



Command Sgt. Maj. Jody Volz, Afghan adviser for Train Advise Assist Command-South, looks out as a U.S. Army UH-60 Black Hawk helicopter lifts off from Kandahar Airfield, Afghanistan, 4 August 2015, to conduct an aerial battlefield familiarization flight. (Photo courtesy of the Department of Defense)

# At the Point of Friction

## The Role of the Modern Command Sergeant Major in Today's Army

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August 31, 2005, initially opened as an uneventful day. However, most days opened like that, especially before the sting of battle in a conflict that would ultimately be called Operation Iraqi Freedom. Soldiers from the 1st Battalion, 24th Infantry Regiment, 25th Infantry Division, did not take the relatively quiet morning for granted. In a matter of seconds, then Lt. Col. Michael Kurilla found himself and his soldiers in battle with a determined foe. Kurilla received wounds as he returned fire. As he fought for his life, his top enlisted advisor, Command Sergeant Major (CSM) Robert Prosser, rushed to his aid in concert with other leaders and led the charge to return the fight to the enemy. He achieved fire superiority with violence of action. Prosser signifies successive generations of senior noncommissioned officers (NCO) who served in the capacity of a CSM and intuitively recognized their place in a formation. He, like others before him, knew where he should assert influence on behalf of his commander. His actions demonstrated the personality, character, and prudence expected of the CSM position, but the intuition and resolve Prosser demonstrated are not established in doctrine. This article seeks to use the features of Prosser's action to clarify the role of the CSM to benefit direct and tactical leadership. A quick review of history and Army doctrine indicates several critical focal areas that either require further explanation or codification: roles and responsibilities within the core competencies, the role of the CSM as part of a command team, and the role of the CSM in garrison and combat.

## The History of the Command Sergeant Major

The position of the CSM did not officially enter the U.S. Army's rank structure until July 1967 under the guidance of Gen. Harold K. Johnson, the Army chief of staff.<sup>1</sup> Johnson prompted the Army to develop the Command Sergeants Major Program that would "create a small body of select sergeants major for ready assignment to all major commands of the Army."<sup>2</sup> Prior to this period, leaders had a nebulous understanding of the sergeant major (SGM) role. The rank of sergeant major (pay grade E-9) existed, but leaders serving in this grade did not serve in the capacity as the senior enlisted advisor to their

commander. Instead, most commands would empower only one E-9 in any color-bearing unit to serve as the senior enlisted soldier, and each staff section would have an E-9 at echelon. Soldiers and commands were perplexed. Leaders would later submit that the role of the SGM had lost prestige.<sup>3</sup>

The Command Sergeants Major Program served to officially establish the title of command sergeant major and firmly entrench the CSM as the senior enlisted individual within a color-bearing command. From the onset, the role of CSM met opposition. Commanders proclaimed that such a position would create opportunities for enlisted soldiers to infringe on their command. Leaders were concerned that CSMs would "usurp the lines of authority in the chain of command."<sup>4</sup> However, senior leadership remained committed to the program and saw the need for the Army to solidify a senior position for enlisted members. Leaders especially stressed the urgency of a CSM position as the United States began to increase its involvement in Vietnam. In 1967, the U.S. Army first codified the role of the CSM in doctrine through its publication of Army Regulation (AR) 600-20, *Army Command Policy and Procedures*. The published work listed the sergeant major of the Army as "the senior enlisted advisor and consultant to the Chief of Staff of the Army on problems affecting enlisted personnel and their solutions."<sup>5</sup> In the wake of the Vietnam War, senior leaders once again revisited the role of the CSM. Gen. William Depuy used the newly established Training and Doctrine Command to launch a series of working groups with officers and NCOs to outline the role of the CSM. He reasoned that the role of the CSM should expand to beyond a position where an individual "floats around out there and observes what's going on with soldiers and tells the old man about that; that's a very limited view of what a Sergeant Major is supposed to do."<sup>6</sup> His efforts led to the development of Field Manual (FM) 22-600-20, *The Army Noncommissioned Officer Guide*, in March 1980, which gave meaning to the NCO support channel and officially granted CSMs authority over NCOs within their ranks.<sup>7</sup> Once published, FM 22-600-20 precipitated a series of publications that further explicated the role of a CSM such as Training Circular (TC) 22-6, also titled *The Army Noncommissioned Officer Guide*.<sup>8</sup>

## The Role of the Command Sergeant Major in U.S. Army Doctrine Today and Required Areas of Emphasis

Many of the duties of today's CSMs currently reside in TC 7-22.7, *The Noncommissioned Officer Guide*. A cursory glance of the doctrine denotes six principal competencies required of CSMs/SGMs: readiness, leadership, training management, communications, operations, and program management.<sup>9</sup> TC 7-22.7 expounded on all the lessons the U.S. Army had garnered

since the inception of the CSM rank.

However, doctrine still

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offers some ambiguity concerning the role of the CSM within the command team in combat and in garrison.

**Readiness.** TC 7-22.7 designated the CSM as having responsibility to establish standards for training and assess the efficacy of readiness across the formation. The CSM's role in training entails oversight of training reporting and certifications within events such as Unit Status Reporting, Expert Infantryman Badge testing, and Expert Soldier Badge testing.<sup>10</sup> However, the doctrine has some shortfalls pertaining to how and when the CSM can extend influence with training a unit staff, identifying shortfalls in commander's combat readiness assessment, and validating training. Some critics would argue that the above areas fall under the purview of a commander. Yet, lessons learned from 1967 to present continue to demonstrate that a CSM should have influence within these realms. In the wake of Vietnam, the U.S. Army extended the influence of a CSM in doctrine. Senior leaders recognized that a CSM offers years of experience and intimately understands the intricacies associated with preparing enlisted members for combat. Moreover, due to the ambiguities

in TC 7-22.7, most CSMs have determined the extent of their responsibilities for readiness through dialogue with their commanders. What is needed is an expansion within doctrine that clearly delineates the scope of influence that a CSM has with readiness. Lastly, TC 7-22.7 briefly glosses over readiness tasks that a CSM performs in garrison, but it does not explicitly state what tasks a CSM owns in garrison. In particular, the CSM has responsibility and ensures that systems are codified and adopted to assist the organization and the command in ensuring individual medical readiness, individual training readiness, and administrative actions such as awards and evaluations.

