



By Chris Ingram

Commanding a line company is the ideal job for most company grade officers; the culminating point of company grade leadership. Being told you have been asked to relinquish command early and take on the responsibility of a Brigade Headquarters and Headquarters Company (BDE HHC) means giving up your time on the line early for a command that, let's be brutally honest, few people seek out.

Command of BDE HHC, means your brigade commander selected you to lead their company. It's an honor that comes with both prestige and challenges. Congratulations on your second guidon; now what are you going to do with it?

Enabling the Brigade Fight

Your mission on a line company was fairly simple; something along the lines of “close with and destroy the enemy.” This was accomplished by combined arms maneuver to mass effects on a single objective. The mission of a BDE HHC is nothing of the sort. Your new mission will be to build readiness and enable the brigade fight. Without an effective BDE HHC, the brigade commander loses the ability to execute mission command and the brigade fight turns into a series of uncoordinated battalion fights.

To lead the brigade fight, the staff has to function simultaneously along multiple lines of effort. The officers on staff are primarily focused on the brigade mission, either in planning and resourcing the future fight or synchronizing and managing the current fight. Their focus is primarily on the demand signal from the boss, followed by a requirement to coach and manage their battalion counterparts, and report and coordinate requirements of the division headquarters. Nothing in those efforts is focused on the company mission of BDE HHC.

The company fight, led by you and your First Sergeant, is largely managed through NCO channels. This company fight often receives little input from officers, except when the company fails to accomplish its mission and threatens the brigade mission. Done right, the brigade staff can focus on planning, resourcing, and mission command while the company quietly performs the tasks necessary to ensure mission command systems are up, supplies are on hand, and vehicles are ready on a moment’s notice. Your mission is not the fight, it is enabling the fight.

Influence over Authority

In a brigade or higher HHC, everybody either outranks the company commander or works directly for someone who does. Each section is led by a field grade officer and every staffer is within arms reach of the Brigade Commander or Command Sergeant Major. Other than your First Sergeant, Company Executive Officer, and Supply Sergeant, nobody in a BDE HHC is rated or senior rated by you or the First Sergeant. You may have command authority, but without the ability to directly affect their rating, you need to find other tools to lead.

Relationships are everything, and trust is invaluable. The interpersonal relationships and trust you develop with key staff leaders will directly impact your ability to accomplish the company mission. The field grade officers have already been company commanders, and will either believe they can do your current job better than you (and may attempt to do so) or be

sympathetic to your plight and be willing to lend a hand. Listen to their advice, take their requests seriously, and practice the skills of tact and diplomacy at all times. Your urgent requirement is not likely as critical in their eyes as the project the boss has tasked them to complete. However, if you build trust, they will support the company.

The most important of those relationships will be with the Brigade Executive Officer and Operations Sergeant Major. When you reach the extent of your ability to influence others to accomplish a critical task, and you inevitably will, the Brigade XO and Ops SGM will be your lifeline. Maintain an open line of communication with these two leaders, keeping them informed of your challenges so that when you ask for help, they are ready to pounce. Choose these requests carefully, but ask for their assistance before the company mission impacts the brigade's ability to do its job.

“Everything is simple in war, but the simplest thing is difficult.” -CvC

You no longer have the ability to plan, resource, and execute collective training for a company attack. In fact, as Scott Nusom pointed out in his article [Surviving Headquarters Company Command](#), “Your training role as it pertains to the staff is to ensure that all Soldiers meet the individual requirements needed to deploy.” Sounds simple enough. You will soon discover that “the simplest thing is difficult.” You were selected to lead a diverse company of experts. There will be more Sergeants First Class and Captains than Privates or Lieutenants. Few of your Soldiers will be combat arms. Most will be experts in intelligence, signal, and logistics, along with a host of special staff. Between competing requirements and varying skill sets, executing a small arms range just became infinitely more challenging.

Focus on fundamentals of readiness. Maintenance Monday and Sergeants Time Training need to become sacred times in the company. If this is not the case, now would be a great time to have that discussion with the Brigade XO and Ops SGM, or even with the boss and CSM. These two blocks of time are the only way you will be able to get a diverse fleet of vehicles up to the Army Maintenance Standard and train Soldiers on basic skills they need.

Weapons qualification and physical fitness testing will be a constant requirement. The challenge of resourcing and enforcing qualification standards will probably require regular coordination to get staff onto ranges run by other companies in the brigade. The relationships you build across the brigade to support these “onesies and twosies” qualifications will be critical to success. Schedule redundancy in every training event. Whether weapons ranges, SHARP classes, or physical fitness tests; schedule multiple opportunities. It is likely that you'll never see your entire formation in one place, at one time. Run physical fitness tests as a company, but plan to run them regularly.

