

From the Boresight Line: Onward to Company Command

by SFC Gary W. McKenzie Jr.

You are about to take command of your first unit: the armor or scout company, maybe even the anti-tank company at Fort Irwin, CA. This time is exciting; family and friends alike will be anxious to celebrate this achievement. As you take the reins, you have to commit to some priorities – a priority is the most effective way for a commander to steer an organization. You must also understand that the ability to throttle pursuit of **your** priorities in a manner that enables focused organizational energy on higher's mission will permit much better results for that highly regarded "key developmental eval."

Priorities

Understand this simple concept: If you have more than two priorities at any given time, they're **not** priorities. Ways to ensure that priorities are priorities:

- Set monthly goals or "to do" lists.
- Focus a month on property, including ancillary equipment and services.
- The Command Supply Discipline Program is important – this is a great way for a new commander to learn the unit's discipline and get face-to-face time with Soldiers.
- Have a training-meeting format going into the job; protect this meeting at all costs. If having biweekly training meetings works for you, then commit to this – this frees up two hours every other week for admin tasks and getting sync'd with your first sergeant.
- Make it a training meeting – this isn't where you talk about maintenance or taskings that are coming down! It could be as simple as the vests for Army Physical Fitness Training next week or as in-depth as reviewing the concept of operations (four to six weeks out) for a company-level field-training exercise.

You should try to have a long-term (one to three months) priority and a near-term (could be due at the end of the day or two weeks out) priority. Managing time and organizing the usable calendar space you have are crucial, yet tricky, tasks. I urge you, however, to not look beyond the basics as often; skills that will enhance the formation's lethality are not all sexy training events. The basics are gunnery-skills training tasks, Excellence in Armor program, land navigation, troop-leading procedures/military decision-making process, weapons qualification, certifications, gunnery ... the list is long. The simple things matter, the repetitions matter; armor warriors rely on skills that are easily overlooked from the bird's nest.

Reacting

Reacting is almost a swear word. The enduring question is: "Should the company react to the battalion or the other way around?"

- Understand that you can influence the boss at times; just make sure it's the right time.
- Fragmentary orders exist for a reason; they are necessary.
- Limit how much emotional energy you spend in the presence of your Soldiers; in combat they would look to you as the anchor.
- It may be necessary at times to pursue a discussion with the boss about the "sacredness" of your training calendar and the effort you are putting into it to resource excellent training – try to establish the purpose of the calendar as contractual between you both.

Gunnery

Gunnery never ends; there is no definitive start point or finish point. Short and sweet: you have master gunners in your formations who can help you identify your training deficiencies and challenges.

- The Advanced Gunnery Training Simulator (AGTS) is the most underused and crucial instrument in maintaining crew lethality. However, at more than \$750 per 4.724-caliber round, we cannot possibly live on a tank range for four months of the year.

- AGTS should have nested goals ... where are you in your gunnery density? Are sustainment crews shooting four to six hours per month? Are new crews meeting the 12-15 hours of intensive training in the first week?
- AGTS should be a platoon-led event.
- Vehicle-crew evaluators, AGTS instructors/operators, simulations training managers and master gunners: are we training these? Are we training changing doctrine and meeting standards?

From your new seat, you impact the future of armor lethality. What do we want armor formations to bring to the table in five years? Are you training them that way?

Position	Rank	Time in service (years)	Total experience per position
Company commander	Captain	7	7
Company executive officer	First lieutenant	3	3
Platoon leader (x3)	Second lieutenant / first lieutenant	1.5	4.5
			14.5 years (officers)
First sergeant	First sergeant	16	16
Platoon sergeant (x3)	Sergeant first class / staff sergeant	12	36
Headquarters section sergeant	Staff sergeant	8	8
			60 years (senior NCOs)

Table 1. Chart of company experience. Most of a company's experience is in senior noncommissioned officers.

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Acronym Quick-Scan

ACR – armored-cavalry regiment

AGTS – Advanced Gunnery Training Simulator

NCO – noncommissioned officer

OSUT – one-station unit training