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The Escalating Role of the Noncommissioned Officer

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Abstract

Empowerments of the United States Army Noncommissioned Officer have developed gradually from the beginning of its birth of our nations in its early stages armed forces times past.

Noncommissioned officers bestow everyday jobs enforce standards, discipline health and welfare. Military and decentralizing subordinates for team, squad, and unit missions, shown to be an essential element that requires relentless, as well as devoted commitment of less experienced influential leader, in the form of a NCO in the rank of CPL through Staff Sergeants provided mentorship by senior noncommissioned officers. This written essay on the NCO evolution found in my research and recorded in several history books, proved that NCOs have been the Backbone in the past and their knowledge and skill are needed even more in years to come.

The Escalating Role of the Noncommissioned Officer

Noncommissioned officers include developed over past centuries, have increased in empowerment of the NCO Corps since our Army's beginning in 1775, and have been a significant progress to the present. The U.S. Army NCOs reach back in history to the birth of the U.S. Army military history. At Valley Forge NCOs fought long side George Washington, then general of the Continental Army. NCOs served under General Winfield Scott at Chippewa and controlled the order of gunfire beside General Taylor at Palo Alto. During my history research on this topic, there were three areas that I choice to write on. I trust that over the centuries the Army has entrusted increasingly-responsibility in the command of NCOs.

In my reading, I chose to focus on three main areas:

- 1) The health, welfare and discipline of enlisted Soldier
- 2) How to Train and fight junior enlisted Soldiers on team, squad, and unit formations
- 3) The need to train how to defend and secure using squad, platoon, and small unit tactics

Colonists tailored most their military training ideas from Persian as well as British customs when they originally shaped the American forces. The NCOs of America mirrored their duties and traditions as well. NCOs evolved over time, from administrator managers, masters of drill and camp enforcers of discipline. There main function was as admin supervisors, drill sergeants, and to enforcers of military discipline. NCOs as leaders always stayed in regular contact with and enlisted Soldiers.

Consequently, the social gap, between the enlisted Soldiers and the officer corps was tremendous. Noncommissioned Officers were limited to the position that they could hold because of there social status as an enlisted Soldier Officers of this era did not see NCOs as their equal socially and the lower enlisted Soldiers was considered even lower class citizens then the

NCOs. In the book, title *The Story of the Noncommissioned Officer Corps* exposed in spite of killed or wounded in combat in the British deliberate combat techniques, noncommissioned officers forcefully had almost browbeat (strong-arm) troops to make them maintain their position in the face of opposition.

In the summer of 1779, Washington responded by appointing him the Continental Army Inspector General. Baron von Steuben published *Regulations for the Order and Discipline of the Troops of the United States* (Brown, J). The manual known as the “Blue Book” because of blue pages that IG Von Steuben included in the first publication. These books established what we call today esprit decors’ and were the NCOs loyalty would lie; NCOs were hand picked by the commander of that unit, and approved by regimental or battalion commander.

In his manual, it established company commanders would select NCOs and their training the responsibility of the company commander. Despite this manual, having various disadvantages stalled career progression for NCOs, it did institute the noncommissioned officers escalating responsibility in taking care of Soldiers health, welfare, and discipline, of enlisted Troops. These are some of duties of the NCOs, established in Von Steuben manual:

- The Sergeant Major served as the assistant to the regimental adjutant. He kept rosters, formed details, and handled matters concerning the "interior management and discipline of the regiment.
- The Quartermaster Sergeant assisted the regimental quartermaster, whose duties he assumed during the quartermaster's absence. He also supervised the proper loading and transport of the regiment's baggage when on marches.
- The First Sergeant enforced discipline and encouraged duty among troops, maintained the duty roster, made morning report to the company commander, and kept the company

descriptive book. This document listed the name, age, height, place of birth, and prior occupation of every enlisted man in the unit.

Sergeants and Corporals were expected to instruct recruits in all matters of military training, including the order of their behavior concerning sanitation and military appearance. (CMH Pub 70-38, pp 3-4) The 1SG punished devious behavior. A roster of the sick was forward to the 1SG.

