will solve the problem. They must identify the issues as they appear and put talent to friction.

Burning Bridges and Blaming Higher Headquarters

Early on in my time as a CSM, I often disagreed with my brigade CSM. A situation happened outside of my control and I blamed the installation's garrison organization. Over the phone, I offered what I thought was a solution and it turned into a heated discussion with the brigade CSM. I lost my temper and composure. I stated, "I might not be the CSM you want, but I am the CSM you have got." When I finished venting, the brigade CSM hung up on me. A week or two later he came to my office and said something I will never forget: "You were right in everything you said to me, Wally, except ... you are exactly the CSM I want." Those words stuck with me. Instantly, I was back on the team. I apologized. We figured it out and fixed the issue.

The argumentative CSM/SGM, the one who picks fights, only cares about their own organization, and never gives anything will quickly find themselves isolated on an island. In the end, the only people who will suffer will be the 700 Soldiers for whom you are responsible. Always be ready to give more than you take, willing to put the brigade's success over what is more comfortable for your battalion, and work well with peers to find solutions and compromises that will lead to mutual success.

As leaders, we do not have time for personality conflicts. The greatest power CSMs/SGMs have is knowing where to look, who to call, and having a network of friends, peers, and classmates that can be leveraged to solve problems. Most problems are solved by relationships, your most powerful resource.

The transition from 1SG to CSM/SGM often marks the point in a senior NCO's career where they begin to regularly interact with Department of the Army (DA) civilians, civilian leaders, or host-nation military leaders. Do not forget about them. The local national liaison officer (LNO), mayor, or DA civilian can be instrumental to your unit conducting the training it desires. They may be a veteran, National Guardsman, or reservist who has walked a mile in your shoes. They may be an essential support function and critical to your success.

Talk to your peers regularly. Get away from your office and drop by your subordinate offices. Stay a little after meetings to talk to each other, even if it is just letting each other vent for five minutes. This forum pays dividends when you need to move mountains or get short-notice tasks completed. Do not have personality conflicts or fights with your 1SGs or peers, period. Be the bigger man, and be the one to apologize and mend the relationship after a heated exchange. Also,—

- Get over yourself; the Army is always competing for resources. You do not have the hardest job, so enjoy it. Leaders have been making tough decisions since the dawn of time.
- Do not play the short game; it is not a 24- or 30-month outlook. If your goals only cover your time in the position, you failed.
- Train people, take risks, send people to school, and build redundancy. Focus on your most critical resource—people.
- If you provide Soldiers to another unit or higher headquarters, send your best. It will pay off in the long run, trust me on this.
- Individual responsibility is important. Encourage your Soldiers to take on responsibility whenever possible. Expect your leaders to take responsibility.
- Do not let decision making become seen as a group problem; people will never be held accountable.

The Difference between Leadership and Management

Leadership and management are not the same, but are often confused. Leadership is about people; management is about systems. It takes a while to learn this and I am still working to improve my management skills.

As a CSM/SGM, your primary concerns are building and managing systems. Your time is limited, so everything becomes about touch points. Identify critical touch points for what you need to influence in your unit, develop the systems that control the pertinent information, and use those systems to recognize friction points. The CSM's/SGM's aperture is so broad there is no way to personally affect it all with your involvement or presence. If you try, you will fail.

Time is your most precious commodity. Systems help manage the information flow so you can focus your limited time on things that are yours and your commander's priorities, are mission-critical, or only you can do based on knowledge, skills, or relationships. For everything else, develop your 1SGs and staff members to handle routine business, empower them to make everyday decisions, and train them to know when things require your involvement. If you do not develop systems to control all of the information you will receive, you will quickly become overwhelmed and remain on your heels, resulting in micromanagement and failure. I am not saying personal leadership is not important. I merely mean the balance has shifted. Your leadership is still critical in two areas—training your battalion and mentorship.

Do not expect to walk into a battalion that can do anything correctly with just an occasional guiding nudge from you. You will have to train your staff, company commanders, and 1SGs on how to manage a calendar, write with brevity, brief the commander, build a team, interact with higher headquarters, and a million other things you currently take for granted. This requires your presence, time, and effort. If you do not teach them, no one will.