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Sgt. Maj. of the Army Michael A. Grinston presents Command Sgt. Maj. Vitalia Sanders, 101st Headquarters and Headquarters Battalion command sergeant major, with a coin after joining soldiers of the 101st Airborne Division (Air Assault) for lunch at Mihail Kogalniceanu Air Base, Romania, 15 December 2022. Army leaders often take time to recognize superior performance of their soldiers. (Photo by Sgt. Khalan Moore, U.S. Army)

**Leadership.** TC 7-22.7 offers a decent narrative on the role of the CSM with leadership. Still, the passages could elaborate on the role that a CSM provides with mentoring officers. TC 7-22.7 almost exclusively limits the CSMs role with leadership to NCOs. A commander ultimately assesses and validates the proficiency of officers, but NCOs still play a crucial role in the development of officers. Nearly every entry-level officer professional military education (PME) course (e.g., Officer Candidate School, Basic Officer Leader Course, and West Point) has an NCO who trains junior officers as they learn their craft. Furthermore, NCOs have trained officers as early as the inception of the U.S. Military Academy in 1802. Leaders often forget that it was the NCO that taught officers orienteering, horseback riding, and marksmanship. As we continue to posture the Army for large-scale combat operations, we should consider what the role of the CSM is concerning the training of officers.

**Training management.** TC 7-22.7 provides a little more granularity regarding training management compared to other passages concerning the role of a CSM. Passages in TC 7-22.7 articulate that a CSM can conduct after action reviews (AAR) and verify that training is captured in systems of record.<sup>11</sup> However, one area lacks particular attention. TC 7-22.7 states that a CSM can enforce the eight-step training model, but to what degree can a CSM do that? Can a CSM personally prescribe retraining for a formation? In reality, the CSM's authority remains limited to individual soldier training, and commanders often take on the responsibility of certifying and validating collective training. Alternatively, TC 7-22.7 can extend the role of CSMs to empower them to enforce standards, ensure subordinate leaders competently utilize the eight-step training model, and provide recommendations on the execution of collective training based on their experience. Additionally, the CSM assists the commander by providing real-time assessments during

certifications at the platoon level or higher. Passages within FM 7-0, *Training*, provide broad guidance articulating that a commander is responsible for all aspects of training, and senior NCOs are responsible to ensure subordinate leaders are trained and prepared; training is conduct to standard, not time; and tasks are repeated until the standard is reached.<sup>12</sup> However, the regulation does not delineate or provide specific NCO responsibilities during the eight-step training model. TC 7-22.7 can expand to further explicate the responsibilities CSMs share with the commander during the eight-step training model. As the senior trainer at the battalion level, the CSM's role in the eight-step training model commences after the commander executes steps 1 through 4. Senior NCOs in the formation, with CSM oversight, execute the remaining steps of the eight-step training model. A few of these critical steps include retraining and providing critical observations and recommendations concerning the commander's conduct of unit AARs. Additionally, CSM doctrine and future publications could offer more explanation pertaining to how CSMs provide oversight of leaders time training and ensure the programs of instruction remain nested with commander's priorities and in accordance with the eight-step training model.

**Communications.** Doctrine codifies roles where a CSM enables a commander to execute the operations process by ensuring a common operating picture or PACE plan exists.<sup>13</sup> Yet, most of these tasks overlap with roles that an operations SGM habitually shares. What is needed is further explication of the federation of responsibilities between the operations SGM and the CSM. Communications could be regarded as one of the most important core competencies of their role, however this is very ill-defined in current doctrine.

**Operations.** The narrative in TC 7-22.7 discusses operations, but it does not fully describe what role the CSM plays in the operations process. The publication mentions that a CSM must understand the operational environment and support the commander's priorities. The major question is how the CSM directly enables the operations process. FM 3-0, *Operations*, outlines the operations process in three components: plan, prepare, and execute, with assessment conducted during each phase. Within that realm, doctrine identifies commander's activities as understanding the operation environment, visualizing the end state, directing, leading,

and assessing.<sup>14</sup> Staffs perform some of the functions that enable commander activities such as publishing written orders to allow the commander to direct and articulate his or her end state. A CSM can serve as a critical stakeholder that amalgamates NCOs within the staff to help achieve commander activities in the operations process. Moreover, in combat, a CSM can provide invaluable insight in the management of the common operating picture, which allows the commander to understand the operational environment.

**Program management.** When TC 7-22.7 mentions program management, it provides a few instances of where a CSM can perform operations in garrison. A CSM can support commander's programs (e.g., Unit Prevention Leader, Army Oil Analysis Program, Retention).<sup>15</sup> Furthermore, a CSM can lead talent management programs. However, the role of the CSM in garrison necessitates more clarity within doctrine or PME. For example, a passage that clearly states that a CSM armed with his or her experience plays a vital role in managing critical programs such as commander-appointed positions (master gunner, unit sexual assault response coordinator, etc.) would greatly assist future CSMs as they assume responsibility.

