

Featured Member: March 2011



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1. My background...

In 1998 I was 17 years old and I lived in Kentucky. I got into an argument with my father over applying to college. He wanted to spend the weekend looking at colleges, and I wanted to go camping with my friends. Later that night, he drove me to an Army Recruiting Station and told me that I should probably spend the next few years camping. I enlisted in the Army that next week. As a young Private, the Army excited me. I turned out to be a pretty good Soldier, and one day my Lieutenant handed me a West Point application packet and encouraged me to apply. I filled out the paperwork, it was the year 2000, and we were deployed to Bosnia. A few months later, I got an acceptance letter, and I left for West Point Prep School.

At West Point Prep and West Point, I struggled somewhat academically since I had been out of school so long, but I really enjoyed a lot of what the school had to offer. I was on the Rugby Team, and I thrived in that environment. To this day, my best friends are the guys that I played with. When branch night came, most of the guys on the team picked Infantry. My mentor and Rugby Coach was an Infantry Officer, and he had a big influence on us.

My first assignment was 1st Cavalry in Fort Hood, Texas. I arrived there just a couple months before we deployed to OIF 06-08 for 15 months. I was a PL the entire time overseas, and it was awesome. I loved the autonomy and responsibility I had as a Platoon Leader. We had a tough fight, and we were tired when we came home. My leadership gave me the opportunity to serve in the 3rd US Infantry Regiment (The Old Guard) upon redeployment. In The Old Guard, I was able to continue serving as a Platoon Leader until I was eventually pushed up to XO. My time in The Old Guard really reenergized my passion for my career, and it gave me a deeper appreciation for the sacrifices that our Soldiers make. My leadership was excellent, and I enjoyed my time there, but eventually I had to PCS for the Maneuver Captains Career Course.

I took the option of going to the Fort Knox MCCC because I'm from Kentucky. I spent more time home while I was there, than I had in my 12 years wearing the Army uniform. During my tenure, I met my current wife, and we got married. I really wanted to come to 82nd Airborne and my branch manager was extremely helpful in getting that assignment. Now that I'm here, I truly love it. My days are exhausting; but my Soldiers, NCOs and Officers make it worth it. My learning curve is very steep. As Infantry Officers, we are challenged by going back and forth from mechanized to light Infantry. The Airborne community is fascinating, and there is a lot to learn. I also play on the Fort Bragg Rugby Team. We're actually very good and we hope to have a successful season.

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2. My experience taking the guidon...

I've been in Command since November. The Officer I was replacing had a RASP date to try out for 75th Ranger Regiment. We were waiting for property to arrive in containers from Afghanistan, and we literally waited until the last minute until he had to leave. He was very helpful, but at the end of the day I was holding the guidon while I was doing CoC inventories. It wasn't the ideal way to take Command, but we made the best out of it. Eventually the containers arrived, and my XO did a fantastic job of getting my property in order. In hindsight, I probably learned more because of everything we went through. It was tough at the time, but I'm glad it happened that way.

We received a lot of products from MCCC, but I really didn't find many of them helpful as a new Commander. I browsed through the Company Commander website and I found a checklist for "New Commanders". It was a breakdown of major tasks that should be conducted in the first 30, 60, 90 days. That was probably the most helpful thing that I've had, because it kept me on track of what I had to get accomplished. I felt like I was drinking water through a fire hose, and I still do to some extent. I made good friends with the other Commanders. We're losing our top 2 Commanders in the next couple months, and they are leaving with a wealth of information. I've tried to capture as much of that knowledge as I can. I've also done the same with one of my PSGs. I'm pretty flexible, and I'm open to new ideas, so I think they enjoy talking to me.

At the end of the day, you've just got to show up ready to work and ready to learn. I try my best to lead by example, and I really try to hold myself and my officers to the same standard that I hold the Soldiers to. I tell my Officers that they've got to endure there hardships with their Soldiers. That's a motto I'm trying to live by right now, and it's something I wish I would have done a better job of in the past. In our job, it's too easy to go back to the office when it's raining outside, or it's too easy to skip PT when work is piling up on our desks. In our Company, there is no Officer PT. We all do PT with our Soldiers, and most days, I'll fall into a Squad for PT and do PT just like all the other members of that Squad.

3. How I dealt with a "spice" problem...

Last month I had two Soldiers that were caught smoking Spice in the Barracks. The Soldiers just arrived to the unit a few weeks prior. There was a third Soldier from another Company that had been in the unit longer and was the ring leader. A couple problems jumped out at me right away about this incident. First off, my Company just returned from Afghanistan and endured a very tough fight. During the deployment, the Company was isolated, and sometimes went months without eating a hot meal, and lived without the comforts basic life qualities like showers, washing machines or air conditioning. They sustained a horrendous amount of casualties and amputees. I say all of this because it's very hard to indoctrinate brand new Soldiers into these "battle hardened" Platoons and Squads and it takes a lot of time for the older Soldiers to accept them. Of course, the Soldiers made a bad decision, but through this incident, I recognized that we had a divide between our new Soldiers and our older "seasoned" Soldiers.

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In my opinion, serious misconduct has to be dealt with in a harsh and severe manor. I say this because I've seen units that don't apply the seriousness that it needs, and it creates an epidemic of problems because Soldiers aren't scared to break the rules. Spice incidents are treated the same as drugs in my unit. Both Soldiers received a Field Grade Article 15 with maximum punishment. Additionally, the Soldier's entire Platoon was recalled the Saturday morning after the incident, and effective immediately, the two Soldiers' pass privileges were pulled. I also tried to emphasize on the Company, that when one of us fails, we all fail. If a Soldier falls asleep on guard, and a COP gets attacked in his sector, we're likely to take casualties because of his actions. Additionally, I truly feel that collectively we failed those two Soldiers. Since then, I've tried to place responsibility on the Soldiers to look out for each other. We've assigned "Airborne Buddies" to new Soldiers, and if the Soldiers get in trouble, the Airborne Buddy gets some of the blame for not looking out for him. All in all, some Soldiers are going to fail to conduct themselves within conduct guidelines that are appropriate for the US Army. As leaders, it's our responsibility to not look past the incident or the people around the incident that didn't take preventive measures, or worse, knew it was happening and didn't stop it.

4. JFEX: a great training opportunity...

JFEX (or JOAX) is basically seizing an Airfield with an Airborne Assault. It's actually a really fun exercise to run through and it did wonders for the cohesion of our Company. The coolest concept of a JFEX is that there are no "organic" Squads. It's a concept called "min force"; once you assemble a leader, radio, 4 Soldiers and a gun, you send them to assault the Objective. It doesn't matter who it is, just the first ones to show up. That's a very big motivator to be the first to get to the assembly area.

Leading up to the exercise, we had a series of LPD's on Airfield Seizures, Airborne Operations, manifesting, rigging, de-rigging etc. My Company's Mission (B Co.) was ISO TRAIL. We jumped into the southern end of the Objective and seized key terrain and established blocking positions. The challenge of the JFEX is that once you hit the ground, time is everything. It takes a lot of time to put your weapon, nods and radio into operation, put your parachute into your aviator's kit bag, and find your assembly area. If I could go back, I would spend more time rehearsing this with my Company. All in all, I was very happy with the way my Company performed. My BN CDR said we performed way above his level of expectation.

5. Closing thoughts...

I truly love being in Command. I'm very privileged and humbled to be in this position. My leadership is phenomenal and my Paratroopers are even better. We all work very hard, but I'd rather work hard with good people and learn, than do the opposite.