

Studying Military History... Is it ~~an~~-important?

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Argumentative Essay Outline

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Topic #6: Is it important for military professionals to take time out of their busy schedules to

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study military history? If so, why? If not, why not? In your analysis, be sure to provide at least three examples from issues discussed in H100 that support your position. In your conclusion, be sure to address how (or whether) a better understanding of the past can prepare Soldiers for challenges that lie ahead.

1. Thesis Statement. Despite advancement in education, training and technology today's

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Noncommissioned Officer can still learn valuable lessons through the study of military history which are relevant and applicable on the modern battlefield.

2. Major Points.

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- a. The birth of the Non-Commissioned Officer Corps and its role prior to 1900.
- b. Growing pains, the Non-Commissioned Officer Corps from 1900 to 1945.
- c. Re-learning the same lessons, the Non-Commissioned Officer Corps from 1946 to present.

3. Supporting Points of Evidence.

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- a. Transformation under fire, regulations governing the roles and responsibilities of the noncommissioned officer are revised in order to meet the changing battlefield.
- b. Transformation in the midst of war, as technology advanced in the early 20th century the role of the NCO as a technician and small unit leader expands.
- c. Task Force Smith, complacency and a failure to recognize past mistakes in the post WWII era leads to disaster on the battlefields of Korea.

4. Conclusion.

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- a. Applying yesterdays lessons on the battlefield of today and tomorrow.

Abstract

Army commanders have not used the study of military and NCO history effectively in the past. Failure to do this has resulted in a constant ebb and flow of military readiness, which has adversely affected the onset and outcome of all past U.S. conflicts. As seen throughout history, ground force commanders have consistently minimized the role of the NCO during peacetime only to become dependant on them as small unit leaders and trainers during wartime. The application of lessons learned both on and off the battlefield is predicated upon knowing and understanding our military history. By taking time out of busy schedules and formalizing these studies Commanders and Senior NCOs can break this cycle and minimize repeating costly mistakes from the past.

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The noncommissioned officer corps has been a constant fixture in the United States Army since its very formation in 1775, however; its role and purpose have changed dramatically since that time. Steeped in a long and proud history the noncommissioned officer (NCO) has adapted to meet the challenges of training, leadership, and education. From its beginning, the United States Army closely modeled its NCO Corps after the armies of Europe and Great Britain. The two major roles of the NCO were centered on discipline and supervision. Although methods have changed over the years, these two functions, along with training, still fall squarely on the shoulders of today's NCO Corps. Early in our army's history, there was a vast social gap between officers and enlisted soldiers. This separation in social class prevented close interaction between the two and created a void, which was to be filled by the NCO. In 1779 Baron Fredrick Wilhelm von Steuben published, Steuben's *Regulations for the Order and Discipline of the Troops of the United States* establishing that the NCO was selected by and responsible to the Company Commander (The Story of the Noncommissioned Officer Corps, 2005). The function of first line supervisor and disciplinarian filled by the NCO, both in garrison and on the battlefield, provided officers of the era a unique and trusted insight to the morale and welfare of their unit. Through the study of early military history today's NCOs will better recognize that these initial tasks first outlined by Baron von Steuben are just as relevant today and remain essential to a well functioning unit. During the Civil War the elimination of linear tactics changed the role of the NCO on the battlefield. Bvt. Maj. Gen. Emory Upton published *A New*

System of Infantry Tactics, which the U.S. Army adopted as doctrine in 1867. This manual placed greater emphasis on simplicity of maneuver and could be trained and implemented by NCOs (Wikipedia, 2008). This era in military history set the stage for the sergeant's role of primary trainer and small unit leader. Platoon, squad, and fire team leaders on the battlefields of Afghanistan and Iraq continue to serve the Army in these capacities. Both Officers and NCOs in today's Army can apply lessons learned from studying the application and distribution of work during this period of NCO advancement.