## What Is the Current Role of the Command Sergeant Major?

TC 7-22.7 has been a resounding success, but it lacks clarity in a few areas that invite parallels to the ambiguities of the 1960s. Once again, a lingering debate has ensued concerning the role of a CSM and what latitude a CSM should have. We would offer that two narratives persist across the Army regarding the vague role of the CSM. First, that the absence of clearly defined roles and responsibilities is intentionally left vague so that a commander can employ the CSM how he or she determines most appropriate without being bound by doctrine or regulatory guidance. Second, the role is purposely left ambiguous because the U.S. Army generally assumes battalion- and brigade-level leaders have enough training and experience to understand roles and responsibilities at their level. In other words, by the time officers reach field grade years and noncommissioned officers have completed the Sergeants Major Academy, their experiences, training, and education up to that point have provided all the necessary tools for a command team to clearly define their roles and responsibilities.

However, our current experience serving as a battalion command team demonstrates that both narratives are inaccurate. Professional experiences, training, and PME alone did not prepare us for immediately determining the role of the CSM. After almost a full year in squadron command, many instances continue to occur where we need to define the role of the CSM, both in garrison and in combat. Leaders recognize that a commander owns the lion's share of responsibilities within their formation. Yet, the preponderance of responsibilities delegated to a commander should not marginalize the importance that a CSM plays in a unit. History has demonstrated that a CSM can ultimately cause the success or failure of a commander's command. In the absence of clarity in doctrine, most CSMs have succeeded by innately understanding where to place themselves at the point of friction. Yet the term "point of friction" is an intangible concept. Doctrine can simplify that concept and provide standards for future CSMs. In short, doctrine can expand in tandem with PME to further explain the following roles a CSM should play in the future (the CSM as part of a command team and the CSM in combat).

## What Is a Command Team?

Battalion- or brigade-level commanders and their CSM counterparts have a different command relationship than company commanders and their first sergeants. Both the CSM and commander are considered experts at their craft—successfully serving in branch-certifying positions in their respective NCO and officer key developmental positions within a battalion or brigade. The current chief of staff of the Army asserts that battalion commanders are arguably the most consequential leaders in the Army. Their experience, placement, and influence give them an outsized ability to shape the future service of the soldiers they lead. They train and develop young soldiers, noncommissioned officers, and officers and have more impact on their decisions to continue serving (or not) than any other leadership position.<sup>16</sup> Together, the battalion command team determines whether their unit will succeed in battle while having the most profound effect on the entire Army.<sup>17</sup> These illustrative assessments highlight the importance placed on the positions of the commander and the CSM, and by implication, their authority and influence must match the record. In

particular, the CSM does not hold formal command authority but, as the connotation of *team* suggests, the CSM operates in harmony with the commander and is empowered as an extension of the command. The commander can and should employ the CSM as an extension of command to areas where he or she has authority to enable the mission success. As the senior NCO in the battalion or brigade, the CSM enforces policy standards on performance, training, appearance, and the conduct of the organization. The CSM is the principal adviser to the commander, providing advice and recommendations pertaining to all aspects of the organization.<sup>18</sup> CSMs also have a unique responsibility in that they share the responsibility for effectively using available resources for planning the employment, organization, direction, coordination, and control of military forces for assigned missions.

Additionally, the U.S. Army expects command teams to lead beyond the formal authority by serving as examples and role models.<sup>19</sup> We argue that the CSM possesses the authority to contradict a battalion, brigade, or subordinate commander in the presence of an illegal, immoral, unethical, or unsafe order. Anything beyond this, then the CSM begins to usurp the authority of his or her commander or subordinate commanders. However, there exists a counterargument where the commander can give authority to the CSM in specific instances (e.g., controlling a casualty evacuation or personnel replacement operations) where the CSM has wide latitude and decision authority that impacts the entire organization. Furthermore, there becomes a gray area of authority when the CSM identifies a soldier or officer in violation of written policy or regulation. One could argue that the CSM is authorized to make the on-the-spot correction. However, what happens when, hypothetically, a subordinate commander gives orders in contradiction to an established policy? Does the CSM have the authority to tell the commander "No," he cannot continue going against the policy, or does he need to refer to the subordinate commander to the higher-ranking commander to adjudicate? This is perhaps where wisdom, experience, and self-awareness may play a role in how the CSM will handle the situation. Heavy coaching and mentoring would be perhaps a way to resolve the issue, but not all instances are alike.

Moreover, a commander may employ the CSM at various identified "friction" points during operations,



U.S. Army Reserve Command Sgt. Maj. Gregory G. Dirks, the command sergeant major of the 361st Theater Public Affairs Sustainment Element, climbs a rope on an obstacle course during Operation Strike Back at Joint Base McGuire-Dix-Lakehurst, New Jersey, 27 April 2023. During this second annual Operation Strike Back, held by the 99th Readiness Division, reserve soldiers participated in an obstacle course, electronic weapons qualification, rappelling, and other events. (Photo by Staff Sgt. Fred J. Brown, U.S. Army)

provided that delegated orders and intent are understood. All these points underpin the importance of properly defining clear roles and responsibilities and improving the command team dynamics. Chapter 9, “Leading at the Organizational and Strategic Levels,” in Army Doctrine Publication 6-22, *Army Leadership and the Profession*, is a great starting point to understanding and developing this command team dynamic.<sup>20</sup> Additionally, clear roles and responsibilities enable the command team to function more effectively. TC 7-22.7 and the commander’s vision and priorities serve as a useful guide for defining these roles. Taken one step further, initial counseling with key staff positions, such as the “top 5” (commander, CSM, operations officer, executive officer, and operations SGM) at the squadron and battalion level, assists the commander and CSM in identifying a holistic view or all activities in the organization.