*The CSM/SGM is a mentor to 1SGs, platoon sergeants (PSGs),
and young officers—especially company commanders.*

The CSM/SGM is a mentor to 1SGs, platoon sergeants (PSGs), and young officers—especially company commanders. You will have the closest relationship with the commander; company commanders will float things by you to gauge how battalion commanders will respond. This mentorship requires personal leadership and is as crucial to the unit's success as the next round of live-fire exercises (LFXs) is to your unit's training. I am wearing CSM rank because of the mentorship three CSMs provided during my career. The officers in your battalion will look to you as a model for their noncommissioned officers (NCOs)—how to act, look, and speak. They will determine if they should trust their NCOs based on you being the organization's senior NCO. Some common traps include—

- *Delegation.* Time is your most priceless commodity. Ensure you delegate wisely to maximize your time. I refused to delegate leading.
- *Time management.* We often do not value our Soldier's time. Focus on output and training as opposed to the amount of time spent at work. Good Soldiers are too often waiting on "the word."
- *Subordinate-unit level.* Your subordinate leaders need to be heavily focused on mentoring, training, and leading. Too many times, I heard leaders in a formation explain to the battalion commander or myself that they could have performed better if given enough time to train at the squad, platoon, or company level. After looking at the calendar, we found that leaders at those levels had adequate time in garrison to address their unit's issues.
- *Double standards.* The only real double standards that exist in the Army are the different expectations we have of people. Do not treat everybody equally, but treat everyone fairly, dependent on their circumstances.
- *Make sure you train your organization to fight.* Junior officers lead in war; you must take the time to teach them tactics and how to be leaders.

- *Resilience training is a part of your regular training. It does not change during a war. Tough physical training and resilience go hand in hand. Long-distance runs and road marches build a fitness level that cannot be found in the gym.*
- *You have a responsibility for your subordinate's professional development. Although professional development is for individuals, Soldiers should not have to figure it all out for themselves.*
- *Remember to use your professional development time effectively. In my time at NTC, we brought in Medal of Honor recipients, former commanders and CSMs, former Sky Soldiers, and business leaders to talk to our unit. We routinely spoke about strategic policy, but our focus always remained on tactics and our future fight.*

Start Predicting the Future

CSMs/SGMs must plan for future operations, identify implied tasks, know conditions that need setting, and execute tasks with minimum guidance. Failure to do these things creates a dumpster fire. Remember, no help is coming.

Identifying friction facilitates mitigating future problems. This is critical because at the battalion and brigade level, dynamic retasking is never dynamic. As a CSM, I can pick up the phone and redirect the work, efforts, and lives of 700 Soldiers, officers, warrant officers, leaders, and their families. However, a battalion has a certain organizational momentum and inertia that is hard to overcome and shift on a dime. Every time we make a short- or no-notice change, it increases the likelihood of missing tasks and making mistakes, and can cause your staff members and commanders to operate in crisis management mode. Look deep, develop a concept, and address friction as necessary.

As a CSM/SGM, our words, actions, and decisions carry serious weight. An angry email, miscommunication, or outburst affects entire organizations exponentially more than when we were 1SGs or platoon sergeants. Senior leaders will not tolerate those who fail to grasp these facts. Unfortunately, many CSMs/SGMs step into these pitfalls, sometimes irrevocably, without ever knowing they have made a fatal error. This causes superiors, peers, and subordinates alike to view your influence as diminished. You never want to become irrelevant.

Be Brilliant at the Basics

If you want people to be good at lift-and-shift fire signals with confirmation, take away radios. If you want people to learn how to navigate land, take away their global positioning systems (GPSs) and make them use a map and compass. Battle drills, battle drills, battle drills, battle drills, battle drills (get my drift?). Simplicity works. Complexity fails. You will be a fantastic CSM, at least twice as good as I was. If any of this helps in any way, then I have done my job.

Last but not least, do not forget to keep the main thing, the main thing!

