

# Issue Brief

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Command Is an Art  
Not a Science

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## Command Is an Art Not a Science

### Abstract

*The art of successful command of a battalion encompasses the effective integration of leadership, training, administration, discipline, morale, and security to create a cohesive and combat-ready fighting force. While weapons, equipment and operational plans are essential components of military capability, the decisive element remains the soldier.*

*This paper examines the essential elements that contribute to a successful battalion command through four interconnected dimensions: Man Management and Promotion Policy; Command routine and challenges; Maintenance of Morale; and Security of men and material. It highlights the importance of fair and merit-based personnel policies, rigorous individual and collective training, effective welfare measures, and the development of strong junior leadership.*

*The paper also emphasises the necessity of maintaining high standards of security in relation to personnel, information, weapons, equipment, and institutional procedures. It argues that successful command is 'not the product of individual authority alone but of a well-established culture of professionalism, accountability, and mutual trust'. The harmonious application of these principles enable a battalion to sustain readiness, preserve cohesion, and achieve excellence in both peace and operational environments.*

**Keywords:** Art of Command, Command, Man-Management, Morale

### Introduction

The most complex factor of production, as identified by the modern subject of Management, is to manage a Man. While in command one can manage arms and equipment and make workable operational plans, but cannot predict the behaviour of each and every man under his command. Reaction to a given situation will be different by different persons under similar situation both in war and peace. This is because man by nature is calculative and would like to 'stick his neck' only after weighing loss and gain of his indulgence. If this be so, then how are there many examples of selfless sacrifice and valour in the history of warfare. The answer is simple viz. one goes into the battle with a hope of victory and be part of glory or to avoid court martial. Managing such a complex element of command is very challenging both during peace and war specially during the former.

Peace is nothing but preparation for war. It is the moral responsibility of each Battalion commander to keep his command fully prepared to take the field with least tremors and adjustment. This is possible only, if men are kept fully trained, motivated and disciplined all the time. This subject is being attempted based on the practices followed by successful Battalion commanders who brought glory to their command under challenging conditions of both war and peace and rose in their career to take on higher assignments in the hierarchy of the Army.

### **Part 1: Man Management and Promotion Policy**

A soldier spends almost 9 months in a year in the unit. By all means it is his real home and not a place of work. He should find more comfort in his unit than in his home. The traffic of goodwill, trust and brotherhood has to flow both ways viz. the leader and the led. At no stage there should be a feeling that one is in conflict with the other. The waves of efficiency, wellbeing, discipline and will to succeed can be felt while entering a good unit. How this can be achieved is discussed in the succeeding paras.

#### ***Drill***

It is one of the most important activity to instill in a soldier pride and ability to respond to orders. It improves the soldierly bearing and individual discipline, hence must be practiced even for 10 minutes every day before ending physical training or games periods.

#### ***Inspections***

If inspections and drill is taken away from unit life, there will be no difference between Army and civil setup. Inspection must receive attention of each appointment in the chain of command. Following is suggested sphere of each commander.

- ***Platoon Commander.*** Daily inspection of individual turnout and personal hygiene.
- ***Company Commander.*** Daily inspection of barracks, cook house, bathrooms and weekly inspection of kote and stores.
- ***Battalion Commander.*** Monthly ceremonial inspection of entire unit as it would take place during annual administrative inspection by the formation commander. During this inspection, the quarter guard, upkeep of barracks, cook house and other aspects related to security of weapons, documents, stores etc. must be viewed.
- ***Regimental Medical Officer.*** Monthly medical inspection of each individual in the Battalion.

## ***Welfare***

Timely leave, hearing of grievances, training and enhancing promotion prospects of every individual are the only facets of welfare. Over pampering and over comforts are going to give diminishing returns.

