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AD-A182 784

DUTIES AND ROLES OF THE BATTALION COMMAND SERGEANT MAJOR

BY

LIEUTENANT COLONEL JAMES R. SIKET

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REPORT DOCUMENTATION PAGE		READ INSTRUCTIONS BEFORE COMPLETING FORM	
1. REPORT NUMBER A182784	2. GOVT ACCESSION NO.	- RECIPIENT'S CATALOG NUMBER	
4. TITLE (and Subtitle) Duties and Roles of the Battalion Command Sergeant Major		. TYPE OF REPORT & PERIOD COVERED Individual Essay	
		6. PERFORMING ORG. REPORT NUMBER	
7. AUTHOR(s) Siket, James R., LTC, FA		8. CONTRACT OR GRANT NUMBER(s)	
9. PERFORMING ORGANIZATION NAME AND ADDRESS U.S. Army War College Carlisle Barracks, PA 17013-5008		10. PROGRAM ELEMENT, PROJECT, TASK AREA & WORK UNIT NUMBERS	
11. CONTROLLING OFFICE NAME AND ADDRESS U.S. Army War College Carlisle Barracks, PA 17013-5008		12. REPORT DATE 20 March 1987	
		13. NUMBER OF PAGES 25	
14. MONITORING AGENCY NAME & ADDRESS (if different from Controlling Office)		15. SECURITY CLASS. (of this report) Unclassified	
		15a. DECLASSIFICATION/DOWNGRADING SCHEDULE	
16. DISTRIBUTION STATEMENT (of this Report) Approved for public release; distribution is unlimited.			
17. DISTRIBUTION STATEMENT (of the abstract entered in Block 20, if different from Report)			
18. SUPPLEMENTARY NOTES			
19. KEY WORDS (Continue on reverse side if necessary and identify by block number)			
20. ABSTRACT (Continue on reverse side if necessary and identify by block number) See back page			

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USAWC MILITARY STUDIES PROGRAM PAPER

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DUTIES AND ROLES OF THE BATTALION COMMAND SERGEANT MAJOR

An Individual Essay

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ABSTRACT

AUTHOR: James R. Siket, LTC, FA

TITLE: Duties and Roles of the Battalion Command Sergeant Major

FORMAT: Individual Essay

DATE: 20 March 1987 PAGES: 23 CLASSIFICATION: Unclassified

The battalion command sergeant major (CSM), in peacetime, is the battalion commander's most important advisor. The CSM possesses more experience than any other person in the battalion. Consequently, the battalion commander must obtain the maximum effort of the CSM both in assignment of duties and responsibilities, yet ensure he is properly integrated into the command structure of the battalion. Because there exists little substantive policy concerning the employment of the CSM at battalion level, the battalion commander must devote valuable time determining how to properly employ this critical asset. The author suggests appropriate duties and roles for the CSM at battalion level. The author recommends that the CSM should be involved in the training, maintaining, caring, and leading of the unit's soldiers. The relationship of the command sergeant major to the chain of command is also addressed.

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Duties and Roles of The Battalion Command Sergeant Major

In making preparation for the day I would assume command of my artillery battalion, I devoted a significant amount of time reviewing the areas which I believed I was well prepared and those not so well prepared.

I concluded from this review the critical area which I felt most insecure concerned how I would integrate the battalion command sergeant major (CSM) into my master plan for commanding the battalion. Because I had developed long range goals for the battalion, I believed that I could meet those objectives if the supporting programs I established could be organized into a cohesive system. My previous experience of two plus years as a battalion executive officer in a direct support field artillery battalion convinced me that the command sergeant major would help sustain systems to achieve my goals. I also realized that without his complete dedication, achieving a well motivated, highly competitive unit would be difficult. If both our personalities failed to harmonize well the potential for a disjointed command atmosphere could easily permeate throughout the battalion. This conclusion was based upon my observations of the relationships of numerous battalion command sergeants major

and battalion commanders during the past two years. Some of those appeared to be harmonious relationships, while others were less than harmonious.