CHAPTER 5: Managing Personnel in a Brigade Combat Team Formation

**By CSM Quentin Fenderson, Outlaw 40, National Training Center
Operations Group Command Sergeant Major**

Before assuming the role as a brigade combat team (BCT) command sergeant major (CSM), I had little understanding of my role in personnel management. After my change of responsibility (COR), I was quickly introduced to a saying indicating, "S-1s manage numbers and leaders manage personnel." Regardless of whether the commander directly or indirectly informs you through counseling, they expect a CSM to manage and mentor the enlisted population. Understanding and executing your role in this process can be challenging. There is no school you will attend in your enlisted career (unless your military occupational specialty [MOS] is 42A [human resources specialist]) that can provide you the in-depth tools needed to fulfill your role in the process and assist in facilitating sustained personnel readiness in the BCT.

My first assignment as a battalion CSM was as a sergeant major (SGM), a recent graduate of the United States Army Sergeants Major Academy (USASMA). I had no idea how to manage the enlisted population through an organizational lens. By not fully understanding my role, I often asked the S-1 noncommissioned officer in charge (NCOIC) why the Human Resources Command (HRC) was not sending us the people (for example, staff sergeants or sergeants) we need. The questions I thought were valid were based on my experience as a first sergeant (1SG) and on the Army force generation (ARFORGEN) model.

I did not take into consideration career management field (CMF) inventory or the demands of the sergeant and staff sergeant population. I just knew in previous units, before deploying, the Soldiers that were needed, regardless of CMF, were in the formation. Later, I was introduced to a new concept—the sustain readiness model (SRM). I initially wondered why we were changing a perfect system in which, when we went on a deployment, Soldiers were available. When we returned from a deployment, some Soldiers underwent a permanent change of station (PCS) move, and others replaced them. So, moving to a process that required managing CMFs, skill levels, and training, was going to be a tall task.

As a BCT CSM, I visited HRC where I received an overview from an account manager. Being an infantryman (a bull in a china shop), she introduced me to the simple things like, the difference between a "distribution management sub-level (DMSL), brigade level" and "distribution management level (DML), division level." The DMSL is for the BCT account and the DML is for the division account. Ultimately, a BCT has the capability to manage its formation without necessarily going to the division, with the understanding senior mission commanders are authorized to make necessary changes within the division's DML.

I was also introduced to how the BCT was assigned personnel and other areas that influenced that process. This was the first time I realized we were being manned based on our target and not necessarily the authorizations. This was important, because like many BCT CSMs, I initially thought if I am authorized certain personnel, I should have them. Later, I learned we were manned based on the target, along with the influence of the manning guidance. This knowledge benefited me in future conversations with branch managers.

I also learned about the joint promotion screening (JPS) tool, which informed me of all the specialists and sergeants eligible for promotion in the primary or secondary zone. This information is also captured on the 117s, 294s, and C10 reports provided by subordinate commands. However, the JPS tool allowed me to provide oversight of the BCT's promotions with numbers the Army used to evaluate us, not how we assessed ourselves.

In the JPS tool, I could see flags, bars, and the battalion CSMs in conjunction with manning rosters, and could manage and mentor the formation in areas such as crew and squad manning. The S-1 and an internal military occupational specialty inventory (MOSI) was no longer the linchpin in the process.

The brigade S-1 was not being yelled at by random SGMs and the G-1 could focus on oversight instead of managing personnel requirements in my formation. My trip to HRC was originally designed as an opportunity to talk to branch SGMs. Unfortunately, it reminded me how uneducated I was in the Army manning process. A cultural shift ensued, which began to help us assist leaders in managing formations with the same emphasis we were managing "pacing items."

Operators identify faults; mechanics verify faults. An MOS 92A (automated logistical specialist) orders parts to correct faults; a warrant officer and 92A receives faults through the support supply activity (SSA), and it filters down to operators or mechanics to repair faults. Our Soldiers should be managed with the same level of importance. You often hear, "This is the equipment you may have to deploy with one day," but rarely do you hear, "These are the Soldiers you are going to deploy with one day." I determined we were managing personnel based on assumptions instead of a systematic process. I recommended to my commander, "We need to develop a culture that manages personnel as if they were an O2 priority part on the equipment status report (ESR)."