According to the Dragoons Terms of Reference (see table), the CSM’s overall theme is “standards and discipline,” while the operations SGM’s focus is on “predictability.” Additional areas include the leader development focus, key interactions, and specific areas of responsibility. Although not all encompassing, this attempts to align tasks more in line with the strengths of both the CSM and the operations SGM. Clearly defined roles and responsibilities enable mission command and support decentralized execution of tasks in a much more efficient manner. As the command team gains experience, they build trust in each other. There needs to be a continual, candid dialogue between them that revisits their roles and where each needs to counterbalance each other’s strengths and weaknesses. This requires a degree of humility, self-awareness, candidness, and dialogue—often behind closed doors. This is particularly useful in a garrison environment where an organization may have myriad competing requirements that necessitate an effective and efficient division of responsibilities to ensure leader oversight. The CSM also has a vital role in the mentorship and development of the NCOs, officers, and staff within the organization. The CSM has an integral piece in managing and driving the NCO development process but equally has an integral piece in developing the young officers in the command. The commander ultimately owns young officer development, but it also pays dividends to have the platoon leaders—young officers—in the

room when the CSM provides counsel to the platoon sergeants and staff NCOs in charge; this enables young officers to understand roles and responsibilities while also teaching how to counsel NCOs.

We highlight the importance of a CSMs communication abilities to both internal and external audiences. As Lt. Gen. James Dubik and Col. David Hodne point out, the CSM and commander have a vital role in translating strategic and operational messages down to the tactical level.<sup>21</sup> At the same time, articulating and translating tactical issues, problems, concerns, recommendations, or even successes to the operational and strategic levels is vitally important. Likewise, communication skills and interpersonal skills developed over a career assist the CSM in communicating resources, army support services, and billeting challenges with stakeholders, which in turn facilitates action and improvement in the organization. Furthermore, the CSM plays a vital role supporting the recruitment and retention challenges at the tactical level and strategic levels. Given the Army’s current recruiting shortfalls, the retention efforts at the battalion and company levels have become an ever-increasing priority. Although AR 601-280, *Army Retention Program*, defines retention as a commander’s program, the regulation provides narrow guidance pertaining to the role of the commander and CSM in promoting a successful program.<sup>22</sup> Also underpinning the importance of the mission, the battalion retention NCO is directly supervised by the CSM. As a command team, the commander and the CSM both have an equal share in promoting the retention mission, instilling a healthy unit culture, and emphasizing leader involvement in retaining the Army’s talent. CSMs also have a crucial role in talent management of the soldiers and NCO corps. A CSM directly influences talent management by balancing Army requirements against unit requirements and facilitating the best talent to both meet unit requirements and goals of the Army. CSMs require a strategic insight in this balancing aspect and must be astute enough to effectively communicate strategic manning goals to the tactical level. CSMs also recognize that in some cases, retention and talent management decisions may incur a personnel cost on the unit in order to meet goals of the Army and/or the individual. Finally, CSMs must also support and reinforce Army retention bonuses and/or recruiting initiatives such as the most recent Army initiative in the Soldier Referral Program.<sup>23</sup>



**Table. Dragons Terms of Reference**

<p><b>Squadron Commander</b></p>	<p><b>Focus</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Culture of dignity, respect, warfighting, lethality</li> <li>• Maintenance of open, positive command climate</li> <li>• Primary trainer of the squadron</li> <li>• Leader development program</li> <li>• Lead the operations process (guidance, intent, priority information requirements)</li> <li>• Prioritize efforts, requirements, resources</li> <li>• Maintain long-term vision, focus, and planning</li> <li>• Retention and talent management-congressional inquiries</li> <li>• Group physical training (PT) program</li> <li>• Squadron situation report</li> <li>• Soldier Family Readiness Program</li> </ul>	<p><b>Leader Development Focus</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Platoon leaders: Standards and leadership</li> <li>• Company commanders: Up and out, bigger picture</li> <li>• Majors: Organizational leadership</li> </ul> <p><b>Primary Theme</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Vision and branding</li> </ul> <p><b>Key Interactions</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Division commander</li> <li>• Brigade commander, CSM, XO, S-3, legal/paralegal, adjutant, chaplain, surgeon/physician assistant, unit public affairs representative, unit victim advocate</li> <li>• Battalion commanders</li> <li>• Troop commanders</li> </ul>
<p><b>Command Sergeant Major (CSM)</b></p>	<p><b>Focus</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Individual soldier readiness</li> <li>• Enforcement of discipline/standards</li> <li>• NCO leadership presence</li> <li>• NCO development program</li> <li>• History and traditions</li> <li>• Individual counseling program</li> <li>• Boards and promotions</li> <li>• PT (execution and participation)</li> <li>• Retention program</li> <li>• In-processing policy</li> <li>• Sponsorship program</li> <li>• Prompt completion of personnel actions</li> <li>• Barracks program oversight</li> <li>• Transition/Soldier for Life-Transition Assistance Program oversight</li> <li>• NCO inductions</li> <li>• Fosters esprit de corps</li> <li>• Unit manning roster management</li> <li>• Rehabilitation PT</li> <li>• Awards program</li> <li>• Rear-detachment manager</li> <li>• Rehearsal &amp; ceremony validation</li> </ul>	<p><b>Leader Development Focus</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Platoon sergeants (PSG): engaged leadership</li> <li>• First sergeants (1SG): grooming potential</li> </ul> <p><b>Primary Theme</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Standards and discipline</li> </ul> <p><b>Key Interactions</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Brigade CSM, commander, operations sergeant major (OPS SGM), adjutant/S-1 NCO</li> <li>• Squadron adjutant/S-1 NCO, medical PSG, chaplain, physician assistant, paralegal, retention NCO, equal opportunity, sexual assault response coordinator, career counselor</li> <li>• 1SGs</li> </ul>

