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Noncommissioned Officers in the Army

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### Abstract

The United States Army has evolved over time with the empowerment of its Noncommissioned Officers. The Noncommissioned Officer has been given more power over time and sees his role on the battlefield changing from one of taken orders from Officer to that of giving and enforcing standards on the battlefield. As Noncommissioned Officers, we are truly the backbone of the Army and we continue to make changes that give our Officers the flexibility to do more on the battlefield with the confident that the standards will not change.

## Noncommissioned Officers in the Army

The empowerment of the American Noncommissioned Officer is he ready for the transformation he has seen since the formation of the Rank. The United States Army Noncommissioned Officer (NCO) had its beginning during the Continental Army in 1775. We took what we learn from different Armies and made it a uniquely American way. During the American Revolution, the NCOs had little or no standardization of their duties and responsibility. Inspector General Friedrich von Steuben standardized the NCOs duties and responsibilities in his Regulations for Order and Discipline of the troops of the United States commonly know as the Blue Book (von Steuben 1782). By outlining the role of the NCOs this allowed for the picking of the best Soldiers to be in the NCOs positions. During battles the NCOs were expected to teach new Soldiers and to closes gap in the lines and encourage men to be silence, and fire his gun rapidly and true. The development of these first NCOs sustains the Continental Army thru its first years, and led to the NCOs being known as the backbone of the Army.

During this time, the Army had only five types of NCOs, Corporals, Sergeant, First Sergeant, Quartermaster Sergeant, and Sergeant Major with limited duties and responsibility for each of them. Officers were expected to be the ones that led troops on the battlefields, not NCOs. From the American Revolution to World War I the NCO got his promotion from the Regimental Commander where he often spent his entire career. All NCOs rank was the property of the units that they were assigned to, and if a Soldier left, his unit his rank stays with his unit. This did not encouraged Soldiers to become NCOs and the chances for them to get stripes were not as high. Once NCOs whom got there stripes would leave the unit they would lose the stripes if they were transfer to another unit. This did not set well with the Soldiers and provide no interest for them to

advance and take a leadership position. Therefore, because they were not as educated and trained like the Officers their roles were limited to a few areas that the Officers felt they would not get in the way of making a decision that could affect the outcome of a battle. They were not in a position of responsibility like the NCOs of today, and they were not proven assets on the battlefield.

During the Civil War, the role of the NCO increased from where it was during the formation of the Continental Army to more of a leadership role. The size of the army grew so fast that the role of the NCO was increased. At the start of the war because there were so few of Soldiers, the NCOs role was not as great. Now with the size of the Army and the death of some many Soldiers due to lack of training and experience, NCOs were give more responsibility. NCO were training to give command that the Officer said back to there units, and in some occasion they would step in temporary, if the officers were killed on the battlefield. The NCO was to ensure the skirmishers lines were maintained and were conducted in an orderly manor. The NCOs were also the guideon carriers a role that was not only respected, but one that dictated the direction of the units movement. This behavior of the Sergeant during the Civil War demonstrated the great dedication and courage to their Soldiers that is still a great representative of the NCOs of today. By NCOs, doing this it increased the leadership and responsibility of the NCOs during this period.

The NCOs were place in charge of some drill during the training of Soldiers, even though the Officers were tasks to conducted most drills. With the changes and tactics during the Civil War, the NCOs role changed with them. NCOs started to lead more patrols and put in charge of squads that raided and attacked the enemies' position. This change in the use of NCOs had a positive effect on not only the Officers, but also the Soldiers in the units. Officer now had the

ability to have good NCOs maintain the line and keeping the troops in order and the ability to give the NCOs a tasks that was normally one that an Officer would led and know it would be done to standards. This was very helpful to the Officers during the Civil War because of the way the War was being fought. NCOs were not given these duties because the Officers felt they could do them. Officers on the battlefield were being lost during combat operations and they need to fill this void in the command and control of the formations. Even though NCOs mastered this newfound task Officers still did not have the full comfort in his ability to lead troops in combat. His role was better than that of the Continental Army, but his responsibility were still not like that of a leader on the future battlefields. NCOs still needs to prove that he is capable of handling any mission that is placed in front of him.