Consequently, I was not completely comfortable with how I perceived the two potentially strong personalities might impact on the battalion: strong cohesion could yield success whereas anything less meant mediocrity. Some commanders permitted the command sergeants major do whatever they wanted while others maintained moderate control of them; and still others defined specific missions for the command sergeants major in every area. It was my intention to provide specific guidance to the command sergeant major; guidance which I wanted him to accept positively that was designed to help him successfully accomplish his missions. Therefore, throughout the precommand course TDY I was attentive to the special presentations delivered by CSMs both at Fort Sill, and Fort Leavenworth. During these courses several informal discussion panels of command sergeants major presented various opinions concerning the duties of the command sergeant major and his role at battalion level. These presentations included plenty of time for questions and answers from the precommand course students so the opportunities were available to obtain information.

Although I gained perspectives the discussions presented during the precommand course, the panels espoused only intangible, ambiguous, and diverse opinions concerning the role of the battalion command sergeant major. For example, each of the panel members stated in one term or another that the

battalion commander and his sergeant major had to interact harmoniously concerning all aspects of commanding the battalion; they must continuously communicate effectively with one another; and command sergeant major knew his duties thoroughly and would provide critical advice to the commander to ensure the battalion functioned effectively. Further, the panel characterized the command sergeant major as the one who always would have a feel for the pulse of the battalion. He would keep the commander informed as to whether the morale was positive, or negative and adversely affecting the soldiers' performance. The panel of command sergeants major was convincing to me in its portrayal that the command sergeant major possessed a unique talent for accurately assessing the state of morale within the battalion as no other person could.

Through my personal experience, exposure to precommand classes and reading regulations, I was able to acquire sufficient information to form my initial ideas concerning the relationship I would create with my command sergeant major. Considering all of that, I continued to feel comfortable in controlling all functions of the battalion, except for the most effective employment of the talents of my command sergeant major. Consequently, on the day I assumed command, I had outlined my initial plan concerning this subject but had little more confidence in it than I had one year later when my name first appeared on the command designee list.

So, with this background, I continued to search for ideas to refine my approach and reduce the number of uncertainties related

to the duties and roles of the battalion command sergeant major. I believed I was going to begin command just as I had witnessed others begin command - wasting valuable time trying to create a system with respect to the employment of my CSM.

On my first day of command I executed my plan to have the CSM be the first person with whom I would meet. After completion of social activities associated with such affairs I spent the late hours of that afternoon with my CSM in my office, one on one. The agenda, in addition to a few minutes of formal introductions, included providing guidance to the CSM to take a few days to develop a list of the areas which he currently held responsibility and a second list of other areas he wanted to have greater influence; and I told him I would develop the areas, separately, which I wanted to have him involved. I provided him one week to collect his thoughts and put them on paper. When we met on this subject the following week, we discussed the proposals and made plans to formalize his duties so that everyone he knew exactly what I wanted him to do. I discussed most of the options with my field grades and battery commanders prior to committing to a fixed program.

During my tenure as battalion commander I experienced two distinct opposite personality types in my two command sergeants major (they had one month of overlap). Working with each had its own rewards, challenges, and even a few frustrations, as was to be expected. This exposure to two personality extremes gave me insight into what a command sergeant major could and could not do, should and should not do. Looking back, if I had the more

aggressive of the two first, I might have expected more of the second. However, I had muddle through the first six months of command making modifications to the relationship concerning how the command sergeant major fit into the equation of establishing and maintaining a cohesive and "gung-ho" battalion.

Because I began command with a much less than smooth relationship with my most senior noncommissioned officer, I want to share my experiences and thoughts concerning this critical relationship. As a result of this experience I want to identify what I believe are the appropriate duties, responsibilities and relationships of the battalion command sergeant major, and how he integrates into the command functions within the battalion.

