

Title: The Backbone of the Army

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“The backbone of the Army is the noncommissioned man!” – The ‘Eathern’ (1896) by Rudyard Kipling.

“War brings opportunity” is a well known saying. What many failed to realize is that these opportunities can exist within the U.S. Army promotion system. Following WWI, WWII, Korea and Vietnam there were large increases in the numbers of Army noncommissioned officers. This was mostly due to regular combat attrition and to many senior enlisted NCO’s leaving the military. Many of these new NCO’s lacked training, discipline and overall understanding of their roles. As a result, officers began executing duties that should have been completed by NCO’s. This led to perhaps the saddest result of the increases in NCO’s numbers, the loss of prestige and authority of the noncommissioned officers.

To discuss the history of the U.S. Army NCO from 1945 through the present it is important to understand this fact and the resulting loss of authority and prestige for NCO’s. Much of our military history since 1945 has been devoted to addressing this concern. To reestablish and strengthen the Army’s NCO backbone, military doctrine has addressed training, duties, and discipline as well as heroic actions as lessons.

Training

“There are three types of brains: One understands matters for itself, one follows the explanations of others, and one neither understands nor follows. The first is the best, the second excellent, the third useless” (Macheivelli, p 71).

From WWII through Vietnam, basic training was a hands-on experience instead of the classroom. NCO’s were responsible for conducting all training. Soldiers were then sent to their unit where the squad leaders were expected to continue with on-the-job training. The major problem was that during times of war this rapid expansion of the Army led to a decrease in experienced men in the noncommissioned officer ranks. “If a man showed potential, he was

promoted, with privates becoming corporals, and corporals, sergeants” (Arms). This practice became a problem in itself after each conflict ended.

In the immediate post-World War II era, there were two programs which affected NCOs: a Career Guidance Plan and professional schools for NCOs. The technical ratings were dropped and emphasis was placed on service-wide standards for NCO selection and training (Fisher). NCO evaluations became more standardized Army wide. Senior NCO promotions become Department of the Army selections. As a result of increases in technology, the Army also began to emphasize the need for young soldiers to become better educated in order to advance (Arms). The Army established the Army Education Program providing ways for the enlisted soldiers to get high school or college diplomas (Arms).

In 1971, the Army implemented the Noncommissioned Officer Education System (NCOES). Which was a revision of the 1957 AR 350-90 establishment of Army-wide standards for NCO academies (Arms). The new system was designed to educate NCOs on subjects and skills necessary to enhance their performance and abilities. These new courses were: Basic Noncommissioned Officer Course (to provide basic leadership skills and a knowledge of military subjects needed at the squad and team level), Advanced Noncommissioned Officer Course (to provide the student with advanced technical and leadership skills), and the Sergeants Major Academy (which prepared senior NCOs to perform duties as sergeants major at the division and higher headquarters). The NCOES grew in the 70's and 80's and today includes the Warrior Leadership Course (to provide initial elements necessary to lead a squad or section” (Arms).

The U.S. Army Sergeants Major Academy at Fort Bliss, Texas writes all NCOES common cores. This new emphasis on NCO education was solidified in 1986 when Primary

Leadership Development Course (now Warrior Leader Course) was established for the first time as a mandatory prerequisite for promotion to staff sergeant (Arms).

The NCO education and evaluation systems have grown and will continue to grow to address the ability to keep qualified NCO's in the Army. Tactical and technical training requirements are in place for all levels of noncommissioned officers. This has been an integral part of training NCO's in leadership and re-establishing the prestige and competence of all Army NCO's.

Duty

Much of an NCO's duties are to act as a consultant to officers and to take care of soldiers. From 1945 through 1972, NCO's were not able to perform these duties and it was left to others (officers) to pick up their roles.

These duties are could be summarized by the following two quotes:

“[A leader] ought to choose wise men from among his subjects, and give to them alone freedom to tell him the truth, but only in reply to specific questions he puts to them, not on any subject of their choice.” (Machievelli, p 72).

“...military professionals charged”to win the love of their soldiers by taking great care of their healthy and safeties....as of their own children”(Fisher, p 3).

The recognition of and correction for this lapse of duty began in the Korean War.

“During Korea the noncommissioned officer emerged more prominently as a battle leader than he had in World War II. The deeply eroded hills, ridges, narrow valleys, and deep gorges forced many units to advance as squads” (Arms). In subsequent and current conflicts the importance of strong squad leaders has been solidified. We now must rely on the NCO at the site to make decisions without calling in to receive specific guidance.

