

Sergeant Major of the Army

William G. Bainbridge

By

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L05

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I. Introduction:

A. List of references used during the research for this briefing:

Elder, Daniel K., Gillespie, Mark F., Kelly, Michael B., Hawkins, Glen R., and Pierce, Preston E. The Sergeant Major of the Army, Revised Edition US CMH Pub 70-63

Bainbridge, William G. and Cragg, Dan, Top Sergeant: The Life and Times Of Sergeant Major of the Army William G. Bainbridge, 1st Edition New York, Ballantine, 1995

William G. Bainbridge- Former Sergeant Major of the Army,
www.army.mil/leaders/leaders/sma/former/bainbridge.html - 5k - Oct 31, 2005

B. Research for this briefing included sources from the internet, books, and articles. The majority of the information used came from book sources.

II. Body:

A. William G. Bainbridge normal life and background before entering the Army

B. His initial training as a Soldier

C. Sergeant Bainbridge service during World War II and discharge

D. His recall to the Army and service from 1950 to 1972

E. Selection as the first Sergeant Major of USASMA

F. Selection as the 5th Sergeant Major of the Army

III. Closing:

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B. Question:

C. Conclusion:

Works Cited

Elder, Daniel K., Gillespie, Mark F., Kelly, Michael B., Hawkins, Glen R., and Pierce, Preston

E. The Sergeant Major of the Army, Revised Edition US CMH Pub 70-63

Bainbridge, William G. and Cragg, Dan, Top Sergeant: The Life and Times of Sergeant Major

of the Army William G. Bainbridge, 1st Edition New York, Ballantine, 1995

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“The Bainbridge Award”, Training and Mentoring, Google 9 Dec

Sergeant Major of the Army (SMA) William G. Bainbridge is one of the many outstanding professional senior noncommissioned officers who made a significant and lasting impact on the Army. Senior noncommissioned officers often ask themselves “what events, or people, influenced these leaders and helped build their character?” SMA Bainbridge’s personal history is an excellent example of the positive influences that produce great leaders.

SMA Bainbridge was born on April 17, 1925 in Galesburg, Illinois. He spent his youth in a small farming community during the Great Depression. Growing up in a hard-working class family with very little material possessions, he had to work hard to help the family pull together to make a living. Despite these hardships, he enjoyed school and placed a high value on education. He came of age in this era, learning the value of individual people, honesty, hard work, and the importance of teamwork and community. He carried these lessons with him throughout his Army career.

On June 7, 1943, just weeks after graduating from Williams Field High School, he volunteered for enlistment in the U.S. Army. He attended a seventeen-week training course consisting of Basic and Advanced Training for Anti-Aircraft Artillery at Camp Wallace, Texas. Basic Training required six-day weeks of twelve-hour days beginning at 0500 each morning. The training included intense physical training, with frequent 25-mile foot marches, along with other usual military subjects. He received long classes on aircraft identification and practiced dismounted drills weekly--firing .30 caliber and .50 caliber machine guns, the British Enfield rifle, and the Springfield M1903 rifle. Regardless of the other training conducted that day all Soldiers changed into Class-A uniforms for retreat. It was here that Private William Bainbridge developed important attributes for success in military life.

First, he learned important lessons from Sergeant Simpson, his platoon Sergeant; “He trained and told us the little things we should do... the things you ought to do right... he also took care

of us.” (Elder, Gillespie, Kelly, Hawkins, and Pierce 112) Private Bainbridge did not forget those traits that made a permanent impression on him; he would practice those important lessons for the duration of his career. As such, his chain of command recognized his leadership potential and promoted him to Private First Class in only four months.

After finishing his training as an anti aircraft artilleryman, completing a year of college in five months, and graduating from the Air Cadet Pilot program, he transferred to a unit for training as an aircraft gunner. A few months later, the Army determined that there were enough gunnery students. Therefore, Bainbridge, now a Corporal reclassified as an Infantryman, and transferred to Fort Atterbury, Indiana. Again, his chain of command recognized his leadership potential and made him a squad leader with a direct promotion to sergeant. Sergeant Bainbridge advanced through the ranks from private to sergeant in less than 18 months.

In December 1944, his unit deployed to Germany. German Soldiers captured his unit on 19 December 1944. Bainbridge and other POWs spent the next three months at Stalag-9B, Bad Orb, east of Frankfurt and Stalag-9A at Ziegenhain near Giessen. Prisoner-of-war camp conditions were intolerable; however, he survived and recounted, “My love of country, the way I was brought up, and my family life helped sustain me.” (Elder, Gillespie, Kelly, Hawkins, and Pierce 114)

On 25 March 1945, the American 6th Armored Division liberated Stalag-9A. After several weeks of medical care, Bainbridge and fellow Soldiers flew to Camp Lucky Strike for treatment, in preparation for the two-week journey home by ship.

The war concluded shortly after Sergeant Bainbridge’s return to the United States and after a few days at Camp Kilmer, New Jersey, he took sixty days leave. Like many others, he immediately returned to his hometown for a reunion with family and friends. On 20 June 1945, he married his childhood sweetheart, Hazel Smith, of Momence, Illinois who would become his life long

soul mate and have a major impact on his career. On 7 December 1945, Sergeant Bainbridge received his discharge from the U. S. Army.

