

NCO HISTORY BRIEF

By
SGM STEVIE BURCH

CSM(R) Smith
Group Room L03

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I. Introduction

- A. The primary source used for this paper was the book “The Sergeants Major of the Army, 2003 General Editor, Daniel K. Elder.
- B. I will discuss and identify some of the contributions of the Fifth Sergeant Major of the Army, SMA William G. Bainbridge.

II. Body

- A. Assignment, Duties and Awards
- B. Heroic Actions in WW II
- C. Weapons assigned during WW II
- D. Contributions to Training
- E. Changes made while assigned as SMA

III. Closing. The closing will include the following:

- A. Training programs in our NCOES system today wouldn't be what they are if it wasn't for the professional NCOs of our past
- B. A question and answer period.
- C. During this briefing, we have discussed the contributions to the NCO Corps made by previous Sergeants Major of the Army to the NCO Corps.

SMA WILLIAM G. BAINBRIDGE

SMA Bainbridge was born [REDACTED] in son of a farmer. He was a very young and eager high school senior that wanted to join the Army and fight for his country during World War II. He asked his parents for permission to quit school early to enlist into the Army and they denied him of that privilege. The following year within a matter of weeks of graduating from Williamsfield High School in 1943, the eighteen year old found himself inducted into the U.S. Army. His military career spanned for more than 30 years of service, served during three wars, fought in two wars, and was captured in one.

Assignments

SMA Bainbridge served in various leadership positions the world over, including Battalion Sergeant Major, 1st Battalion, 28th Infantry, 1st Infantry Division Fort Riley, Kansas, II Field Force Sergeant Major in Vietnam, Command Sergeants Major U.S. Army Pacific at Fort Shafter, Hawaii, and Infantry Training School Command Sergeants Major at Fort Benning, Georgia, 1st Sergeants Major of the United States Sergeants Major Academy, and the 5th Sergeants Major of the Army from 1975-1979.

Awards

During his career he received many awards and decorations. These awards includes the Distinguished Service Medal, Legion of Merit, Bronze Star Medal, Purple Heart, Air Medal, American Campaign Medal, Republic of Vietnam Campaign Medal, Ten Good Conduct Medals, Two awards of the Combat Infantry Badge, Three Army Commendations Medals, and many others.

Heroic Action in WWII

During World War II, SMA Bainbridge served with A Company, 423rd Infantry, 106th Infantry Division; this was a newly formed division. As a private first class, Bainbridge was initially assigned as the company radioman. However, the company commander quickly recognized his leadership potential and made him a squad leader with a direct promotion to Sergeant. In early December 1944, Bainbridge found himself and his unit crossing the English Channel to Le Havre, France where they replaced the 2nd Infantry Division. One of his most memorable moments was when his unit had come under enemy attack and his unit was down below company strength. The units mission was to disrupt the German timetable long enough so the allied armies could have a chance to counterattack. His squad was ordered to secure a house that the Germans were fighting from. As they moved toward their objective the enemy opened fire with machine guns killing and wounding every other man. SMA Bainbridge gave orders to the remaining men to lay suppressive fire on the house while he flanked the house to employ grenades. The mission was accomplished through his courage, selfless service and commitment to his unit and the army. He then ordered his men to continue to move out again when they came under heavy attack, while fighting this time they ran out of ammunition and had to surrender to the Germans. Forced to surrender during the Battle of the Bulge, he spent five months in a German POW camp, weighing only eighty-six pounds when he was liberated from the Germans on Good Friday in 1945. The War concluded shortly after he returned to the United States. Like many others, he immediately returned to his hometown for a reunion with family, friends, and other war veterans. On 20 June 1945, Bainbridge got married to a girl whom he had known since grade school. On 7 December 1945, he received his discharge and returned to civilian life in Galesburg, Illinois.

Weapons

During his career SMA Bainbridge went through five generations of the Infantry rifle. While he was deployed during World War II, he was assigned and fired weapons such as the Browning Automatic Rifle (BAR), the M-1 Garand, which was the basic infantry weapon of World War II, the .30 caliber Springfield Model 1903 bolt-action rifle, the 7.62 mm M14, the M16 (5.56mm) rifle, and the M1911A1 .45 caliber pistol.

Contribution to Training

In 1966 SMA Bainbridge was assigned as the Sergeants Major of the Infantry Training Center, Fort Benning Ga. During this time he helped to develop the Noncommissioned Officers Course (NCOC). The NCOC was different from the traditional NCOES courses, this course taught NCOs how to survive in combat and perform as Infantry Fire team Leaders. The course was developed as a result of lessons learned in Vietnam. The traditional NCOES courses as we know it teaches leadership skills, drill and ceremony, conducting inspections and teaching classes. If the individuals were in the top 10% of their Basic Training and Advanced Initial Training, they were automatically promoted to Sergeant after graduation and enrolled in the NCOC. After successful completion of NCOC they were then sent immediately to Vietnam. The top 5% of the class was promoted to Staff Sergeant and assisted the Drill Sergeants and then later sent to Vietnam. While assigned as Sergeant Major of the Infantry School, SMA Bainbridge discovered some discipline problems among the Drill Sergeants. Some Drill Sergeants were becoming “entrepreneurs” collecting money and running numerous other unethical scams on their soldiers. After investigating the situation, he also found out that most of the Drill Sergeants at that time had been in the program for as many as six years and becoming

too complacent in their duties. Drill Sergeants during this time were being transferred back and forward from Fort Knox to Fort Benning and Fort Sill.

