

Running head: EMPOWERMENT OF THE NONCOMMISSIONED OFFICER

Empowerment of the Noncommissioned Officer

H101 Argumentative Essay

MSG Jerry Wiley

United States Army Sergeant Major Academy

Class Number 58

SGM Devega, FA, M11

Mar 16, 2008

Outline

Thesis Statement: The ever-increasing empowerment of the American noncommissioned officer over time is due to three fundamental causes, resulting in responsibilities shifting down the chain of command. From the battlefields of the Revolutionary War to the current Asymmetric threat in Iraq; the United States noncommissioned officer has been in a constant state of transformation.

- I. Introduction
- II. Roles and responsibilities established with the Continental Army
- III. Generational warfare and technological advances in combat systems
- IV. Current and future trends
 - A. Education
 - B. Duty Positions in combat
- V. Conclusion

Empowerment of the Noncommissioned Officer

The history of the United States Army and of the noncommissioned officer began in 1775, with the birth of the Continental Army. The American noncommissioned officer did not copy the British. He, like the American Army itself, blended traditions of the French, British, and Prussian armies into a uniquely American institution. As the years progressed, the American political system, disdain for the aristocracy, social attitudes, and the vast westward expanses further removed the U.S. Army noncommissioned officer from his European counterparts and created a truly American noncommissioned officer. (ARMS 1986) Have the duties and responsibilities changed over the last two hundred years or are they inherently still the same?

The three primary causes for the transformation in roles and responsibility are; first the changes in warfare tactics from a linear formations controlled by officers as first seen in Revolutionary War. The second is Generational warfare and technological ad fourth-generation warfare against asymmetric threats advances in combat systems that increased the speed of war and strategy. The last factor is the noncommissioned officers education system that has evolved since the post World War II era, resulting in increased duty positions within the planning and staff of operations.

The first fundamental cause was due to the United States adapting the European warfare techniques of 19th century during the Revolutionary War. Little standardization of NCO duties or responsibilities existed until General Friedrich von Steuben standardized the duties and responsibilities in what is now known as the Blue Book. The tactics of the day called for each unit to form a line across the battlefield. The NCOs were to close the gaps occasioned by casualties and encourage men to silence and to fire rapidly and true. (*von Steuben) The technology for this period was a .75 caliber smooth bore musket. Soldiers were expected to be

able to fire a shot every 15 seconds. Enemy engagements greater than 75 yards were very hard for a soldier to deliberately hit a man sized target.

The men fired volleys, sending a mass of balls toward the enemy, some of which would hit. In order to fire volleys in unison, they formed into units of two or three ranks (lines) deep, shoulder to shoulder. The tactics were not designed to shoot down the enemy until he gave way, but to break up his organized lines so that your side could then march forward, with the NCOs in many cases carrying the unit colors to ensure a cohesive, organized and linear fashion, and charge with the bayonet. The American Army found that they could not fight and win with those tactics alone. The drilling of individual tasks in training was given to the NCO for the first time.

The second cause of the expanding role was the first modern war for the United States the Civil War. This demonstrated the importance of industrial mobilization. Modern communications such as the use of the telegraph in military operations greatly improved communicating strategy over long distances. The railroad system allowed armies to move large numbers of troops and equipment quickly and efficiently. These innovations would impact on noncommissioned officer rank structure and pay, with more technical fields receiving higher pay. As the war progressed, organizational and tactical changes led the Army to employ more open battle formations. These changes further enhanced the combat leadership role of the noncommissioned officer. Along with the deadly effect of new technologies such as the rifled musket on mass formations of infantry, the effective use of the new machine gun, and new artillery to name a few (Modern Strategy 2007).

World War I required the first massive training of men the United States had seen. NCOs trained four million men, one million of whom would be sent overseas. A typical training day started at six, with breakfast at seven o'clock. Training assembly began at eight, and the work

day ended at four. Corporals were the primary trainers during this period, with lessons emphasizing weapons and daytime maneuvers. Twelve hours of training were devoted to proper use of the gas mask, with a trip to the gas chamber included. After viewing the differences in American and foreign NCO prestige, General Pershing suggested that special schools for sergeants and separate NCO messes should be established. The performance of noncommissioned officers in the American Expeditionary Force seemed to validate these changes. (ARMS 1986)

During World War I much of the wars combat involved trench warfare where hundreds of soldiers would fight for terrain one foot at a time. The war had turned into a stalemate, and to break the stalemate both sides turned to new technical devices such as the light and heavy machine gun, the airplane, the U boat, and poison gas to outmaneuver the enemy, once again expanding the roles of the noncommissioned officer.

