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Empowerment the Noncommissioned Officer

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## Abstract

“I am a Noncommissioned Officer, a leader of Soldiers. As a Noncommissioned Officer, I realize that I am a member of a time-honored corps, known as “The Backbone of the Army.” (Fisch & Wright 1989, p. 4). One of the Commanders' responsibilities is to empower the NCO Corps through education and began to recognize NCOs as a distinct and essential group, separate from those they led in the past, and provide them a career ladder to climb with knowledge and training needed to climb it. The implementation of the Skill Qualification Test (SQT) was the beginning to helping NCOs to be more proficient in their technical skills by being tested once a year. The removal of this testing system has weakened the enlisted force. As we move forward into the new millieum our leadership traits as NCOs will be challenged time and time again. One great American hero Sergeant Alvin C. York has left an outstanding legacy for NCOs to emulate. NCOs must uphold our tradition on the Army values and what right looks like for subordinates and junior Officers to follow.

## OUTLINE

Thesis: American NCOs empowerment has increased over time. Three factors leading to NCO empowerment are re-empowerment of NCOs, technical proficiency and leadership. These factors will strengthen the American NCO and result in everlasting empowerment.

### I. Introduction

A. NCO Corps

B. Re-empowerment of NCOs, technical proficiency and leadership

C. Argument

### II. Re-empowerment of NCOs

A. Officers empowering NCOs to increase their leadership development

### III. Technical proficiency

A. Skill qualification test (SQT)

B. Noncommissioned Officer Education System (NCOES)

### IV. Leadership

A. Sergeant Alvin C. York

B. Values and morals of NCOs

### V. Conclusion

A. Re-empowerment of NCOs

B. Personal opinion on areas that can strengthen the NCO Corps

## **Introduction**

Today's Army need to be certain that they preserve what is important and correct those areas that need setting up. The empowerment and duties of the noncommissioned officers corps (NCO) must not change. "Despite profound changes in the outward appearance of the NCO Corps, the mission "to protect and defend" remains the same" (Rush 2003, p. 20). NCO has set the example, lay down the standards, and enforce them. The NCO Corps are at the dawn of a new strategy, one that embraces a commitment to joint operations. It requires the NCO Corps to play a key role in joint mission readiness and interoperability.

This paper will enlighten you on areas that empowerment of the NCO Corps can improve are: re-empowerment the NCO Corps, technical proficiency and leadership.

## **Re-empowerment of NCOs**

Unlike, the past when the "noncommissioned officers were the enforcers of camp discipline and the only authority figure that trained their Soldiers" (Fisch & Wright 1989, p.7). Education was not a focus for noncommissioned officers. Moreover, their entire careers were often spent within one regiment. If a man was transferred from one regiment to the next, they did not take their rank with him. Noncommissioned officer could transfer in grade from one regiment to another without the permission of the General in Chief of the Army. Basically, we had underutilized NCOs that lacked knowledge technically and tactically. Now, NCO's rank and advancement for promotion come at an alarming rate with recommendation from their commanders. Today, commanders have the responsibility to afford NCOs the opportunities for self-development, on the job training, and leadership development. We have grown smaller and the Army has downsized by "closing bases, force structure, culture, transformation, and the Global War on Terrorism" (Santos, 2004, p.1). All these areas have put some strain and stress

on the NCO Corps. The NCO Corps have endured significant losses during these exhausting proceedings. However, the Officer Corps has afforded us to revalidates our basic values by letting NCOs teach, train, mentor, and make decisive decisions daily without asking for their permission but keeping them informed of our actions. More importantly, they have place confidence in our ability to lead Soldiers in combat. For example, my commander led off NCODP, he said NCO business was officer business and that he would be involved so that he could take care of his NCOs'. In addition, they have delegated their authority to us to enforce standards ensure we live up to our motto "Back bone of the Army". Today, officers are managing the NCO Corps better than they did in the past. In addition, they have allowed us to attend college, enroll in web-base courses, reenlistment options to attend college, and further our education and training through schools. More importantly, they are not delaying NCOs to attend NCOES for any reason short of war, teaches, counsels, trains, and lead Soldiers.

