

Running head: KEY TO THE SUCCESS OF THE UNITED STATES ARMY

Empowering the Non-Commissioned Officer

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From the birth of the noncommissioned officer in 1775 during the rise of the Continental Army, the role of the noncommissioned officer has continued to evolve. Friedrich von Steuben was the first officer to truly understand the importance of empowering the noncommissioned officer, by providing Regulations for the Order and Discipline of the Troops of the United States, which outlines the duties and responsibilities of the noncommissioned officers in the United States Continental Army. Enemy tactics, new equipment, and the development of a noncommissioned officer professional education system will prove to be the corner stones that lead to evolution of the noncommissioned officers. The United States Army unique ability to empower their Non-Commissioned Officer Corp has lead to its success (Arms, 1989).

The War of 1812 would prove to be the turning point for the United States in the establishment of a professional military. The United States up to this point in its military history relied heavily on state militias to defend the home lands. This proved to have very mixed results. On one hand the militias while under the leadership of professional Soldiers executed some of their mission well, but for most part there tends to be more problems when having to utilize militias than solutions. Examples of this are as follows:

1. States militias had problems providing an accurate numbers of personnel that were available for the defense on the nation.
2. States refused the use of militias outside of state boundaries.
3. Large numbers of state militia personnel would retreat once they encountered enemy forces.
4. Due to the lack of formal military training, militias were harder to command and control.

When peace was proclaimed in February 1815, President James Madison met with congress at the Blodgett's Hotel and acted promptly in the creation of a small but efficient professional army. Congress voted on a peacetime army consisting of 10,000 men, forming two divisions; one in the north commanded by MG Jacob Brown, with four territorial departments, and one in the south, commanded by MG Andrew Jackson consisting of five territorial departments. This would only mark the beginning of many changes that the army would face in becoming the world's most powerful and professional fighting force (Stewart, 2005).

During the Mexican War the army was forced to cover larger areas with a smaller number of troops and an even smaller number of officers available to command these units. It was during this time that officers began to see that the experienced NCO was able

to provide proper leadership in the execution of a mission, even in the absence of officers. Enemy tactics and techniques from this point on would force officers to rely on NCO's to act in their absence or in the absence of command. Some of the techniques employed by enemy forces would be the use of hit and run tactics as well as operating in smaller units. These changes in turn will force the United States military to make changes of their own to counter these new techniques. Since the military at this time doesn't have enough officers to command elements at a level smaller than platoon, NCO's would be charged with this responsibility. This in turn would foster a stronger belief in the NCO Corp by officers. The change in enemy tactics and techniques would only serve as one of the milestones in the empowerment of the Non-Commission Officer. The next milestone would be the advancements in technology.

As the world began to make advancements in the area of technology, so too did the armies of the world in their efforts to create a more powerful and effective fighting force. With the creation of newer types of equipment, comes the need for the United States Army to change in the way it operates. The creation of the machine gun for example, requires a three man team to operate the weapon system to its full capabilities. This weapon system would be placed in a support position along with

other machine guns, to provide suppressive fire for advancing troops, forcing the element to work independently from the main body of the unit under the charge of an NCO. This once again forced officers to depend on the NCO to carry out missions without their direct observation. The days of soldiers standing shoulder to shoulder awaiting the orders of the officers charged to lead them, before being able to take action is beginning to come to an end. The creation of the tank would prove to be an even bigger step toward the empowerment of the NCO, not only where NCO's required to maintain the equipment and personnel they where charged as the commander of that vehicle. This new technology required NCO's to make decision without the direct supervision of the officers appointed over them. As technological advancements start to grow, so too did the need to educate the NCO on not only how to operate these new pieces of equipment but how to maintain as well as employ them (Stewart, 2005).

The establishment of basic training as well as the establishment of a Non-Commissioned Officer Education System (NCOES) would prove to be the final milestone in the empowerment of the NCO. For the first time in U.S. military history the Non-Commissioned Officer would receive formal military training, just as the officer appointed over them do(although not at the

same scale). In 1986 the Department of the Army would make it mandatory for NCO's to successfully complete the Primary Leadership Development Course (PLDC) for promotion to the grade of staff sergeant. This would only be one of many changes that the NCO would encounter in the development and refinement of the Non- Commissioned Officer Education System.

The Non-Commissioned Officer of the United States Army has come a long way since its humble beginnings in 1775. The advancement in military operation and function are due in part to; the advancement in technology, the ever changing tactics and techniques of friendly as well as enemy forces, and the education of the NCO Corp. The success of our military is due in part to our unique ability to adapt to our changing environment and our ability to empower the NCO Corp. No other military in the world prepares and equips its NCO Corp in the manner in which the United States does, nor does any other military rely on its NCO Corp to operate so independently. All of this is visible for the world to see as they view or conduct during operation in Iraq, Afghanistan, and many other countries around the world.

The NCOs Corp. was never designed to replace the officer Corp. but it has evolved to the point that it greatly enhances it. It is this partnership between the NCO and Officer Corps that make the United States Army the strongest military in the

world. The United States Army continues to go through many changes, however it's through these changes and adaptation that the NCO Corp. has earned it's right to be empowered.

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