

UNCLASSIFIED

Running Head: History Essay

History Essay

1SG Dennis K. Crigger

United States Army Sergeants Major Academy

Class # 35

SGM Faithette R. Foreman

15 August 2009

UNCLASSIFIED

Abstract

Empowerment in today's military is an essential part of the Non Commissioned Officer (NCO) Corp. In American military history the empowerment of the Non Commissioned officer has drastically changed since the Vietnam War era to the current conflict of Global War on Terrorism with Operation Iraq Freedom and Operation Enduring Freedom. The knowledge of the NCO has been the key to the success of many battles and conflicts over time. This paper will focus on the empowerment of the NCO and how it has changed since the Vietnam War and transitioning through Desert Storm and Desert Shield and concluding with the current conflict of Operation Iraqi Freedom and Enduring Freedom. We will also examine the thought as to whether we have fully prepared our NCO Corp for the additional responsibility that comes with knowledge and power.

There have been many comparisons made relating to how the empowerment of the NCO and how it has changed since the Vietnam War to the current conflict in support of Global War on Terrorism. “Empowerment can be defined as the process of transferring decision-making power from influential sectors to poor communities and individuals who have traditionally been excluded from it” (Combat 1). Empowerment of the NCO has brought on a new meaning since the Vietnam War. There are two ways to look at and examine this theory. During the Vietnam War era the Soldiers were younger and in many cases less mature. This was generally due to the draft that was initiated during that time. Thus, the Soldiers were younger in age and were less empowered (with decision-making authority) than they are in today’s military. As we moved into the 1990’s and Desert Shield/Desert Storm kicked off the American Soldier were a little more mature and the traditional NCO was a little older in age. Coming into the next generation of NCO we saw that the NCO was in some cases younger in age but was still empowered more decision-making authority than the old time NCO of the Vietnam War days. The two main questions relating to all of this is, “Have we trained and prepared them for the job of a Non Commissioned Officer?”, and “Are we promoting NCO or are we just promoting Soldiers to Sergeants?”

The Vietnam War was considered the turning point in history for the NCO in American military history. “Mid way through the Vietnam War, the quality of the American NCO had declined. General William DePuy noted that the impact of the lack of experienced NCOs in the 1st Infantry Division was untrained Soldiers” (Vietnam, 46). Although Sine the Vietnam War was considered one of the longest Wars in history, Soldiers would rotate in and out of a combat theater rapidly which in most cases would not give that Soldier ample time to get settled in with

a unit and not give them enough time to learn how or what empowerment was all about. During the Vietnam Era the United States Military was faced with the problem that they did not have enough qualified and trained Soldiers to serve.

As the United States of America transitioned from the Vietnam War era through the Cold War and into the Desert Storm era of 1991 the role of the NCO began to change in the American Military. “Desert Storm had many of the features of the dramatic campaigns of liberation during World War II, but it also demonstrated the considerable recent change that had occurred in the Army. This change included the further evolution of expeditionary combat, the affirmation of an American training revolution, the maturation of precision-guided munitions, the introduction of battlefield digitization, the fluidity between conventional combat and operations other than war, and the reinforcement of a concept known at the time as the Total Army. Noncommissioned officers were key players in each of these accomplishments” (Hogan, 204). With the NCO playing a key role in Desert Storm era the empowerment of the NCO has started a transitional phase.” It is clear that the major improvements in Army capabilities manifested during Desert Storm were largely the result of the noncommissioned supervision that brought them into effect at the soldier’s level” (Hogan, 209).

After the attacks of 9/11 we embarked upon a new war. This will forever be known in history as the Global War on Terrorism. This was will be fought not only on the home front but in foreign lands of Iraq and Afghanistan. The role of the NCO will take another step forward into the 21st century. In the new era of the NCO there have been many changes since the Vietnam War era. The empowerment of and the NCO stepping up and raising the bar has greatly changed over time. “Today, NCOs lead their troops in combat in both Iraq and Afghanistan. These NCOs continue the history of those who went before them. They retain their duties and responsibilities

given to them during the American Revolution and the role as a small unit leader received on the Western Plains. They are leaders that train and prepare their Soldiers for combat as they did in World War I, World War II, Korea, Vietnam and Desert Storm and throughout our Nation's history"(2009 Year of NCO,1).

The NCO of today is more vestal and is in most cases better and more highly trained then the Soldier during the Vietnam or even Desert Storm eras. The current day NCO is in some ways ore proficient and in some ways less proficient with warrior drills and battle tasks. The NCO of today is by far a more technical savvy NCO. They have more available means in which to talk to and mentor their assigned Soldiers.

The empowerment of the Vietnam era NCO was less empowered that the current day NCO. This was mostly due to the training requirements of then verses what we have in the 21st century Army of today. During the Vietnam era the Soldiers were drafted to military service, sent to the required initial training and sent into combat. During Desert Storm the Soldier's Storm was more of the volunteer force. There was not a draft anymore and every Soldier that was serving was a volunteer. As we moved into Global War on Terrorism the same applied as we were a volunteer army. After the attack of 9/11 there were many folks that decided to come back on active duty to serve their country. This is just another reason you have NCOs that are more empowered in today's NCO corp.

The largest difference between the empowerment of the Vietnam NCO and the NCO of today was how well they were or wee not trained for their mission. The NCOs from the Vietnam War were not trained as well or to the standard that the NCOs of today. With the implementation of the Non Commissioned Officers Education System which was the turning point in the training for NCOs across the board.

Essentially the NCO in American Military History was less empowered during Vietnam and more empowered in current operations due to the improvements in the training curriculum and the more of a volunteer force over the past 40 years since the Vietnam War. Also today's military focuses more on the leadership and empowerment of its NCO corp. As it has been noted many times that 2009 is the year of the NCO and more importantly that NCOs are considered the backbone of the Army. The end result is that the NCO of today is empowered more than the NCO was during the Vietnam or Desert Storm war eras. This was all contributed to the lack of trained NCOs during the Vietnam era as well as the better training and leadership of the NCOs today in American Military History. Better training and better mentorship makes better and more qualified NCOs for the United States Military.

References

2009-The year of the Non Commissioned Officer. Retrieved July 28, 2009.

<http://www.army.mil/yearoftheNCO/home.html>

Combat Poverty Agency working for poverty free ireland. Retrieved July 27, 2009.

<http://www.cpa.ie/povertyinireland/glossary.htm>

Hogan G. (2007), the Story of the Non Commissioned Officers Corp: Washington DC: Center of Military History.

Vietnam—the Crisis of the NCO Corp (2008), H109A U.S. Army Sergeants Major Course (SMC-NRC).