After I had been in command for six months I developed a list of the areas in which I believed the command sergeant major should have an impact. I also spent a lot of time examining how he best contributed to the chain of command/chain of concern and how the battalion could maximize use of his vast experience, talent, and normally unwaivering personality. Complete integration of the battalion CSM into the battalion would be more beneficial to the soldiers than limiting him to his most proficient areas of expertise. I did not want him to ignore the areas in which he was less experienced. While in command, I believed I effectively directed the CSM into doing the best he could do in all areas; both had a positive impact on the battalion.

Upon completion of my review of the best employment of the CSM after six months of command I wrote a letter to him

articulating what I expected him to do for the battalion. I later did the same with his successor shortly after he assumed his duties. I got the impression that both of them initially were irritated by the letter, to varying degrees, however, after a few days to a few weeks, this irritation had no impact on our relationship. In fact, my second CSM made the list more comprehensive. The list served as an extensive but informal NCO support form (similar to OER support form) identifying his objectives during the entire rating period. I referred to the letter periodically in counseling with each command sergeant major and we both referred to it to ensure that the requirements therein continued to orient toward our objectives.

Although I do not wish to regurgitate the contents of the letter, which consisted of a series of one-liners on duties and responsibilities, I do want to address the major categories of duties including some important points in each category.

In general, I organized all of the duties and responsibilities of the command sergeant major into four categories: training; maintenance; leading; and caring. I will address these four categories, and will conclude with how I perceive the command sergeant major should relate to the chain of command.

TRAINING: The battalion command sergeant major must have a major influence on training. Because the sergeant major probably is the most experienced and seasoned trainer in the organization he must know how to properly exert his influence to enhance training soldiers. Sergeants lead, teach, and train soldiers to

perform the individual tasks of their military occupational specialties. The command sergeant major provides both direct and indirect motivation for sergeants to ensure that they have every possible opportunity to be effective and enthusiastic trainers.

1. The command sergeant major must observe unit formations and ceremonies to determine if these are conducted on time and in accordance with FM 22-5, to include the special techniques and standards imposed by higher headquarters. Much to my chagrin, I found that some command sergeants major did not know FM 22-5 well, therefore, they must study and understand these documents if they are to maintain credibility with the first sergeants and the battalion commander. Military ceremonies and formations are routine exercises which require a consistent pattern of execution. The CSM needs to devote some time each day observing formations of subordinate units so that short critiques can be discussed with first sergeants as necessary. Often there are unique requirements at a formation (presentation of various awards, letters, etc.), and the CSM needs to know the specific procedure for each requirement so that proper execution is accomplished. He also is the enforcer of the procedures for battalion level ceremonies, ensuring all first sergeants know what is expected.

2. Quality individual and collective training must be conducted routinely. The command sergeant major must evaluate the quality of that training. He must ensure that first sergeants spend time away from their offices to check the quality of training within their batteries. Although the battalion S-3

and all commanders habitually must check training, the battalion command sergeant major also can project authority and create motivation for the sergeants who train the soldiers. He certainly is able to attract the attention of the first sergeant and senior noncommissioned officers in a unique manner unlike the approach used by the battalion commander. CSMs have a talent for providing guidance so that sergeants can focus their efforts on conducting meaningful training. Often, noncommissioned officers are more receptive to corrections generated by the command sergeant major. The CSM can make these observations and provide constructive criticism only if he routinely attends periods of prime time training.

3. CSM needs to provide input to all staff sections concerning Sops, policies, schedules, and plans to ensure that productive training is scheduled and executed based upon command guidance and directives from higher headquarters (much of which he obtains from meetings with the commander). The CSM must review all plans and schedules prior to publication by the S-3. Because he is very knowledgeable of all of the battalion's commitments he can identify conflicting schedules and can provide comments concerning guidance from higher headquarters; often from a perspective unlike either the battalion S-3 or XO. His review is necessary for all such documents to preclude generating unnecessary changes to the training schedule and plans. My experience indicated that prior to the plans and training schedules being finalized by the S-3 corrections and recommendations often were made by the CSM. The CSM would review

the details of NCOPD classes (occasionally NCOPD was missing from the schedule); protect NCO section leaders' time by ensuring that sufficient time was allocated to them to prepare for inspections, promotion boards, soldier of the month boards and other section requirements. The CSM reviewed every training schedule prior to processing it through me. I always returned these documents to the S-3 through the CSM when I discovered errors which were the responsibility of the CSM correct. As a result training schedules were more accurate and the soldiers had confidence that what was on the schedule would occur.