Like previously stated responsibilities, duty, NCOs train in all areas novel recruits in their professional area. When the blue book was, originally, published officers were responsible for training, not NCOs. However, Von Stueben's structure enables NCO the skillful training in leadership, because of their responsibility to support officers. Staff NCOs had a responsibility to support their officers, line NCO were known to take over for line officer in the heat of combat. Normally NCOs that were in these positions has short life expectancies due to their close location to the battle using linear tactics, until new tactics were developed after the civil war. Fire tactics typically of warfare in this period was not necessarily the word of the day, in the early eighteen hundreds, throughout my studying history of the empowerment of the NCO Corps of 17th Century; it led me to focus on major elements during the NCOs forward progress throughout military history. During this period in 1815, Rules and Regulation for field exercise and maneuvers of Infantry, was published by BG Gen Winfield Scott and circumvented outdate doctrine "The Blue Book", for more than thirty years this manual was in effect for tactical doctrine for the Army. Now with General Scott's manual on a revised tactic to doctrine sited prominence more on significance on hasty transition into a linear formation, from a column of march on the battlefield. This technique of strategy shaped the materialization of color sergeant,

replaced the officer ensign who was previously responsible for carrying of the colors. His position, change expansively and improved role of the NCO in combat. Thirty years would pass, with the duty more diverse, treacherous than previous years. Missions led by NCOs would require taking command of units when all officers became casualties. During the battles of the Mexican War (1846-1848), Noncommissioned Officers led their troops in victorious amphibious landings south of the Rio Grande at Vera Cruz, well-executed house and street skirmishing in the battles of Monterrey and Mexico City. The U.S. was victoriously overwhelming Contreras following an astonish road march, and effectively used in cooperated effort of both artillery bombardment and siege mortar round placement at the battle of Palo Alto. The NCO learned various leadership skills that early on in previous wars; that would prepare them for more challenging future wars.

Noncommissioned Officers took on additional leadership responsibilities during the Civil War, as battlefield scenarios changed, so did the tactics. A huge challenge during the Civil War was trying to perform linear tactics with dissimilar weapons were designed for with less accurate effectiveness. MG Emory Upton, with some suggestion from numerous seasoned commanders in the field, created an updated tactical book for the Army, and adopted in the year of 1867. The information and instruction in his new manual required less time to understand and taught fresh recruits, minimized the training day, and increased Soldiers effectiveness. The steady eradication linear tactics clearer defined what areas the noncommissioned officer is responsible for during battle. Since United States expanded its area of national interest in foreign countries, the chain of command felt the same that NCOs need to better more knowledgeable and better trained (pp. 12). However, little had change to improve the separation between officers and noncommissioned officers social status and mindset.

NCOs demonstrated their technical competence as leaders repeatedly during World War I. NCOs to officer ranks helped compensate for heavy combat losses of officers. At the same time, the technologically and infinitely more complex Army required a large number of specialist NCOs. To fix this 648 retirees were recalled, by the army, but because they were more knowledgeable about the army system and less physical due to their age, the army made them mainly trainers of new recruit. Most draftees served as combat zone replacement and only in the US, and with no training experience diverse barracks, discussed throughout the French and the British forces saw the United States noncommissioned officers as partially trained and unrefined NCOs. An additional problem for American Noncommissioned Officers was the allied officers had a negative perception with disgust that US, NCOs appeared to have minimal authority over their Soldiers. The French and the British forces believed a fraction of the cause for the mis-trust was because the US NCOs and the lower enlisted still live together in the barracks. The Allied Forces had long separated their NCOs from their Soldiers, from each other, which gave their noncommissioned officers better living conditions and special privileges.

The leadership after hearing all the negative comments from the French and the British made Americans realize compared to other countries, that we were far behind in our NCOs social status. The NCOs themselves realized that they were not as well trained their counterparts and not prepared for the demands that being in the trenches of the battlefield demanded. Because of this, General Pershing suggested that all Noncommissioned Officers training in leadership improved immediately. However, his recommendations NCOs benefited, but in expeditionary force, some did not receive this training. This training was unable to implement to all NCOs worldwide. Because of an overwhelming number of NCOs continuously increasing in their progress, close to end of the war, they demonstrated the worth of the reformation by General. He

presented General Pershing wrote a message to Major General G.B. Duncan, commanding general of the 82nd Airborne Div: Noncommissioned Officers “must have initiative and must hold what ground they gain to the utmost (Fisher). Small unit actions proved to be the most important tactical lesson in battle on the western frontier. NCOs would take the lead to take infantry fire teams and small units on the battlefield.

