

IMPORTANT FACTORS

Important Factors That Have Led to the Empowerment of the American Non-Commissioned

Officer Over Time

Charles Covington

United States Sergeants Major Academy

Non-Resident Class Number 35

SGM Faithette Foreman

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Abstract

Three major causes for the empowerment of the Non-Commissioned Officer of today's Army are emergence of small unit tactics, education and training as well as legislation and regulations.

Small unit tactics emerged to adapt to weapons technologies. Education and training, both professional and personal, prepare the NCO of today for positions of increased responsibility.

Command Authority bestowed upon NCOs through legislation and Army regulations have empowered the NCO to take initiative and execute on sound judgment. Positive consequences of

delegating command and control down the chain of command to the NCO is seen through decentralized problem solving capabilities displayed as the norm. Empowerment of NCO Corps

forms the backbone of our Army and will not falter in the future.

Important Factors That Have Led to the Empowerment of the American Non-Commissioned Officer Over Time

Throughout history, armies have existed in one form or another. Regardless of size or origin, all armies have common traits and characteristics. Parts of any army are technically oriented whereas others are more tactically oriented. In either case, the one common factor that exists is that they all have some form of structured leadership. Good leaders are the catalyst that sparks the drive of an army. Leaders motivate men, instill confidence, discipline and enforce standards within an army's ranks. But while armies across the globe may have all of these things in common, it is the United States Army that is set apart from the rest by the status of its Non-Commissioned Officer (NCO) Corps. The NCOs in the United States Army are unlike any other in the world. They hold respect, command and authority equal to and, in some cases, greater than officers in other nation's armies. Several factors over the past 235 years have influenced and contributed to the empowerment of the most effective weapon in the United States Army's arsenal, the Non-Commissioned Officer. More than any other in our Army's past, the emergence of small unit tactics, education and training as well as legislation and regulations have been the three most important factors in the empowerment of today's Non-Commissioned Officer.

Important Factors

Emergence of Small Unit Tactics

The transformation to small unit tactics is one of, if not the largest contributing factor in the escalation of empowerment of the Non-Commissioned Officer over the past 235 years.

Technological advances in weapons systems have been a driving force in our Nation's battle tactics. Caused by attempts to mitigate increasing casualties caused by technological advancements late during The War Between the States and World War I, the skirmisher line

battle tactics used during the Revolutionary War evolved into a more a more open type of warfare focused on small units led by NCOs (CMH Pub 70-37, 1989). These tactics decentralized the command and control from the Company Officers to the NCO who leads small unit patrols. The NCO that once was the file closer (skirmisher line tactics), transformed into a leader of scouting parties and combat patrols. This solidified the NCOs role as a leader and established command authority over soldiers. Machine guns and mortars of trench warfare during World War I brought about still yet more oversight, responsibility and authority for the Doughboys. The high numbers of casualties among junior officers along the Western Front led the Army to discover that these officer loses could be filled with able Non-Commissioned Officers. So much so was the NCO empowered on the battlefields of Europe during the Great War, the Army created a new NCO rank; the Platoon Sergeant (CMH Pub 70-37, 1989).

Education and Training

The Non-Commissioned Officer Education System

Education and training of Non-Commissioned Officers has played a formidable roll in the escalation of the significance of the NCOs role in the Army. General Pershing identified the need for and instituted professional training for NCOs in Europe during the Great War. In spite of the NCO training program's success, World War II saw no such training for an exponentially larger NCO force. It wasn't until the post war era that the Army instituted an NCO Academy System. The new academy system struggled throughout the next 20 years. With the system plagued by non-standardization of training among training locations, lack of uniformity in course subject matter and an uncertain selection process, most NCOs never attended any professional training (CMH Pub 70-37, 1989). The Non-Commissioned Officer Educational System in use today was

implemented to overcome the inefficiencies and inconsistencies experienced by the previous NCO Academy System.

With course objectives and scope outlined in Army Circular No. 351-42, HQ, Department of the Army, Washington, 23 June 1972, what we know today as NCOES, began as a 3 level system for career soldiers from the grade of E4 to E7. The NCOES system was aimed at progressive, continuing professional development in order to provide career NCOs with necessary training to prepare them for promotion and the Army with trained NCOs for positions of increased responsibility. These courses furnished NCOs with leadership training and more advanced doctrinal knowledge in their respective MOS (CMH Pub 70-37, 1989). It also fostered the development of personal counseling skills necessary to take care of the soldiers in their charge.

The NCO Education System culminates at the Sergeants Major Academy. Officially activated by General Orders No. 98, HQ, U.S. Continental Army Command, Fort Monroe, VA, 18 July, 1972, The Sergeants Major Academy was assigned the mission to provide a broad, MOS non-specific, professional development course of instruction to qualify Sergeants Major for service in top level NCO positions throughout the Army.

