



## EVERY SOLDIER COUNTS: PART I THE ROLE OF THE COMPANY COMMAND TEAM IN MANNING A BRIGADE IN TODAY'S FORCE REDUCTIONS

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**Editor's Note:** *This is the first article of a three-part series on how company command teams, battalion S1s, and brigade S1s sync their efforts to properly man brigade combat teams as the Army reduces its end strength.*

Effective manning of a brigade starts at the company command team. As the Army reduces its personnel strength to prewar levels, leaders at all echelons must understand that every Soldier assigned to their formation counts. Gone are the days that non-available Soldiers can be overlooked. Due to this reality, company command teams must understand their Soldiers' available statuses at all time and work diligently to mitigate any issues that negatively impact them. Company command teams can accomplish this by aggressive enforcement of their Soldiers' medical and dental readiness, updated Family care plans, and regular participation in the unit's Soldier Readiness Process (SRP).

The Army's current personnel reduction from the wartime

high of 569,000 to a prewar level of 490,000 or lower is a massive culture shock for many of our company command teams. Since 2001, the Army has steadily increased its end strength in order to meet operational requirements in Operations Enduring and Iraqi Freedom. The last such increase came in 2009 as then Secretary of Defense Robert Gates requested and received a temporary end strength increase of 22,000 Soldiers.<sup>1</sup>

Of the wartime end strength increases, the temporary end strength increase was unique since it was granted specifically to overcome the large number of Soldiers in a non-available status.<sup>2</sup> Intended to increase the Army's end strength to 569,000 for three fiscal years, this increase enabled units to deploy to Operations Enduring and Iraqi Freedom at

*Soldiers with the 3rd Brigade Combat Team, 10th Mountain Division pull security during a route clearance foot patrol in Paktiya Province, Afghanistan, on 19 March 2014.*

Photo by PFC Dixie Rae Liwanag



100 percent of their required strength. Simultaneously, this temporary increase enabled non-available Soldiers to work through issues ranging from medical to Family care plans and either return to their units as available Soldiers or separate from the Army.

Three years later, the 2012 Army Manning Guidance directed leaders to closely “screen, identify, properly code, and work to resolve Soldiers with both temporary and permanent non-available conditions, returning as many of them as possible to an available status as soon as possible.”<sup>3</sup> This guidance was a reflection of the end of the 2009 temporary end strength and the start of the Army’s force reduction. Units were no longer authorized to man their units above their designated levels “to compensate for non-available personnel.”<sup>4</sup> Instead, leaders were tasked with maintaining their units’ mission readiness by monitoring their Soldiers’ readiness as closely as they do their equipment’s readiness.

While Army and Department of Defense staffs review policies to expedite the separation of long-term unavailable Soldiers, command teams — from company to brigade — must ensure available Soldiers maintain their status through aggressive tracking and actions. Company command teams can directly affect their Soldiers’ availability by focusing on three main areas.

The first of these is the aggressive enforcement of medical and dental readiness. Company commanders can use the Medical Protection System (MEDPROS) to monitor their Soldiers’ medical and dental readiness, but the company command team will need to motivate Soldiers to receive their annual vaccinations and dental exams before they become susceptible to health issues and possibly become a medically non-available Soldier.

The second area company command teams should focus on is ensuring appropriate Soldiers have completed a Family care plan. Army Regulation (AR) 600-20, *Army Command Policy*, paragraph 5-5, charges unit commanders with the enforcement of Family care plans.<sup>5</sup> While it is open for interpretation as to which level of unit commander is charged with enforcing the use of Family care plans, the company commander is ideal due to the close proximity he spends with the vast majority of Soldiers. It is that proximity that best equips the company commander to effectively ensure that the appropriate Soldiers have a fully functional Family care plan. Company commanders, along with their first sergeants, must identify the Soldiers who qualify for Family care plans in accordance with AR 600-20 to ensure these Soldiers are fully available for deployments. Once properly counseled, Soldiers that require Family care plans have 60 days to complete their plan or face separation in accordance with AR 635-200 (for active Army Soldiers), AR 135-178 (for Reserve Component Soldiers), and AR 135-91 (for Army National Guard Soldiers).<sup>6</sup> Strict adherence to this standard ensures that all Soldiers that meet this criterion are available for all unit operations.

The third area that company command teams must focus on is the Soldier Readiness Process (SRP). While battalion and brigade S1s generally are tasked with coordinating the necessary agencies to execute the SRP, it is company

command teams that successfully execute this process. Company commanders and first sergeants are the leaders that conduct the preliminary SRP packet checks; ensure Soldiers have their eyeglasses/inserts, legal documents, and next-of-kin notification documents; and load Soldiers onto the buses that transport them to the SRP site. Their involvement improves the effectiveness of the unit’s SRP and increases the unit’s number of available Soldiers.

As Army Chief of Staff GEN Raymond Odierno testified before Congress, the Army will use many measures to meet its lower end strength and reduction of 12 brigade combat teams. One of these measures will be separation boards used to select Soldiers for involuntary separation.<sup>7</sup> With the pending use of these boards, it is imperative that company command teams actively invest their energies in maintaining each of their Soldier’s availability status. If not, the Army risks not meeting its operational responsibilities due to the impact of a large population of non-available Soldiers on our much smaller end strength.

While manning a brigade is a multi-echelon effort that spans from company command teams, battalion and brigade S1s, division G1s, and the various assignments personnel stationed at Human Resources Command (HRC), it is company command teams that can best affect the availability of individual Soldiers on a daily basis. They are the leaders that have the day-to-day interaction with each Soldier necessary to validate his or her availability. Due to this reality, company command teams have the necessary understanding of their Soldiers’ available status to maintain their unit’s readiness status. These leaders can and must accomplish this by aggressively ensuring their Soldiers’ medical and dental readiness, updated Family care plans, and regular participation in the unit’s SRP.

## Notes

<sup>1</sup> John J. Kruzell, “Gates Calls for Increase of 22,000 Soldiers,” U.S. Army website, <http://www.army.mil/article/24678/gates-calls-for-increase-of-22000-soldiers>, July 2009.

<sup>2</sup> Ibid.

<sup>3</sup> All Army Activities (ALARACT) message 293/2012, “HQDA EXORD 10-12 ISO the HQDA FY13-15 Active Component Manning Guidance,” Pentagon Telecommunications Center, Headquarters, Department of the Army, Washington, D.C., October 2012.

<sup>4</sup> Ibid.

<sup>5</sup> Deputy Chief of Staff, G-1, “Army Command Policy - Rapid Action Revision 2012,” HQDA, Washington, D.C., September 2012, 5-5.

<sup>6</sup> Ibid.

<sup>7</sup> GEN Raymond T. Odierno, “Planning for Sequestration in Fiscal Year 2014 and Perspectives of the Military Services on the Strategic Choices and Management Review,” House Armed Services Committee, First Session, 113th Congress, Washington, D.C., September 2013.

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