- ***Hearing of Grievances.*** A soldier generally likes to share his anxiety and personal matters only with those who are in a position to solve them. In a month, two days should be spared by the Commanding Officer wherein any one, without going through his chain of command, can approach him directly to get his problem addressed.
- ***Enhancing Promotion Prospects.*** Every individual should be given fair opportunity to attain education and map reading standards required for his promotion to the next rank as well as to attend the promotion cadres. Those who are away from the unit should be recalled to attend the cadre. Planning for promotion of the affected persons must take place at least a year in advance. Promotion should be strictly on merit and not merely on seniority. Rejecting the dead wood at every rank will be in the best interest of the unit.
- ***Use of Manpower.*** Over employment of manpower as working parties, sentry duties, night guards at places having no threat, are counterproductive. Working parties must carry appropriate tools for the designated task. Instead of pooling men from different subunits, the task be allotted to sub unit wise (section or platoon) under their commander. It will achieve desired finesse and timely completion of the task. At night there should not be more than 30 men deployed on night duty in a peace station. Family members should not be detailed on night duty away from family lines.
- ***Respect Sunday and Holidays.*** A man, after six days of hard work does look forward to a break on the seventh day. Contrarily, one finds Sundays and holidays rather more busy in mundane activities. Though there is no physical training period, a man wakes up early to attend Mandir parade. Why mandir parade cannot be held on Saturday evening? on Sunday and holidays there must be visible break from the unit routine. There is a very nice book titled Psychology and a soldier – recommended for study.

- **Parade Timings.** Parade timings must be scheduled in such a way that lunch is taken by 12.30 so that men can have one hour rest before resuming late afternoon activities.
- **Games.** It is a very important activity of the unit to release individual stress, promote camaraderie, familiarity and unit spirit. It should be treated as a parade to be attended by all Officers, JCOs and other ranks. Mundane tasks during this period must be avoided.
- **Awards and Punishment.** To maintain high standard of discipline and efficiency, punishment must be severe and demonstrative to be a deterrence.
- **Promotion Policy.** It should have consistency over a long period of time as a unit culture and should not vary from one commanding officer to another. A liberal commanding officer will leave behind inefficient junior commission and non-commissioned officers who will prove a dead wood for the incoming commanding officers. One should not show compassion and magnanimity at the cost of unit interests. Promotion should be strict and supersession should not be hesitated.

Each unit must have charter of promotion policy for each rank, duly deliberated by all officers of the unit and should remain operative at least for 10 years. Pressing field and war time circumstances can be exception to the policy.

- **Preparation for Retirement.** At the battalion level, we know who is retiring when considering his age and promotion prospects. There are number of vocational courses available with the Directorate of Resettlement. Persons about to retire should be sponsored on these courses based on one's aptitude. They should be advised on financial management of their retirement benefits and made aware of self-employment schemes available in their respective regions. For instance, those having agricultural land should be advised to start self-employment in agro based projects and how to enhance agricultural income by better crop management as well as diversification of crops from traditional to cash crops/ orchards. They can be sent for training in their state' agricultural institutions involved in research. Officers come and go but the junior leadership serves for a long period and provides continuity to good practices. Hence, their selection under no circumstances should be lenient.

## **Part 2: Command Routine and Challenges**

Command of a unit overnight catapults an officer to the domain of loneliness and great responsibility wherein only one person is responsible and accountable for making decisions. Whole unit in fact, looks up to this man to decide, lead and administer. A commanding officer has got a lot of liberty and autonomy to run the unit. Role of a Brigade commander and higher ups are there purely in advisory capacity and they visit the unit to feel its pulse. There are basically, three elements of command— You, Yourself and Your Goal. These are discussed in detail as under.

### ***Yourself***

Promotion to command a battalion imposes tremendous sense of personal achievement as well as added responsibility. Therefore, one has to ask himself “Am I worthy of trust of my men ? Will I bring them back alive -should there be war in my time? It is suggested not to fall in the trap that “there will not be war or war like conditions during one’s tenure”. Therefore, always plan pessimistically and train the command to take on the field with least amount of hiccups. On taking over the command, one must revise his military knowledge in following subjects.

- Glossary of military terms.
- All operations of war.
- Administration in war and peace.
- Training manuals of current as well as future operational role of your unit.
- Guide to commanding officer for training of specialist platoons
- Instruction on contact with foreign nationals.
- Instructions on handling and disposal of personal security cases.
- Classification and handling of classified documents .
- Security of arms, ammunition and Kote.

One should also go through Army orders and instructions /letters pertaining to following subjects as amended time to time:

- Instructions for the reporting of physical and battle casualties and submission of reports on accidents Injuries and like.
- Payment of maintenance allowances to wife and children.
- Hearing of the charge by the commanding officer.
- Mechanical transport discipline (DOs and DONTs) for drivers.
- Absent without leave beyond 30 days.
- Disciplinary cases and mechanical transport accidents.
- Loss of weapons.
- Losses and recovery of arms, ammunition explosives and equipment.
- Regimental funds.
- Orders pertaining to canteen accounts.