In the last half of FY 1971, the Army implemented the Noncommissioned Officer Education System. This progressive system is designed to educate NCOs on subjects and skills needed by them to enhance their performance and abilities. At first NCOES consisted of three levels of training: Basic Noncommissioned Officer Course (to provide basic leadership skills and a knowledge of military subjects needed at the squad and team level), Advanced Noncommissioned Officer Course (to provide the student with advanced technical and leadership skills), and the Sergeants Major Academy (which prepared senior NCOs to perform duties as sergeants major at the division and higher headquarters). (*USASMA AHR 72-73)

The Noncommissioned Officer Education System grew in the 70's and 80's and today includes the Warrior Leader Course (which emphasizes how to lead and train and the duties, responsibilities, and authorities of NCOs), in addition to the above-mentioned courses.

All NCOES courses have common cores written by the U.S. Army Sergeants Major Academy at Fort Bliss, Texas. The Academy also operates three senior NCO courses outside NCOES, which are designed to train NCOs for particular positions. These courses are the First Sergeant Course (a sister course is operated in Europe), the Operations and Intelligence Course, and the Personnel and Logistics Course. (*USASMA AHR 86)

The emphasis on NCO education was stressed in 1986 with the issuance of MILPO Message Number 86-65. This message established the Primary Leadership Development Course as a mandatory prerequisite for promotion to staff sergeant. This was the first time an NCOES course actually became mandatory for promotion. (*USASMA AHR 86)

In 1987 the Army's emphasis on NCO education was again clearly exemplified by the completion of a new Sergeants Major Academy building. This 17.5 million dollar, 125,000 square foot structure allowed the Academy to expand course loads and number of courses.

As the Noncommissioned Officer Education System continues to grow, the NCO of today combines history and tradition with skill and ability to prepare for combat. The NCO retains the duties and responsibilities given to them by von Steuben in 1778, and these have been built upon to produce the soldier of today. (ARMS 1986)

The last factor is the military's current trend to transformation into a future force turning from a Cold War structured organization into a modular balanced force. The new force is built to serve as an expeditionary force that can sustain the long war against terrorism and at the same time be ready across the full spectrum of operations needed globally. Restructuring the force to successfully undertake fourth-generation warfare against asymmetric threats, the noncommissioned officer continues to be a valuable leadership asset in the new Brigade Combat team. The information affects of a tactical operations center (TOC) NCO brings both experience

and continuity resulting in smooth operation and a functional TOC at all times. The technical aspect continues to grow with various Command and Control computer systems, resulting in increased levels of training and reasonability for all levels of the noncommissioned officer corp.

Tactical combat operations conducted on the ground in fourth-generation warfare against asymmetric threats in Iraq and Afghanistan have given NCOs a “must have” authority to make split second decisions once reserved only by an officer. The modern NCO is a pentathlete and must be able to make complex decisions quickly while understanding the second and third order effects of the decision making process and how it affects areas such as cultural awareness, perceived political favoritism, economic impacts, etc. With the Projected outlook of persistent global conflict the noncommissioned officers role will continue to grow and merge in the leadership of the future army.

We have discussed the fundamental causes for the expanded role in the noncommissioned officer corp. it is charted in our history from warfare tactics starting from the Revolutionary War, to the current fourth-generation warfare against asymmetric threats. Advances in technology, and decentralized combat operations have increased the speed of war and strategy. As the speed and technology increased the roles of the NCOs have mirrored the needed thought education and experience. I believe this trend will continue into the next generation where the pentathlete NCO will be more educated both from a formal college (College of the American Soldier), as well as a balanced globally aware leader.

References

Arms,L (JAN1986) *United States Army Sergeants Major Academy Annual Historical Review*.

Retrieved at www.cgsc@us.army.mil

History of the US Army Sergeant Major Academy, 1 July 1972-73December 1974,

USASMA

Strategy (2007, July). *Modern Strategy and Tactics*. Retrieved November 5, 2007, from

<http://www.infoplease.com/ce6/history/A0861328.html>

Von Steuben,B. (1782) *Regulations for the Order and Discipline of the troops of the United States*

