

# The Command Sergeant Major



# Fires and Maneuver

(Graphic by NCO Journal)

## The Command Sergeant's Major Role in Fires and Maneuver

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**A**rmy doctrine is many things, but "it is not dogma to be applied blindly. It is adjusted to the circumstances of the operational environment."<sup>1</sup> Doctrine describes the role of a command sergeant major and tasks them to affect numerous areas of friction.

The command sergeant major is the senior noncommissioned officer in a unit who advises the commander on all issues related to the enlisted ranks. Commanders employ their command sergeants major throughout an area of operations to extend command influence, assess morale of the force, and assist during critical events.<sup>2</sup>

At the Joint Multinational Readiness Center (JMRC), U.S. Army Garrison Bavaria, Hohenfels Training Area, we train U.S. forces, our allies, and partners as a joint

multinational force thus; areas of friction are a greater challenge. All JMRC exercises are multinational and take place in a decisive-action environment.

This article provides a deeper understanding of the role of the command sergeant major and provides senior NCOs the essentials from two different perspectives: a maneuver command sergeant major and a fires command sergeant major serving as senior trainers at JMRC.

### **Maneuver Perspective: Expanding the Influence**

One of the primary responsibilities of command sergeants major is the ability to extend command influence and help commanders "see the organization."



Command Sgt. Maj. Brian M. Dettle assumes responsibility as the senior enlisted advisor of the 205th Military Intelligence Battalion, 500th Military Intelligence Brigade-Theater during a change of responsibility ceremony at the historic Palm Circle on Fort Shafter, Hawaii, Feb. 1, 2019. (U.S. Army photo by Staff Sgt. Shameeka R. Stanley)

To be successful, command sergeants major need to be empowered by their commanders. This requires gaining and maintaining the commander's trust. Having their trust enables freedom of movement across the formation and creates open dialogue with subordinate command teams. This generates a common understanding as pertinent information is shared between companies, battalions, commanders, and brigade staffs.

Do key leaders plan for their own mobility? Do they help the commander "see the unit" and identify areas that are not meeting the intent? Do NCOs position themselves to identify friction and have a positive impact? Do first sergeants/command sergeants major engage platoon leaders/commanders along with platoon sergeants/first sergeants to open dialogue? Do platoon sergeants/squad leaders know the mission and intent? Can they effectively communicate the "why" to the Soldiers? Do they supervise all aspects of the fight?

## 2. NCOs in the Operations Process

**OPERATIONS:** Do NCOs understand the military decision making process/troop leading procedures? Is their role in the staff process well-defined and understood? Do they maintain/understand running estimates, warfighting functions, synchronization meetings, and operations synch? Are they aware/understand the importance of the decision support matrix and how it is tied to information requirements? Can they make recommendations during the fight on the current operations integrating cell floor or in planning?

**FIRES:** Are the NCOs involved in the planning and execution of the fires plan? Are they experts in their mission command systems? Do they understand/execute Artillery Systems Cooperation Activity/digital fires?

**CASEVAC:** Do NCOs understand the plan? Are they leading the rehearsal? Does the commander leverage the NCO's experience? Are the right NCOs tied into the plan at the appropriate level? Are non-standard platforms

To be successful, command sergeants major need to be empowered by their commanders.

Command sergeants major act as conduits of perspectives between the brigade planners and Soldiers. Through collaboration, they can help influence parallel planning across the brigades and battalions. Yet, this influence is not limited to command sergeants major. Other senior NCOs also play an integral role. Below is a table of fundamentals for senior NCOs from the JMRC perspective.

## Fundamentals for Success

### 1. Extending Command Influence

Do the senior NCOs have a working knowledge of all parts of the plan in order to advise on areas of friction?

briefed, utilized, and trained? Is the unit's plan tied in with adjacent units?

**SUSTAINMENT:** Do NCOs make sound and timely recommendations? Do they understand the plan and are integrated into the rehearsals? Do NCOs anticipate transitions and needs? Do NCOs effectively execute the plan? Are accurate logistics statistics turned in? Are platoon sergeants and first sergeants involved in the process?

### 3. TLPs/PCCs/PCIs

Are troop leading procedures happening at the company/platoon/squad level? Is the process understood, followed and resourced? Are rehearsals and pre-combat checks directed/specified from higher HQs? Do subordi-

nate NCOs conduct implied pre-combat checks/rehearsal based on the order? Does the unit have a standard operating procedure (SOP)? Does it clearly outline pre-combat checks/pre-combat inspections and rehearsal procedures? Are the rehearsals/pre-combat checks effective and discuss what is pertinent at the appropriate level?

#### 4. Security and Force Protection

What is the unit's priority of work? Is it disseminated and followed? Does the unit follow their SOP? Who checks and verifies the security plan at echelon? Is security integrated with adjacent units? Is risk management completed and changed based upon mission, then properly disseminated? Are the NCOs involved in risk management planning? Who is enforcing fighter management within the unit? Do the NCOs understand field craft and enforce it? Do NCOs understand the task/purpose for obstacle emplacement and employ accordingly?