William Bainbridge joined the reserves while working as a farmer in Victoria, Illinois. In October 1950, the Army recalled him to active duty after fighting broke out in Korea. Recalled as a Staff Sergeant, Bainbridge returned to Camp Atterbury where he completed assignments as Platoon Sergeant and First Sergeant of the 5012th Army Service Unit and Sergeant Major of the Fifth Army Food Service School. After much success, Bainbridge requested enlistment in the Regular Army with the intention of becoming a career Soldier. After a grade determination, he reenlisted in the active army as a Sergeant First Class. Shortly thereafter, Sergeant First Class Bainbridge received orders for reassignment to Germany. He and his family arrived in Stuttgart, Germany, where he requested family housing by enrolling on a standing list. The standing list initially put him at number two, but by the following week, he had fallen to number twenty-two and did not receive an explanation. This upset Sergeant First Class Bainbridge, so he decided to challenge the unfair housing system by elevating it to the chief of housing. He eventually received quarters a few days later. Campaigning for equal quarters and equal treatment by housing officials became one of the many challenges he took on during his career.

Transferring from Germany, Master Sergeant Bainbridge arrived at Fort Riley, Kansas. The chain of command, typically, recognized his leadership and COL Boston, Commander of the 1st Battle Group, 28th Infantry, selected him to serve as Sergeant Major of the Battle Group. MSG Bainbridge accepted, and used the following philosophy in the performance of his duties: "... if you have the job, you're never 'acting' – you're the one who is responsible for everything." (Bainbridge and Cragg 99) This philosophy would penetrate every assigned command of his career. He deployed with the 28th to Germany and returned. Following challenging but successful assignments to Vietnam, Fort Benning, Fort Meade, and the United States Army

Pacific, Army leadership selected CSM Bainbridge to become the first Command Sergeant Major of United States Army Sergeants Major Academy (USASMA). CSM Bainbridge accepted this position because he felt it was important to exercise the proper influence when developing USASMA, and important to properly select the individuals who would attend USASMA.

CSM Bainbridge faced many challenges as the USASMA CSM. The first challenge he faced was getting the curriculum approved by the Department of the Army. Some members of the Army leadership—mainly officers had a problem with teaching NCOs about world affairs. They believed that NCOs should focus only on doctrine, tactics, and training subject matters, but CSM Bainbridge recognized that this was an important part of NCO development, and persuaded the leadership to approve the curriculum. The originally approved topics still serve to shape the curriculum today. CSM Bainbridge worked hard to develop the library that would become the Learning Resource Center, identify instructors for the first class, secure housing for instructors and students, and design the crests and coat of arms for USASMA. Hazel, his wife, played a major role in his selection as the first USASMA CSM. General Haines, who approved CSM Bainbridge's selection as USASMA CSM, did so in part due to "the organizational ability and professional drive of Mrs. Bainbridge". (Bainbridge and Cragg 243) CSM Bainbridge and his wife were a dynamic team in supporting and leading soldiers and their families.

After three successful and historic years at USASMA, CSM Bainbridge accepted a selection as the fifth Sergeant Major of the Army (SMA). One of his duties as the SMA was to sit as the first enlisted member of the Army Policy Counsel. The counsel discussed the day-to-day business of the Army, and served to determine the direction of the Army. SMA Bainbridge provided excellent guidance, from an enlisted standpoint, to the board from the information that he and Hazel gathered from talking with soldiers during their travels. He quickly gave credit to

his wife as an important part of the team due to her interaction within the community. Issues that affected enlisted soldiers came before the board, and SMA Bainbridge brought a common sense, NCO point of view to each issue.

SMA Bainbridge also served on the Army Uniform Board, where he was instrumental in making several changes. He designed the first chevrons for the position of Sergeant Major of the Army. He also worked to have the dress mess uniform for enlisted soldiers designed and approved; you can still hear noncommissioned officers refer to the dress mess jacket as the "Bainbridge" jacket. He served as an advisor for the development of the Battle Dress Uniform as well.

SMA Bainbridge expanded the responsibilities of the office for the Sergeant Major of the Army. He accompanied the Army Chief of Staff to Congress and offered congressional testimony to hearings regarding enlisted pay and housing, troop strength, personnel policies, and other areas important to the well-being of soldiers. A significant task never before accomplished.

He also made Congressmen aware of how his position worked within the NCO Corps, and how this served to support his commander. He procured permanent funding for the Noncommissioned Officer Education System (NCOES) across the Army, eliminating the need for commands to provide separate funding. He expanded the tenure for the position of Sergeant Major of the Army from its previous two-year tour to four years, as it stands today. His service was so great that the Association of United States Army developed the Bainbridge Award in 2000 for presentation to the "noncommissioned officer - active, reserve component or retired - whose contributions to the NCO Corps and the local community have been significant". (The Bainbridge Award)

SMA William G. Bainbridge's many contributions continue to influence our Army. When you look back on his career, you see the milestones and decisions in his life that enabled him to

make a noteworthy difference. It is important that we know and understand the historical impact noncommissioned officers made upon the Army. We need to share this information with Soldiers, helping them to understand and build upon the rich traditions and history of our organization.