The future of the Non-Commissioned Officer Education System

The NCO Education System continues to adapt to the changing needs of the Army's NCOs based on the dynamic environment in which we all operate. Naylor points out the empowerment of NCOs in today's battle space has placed NCOs in non-traditional roles such as working hand in hand with non-governmental organizations and in some instances; they are acting as the Mayor of a town (2008, ¶ 2). He goes on to write that implementation of self structured courses, designed to be taken between the currently established NCO courses, are aimed at affording

NCOs to continue to develop professionally and intellectually throughout their entire career (2008, ¶ 4).

Legislation and Army Regulations

The final major contributing factor to the empowerment of the NCO is today's Army, is legislation and regulation. It is from legislation and Army regulations that the NCOs are legally empowered in their position of command and leadership. An excellent illustration of this can be found in the January 1967 edition of Army Regulation 600–20, Personnel—General Army Command Policy and Procedure, Section IV. Enlisted Aspects of Command lists the following as responsibilities of the Non-Commissioned Officer. Noncommissioned officers will (1) Execute orders on their own initiative and judgment within the authority delegated to them. (2) Be employed as training instructors to the maximum degree practicable. (3) Make recommendations relative to unit mission accomplishment and troop welfare. NCO recommendations have traditionally been of immeasurable assistance to their commanding officer on such matters as assignment, reassignment, promotion, privileges, discipline, training, unit funds, community affairs, and supply (CMH Pub 70-37, 1989, p. 272). Updated in 2002, Army Regulation 600-20 goes further to articulate more specific duties and responsibilities of senior NCOs, squad and team leaders. The 2002 update goes on to state in paragraph 3-2b(4), “In the absence of the platoon leader, the platoon sergeant leads the platoon”. By specifying within regulations the NCOs authority, duties and responsibilities, NCOs are empowered by the Department of the Army to execute command authority and execute orders based on judgment and initiative.

Preparing Our NCOs for Empowerment

Army leaders recognized as early as World War I, the potential of the NCO. They continue to provide all available opportunities for NCOs to develop and grow professionally to prepare them for the ever increasing burden that comes with empowerment. Career management, NCOES

syllabus improvements, tuition reimbursement for civilian education, civilian occupational counterpart seminars and specialized Army training are only a few of the opportunities today's NCOs are afforded in efforts to maintain their edge in the dynamic, fluid world in which we all operate. That is not to say that the Army is concerned with or do they address only duty related training. The leaders of today's Army identify NCOs high operational tempo. In its dedication to our soldiers' success, the Army has made great efforts to care for an NCOs mental and personal health. It is taking care of the NCO personally and professionally that has and will prepare him for the hard road ahead. The Army's preparation of the NCOs of today will ensure that they maintain focus on the task at hand and execute their duties with all authority granted to him.

Consequences of Empowerment

The consequences of empowerment are far reaching and evident throughout our Nation's history. Empowering the NCO to take initiative and solve problems at the small unit level, the commissioned officers are now free to focus on operational and strategic level planning and command at higher levels. The results of this empowerment by people like General John Pershing, Commander of the American Expeditionary Forces and Major General G. B. Duncan, Commanding General of the 82nd Airborne Division, are exhibited as the Allies crossed the hedgerows of the coastal regions of France. Each small unit attacked the problem independently, not waiting for guidance from higher command. From the ingenuity of SGT Curtis Culin, the Rhino tank solved the hedgerow mobility quandary (Zapotoczny, 2005, Breakout From the Hedgerows: A Lesson in Ingenuity ¶12). Nowhere more than the ebb and flow of battle in the streets and countryside of Southwest Asia the consequences of the shift in responsibilities to the NCO more evident. NCOs leading soldiers, making decisions based on experience, judgment and real time intelligence to defeat an entrenched, ideological enemy is the direct result of their

empowerment. Their ability to bring order to the chaos of battle make the small unit leader, the NCO, a permanent fixture in the leadership structure of the Army. Advancements in technology continue to empower today's NCO with knowledge and responsibilities never known in the Army of the past.

Conclusion

The emergence of small unit tactics, education and training as well as legislation and regulations have been the three most important factors in the empowerment of today's Non-Commissioned Officer. Not one factor more than another, but the whole of the three factors discussed have empowered the United States Army Non-Commissioned Officer to be the best NCO in the world. It is this empowerment that sets the United States Army's NCOs apart from other army's NCOs. It is not a trend. It is doctrine. It is Army regulation. It is federal legislation. A trend is hot and cold, popular one day and not the next. Non-Commissioned Officers are the backbone of this great Army and will continue to execute based on initiative and sound judgment. The empowerment realized by today's NCOs will remain in the Armed Forces and will continue to make our NCOs the most lethal weapon in our arsenal.

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