In 1972, SMA Bainbridge was selected by General Haines to be the 1st Sergeants Major of the Sergeants Major Academy. His first task was to develop the Plan of Instruction that supported the Academy's mission of preparing the selected senior Noncommissioned Officers to assist Commander at the division level and higher. His committee consisted of 10 Command Sergeants Majors from major commands and 13 educated personnel, both military and civilian, from places like the War College, the Command and General Staff College, the Signal and Chemical School and many others. SMA Bainbridge finished the course curriculum in just two weeks with the amount of quality, educated personnel that was working on this mission. The curriculum consisted of courses on leadership, world affairs, human relations, military management, military operations, military organization, and various electives. The subject of world affairs was the most controversial of all other subjects. There were many officers that questioned why enlisted soldiers needed to learn about world affairs since most of their careers were often spent in operational and tactical environments, and officers should be concerned with the "big picture" and not enlisted soldiers. SGM Bainbridge's thought on the entire situation was that officers were jealous that NCOs would study world affairs and then start to undermine the commissioned ranks. He tried to convince the officers that a smart noncommissioned officer would be a great asset to the army. This issue went as high up to the level of General Creighton W. Abrams, who at the time was the Chief of Staff of the Army. General Abrams agreed to include world affairs to the USASMA curriculum. The first class was held on 15 January 1973, which was six months in length and had a total of 160 students.

Changes made while assigned as SMA

The greatest moment in his career came when he was elected to be Sergeant Major of the U.S. Army. He was the first to hold this office for four years. SMA Bainbridge loved providing for the welfare of his soldiers and took his job very serious. Whether in base camps in Vietnam, aviation units in Germany, or training centers in Fort Benning, SMA Bainbridge never forgot the job he was there to do. One of his favorite quotes was “Soldiers will do anything you asked of them provided you prepare them with good training and treat them with dignity and respect.” The next contribution to training made by SMA Bainbridge was when he instituted the one-station unit training (OSUT) program. This program was established to provide continuous training and minimize the cost of PCS moves. In this program, soldiers didn’t have to move to another post between basic training and advanced individual training. This program was primarily used for combat arms and combat support soldiers.

SMA Bainbridge made a significant change to the Drill Sergeants situation during his second term as Sergeant Major of the Army. He assisted with the institution of the centralized selection system for Drill Sergeants. This program selected NCOs based on their proven abilities to lead soldiers. This program allowed Drill Sergeants to a two year tour with the option of an extension for a third year. This program also produced more discipline and professional Drill Sergeants. SMA Bainbridge stated in his book that “when you look over promotion lists or talk to the students at the United States Army Sergeants Major Academy, or observe good looking soldiers leading troops, you notice that a good percentage of them were wearing the Drill Sergeants Badge on their right breast pocket.”

SMA Bainbridge also argued for the elimination of the MOS testing for Sergeants Major and Command Sergeants Majors. He argued why should a SGM/CSM who has made it that far

in the ranks have to continue to take tests to prove what they are worth. The opposition to this elimination was TRADOC. Their argument on the elimination was that SGM/CSMs needed to set good examples for their subordinate NCOs by being able to pass their MOS testing. General Weyand, the Chief of Staff approved the discontinuing of the testing for SGM/CSMs. The Chief of staff also discontinued the efficiency report for Sergeants Major of the Army as well at the request of SMA Bainbridge.

Near the end of SMA Bainbridge's tour as SMA, he requested through the Army Uniform Board that the SMA's rank be changed to distinguish the Army's Senior Noncommissioned Officers from the other Sergeants Majors in the field. After several designs were submitted, the new SMA rank was unveiled. The new rank had three chevrons, three rockets, and two stars. The first set of new SMA rank was pinned on SMA Bainbridge by General Bernard W. Rodgers on 12 December 1978. SMA Bainbridge believed that the Office of Sergeant Major of the Army changed with each incumbent and each Chief of Staff. Although he was not a policy maker, he influenced several key decisions affecting the Army of the future. "What was good enough yesterday," he said, "certainly is not going to be good enough tomorrow." A strong believer that command sergeants major, indeed all senior NCOs, are teachers, Sergeant Major Bainbridge judged as vital their role in passing on information to the new soldiers entering the Army.

SMA Bainbridge retirement ceremony took place at Fort Myer on 18 June 1979. After his official retirement, he went to work for the United States Soldiers Home located in the District of Columbia. This institution has since been named the United States Soldiers and Airman Home. He held the position as secretary to the board of commissioners until he retired in July 1991. After forty-three years of government services, SMA Bainbridge retired for good

and currently lives in Palm Bay, Florida, just south of Patrick Air Force Base. This truly remarkable Senior Noncommissioned Officer cared about the NCOs and made a difference in what the NCO Corps is today.

In summary I have discussed significant contributions made by the 5th Sergeants Major of the Army William G. Bainbridge.

In conclusion the training programs in our NCOES today wouldn't be what they are if it wasn't for the professional NCOs of our past.

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