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Technology, Tactics and Professional Development, the Road to Empowerment

MCPO Kurt.A.Rugenius

United States Army Sergeants Major Academy

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SGM Glen Scott Caspari

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## Abstract

The noncommissioned officer's (NCO) ability to adapt to three main factors, technology, tactics and NCO professional development are responsible for the ever-increasing empowerment of the NCO. The initial strategy for NCO development was gaining experience through on-the-job training. Despite early attempts at NCO professional development and education, on the job training remained the preferred method of NCO development. It took a leadership crisis in the Vietnam War to push NCO development forward to meet the Army's leadership goals. Even though, the early academies had their flaws, constant attention and improvement continues to lead the NCOES in meeting the needs of the Army while institutionalizing the professionalism of the Soldier.

## OUTLINE

Thesis: The noncommissioned officers' ability to adapt to technology, tactics, and professional development led to the empowerment of the noncommissioned officer as these factors create new roles and are critical in producing strong leaders.

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## Introduction

Baron Frederick Wilhelm von Steuben, Bvt. Major Emory Upton, and Gen John J. Pershing understood the effects of technology, tactics and the need for professional development of noncommissioned officers. Each saw the potential in noncommissioned officers to lead men and assume roles of greater responsibility. Overtime, the empowerment of the noncommissioned officer continues to grow, through leadership development and the ability to adapt to critical new roles driven by three major factors: technology, tactics, and noncommissioned officer professional development. Despite these officers' vision, the empowerment of noncommissioned officers has been long and slow process. There are those who propose officers know their Soldiers best and can develop their Soldiers through on-the-job experience and on-the-job training. As history demonstrates, during World War I, World War II, and the Vietnam War, on-the-job experience and on-the-job training fails in fully preparing the noncommissioned officer to meet the roles of increased empowerment.

## Technology

By creating new roles, advancements in technology consistently plays a major role in the empowerment of the noncommissioned officer. During the Revolutionary War, the non commissioned officer's primary role was a file closer. American forces armed with technically advance French made muskets' combined the weapon's superior accuracy with an aimed volley fire, whose devastating effect which the set it apart from the rest of the world's Armies. Baron Von Steuben's Blue Book Regulations created the noncommissioned officers role as a battlefield leader by placing the responsibility of the aimed volley fire with the noncommissioned officer.

Technological advances in the fields of artillery, communication and transportation, created new roles for the noncommissioned officer. During the post American Civil War era,

technological improvements in field gun accuracy, rate of fire and its ammunition's killing effect, changed the Army's tactical use of artillery from direct fire to indirect fire. In 1868, the U.S. Army re-opened the Artillery School of the U.S. Army for both officers and noncommissioned officers. The two-year course offered a high degree of specialized training that paralleled the officers' course while placing special emphasis on the duties of the noncommissioned officer.

Through technology, the noncommissioned officer's new roles created rank structure and improved NCO pay. To increase the retention of technical field soldiers, the 1908 Congress authorized a targeted pay increase for those with specialized technical skills. In the 1930's, responding to new technologies, the Army created a technician rank of corporal, sergeant, and staff sergeant. Though this system disappeared in 1948, it reappeared in 1955 as a specialist. Today, technology continues to influence the Army and the battlefield while shaping and reshaping the roles of the NCO Corps. Noncommissioned officers operate, maintain and bring to force computers, communications equipment, and weapon systems, pushing the NCO collective worth and empowerment forward.

### Tactics

In a domino like effect, as technology advances, it spawns new tactics designed to take advantage of or countermeasure the new technology has increased threat. Technological advances at the time of the Civil War accelerated the NCO's development as a battlefield small unit leader. The Civil War's linear tactics were slow to change in meeting new rifle technology and its associated lethality. The technology of rifled barrels, high capacity magazines, and improved ammunition propellants, yielded greater accuracy, increased rates of fire, and higher casualty rates among units employing linear tactics.

In, 1862, Union Major General Silas Casey recognizing the devastating effect of improved weapon technology on linear tactics, published the *U.S. Army Infantry Tactics for the Instructions, Exercises, and Maneuvers of the Soldier, a Company, a Line of Skirmishers, Battalion Brigade, or Corps D'Armee*. In his publication, Casey emphasized the Color Sergeant's combat role of dictating the unit's pace and bearing. This crucial tactical duty, once reserved for officers, further established the NCO's role as a battlefield small unit leader. Furthermore, Casey envisioned improved weapons technology's mass effect of on battle casualties. The devastating effects of improved weapons technology could leave a unit void of officer leadership, leaving the noncommissioned officer in command. This led to Casey's foresight of the need for open tactics and the necessity for NCOs to receive training in giving orders and providing battlefield leadership. As the Civil War progressed, Union Brevet Major General Emory Upton took notice of advancing weapons technology and new tactics effect on the battlefield. Supplementing Casey's manual, Upton's *Tactics* simplified battlefield maneuvers opening up battle lines with skirmishers carrying breach-loading rifles. Due to an officer's limited span of control, the noncommissioned officer led and maintained order in the skirmish lines.