**Table. Dragons Terms of Reference (continued)**

<p><b>Executive Officer (XO)</b></p>	<p><b>Focus</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Second in command</li> <li>• Materiel and maintenance readiness</li> <li>• Chief of staff Lead battalion command and control warfighting function</li> <li>• Train staff on military decision-making and rapid decision-making processes</li> <li>• Process focused Manage battle rhythm and battalion standard operating procedures (SOP)</li> <li>• Control staff duty officer program</li> <li>• Synchronize sustainment warfighting function</li> <li>• Manage maintenance, property accountability</li> <li>• Manage unit status report and command inspections</li> <li>• With CSM, command and staff meeting</li> <li>• Manage legal activities</li> <li>• Logistics synchronization</li> <li>• Main command post officer in charge</li> <li>• Officer manning tracker</li> <li>• Financial liability investigation of property loss/investigation quality control</li> <li>• Squadron regulatory programs/social events</li> <li>• Budget management</li> <li>• Safety program oversight</li> <li>• Manager of commander’s critical information requirements</li> <li>• Top-5 huddle</li> <li>• Hails &amp; Farewells, Stable Calls</li> <li>• Government purchasing card management</li> </ul>	<p><b>Leader Development Focus</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Squadron staff officers, staff NCOs</li> <li>• Troop XO</li> </ul> <p><b>Primary Theme</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Systems, processes, and reporting</li> </ul> <p><b>Key Interaction</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Brigade XO, staff</li> <li>• Adjacent units</li> <li>• Squadron CSM, staff, unit public affairs representative, adjutant, maintenance technician, property book officer, staff judge advocate, paralegal</li> <li>• Company XO</li> <li>• Headquarters &amp; headquarters company commander/1SG (support to unit)</li> </ul>
<p><b>Operations Officer (S-3)</b></p>	<p><b>Focus</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Training readiness</li> <li>• Staff content in command and control warfighting function</li> <li>• Calendar synchronization</li> <li>• Squadron training meeting</li> <li>• Training resource meeting</li> <li>• Training management review</li> <li>• Training guidance (quarterly, annually)</li> <li>• Short-range and long-range training calendars</li> <li>• Daily task order and Flash fragmentary orders</li> <li>• Task tracker</li> </ul>	<p><b>Leader Development Focus</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Squadron OPS SGM, staff officers, staff NCOs</li> <li>• Troop commanders: unit training management, 8-Step Training Model</li> </ul> <p><b>Primary Theme</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Planning</li> </ul>

**Table. Dragons Terms of Reference (continued)**

<p><b>Operations Officer (S-3)</b></p>	<p><b>Focus</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Training in military decision-making and rapid decision-making processes for operations personnel</li> <li>• Unit training management systems</li> <li>• Supervise current training and operations</li> <li>• Troop quarterly training briefing reviews and scheduling</li> <li>• Manage ammunition, training land, Digital Training Management System</li> <li>• Manage Army Regulation 350-1 requirements, master resiliency training</li> <li>• Government travel charge card/ Defense Travel System</li> <li>• SOP development</li> <li>• Deliberate risk assessments</li> <li>• Leader professional development schedule</li> <li>• Squadron situation report</li> </ul>	<p><b>Key Interactions</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Brigade S-3, OPS SGM, staff</li> <li>• Adjacent units</li> <li>• Squadron fire support officer, chemical officer, master gunner, intelligence officer</li> <li>• Troop commanders</li> <li>• Assistant S-3s</li> </ul>
<p><b>Operations/Staff Sergeant Major (OPS SGM)</b></p>	<p><b>Focus</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Current operations officer in charge/general staff manager</li> <li>• Tasking order review</li> <li>• Task tracker</li> <li>• Troops-to-task, borrowed military manpower</li> <li>• Staff duty program/SOPs/charge of quarter SOPs</li> <li>• Backside support for collective training (opposing force, Virtual Contracting Enterprise, etc.)</li> <li>• Schools (CO, NCO professional development system, Army Training Requirements and Resource System, troop schools)</li> <li>• Driver's training program</li> <li>• Gunnery oversight</li> <li>• Expert Soldier Badge, Expert Infantryman Badge, Expert Field Medic Badge</li> <li>• Official travel (Defense Travel System)</li> <li>• Ceremony setup</li> <li>• Coordination with adjutant for ceremonies/social functions</li> <li>• Tactical command post readiness/manning with S-3 platoon</li> <li>• Ammo and training aids, devices, simulators, and simulations resources and accounts</li> <li>• Squadron duty and alert roster upkeep</li> </ul>	<p><b>Leader Development Focus</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Squadron staff NCOs: military decision-making process, efficiencies in systems</li> </ul> <p><b>Primary Theme</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Predictability</li> </ul> <p><b>Key Interactions</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Brigade CSM, OPS SGM, staff NCOs</li> <li>• Adjacent Units SGM/CSM</li> <li>• Squadron assistant S-3s, fire support officer, communications &amp; information systems officer, master gunner</li> <li>• Troop 1SGs, operations NCOs</li> </ul>

**Table. Dragons Terms of Reference (continued)**

<p><b>Operations/Staff Sergeant Major (OPS SGM)</b></p>	<p><b>Focus</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Physical establishment/internal systems of main command post</li> <li>• Command and control proficiency (XO)</li> <li>• NCO/soldier of the month boards</li> <li>• Operational tempo referee</li> <li>• Army Battle Command System and command-and-control crew training (Joint Battle Command Platform, Advanced Field Artillery Targeting and Direction System, etc.)</li> <li>• Lead manager of tactical rehearsal setup</li> </ul>	
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(Table by authors)

Consequently, their selection to serve as a CSM is not a random occurrence; it requires a leader with the competence and presence of mind to retain talent and meet Army retention goals.

CSMs also have the role of enforcing the good order and discipline in the organization. At one level, they enforce the standard of conduct, wear of uniforms, and standard operating procedures that most are familiar with. Yet, on another level, they assist in enforcing policies and ensuring fair and equitable treatment of administrative action across the organization. Based on experience, CSMs hold a unique view in all matters pertaining to soldiers and advise the commanders on distinct circumstances related to soldier and administrative/legal actions. The CSM advises the commander on precedents established with legal actions in the squadron and advises the commander on decisions that would demonstrate unfair treatment or otherwise message favoritism. When a commander encounters cases where he or she needs to enforce personnel actions, the CSM can assist the command in ensuring a speedy process by enforcing adherence and efficiency within the personnel and legal systems. CSMs also are critical in linking in the staff judge advocate and unit legal specialists across the subordinate commands and advising the commander to seeking legal advice prior to any administrative action.

