



Company Commanders: Leaders In and Out of Rating



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By LTJG Michael Cole

USCG Training Center Cape May

Reference: [News](#)

Company commanders have long been a symbol of the Coast Guard's enlisted corps. The mirror shined boots, the campaign cover, the booming voice; all are hallmarks of one of the most important leadership positions in the Coast Guard, forging our future enlisted force.

Company commanders are the first thing a new recruit sees and the last thing they forget. But company commanders are drawn from the ranks of the most competent in their respective ratings. Many balk at the thought of answering company commander training solicitations. If a sailor is already doing great in their rating, why put all that aside to spend 3 years in a completely different job? Discussions with several company commanders and students at the company commander course at USCG Training Center Cape May reveal a range of benefits:

“Instant Credibility”: One of the biggest challenges a leader can face is convincing others to take him/her seriously. The company commander's pin is a visible indicator of mastery of yet another leadership specialty. It affirms proof of competence. “You lend legitimacy wherever you go in the Coast Guard,” says Petty Officer 1st Class Sean A. Ross, “When you say something, or when you're part of something, people pay attention. They figure that if you earned that company commander's pin, you must be squared away.”

“Taking it up a Level”: Ross' comments are about more than just a shiny pin. Most company commanders talk about “taking it up a level,” experiencing an increased instinctual level of military bearing, command presence and the ability to make difficult calls under pressure, particularly when those decisions involve the welfare of large numbers of subordinates. “You start to do these things without thinking about it,” says Ross. “You're squared away, you're

locked on, you're direct, you move with a sense of purpose, you're highly professional, and people notice.”

Consideration for Command Cadre: The experience can make a difference in future assignments, as detailers know that company commanders have experience leading large numbers of the most challenging kind of subordinates: the raw and untested. “When you’re putting in for XPO or OIC billets,” says Petty Officer 1st Class Richard E. Bauz, a student at the company commander’s course at Cape May, “having company commander experience is definitely something they consider.” Chief Warrant Officer Chris Hatch of the Enlisted Personnel Management Division’s Assignments Branch concurs, “There is no other job in the Coast Guard that’s going to take 120 raw people and put them under your leadership. From an Enlisted Personnel Management [EPM] standpoint, it’s extremely favorable.”

Leadership Ability, in and out of Rating: All company commanders and students of the company commander’s course agree that the experience of supervising large numbers of inexperienced recruits gives them a rapid boost in all of the listed Coast Guard leadership competencies. With special time set aside to ensure company commanders can study and advance in their respective ratings while serving as company commanders, advancement is not a problem. “As you move up in the ranks, you need something to set yourself apart from your peers,” says Chief Petty Officer Greg P. Dendy, a Section Leader at Cape May, “service as a company commander does that for you.”

Perhaps the most important aspect of being a company commander is service-before-self. After already having volunteered to serve by joining the Coast Guard, company commanders go the extra service mile, by putting themselves at the disposal of their shipmates, working for their future. “Being a company commander has given me a lot of benefits,” says Dendy, “but in the

end, I don't do it for me. I do it for the recruit. I know that I can't change the whole Coast Guard by myself, but through what I do here, I know that it's better and that means a lot." If you're interested in becoming a Company Commander, please see ALCGENL 078/11, or contact Chief Petty Officer William Woodring at (609)898-6778 or william.j.woodring@uscg.mil.

Leadership Competencies Addressed: *Influencing Others, Taking Care of People, Stewardship*