

The Transition from Line Company to HHC:

A Guide for Second-Time Commanders

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“A headquarters and headquarters company (HHC) is a completely different beast” is an adage that should ring in your head with the same tone as “I’m not signed for it” and “the OPFOR cheated” — great for banter, bad for business. Many a captain has heard the saying “a command is a command is a command,” and that is exceptionally true of all companies, troops, and batteries (C/T/Bs) within a brigade combat team (BCT). Whether in an armored, Stryker, or infantry BCT, all C/T/Bs share collective training tasks covering deployment activities, local security, convoy operations, and conducting the troop leading procedures (TLPs).¹ Based on my experience commanding C Company, 4th Battalion, 23rd Infantry Regiment, and Headquarters and Headquarters Troop (HHT), 8th Squadron, 1st Cavalry Regiment (both in 2-2 Stryker Brigade Combat Team at Joint Base Lewis-McChord, WA), I have collected the following tactics, techniques, and procedures (TTPs) to successfully transition from “line” command to “HHC” command.

Bottom line up front:

- 1) Establish the chain of command;
- 2) Provide purpose;
- 3) Enforce systems; and
- 4) Train to win at the point of contact.

Step 1: Establish the Chain of Command

Another example to add to our list of tired sayings: “Everyone in HHC has multiple moms and dads.” You will not find a single organization in the Army that answers to a lone call sign, and we have an established TTP that enables us to exercise mission command in the presence of competing priorities: the chain of command. Your first priority in establishing your position within the chain of command is receiving clear guidance from your higher commander and coordinating directly with your field-grade counterparts to establish priorities and lines of effort.

Get refined guidance from your higher commander early and often. As the HHC/T/B commander, your priorities will likely include Soldier welfare, vehicle maintenance, driver’s training, weapon qualification, and all other tasks that generate combat readiness while your battalion executive officer (XO) and S3 are primarily concerned with the operations process and command and control of subordinate elements. This is often a source of friction as staff sections and specialty platoons feel overtasked, but you can easily



Photos courtesy of author

1SG Troy Mueller leads Headquarters and Headquarters Troop, 8th Squadron, 1st Cavalry Regiment, in conducting command maintenance in June 2021 at Joint Base Lewis-McChord, WA.

synchronize efforts by examining priorities up the chain of command. You, the XO, the S3, and the operations sergeant major all work for the same commander — as well as the same brigade commander. Their priorities will quickly clear up yours, and it is likely that the true priorities will fall on the HH-side of daily task organization. While many battalion and squadron commanders will provide explicit priorities for specialty platoons, it is important to clarify how staff sections nest with overall training priorities and discuss these lines of effort directly with your S3 and XO. Together you can adjust your HHC/T/B’s battle rhythm to protect company maintenance and training time while still enabling your battalion or squadron. Once you have received guidance and synchronized with the S3 and XO, a successful tactic is to leverage your staff NCOs to accomplish HH tasks while

