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History of the NCO in the American Army
1775-1865

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History of the Noncommissioned Officer Corps, USASMA, Class 55, Group R08
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NCOs in the American Army (1775-1865) Briefing Outline

I. Introduction:

Good _____ CSM Keehu and classmates of R08. My name is MSG Hatley and today I will be presenting you an unclassified briefing on the NCOs in the American Army during the era of 1775-1865.

I compiled the information to be briefed from the books "The story of the NCO Corps" by Arnold G. Fisch, and Robert K. Wright, "Diary of a Common Soldier in the American Revolution 1775-1783" by Jeremiah Greenman, "Guardians of the Republic: A History of the Noncommissioned Officer Corps" by Ernest Fisher, and also from the article "A short story of U.S. Army Noncommissioned Officer" by L.R. Arms.

This briefing will allow us to understand the transformation the NCO Corps went thru from its birth until now, and the obstacles encountered.

II. Body:

- a. Birth of the NCO Corp- concept behind it
- b. Duties of the NCO- development and description of positions
- c. Leadership roles- who became what and responsibilities
- d. Training of NCOs- Forming of the NCO development program and its concept

III. Closing:

- a. Summary: The NCO Corps was and is a vital part of our Army. It has overcome numerous obstacles and changes, but stayed loyal to the duties and responsibilities. Our Corp has become a role model to the free world.
- b. Questions:
- c. Concluding Statement: NCOs have demonstrated as proved by history time and time again, that thru many changes and hardships they are still professionals and true leaders. The NCOs have really earned their nickname "The Backbone of the Army."

History of the NCO in the American Army (1775-1865)

The history of the NCO started in 1775 when the continental ~~Army~~ ^{S Power} was born. The American NCO is a mix of French, British, and Prussian armies, who as the years passed by continued to grow into a truly American NCO.

During the early stages their duties and responsibilities were almost non-existent, until 1778 when General Friedrich Von Steuben standardized them in his "Regulations for the Order and Discipline of the Troops of the United States" commonly known as the Blue Book. The book stressed the importance of putting the best soldiers in NCO positions.

The duties stated by him were:

Sergeant Major-assistant to the regimental adjutant who kept rosters, formed details, and handled matters in the interior management and discipline of the regiment.

Quartermaster Sergeant- assisted the regimental quartermaster and assumed the duties in his absence, and supervised the loading and transport of the baggage when on march.

First Sergeant- kept discipline while encouraging soldiers, maintained the duty roster.

Completed all the reports for the company commander and the company descriptive

book. Sergeants and Corporals- taught recruits in all military training, behavior, neatness, and sanitation.

Each infantry company was arranged into four squads, with a squad consisting of a sergeant, a corporal, and nineteen privates. They were formed into two ranks of ten with the corporal serving as the file closer in the rear of the formation and the sergeant doing the same on the flank (Fisch).

Artillery and light Cavalry regiments had similar arrangements to the Infantry, but made provisions for specialized ratings like gunners, bombardiers, saddlers, and blacksmiths. These individuals received higher pay than privates, but did not have the command responsibility of noncommissioned officers.

During battle, NCOs closed the gaps created by casualties, kept soldiers silent and proper marksmanship. NCOs were an essential part of the linear tactics that survived until the Civil War with some of the roles played by them being; on the battlefield the sergeant became what was called as the “covering sergeant”, who stood in the second rank immediately behind the company officer and was responsible for protecting him(Altenburg). He kept his bayonet fixed and carried his musket at shoulder arms. He did not fire in volleys, but kept his fire until needed to defend his officer. One of the corporals assumed a similar role, protecting the junior officer who carried the colors. During this era, NCOs were locked in for an entire career into the one regiment that had accepted his enlistment, and could not be transferred to another without the approval of the General-in-chief of the Army, something seldom granted, hindered NCO development. When a transfer was granted the NCO did not take his rank with him, meaning positions were not permanent, and that stripes stayed with the regiment.

After the war of 1812 and the 30 years of peace that followed, NCO duties changed to lead the men into missions to enforce treaties, protecting caravans, and blazing trails on the way to the west, but they were still small unit leaders and disciplinarians only.

In 1821 the first reference to NCO chevrons was made by the War Department. A general order directed the sergeants major and quartermaster sergeants to wear chevrons on each

arm above the elbow, sergeants and senior musicians, one on each arm below the elbow, and corporals one on the right arm above the elbow.

