

Our NCO Corp: History Essay

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History Essay

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Abstract

The Army's Noncommissioned Officer Corp truly is the backbone of the Army. In the last 230 years, the Army has changed dramatically with regard to the Noncommissioned Officer Corp and the responsibilities they share. History will show that although the process to empower Noncommissioned Officers has been slow, it has had a dramatic effect on today's Noncommissioned Officer and in shaping today's Army. This empowerment has improved the quality of not only the Noncommissioned Officer Corp, but the Officers that work with us and the lower enlisted that we take care of. In the essay that follows, three factors that have led to the ever-increasing empowerment of Noncommissioned Officers will be examined; Noncommissioned Officer pay, the Noncommissioned Officer Education System (NCOES), and the Enlisted Personnel Management System (EPMS). Counter arguments will also be discussed.

Three factors have led to the ever-increasing empowerment of the Noncommissioned Officer. Pay is by far the most significant factor in my opinion. I determined early on in my career that I wanted to obtain the rank of Sergeant for the pay incentive as well as the pride and level of responsibility. History has shown us that during the Army's infancy however, Noncommissioned Officers weren't paid much more than their lower enlisted counterparts. During the winter of 1779 and 1780, nearly all Soldiers failed to be paid at all (American Revolution/Geography, Pg 1). In 1775 under General George Washington, Sergeants were paid a sum of forty-eight shillings a month while Privates received forty shillings a month (Time Honored Professionals, Pg 7).

The inadequacy of Noncommissioned Officer pay was due to a lack of status that the Officer's ordinarily had. It took several years before the importance of Noncommissioned Officers would be recognized and changes would be made. Following the Spanish-American War, the Army struggled with maintaining skilled Soldiers. Too often was the case that Soldiers would leave for the civilian sector due to higher paying jobs (Time Honored Professionals, Pg 7). In 1908, Congress passed an act that increased a Corporals pay to twenty-one dollars a month and a Privates pay to fifteen dollars a month (Time Honored Professionals, Pg 19). Slowly the gap between the Noncommissioned Officer and the lower enlisted Soldiers increased.

On today's military pay scale, there is a definitive difference between a Noncommissioned Officer's pay and that of the Private E-1. According to the latest pay chart from the Defense Finance and Accounting Service, a Sergeant makes nearly two thousand dollars a month in base pay while and Private makes nearly fourteen hundred dollars a month (DFAS, Pg 1).

Although it has taken several years for Noncommissioned Officer's pay to finally reach its rightful place, we must ensure that we continue to work hard to earn that pay and keep the respect and status demanded of our pay grades.

Another factor that has contributed to the ever-increasing empowerment of the Noncommissioned Officer is the Noncommissioned Officer Education System. This four tier education system improves leadership skills, while preparing Noncommissioned Officers for levels of greater responsibility. Initially created in 1971, the formal Noncommissioned Officer Education System as we know it today was a long term approach to educating the Noncommissioned Officer Corps (Time Honored Professionals, Pg 21).

Warrior Leadership Course (WLC) is a non-Mission Occupational Specialty specific school focusing on small leader tactics, land navigation, counseling of Soldiers, and moving as small units usually at the team level. The Basic Noncommissioned Officer Course (BNCOC, to become the Advanced Leadership Course ALC) is a Mission Occupational Specialty specific school focusing on specific occupational issues and tactical situations at the Staff Sergeant or Squad Leader level. Advanced Noncommissioned Officer Course (ANCOC, to become the Senior Leadership Course SLC) is also a Mission Occupational Specialty specific school focusing on specific occupational issues and tactical situations at the Sergeant First Class or Platoon Sergeant level. The United States Army Sergeant's Major Academy (USASMA) is the pinnacle of the Noncommissioned Officer Education System. Thus far, the training for the Sergeant's Major Academy has focused on issues relating to our positions as senior

Noncommissioned Officers and our abilities to take care of Soldiers and prepare them for combat.

Although content regarding instruction at these schools has changed somewhat over the years, the basic premise of the training still holds true to the primary goal of the Noncommissioned Officer Education System. Educate our Noncommissioned Officers and prepare them for positions of greater responsibility. I have always enjoyed attending Noncommissioned Officer Education System schools. The chance to brush up on tasks that are not ordinarily performed or gathering new information or techniques that can be brought back to the individual units. I can't wait to attend the resident course of the Sergeant's Major Academy.