I initially introduced what I learned to the battalion CSMs, who disseminated the information throughout their formations. This also created shared understanding in battalion S-1 shops on how they influenced the process in areas such as slotting, commander overrides, and how requisitions were created, automatically or manually within the 10-week manning cycle.

This paradigm shift enabled the BCT to deploy to a European training event at 87 percent (deployable) of the 96 percent assigned (to the BCT), which did not include a 2 percent rear detachment population. The BCT continued to maintain 86 percent to 87 percent strength for the entire 9-month deployment. This was assisted by identifying Soldiers who were on station 26 or more months and requesting transitioning periods (redeployment) for them to facilitate availability of new leaders (to deploy) during major training events. For example, stabilization codes created in the SRM manning guidance does not account for units, which have regionally aligned force (RAF) deployments. Typically, stabilization codes are used to keep leaders in the formation. Because of mismanagement in the enlisted population at the unit level, Soldiers are kept on station an average of 30 months (based on location and MOS). Instead of waiting for HRC to manage the enlisted population in my formation, I identified Soldiers with more than 26 months of time on station and requested them to conduct a PCS in exchange for requisitions aligned with the five enlisted manning cycles (EMC). This ensured there would not be any pitfalls of available personnel in training and deployment requirements that could degrade readiness. It also supported Soldiers (key development [KD] complete) broadening their horizons by becoming drill sergeants and recruiters while continuing to maintain boots-on-ground (BOG) requirements.

S-1 NCOICs and strength managers have an important responsibility to manage the system in the personnel framework. I realized the role I played in this process, outside of bugging the S-1 or G-1 on filling positions in my formation. I am not suggesting a CSM should have a desk in the S-1 shop, but you cannot hold a system accountable if you do not fully understand the system. You cannot create shared understanding if you do not understand something. People are the most important factor in our profession. As a CSM, you can play a significant role in mentoring and shaping the environment for subordinates. In my case, it was a trip to HRC that changed the way I viewed the management of the formations I serve.

CHAPTER 6: Reimagine Your Promotion Board

By CSM Matthew Hire, Panther 40, Combined Arms Battalion Trainers

After spending 22 months as a command sergeant major (CSM) of an infantry battalion, I began thinking about some organizational accomplishments, and how fortunate I was to serve beside some of America's finest men and women. Before assuming the position, I was constantly thinking about where I would need to be and what I would need to be doing to help grow the organization and develop those around me. I was asking myself the same questions: How would I be able to best see my unit? Where would I gain the knowledge or perspective to provide advice and meaningful counsel to the battalion commander? Which forums would deliver open dialogue, candid feedback, and collaboration? Throughout my tenure, these touch points became more evident, but within weeks of my arrival and the execution of my first monthly promotion board, I realized I overlooked a key event that would provide invaluable insight into the organization.

There are obvious outcomes of the unit monthly promotion board, which are vital to day-to-day Army operations. "The promotion board's mission is to validate the potential of Soldiers to assume increased responsibilities associated at the next higher grade and to make a recommendation of yes (recommend) or no (do not recommend) to the promotion authority for each Soldier considered."¹ The regulation clearly defines expectations for the board, but those involved in the execution might have different expectations.

As a young enlisted Soldier, the thought of going to my first promotion board was as nerve racking as it was exhilarating. Soldiers view the board as a gateway to future success in the Army, validation of hard work, and process culminating in their first experience leading Soldiers as a noncommissioned officer (NCO). At this point, the board is about individual success or failure.

While not a member of the board or an active participant, each Soldier is escorted by a sponsor. The sponsor, in most instances, has the duty of reporting to the board and giving the members their initial introduction of the Soldier. There is a certain amount of pride associated with this task; as the first line supervisor, you get to see a culmination of training and mentorship as your Soldier attempts to become a sergeant or staff sergeant. This responsibility also brings the challenges of properly representing your Soldier, the company, and your first sergeant (1SG). This can be a leader's first introduction to senior NCOs across the battalion, and their first look outside the company level.