#### 5. Discipline

**ORGANIZATIONAL:** Do NCOs understand the battle rhythm and integrate themselves accordingly? Does the unit perform routine tasks regularly? Does the unit follow its tactical SOP or have one? Does the unit conduct effective rehearsals at echelon that NCOs are a key part of?

**INDIVIDUAL:** Do NCOs/Soldiers show initiative? Do Soldiers employ camouflage and stay in uniform? Are NCOs setting the example? Do NCOs enforce unit standards? Is the unit physically ready to accomplish its mission? Do NCOs conduct checks/inspections prior to execution? Are units using proper movement formations?

#### Know the Plan

Command sergeants major do not need to be technical experts in all warfighting functions but they must be knowledgeable enough to ask hard questions and observe with a critical eye. By doing so, they leverage experience to influence brigade and battalion staffs, which assists plan development.

If command sergeants major are not engaged in synchronization meetings,<sup>3</sup> or are not a part of the military decision making process<sup>4</sup> over the course of developing the plan, areas of friction, or decisions relevant to the operation may not be properly identified. Without understanding or knowing these critical areas, they cannot extend the commanders' influence or provide assistance during critical events. In addition, without understanding the effort, their ability to advise commanders and staffs is degraded.



U.S. Army Paratroopers assigned to Headquarters and Headquarters Company, 1st Battalion, 503rd Parachute Infantry Regiment, 173rd Airborne Brigade fire an M252, 81mm mortar system during a live-fire training exercise at the Baumholder Military Training Area, Baumholder, Germany, Jan. 18, 2018. (U.S. Army photo by Ruediger Hess, Training Support Activity Europe)



Command Sgt. Maj. Jerel B. Foster (left), command sergeant major of the 4th Special Troops Battalion, 4th Sustainment Brigade, talks with Soldiers during a road march on Fort Carson, Colorado, March 8, 2019. Soldiers and leaders from the brigade walked a total of six miles. (U.S. Army photo by Sgt. James Geelen)

## Relationships

The brigade command sergeant major must leverage the subordinate unit command sergeant major to "own their enterprise." As an example, the brigade's senior enlisted fires trainer is also the fires command sergeant major. A brigade command sergeant major should encourage and empower the fires command sergeant major to assume responsibility for training brigade fires personnel.

The same goes for the brigade support battalion command sergeant major. As the senior enlisted logistician, no one is better suited to ensure that the brigade logistics, support operations officer and medical operations officer are executing their tasks appropriately. How beneficial would it be for the maneuver battalion command sergeant major to assist brigade planners during course of action development? Rarely do we see brigade senior NCOs employed in that manner.

Battalion command sergeants major need to stay engaged with their respective units, but also advise brigade staffs on the best use of their units and to use their expertise in planning and execution.

## Friction Points

While commanders typically move with the decisive effort, command sergeants major deploy to the areas with the most risk or anticipated friction and utilize NCOs to apply the "grease" to these friction points.

The first step is to identify these potential friction areas during the planning phase and mitigate risks during the military decision making process, rather than during execution.

The command sergeants' major battlefield location during execution is determined by the plan. Equipped with the schedule of events and experience, they know where they can make the biggest impact in reducing friction. During plan execution, it is their experience and direct link to the commander that makes the difference.

## Battlefield Circulation

Mobility planning at a combat training center is critical. Often we observe command sergeants major confined to their tactical operations centers and unable to get out and see the force. This limits their impact and hampers the brigade's mission.

This is even more critical at JMRC where task organizations incorporate multinational elements. Seeing the force, enhances a shared understanding and helps to overcome challenges with human, procedural, and technical interoperability. A brigade/battalion command sergeants major's ability to travel must be built into the plan.

## **Fires Perspective, Own the Enterprise**

Regardless of military occupational specialty, battalion command sergeants major should be well-rounded and educated in all fields. As senior fires command sergeants major, they need to get out of their comfort zones and view each specialty in the field artillery branch.

The field artillery mission is to destroy, defeat, or disrupt the enemy with integrated fires to enable maneuver commanders to dominate.<sup>5</sup> The more the command sergeants major know about the mission, the more effective they can be in ensuring fires commanders coordinate and communicate with the maneuver elements.

The employment of artillery fire hinges on synchronization with fire supporters embedded with units while delivering timely and accurate fire support. Successful maneuver requires collaboration between maneuver and fires units to coordinate artillery fire missions. The field artillery organizational structure within brigade combat teams and divisions should not limit the ability to deliver fires.

Fires support ground and air operations by attacking the enemy throughout the battlefield, setting the conditions for the scheme of maneuver. The fires command sergeants major must collaborate, build relationships, and own the fires enterprise to extend influence across the area of operations.

## **System of Systems**

Artillery fire, as an integrated weapons system, requires the continual analyzing, allocating, and scheduling of fires through fire support training, planning, and rehearsals.<sup>6</sup> Senior fires NCOs ensure the plan addresses all of these items as well as means of fire support and integrates indirect fires, joint fires, and target acquisition with maneuver. The plan should also identify critical times and places for employment while considering possible limitations. Ensuring this information is provided to the lowest echelon, understood, and adaptable for bottom-up refinement is paramount.