In 1958 two grades were added to the NCO ranks. The stated purpose was that E-8 and E-9 ranks would "provide for a better delineation of responsibilities in the enlisted structure"

(Arms). Army policy makers also hoped that additional grades would help in recruiting and retention of good NCOs. This established the current NCO ranks: corporal, sergeant, staff sergeant, sergeant first class, master sergeant, and sergeant major (Arms).

In 1966 Army Chief of Staff Harold K. Johnson changed the two most senior ranks for NCO's. First he chose Sergeant Major William O. Wooldridge as the first Sergeant Major of the Army. Second, General Johnson decided to establish the position of Command Sergeant Major (Arms).

Much confusion still existed in the defining the roles of NCO's. Although some guidance had been given in regulations, the wording was vague and open to individual commanders interpretation. This served to continue the wide differences in NCO roles as well as relationships to the officer chain of command.

In 1980, a new version of FM 22-600-20 outlined a clear explanation of the relationship between the commissioned officer chain of command and the NCO support channel. This regulation clearly defined the fact that there is one chain of command in the Army, but that the NCO support channel was a valid part of the military system (Fisher, p 402).

This regulation was replaced by Training Circular 22-6, The Noncommissioned Officer's Guide. This contained three new principles:

1. Establishment of a NCO support channel for communication and reinforcement among NCO's.
2. The assignment to NCO of the primary role in training and developing individual soldier skills
3. The strengthening of Primary Leadership Development Course (now Warriors Leaders Course) as the NCOES entry course required for promotion to the rank of sergeant (Fisher, p 416).

Discipline

Throughout history noncommissioned officers have been the discipline in the military. They are the motivation and example for young soldiers to follow. In combat soldiers will look

to the NCO's for guidance and direction. The traditional discipline in the Army from 1945 through 1972 was enforced with physical beatings and intimidation. WWII, Korea and Vietnam NCO's felt the Uniformed Code of Military Justice was "as then constituted was unworkable" (Fisher, p 339). This widely held belief contributed to the erosion of NCO authority and respect by allowing them to be hollow in threats or punishment. Studies found that lack of leadership and officer support of the noncommissioned officers were the main reason for this loss of authority (Fisher, pp 337-340).

Outstanding senior NCO's can by the strength of their personality and leadership impel respect. They ensure courtesy is not given merely because of rank but from an earned respect.

"In some cases respect was mingled with fear on the part of many soldiers toward a particularly strong and dominating NCO, a feeling vividly evoked in lines from Dennis Murphy's postwar novel, *The Sergeant*:
At six o'clock he [1SG Callan] came out of his office and walked down the wooden sidewalk. They were already quiet as he approached, forming their lines without an order, but even when he came opposite them he waited as if it would become more quiet" (Fisher, p 266).

In 1973 the Army transitioned to an all volunteer Army and the traditional forms of discipline were forced to change. Although the core concept remained that the officers set the policies and the NCO's are the enforcers of the policy, a new idea of "persuasive leadership" (a new name for an old leadership principle)" emerged (Fisher, p 339). NCO's had to apply information and old philosophies to create discipline and unit cohesion. Several studies were conducted to understand the motivations of new soldiers in the all volunteer Army. This information is invaluable in guiding soldiers and leaders.

"Based on his experiences of warfare in 400 B.C., SunTzu, recorded in his treatise, *The Art of War*, "Know your enemy, know yourself, and in a hundred battles you will never be in peril." In order for leaders to "know themselves," they must understand the motivation of young Americans who volunteer to serve in the Armed Forces" (Kolenda, p 65).

Heros

Today's NCO use Army values and historical Vignettes as learning tools. Many of the heroes stories outline the warrior values and ethos for which soldiers strive. From WWII through Vietnam, NCO's not only lost authority. But most importantly they lost their sense of pride in themselves and the NCO Corps.

World War II witnessed a number of heroic deeds by noncommissioned officers:

“Staff Sergeant Charles W. Shea at Monte Damiano, Italy. On 12 May 1944, Company F, 2d Battalion, 350th Infantry, 88th Division, encountered heavy machine gun fire as they advanced. Staff Sergeant Shea recognized that the advance of his unit depended upon taking the three machine gun positions, and advanced alone. He hurled a grenade into the first of these, capturing four enemy soldiers; moved to the second and forced the two-man crew to surrender. He then moved to the third. Coming under fire, he rushed that position and killed its three defenders. With this, Shea's unit continued to advance” (Arms).