4. The CSM must endeavor to keep subordinates up-to-date on tactics and techniques at section level. He must help improve the image of his unit among his contemporaries. Often the CSM would be the first to become aware of the latest changes in detailed section procedures on major items of equipment; or specific alterations to soldier common task testing directed by Department of the Army. He had to ensure that these changes were disseminated accurately to all noncommissioned officers after discussing with the battalion commander and S-3. Additionally, because the battalion was part of a maneuver brigade, the CSM had to interface with other battalion CSMs in the brigade. Often this interface was an opportunity for the other battalions to form opinions of their sister battalion, and the impression reflected through the CSM could strongly influence those opinions. Every time the brigade commander directed some action through CSM channels, the CSMs supported competitively and would try to ensure rapid compliance. If the other battalion

CSMs recognized the accomplishments of the battalion the credit was due to the CSM's ability to interact with those CSMs. Positive feedback from these CSMs had positive effect on the troops in the maneuver units and the troops of the battalion.

5. The CSM must strengthen the noncommissioned officers professional development program (NCOPD) within the battalion. This strength results in better trained soldiers who, as a group, achieve above the Army average SQT scores. The CSM must oversee the NCOPD within the battalion. Although he has no assets to control the program, he has a vested interest in helping to ensure the program is outstanding - he provides valuable input and recommendations to the S-3 concerning what is best for the noncommissioned officers development. He must ensure that the program is included in the training schedule and that the subjects taught are pertinent and appropriate to enhance NCO professionalism. Because he monitors the program he ensures that the subjects taught achieve the commander's goals. For example, I wanted NCO SQT scores to improve over the previous year's scores, which were very poor. I provided guidance to the CSM and measured the results of SQT scores to determine if improvement was made. I provided the CSM time to organize his training schedule input to the S-3 as part of the program to improve SQT training for noncommissioned officers.

6. The CSM monitors the progress of the battalion reenlistment NCO so that first term reenlistees have the opportunity to accumulate enough quality points to meet the Army reenlistment quality point average. Much of the program to raise

the quality point average was based upon the soldier's GT score. One manner in which these scores were dramatically increased was to provide worthy soldiers and noncommissioned officers the opportunity to attend the basic skills education program (BSEP). Finding the time to send soldiers to BSEP both during and after duty hours was not a significant problem, but keeping them in the program and maintaining positive attitudes among these soldiers was a challenge. The CSM can talk to and motivate soldiers to study and improve themselves. His influence in this program through the first sergeants helped to raise many GT scores. This program benefited the soldiers when reenlistment time drew near because higher GT scores translated into more reenlistment options.

MAINTAINING: Throughout my nearly five consecutive years as battalion executive officer and commander, I infrequently observed command sergeants major, from any unit, productively engaged in motor pool activities. Some command sergeants major lacked the experience, confidence, and desire to spend time in the motor pool motivating soldiers. However, CSM presence in the motor pool inspires soldiers, and helps generate interest in their work; and keeps soldiers working productively during the scarce time allocated for maintenance.

