

Outline

Significant Contributions of Former Sergeants Major of the Army

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Significant Contributions of Former Sergeants Major of the Army

Sergeants Major of the Army (SMA) have made many contributions that have changed, or in some way, affected the non-commissioned officer (NCO) corps and the Army. From the inception of the position, SMAs have refined the duties of their position, institutionalized training, had effects on discipline, and contributed valuable input on the transformation of the Army. History will show that the position of SMA is a necessary and important one.

“The sergeant major, being at the head of the non-commissioned officers, must pay the greatest attention to their conduct and behavior...He should be well acquainted with the...discipline of the regiment, and...the manner of keeping rosters and forming details. He must always attend the parade, be very expert in counting off the battalion and in every other business of the adjutant....” (von Steuben, 1794)

Although accounts of history indicate that there were Sergeants Major since the Revolutionary War, the term referred to both rank and administrative positions. In 1920, the highest enlisted position within the Army was a Master Sergeant (E-7). Duties of the Sergeant Major were carried out by Senior Master Sergeants and the title “Sergeant Major” was informally held. In 1957, the Marines realized the need for a senior non-commissioned advisory position and appointed a Sergeant Major of the Marine Corps. The administrative assistant to the Army Chief of Staff (CoS), SGM George Loikow (E-7), recommended appointing a top NCO position within the Army, but it would be almost 10 years before the Army CoS would appoint the first Sergeant Major of the Army. When the *Military Pay Bill of 1958* was approved the “super ranks” of E-8 and E-9 were created. This re-introduced the rank of Sergeant Major as an official grade, and in 1959, the first NCOs were promoted. In 1965, Army CoS Harold Johnson started the process of selecting the NCO who could speak on behalf of the enlisted ranks. He

petitioned the Major Commands for nominations and selected the SGM of the unit that was serving in Vietnam. On 11 July 1966, Army CoS swore in the first Sergeant Major of the Army William O. Wooldridge. There was no legal responsibility tied to this position. There was an assumed authority and this position would serve to add confidence and prestige to the professionalism of the NCO Corps. SMA Wooldridge's first task would be to develop the duty description of his newly created office.

In 1779, Baron Frederick William von Stueben wrote the first duty description for all NCOs in *Regulations for the Order and Discipline of the Troops of the United States*. This text was the basis for the *Non-Commissioned Officers Manual*, which included a duty description for Sergeant Majors. This description identified the administrative requirements of the position as well as special responsibilities such as customs and courtesies. CoS Johnson tasked SMA Wooldridge with establishing the duties of his new office and presented his new SMA a note card with a brief description of his duties written on it. SMA Wooldridge folded it up, and carried it with him. The CoS was adamant that this new position be advisory in nature, so creating the duties of the SMA without precedence was a challenge. SMA Wooldridge knew this position must represent the interests of the Soldier and give credit to Soldier related issues. He did not want his position to replace the chain of command, or supersede the unit CSMs. He wanted to ensure that his duties were unique to his position and not parallel to those of other SGMs.

Since the 1820s, the Army has used chevrons as rank insignia and for grade identification. In 1958, with the addition of the "super ranks", the insignia for SGM (E-9) was introduced. The newly implemented SGM insignia was three chevrons above three arcs, with a five-pointed star in the center, similar to what is currently in use. In 1968, SMA Wooldridge

identified that there should be some distinctive differences between SGMs holding command positions and those SGMs on staff. Because of this recommendation, the Army created the Command Sergeant Major (CSM) rank by adding a wreath around the original five-point star. In 1979, further changes to the CSM rank would create the first SMA insignia by incorporating two stars in the center. In 1994, SMA Kidd implemented the redesign of the SMA insignia. The new insignia would include the Coat of Arms, or the eagle, flanked by the two stars that previously represented the SMA. Adding the Coat of Arms would symbolize the connection to the CoS and represent every rank in the Army.

Representation of every rank has been an integral part of the Office of the Sergeant Major of the Army (OSMA). Listening to Soldier's about their issues and considering the effects of policy from the all ranks perspective proved to be the foundation to improving quality of life issues. SMA Silas Copeland (1970-1973) understood that marketing the Army, as a competitive career choice, would attract the "all volunteer" force required. Treating Soldiers like professionals and providing an attractive quality of life was a great method to recruit and retain Soldiers. Some quality of life issues that SMA Copeland looked in to were upgrades to billets, better family housing, pay raises, and improved health benefits. Taking care of Soldiers and their families was also extremely important to SMA William Connelly (1979-1983). He supported initiatives for dramatic pay increases, better enlistment and reenlistment bonuses, and implementation of the Veteran's Educational Assistance Program (VEAP). SMA Robert Hall (1997 – 2000) was actively involved in Soldier issues as well. He provided input that affected improvements to pay and benefits, including housing, retirement pay, and medical care.

Soldiers with families have not been the only concern of SMAs. Many focused on single Soldier issues and Soldiers who were leaving military service. SMA Julius (1987 – 1991)

spearheaded the program known as the Better Opportunities for Single Soldiers (BOSS). The program initially provided a recreational outlet for Soldiers. Later it encompassed all quality of life issues that single Soldiers encounter. SMA Julius Gates (1987-1991) also participated in the creation of the Army Career and Alumni Program (ACAP). This program helped ease the uncertainty of transition that Soldiers and civilians faced when leaving Federal Service. SMA Richard Kidd (1991-1995) continued to provide input on ACAP until its formal establishment in 1991. Every Soldier, whether new to the Army or leaving, has been the focus of the OSMA. SMA Hall utilized a unique way of receiving invaluable input from every Soldier. He published his email address in *Soldiers* magazine and encouraged Soldiers to contact him directly. By using his email address, Soldiers could provide input on many of the issues they encountered at the unit level, to include training and promotions.

