



**THE FIRST
SERGEANT MAJOR OF
THE ARMY**

SMA WILLIAM O. WOOLDRIDGE

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#233
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Introduction: The following Easy is unclassified.

Purpose: This Paper is designed to give you and the students of M03 a brief over view of the first Sergeant Major of the Army. SMA William O. Wooldridge.

Body: I will cover his prospective career, Units he was assigned to, significant achievements and awards and decorations he earned and the contributions to the Non Commissioned Officers of the U.S. Army. I will also explain how he was selected to the Office of the Sergeant Major of the Army.

a. SMA William O. Wooldridge was born on the 12th of August in 1922, in Shawnee, Oklahoma. He entered the U.S.Military on 13 November 1940. William O. Wooldridge always wanted to become a soldier; his older brother inspired him. When he was a young boy he would see his brother wearing his uniform. William was to young to join back then. He moved away to California, worked odd jobs and then returned back to Texas and joined the Army.

William O. Wooldridge joined the Army and was assigned to F Co 23rd Infantry Regiment located at Fort Sam Houston, Texas. In the 1940's, all training was conducted at company level. Private Wooldridge training began at Dodd Field, Texas. Basic training was lead by a Corporal and lasted two weeks. Once he completed Basic training, Private

Wooldridge started Advanced Individual training which was also conducted at company level but resourced at battalion level. Private Wooldridge excelled at AIT, so much so that, after he completed the training he was promoted to Corporal.

Corporal Wooldridge was then sent to the Squad Leader Course and shortly after completing this he participated in the Louisiana Maneuvers.

In 1941, Corporal Wooldridge requested an overseas assignment. Wooldridge lost his stripes as they belonged to the company, so he departed as a Private. He was assigned to the British Land Forces in Iceland. This short tour proved to be one of the most influential in his career. The one person (Soldier) that inspired Private Wooldridge was the Regimental Sergeant Major. This soldier was the most professional, competent; he looked, acted and was a leader of men. Wooldridge looked up to this man, because he was always everywhere, training, teaching and taking care of his men. He was in charge!

Upon his return to the United States Army in October of 1942, he was assigned to K Co 26th Infantry of the 1st Infantry Division. Sergeant Wooldridge would serve with this Regiment from October of 1942 until May 1945. He participated at the invasion of North Africa, fought at Kasserine Pass, landed at Gela in Sicily where his platoon a commendation. Then he would fight again with the Blue Spaders when they invaded OMAHA beach at Normandy on D-Day.

Sergeant Wooldridge distinguished himself at Aachen, Germany in October of 1944 and received his first Silver Star and Purple Heart. Wooldridge would earn his second Silver Star at the Battle of the Bulge for assuming command of his leaderless company. Staff Sergeant Wooldridge's, Platoon Leader, Company Commander and First Sergeant

were either dead or severely wounded. He took command of the company until the Battalion S-3 could make his to the company and assume command.

After the war was over Sergeant Wooldridge career was filled with assignments to Japan, Germany, Washington, Oklahoma and Kansas.

While Sergeant Wooldridge traveled to numerous assignments he served in all duty positions. In Germany he served as an Infantry Rifle Platoon Sergeant. It was this point Sergeant Wooldridge began going to school at night and requesting attendance at the Seventh Army NCO School in Munich. In those days there was no requirement to attend any school. Sergeant Wooldridge saw the importance in formal schooling for NCOs.

In 1954 he was assigned to Fort McNair, in Washington D.C. While assigned as the First Sergeant to G Co 3rd Infantry, Sergeant Wooldridge testified before the House Armed Service Committee. Congress responded to the concerns of Wooldridge and other senior leaders and passed the Career Incentive Act of 1955. This Act established improved pay and benefits for all military personnel. Wooldridge would again change stations to Kansas, where he was again assigned to 3rd Bn, 26th Infantry, where he would serve as the Battalion Sergeant Major.

Sergeant Major Wooldridge considered his service as the Group Sergeant Major as his Most significant in terms of professional development. This was due to his attendance of the Southern Command Senior Noncommissioned Officers School at McGraw Kaserne in Munich in 1960.

In March 1963 Sergeant Major Wooldridge was selected as the 24th Infantry Division Sergeant Major. As the Division Sergeant Major he expressed the underutilization of Sergeant Majors. His division commander, Maj General W. A. Cunningham prepared

a paper with Wooldridge's concerns, describing the guidelines and duties for unit Sergeants Major. This would now let Sergeant Majors finally serve at the head of the Noncommissioned Officers.