During the Korean War:

“Sergeant Ola L. Mize led the defense of "Outpost Harry" near Surang-ni. Learning of a wounded soldier in an outlying listening post, during an artillery barrage, Mize moved to rescue the soldier. Returning to the main position with the soldier, Mize rallied the troops into an effective defense as the enemy attacked in force. Knocked down three times with grenade or artillery blasts, Mize continued to lead his men. With the enemy assault temporarily halted, Mize and several men moved from bunker to bunker clearing the enemy. Upon noticing a friendly machine gun position being overrun, he fought his way to their aid, killing ten enemy soldiers and dispersing the rest. Securing a radio, he directed artillery fire upon the enemy's approach routes. At dawn, Mize formed the survivors into a unit and successfully led a counterattack which cleared the enemy from the outpost” (Arms).

During the Vietnam War:

“There were many outstanding acts of heroism during the Vietnam War; one of the most outstanding was that of Sergeant First Class Eugene Ashley. Upon losing communication with the camp, he directed air strikes and artillery support. He then organized a small assault force composed of local friendly forces. Ashley and his newly-formed unit attacked enemy positions, clearing the enemy and proceeding through boobytrapped bunkers. Wounded by machine gun fire, Ashley continued on, finally directing air strikes on his own position to clear the enemy.

As the enemy retreated, he lapsed into unconsciousness. While being transported down the hill, an enemy artillery shell fatally wounded him” (Arms).

These heroes’ stories help to instill a sense of pride and heritage for enlisted soldiers and NCO’s alike. Soldiers now understand that NCO’s act as a parental figure and hero. They epitomize the values and qualities that set soldiers apart. NCO’s must be morally, physically, mentally strong soldiers with the skills and temperament to lead.

War brings opportunity is a well known statement. And while this is true these opportunities can exist within the U.S. Army promotion system, this does not necessarily lead to the lessening of prestige or expectations for the noncommissioned officers. The opportunity is that we (the Army and the Soldiers) learn from our past mistakes. We have learned from history of the U.S. Army NCO from 1945 through the present. As we have discussed much of our military history since 1945 has been devoted to addressing this concern. New leadership training is required for all ranks of NCO’s. The duties for NCO’s are clearly outlined in regulations for both officers and enlisted to maintain. The role of an NCO as disciplinarian has adapted to an all volunteer Army and UCMJ is upheld by officers and NCO’s. The Army has reestablished pride in the NCO with all of these steps and the implementation of Warriors Ethos, Army Values and Historical Vignettes. The NCO does stand apart from other soldiers while sometimes solitary they stand proud. NCO’s make it happen and are seen as the definitive “backbone of the Army”

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Introduction. The introduction will include the following:

- A. Greeting: **Good day, I am MSG Stritikus.**
- B. Type and classification of briefing. **This is unclassified information briefing.**
- C. Purpose and scope.

Briefing on NCOs in the American Army (1945-Present).

- D. Outline or procedure.

Agenda

- References
- Thesis (Main Idea)
- Training
- Duty
- Discipline
- Heroes
- Questions and Summary

- E. List the references you have used in your research.

References

- F. A brief statement about your research. **Thesis (Main Idea)**

To discuss the history of the U.S. Army NCO from 1945 through the present it is important to understand this fact and the resulting loss of authority and prestige for NCO's. Much of our military history since 1945 has been devoted to addressing this concern. To reestablish and strengthen the Army's NCO backbone military doctrine has addressed training, duties, and discipline as well as heroic actions as lessons.

Body. The body of your outline will include subparagraphs that outline the logical development of your research.

A. Training and Duty

B. Discipline and Heroes

Closing. The closing will include the following:

- A. **A question period.**

- B. **Conclusion/Summary:**

War brings opportunity is a well known statement. And while this is true these opportunities can exist within the U.S. Army promotion system, this does not necessarily lead to the lessening of prestige or expectations for the noncommissioned officers. The opportunity is that we (the Army and the Soldiers) learn from our past mistakes. We have learned from history of the U.S. Army NCO from 1945 through the present. As we have discussed much of our military history since 1945 has been devoted to addressing this concern. New leadership training, clearly defined duties, enforced disciplinary standards, and pride in being an NCO is reinforced with historical heroic reference. The NCO does stand apart from other soldiers while sometimes solitary they stand proud. NCO's make it happen and are seen as the definitive "backbone of the Army"