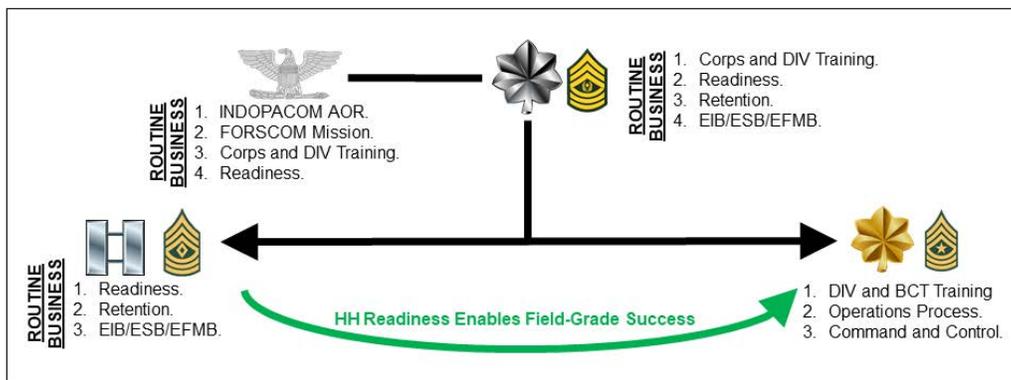


Figure 1 — Synchronizing Command Lines of Effort

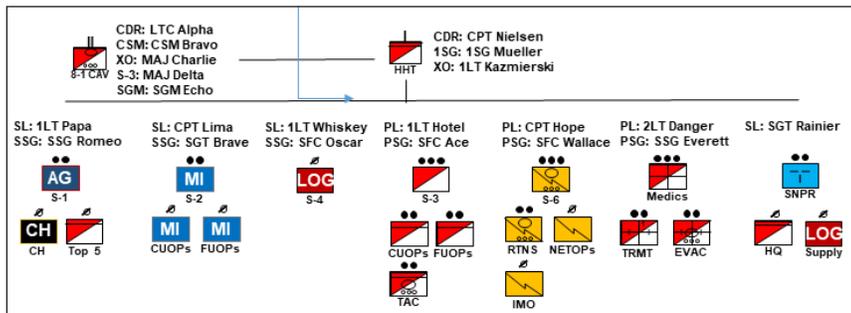


Figure 2 — Sample Task Organization for an HHT Quarterly Training OPORD

their officer counterparts focus on operations process tasks. Remember what NCOs promise to their officer counterparts in their creed: “Officers of my unit will have maximum time to perform their duties.”²

Figure 1 provides an example of priorities within a BCT chain of command and how HH training nests with other priorities. Illustratively, you’ve never heard of an email stand-down or tracker DONSA (day of no scheduled activities), but you absolutely understand the pain of lost sensitive items, low operational readiness rates, and weekend serious incidents. All other HH functions, including staff functions supporting the larger force, will grind to a halt if routine business isn’t accomplished well.

Another successful tactic in establishing the chain of command is specifying it in writing using common operational language. While your modified table of organization and equipment (MTOE) or table of distribution and allowance (TDA) likely separates the unit into dozens of teams and sections, a best practice is to consolidate them under 7-8 direct-reporting elements to facilitate your span of control. If the S6 includes a retransmission section, an information operations section, and a networks operations (NETOPs) team, then it is NOT “a shop” — it is a platoon. And its leaders are a platoon leader and platoon sergeant. The impact of this operational language will help your subordinates synchronize leadership duties with their other tasks for their field-grade raters. This concept embraces

the tenets of mission command by enabling your elements to seize the initiative and act within intent in the absence of direct orders because they rightfully see themselves as leaders and not as “staffers.”

Step 2: Provide Purpose

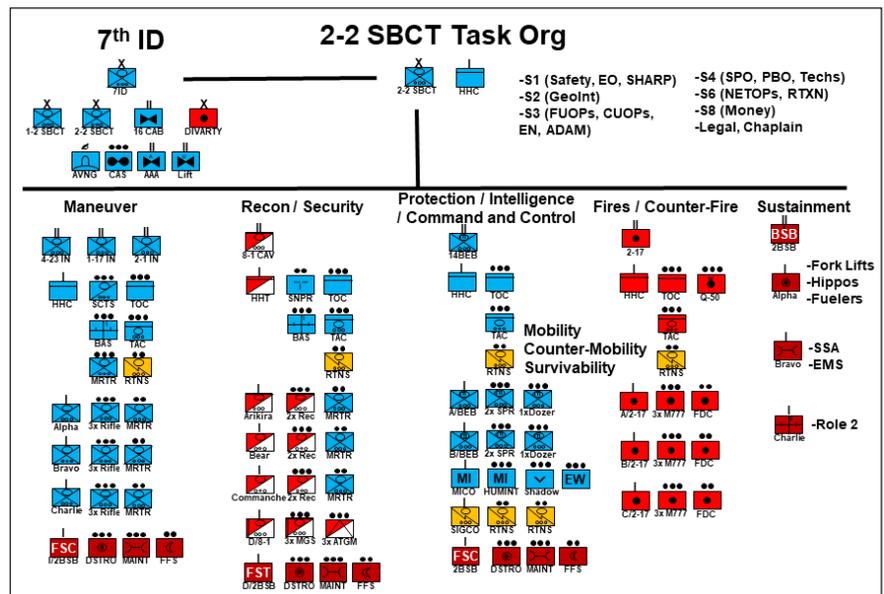
All Army leaders are trained to think “two levels up.”³ The purpose of line C/T/Bs, and understanding their role in the BCT fight, is very straightforward,

