



Taking the Guidon: Exceptional Leadership at the Company Level

Nate Allen, Tony Burgess

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Significance of the title: The unit guidon serves to identify the unit, is a symbol of the commander's authority and presence, and represents the collective pride and spirit of all soldiers--past and present--who have served under it. Historically, the guidon accompanied the commander into battle where, in the heat and confusion of the close fight, it emboldened and rallied the soldiers to accomplish the mission. Today, the unit guidon continues to be an honored symbol of the commander's authority and responsibility, and it connects the valorous deeds of past warriors with today's soldiers who continue the proud tradition of selfless service to our Nation. An Army unit conducts a change-of-command ceremony whenever a new commander takes charge. The central rite of this ceremony is the passing of the unit guidon from the outgoing commander to the incoming commander. By taking the guidon, the new commander signals his or her selfless commitment to the traditions, values, and soldiers that the guidon represents. We wrote this book to capture our ideas about how to best prepare for and command a U.S. Army company-level unit. In the book, we lay out a leadership framework that was effective for us and, based on feedback from hundreds of readers, is making a significant difference in how others think about leading. One of the best things that emerged out of this project was the idea for creating the Company Command (CC.army.mil) and Platoon Leader forums (PL.army.mil), but that is another story. Here is an excerpt from the preface that introduces the book: Combat is the ultimate team sport; the cost of losing is death. As an Army leader, your mission is to build a winning team of disciplined, fit, and motivated soldiers that will accomplish the mission. In this book, you will find some input into to the age-old dialogue on how to create a team and harness its energy to accomplish uncommon results. Leading soldiers is our inspiration; doing so has affected every part of our lives. To begin with, the knowledge that we would command a company motivated us to prepare doggedly for command. This book is a compilation of our research and thinking, validated by experience (both success and failure!). It is not meant to be prescriptive in nature; nor will all these ideas work for you and your situation. Rather, our intent is to spark your thinking and encourage you as you prepare for command. We were fortunate to work with and watch some great leaders in action and to learn from some challenging experiences. Now we are in a position to pass on some of what we have learned. Our desire is that reading this book motivates and challenges you while you prepare for and execute the most honorable mission in the world--leading American soldiers!

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