



U.S. Army 1st Sgt. Ivan Mendez, with the 4th Brigade Combat Team, 1st Cavalry Division, looks through a laser range finder at Forward Operating Base Gamberi, Laghman province, Afghanistan, May 18, 2013. (U.S. Army photo by Spc. Hilda Clayton)

Command Team

By 1st Sgt. Gerald J. Schleining Jr.

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“The command team must know each other’s strengths and weaknesses, because those are the team’s strengths and weaknesses. For the command team to reach a point of tangency, it must use the strengths to its greatest advantage while covering for the other’s weaknesses.”

—Command Sgt. Maj. Jimmie W. Spencer, letter Sept. 1, 1997

An old sergeant major told me on the day I put on my diamond, “You have a choice to make. You can either get along with your commander and have a good relationship, or you can not get along and drag through your tenure. Either way you are bound to take care of your company, and nothing else matters.”

As I began my first tour as a first sergeant I took heed to those words, looking down the road at the next two years asking myself, “How do I want to leave this command?” This began my learning process of the command team and what my role in it was.

My commander at the time was a seasoned commander. He had been in command for a year and a half and was ready to change the direction of the company.

We were in the preparation phase of a Joint Readiness Training Center (JRTC) rotation, and the company had gone through a major rotation of key leaders.

We had new platoon leaders, underdeveloped non-commissioned officers, and besides a lot of motivated

Soldiers, the company was ripe for change. The outgoing first sergeant retired and had taken a standoffish approach to the unit in his last year.

Needless to say, I was fit for a challenge that would solidify all that it meant to be a first sergeant. My command sergeant major whispered in my ear as he congratulated me on my promotion that I would earn my diamond in the next six months.

My first priority was to learn what it was that was expected of me as a first sergeant. I think that we all *know* what a first sergeant is supposed to be and what the first sergeant’s basic function is in the company, but what are the nuts and bolts?

At battalion staff meetings the “command team” kept being brought up. It was an expectation by our battalion commander that the company commanders and first sergeants operated as one team.

I figured that was logical, but what did it entail? The first step would be to find out who my commander really was; what was his leadership philosophy? What did he

expect from his Soldiers, his NCOs, and his first sergeant?

This would build a foundation that I could work from. In this discussion, we learned about each other's leadership style and came up with a basic understanding of each other.

The second thing that the commander and I began to embark on was goals for the unit. Staying within the parameters of *Battle-Focused Training*, we established short-term and long-term goals.

With JRTC quickly approaching, we kept it in our short-term window and looked at what we could affect in the time prior to the rotation. JRTC became our intermediate point. It would be the event that we would measure our results from.

The commander outlined his training objectives, and I provided my input on NCO development and individual training. We also discussed discipline and family welfare.

Once we had a grasp of the direction of the company, I still was unclear on the execution of the tentative plan. Whose job was whose?

It was evident that the ultimate goal of the command team was to take care of the company. Having a clear understanding of the goals and objectives of the unit helped in knowing which element would have a greater impact on the outcome.

We agreed that in order to better operate in a command team, he would task-organize the goals of the unit and assign a task or goal to a specific member of the command team.

Ownership of the task fell on the commander, and with that understanding it enabled us to stay within our own lanes.

An agreement that we would stay in our lanes maintained a good working climate and enabled us to move freely from one goal to the next.

During our weekly training meeting we discussed our progress. When help or support was needed, it was there on both sides.

By the time our rotation at JRTC was in the memory

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My questions about “command team” and officer/NCO relationships still had not been answered. I tried to look back at the near past and draw from my experience as a platoon sergeant. The development and training of young lieutenants was very different than working with a seasoned officer.

While the job of a platoon sergeant is extremely challenging and rewarding, the company-level relationships are far more formal and require mature leadership and an understanding of the full scope of responsibilities and duties of that leadership.

A quick study of doctrine, *Field Manual (FM) 7-10* [now known as *Army Techniques Publication 3-21.10: Infantry Rifle Company*], led me to my job description. This provided an outline of my duties and responsibilities as a first sergeant of a rifle company. **A more comprehensive description of NCO leadership responsibilities can be found in [Training Circular: 7-22.7: The Noncommissioned Officer Guide](#).*

I then looked at the commander's job description, to have a better understanding of what he would be required to accomplish and to put myself in a position, as his advisor to aid him.

This was one of the most important tools I found. It gave a clear and concise outline of our duties.

The command team was starting to make sense. Looking at our job descriptions the two jobs [assisted by the XO] complement each other in many cases, and at times the lines blurred and came together.

books, we had managed to complete and maintain 80 percent of our objectives. The key to success was a desire to put the number one thing first and that is the *company*.

In the duties and responsibilities outlined in *FM 7-10*, the underlying assumption is that the number one task of the command is to take care of the company. This includes the training of the Soldiers and their welfare. It means that tactically, logistically, and administratively the company must be sound.

In order to accomplish this, the command team must effectively work together. Personal feelings must be put aside or dealt with upfront, and objectives must be clearly defined and task-organized within the command team.

Staying in your lanes is a critical piece also. It provides trust and confidence in both leaders and allows for freedom in action. It never goes without the mutual support of the team.

It is not your company — we only borrow it for a time. We should all look forward to the possible end of our tours as first sergeants and ask, “How will I leave this command?”

Hopefully, with a well-developed plan and the execution of a working command team grounded in the understanding that the unit comes first, the company will be much better than when you borrowed it. ■

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