One must make himself aware of incidents that have taken place during the last 5 years in the area of current deployment be it peace or field, pertaining to environmental disasters, espionage, riots, internal security and attitude of local population towards national security. One should also keep oneself updated about the geopolitical environment in the neighbouring countries; likely induction of new weapons in the army, trends of future warfare so as to be proactive in preparing one's command to face such eventualities.

### ***Your Men***

Promotion up to the rank of Battalion commander is in one's hand; beyond this it depends on the performance of one's command; hence, there is a need to train the men under you both individually as well as collectively to enhance and maintain Operational preparedness of the unit at all times.

**Individual Training.** A soldier needs to be physically fit , marksman in shooting and good in the field craft. One cannot achieve it overnight but with daily practice it can be accomplished. Following are suggested: -

- Have a circuit of 3.2 km in the unit earmarked. Whole battalion including officers should run daily and complete it in a given time Thereafter, each one should be put through selected obstacles—such a routine will not take more than 30 minutes and be conducted 4 times a week without equipment.
- Organise a fieldcraft range creating various types of cover and obstacles within the unit and each person should go through this course once a week.

- Activate short range firing wherein every one fires 10 rounds once a week both during day and night.

### **Collective Training**

- Each platoon, once a fortnight, must go through the battle procedure and battle drill for advance to contact quick attack, reorganisation and withdrawal.
- ITC company must practice the above operations of war once a month under the supervision of the Battalion commander.
- Entire Battalion must go through route march up to a distance of 15 Km with full battle load once in two months led by the commanding officer.
- Irrespective of operational role, once in 4 months, the commanding officer must exercise his entire battalion in the battle drill and battle procedure for a deliberate attack, quick reorganisation and defence at night.

A commanding officer must visit the ongoing training daily and spend at least 1-2 hours to see for himself the standard of training being imparted rather than coming straight to the office and depend on reports given by others.

### **Your Goal**

One's goal should be "to further enhance the training, administration and sports standards of ones' unit so that each one under him feels part of a winning outfit"— one must assess the potential of one's unit in sports and professional competitions and concentrate on that discipline which can win at least 3 brigade events and 2-3 divisional events. These teams must remain concentrated and practice throughout the year; as only then desired results can be achieved. In one's tenure one sports team or a team of professional competition must be raised from scratch as add on.

Quarter guard, JCO mess, commissioned officers mess, mandir etc. are the institutions of the unit. There should be continuous effort to add on something worth preserving for a long time.

Remember one's name will always remain imprinted not only in the rogues Gallery of the unit but also in the memory of men who were there under one's command tenure. One will continue to remain good or bad example for those officers who were commissioned while one was commanding. Therefore, always think of leaving the unit in a better shape than the one

was taken over. Remember, a commanding officer usually comprises of three personalities viz. Teacher, Leader and Benefactor!

### Part 3: Maintaining the Morale

“Morale” is a word very glibly referred since the time we donned the uniform but only few of us make an attempt to analyse its real meaning, identify its real indicators on ground and implement actions to improve its existing state in the unit. In simple words, “morale” gives the men desired impetus to give their best against all odds. Intellectually morale is a man’s conviction that whatever he is doing or made to do is in his as well as in the best interest of his unit. ‘Emotionally’ it is a zest that goes with his physical and mental health. ‘Socially’ it is his feelings that he is wanted by the unit, if not indispensable. Good leadership too is essential to recognise this to sustain high morale in the unit. There are three players to raise and sustain group morale in the unit—Individual, Leader and the Cause.

#### *The Individual*

**Physical Needs.** It should be ensured that routine is not exacting leading to fatigue. Men look forward for break from routine which Sundays and holidays provide. Physical comfort should not be at the cost of physical fitness. Physical fitness alone enables men to perform all tasks under heavy odds and ensures mental happiness. The belief that ‘a tough mind leads to a tough body’ is actually true in its reverse form that is ‘a tough body leads to a tough mind’. Whatsoever, train him hard so that he can save himself in battle. That is the true welfare.

**Mental Well Being.** When man’s physical needs are relatively satisfied, his desire for mental wellbeing becomes pronounced. For that, the following are suggested:

- **Free Flow of Information.** There should be free flow of information between the commanding officer and his command through various channels available—pertaining to individual’s involvement in events like visit by senior officers, test exercise of unit, move to field areas and challenges involved or any change in existing policy pertaining to leave, movement and security. *No commander can keep the morale at its peak throughout the year. It has to be event specific.*
- **Investment of Savings.** Best available means for investment and how one should prepare for post- retirement phase of his life.