Sergeant Major Wooldridge would again change station this time he would serve as the 1st brigade Sergeant Major for the 1st Infantry Division. In June of 1965 he was selected to serve as the Division Sergeant Major and he would take his unit into Vietnam. Wooldridge relished being a combat soldier in the vast battles of Vietnam, he would soon be called upon to make his most challenging contribution to the Army, establishing the office of the Sergeant Major of the Army.

Over 4,700 Sergeants Major assigned to twenty-one major commands were eligible for the nomination to Sergeant Major of the Army in 1966. Sergeant Major Wooldridge nomination was endorsed and sent off and received with him not wanting the job. He was ordered to speak with Gen Johnson in Washington D. C. on 5, July 1966. On the 11th of July in 1966, Sergeant Wooldridge was sworn in as the first Sergeant Major of the Army. Sergeant Major Wooldridge saw the creation of the new Command Sergeants Major rank in 1968; he organized the first Command Sergeants Major Conference, the first Noncommissioned Officers Candidate Course. He created the first Command Sergeant Major Program, which identified the Sergeants Major who served in staff positions and those who were senior enlisted advisors to unit commanders. Wooldridge would go on and finish his tour as Sergeant Major of the Army. He assisted in the selection of Sergeant Major George W. Dunaway as the second Sergeant major of the Army. After his tour he was then assigned as the Military Assistance Command, Vietnam (MACV), Command Sergeant Major. Wooldridge would retire in 1972 after being accused of fraud

and corruption related to the military club system. Sergeant Major Wooldridge was never tried in a military court, however he later pleaded guilty to two counts of bribery for accepting stock equity and profits. The Government later conducted its own investigation and at no time did they find any wrongdoing during his tenure as the Sergeant Major of the Army.

b. AWARDS

Sergeant Major of the Army Wooldridge awards includes;

Silver Star with One Oak Leaf Cluster

Legion of Merit with One Oak Leaf Cluster

Bronze Star Medal

Purple Heart

Air Medal with Five Oak Leaf Clusters

Army Commendation Medal with One Oak Leaf Cluster

Good Conduct Medal with Ten Oak Leaf Clusters

American Defense Medal

European-African-Middle Eastern Campaign Medal

World War II Victory Medal

Army Occupation Medal

National Defense Service Medal

Vietnam Service Medal

Republic of Vietnam Campaign Medal

Combat Infantry Badge with One Star

c.

UNITS

F Co 23rd Infantry, 2nd Infantry Division, Fort Sam Houston, Texas

British Land Forces, Iceland (Private)

K Co 26th Infantry, 1st Infantry Division, North Africa, Sicily, France, Belgium,

Germany (Private - Staff Sergeant)

Student, Schofield Barracks, Hawaii

HHC 8th U.S. Army Seoul, Korea (1SG)

K Co 3rd Bn, 26th Infantry, 1st Infantry Division, Germany (1SG)

G Co 3rd Infantry Division, Fort McNair, Washington D. C. (1SG)

3rd Bn, 26th Infantry, 1st Infantry Division, Fort Riley, Kansas (1SG)

2nd Battle Group, 28th Infantry, 24th Infantry Division, Germany (CSM)

24th Infantry Division, Germany (CSM)

1st Brigade, 1st Infantry Division, Fort Riley, Kansas, Republic of Vietnam (CSM)

Sergeant Major of the Army

Military Assistance Command, Vietnam, Republic of Vietnam (CSM)

Range Command White Sands, New Mexico (CSM)

HHC U.S. Army Garrison, Fort Macarthur, California (SGM)

Closing: Sergeant Major of the Army William O. Wooldridge has set the example for all soldiers to follow. He has show soldiers what it is to be in charge, to change, taking care of soldiers, seek self-improvement. A true leader of soldiers, always up front, honest, courageous, competent, caring and devoted to the Army. He established some of the first

formal Noncommissioned Officer training programs, the Command Sergeant major program, duties and responsibilities for Sergeants Major. But best of all he gave the enlisted a voice at the senior level. He was an advocate for Military Pay, Quality of life, Training, and Professional Development. His accomplishment will never go forgotten!