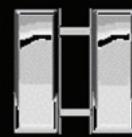




# Company Command

## Building Combat-Ready Teams



**To:** Company Commanders

**From:** Company Commanders

## Third-Generation Leadership—Redux

In the June 2007 issue of ARMY Magazine, we asked you to think about one person who has significantly influenced your development as a leader and to picture this person in your mind. We shared the example of Steve Delvaux who, as a young lieutenant, was influenced by his company commander, Hank Arnold. Later, Hank's imprint was evident in the way Steve developed his own lieutenants. Hank Arnold's legacy is the leaders that he influenced and the leaders that those leaders are influencing today and will influence in the future.

In this article we want to share another 3GL (third-generation leadership) story, one that involves several generations of leaders, among them, Joe Byerly. "I recently passed the guidon," he says, "and went through a process of reflecting on my experiences of commanding two companies. In the process, it became clear to me that much of who I have become as a leader, including many of the ideas we implemented, has grown from seeds planted by my very first troop commander, CPT Louis Netherland. The 3GL idea made me wonder who influenced Louis. So I asked him."

### Louis Netherland

Then-LTC H.R. McMaster was my first squadron commander. I was not a natural-born platoon leader, and when I reported to my first unit in 2000, I was a college graduate fresh out of Officer Candidate School. My learning curve was vertical, and the things I didn't know about soldiering could have easily filled a major metropolitan library. LTC McMaster had a significant impact on my development, and I have tried to extend the lifespan of that influence through every Soldier I have worked with since then. These are the top three things that LTC McMaster deeply ingrained into his leaders:

- *A Clear and Consistent Message Goes a Long Way.* Every lieutenant and most of the captains in the squadron could do a reliable impersonation of LTC McMaster. The key to getting the bit right was to recite any one of his oft-repeated maxims for success in training and for executing the squadron mission-essential task list. These were not fluffy catchphrases or vague talking points. These were targeted principles for victory, and they were just general enough to be applicable to a variety of conditions on the symmetric and asymmetric battlefields. During after-action reviews, training meetings and officer professional development [OPD] sessions, the squadron commander would draw from these again and again, emphasizing their application and relevance. These messages became a battle drill, and one lieutenant could recite the beginning while his wingman finished the closing words for him.

There will be some who read this and argue that such a method created junior leaders who couldn't think for them-

selves—automatons who had to refer to rote memorization in order to choose a course of action. Within the squadron, however, LTC McMaster's clear and consistent message had precisely the opposite effect. There was no doubt in any officer's mind as to what the commander's expectations were and where he stood on the most critical aspects of our mission. Armed with this knowledge, the green-tab leaders were empowered to act decisively, aggressively and, most importantly, with creativity and adaptability.

*"While they influence primarily by role-modeling how to lead, [leaders with a 3GL perspective] also impart 'the why' behind their actions in such a way that their Soldiers are not only inspired but also are equipped to do the same with their subordinate leaders."*

—ARMY Magazine, June 2007

This is what leaders owe those who work for them. Tell your Soldiers what is important to you, provide that unwavering azimuth, and then watch great things happen when Soldiers can be confident in knowing where you stand.

- *Mentorship is a Duty.* When I sat down for my first OER [officer evaluation report] counseling with LTC McMaster, I had no idea what to expect. After he took 30 minutes to dis-



*CPT Louis Netherland (left) and then-2LT Joe Byerly with their spouses in 2004. Byerly says his first troop commander nurtured “the scholar, the artist and the family man” as well as the warrior persona.*

Discuss my strengths and weaknesses with me, I thought we were wrapping things up. That’s when he took out a pen and a sheet of paper and said, “Let’s talk about what’s ahead in your future.” For the next 30 minutes, he sketched out a timeline with hash marks at the points when I would likely take charge of a scout platoon, when I would become a troop XO [executive officer], and when I would head to the Captain’s Course.

I wouldn’t realize it until much later, but the fact that the squadron commander took the time to discuss in depth not only his observations of my performance but also his plan for me (even the fact that he *had* a plan for me) isn’t necessarily the experience of lieutenants in our Army. And he did this with everyone he rated or senior-rated: Out came the pen and paper, on came the *Let’s talk about your future* and the *What do you think you’re interested in doing after this?* or the

*CPT Netherland, awarding 2LT Byerly his spurs upon completion of the 5th Squadron, 15th Cavalry Regiment Spur Ride in 2004, believes that “mentorship is a duty.”*

*Have you ever thought about perhaps doing something like ... ? This had a ripple effect—the idea that since he cared so much, so should I. Many of the lieutenants would get together after their OER counselings and talk about how they were ready to storm the Normandy beachhead after walking out of his office.*

Maybe the greatest duty we owe our fellow Soldiers is mentorship, and while I have seen countless examples of it at all levels, it’s still common for me to encounter a junior officer or ROTC cadet who seems surprised when I have taken the time not only to talk but also to listen. There are few worse feelings for a new officer than that of being set adrift to figure it out on your own. It’s not that figuring things out independently doesn’t have its positive character-building aspects; it’s when that feeling is accompanied by the suspicion that your boss has neither the time nor the desire to have a conversation that the dark clouds appear.