Mission Command is the Fight

Maneuvering, securing, and establishing the brigade main command post (Main CP) and tactical command post (TAC) is your fight. This begins with maintenance of vehicles and communications equipment, but carries through into other areas of training and readiness. If these mission command nodes are unable to accomplish their mission, the fight is desynchronized and victory is endangered. Your new tactics revolve around an understanding of the requirements for maneuvering, resourcing, and establishing these command posts.

How your team fights this fight will vary. Read into the doctrine, lessons learned at the National Training Center, Standard Operating Procedures of your brigade and others, and find the FORSCOM guidance on command posts. There is no single way to execute this task, and much of it will depend on how your brigade commander operates.

Once you've figured that out, plan maneuvering, securing, and establishing the Main CP just like you would any operation. At a national training center, the Main CP will jump up to every 48 hours, so there won't be time to build a new operations order each time. Utilize home station CPXs or brigade field exercises to iterate the jump process, day and night.

Establish marking standards for a quartering party and standardize serials so that each element knows their place in the movement, where they will move from the release point, and their priorities of work upon arrival. Before you deploy to a training center rotation, the team should be able to get systems up and assume the brigade fight in under thirty minutes upon arrival at the new site.

Don't forget the "discipline" in CSDP

Less exciting than the change in tactical focus will be the growth of your property books.

Gone are the days of simple organizational charts with similar sub hand receipts and like items. The various warfighting functions in a brigade headquarters have a plethora of unique vehicles and systems, and a greatly increased automation requirement. You will be signed for more computers than people and a host of systems you didn't see on the line.

Similar to the training challenges, you will find competing requirements and priorities interfere with command supply discipline. Nobody in the company will care as much about this program as you, and it will require discipline, tact, and determination to maintain accountability to standard. Never delegate, or bypass, the cyclic inventories and never assume your sub hand receipt holders or sensitive item inventory officers are familiar with the regulations on their responsibilities. You will dedicate an inordinate amount of time to

counting things and signing stuff.

Taking Care of Soldiers

If you thought crew manning was a challenge in a line company, just wait until you walk down the cubicle farm each day and never fail to see a new face. The brigade headquarters often serves as a transition ground for Soldiers. Leaders waiting their turn for a position in one of the battalions, spinning their final wheels before retirement, or those who unexpectedly find themselves removed from position will all join the headquarters team. It will often be your responsibility to manage their awards and other administrative requirements from leave and transition to legal actions. Whether they are in the unit as long as you or for a short duration, take care of them.

Personal issues are not restricted by rank, and you will find yourself dealing with different issues than on the line. While we were fortunate to not have a single Serious Incident Report relating to misconduct of BDE HHC Soldier, we were faced with a large number of behavioral health issues, medical issues, relationship failures, and even suicidal ideations. Given the years of military experience of the leaders in the company, around one third of the company was dealing with a temporary or permanent profile at any given time. Leading a brigade headquarters company requires balancing strict adherence to standards with an endless supply of empathy and diplomacy.

Commanding in a Complex Relationship

Commanding a BDE HHC requires leading in the grey space between a typical company and the larger unit. In a battalion HHC and in headquarters companies at a division and higher, the chain of command is clear and you fall under a BN or HHBN. One of the few company commands in the Army that do not fall directly under a battalion headquarters is BDE HHC. In our case, the Brigade Engineer Battalion (BEB) was tasked to provide maintenance and logistical support, as well as administrative and legal support. While you will likely find yourself in brigade meetings, reporting alongside the battalion commanders, you will still likely be rated by, and need to build a strong relationship with this battalion commander. We sent the company executive officer to battalion meetings for situational awareness and to coordinate training resources, and I would visit with the BEB commander whenever I needed guidance or mentorship. This is a way, but you will need to work with your supporting battalion commander to find out how they want to handle the relationship.

You will need to be a leader in this grey space. You aren't a staffer, but should use the daily and weekly staff sync meetings to gain situational awareness and share company

requirements. You don't report to a battalion, but you rely on them to accomplish your mission. The brigade commander is in your company, but you will need to schedule time for commander's dialogue. You command a company that doesn't have platoon leaders and will need to use NCO channels as a conduit for action. These relationships can create challenges, but they also provide freedom of maneuver if you are able to build trust.

Growing as a Leader

While it is not a "broadening assignment" in the strictest sense, this command will force you to widen your aperture and grow as a leader. Your interpersonal skills, empathy, and professionalism will be challenged in ways you can't achieve in a line command. If you evolve your leadership style from direct to organizational, and if you have the patience and diplomacy to survive the position, you will be better suited for future leadership roles at a higher level. You were selected for a job you didn't see in your future, so take the guidon you've been offered and make the most of it.

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