During World War I the United States Army had the requirement to trained a larger amount of Soldiers and send them overseas. This was a requirement normal for Officer, but NCOs took on this role and accomplished this mission. NCOs trained Soldiers from sun up to sun down; teach them how to become a Soldier, fight, and survival on the ever-changing battlefield. World War I proved to be a brutal fight with technology moving to the far front, with new machine guns mounted charges, air power, and gas warfare. The new Soldiers had to be trained on gas warfare and trench fighting with the NCOs teaching recruits before they are deployed overseas. The NCO not only trained the Soldier for combat, but also during the War made new stride in the development of Soldiers on the battlefield. Officers saw the grow role of the development of the NCO as a must do and credit them for turning the tide of some of the ferrous battle during this era.

After World War I Congress recognized the NCO ranks. Five NCO ranks were established: Master Sergeant, Technical Sergeant, Staff Sergeant, Sergeant, and Corporal. The

First Sergeant became a position comparable in rank to the Technical Sergeant. Two hundred and thirty-one vocational skills could add three dollars to thirty-five dollars to the Soldiers monthly pay. (Emerson 1920) As the Army reduced after the war, enlisted Soldiers were demoted, rather than promoting them. Enlisted men were still not allowed to keep their rank if their unit disbanded or he was transfer to another unit. The Regiment gave these promotion and they still could not be taken with the NCOs when they leave. The Army also in 1922 reduced 1600 NCOs in a cost saving plan and the reduction of the total force in the Army. This caused a severe hardship for many NCOs especially those with families. (Fisher 1922)

The Army after World War I down sized so much that NCOs left the services. They had gained the respect and trust of the Officers Corp, but left in great numbers. NCOs were leading Soldiers and combining to accomplish the mission on the battlefield. They led men, taught their Soldiers how to fight, and survived on the battlefield. The NCOs left the Army in droves and with them, many experiences and much of what it took hundreds of years to achieve was wasted. During World War I, NCOs were given more of a leadership role compared to the first Sergeants in the Army and their role grew similar to that of what we are today.

In conclusion, the role of the NCOs has changed and will continue to change as time goes on and new wars are fought and enemies fight use in different ways. NCOs have come a long way from one of only doing and saying what officers want us to say, to being a voice on the future of warfare. We, as NCOs need to continue what NCOs before stride and us started to become that NCO who is leading from the front. The United States military continues to fights on the enemies turn, with go into every conflict and it is like we for get that our passed has showed us. The fight on the global war on terror is nothing new; if we look at our past conflicts, we will see a similar trend in today's battles as the ones from our past. As, NCOs we need to

teach our Soldiers our history so when they see the enemy doing something on the battle field, they can think back to pasted battles and see what worked for that NCO or unit and try to use his lesson learn to come up with a plan that could work.

Down sizing our forces after a major conflict only to rebuild when the next conflict raised. This continues practice only produces casualty on the battlefield at the start of a major conflict. Soldiers are not prepared to fight and the ones that are prepared to fight spend more time attempting to teach the Soldiers rather than fight the enemy. We must maintain a strong core of NCOs to be effected in fighting a war in the modern age. All the technology in the world means nothing if we do not have the right people in placed to take advantage of the technology. This was proven at the start of World War I, and we found ourselves competing with industry for skilled works to accomplish tasks. As we learn during the Spanish –American war, we must be conscious of the local populace. We cannot go to a country and expected Soldiers to behave and act, as we want them to act. We must be aware of their rights and needs to be governing as they chose to be, and to culturally aware of where we are going. In Iraq, we are learning this daily and this should have been a lesson that we would have taken from the past to apply to our handling of the different in the county as we attempt to allow then to govern them. The insurgency group in the county is using the same tactical we us and we need to continue to apply lesson learn to defeat them.

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