■ *Thinking on Your Feet First Requires Someone Who Can Think.*

OPDs in the Quarterhorse (1st Squadron, 4th Cavalry Regiment) were regular and lively affairs. As a former history professor at the United States Military Academy, LTC McMaster



typically governed over a broad reading list that, while usually military-themed, offered us the opportunity to consider lessons learned that went far beyond tactics and strategy. When we read about the Desert Fox or the Ia Drang Valley, it wasn't enough to know that Erwin Rommel or Hal Moore knew how to command troops in the field; it was more important to understand what made them tick: What were the fundamentals they held dear, the ones that shaped them the most as leaders and men?

When we read *Acts of War* by Richard Holmes, it wasn't to be able to spin off some cool historical anecdotes but to understand what happens to men in combat so that we could be better prepared to lead them through that crucible. LTC McMaster emphasized personal and professional development that was big and cosmopolitan. Field manuals [FM] were, of course, required reading, but when he mentioned once that he had recently reread *Catch-22*, it let me know that it was OK—and even encouraged—to color outside the lines.

The squadron commander knew that in order to build aggressive and adaptive young officers who could think on their feet, they first had to learn how to think, and to think about things that went far beyond occupying an attack-by-fire position. The ability to draw on a broad base of knowledge, some of it outside of your comfort zone, builds confidence and an agile mind. Perhaps the captain with *The Bookseller of Kabul* in his ruck instead of some tired military history of Afghanistan comes out on the other side with a better perspective on how to do his job. Maybe the lieutenant with a copy of *In Pharaoh's Army* at his bedside along with FM 3-20.98 *Reconnaissance and Scout Platoon* is more ready for the moment of truth.

### Joe Byerly

My first assignment in June of 2004 was at Fort Knox, Ky., as an executive officer in Bravo Troop, 5th Squadron, 15th U.S. Cavalry Regiment (19D One Station Unit Training) under the command of CPT Louis Netherland. I remember feeling overwhelmed by all the things I didn't know

as a brand new officer, but CPT Netherland always took the time not only to explain the “what” to me but also the “why” and the “how” if required. His engaged style of leadership eased my anxiety, which allowed me to become a sponge and focus on growing professionally.

■ *You Can Effect Change in an Organization.* Never satisfied with the status quo, CPT Netherland would occasionally identify a missing aspect of a training event or ceremony that could make the experience richer for the

*“Success is not developing great leaders. Rather, success is developing great leaders who themselves have a personal vision to develop great leaders.”*

—ARMY Magazine, June 2007

Soldiers who were executing it, and then he would fix it. I would watch as other commanders from across the squadron adopted and implemented ideas that began with my troop commander. Over time, his personal actions affected the entire squadron.

One day during a conversation over training, we began talking about the importance of 19D Cavalry troopers understanding their history and lineage. We both felt like the current instruction that was being offered to trainees was lacking, and it was at that point that CPT Netherland encouraged me to do something about it. Over the course of the next six months, with his guidance, I worked closely with the branch historian to rewrite the program of instruction [POI], and that POI remained in use for years after I left.

An important thing to note about CPT Netherland's desire to implement change was that it was never about him; rather, it was about the Soldiers who would benefit from it. He cared more about the greater good of the organization than he did about OER bullets. This was apparent to all of his subordinates, and so with every idea he wanted to bring to fruition, he had support from everyone.

■ *Take Time to Listen and Provide Feedback.* On several occasions over the course of that first year, we sat down to discuss not only my career path but his as well. This was helpful in understanding what was out there beyond platoon-leader time, and by the troop commander opening himself up about his own experiences and concerns, it allowed me to begin mentally preparing myself to be in his shoes

*CPT Byerly (center, right) with his officers on Contingency Operating Site Marez overlooking the city of Mosul, Iraq, in 2010, credits CPT Netherland with “much of what I have become as a leader.”*



one day. I would have probably gained some of this knowledge in OPDs, but I don't think it would have taken hold as it did in those one-on-one counseling sessions.

When I made mistakes, which were numerous, CPT Netherland and I would sit down and work on a solution together. From there, he would ensure I captured the lessons learned, which became a large source of my professional growth.

His ability to listen and to provide feedback showed me that my commander cared about my development as one of his subordinates, so I always took what he said to heart. His mentorship also didn't end when I left the unit, or when we held the same rank for a brief period of time. I've continued to seek his feedback and counsel seven years after he was my commander.

■ *Officers Must be Well-Rounded.* CPT Netherland preached the importance of being well-rounded. We trained for and ran in a half marathon as well as numerous other races. We took our wives to nice restaurants and to Broadway plays in Louisville, Ky. We discussed doctrine, but we also discussed books and articles that would expand my horizons as an officer.

The troop commander showed me that those preconceived notions that I had about what a platoon leader or company commander should be were all wrong. The warrior persona, while important, must be backed by the scholar, the artist and the family man. All of these areas must be continually nurtured in order to be successful.