From the skirmish lines of the Civil War battlefields, the noncommissioned officers role as a small unit leader continued to grow and adapt to new environments. During the Indian Wars, tactics derived to meet the expansiveness of the American West resulted in noncommissioned officers leading cavalry and infantry over hundreds of miles of desert and prairie. During the Philippines Insurrection, noncommissioned officers gained valuable experience leading patrols through the jungle environment. The decentralize tactics of the Vietnam War, resulted in the noncommissioned officer accepting a greater role as a combat leader. More than

ever, in this era's unconventional warfare, NCOs are leading teams in the War on Terror throughout the world.

### Professional Development

Too slow in coming, noncommissioned officer professional development and education is a cornerstone to the empowerment of the noncommissioned officer. Professional development enhances the role and status of the noncommissioned officer by blending both leadership and technical expertise, preserving a ready force. For the most part of the Army's history, most officers agreed that on-the-job training was the preferred method of developing the noncommissioned officer corps. This philosophy left many noncommissioned officers unprepared for the future. As the roles and responsibilities of the noncommissioned officer grew, on the job training was failing to produce and retain the leaders needed to accomplish the Army's mission. In World War I, General John J. Pershing noted the lack of status and prestige of American noncommissioned officers when compared to their British counterparts. To correct this disparity, General Pershing recommended increasing the responsibilities and status of noncommissioned officers through the advancement of the leadership training. In the post World War II theatre, the noncommissioned officers tradition of on the job training was again failing to produce the quality and quantity of noncommissioned officers needed for the post World War II duties in Europe and Japan. To meet the Army's needs for well-trained noncommissioned officers, the Army took its first real step towards NCO education by creating a career-guided program and a service wide system of noncommissioned officer academies. A major resultant of the career-guided program was the military occupational specialty system (MOS). The focus behind the system was to provide the Army with a ready, well-rounded, trained noncommissioned corps. Unfortunately, the few noncommissioned officers attended because the

training was relegated to just the American Expeditionary Force, on-the-job training remained the norm for corporals and sergeants.

During the Vietnam War, a shortage of experienced NCOs coupled with high turnover rates left the noncommissioned officers corps ill prepared to execute their duties. The consequence was a crisis in leadership, which resulted from an inability of leaders to communicate with subordinates.

In 1971, the Army took the long road approach to NCO shortages and preparedness by implementing the Noncommissioned Officer Education System (NCOES). Starting with a three level education system and quickly adding a fourth level, the noncommissioned officer had a structured vehicle to receive technical training and leadership skills to become successful team, squad and section leaders (Fisher, 1994). At the advanced levels of NCOES, the system provided training in the performance of duties as a first sergeant and sergeant major.

The NCOES continues to shape the Army's NCOs as professional soldiers. Today, NCOs lead small teams on tactical missions throughout the world. Senior NCOs serve as leaders of multi-national and joint service teams. Thanks to NCOES, the NCO is better educated, better prepared, and sustains the Army's all volunteer force. The Army's NCOES proves leaders are made, not born.

### Conclusion

The three factors of technology, tactics and professional development and education are the vehicles that continue to influence the empowerment of the NCO as a technician, a tactician and a leader. While technology creates new roles for the noncommissioned officer to fill, it also influences tactics. Tactics, no matter how sound, are only as good as the Soldiers who led them. Today's NCO led small teams contribute greatly to the successes in the War on Terror. Largely

due to lessons Soldiers learn through the Army's professional development programs; leadership roles continue to push down the chain of command to lower and lower ranks. Though slow in coming, I feel the road to noncommissioned officer empowerment is well paved, but not complete. I feel a select number of Sergeants Major could reach the capstone of noncommissioned officer empowerment, unit command.

One only needs to look as far as at the United States Coast Guard who empowers a select number of noncommissioned officers to assume ultimate responsibility of command. Each day chief petty officers command as Officers in Charge, all enlisted crews of Coast Guard cutters and shore units. The Chief, like the Army NCO, whose charge is the care, training, standard bearing and leading of sailors, demonstrates bridging the gap between command and caretaker is a road shared.

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