



by Chad Corrigan

One thing I learned early in Squadron command is that I was no longer one of the guys.

You cross a major threshold when you transition from company grade through field grade time and on to Squadron Command. I may have felt the same, but I wasn't perceived the same. I still felt like a Captain. But I wasn't a Captain anymore. My words and actions hit with much more weight. I had to be deliberate when I spoke. I had to be careful with humor to not accidentally hurt someone. Commanding a Squadron isn't just a bigger company. I

was completely comfortable in an Apache battalion. I grew up in the hangar. But now my presence rippled through the building when I walked in.

It was a blind spot when I took command. However, reading the body language and noticing the discomfort and surface-level answers I quickly discovered this new distance. My predecessor didn't show up unannounced in the company areas. The first time I popped in just to buy a soda and see what was going on everyone was kinda freaked out. A Chief Warrant Officer Three and key leader nervously asked, "Uh, sir. Do you need anything? Is everything alright?" I didn't know that this wasn't normal before and hadn't taken the time to think about it. It quickly became the new norm, but I was surprised that my visits were initially disruptive. I was surprised people were alarmed. In my eyes, I was just seeing how everyone was doing and grabbing a drink. To them, it was "oh sh*t!"

I was the callsign 24/7. There was no off-duty. No one saw me as Chad. If they bumped into me out to eat in the 'Ville outside Camp Humphreys, "there's the SCO." I signed emails with PH6. These new pronouns were part of my identity.

Was the divide bigger? Yes. Much bigger. Was it insurmountable? Not at all. I just had to work harder to build rapport through personal and direct engagement. I conducted battlefield circulation (BFC) constantly. Essentially, I practiced leadership by walking around. Everything was a BFC. PT, flights, training, going to chow at the DFAC. If I needed a drink, I didn't go to the shoppette, I went to one of the Troop fridge funds. I knew it would create the opportunity for me to have multiple conversations with Soldiers of all ranks. Knowing that the obstacle is there just makes it easier to overcome it. It was harder to get candid answers, often I had to ask more than once. "Do you need anything?" "No, sir. We're good." "Really?"

I once heard someone describe being a battalion commander as the old player-manager in baseball. Someone who coached the team, but still played. I still took my at-bats. I flew and fought. But I also chaired the meetings, filled out the lineup card, and promoted and demoted Soldiers. In practice, I was more manager than player, more leader than Soldier.

Was it lonely at the top? Yes. But there was still camaraderie, it was just different. Instead of being part of a broad group, now it was more about a tight inner circle. The Command Sergeant Major. The Senior Warrant Officer. The Command Group. The "Big 5." My fellow commanders were critical friends. Friends who I vented to, leaned on and compared notes, and got advice from. While I missed the tight knit camaraderie I experienced as a company grade officer, the ability to really help people, teach, and change an organization that comes with commanding a Squadron was personally rewarding.

Chad Corrigan is a soldier in the US Army, an officer, and an Apache pilot by trade. He currently serves on the Joint Staff and has served in Iraq, Afghanistan, Syria, and Korea. Chad has a BA in Philosophy and Political Science from Stonehill College, a Master's in Public Policy and Management from the University of Pittsburgh, graduated from the School of Advanced Military Studies, and was a National Security Fellow at Harvard's Kennedy School of Government. His work was published in the anthology "Why We Write: Craft Essays on Writing War". He is also a member of the Military Writers Guild.

Editor's Note: In June, we asked our [From the Green Notebook](#) community a simple but profound question: What's the one thing you wish you would have known before you started your last assignment? This week, we are pleased to share the nuggets of wisdom leaders have learned with the hope that it doesn't have to be relearned by someone else the hard way.

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