- **Recreation.** Boredom is an enemy of morale and variety is its friend. Provision of TV, library, indoor games be provided at the company level. Inter- platoon and inter- company sports events draw maximum healthy competition as these are bitterly contested and promotes group identity. Battles are won or lost by platoons and company, rather than by Brigades and divisions.
- **Job Satisfaction.** Finding right man for right job is necessary for the efficient functioning of the unit. The liberal promotion policy is against this desirability as it will popup crop of junior leadership which will be unable to hold on its own and will amount to square pegs in round holes. A deserving, well trained is likely to be competent individual who will feel no pressure in accomplishing the given task. However, reverse will be true for an inefficient person.
- **Group Solidarity.** Identifying with a group plays a big role in maintaining the morale. Each soldier should remain part of his section, platoon and company till compulsion to change his sub unit due to his better employability and promotion. Frequent changes of sub unit will make a soldier loose his group identity, so— essential to fight and perform as a group.
- **Self-esteem.** Every man wants approval and appreciation. A mere *Shabashi* will raise his self-esteem, encourage him to continue doing well, inculcate a sense of pride in himself and will also develop confidence in his superior as well as strengthen his belief that his good work will not go unnoticed. One should be liberal in forwarding citations for appropriate awards. For average achievers, there should never be unwarranted criticism. Make everyone feel wanted. Uncalled for criticism serves lowering the morale of any person /group. Do avoid public criticism also. A flak given in private will be well taken.

## **The Cause**

If a cause is not righteous, then a man can never be motivated to give his best to what he is being asked for. A live example is the Vietnam war wherein the belief and disbelief in the cause by the Vietnamese and Americans respectively proved the destiny of the waring forces. Men will see through the orders for good of the unit/ cause vis-a-vis hypocrisy. The latter is bound to have slipshod response.

## Religion

Men who have faith in the power of prayer find that it works for them, gives an assurance and degrades the fear of unknown. Never commit a mistake of not rendering support to the religious beliefs of the men. Faith in one's destiny, fair play of GOD, death in battle leading to liberation (Moksha)— are some of the positive beliefs which must be pronounced through discourses at the religious place.

## The Leader

The leader is the ultimate player to raise and retain the morale of the group. Morale can be made or marred by him. Leader has to maintain his own morale always high. Only then can he achieve the same for his men. A lot depends on inner personality of the leader, his integrity, honesty, intellectual as well as professional competence. In addition, following be followed as a guide: -

- Set a personal example to your men for what is demanded of them.
- Do not be a hypocrite.
- Bring an element of transparency in your command.
- Ensure you and your officers go through the same degree of privation which you subject your men to. If you do not do so, then you will lose credibility instantaneously.
- Show genuine love for your men. Apply principle of 'forgive and forget'.
- Resort to harsh punishments when absolutely necessary. Do not make criticism your habit.

A soldier who feels that everything is possible under the powers of his leader, has been done for him and who trusts his superiors and comrades and believes in the cause that he is fighting for is bound to have a high morale. Remember "morale relates to events at hand and cannot be expected of same wavelength throughout the year as events at home also make an impact".

Finally, when time of reckoning comes— to engage in a battle, then it will be morale only which will enable one's men to come victorious.

## Part 4: Security of Men and Material

Security in a unit encompasses three main aspects viz. security of men, material and information. It is not the responsibility of few appointments in the unit but the responsibility

of all ranks to be aware of the regulations pertaining to these subjects and adverse repercussions of non-compliance of these orders.

Generally, the fault originates at the grass root level which may eventually blow up to such a proportion causing national embarrassment or tarnish the image of Army/formation/unit due to loss of life and weapon.

### **Security of Persons**

- A cell in the unit be created to remain in touch with persons proceeding on courses / temporary duty/ leave/ pass. Instances have occurred where individuals away from the unit were murdered, committed suicide, arrested by the police for committing civil offences etc. and the unit came to know at a belated stage.
- Jawans going on weekly out pass must be dressed in a laid-out mufti dress of the unit which will deter them from unsoldierly conduct.
- A buddy system should be in place to avoid desertion and emotional instability.
- Avoid detailing married men on night duty away from their family lines.