Several SMAs affected a critical training milestone for professional development, the Non-Commissioned Officer Education System (NCOES). Prior to 1966, individual units mandated military education to meet their organizational need. Although NCOs were receiving training there was no formal standardization, and it was not accessible to all NCOs. In 1967, SMA Wooldridge advised the creation of the Noncommissioned Officers Candidate Course (NCOCC), a 22-week course that made Sergeants out of civilians. Although not well received, it was a method to lessen the critical NCO shortages by providing combat training and promotion to Sergeant to top graduates of Basic Training. SMA George Dunaway (1968 – 1970) was an avid supporter for institutionalizing professional development. He provided input on the creation of the Non-commissioned Officer Educational Development Concept (NCOEDC). This educational concept recommended training that was compatible to the grade of the Soldier. SMA Dunaway advised on the three levels of training Soldiers should receive: Basic – to train

E-4s their responsibilities at the company level, Advanced – to focus E6/E7s on the bigger picture of the Army, and the Senior NCO course – E8s received training on responsibilities of senior staff positions. These three courses would be formalized programs of instruction, consistent within Military Occupational Specialties (MOS) and offered to career minded Soldiers. SMA Copeland was the advisor on the finalization of SMA Dunaway's recommendations for standardized training. SMA Copeland assisted in the transformation of the initial NCOES system, and provided input for the development of training for 41 basic MOS' and 43 advanced courses, to include the branch immaterial Sergeants Major Academy. In 1972, the Sergeants Major Academy received its first class of students. The second class of students to attend the academy would include SGM William Connelly, who later became the sixth SMA, and the first SMA to graduate from the Academy.

To further NCOs professional development, SMA William Bainbridge (1975 – 1979) developed the Soldier Qualification Test (SQT). The SQT would be a method of certifying a Soldier in the duties of his MOS. Later SMA Gates recommended replacing the SQT with the Self-development Test (SDT). This test was also a gauge of a Soldier's proficiency in his job but was more cost effective for the Army. SMA Connelly assisted in the development of the Noncommissioned Officer Development Program (NCODP) in order to sustain the combat readiness of a unit by focusing on developing leadership and professionalism within the NCO corps. SMA Connelly was also instrumental in the creation of the Common Task Test (CTT), which tested Soldiers on critical battlefield skills appropriate to their job skill level, a test that is still in use today.

SMA Glen Morrell (1983 – 1987) saw the need for NCOs in combat support (CS) and combat service support (CSS) to receive the same primary leadership training that NCOs in the

combat arms (CA) branches received. He recommended merging the separate primary leadership courses into one. Based on this recommendation the Primary Leadership Development Course was the first MOS immaterial leadership training. In addition, expansion of the Sergeant Majors Academy enabled all First Sergeants and Command Sergeants Major to receive formalized training. Although SMA Morrell emphasized the need to send the best Soldiers to NCOES training, sometimes units would send Soldiers who were not contributing to the unit. During SMA Gates' tenure, NCOES became a requirement for promotion. To further this effort, SMA Kidd rallied for ALL promotable Soldiers to attend NCOES, not just those who had met their promotion cutoff scores.

Supporting Soldiers in their pursuit of promotion and ensuring that the system for promotion was fair and equitable has been issues that have always involved SMAs. SMA Wooldridge saw a need to centralize the promotion process for the E-8 and E-9 grades. Until that point units based promotion on vacancies within the unit and the NCO had to be a part of that unit in order to receive a promotion. With a centralized promotion system, all eligible NCOs had the opportunity for assignment to a unit that had a vacancy. SMA Wooldridge was also instrumental in standardizing the promotion point scoring system. This created a quantitative measure that Soldiers could use to evaluate themselves and their promotion potential against their peers. Eliminating the specialist ranks became a project of SMA Connelly. He saw no need for positions that served no purpose, held no authority, and diminished the respect for the Soldiers who held those positions. SMA Morrell was instrumental in the implementation of the secondary MOS in an attempt to balance significant shortages within some critical MOSs. This secondary MOS also gave Soldiers an opportunity to affect their own careers.

SMA Dunaway wanted to further the professionalism of the NCO corps by allowing Soldiers to have control over their own careers. His input was crucial to the creation of what we now know as the career management branches. These branches would assist the Soldier throughout their career allowing them to advance as much as their skills and determination would allow. SMA Dunaway also formalized the way SMAs were selected. He recommended a board which would allow more input from the Army Staff rather than the CoS making the selection. Tied to a Soldier's career management was the creation of the Enlisted Evaluation Report (EER) and later the Noncommissioned Officer Evaluation Report (NCOER). SMA Gates would implement the NCOER, a rating system created entirely by NCOs.

Operational readiness is more than equipment and tactics; morale and welfare of the Soldier is what makes the Army the force that it is. Every SMA has taken the input from the field and considered the effects that decisions at higher echelons will have on the individual. Sergeants Major of the Army have inevitably influenced change throughout the Army by utilizing their personal careers and insight to add variety and experience to their position. Although their written job description has changed from the inception of the position in 1966, their primary duty has always been the Soldier. Through changes to our leadership training and quality of life issues that affect a unit's discipline, the SMA has had a positive effect on many systems in the Army. As the Army transforms to meet the needs and requirements of the Nation, the SMA has been the senior enlisted advisor to the Army Chief of Staff. As the Army continues to change the SMA will be there ensuring that the Soldier will always be first.

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