

Likely issues. Finally, RCM 306 directs the commander to consider any other "likely issues." This catch-all requirement is entirely appropriate since no two cases are alike, and new issues in military justice come to light every day. Considerations ranging from "gut feelings" about a soldier's character to complex legal issues are all important to the fair administration of justice.

The military justice system is run by commanders. Decisions regarding the

disposition of criminal cases and the fate of individual soldiers fall directly upon the men and women who lead these soldiers. The decisions commanders make can affect not only individual soldiers but the entire unit.

Rule for Court-Martial 306 provides a commander with a valuable checklist that will help him organize the factors that he must consider. It also alerts him to some extremely important factors that may not be readily apparent. A working knowl-

edge of the RCM 306 factors is a valuable tool that commanders at all levels can use to ensure that military justice is fairly administered.

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Company Family Support Groups As Combat Multipliers

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During my command of a light infantry rifle company and a battalion headquarters company, I heard many comments about company family support groups (FSGs). A common question was, "Why is a company FSG needed if the battalion has one?" But ask anyone who had the misfortune to be assigned to the unit devastated by the 1986 air tragedy at Gander, Newfoundland, or whose unit deployed during Operations DESERT SHIELD and DESERT STORM or for other extended periods. These soldiers and their family members will tell you how important well-prepared and active company FSGs are. (For a discussion of battalion family support groups, see "Family Support Program," by Lieutenant Colonel Marshall L. Helena, *INFANTRY*, July-August 1990, pages 16-17.)

A company FSG should not be just a "check-the-block" requirement. All company commanders and first sergeants must understand that FSGs are essential to successful company command. More

important, they are not only essential, they are the right thing to do. An active, effective, and caring family support group (FSG) is essential to successful company command because it helps married soldiers focus on their mission. It also builds unit cohesion.

An FSG is an informal, *voluntary* group of soldiers' spouses who maintain an information network in a unit, provide a social forum spouses can use to share their mutual concerns, and organize various company activities. Soldiers whose families are cared for by the company support group can better focus their attention on their jobs and their missions. Additionally, when company FSGs keep the families informed, the soldiers know their commanders care about them, and this builds unit morale. There are several ways to establish a good FSG.

Leaders. The first step is the careful selection of an FSG leader. Before making this critical selection, the commander should evaluate his sources of information—first sergeant, platoon leaders, pla-

toon sergeants. An FSG leader must have the desire and the time to care for all the soldiers' family members. This is not to say that the leader must be personally responsible for all of them. On the contrary, the FSG leader should use voluntary subordinate leaders to allow information to flow in both directions to all levels of the company. The leader should also have good communicative, diplomatic, and organizational skills. These skills are required for effective company representation within the battalion FSG and for credibility among the company's family members. For instance, some of the spouses of the young, junior enlisted soldiers in my companies were reluctant to participate in the FSG if they were initially contacted by an FSG member who, in their view, "wore her spouse's rank." Rather, they preferred to join a group of people with whom they could identify and socialize.

Finally, the company FSG leader does not have to be the spouse of either the commander or the first sergeant. Our

company FSG leader simply maintained a candid and communicative relationship with the first sergeant or me.

News. Disseminating information is most important, and the FSG leader can use different techniques to do this. We established voluntary platoon and section points of contact (POCs) to even out the tasks of disseminating information. Again, the platoon and section leaders' spouses did not have to be the POCs. In both of my companies, specialists' and privates' wives who had the desire and the time served effectively as POCs. We maintained the family members' privacy by asking them whether they wanted to receive notice of all company activities or of formal notifications only.

Our FSG leader held periodic FSG meetings that kept all the members informed about company activities, welcomed incoming members, honored outgoing members, and encouraged spouses to socialize with others who shared similar family and career concerns.

My first sergeant and I attended these meetings, at least the opening minutes in some cases, to inform family members of upcoming company events and to show them we cared about them. The group produced a sense of belonging among the family members by distributing monthly company FSG newsletters. These newsletters complemented the meetings, especially for any family members who could not attend.

We found that when the first sergeant handed out these newsletters in formation, the soldiers frequently failed to deliver them to their wives. We overcame this problem by mailing the newsletters directly to the wives, paying the postal costs from our company FSG fund. This greatly increased the probability that the wives would receive their newsletters.

Funds. The company FSG fund is maintained to provide money for selected and approved company activities. Each post has its own regulations that govern FSG funds, but the offices of the inspector general and the staff judge advocate usually serve as official fund advisors. Our company FSG leader organized bake sales, hot dog sales, and car washes to earn money for our company

FSG fund, and let meeting participants decide whether or not to allot funds for selected company activities.

The battalion FSG treasurer handled our administrative company FSG fund procedures (deposits, withdrawals, checking account maintenance, and the like). This meant our FSG members did not have to devote precious time to these functions.

Friends. Company FSG activities provide the opportunity for soldiers and their family members to make new friends. We included all soldiers in our company activities, regardless of their marital status. These activities included sendoffs and receptions for extended unit deployments and training exercises. The chain



of command coordinated with the FSG leader so these activities would affect the largest possible number of soldiers at the most opportune times.

Our FSG also decorated the company's barracks for holiday seasons. The FSG leader coordinated for the members to bring home-cooked food to the company and deliver it to the dayroom for soldiers who could not take holiday leave.

We encouraged our soldiers and their families to socialize with each other by having company parties at times when the most people could attend. We used various incentives to increase the probability of their attendance. For our soldiers

and their families, time off was a valuable incentive, and we usually gave soldiers the afternoon off preceding an evening FSG activity. This allowed the soldiers and their families to prepare for the event. Unit deployments were also strong incentives for family participation; others included babysitting services, offering chances to meet new people, staying informed of the soldiers' future deployments, and having fun at FSG events.

FSGs are sometimes approached to provide other services, such as long-term babysitting, providing spouse abuse shelters, counseling spouse abuse victims, and lending money. Although FSGs may be sympathetic to family members with such needs, other post organizations are better able to deal with these situations on a daily basis. Every post in the Army has installation organizations that are responsible for these activities (Army Community Service, Family Advocacy Program, Army Emergency Relief, and Child Care Centers).

Some may say that all of this concentration on soldiers and their families takes time away from valuable training. But I found that active, caring FSGs contributed to my company command, because they enabled the soldiers to focus their attention on mission accomplishment instead of worrying about their loved ones. I have observed deployed units, for example, that had to redeploy key soldiers because of minor family problems that had needlessly escalated into apparent emergencies. Effective communication throughout their FSGs could easily have solved many of these problems.

Our company spouses were thankful for FSGs that kept them informed of their husbands' jobs, presented opportunities to make new friends, and strengthened overall unit morale.

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