



The Battallion Staff

By CPT Scott Nusom

There are few assignments in the Army that produce the same unique leadership challenge as commanding a headquarters and headquarters company (HHC) and what makes the HHC command so challenging is learning how to productively integrate and interact with the battalion staff. To be fair, the company-battalion staff relationship is complicated. First, members of the staff have a diverse group of leaders competing for their time and resources that you don't normally find in a traditional company. Second, the battalion staff usually works in a separate building, physically dividing the company. Finally, the perception of how the company headquarters communicates can be just as bad as the perception of the staff failing to attend company training.

More likely than not, there is one of two reasons why you were selected to command and HHC. You were either a successful commander rewarded with a second command or you were selected because the brigade commander believed you were professionally capable of handling the complexities of leading an HHC. Regardless, how you choose to handle the company-staff relationship will probably be the difference between having a successful and

enjoyable experience or being continuously frustrated and falling into the stereotypical HHC mentality of “us versus them”. Although command philosophies and styles of leadership differ, focusing on these three techniques will help an HHC command team build a strong, integrated relationship with the battalion staff.

Establish realistic expectations through simplicity and redundancy. Let’s be honest, you are not training the staff for a major collective exercise, as a matter of fact, you aren’t really training the sections at all. Any training they do as a collective entity will be planned by the field grade officers who have daily oversight over the sections. As the HHC Commander, your training role as it pertains to the staff is to ensure that all Soldiers meet the individual requirements needed to deploy (and to function effectively as a Soldier). Your company’s training plan for the staff needs to solely focus on individual training. It can be challenging enough to complete the basic requirements in an HHC, much less accomplish more audacious training objectives. If your training plan requires a majority of the staff to be pulled away from their primary responsibilities, you will end up frustrated and disappointed. In order to maximize staff participation at company training events, remove the guess work from the training schedule. Establish a weekly training battle rhythm where a few simple training events are occurring on the same days each week (or each month) and ensure you build in redundancy as it is an unrealistic expectation to think that the entire staff can attend a company training event simultaneously. For example, conducting Sergeants Time Training in the morning and again in the afternoon will allow the staff sections to rotate their Soldiers to training without shutting down the battalion. Additionally, scheduling mandatory training twice a week will give the staff flexibility and greatly increase the level of participation.

Build relationships and practice strategic communication. Building effective relationships with battalion leaders will set the foundation for your success at integrating the staff with the company training plan. As a result, you need to get to work on this as soon as you assume command. The two field grade officers understand the difficulties of leading an HHC and they will want to ensure you and the company succeeds. However, they can’t support what you don’t tell them and their priorities of running the battalion will always be their main focus. It is important that you sit down with both field grade officers after assuming command and let them know your plan for ensuring the staff remains trained and ready for deployment and ask them for their input and feedback. Be willing to make adjustments and always let them know about important events in advance so they can apply the appropriate amount of pressure when needed. Further, you should make it a priority to develop a positive relationship with the operations sergeant major. No one understands the importance of training like senior non-commissioned officers and he/she can be very

influential at getting the staff to company training events. Another important leader on staff that you should build a strong relationship with is the assistant S3 (AS3). As a peer, you can be more candid with the AS3 if the situation warrants, they can influence the staff, and as an officer waiting in the command queue, they will have an appreciation for ensuring company training is completed. Finally, keep in mind that a majority of the primary staff officers are junior captains or lieutenants that come from a variety of different branches. Although the field grade officers are primarily responsible for their development, you should still assume a mentoring relationship with them as well. Provide assistance if they are struggling and always give them the courtesy invite when you are conducting leader development training as staff officers (and NCOs) are almost always forgotten when it comes to company professional development.

If you discover that there is animosity between the staff and the company leadership after you assume command just accept that the company headquarters is just as much as fault as anyone on staff. Almost certainly, the main cause of any animosity is probably a lack of effective communication. In a traditional company, communicating tends to be easier when unit leadership is co-located and subordinate organizations are more or less focused on the same mission. In an HHC, this is not the case. As a result, it is extremely important that you and the company leadership establish a strategic system to communicate with each staff section and that you identify one leader in each section that is responsible for disseminating information to their Soldiers. This is an area you will want to assess often to ensure the company is communicating effectively. As the company commander, send a weekly SITREP to the field grades and primary staff officers to let them know what issues you are having, where you need support, and to remind them of upcoming training events. The first sergeant and operations NCO should maintain constant communication with the operations sergeant major and the other sections NCOICs and the company executive officer should be the primary source of communication with the support shops. Ensuring you have multiple touch points within the battalion headquarters will fix the communication problems and will alleviate a majority of the animosity between the staff and the company headquarters.

Be an ambassador in addition to a commander. An HHC is not a traditional company and you are not a traditional commander. Succeeding in an HHC requires more collaborating and mediating than in other types of commands where the commander and first sergeant have more control over the circumstances. Constant face-to-face interaction with the staff is the best way for you and the company leadership to subtly remind the section leaders of upcoming company priorities and it is far more impactful than sending constant e-mail reminders. Feeling that Soldiers in the company blew off training is frustrating and may trigger the desire to march up to the headquarters building and blow

up on the staff...don't. This is unprofessional and counterproductive. There are three things to keep in mind when it comes to dealing with the battalion headquarters. First, unlike a traditional company where every subordinate organization is concentrated on a similar mission, the staff is going to be more aligned and focused on the battalion METL than they are with the company METL. Second, battalion staffs are constantly hit with last minute tasks that can derail even the most supportive staffs. Third, HHCs are leader-heavy organizations so going on a tirade inside one of the "S" Shops is not going to earn you any credibility with the section or the battalion leadership and will degrade your efforts to build effective relationships. Just like in any other organization, leaders on the battalion staff struggle to complete all their tasks during the duty day and constantly interacting with the headquarters will ensure sections practice economy of force and rotate their Soldiers to company events while still completing their daily operations. Finally, there are a lot of factors that force the staff to become separated and divided from the rest of the company. In order to keep the unit connected and to foster esprit de corps, use your position as the commander to schedule events that unite the entire organization. For example, having a monthly physical training challenge during PT hours is a great way to bring the entire company together in the spirit of competition and does not impact the work day.

Figuring out how to interact with the battalion staff and integrate them into the company is a challenging and complicated undertaking. Although there is no blueprint for guaranteed success, being mindful of these three techniques will greatly assist in alleviating frustration and will help to ensure that commanding an HHC is an enjoyable and rewarding experience.

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