Focusing on making impacts, mentorship and being well-rounded have shaped my leadership philosophy, as well as having served as the foundation for who I am as an Army officer.

### Travis Johnson

My first company commander was CPT Joe Byerly. As I reviewed this article, it was really interesting to read about the leaders who influenced him; it is obvious to me how H.R. McMaster was reaching through Netherland and Byerly and touching me. Pretty inspiring to think about! Here are a few things that I've learned:

■ *Providing Opportunities to Grow.* I joined Charlie Troop, 3rd Squadron, 7th U.S. Cavalry Regiment as the troop fire support officer in the summer of 2010, six months into their deployment to Iraq. I learned a lot from Joe Byerly, my commander, and one of the things that really stuck with me was being given the opportunity to fail.

*Second LT Travis Johnson takes notes as CPT Byerly (right) discusses an operation with an Iraqi commander in September 2010. Johnson says Byerly gave him "the best opportunity to succeed."*

I don't want to give anyone the wrong idea: I was not set up for failure. Rather, I learned valuable lessons by being given the opportunity to sink or swim. I knew that if I wanted to become a better officer and develop professionally, I needed to be able to handle the tasks that were given to me. I looked forward to the opportunity to sit in his place during meetings and brief the squadron commander on our operations while CPT Byerly was out with the rest of the troop, as this gave me a chance to see firsthand what was happening at the higher level. I wanted to be taken seriously and understand the information, so I learned to prepare for what I was going to brief. CPT Byerly provided guidance, and we would rehearse to ensure that I was ready.

■ *Professional Development.* On numerous occasions, my commander assigned books for us to read as well as a deadline for completing the reading. Once we were done, we would go to lunch and discuss topics of the book and how they might relate to what we were working on at that time. Once I realized how valuable this training could be, I took it upon myself to find new and challenging books that I could use to grow in order to continuously develop my leadership skills as an officer. Now, wherever I go, I always have a book with me, or in mind, that I know I can reference to find something that correlates with what I am doing. Learning to apply the lessons learned is something I will carry with me for the rest of my career, as well as my life.

■ *Team Building and Unit Cohesion.* I've also learned the value of team building and cohesion. Our troop volunteered for "Homes for Troops"—a program to build homes for disabled veterans—and we ran races together, including 5- and 10-kilometer road races, half marathons, marathons and triathlons. Our troop had a professional reading list, and leaders were encouraged to read on their own time. We designed t-shirts and decals bearing the troop name and insignia, all to build team cohesion and





CPT Byerly congratulates 2LT Johnson on receiving an award in Iraq in 2010. "I learned the importance of good character from my first troop commander," says Johnson.

make us proud to be a part of something bigger than ourselves. Not all Soldiers will volunteer to run races on their weekends just to improve their fitness or to read books in their off-time just to become better at their job. In order to encourage these activities, a small incentive was provided for the effort: After a certain number of races were run, or a certain number of books were read, Soldiers were given a chance to spend some extra time with their families on days when the mission allowed. Encouraging these types of activities not only helped Soldiers develop professionally and personally but also improved their morale.

■ *The Value of Character.* Finally, and perhaps most importantly, I learned the importance of good character from my first troop commander. Of course, I've always known that trustworthiness, treating others with respect and hard work are important. My commander, however, was a prime example that character traits such as these not only help in your own development but also play a large role in the development and attitude of those around you. CPT Byerly was always true to his word—he never said one thing and did another. It was evident that he cared about the well-being of his Soldiers and was never above getting his hands dirty if need be. Those in his presence saw his genuine nature and his work ethic, which made his Soldiers want to work for him and helped keep morale high. This can go a long way when you are in a leadership position.

All of these lessons have made me a better officer and a better person. I will continue to use them professionally and personally to ensure that I give myself and those around me the best opportunity to succeed, which is what was given to me by my first troop commander.

*Every single day, we are creating a legacy of leadership that is impacting units and Soldiers, now and long into the future. H.R. McMaster may not know Joe Byerly or Travis*

*Johnson, but he has influenced their development. With this 3GL vision in mind, think of a leader whom you are developing. What are you doing, intentionally and with purpose, to be a catalyst for his or her development?*

*Picture the leaders that he or she is influencing now and will influence in the future. Visualize the ripple effect. And don't leave it to chance that this person will understand what you are doing in terms of leader development. Explain it. Put it into context. And then keep at it—be consistent and keep coming back to this ongoing, never-*

*ending conversation about leader development and becoming more effective. In the process, you will ignite a passion and deep commitment to developing leaders—in yourself and in those you lead. Your greatest legacy will be the leaders that your leaders equipped and inspired to live this vision everywhere they go.*

*One way to start on this path is to print a copy of this article as well as the June 2007 "3GL" article in ARMY Magazine and then to sit down and talk about it with one or more people. And if you are a commissioned officer, please join the ongoing conversation in the CompanyCommand forum (<http://CC.army.mil>) where we are collectively growing the profession with this 3GL mind-set.*

**Connecting in conversation...  
...becoming more effective.**

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*Art by Jody Harmon*

**Have you joined your forum?**