Commanders of a field artillery battalion are often dual-hatted as fire support coordinators; their duties pull them away from the battalion headquarters and can cause them to lose focus on the execution of key tasks. This requires command sergeants major to be their second set of eyes in ensuring plan execution and timely decision making.

Command sergeants major must also ensure Soldiers

understand the plan, are certified to perform their function, and they are fully qualified on their equipment. Command sergeants major confirm the certification program is in place, and are rigorous in its execution to produce desired results at the right time and place.

## **The Five Requirements**

For field artillery units, there are five requirements for accurate fire. They are accurate target location and size, accurate firing unit location, accurate weapons and munitions information, accurate meteorological information, and accurate computational procedures.<sup>7</sup>

From the JMRC perspective, units routinely satisfy three of the five requirements. However, rotational training units rarely account for meteorological conditions or muzzle velocity variations as part of their computational procedures. These non-standard conditions affect the direction and distance of the round as it travels to the target. If the five requirements are not satisfied, the desired effects on the target will not happen.

To train as we fight, rotational units must not compromise standards regardless of the conditions. The command sergeant major has to set the tone by enforcing standards of discipline and ensuring everyone understands the fires mission to destroy, suppress, or neutralize the enemy and allow freedom of movement for the maneuver.

## **Duties Common to Both Positions**

Selecting the right people and making sure they receive the training they need to manage mission command systems is critical to the success of the tactical operations center. Sending Soldiers to the digital master gunner course, or the future master gunner course and ensuring these skill sets are maintained within the staff are critically important.

Units must invest in training Soldiers with longevity or risk-reduced operational performance due to the loss of experienced Soldiers. Command sergeants major must oversee this management and ensure the training program is executed by the operations sergeants major.

Command sergeants major also assist their commanders with rear area security. Most commanders are reluctant to use combat power to protect rear area and interior lines but need to plan for the protection of combat train and field train command posts. In addition to those areas, tactical operations centers, unit maintenance collection points, and brigade support areas all need to be secured. These functions lack anti-armor capability and, when facing an armored enemy, require protection measures. Command sergeants major can assist in forming a rear area security plan and assess the effectiveness of security measures.

In addition to a rear area security plan, having a coherent sustainment plan that includes casualty and medical evacuation adjusted to each operation throughout the

CTC rotation is challenging. Units struggle with ambulance exchange points and logistic release point locations and often do not have a shared understanding across the brigade. Not being able to evacuate casualties in a timely manner erodes the trust between command teams and Soldiers. NCOs solve this problem throughout most of their careers. Through their experience, they have detailed insight into what works and what does not work.

Incorporating a fires plan into the rear area security is often overlooked and is another way to add protection. It should identify the critical and defended asset lists and levy protection against them.

Camouflage and concealment can go a long way but nothing replaces firepower. Improper protection planning gives commanders a false impression that they have more combat power available for the fight when some of that combat power will be needed for protection. The command sergeant major is in a unique position to travel across the formation and bring back unvarnished feedback the commander can use to make informed decisions.

The difference at the battalion and brigade level is a staff to develop these plans. Checking in with the staff sections charged with planning and executing the sustainment and casualty evacuation plans should be a priority

for the command sergeants major, but not be all-encompassing. It is only one of the areas, which brigade and battalion command sergeants major should focus.

Command sergeants major, especially the brigade support battalion command sergeant major, should look at the brigade plan for detail and feasibility. The maneuver command sergeant major should ensure the plan supports the tactical plan and identify friction points.

## Conclusion

Doctrine describes command sergeants' major roles as senior enlisted advisors who extend command influence, assess morale of the force, and assist during critical events. These broad categories only scratch the surface of what it takes to be successful as a senior NCO. Given the breadth and depth of friction points and critical events across a brigade's area of operations, command sergeants major must use their experience and understanding of operations to position themselves to enable the fight.

Collaboration and dialogue across units, with other senior NCOs, command teams, and Soldiers within the unit is critical to success. At JMRC, we strive to train the way will we fight in the future and "Train to Win!" ■

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## Notes

1. Army Doctrine Publication 1-01, Doctrine Primer, September 2014, para. 2-8.

2. Army Doctrine Reference Publication 6-0, Mission Command, May 2012, para. 3-38, see also Field Manual 3-96, Brigade Combat Team, October 2015; see also Field Manual 6-0, Commander and Staff Organization and Operations, May 2014.

3. Field Manual 3-0, Operations, October 2017.

4. Field Manual 6-0, Commander and Staff Organization and

Operations, May 2014.

5. Army Doctrine Reference Publication 5-0, The Operations Process, May 2012.

6. Fires is defined as the use of weapon systems to create a specific lethal or nonlethal effect on a target. Joint Publication 3-09, Joint Fire Support, December 2014.

7. Field Manual 3-09, Field Artillery Operations and Fire Support, April 2014.

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