### **Technical proficiency**

Major General Emory Upton realized that the American Army needed to adopt the European ideology of educating our Noncommissioned Officers. During the 1890s "he expressed in future wars we need to devote attention to education due to the Army's command structure and ever-increasing importance of responsibility"(Fisher, 1994, p.142). The observation of the increased use of modern weaponry and the complex and sophisticated interest grew to extend specialized education to all parts of the armed services. The enlisted Military Occupational Specialty (MOS) Evaluation System has undergone a series of changes over the years. Our enlisted military occupation system for the Noncommissioned Officer Corps (NCO) once required NCOs to take the Skills Qualification Test (SQT) in 1995. Unfortunately, the Army discontinued measuring a Soldiers' proficiency in their primary Military Occupational Specialty

using the Skill Qualification Test. The removal of the SQT has created a less technical and proficient Soldier in their MOS today. The passing score was 60 percent or above. “The SQT assessed a Soldier's Occupational Proficiency through a combination of hands-on performance evaluations, written test, and their supervisor's performance certification of specific tasks (<https://aartstranscript.army.mil>).” The discontinuations of the SQT have created a NCO Corps that lacks assessed MOS knowledge and proficiency. The NCO Corps play a role where other people lives are in their hands 24/7 and essential to success. I know this first hand being a Noncommissioned Officer in the Army. I actively seek out all information to make sure that my subordinates know more than I do. In addition, technical training skills are currently not taught in conjunction with Warriors Leaders Course until a Soldier is selected for Staff Sergeant and attends BNCOC. The technical skill deficiencies were evident and identified during my last tour of duty amongst many of the subordinates and peers alike. Technical training must continue to happen if we are to sustain a mission ready fighting force. We need to bring back the on the job-training program, cross train in different MOS's, and specialized training certification to ensure Soldiers and their leaders are technically proficient. The Army ought to develop a technical training course for Sergeants in most of its technical MOSs. It must provide the opportunity for all TRADOC branch schoolhouses to offer a technical training component in conjunction with WLC. This will bridge the technical training gap that currently exists between initial entry training and BNCOC.

### **Leadership**

A great American hero who defines leadership was SGT Alvin C. York. During World War I, SGT York was an ordinary person like you and I. Therefore, any Noncommissioned Officer can look back on the history of this fine American hero to reflect on what right looks like. SGT York

was not only a Noncommissioned Officer who lacked education at the beginning so he could help support his family on their farm. SGT York was a Christian man who did not believe in killing or stealing from his neighbor. SGT York was a leader that led from the front and in the heat of battle did not hesitate in front of his men to take out the enemy. SGT York learned his rifleman skills at home shooting for game or participating in shooting contests on the weekends. After returning home from war with the Germans, SGT York did not want fame and fortune. He wanted to return to his simple country life in the mountains where he married his life long sweet heart Ms. Gracie. SGT York used his fame to help build a school in his small town to continue education.

Now, I feel many of our Noncommissioned Officers lack morals and values needed in mentor and develop Soldiers with a high moral character. Too many leaders become complacent and allow inappropriate behaviors and the use of profanity in front of their subordinates. Leaders want Soldiers to like them instead of earning their respect. Every leader must mentor, train, and coach subordinates to standard without taking shortcuts. Do not allow Soldiers to take shortcuts when it comes to training, this can cause lives on the battlefield. As long as leaders choose, the hard right over the easy wrong Soldiers will learn to respect you more for looking out for their best well being. Every leader can take from SGT York's experience by leading from the front. You are out with your Soldiers conducting realistic training. Therefore, when the units deploy every Soldier is confident in their basic skills, not only infantry Soldiers but also clerks, mechanics, cooks and other combat service support personnel. Our NCO Creed cannot exhibit these words better "No one is more professional than I. I am a Noncommissioned Officer, leader of Soldiers". If leaders take our creed with any dignity and pride, some of this disgraceful behavior would cease.

Some of the fundamental causes and consequences of this shift of responsibility down the chain of command in my analysis are: The U.S. Army have not prepared our NCO Corps for the ever increasing burdens of responsibility for the fact that we are promoting Soldiers at a high rate of speed with very little experience in their technical skill sets. Too many junior NCOs do not have the maturity to handle the amount of responsibility placed on them in a short period. The NCO Corps need to train and develop more skilled, knowledgeable, and committed leaders who are willingly and able to accept increasing amounts of responsibilities who thrive on challenges. This will allow the NCO Corps to achieve a ready military fighting force that can win on the battlefield. In addition, it will guide the Corps in the right direction, the NCO Corps need additional resources and educational tools in order to strategically fight the enemy. Both military and civilian leadership need to work together and do not shortchange our Armed Forces with cheap equipment that endangers their lives. Our military forces need the best equipment that money can buy to accomplish our mission during war and peace.

In conclusion, it is a new millileum where NCOs must adjust to the massive demands and challenges and act as professionals. In addition, work together to lead their Soldiers in the right direction by adhering to the Army values. Motivation and discipline are the keys to a productive NCO Corps for our NCOs to emulate. Unfortunately, I feel this trend will continue conversely due to the uptempo of the current deployments. We must reduce the current time on deployment from 15 months back to 12 months. The Soldiers need predictability for their Families to be able to stay at one post longer periods of times. We currently see no end for many years to come.

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