but as the HHC/T/B your specialty platoons work for battalion/squadron and therefore need to understand BCT operations. Similarly, staff members effectively are the battalion during the military decision-making process (MDMP) and the operations process so you are responsible for training them to think how their operations will impact the division fight. Explaining the BCT fight to Soldiers and junior leaders accustomed to team and crew operations may seem daunting, but it’s a much easier concept to explain

when you sketch out the fight and who else is there. It is critical that you discuss the combined arms structure of the BCT for your sections and platoons to thrive. Figure 3 is an example of the forces available to a BCT within an infantry division that you can use to start this conversation.

For a single audience composed of all Soldiers within an HHC/T/B (rank and Military Occupational Specialty [MOS] immaterial), I recommend the following explanation of Figure 3: “The Army is designed in brigade combat teams. BCTs are the ones that seize and hold terrain with support from division. Divisions will usually have two or three BCTs

Figure 3 — Example Task Organization for Explaining “Two-Levels Up”



along with helicopters, rocket artillery, and access to Air Force and Navy assets. The core of the BCT is its three maneuver battalions which physically seize and hold terrain. Each of those battalions has an HHC/T/B and forward support company (FSC) so it can operate independently for around 72 hours. The cavalry is very similar to the maneuver battalions, except its primary tasks are to go first to conduct reconnaissance and then “reverse passage of lines” (RPOL) back to conduct wide-area and flank security. The engineer battalion has sappers and digging assets (to conduct mobility, counter-mobility, and survivability operations) along with the military intelligence company (MICO) drones and signal company (SIGCO) retransmission sections. The fires battalion has howitzers to fire at targets out to 20 kilometers based on intelligence from the cavalry, unmanned aerial vehicles (UAVs), or the maneuver battalions. The fires battalion also gives us counter-fire radar teams. The brigade support battalion drives to and from the division support area to keep us fed, fueled, fixed, supplied, and medicated. Finally, all of it is managed by HHC brigade which has a lot of specialty staff sections to do better MDMP. It is our job to support the line C/T/Bs while integrating all of the assets available to us.”

Figures 4 is an example concept sketch that depicts how a cavalry squadron and BCT operate across the rear, close, and deep fights. A similar sketch of the BCT fight will enable your Soldiers to visualize how their role and warfighting function impact the entire unit’s success, and it will also give them confidence that their leaders understand combat operations and have a clear glide path to train them for war.

For our same audience of rank and MOS immaterial HHC/T/B Soldiers, I recommend the following explanation of Figure 4: “The BCT is usually organized into three areas called the close fight, deep fight, and support zone. The close fight is what you think of as war where infantry and armor shoot at each other. That’s where the three maneuver battalions operate along with their organic scouts, medics, and mortars supporting them. In front of the close fight is the deep fight. The deep fight is where the BCT can shape the battle by using the cavalry, scouts, UAVs, aircraft, Special Forces, electronic warfare, and signal intelligence to destroy

or disrupt the enemy’s most important personnel and equipment before they even have a chance to fight. The support zone is where everything else sets up to provide us intelligence, fires, protection, sustainment, and command and control.”