Brigade- and battalion-level command teams possess a high degree of positional and personal power. Position within a command team give positional power,

while the personal power comes from subordinates' trust, respect, and admiration for the leader as well as from the leader's charisma.<sup>24</sup> Both the commander and the CSM must command with a degree of humility and self-awareness to understand this power. Additionally, they must also observe each other as well as subordinate command teams to ensure all are using their power effectively and for positive influence. This comes through leading by example, treating others as you would want to be treated, self-awareness, and humility. With great power comes a responsibility to manage it accordingly. Conversely, power for personal gain undermines positional and personal influence and is a threat to good order and discipline or worse yet, a compromise of the command team's authority. Some common examples include inappropriate relationships (or the perception thereof) and misuse of government resources (e.g., finances, personnel, vehicles). CSMs at the battalion and brigade levels are not authorized personal assistants and should not have subordinates conducting favors such as personal taskings or paying for gifts, food, or gas. Moreover, the positional power could become intoxicating to the point a leader may become so self-absorbed that they believe the rules simply do not apply to them.

One much less extreme but more common example is when a CSM unintentionally usurps the commander's authority by creating a separate "NCO tasking channel" that is separate from the operation process without the commander's knowledge. This challenges

the commander's authority and priorities, and decreases the organization's shared understanding. CSM Wayne Wahlenmeier illustrates this point: "A CSM can pick up the phone or send an email that can change the focus, efforts, and lives of all of my Paratroopers and their families. But, a battalion has a certain momentum and inertia that is very difficult to shift on a dime. Every time a short notice or no-notice change is made, it increases the chance of missing tasks, making mistakes, and can cause your staff and commanders to operate in crisis management mode."<sup>25</sup> Furthermore, as CSM Christopher Carey notes, "A CSM is like a Tyrannosaurus rex—when walking around the unit area, CSMs encounter soldiers and NCOs, and they will immediately respond to guidance or corrections, often at the expense of whatever task they are doing. A T-Rex, however, also has a giant clumsy tail that can often destroy everything behind it."<sup>26</sup> This is attributable to the power of the CSM, as their decisions often carry significant weight. If they do not watch out for the tail, they may not realize the effects they have, often at the expense of already established commander's priorities or guidance.

As an extension of the command, there are some areas where abuse of power, rank, or position can arise. The CSM can demonstrate unlawful command influence (UCI) and should be aware of the risk in doing so. In general, "UCI is the improper use, or perception of use, of a superior authority to interfere with the court-martial process," nonjudicial punishments, or adverse actions.<sup>27</sup> For example, using threats of nonjudicial punishment to force compliance and/or change behaviors; the commander alone can impose nonjudicial punishment, and it should not be used as threat or coercion to bring about compliance or behavioral change of an individual or the organization. As an extension of the command team, CSMs need to clearly understand the roles and responsibilities when making recommendations to the commander or during coaching or mentoring regarding legal or adverse actions. CSMs play a vital role in the coaching and mentorship of both the commander and subordinate command teams. Still, mentorship and coaching needs to be in accordance with staff judge advocate counsel. A CSM can recommend disposition to their commander but needs to ensure that the commander has the ultimate disposition authority and that decision is consistent and fair.

## Command Sergeants Major on the Battlefield

One final point on the command team dynamic is the where the commander and CSM place themselves on the battlefield, in training, or amidst the organization during garrison daily activities. The command team needs to be cohesive and present an image to the organization of a unified team, exemplifying the values, discipline, standards, goals, and vision for the formation. However, this does not necessarily mean that the command team needs to be together observing training, operations, or garrison activities. Based on their "expert" authority and wealth of experience relative to the rest of the organization, the commander and CSM should have the trust and confidence in each other to be able to operate independently when observing the soldiers of their organization. Common narratives against this concept suggest that the commander and the CSM could appear as not unified when there is trouble between them, or, worse yet, when they espouse different standards. Our experience suggests the opposite. By operating independently, the command team can provide more observation of the organization to identify issues, solve problems, and highlight areas of performance, both good and bad. This may apply to physical training, motor pool operations, or when there are several high-risk or high-visibility events in which command team influence may be warranted. The same concept applies in combat, where the commander may need to place himself or herself at the decisive points while the CSM may need to operate geographically separated at another area of friction. Combat should not be the first time the command team operates separately; this should be practiced and learned in the garrison environment. Finally, operating decentralized and independently requires a degree of deliberate synchronization and deliberate planning to ensure there are touchpoints/daily synchs to reconcile feedback, trends, and issues and enable the command team to properly formulate assessments, AARs, and remedies based on observations. We recommend additional instruction on these themes.

**The CSM in combat.** Command teams should broaden their analysis and think in terms beyond the temporal when determining where to place the CSM in combat. Army doctrine and training states that the commander should place himself or herself at the decisive point on the battlefield to make timely decision for converging effects at a specific place, key event, critical factor to attain a marked advantage.<sup>28</sup> This does not necessarily mean or imply that

the CSM also needs to be at the same location. In addition to the decisive point, there will always be other areas of friction or risk in warfare, and CSMs can apply their experience, leadership, and judgment at those other points. Commanders should assign roles and responsibilities for CSMs by outlining how they support their battalion/brigade by operation. FM 3-0 clearly characterizes the conduct of warfare in three operations: offense, defense, and stability.<sup>29</sup> Command teams can determine where a CSM fights in combat by examining his or her role through the lens of these operations. As an example, we will focus on some recommendations for the offense and defense.