At the dawn of the 20th century, the industrial revolution spurred advances which would significantly impact the military, such as automatic machine guns and the combustion engine. These introductions into the U.S. Army served to expand the role of the NCO as a technician or specialist. Fields such as the medical, transportation, and maintenance corps saw an increase in dependence on the NCO, which remains to this day. During WWI, fighting in the trenches of the Western Front saw U.S. forces experience heavy losses in the junior officer ranks. This void was met by able NCOs who stepped in to replace the fallen officers. Recognizing the combat effectiveness of small units lead by NCOs General John J. (Black Jack) Pershing established special schools for sergeants to improve leadership skills. Pershing conveyed his views on the importance of NCOs as small unit leaders in a message to the 82d Division Commander: he wrote,

"NCOs must love initiative and must hold what ground they gained to the utmost. It often happens that a sergeant or even a corporal may decide a battle by the boldness with which he seizes a bit of ground and holds it." (The story of the NCO Corps, 2005, P.19)

General Pershing's implementation of leadership training for NCOs did not survive the post war era, however; by understanding his decision making process and the impact it would

have on the future schools for NCOs, today's Soldiers will gain a better appreciation for the current NCOES system.

During WWII, the role of the NCO as a trainer and small unit leader became solidified. Due to the sheer volume of conflict in both the European and Pacific theaters, the requirement for NCO leadership grew. Victory on the battlefield and dependability in the military's rapidly growing technical areas transformed sergeants and corporals into indispensable leaders and paramount to the army's ultimate success in the war efforts. During the post WWII era, however; these lessons were soon forgotten. With the army serving in an occupation capacity in both Europe and Japan the NCO corps became complacent and failed to maintain the critical war fighting skills it had become so proficient at during the war years. (American Military History – Vol. II, 2005) The Army's inability to recognize its operating environment during this era and a failure to capitalize on a strong NCO Corps at the end of WWII would ultimately lead to disaster on the Korean Peninsula.

In early July 1950, Task Force Smith, lead by LTC Charles B. Smith and comprised of Soldiers from the Army of Occupation of Japan, left Japan for Korea. Their mission was to block or delay the North Korean Army's advance southward down the Korean peninsula. Ill trained, equipped and undermanned, Task Force Smith was a complete failure receiving over forty-five percent casualties and only able to delay the North Korean advance for approximately seven hours (Wikipedia, 2008). Through this experience, the Army and the NCO Corps both learned a painful lesson. With rapid demobilization and the focus shifted to occupational duty the readiness of the army had declined to the point of ineffectiveness. This however would soon change as training was ramped up. As the war continued, the NCO would once again demonstrate outstanding small unit leadership on the battlefield. During the Korean War the

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Army had identified the need for better trained and educated small unit leaders, this led to several changes throughout the NCO Corps. One was the Military Pay Bill Act, which created the pay grades of E8 and E9 and emphasized the role of NCOs as senior leaders and advisors (The Story of the NCO Corps, 2005). During this time army units ran many NCO academies at the local level with a curriculum focused on the NCO as a trainer, instructor, and mentor. Unfortunately, these academies did not fall under the Army's formal school system and differed in attendance criteria, budget resources, length, and curriculum. In addition, the majority of the Army's NCOs did not attend these academies and therefore lessons learned were not well captured or disseminated through the force. This would once again come to plague the Army.

At the outset of U.S. involvement in Viet Nam the Army and the NCO Corps once again were found lacking in readiness and ill equipped for the tasks that lie ahead. Over the course of that war the NCO Corps was forced to re-learn and re-define its role on the battlefield. This time, however; the focus would be centered on the NCO as a trainer and force multiplier. Many of the early Viet Nam experiences could have been more successful through the study and application of lessons learned from past U.S. counter insurgency operations.

Conclusion

Throughout our military history the role and responsibility of the NCO Corps has constantly adapted and evolved. It has maintained step with changing tactics and technology on both the battlefield and in garrison, however; often failed to apply lessons learned from past experiences to current or future requirements. The Army's inability to recognize mistakes from the past and apply them to current and future situations is, in part, due to a leadership environment which has ignored its own history. Today's NCO has become a fixture on the modern battlefield as a small unit leader. Understanding how and what that responsibility means

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is directly connected to our military history and the evolution of the NCO Corps itself. Modern NCOs will be more effective in current and future conflicts and less apt to repeat the mistakes of the past by taking time out of their busy schedules to study and understand Military and NCO history.

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