Once you have framed the BCT fight for your Soldiers, it is far easier to counsel them on their purpose and importance. Based off your assigned platoons and sections, walk them through the rest of your concept sketch to highlight their specific duties and responsibilities. A good tactic for this is to brief by nodes rather than MTOE, and I recommend the following priority to support your BCT’s combat effectiveness:

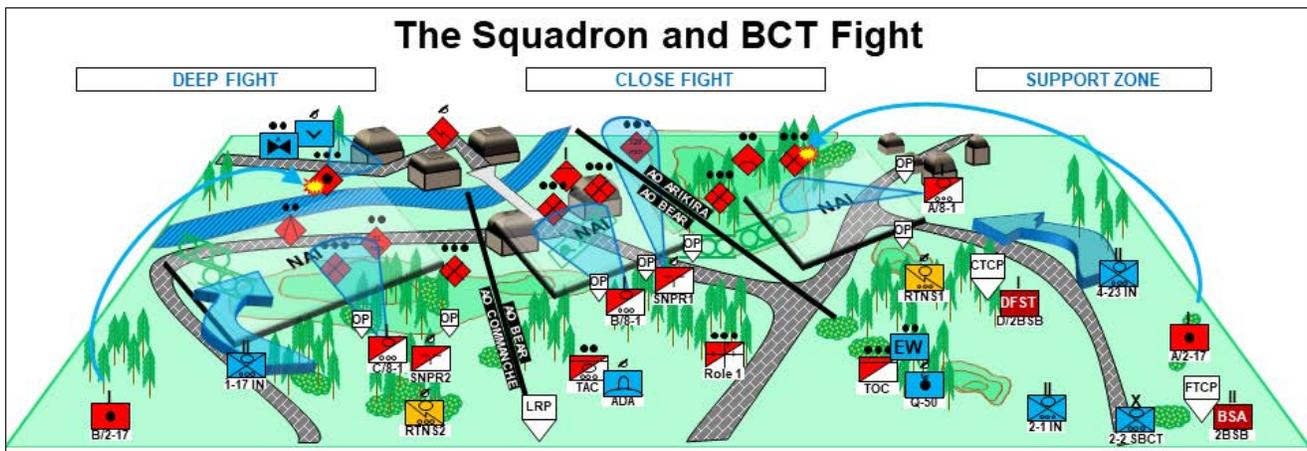
1. The tactical command post (TAC) manages current operations (CUOPs) while close to the fight.
2. The tactical operations center (TOC) manages CUOPs and planning future operations (FUOPs) further from the fight.
3. Retransmission (RTN) sites expand the BCT’s communications, especially between the cavalry and artillery batteries.
4. Mortar firing points (MFPs) provide the battalion with organic fires.
5. Observation posts (OPs) conduct reconnaissance and security for the battalion.
6. The combat trains command post (CTCP) sustains the battalion and receive supplies from the brigade support area (BSA).
7. The forward trains command post (FTCP) prioritizes the battalion’s supplies at the BSA.
8. The Role 1 provides medical aid and minor surgery to sustain the battalion’s fighting force.

By using the above sequence of briefing aids and TTPs, you can fully provide your HH Soldiers with the purpose behind their training and operations. This in turn will provide excellent benefits to your command climate, training, and combat readiness.

Step 3: Enforce Systems

A good unit operates on systems so that its combat readiness is robust against personnel changes. The critical

