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History Argumentative Essay

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Before one can fully determine if the American Non-Commissioned Officer is more or less empowered today versus other times in history, it is important to know what empowerment means. According to Wikipedia, the free encyclopedia, empowerment is summarized as “the process that allows one to gain the knowledge, skill-sets and attitude needed to cope with the changing world and the circumstances in which one lives.” Dictionary.com defines empowerment as giving power or authority to someone. There is no doubt that the US Military is in an ever-changing world, and has been, since our beginning in 1775. The definition used by dictionary.com is the definition that most in the military think of when discussing the term empowerment. Combining these two definitions will allow us to find out if the US Military Non-Commissioned officer is more empowered today in our ever-changing world or as some would suggest, empowerment is simply a buzzword used by leaders but not actually a sound philosophy.

Prior to the creation of a formal Non-Commissioned Officer Education System (NCOES), the only training for young NCOs was when a seasoned NCO would bequeath it to them. While some of this training was certainly outstanding, a large amount was subpar. Without any standards for the NCO to follow, there was no way to enforce that all young NCOs were taught using the same standard. It took the US Military a long time to realize that on the job training (OJT) was not the best way to ensure that our enlisted Soldiers became the best trained NCOs in the world. While von Steuben might have laid out some fundamental approaches for the NCO in his book *Regulations for the Order and Discipline of the Troops of*

the United States (CMH 70-38), it took the creation of the Noncommissioned Offer Education System in 1971 to ensure that NCOs were taught at the same standard. The release of MILPO message 86-65 ensured that no more NCOs would be promoted to the rank of Staff Sergeant without first attending the Primary Leadership Development Course (PLDC), (A short history of the NCO - Modern Era, para 10). In addition to our NCOES system, enlisted Soldiers and NCOs also attend such specialized schools as Battle Staff, wrecker operator, and multiple other schools that relates to their additional skill identifier (ASI). The courses taught at NCOES certainly prepare the NCO today to be empowered; now it is up to the Army leaders to empower them.

The first NCOs in the Army began with a very simple goal; focus on the war and how we can defeat our enemy. In today's military and especially in the National Guard, the role of the NCO is not so simple. While we certainly must prepare our Soldiers for war, we are faced with Operations Other than War. One such operation is Defense Support to Civilian Authorities. This support requires Soldiers to deal with civilians in a multitude of situations. Some of these situations are working at a state/county Emergency Management Center; directing traffic at a traffic control point; distributing food, ice, water...at a point of distribution site; or trying to quell riots in your hometown. These operations have been a primary role of the National Guard for decades and recently, thanks to Hurricane Katrina, have become more involved for the active duty Soldier as well. While the primary focus for this type of mission seems to be centered on the United States, the US Military certainly supports other countries in their time of need with natural disasters such as tsunamis in Asia or peacekeeping operations throughout the world. The importance of this mission has become so important that National Guard units are required to place DSCA as a METL task and report this task on the Unit Status Report (USR). The tasks

that are involved in teaching DSCA to Soldiers are now just as important as all other individual tasks. Today, NCOs are more prepared and trusted while training Soldiers.

One could of course argue that NCOs from the Revolutionary War had a large task at hand in trying to maintain order and teach a bunch of unskilled volunteers how to become decent Soldiers. The main difference between now and then is that the NCO of yesteryear used intimidation as a way to get Soldiers to follow orders. Soldiers knew that once they joined a regiment, leaving the regiment was not a way out if they disagreed with their NCO chain. In fact, leaving your current regiment normally meant that a Soldier would not retain his rank. This is a tradition that would continue through the end of World War I (A short history of the NCO). While the NCO of the past certainly helped build the legacy for what the NCO of today is, the responsibility for Soldiers was primarily an officer function. NCOs received very few benefits and only a slight pay increase over the Soldiers they were responsible for and leaders at all levels knew that if this continued, the morale of the Army would fall (CMH 70-38).

The backbone of any organization will help determine the strengths and weakness of that particular organization. Right clicking on the word 'backbone' in Word, one will find that one of the synonyms is 'moral fiber' and another is 'strength of character' (MS Word). These two synonyms certainly articulate what the NCO Corps has become. The role of the NCO has evolved over time without a doubt. One thing that has not changed is his importance on the battlefield as a small unit leader. Since the establishment of Jamestown, small unit leaders have served as the trainer and standard-bearer in the daily life of Soldiers (Time Honored Professionals). These NCOs have evolved from simply creating a duty roster, to carrying the unit colors, attacking on the battlefield, and serving as ambassadors in foreign countries. While

often viewed as important within their own ranks, NCOs did not often receive this same respect from the commissioned officer. During the Post Vietnam Era, the United States realized that in order to maintain a professional well-trained army that NCOs would have to be at the core (CMH 70-38). Issues such as increased pay and a formal education system were at the forefront of creating a professional NCO Corps, a corps that is truly empowered and encouraged to think freely.

Some in the military, especially some senior NCO's will argue that today's NCO is not prepared to take on this role of our ever increasing empowerment. Soldiers today are promoted too fast and without the proper schooling and experience level required to make virtuous decisions. With the expanded role that the US Military has around the world, the Army has relaxed the standards required to enter the Army. These relaxed standards allow recruiters to meet recruiting goals and the Army to meet end-strength requirements but waters down the NCO Corps. Odds are that Soldiers entering the service today will pin on NCO rank before ever completing at least four years of service. These new sergeants will have never attended a professional NCOES course so valiantly argued for and will now be leading Soldiers only one to two years younger than them.

Finding the negative with those just entering the NCO Corps is easy to do and will probably continue as long as there is an army. However, while Soldiers are able to acquire the rank of Sergeant without attending a professional education class, they all receive mentorship. The mentorship today's Soldiers and young NCOs garner is much greater than that during any other time in history. Today's young NCOs are also better educated in the civilian world and face challenges that we never had to. This mentorship and experience on the job go a long way

to ensuring that today's young leaders are ready to lead troops. Those Soldiers that are not ready to enter the time-honored NCO Corps are often weeded out before being promoted and leadership and subordinates alike quickly notice those that slip through. If young Soldiers enter the NCO Corp and are not prepared for the responsibility that goes with it, then senior NCOs need to step up to the plate and provide the proper counseling and mentorship.

Today's NCO is certainly more empowered than at any time in the past. Responsibilities that at one time were only trusted to officers are now placed on NCOs. The life of young Soldiers are entrusted in the hands of the men and women and the belief from the Commander-in-Chief all the way to the Soldier's parents is that the NCO is doing all they can to protect our Soldiers. If we were not empowered as a corps, this feeling of security throughout the nation would not exist. The American NCO, once regarded as a second rate Soldier compared to a European NCO, has gained honor and prestige. With the development of our NCO Education System, NCOs from around the world want to attend our courses. General Shinseki sums up why we have the best Army in the world with this quote, "We are the finest Army in the world today. Let's keep it that way. We got here because we have the finest noncommissioned officers. And we have never satisfied ourselves with being just a little bit better than the next guy. Every day, insist on being the best and on getting better. Every day, train your soldiers and grow them into leaders. Every day, strengthen the ties that bind us together as warriors, officer and noncommissioned officer." — General Eric K. Shinseki, Army Chief of Staff, 2000 (CMH 70-38).

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