**The CSM in the offense.** At the tactical level, the CSM, guided by his or her expertise, can directly affect the tempo of the battlefield. Tempo exists as a principal characteristic of the offense, and it involves “the rhythm of operations with respect to the enemy.”<sup>30</sup> This necessitates that a commander empowers a CSM to exercise authority at critical junctures on the battlefield. In short, the CSM can operate on disciplined initiative and influence the tempo of an offense to prevent early culmination or expand the number of dilemmas that a commander can exert on an enemy. For example, CSMs directly interface with logistical trains to ensure forces or capabilities arrive at the decisive point at the prescribed time. CSMs can also drive the reconstitution process when employed at critical nodes such as the personnel holding area, unit maintenance collection point, or combat trains. Additionally, the CSM can serve the commander and unit well during periods of transition and during reorganization and consolidation. The CSM should maintain relationships across the logistics community to reduce friction and make processes more efficient. Lastly, a commander has several tools at his or her disposal to clearly delineate where the battalion/brigade should devote its efforts toward achieving a desired tempo. First, the commander can outline their views of tempo within the commander’s intent. Second, the commander can outline where momentum/tempo is impacted through the decision support matrix. The commander can determine where he or she is needed on the battle, often in high friction areas or the decisive point. However, the commander should choose to employ the CSM in other areas of friction identified in the decision support matrix or areas where tempo is at risk of reducing. In some instances, this may encompass areas of enemy contact where

the CSMs experience and judgement may prove vital in assisting subordinate commanders or junior leaders during isolated fights across the battlefield.

**The CSM in the defense.** The role of the CSM in the defense shares parallels with options mentioned in the previous paragraph. First, commander’s intent and a decision support tool provide a commander with context to articulate where the CSM should operate in the defense. Second, a CSM can operate from a position of advantage and influence the timely arrival of combat power at the decisive point. However, the role of the CSM in the defense has several key distinctions. Flexibility and security underpin the essential characteristics that a CSM can affect in the defense. A CSM provides flexibility by operating with logistics nodes in the defense to ensure a unit can maintain operational reach and can affect the enemy. Additionally, a CSM can apportion combat power short of the forward line of troops to enable security for critical combat assets (e.g., fires, logistics, medical assets). Lastly, a CSM reduces risk to forces by conducting combat inspections along the forward line of own troops to ensure subordinate units have established control measures and markings to prevent fratricide or early detection from the enemy. Furthermore, the CSM can inspect areas in the battlefield commonly neglected such as retransmission sites, mortar firing points, observations posts, and the position of the reserve. The recommendations listed for the CSM’s role in combat are not exclusive and may not have adequately addressed all friction areas.

## Recommendations

This article illustrates that there is a bonified need to update U.S. Army regulations and doctrine, and perhaps some leadership training. Regarding doctrine, TC 7-22.7 needs updating. It should expound on the readiness, leadership, training management, communications, operations, and program management topics addressed in this article. Doctrine should further outline a clear division of roles and responsibilities between the CSM and the operations SGM, as this is vague and unclear in TC 7-22.7. The terms of reference in the figure highlights some additional roles and responsibilities that could perhaps serve as a best practice or become codified in doctrine. Furthermore, AR 600-20 requires updates to focus on the importance of the command team, including defining the command team, explaining its importance, defining roles and responsibilities within the command team, establishing imperatives for

counseling and communication, and articulating the importance of understanding positional and personal power.

Regarding leadership, the Army needs to update curriculum or programs of instruction (POI) to include a more deliberate foundation of the battalion- and brigade-level command teams. The School for Command Preparation in Fort Leavenworth, Kansas, conducts the battalion- and brigade-level precommand courses. However, this course does not allocate enough time in the POI to address why the command team is the most consequential leadership team in our Army. The prescribed readings do not include TC 7-22.7 but should include them as mandatory. The POI should be expanded to cover the importance of the command team, with discussion centered on roles and responsibilities; the importance of commander teams; understanding power dynamics (personal and positional power); and the abuse of power and associated pitfalls to include recent trend analysis of battalion- and brigade-level CSM and commanders who have been removed from position. The course could also benefit by introducing a staff judge advocate to offer a more holistic and deeper instruction on UCI, abuse of power, misappropriation of government resources, etc., particularly in at the small-group level. Finally, the output for the “building cohesive teams” block of instruction should provide each member

with deliberate “terms of reference” with clear roles and responsibilities for command teams based on the level of command. Our command experience to this point demonstrates that we were not as prepared as we could have been. Perhaps these recommendations will assist future command teams in understanding clear roles and responsibilities moving forward.

## Conclusion

The importance of CSMs and their role within the battalions and brigades across the Army cannot be overstated. CSMs possess the influence, power, and expertise to enhance the readiness of their respective organizations and demonstrate care to our soldiers—the U.S. Army’s most vital resource. Yet, specific regulations and leadership development do not adequately address the formidable roles CSMs play. Although the argument and prescriptions set forward in this article are not the only way to address the problem, they do offer a road map forward to educate our leaders on the significance of the position. Clear identification of roles and responsibilities and understanding of the elements of a command team will assist future leaders in improving organizational effectiveness and educate those who could otherwise succumb to the pitfalls inherent to their position. ■

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## Notes

1. Daniel K. Elder, *The History of the Sergeant Major, from Then to Now* (Fort Bliss, TX: U.S. Army Museum of the Noncommissioned Officer, 1998), 5, accessed 28 June 2023, <https://ncohistory.com/files/SGMhistory.pdf>.

2. *Ibid.*

3. *Ibid.*, 7.

4. *Ibid.*, 8.

5. Army Regulation (AR) 600-20, *Army Command Policy and Procedures* (Washington, DC: U.S. Government Printing Office, 30 June 1969 [obsolete]), 9.