Figure 4 — Example BCT Concept Sketch with Squadron Focus



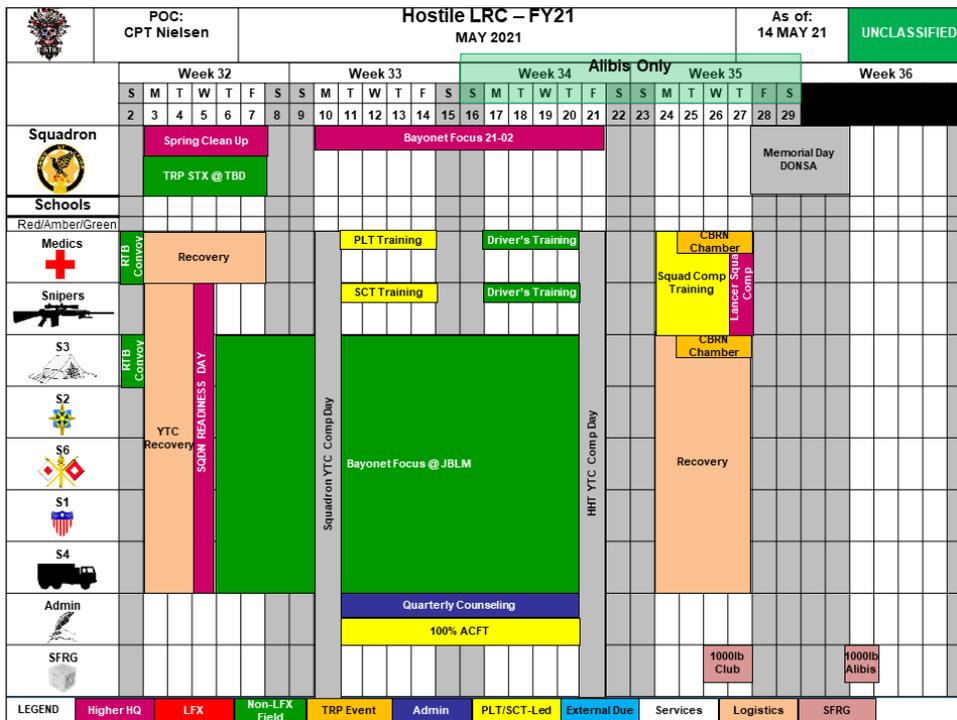


Figure 5 — Example HHT Long-Range Calendar

systems within a line C/T/B tend to include the following: training management, command supply discipline, command maintenance discipline, and Soldier readiness. These systems are managed on a battle rhythm that spans from Motorpool Monday, through the readiness working group, and on to the training meeting with variable inputs from battalion meetings. HH formations are no different from line units in the importance of these systems. The key differences are that HH units have more specialized equipment, a greater variety of MOSs, and additional support requirements to your higher headquarters. Successfully managing these differences simply requires refined guidance in your battle rhythm events and key products, starting with the training meeting. As stated in Field Manual (FM) 7-0, *Training*, “Company, troop, and battery training meetings are the center of gravity of unit training management.”⁴ In addition to the topics listed in FM 7-0, in my experience the following products are critical components of a successful training meeting:

1. Unit mission-essential task list (METL),
2. Higher headquarters’ guidance and calendars,
3. Internal long-range calendar (LRC),
4. Internal short-range calendar (SRC), and
5. Concept of operations sketches.

For transitioning second-time commanders, all of these inputs are familiar and their benefits obvious. Follow the same process while taking the time to coordinate each subordinate platoon’s and section’s unique training requirements. In your LRC, specify a row for each subordinate element and populate it with events like One System Remote Video Terminal (OSRVT) training for the S2 section, a mass casualty (MASCAL) exercise for the medic platoon, special variant driver’s training, and the myriad other tasks that cannot

be adequately trained unless properly resourced in advance. It is very likely that your HHC/T/B will be tasked with higher echelon training and support far more than your line counterparts. Maintaining an internal LRC will allow you to assume risk and shift events as necessary.

The counterpart to the LRC is the SRC. Your LRC and SRC can be similarly formatted, but the SRC planning horizon will be much shorter with greater detail on each event. While the LRC allows you to plan training, the SRC enables you to enforce an HHC/T/B’s other systems like supply, maintenance, and deployment discipline.

Step 4: Train to Win at the Point of Contact

One final trap laid for transitioning HHC/T/B commanders is the false belief that their unit will fight from the

rear and that Soldier skills only apply to maneuver MOSs. This is not true, and with the proliferation of loitering munitions and hybrid threats, it will be even less true in each future conflict.⁵ The BCT HH of today and tomorrow will fight while in continuous contact, be it aerial and indirect while established at support nodes or via direct contact while moving along ground lines of communication. All of the lessons from your line command still apply, and you owe it to your Soldiers to show them best practices to fight for their lives. Your battalion or squadron commander owes you refined guidance on how he or she envisions your unit training for the next fight, and I recommend three key training events to include in your training plan.