The transformation of NCO as leaders of small units has made positive strides over the centuries, as I previously mention, the requirement for small team/ junior leaders has evolved throughout the centuries. Since we even today are engaged in the Global War on Terrorism in Iraq and Afghanistan, Army leadership relies more on the noncommissioned officer than ever before. Somewhere between WWI, WWII, and the Korean conflict, the Vietnam War, noncommissioned officers did not demonstrate true professionalism; they were drinking whiskey and smoking marijuana cigarettes, not to mention any drug that would not allow them to deal with the realities of war. Not all NCOs were in this pool, some demonstrated acts of heroism; like the outstanding acts of SFC Eugene Ashley, during the initial stage in defense of Camp Lang Bei, firing H-E (high explosive), and Illumination motor rounds. After he lost communication with his base camp, he called for fire, directing air strikes and artillery support, which saved many American Soldiers lives. Even though acts of heroism, were display from NCOs such as this tactic. The NCO Corps lost its positive appeal to the officer’s corps as a whole. This problem continued through the early 1980’s as well. Racial issues, insubordination, alcoholism drug abuse. There were several talks that it contributed to the all-volunteer army was the problem. NCOs realized they were somewhere caught up in the middle between undisciplined Soldiers, and an officer’s corps that had little trust and confidence in the noncommissioned officers corps competence.

However, officer leadership at the top, such as the chief of staff gave power to the NCOs in the field, attacked this inner disease as if it was cancer, and restores its efficiency. NCOs in their units attacked these problems, and the Army as a whole cracked down on drug dealers and drug doers. The Army incorporated Race awareness program, which produced dialogue between African Americans and white Americans and restored trust within the ranks. NCOs had something that they could call their own the NCO Creed, New regulations and policies enable the NCO Corps with the duty, responsibility and authority that they need to enforced standards and discipline in the army. With this new found trust it a new relationship with the officer corps and the noncommissioned officer corps, which provided increased support and cohesion with their companies and transformed a volunteer fighting force Army to newer heights in esprit decors', morale and combat readiness. Not only did the leadership and the enlisted feels this way, but European countries as well could see the professionalism of the American NCO and wanted to emulate this professional NCO Corps in there army. In 1988, the stand off between East and West Germany was over with the fall of the Berlin wall. This new evolution in NCO leadership, demonstrated in 1989 during the invasion of Panama and in Operation Provide Comfort. The same accomplishment would also be further verified a year later during operations Desert Shield and not soon after in the ground war Desert Storm.

From the very beginning as we look back at the escalating role of the noncommissioned officer from the early creation of the NCO ranks in the error of continental Army to present. NCOs have evolved to become true professionals, with the incorporation of the NCOES (noncommissioned officer education systems). And with focus on a civilian education; NCOs are no longer serves as the assistant to the Adjutant, kept rosters, formed details, or serves as the

interior manager, but are serving as Commandants of NCO Academy's, Company as well as Battalion Commanders at the Sergeant Majors Academy.

Sgt. Maj. of the Army Kenneth O. Preston, 13th SMA Said "When I compare the Army today to the Army of the mid-70s, it's a totally different organization. The Army is much better now, the units, leaders, quality of life, command climate, everything," he said. "I know that during those transition periods, I had a degree of uncertainty, but I always trusted my leaders and the Army's leaders, and I was always taken care of. My leaders never failed me." As NCOs, we are faced with new challenges everyday and our Soldiers face some of the same uncertainties in garrison and in theater. The quality of life is different than it was during the colonial days and we have sprung light years from what our officer corps thought of us. However, we always have to remember the ones that came before us and paved the way. We will continue to push the envelope forward to transform into the leaders that our country expects to win our nations war on terrorism. The noncommissioned officer will always be the Backbone of the Army no matter what year or century.

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