A third factor that has contributed to the ever-increasing empowerment of the Noncommissioned Officer is the Enlisted Personnel Management System. Introduced in 1975, the Enlisted Personnel Management System has increased career opportunities for many Soldiers while eliminating opportunities for others (Time Honored Professionals, Pg 21).

The Enlisted Personnel Management System is a process that supports enlisted personnel readiness and the soldier's professional development and personal welfare (EPMS, Pg 1). The Enlisted Personnel Management System sets fourth standards by which all enlisted Soldiers can be promoted or reduced in rank. In years past, many Soldiers did not have a career path to follow and there was no standard by which promotions were given or received.

The Enlisted Personnel Management System covers training that Soldiers are required to complete for their particular Mission Occupational Specialty as well as

training that is not required. Once again, Soldiers have the knowledge of what training is expected throughout his or her career and what is required to achieve the next position of greater responsibility.

The Enlisted Personnel Management System covers reclassification of Soldiers if the need arises. There may be times when a particular Mission Occupational Specialty is over strength and the need arises to reclassify Soldiers to another Mission Occupational Specialty. If a particular Mission Occupational Specialty is eliminated for some reason, there will be a need to reclassify Soldiers into other Mission Occupational Specialties.

Enlisted evaluations are covered under the Enlisted Personnel Management System. Standards are in place that require Noncommissioned Officers in the pay grades of E-5 and above to be rated annually regarding their performance. The Noncommissioned Officer Evaluation Report provides ratings in five main categories that offer insight as to the Noncommissioned Officer's overall performance for that rated period.

Although only a few of the categories in the Enlisted Personnel Management System have been identified above, one gets the idea of the system in place that assists not only the individual Noncommissioned Officer, but the Army's mission as well. Making a more skilled and satisfied Noncommissioned Officer benefits everyone involved.

Although the Army has taken steps to empower the Noncommissioned Officer Corp, this issue should receive new attention. Although Officers get paid drastically more than their Noncommissioned Officer counterpart, the Noncommissioned Officer does much more of the work. I understand that Officers are paid more because of the

difficult decisions that need to be made, but it was the decisions on the ground by Noncommissioned Officers in Iraq that meant the difference between life and death.

Getting to an Army school has always been a difficult task for Noncommissioned Officers. Many Officers are sent to Army schools before even leading a single Soldier while Noncommissioned Officers are denied the ability to attend schools because their current duty position doesn't necessarily require it. This is unacceptable.

There is improvement that can be made in the Noncommissioned Officer Education System and the Enlisted Personnel Management System. There must be greater discretion on who is sent to a Noncommissioned Officer Education System school because too many Noncommissioned Officers are going and failing the course or can't pass their Army Physical Fitness Test on the first day. If a Noncommissioned Officer goes to a Noncommissioned Officer Education System school and fails his or her Army Physical Fitness Test, they should be banned from attending for twelve months and counseled. I disagree with the current policy of sending them back to their unit to pass their Army Physical Fitness Test and then sending them their 1059. What are we telling our Soldiers when we can not pass an Army Physical Fitness Test?

As far as the Enlisted Personnel Management System, Noncommissioned officers with combat arms or combat support Mission Occupational Specialties need to be rotated more often through leadership positions so that they don't end up being Master Sergeants and having never led a team, squad, or platoon. I saw this in Iraq and it put Soldiers lives at risk. This may also be a result of Noncommissioned Officer Evaluation Reports not accurately reflecting the actual performance of the Noncommissioned Officer.

Noncommissioned Officer Evaluation Reports are also covered under Enlisted Personnel Management.

America's Army is by far the best in the world. No other Army can complete as many tasks to such a high standard and do so in such a short period of time. This is due to the caliber of Noncommissioned Officer that the Army has today. More is expected of us and we have met each challenge with vigor. The current mechanisms in place that create more knowledgeable and better paid Noncommissioned Officers are the reason. I would say that the Army has done a good job preparing its Noncommissioned Officers for today's challenges and believe that caliber of Noncommissioned Officer will only improve over time.

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