1. The CSM can be a driving factor in making noncommissioned officers use the -10 manual during preventive maintenance checks and services (PMCS). Units which have their soldiers adhering to the -10 manual checks to perform routine PMCS usually have the best maintenance programs. One method for

determining the degree of maintenance discipline in a unit is to walk through the motor pool to observe if soldiers are using the -10 to perform maintenance. In my opinion use of the -10 is not routine. During the year there is insufficient time set available for the conduct of PMCS for each vehicle, consequently maintenance time is critical and must be used productively. The presence of the battalion commander and command sergeant major in the motor pool during the PMCS encourages the sections to perform work more effectively, and continuous emphasis is needed to maintain this proficiency. If the command sergeant major does nothing more than check to see which sections are using the manual and which are not, and passes his observations on to the first sergeant, the proficiency generally will increase over the subsequent weeks. Once the soldier believes that the battalion command sergeant major and battalion commander will be in the motor pool checking PMCS frequently there will be an increased effort to maintain good habits. To the soldier, the command sergeant major seems to have as much positive influence on them as does the battalion commander. Although use of the -10 became routine during section maintenance periods, renewed emphasis is needed to keep it there.

2. The CSM must ensure that first sergeants are emphasizing successful completion of periodic equipment services to achieve a higher degree of maintenance excellence. Noncommissioned officers march to the beat of the drum of the first sergeant. Even when the battery commander wants to emphasize maintenance, the first sergeant unintentionally may work against him because

of the administrative workload which demands his time and attention. Similar to my experience with CSMS, I usually found that first sergeants also were not particularly fond of the motor pool. In order to get the proper emphasis on maintenance the first sergeant must have time designated to be in the motor pool to observe the work of his soldiers. The first sergeant must be present during weekly PMCS; and together with the battery commander, the battalion command sergeant major can strongly encourage the first sergeant to get to the motor pool. If first sergeants can be influenced to spend time in the motor pool they will have a significant impact on maximizing performance and supervision by noncommissioned officers. The CSM can promote success in maintenance.

LEADING: The most important asset of the battalion command sergeant major is the quality of his leadership. Regardless of the level of experience in other areas of expertise, he must have the qualities of a good leader; and CSMS possess excellent qualities of leadership. If he does not transmit those good qualities the influence of his leadership will negatively impact on the soldiers. Because he is in a position of leadership by virtue of rank and time in service his actions have a tremendous impact on the soldiers. This knowledge of leadership needs to be fully exploited to benefit the battalion.

1. The CSM must lead and teach subordinate noncommissioned officers, especially first sergeants, and must provide leadership advice to officers either when requested or when he recognizes the need. As the senior noncommissioned officer in the battalion

the CSM commands a special respect; all noncommissioned officers look to him as their role model. Because the CSM directs much of his effort through NCOPD he has direct influence on the subjects taught and presented. However, when he attempts to provide leadership instructions to officers potential problems can occur. It is my opinion that few officers, to include new battalion commanders understand what the CSM is and does and how he must interface with them. Many CSMs avoid officers and many officers avoid contact with CSMs. The command sergeant major can be a forceful personality in the battalion who can easily discourage a lieutenant or captain from seeking his advice. The battery commanders, in some cases, must be strongly encouraged by the battalion commander to seek guidance from the command sergeant major; and the CSM must be responsive to their needs when such help is requested. The CSM must make himself available to the junior commanders for this advice, therefore, he should familiarize himself with officers when opportunities exist. Yet, junior officers need to understand that the CSM is not in the chain of command -- and who can explain that better than the CSM himself? Further, the CSM must intervene, when necessary, to provide constructive criticism to junior officers. The CSM can correct an officer's uniform and should comment whenever he detects an inappropriate order or directive being issued by a junior officer to a noncommissioned officer. Additionally, battery commanders can use the command sergeant major as a sounding board concerning new ideas and proposals before they bring these ideas to the attention of the battalion commander.

Sometimes the CSM is the only credible sounding board for a battery commander when that commander needs to "test the water" concerning the battalion commanders' policies. The CSM's advice concerning these subjects either may provide additional guidance to that commander or help to build support at the time when the battery commander needs support for a new idea.