In 1829 “The Abstract of Infantry Tactics” was published, and it provided instructions for training NCOs. The reason for this instruction was to ensure that all NCOs had a good knowledge of the exercise and how to use their tactics, of the manual of the soldier, and of the firings and marching manual.

Officers were required to assemble NCOs often for practical and theoretical instruction. In addition field officers were to ensure that company officers provided proper instruction to their NCOs. This method was also the first time NCOs were allowed to conduct training, where sergeants major assisted in teaching sergeants and corporals of the regiment. Newly promoted corporals and sergeants received their training from their first sergeant.

In 1840 the first attempt to give the NCO corps greater prestige by adopting a distinctive sword, a sword model that remains the sword of the NCO corps and is still used in special ceremonial occasions.

As time went by and until the Civil War progressed, organizational, and tactical changes enhanced the combat leadership role of the NCO. One example of such roles of leadership is was seen when First Sergeant Percival Lowe from the Dragoon Regiment and noncommissioned officers of the company established what they called “the company court martial” something not recognized by Army regulations (Fisher).

Establishing this allowed the NCO to enforce discipline, for soldiers breaking minor regulations, without having to do lengthy proceedings. This method discipline proved to be an effective way of disciplining soldiers and avoid ruining their careers.

During the Civil War, the NCOs started to assume a more important role by leading small groups of attackers, which preceded and followed each major unit. NCOs also carried the flags and regimental colors of their units. This task was considered a deadly but a crucial one by allowing the regiment to maintain alignment and letting commanders identify the location of their units on the battlefield.

As the war progressed organizational and tactical changes allowed the Army to employ more open battle formations. Such changes enhanced the combat leadership role of the NCO.

The duties of the American NCO were minimal during the era, however they still played a key role in our Army.

Pay for the troops during the Civil War varied according to the branch and rank, with more technical fields receiving a greater pay. As early as 1861, Army regulations started the pay scale as follows:

The following pay chart details some of the differences:

CAVALRY

Sergeant Major.....	\$21.00
Quartermaster Sergeant...	21.00
Chief Bugler.....	21.00
First Sergeant.....	20.00
Sergeant.....	17.00
Corporal.....	14.00
Bugler.....	13.00
Furrier and Blacksmith...	13.00
Private.....	13.00

ARTILLERY and INFANTRY

Sergeant Major.....	\$21.00
Quartermaster Sergeant...	17.00
First Sergeant.....	20.00
Sergeant.....	17.00
Corporal.....	13.00
Artificer, artillery.....	15.00
Private.....	13.00

Principal Musician.....21.00

Musician.....12.00

ORDNANCE

Master Armorer.....\$34.00

Master Carriage-Maker...34.00

Master Blacksmith.....34.00

Artificer.....17.00

Laborer.....13.00.

SAPPERS, MINERS & PONTONIERS

Sergeant.....\$24.00

Corporal.....20.00

Private First Class.....17.00

Private Second Class.....13.00

Musician.....12.00

HOSPITAL STEWARDS

First Class.....\$22.00

Second Class.....20.00 (Arms)

Some NCOs while receiving better pay than before, but were not being paid equally among the ranks due to some of the specialty ranks receiving higher pay than more senior NCOs in the combat arms areas.

Through this era the NCOs roles continued to be enhanced with the adding of more leadership and position responsibilities.

After the Civil War two military schools reopened and for the first time trained both officers and NCOs, the two schools were the Artillery and Signal Corps (Greenman). The reason for the establishment of training for both officers and NCOs alike was largely due to the two fields required men to have more technical knowledge in order to operate complex equipment and instruments. Efforts to provide advance education for NCOs in less technical fields failed to attract interest, leaders felt that experience and not classroom was needed to make a good sergeant in the infantry and other fields.

Army leaders continued to find ways to improve the involvement of NCOs in the everyday life of a unit and to expand their responsibilities.

Time has been witness to the many obstacles the noncommissioned officer has had to overcome, starting from very minimal duties at the beginning of the era to greater and more important roles in every aspect of a unit.

This increased responsibilities and the playing of such a tremendous role-playing of the NCO has only been made possible by the significant contributions of the many men who put their body and soul into convincing Army leaders that NCOs are true professionals and an important part of the units.

The NCOs have been and are as demonstrated by history, professionals who have gone thru many changes and hardships, but as true leaders have become what we are today “The backbone of the Army”.

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