

Email from 1LT Nicholas Beiniks to LTC Hinrichs, PMS of the Golden Knight Battalion

Sir-

First off, I apologize for not writing more often, but between the training and the upcoming deployment to Afghanistan, I've been a tad bit busy. I wanted to write this so that the staff and the cadets can have an idea of what I've done. or at least for those who remember me. Holy smokes, it's already been two and a half years since I graduated!

Disclaimer: I know you sir are gonna read some of this and be like "seriously, does LT Beiniks think I've been in the Army three days or something?" But bear with me, I'm trying to break it down for the cadets, since I'd say the e-mail is mostly directed at them.

I'm still at Ft Drum, which is my first permanent duty station. It's nice to have been used to the winters, nothing really surprises me here and I've had no problem continuing to live and train in Siberia-like conditions.

When I first arrived to Ft Drum in June of 2007, it was two weeks after my brigade returned from Afghanistan. It was disappointing to miss the deployment, but at the same time I've had maximum experience in the garrison environment. Upon arrival at my unit, I was immediately thrust into a platoon leader position in a distro platoon for a forward support company in a field artillery (towed strike) battalion in an infantry BCT. Try saying that five times fast, haha.

A forward support company (FSC) is a support company (trucks, mechanics, cooks) attached to a maneuver battalion (infantry, cav, or FA). I won't go into the gory details of a support company. however I will go into the details of being a platoon leader, since I know that's a subject near and dear to the cadets' hearts.

My platoon's main job was to haul ammo and supplies for the battalion.

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FA battalion doesn't have the capabilities to haul their own ammo, so it's up to my platoon to make that happen. I don't want to delve too much into details of what my platoon did, but needless to say my platoon's actions made the battalion truly live up to the transportation corps' motto of "nothing happens until something moves!"

As for being a platoon leader, I came into a platoon that hadn't had a platoon leader in over seven months; the platoon sergeant was currently doing both duties, and he had an outstanding staff sergeant (P) helping him

out. I remember the first day I was there, my platoon sergeant spoke to me alone for about four hours straight on every Soldier in the platoon. It was an awesome experience. Also, I was lucky that the last PL had been wildly unpopular-it made for low expectations with me. There definitely seemed to be a bit of quiet hostility at first, because everyone had such a sour taste after their last PL's poor performance.

One of the best pieces of advice I received while I was in ROTC was something I took with me to my job as PL. One of the cadre, MSG Lang, said something to me I'll never forget: "I really respected MAJ Kelley, because whenever he had an idea about training he'd always come to me and ask me what I thought of it." The point of that is, a PL should ALWAYS ask their platoon sergeant what they think of an idea before the PL says to do it. This especially applies to the future PL's who like me will get their PL time as a cherry 2LT with no prior enlisted experience. The PSG will usually give good advice (after all, you as the PL write their NCOER!), and they'll respect the PL for caring enough to ask them what they think. The PL may be the boss, but the platoon's success ultimately comes down to what that PSG does or fails to do. And that will reflect on you, the PL. Today, I look back highly on my platoon leader experience because I had such a great PSG.

So I took the PL job in June of 2007. By August, both of the lieutenants that had been in the company had PCS-ed! As a result, I was now simultaneously doing PL and company XO. Working both jobs had its advantages and rewards. The main advantages were that I had Soldiers at my disposal to carry out XO tasks that required manpower, and I was pretty knowledgeable on the battalion XO's guidance. The main disadvantages were that I worked ridiculous hours to get everything done (leaving prior to 8pm became "leaving work early," no joke!), I felt like I never did a good enough job as PL, and I felt like my commander was pulling me away from my PL experience to accomplish XO tasks.

On that note, let me offer one last piece of advice to the future 2LT's with no prior enlisted experience: use your time as PL to learn what it is your Soldiers do. Let me offer a story to clarify what I mean by that: When I was a PL for my truck platoon, I learned how to drive most of my platoon's trucks, because of course I wasn't taught that at BOLCIII. I asked some of the senior E-4's to show me how to drive, and I really wish I could have gotten a picture then, because the look on their faces was truly a Kodak

moment-a mixture of shock and excitement. They saw how enthusiastic I was to get behind the wheel of a 5-ton truck (and let me tell you, driving an M1084A1 is fun) and this made them more enthusiastic about their job. Now of about the 200 or so missions that I went on, I can count on two hands the number of times I drove. So did I ever become better than my Soldiers at their job? Nope. But did I have an idea of how to do their job? You bet I did.

So finally in April of 2008 a brand-new 2LT arrived. He took over my position as distro PL and I moved to full-time XO. I'm not gonna lie, I did have a bit of separation anxiety from my platoon, but I eventually got over it. Right now I'm still working as the XO, so it's been about 8 months of strictly XO time. I won't go into too much detail on being an XO, because that's probably the 300m target for any MSIV's, and anyone below that it probably hasn't even come into their "AO of worry" yet.

Alright, so enough about work already! LT Beale, who was a year behind me, he's in the same brigade as me; his company is actually right down the hall from mine, so I see him often while at work. It's always nice to see a familiar face from Clarkson. But future 2LT's be warned that while he's a platoon leader, it's not for an engineer platoon, even though he's branched engineers. The same thing may happen to you, or even worse, you may get stuck in the S-3 shop! (that's me being sarcastic, the S-3 shop isn't that bad... But it doesn't compare to being a PL)

So sir, I've had a chance to look at the Golden Knight webpage and see some of the great activities the battalion is doing - The Army 10-miler, the alumni barbecue, contracting day, and my personal favorite. ranger challenge! I'm VERY jealous-it makes me think of all the great memories (and some of the lessons from the school of hard knocks!) I had while I was a cadet. Also, whoever is webmaster is doing a good job, much better than when I was doing it as an MSIV.

So as I finish this rather verbose e-mail up, I'll say that I'm anxious for deployment, but at the same time I really want to hurry up and go already. I'm tired of sitting around. If anyone who actually had the time to read this whole e-mail has a question about anything (post assignment, the LDAC experience as cadre, BOLC II, etc.) or is curious about something, feel free to write to me on my AKO e-mail ([nicholas.beiniks@us.army.mil](mailto:nicholas.beiniks@us.army.mil)), I may not respond quickly but I'll try and get back to you as soon as I can.

With that said, take care and I'll see you all downrange.

--LT Beiniks  
Gladiator 5

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"Now here's the long and short of it. I hate  
hockey and I don't like kids." -Gordon Bombay