I felt much different sitting as a board member as a platoon sergeant (PSG) or 1SG. It held a larger significance and I was charged with deciding whether or not the Soldier sitting in front of me showed the potential for promotion. I had to decide which questions to ask, which created the internal pressure to ensure the questions were relevant, challenging yet achievable, and met the CSM's or sitting board president's intent. At this point in my career, I was more attuned to what the authorizations per grade plate were at the company and battalion level, but my focus was still on the individual's potential and the success of the company.

As a sitting battalion CSM, I initially looked at the task of holding monthly promotion boards as a regulatory requirement to grow our Army by selecting the most qualified Soldiers and sergeants for promotion. Because I came up through the ranks and conducted dozens of boards, I had the cumulative skills and perspectives to execute a promotion board that benefited the Soldier and Army. However, I did not take into account the insight this would give me while executing my CSM duties. Also, I did not consider I had a monthly Army-directed leader professional development (LPD) event that would always take priority. In addition to the monthly LPDs, my unit had training meetings, command and staff call (meeting), and a host of other touch points. I was empowered to influence them all, drive organizational change, and mentor subordinates. All of these tasks provided the commander and me with detailed information that drove the majority of our conversations about the organization and, which direction we needed to go. As I look back at my time as the battalion CSM, there was not a single battle rhythm event that gave me more insight into my organization and the Soldiers inside of it than the monthly promotion board. The rest of this chapter details areas in which I saw the greatest impact.

Identify Talent

One of my first observations was how helpful the board was in helping me identify talent, and individuals with specific knowledge, skills, and abilities within the battalion. The Soldier record brief (SRB) gave me key insights into records I would not normally review. Conversations I had with Soldiers helped identify individuals who spoke multiple languages, were an Eagle Scout, built homes, or were experienced in photography. Every board was a deeper dive into the talent all around me. I quickly realized today's enlisted force was much more educated than how I perceived it when I enlisted. There were more Soldiers with bachelor's degrees in some platoons than they had officers in the company. Although not a requirement, an enlisted Soldier possessing a bachelor's degree represents someone who has the maturity and drive to complete tasks and excel independently. The list of Soldiers with a bachelor's degree provided me with a firsthand account of the future sergeants and staff sergeants in my formation who would be more suited to help our Soldiers through complex problems and life challenges. Some of the aforementioned skills (such as speaking multiple languages) also helped identify Soldiers that had skillsets necessary to fill additional roles within the battalion, brigade, and beyond.

The promotion board also provided a glimpse into the inner workings of leaders within each company. Through the interactions and questions directed at the sponsors, I compiled lists of the most professional and trusted NCOs in the organization, which gave me a better idea of who was ready to step up to the next level, and who was not meeting the expectations of a leader in the formation. The best PSGs repeatedly prepared their Soldiers for the promotion board, which was an indication of their level of dedication to the profession and the quality of training executed within the platoon. This insight drove many decisions regarding manning the organization and development of the unit LPD program. Promotion board interactions helped reveal individuals who should move to other companies to realign talent and which NCOs would pair best with a specific officer counterpart. I began looking forward to each promotion board with enthusiasm because of the talent I would discover.

Noncommissioned Officer Dialogue and Perspective

The promotion board provided me the perfect venue to have open dialogue with Soldiers and NCOs. It was not a formal LPD, sensing session, or meeting; instead it was an open-ended dialogue, which brought forth new ideas, concerns, and recommendations. On one occasion, it helped me recognize our marksmanship program was not in line with Army doctrine; our companies were operating under vastly contrasting standards. Some companies did nothing more than go to the range to group and zero weapons, followed by a trip to the qualification range (results were poor). Other companies understood the process, referenced manuals, certified leaders, and executed preliminary instruction. This disparity in a proper training management glide path was much more detrimental than our qualification numbers. I realized we were training a whole generation of new leaders on the wrong way to do things. We also learned Soldiers and leaders were incorrectly using nonstandard terms such as "amber status" across the formation in regard to their automatic weapons, which presented a safety issue. This problem showed itself again during company live-fire exercises (LFXs), when a machine gunner had a negligent discharge on the very first iteration. I had to intensify my efforts to ensure this never happened again, and among other things, used the promotion board as an azimuth check.