2. Keeping the battalion commander informed of morale, leadership, family, disciplinary, and climate of command problems, and other significant situations is the responsibility of the command sergeant major. When the CSM becomes aware of a problem, he can inform the appropriate first sergeant involved to determine background and encourage the first sergeant to take corrective action. If the response from the first sergeant is not encouraging the CSM can inform the battalion commander of the nature of the problem - and the battalion commander can discuss the situation with the battery commander. The CSM has access to inside information which the battalion commander may be unaware, and vice versa. The information must be exchanged between these two personnel on a daily basis. The CSM often, if not always, will receive conflicting feedback from noncommissioned officers then will the battalion commander. The CSM and commander must be "active" not "reactive" to situations which come about. Keeping each other informed will help the active side of this equation.

3. The CSM must stress safety to all soldiers and make necessary on-the-spot corrections; and should report these violations of safety procedures to first sergeants. All personnel in the chain of command must be aware of their

responsibilities to keep safety first in all unit activities and the CSM can play an important role here also.

4. As the battalion's most senior noncommissioned officer, the CSM must maintain high standards of physical fitness. Today's Army expects its senior leaders to be nearly as physically fit as the soldiers. Commanders and CSMs must take PT with the unit to help maintain teamwork and set the example. The CSM must attend daily PT with the units to indicate to the troops he is in good physical condition and can do what they have to do.

5. The CSM must ensure that all noncommissioned officers set the example and enforce high standards of dress, personal appearance, and discipline for the soldiers to emulate. The CSM can accomplish this by checking to determine if the noncommissioned officers inspect and correct soldiers daily at formation. If the CSM checks to see that this practice is executed routinely, the soldiers will benefit and the noncommissioned officers will learn to be more forceful leaders. I have noticed that noncommissioned officers who cannot tell a soldier to get a haircut also are incapable of issuing orders, and command sergeants major can help to alleviate such problems by working through the first sergeants.

CARING: The CSM has a very important and influential role in caring for the troops. The CSM has access to all types of information and usually becomes aware of most problems. In fact, he often is more efficient at becoming aware of what is happening than the battalion commander. The CSM has access to information which some people might want to keep from the battalion

commander, and, therefore, the CSM must keep his commander well informed.

1. Caring for soldiers includes ensuring that troops get promoted. The CSM must ensure that qualified soldiers appear before NCO promotion boards on time, and that all NCOs counsel unqualified soldiers concerning the specific reasons soldiers were not recommended. He accomplishes this by talking to the first sergeants and talking to soldiers. All noncommissioned officers should counsel their subordinates at least once monthly. Included in counseling should be telling the soldier what things he must do to get promoted. Some soldiers are not fully aware of when they are eligible for promotion, so the NCO must tell them each month. The NCO also must tell the soldier why he was not recommended for promotion and what he must do to get promoted during regular monthly counseling. The CSM easily can check to see if this counseling is being done simply by asking soldiers at random whether or not the counseling is taking place. If instruction is needed then the CSM can incorporate this requirement into NCOPD.

2. Awards are another area which indicates that the chain of command cares about the soldier. The CSM can emphasize to noncommissioned officers and first sergeants that they should recommend individuals for awards prior to their departure from the unit. This should be done 90 days prior to ETS or PCS so that the award can be presented while the soldier is assigned to the unit. If a soldier is not going to be recommended for an award, then it is the noncommissioned officer's responsibility to

tell his soldier this fact.

3. Because the CSM represents the unit and is a board member on soldier of the month competition at higher headquarters, one of his responsibilities is to give proper guidance to first sergeants concerning preparation of the soldiers for these exercises. The soldier of the month/quarter candidate represents both himself and his unit in the presence of higher headquarters personnel. He serves as a model soldier to the other soldiers in the battalion, brigade and division. Therefore, the CSM must be heavily involved overseeing the system to assist the soldier in meeting this challenge.

4. Care of the soldiers' families is extremely important. Just as the CSM has access to most information concerning the attitudes of the soldiers in the battalion, he also has access concerning what is happening with the families. When he becomes aware of a problem, and he can inform the appropriate first sergeant of the situation so immediate action can be initiated. If he is unable to encourage the first sergeant to act expeditiously he can bring the issue to the attention of the battalion commander. In most situations, problems concerning families must be brought to the attention of the battalion commander to make him aware of the situation and action being contemplated by the unit commander.