The first major threat against your formation is the inherent risk of convoy operations. By MTOE, HHC/B/Ts will have a high density of vehicles within their formation, and, by proximity to the BCT’s support zone, will receive a large number of enablers under tactical control (TACON) during combat operations. Jumping each of an HHC/B/T’s nodes presents immense risk to both force and mission for all units that do not have trained drivers, vehicle commanders, and subordinate chalk leaders. A key component of HHC/B/T training for deployment to combat or a Combat Training Center (CTC) is the completion of convoy live fires. This exercise can be conducted under blank-fire conditions and will pay immense dividends on the company’s ability to prepare vehicles, uncoil from a tactical assembly area, maintain communications during movement, and maintain local security on the move. I recommend conducting two separate driver’s training events, each two weeks long, in the train-up to convoy live fires to provide your drivers with the flexibility to complete competing priorities. At a minimum,

consider adding a “long-range road test” to your command maintenance days, with chalks reporting progress via tactical communication systems en route.

The second major threat against your formation is indirect fire of either chemical or high-explosive munitions. The best way to survive these attacks is by never being shot at in the first place. The Army is increasing its emphasis on leader’s training time (LTT) conducted on a battle rhythm with low-cost resources, and concealment training is an excellent LTT event. Once per month, I recommend that your vehicle crews spend one to three hours unpacking their camouflage systems, establishing them over their vehicles and other node equipment, and then rapidly jumping that equipment across a short distance within your BCT area of operations. This easy training, when protected and treated seriously, is the greatest way to increase your company’s combat survivability.

The third major threat against your formation is direct-fire contact. It is an immense failure to your higher headquarters to rely on them to provide precious squads or platoons to secure your formation. No rifle commander would ever dream of deploying to combat and leaving two squads back home, so as an HHC/T/B commander why would you force the same loss of combat power on your commander by asking them to secure your unit for you? The solution is clear and

will have cascading benefits across your formation: conduct team live fires. Planning and executing a security-focused team live-fire event will prepare your Soldiers to fight and win at the point of contact in defense of their own nodes. Your Soldiers will adopt a combat mentality and culture of excellence that reflects in their MOS-specific operations. Planning live fires will drive the nodes to solidify their security teams and battle rhythm prior to deployment while building cross-warfighting function relationships for your battalion or squadron. In my experience completing two separate team live-fire events while in HHC/T/B command, two training days and the smallest maneuver range on your installation will be enough to train and certify your node security teams on preparing their combat equipment, using common tactical language, and fighting to win at the point of contact. Don’t take my word for it — just start the conversation with your first sergeant and sergeant major, and I guarantee that you can build consensus on the importance of combat training for every Soldier in your formation.

Conclusion

HHC/T/B commands within a BCT have a reputation of being more complicated and fundamentally different to command than their line counterparts. It is much truer that these companies rely on identical systems and collective training tasks as other C/T/Bs and simply require more refined leadership to synchronize priorities and specialized subordinate units. By following these TTPs of establishing the chain of command, providing purpose, enforcing systems, and training to win at the point of contact, new HHC/T/B commanders can successfully transition and build units that are ready, lethal, and operate as force multipliers for your entire BCT. I can appreciate that this article recommends a lot of combat training that transitioning commanders might not traditionally associate with HHC/T/Bs, but you should give them a try. It sure beats sitting in the CTCP.

Notes

¹ Army Training Network, <https://atn.army.mil/ATNPortalUI/METL/>.

² The NCO Creed, www.army.mil/values/nco.html.

³ Training and Evaluation Outline 071-300-0001, paragraph 7e (2).

⁴ Field Manual 7-0, *Training*, June 2021, paragraph E-4.

⁵ Lessons from the Nagorno-Karabakh 2020 Conflict, Center for Army Lessons Learned.



Soldiers of HHT, 8-1 CAV conduct a team live-fire exercise in June 2021.

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