I was least effective sitting behind my desk, reading notes from my leaders book to the 1SGs, while absorbing an excessive amount of their time. We had plenty of time after meetings and events to do most of that. My favorite time to spend with them was during our conversations at the promotion board. Unbeknownst to them, I led conversations that forced them to collaborate with each other. I attempted to build a competitive environment where winning mattered, and applauded them individually in front of their peers. The back and forth of these conversations helped all of them build stronger teams, and highlighted additional areas I needed to focus my efforts.

Advise the Commander

My primary responsibility as the CSM was to advise and inform the commander. The promotion board helped me gain insight to be able to provide the commander with a better understanding of the battalion. Throughout our time together, we used this forum to drive home ideas and find out if our Soldiers were informed of battalion policies and procedures. When the commander developed a physical fitness policy, he asked me to see how many Soldiers were informed the policy was published. I quickly identified, not only were the Soldiers uninformed, but company leaders had not incorporated the policies. We also used the promotion board to learn how junior-enlisted Soldiers perceived changes in the training glide path, and specifics of our short- and long-term calendar. Every organization has individuals who tell the boss what they think they want to hear, which leads to decisions that do not always take into account the majority of the population. When given the opportunity, most Soldiers gave candid feedback about what they did not understand about our training program, when given the opportunity. We saw this as a way to mentor subordinates and there were multiple instances in which we had not heard a particular perspective, and it made sense to adjust course. The conversations that occurred within the promotion boards were unlike any interactions a battalion commander would have with their Soldiers, and it led to numerous changes that helped shape the organization.

Promotion boards are vital tools that can be valuable beyond merely meeting a regulatory requirement. AR 600-8-19 states, "The board, utilizing a question and answer format, will test the preparedness of the recommended Soldier to determine their potential to serve at the recommended rank. Hands-on tasks are not authorized. Questions should focus on leadership, awareness of military programs, and knowledge of basic Soldiering and world affairs. The board should consider the Soldier's overall personal appearance, bearing, self-confidence, oral expression and conversational skills, and attitude when determining each Soldier's potential to serve at the next level of NCO responsibility."² As the president of the board, I did not do anything fundamentally different from the guidance outlined in the regulation. I simply took advantage of the environment and structured how I assessed the Soldiers' "bearing, self-confidence, oral expression and conversational skills, and attitude."³ I realized my structured examination of Soldiers in the board allowed me to more clearly see our unit and be more effective as a CSM. I challenge CSMs to make their promotion boards more than a mere exercise of tradition and regulation. Get more out of this crucial training event; see your organization; develop subordinates; advise the commander; and be ready for combat.

Endnotes

¹ AR 600-8-19, *Enlisted Promotions and Reductions* (16 May 2019), paragraph 3-12, pg. 41

² *Ibid*, pg. 42

³ *Ibid*

CHAPTER 7: Reporting the Climate

By CSM Devon Weber, Eagle 40, Aviation Trainers

In this chapter, I hope to convey the importance of how reporting and hit lists can reveal much more than what is shown. In early fall of 2017, I was fortunate enough to serve as the command sergeant major (CSM) for 1st Battalion, 13th Aviation Regiment at Fort Rucker, AL. The 1-13th is a diverse battalion with more than 1,500 Soldiers, 700 international students, and more than 85 civilians. The battalion itself was geographically spread across Fort Rucker and consisted of an advanced individual training company, an administrative support company, a graduate-level course and instructor company, a headquarters company, an international military student office company; and a military police, firefighter, and military working dog detachment. The 1-13th was my first battalion as a CSM and where I quickly realized how combined company reporting showed the battalion's strengths, weaknesses, and forecast manning. Over time, I found with such a diverse battalion, the reports, when combined, provided hidden insight into Soldier development, company command issues, and the battalion's current climate.