5. The battalion sponsorship program is one of the key programs which affects the battalion. Often its impact extends throughout the entire time the soldier is assigned to the unit. If a soldier and his family are initially properly welcomed into

the unit then the attitudes of the family members will be positive and should remain that way throughout the tour. The opposite is true for those who are poorly received in a unit. The CSM should be responsible for overseeing the enlisted portion of the program to ensure it has horsepower. He initiates the written requirement for an enlisted sponsor and ensures that appropriate welcoming letters are sent by sponsors to all incoming enlisted personnel.

THE CHAIN OF COMMAND: I believe there are serious misunderstandings concerning how the battalion command sergeant major interfaces with the chain of command. I have had many battery commanders come to me and ask if the first sergeant has to take orders from the command sergeant major. Further, many battery commanders avoid contact with the command sergeant major and often resent his inspection of or visit to their units. Some battery commanders have disdain for the CSM because of his powerful relationship with the first sergeant.

1. The first principle which must be understood is that the command sergeant major neither is a commander, nor is he in the chain of command. Rather, he is the commander's sergeant major and he supports the chain of command and works in the chain of concern -- which originates at CSM level and extends to section sergeant level. This relationship is not well understood by junior officers, as is often the case with senior noncommissioned officers at battery level. The CSM is the personal advisor to the battalion commander, and is not in the chain of command. He is there to advise the commander on issues discussed in the main

body of this document. He also is a teacher and communicator to the first sergeants of the unit. He does not command the first sergeants and does not outrank the battery commanders. He also must understand this; some do not.

2. The CSM provides the same information to the first sergeants as the battalion commander provides to the battery commanders. This is the reason why the battalion command sergeant major and battalion commander must talk to one another frequently; twice daily is not enough in most cases. Both must be on the same sheet of music, otherwise the first sergeants and battery commanders may work in opposite directions. The CSM supports the policies of the battalion commander and gives instruction and guidance to the first sergeants.

3. The first sergeants need to understand the proper CSM-chain of command relationship also. Prior to disseminating important information to the troops the first sergeant and battery commander need to discuss the information to determine if it is accurate. If there are misunderstandings or questions, these can be corrected immediately. There is nothing wrong with receiving conflicting information as long as it is clarified prior to announcing it to the troops.

4. There is also a proper channel for resolving major disagreements or problems within this battalion commander-battery commander-command sergeant major-first sergeant relationship. The commanders give the orders and the noncommissioned officers execute the requirement of the orders. If a first sergeant has a problem with the command sergeant major then that first sergeant

reports the problem to his battery commander, who, in turn, seeks out the battalion commander for advice. The battalion commander discusses the situation with the command sergeant major and provides feedback to the battery commander who relays this to his first sergeant. If the first sergeant is having problems with his battery commander, the first sergeant seeks assistance from the command sergeant major; and if the problem does not get resolved the CSM approaches the battalion commander. The battalion commander provides feedback to the command sergeant major who in turn discusses this with the first sergeant; if the situation does not improve, eventually there must be a meeting between the battery commander and battalion commander.

CONCLUSION: The battalion command sergeant major is a critical member of the battalion. His influence and presence must be properly and effectively transmitted throughout the battalion. He, therefore, must be fully aware of his responsibilities and properly must interface with the first sergeants, commanders, and soldiers of the battalion. Additionally, he must display his energies in a positive direction because of his inherent influence over the lives of so many soldiers. From previous experience, I have not observed the command sergeant major make full use of his talents and take an active role in helping the officers and enlisted soldiers to obtain maximum benefit from his vast knowledge and leadership ability. It is the responsibility of the battalion commander to ensure effective employment is made of the battalion command sergeant major, otherwise, the potential of the CSM never will be

realized; and the commander's long range goals for the battalion will not be achieved.

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