### **Security of Information**

- Develop a team of reliable informers to keep you informed with the internal affairs and factors affecting morale of the unit. For this, non- combat soldiers are the best as they have access to all corners of the unit. Ensure their identity is not disclosed.
- Religious teachers should not go astray from the laid down norms of conduct of discourses in the place of worship. Instigation caused on grounds of religious fundamentalism can lead to undesirable consequences. Generally, such instigation takes place during evening discourses in a religious place where officers and JCOs are generally not present.
- Maximum information leaks through relaxed office procedures such as improper accounting and handling of classified documents, their disposal and destruction
- Computer is another security hazard. All classified documents / letters must not be saved on the hard disc. These instead be saved as hard copies or on floppies properly accounted for.
- Accountable classified documents should be handled by officers only; unaccountable classified documents must be in the charge of Head clerk.

- Each table should have master ledger of files held and proper handing taking over is carried out, on table in charge proceeding on leave howsoever short it may be.

Loss of document is considered very serious act and been cause of great embarrassment and inviting serious punishment, thus bringing disrepute to unit.

### **Security of Material**

**Arms and Ammunition.** These are critical material which have been entrusted upon the commanding officer for safe custody and authorised use. Following are important to ensure its safety:

- Kote JCO and Kote- in -charge must change in 6 and 3 months respectively.
- During arms cleaning, an officer or JCO should remain at the site of cleaning till the weapons are kept back in the kote. Ensure number of weapons taken out for cleaning are commensurate with the manpower designated for cleaning. There have been thefts of weapons specially pistols when the cleaning is taken very lightly and left without supervision by the officers or junior commissioned officer. It will be better if pistols are taken out separately.
- Ammunition must be issued in the presence of the Company commander and the Quartermaster. Seals broken and lot number checked in their presence. It will help to form the board of officers in case short packing or any discrepancy is detected. Arms and ammunition must not be kept at one place. If needed like during firing, a JCO must be there when there is break for lunch or so. Not following this norm has resulted in Fragging (deliberate killing of own officers /fellow soldiers) in the history of many units

### **Vehicle, Equipment, Stores and Barracks**

- A barrack NCO be appointed in charge for each barrack to take care of its repair and damage. It will prevent barrack damages often unit faces while leaving the station.
- Keys of all vehicles must be deposited and kept in a sealed box under the charge of a transport platoon Commander. No vehicle should move out at night without the permission of the commanding officer. There have been incidents where men without informing took out a vehicle, drove it to their village or met with an accident.

- All water bowsers and water trailers must be kept filled with water to control the fire, should it break out.
- In peace station, a daily duty officer should be detailed to remain in the unit lines for the night. It will result in a quick response to cases of, assault and affray, break of fire and desertion.

It is very important to build security consciousness among all ranks of the unit. Orders and instructions laid down for this must be repeated in monthly sainik sammelan. A faulty action by one man can tarnish the reputation of the battalion as security lapses are taken very seriously by the hierarchy of the Army. Therefore, take it as a challenge to ensure that no security lapse occurs in your command tenure.

## **Conclusion**

The art of successful command of a battalion lies in harmonising leadership, training, administration, morale, discipline, and security into a single cohesive system capable of achieving its mission under all circumstances. This is not merely the exercise of authority; it is the ability to create an environment in which individuals willingly subordinate their personal interests to the collective goals of the unit.

A successful battalion is built during peace and tested in war. Its combat effectiveness depends upon rigorous training, sound promotion policies, strong junior leadership, fair administration, and a culture of professionalism that is sustained over a time. Equally important is the maintenance of high morale, which inspires soldiers to endure hardship, overcome fear, and display courage in the face of adversity. The confidence that soldiers have in their unit, comrades, and purpose remains the most decisive factor of morale.

The art of command therefore consists of creating and preserving a fighting organisation where discipline is respected, welfare is balanced with operational needs, merit is rewarded, and security consciousness is ingrained at every level. When these elements function in harmony, a battalion develops resilience, cohesion, and a winning spirit. Such a unit is capable of withstanding adversity, adapting to changing challenges, and accomplishing its mission with distinction in both peace and war.

### About the Author

**Major General CM Seth (Retd)** was commissioned in 1963 and took part both in 1965 and 1971 Wars. An alumnus of Staff College, he held instructional appointments in infantry School, College of Combat and IMTRAT. Been Deputy Force Commander NSG, BGS and Chief of Staff of a Corps. He also commanded a division in mountains and retired from the post of ADG Territorial Army.



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