The Documents

When encountering quarterly training briefs (QTBs), unit status reports (USRs), and hit lists, most company leaders shudder with a distaste for not only formatting the reports, but also the details, which they may provide. These reports are significant within each organization because of the wealth of information they hold. In this chapter, the focus on the reports will be from the company to battalion level. The primary purpose of the USR is to provide a commander's overall assessment of their unit's readiness. This assessment combines multiple subject areas in the final report. Some of these areas include, but are not limited to personnel readiness, personnel fitness, equipment readiness, and the current status of unit training. The QTB differs from the USR in that the primary purpose of the QTB is to discuss past, present, and future training objectives. With an effective QTB, a command team can review which training they have accomplished so they can adjust future training requirements and request any necessary resources. The QTB also provides the commander a way to brief their training plan to higher headquarters for approval. In some ways, the QTB works hand in hand with the USR. The commander must know where their company stands to forecast future necessary training.

While compiling these reports, the commander and first sergeant (1SG) must work together to ensure their accuracy and produce a detailed future training plan for the company. The battalion CSM and commander are highly recommended to review the reports before the joint battalion-level meetings.

Hit lists, on the other hand, are entirely different from the QTB and USR. Hit lists reflect real-time Soldier and company deficiencies. These lists are regularly updated so a deficiency can be recognized and fixed before it becomes a more significant issue.

Hit lists, on the other hand, are entirely different from the QTB and USR. Hit lists reflect real-time Soldier and company deficiencies. These lists are regularly updated so a deficiency can be recognized and fixed before it becomes a more significant issue. These lists include, but are not limited to the medical, financial, weapons qualifications, semiannual Army Physical Fitness Test (APFT), online training class completion, and annual personnel administrative updates of the Soldiers. A significant percent of these lists focus directly on the individual Soldiers by name to ensure they are meeting all requirements promptly. Company and battalion command teams can also use these lists by consolidating them to see if there is a more significant issue stemming from the company or battalion level, rather than just the Soldier alone.

Poor Reporting and Ignorance

In the competitive military environment, it is only natural to want to be the best, have the best company or battalion, and lead the best Soldiers. I have repeatedly witnessed poor reporting where percentages were adjusted to meet and/or supersede training requirements. An example would be altering a combined company APFT result to a higher, which could include using past-due APFT scores as part of the percentage. Poor reporting can also include false reports because of ignorance regarding company manning and requirements per the structure of the company itself. An example would be a report that 100 percent of the 200 Soldiers in a company possess a current and valid weapons qualification for a rifle. If you take a more in-depth look into the structure of the company, you might find it is staffed by a chaplain that does not carry a weapon, and Soldiers that are only issued and qualified with a pistol.

Poor reporting does not show the correct assessment of a company and also leads to numerous issues at the battalion level. These problems might not arise while you are in the command position, but will set the battalion and future leaders up for failure. Poor reporting can lead to unpredictable loss of manning, short-notice training, and a loss of morale originating in the company and spilling over into the battalion. It can result in a loss of predictability, which imposes a more stressful environment on the company and begins to break up the battalion team.

When it comes to hit lists, ignorance is the biggest mistake. Many leaders do not take the time to understand the data within the hit lists and automatically jump to conclusions. Some leaders try to correct the hit list as fast as possible so they can show an improved percentage, and, once again, have a better company on paper. Doing this places undue stress on the Soldiers and, at times, overlaps with forecasted training priorities (or worse, leads to another hit list). At a larger aperture, this could potentially change and compromise battalion command priorities, thus affecting other companies.

Accurate Reporting and Hidden Benefits

Supreme leadership is required to not only understand, but also recognize weaknesses and correct them. Effective leaders are also necessary for being prepared to report and show weaknesses to others. Accurate reporting can be a humbling experience, which also must be recognized by the battalion command team. At times, accurate reporting and real statistics show a battalion command team where the company needs the most help. When finding a deficiency, a corrective course of action may be designed, and the required training may be requested. Accurate reporting points a leader in the right direction and guides them in producing future training requirements. Accurate reporting also shows a leader how a Soldier's performance progresses so the leader may continue to change the training environment and increase proficiency within the company or battalion. For example, if multiple companies completed night ranges during a two-week stretch, weapons qualification might increase, yet, because of time conflicts, APFT percentages and administrative requirements might drop. An accurate report helps a leader recognize that not enough or too much emphasis went into a single training event. Furthermore, a fair battalion command team understands the increase and drop within company statistics and remains flexible and adaptive to the changes.