6. Elder, *The History of the Sergeant Major*, 7.

7. *Ibid.*, 8; Field Manual (FM) 22-600-20, *The Army Noncommissioned Officer Guide* (Washington, DC: U.S. Government Printing Office, March 1980 [obsolete]).

8. Elder, *The History of the Sergeant Major*, 9; Training Circular (TC) 22-6, *The Army Noncommissioned Officer Guide* (Washington, DC: U.S. Government Printing Office, November 1990 [obsolete]).

9. TC 7-22.7, *The Noncommissioned Officer Guide* (Washington, DC: U.S. Government Publishing Office [GPO], 2020), 2-5–2-7.

10. *Ibid.*, 2-5.

11. *Ibid.*, 2-6.

12. FM 7-0, *Training* (Washington, DC: U.S. GPO, 2021), 4-21.

13. *Ibid.*, 2-6. The acronym PACE applies to a communication order of precedence and stands for primary, alternate, contingency, and emergency.

14. FM 3-0, *Operations* (Washington, DC: U.S. GPO, 2022), fig. 8-1.

15. *Ibid.*, 2-7.

16. James C. McConville and J. P. McGee, “Battalion Commanders Are the Seed Corn of the Army,” *War on the Rocks*, 23 December 2019, accessed 27 June 2023, <https://warontherocks.com/2019/12/battalion-commanders-are-the-seed-corn-of-the-army/>.

17. James Dubik and David M. Hodne, “The Battalion Commander and Command Sergeant Major: The Most Important Senior Leaders in the Army,” *Army Magazine*, February 2013, accessed 27 June 2023, [https://www.ansa.org/sites/default/files/FC\\_Dubik\\_0213.pdf](https://www.ansa.org/sites/default/files/FC_Dubik_0213.pdf).

18. TC 7-22.7, *The Noncommissioned Officer Guide*, 2-4.

19. *Ibid.*, 3-13.

20. Army Doctrine Publication 6-22, *Army Leadership and the Profession* (Washington, DC: U.S. GPO, July 2019), chap. 9.

21. Dubik and Hodne, “The Battalion Commander and Command Sergeant Major.”

22. AR 601-280, *Army Retention Program* (Washington, DC: U.S. GPO, 2021), 5.

23. "Submit a Referral," GoArmy, accessed 27 June 2023, <https://www.goarmy.com/refer.html>.  
 24. TC 7-22.7, *The Noncommissioned Officer Guide*, 3-5, 3-6.  
 25. Wayne Wahlenmeier, "A Letter to My First Sergeants," LinkedIn, 23 January 2023, accessed 27 June 2023, <https://www.linkedin.com/pulse/letter-my-first-sergeants-wayne-wahlenmeier>.  
 26. Christopher Carey (command sergeant major, 1st Cavalry Regiment, 1st Armored Brigade Combat Team, 1st Armored

Division, Fort Bliss, Texas), interview by Lt. Col. Bernard Gardner, 22 March 2023.  
 27. Miscellaneous Publication 27-8, *Commander's Legal Handbook 2019* (Charlottesville, VA: The Judge Advocate General's Legal Center and School, 2019), 17.  
 28. FM 3-0, *Operations*, 3-18–3-19.  
 29. *Ibid.*, 1-9.  
 30. *Ibid.*, 3-3.

# Letter to the Editor

Dear Editor,

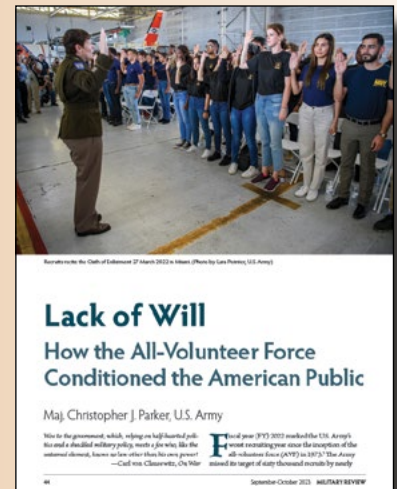
The scope of Maj. Christopher J. Parker's well-researched and well-written article, "Lack of Will" (September-October 2023 *Military Review*) does not include the leadership challenges presented by conscripts.

Gen. William Westmoreland testified before the Commission on an All-Volunteer Army that he did not want to command an army of mercenaries. Milton Friedman then asked him, "General, would you rather command an army of slaves?" Anyone who is forced, under penalty of law, to perform an act against his will for a prescribed period is a prisoner or slave, which was Friedman's point. A prisoner will take minimum risk and will cooperate only as much as is necessary to avoid punishment. As a junior officer while the Army still had draftees, I discovered that I was not leading these reluctant soldiers; instead, I was preventing their escape. Soldiering was not their priority. Threats were more persuasive than incentives. Standards like physical fitness could not be enforced because expulsion was a reward rather than a threat. Compulsory military service did not grow their patriotism any more than incarceration builds solid citizenship.

I met families of WWII draftees who had a lifelong resentment against the government that kidnapped their spouses, siblings, and sons. Conscription is never perceived to be fairly levied throughout the eligible population. Thousands of Americans went to Canada to avoid the draft for Vietnam, and thousands of Ukrainians and Russians are currently fleeing conscription that interrupts their planned lives. Although armies need bulk to successfully fight a prolonged war, the draftees consider themselves to be mere bullet catchers.

Officers who are accustomed to leading volunteers would not recognize their Army if it depended on conscripts.

Michael W. Symanski  
 Maj. Gen. U.S. Army, Ret.



"Lack of Will" by Maj. Christopher Parker, published in *Military Review* September-October 2023, can be viewed online at <https://www.armyupress.army.mil/Journals/Military-Review/English-Edition-Archives/September-October-2023/Lack-of-Will>.