Hit lists, when used correctly, can provide insight into not only a leader's performance, but more importantly, a Soldier's performance. When looking at the lists, many tend to become agitated and revert to the immediate correction of the list. A quality leader investigates the circumstances. For example, a Soldier may land on the hit list because they're delinquent on a government credit card payment. Instead of pursuing immediate correction action, a responsible leader finds out why the delinquency occurred. The Soldier may not have been aware of the late payment or be in financial distress. In any case, the leaders can recognize miscommunication or help resolve any financial difficulties.

If a significant percentage of a companies' Soldiers are on a hit list, there might be a larger issue to address at the battalion level. In the example where Soldiers were at night ranges for two weeks, they might not have been able to receive required immunizations during the day. This scenario might be indicative of a high battalion operational tempo or that too much emphasis went into the training event. Hit lists can be sporadic, so a quality leader must be able to look at not just one, but all lists and reports. If done appropriately, a leader sees that Soldiers who are having significant issues at work or home appear on a majority of the documents. Company or battalion leaders who focus on correcting the percentage as fast as possible may add to a Soldier's issues until a breaking point is reached. A leader who takes one minute to investigate why something happened gains respect and helps the Soldier, all while addressing the hit list.

Conclusion

At first glance, reporting may be time consuming, require an enormous amount of detail, and not be positive. Leaders who takes the time to understand the USR, QTB, and hit lists find that the information hidden within the reports help them determine a battalion's climate and adjust as necessary. If companies report the data accurately, the information itself guides the company and battalion in the right direction.

APPENDIX A: Acronyms

Acronym	Definition
APFT	Army Physical Fitness Test
ARFORGEN	Army force generation
AXP	ambulance exchange point
BCT	brigade combat team
BOG	boots on the ground
BSB	brigade support battalion
CASEVAC	casualty evacuation
CMF	career management field
COR	change of responsibility
CSM	command sergeant major
CTC	combat training center
CTCP	combat trains command post
DA	Department of the Army
DML	distribution management sub-level
EMC	enlisted manning cycle
ESR	equipment status report
FTCP	field trains command post
GPS	global positioning system

Acronym	Definition
HRC	Human Resources Command
JMRC	Joint Multinational Readiness Center
JPS	joint promotion screening
KD	key development
LFX	live-fire exercise
LNO	liaison officer
LOGCOP	logistics common operational picture
LOGPAC	logistics package
LOGSTAT	logistics status
LPD	leader professional development
LSCO	large-scale combat operations
MEDCOP	medical common operational picture
METL	mission-essential task list
MOS	military occupational specialty
MOSI	military occupational specialty inventory
NCO	noncommissioned officer
NCOIC	noncommissioned officer in charge
NTC	National Training Center
OC/T	observer coach/trainer

Acronym	Definition
OPFOR	opposing force
PCC	precombat check
PCI	precombat inspection
PCS	permanent change of station
PSG	platoon sergeant
QTB	quarterly training brief
RAF	regionally aligned force
SGM	sergeant major
SOP	standard operating procedures
SRB	Soldier record brief
SRM	sustain readiness model
SSA	support supply activity
TOC	tactical operations center
TTP	tactics, techniques, and procedures
USASMA	United States Army Sergeants Major Academy
USR	unit status report
WfF	warfighting function
XO	executive officer
1SG	first sergeant

The Secretary of the Army has determined that the publication of this periodical is necessary in the transaction of the public business as required by law of the Department.

Note: Any publications (other than CALL publications) referenced in this product, such as ARs, ADPs, ATPs, FMs, TMs, etc., must be obtained through your pinpoint distribution system.



CALL



10 MEADE AVENUE
BUILDING 50
FORT LEAVENWORTH, KANSAS 66027-1350



<https://CALL.ARMY.mil>

APPROVED FOR PUBLIC RELEASE
DISTRIBUTION UNLIMITED