

Time-Honored Professionals

The NCO Corps Since 1775



"Dress on the Colors, Virginia, 1864." This painting is one of eighteen in the print set, The Noncommissioned Officer: Images of an Army in Action. The print set (CMH Pub 70-36) may be requisitioned through the U.S. Army Publications Distribution Center, Baltimore, Md.

Time-Honored Professionals
The NCO Corps Since 1775

Center of Military History
United States Army
Washington, D.C., 1989

Second Printing

CMH Pub 70-37

Introduction

As you graduate from the Primary Leadership Development Course (PLDC), you have a good idea of what the Army expects you to be, know, and do as a noncommissioned officer. You have studied a number of techniques and specialties, from squad tactics to military ethics. Most important of all, you have studied leadership. The emphasis on leadership in your training has been very deliberate. Whatever else you are in the Army—infantryman, communicator, trucker, medic, or tanker—as an NCO, you will always be a leader.

When you carry out your duties as taught in PLDC, you are following the example of the best NCOs who went before you. By always acting as a professional soldier, you bring benefit to yourself and others. Your troops gain by your counseling and training. You gain professional status, the respect of others, and the satisfaction of doing your best within an honored tradition. In the history of the NCO corps there are countless examples of outstanding service. As you become familiar with the history of the NCO corps, you will not only learn some exciting stories of daring and expert service to the nation, but you will also find many role models of highly motivated, well-trained NCOs.

Today's NCO corps is composed of thousands of professional volunteer men and women who are skilled technical specialists and experienced leaders. But this was not always true. Before NCOs could get the training, responsibility, and recognition that you have today, the Army had to make many changes in doctrine and use of technology. For long periods, NCOs served with little public respect and often with inadequate resources. But NCOs of years past served with distinction through these and other hardships and gave the nation impressive demonstrations of loyalty as well as skill.

Although NCOs today are better trained and more professional than ever, the achievements of your predecessors have contributed much to your career. Get to know them, and you will see that the NCOs of the past are as much your comrades in arms as the men and women with whom you trained in PLDC.





JULIUS W. GATES
Sergeant Major of the Army

CARL E. VUONO
General, U.S. Army
Chief of Staff

Washington, D.C.
1 May 1989

Time-Honored Professionals
The NCO Corps Since 1775

The noncommissioned officer provides the essential link between the Army's commanders and its men and women. To discharge this responsibility successfully, the NCO has always found it necessary to perform several important functions simultaneously. The NCO must, first of all, be a small unit leader, whether that unit is an infantry squad moving against an enemy-held position, a maintenance section in the rear, or a clerical staff at a corps headquarters. Successful leadership in turn demands excellence in many tasks. All NCOs must know themselves and their troops. They must be both tactically and technically proficient. They must understand mission requirements and communicate them clearly, making sound and timely decisions. They must always set a good example. And finally, they must take responsibility for unit performance.

At the same time, the NCO is a trainer, ready to teach troops everything they must know—from the proper wearing of the uniform and the observance of military customs and traditions to marksmanship and physical training. Above all, the NCO must fully understand military professionalism and be able to pass along to others whatever knowledge is required to accomplish the mission, whether it be infantry tactics or the operation of a fuel depot.

Finally, the NCO is the guardian of standards. This rather grand phrase means that the Army looks to the NCO to ensure that soldiers are properly motivated and trained to perform their mission. To ensure that standards of training and conduct are met, the NCO must be ready to reward and punish justly and fairly. On a day-to-day basis, it is the NCO who tests, judges, rewards, and punishes the men and women of the Army.

Throughout the long history of the U.S. Army's noncommissioned officer corps, these three functions—small unit leader, trainer, and guardian of standards—have figured in the daily life of the individual NCO. Beyond all changes of time and place, these essential functions have endured. In the end, whether serving as a file closer in the Continental Army or a squad leader in an assault battalion in one of today's light infantry divisions, the NCO has remained the backbone of the Army.

The Small Unit Leader

The idea of a noncommissioned small unit leader is older than the United States Army. The very first colonists who built Jamestown had squad leaders. Their mission was called "watch and ward." The early American colonists were always outnumbered by Indians, and some of the tribes were hostile. To protect the settlement, a guard force of young men was formed. The men chosen to lead

this guard acted just like today's NCOs in charge of security. They drew up duty rosters, posted and relieved sentries, inspected posts, and kept a record of tours of duty.

NCOs also served as leaders on the battlefield. In our early wars they exercised this leadership as file closers. Armies in the eighteenth century used "linear tactics"—that is, they fought standing in lines facing the enemy, as in close-order drill today. As units advanced and turned on the battlefield, gaps inevitably appeared in the ranks. It was the NCO's essential duty to close these gaps. Posted directly behind the line, the NCO would order the men, under enemy fire, to close ranks and advance in cadence, a notable test of discipline and willpower.

In later generations the NCO inherited a battlefield duty once reserved for the officer corps—carrying the unit colors. This was an essential tactical duty, unlike the ceremonial function of today. In the days before radios, the color guard provided battlefield communication. As he held the colors high, the color sergeant, along with his guard of corporals, became the visible point on which the line of troops dressed, wheeled, and advanced to meet the enemy. To serve as the color bearers, the major target of every enemy marksman, was a badge of special bravery in the nineteenth century Army.

As time went on, new weapons forced changes in tactics and in leadership roles for noncommissioned officers. Rifles with greater range replaced smooth-bore muskets, breech-loaders replaced muzzle-loaders in both the infantry and artillery, and semiautomatic firing was achieved with the Gatling gun. These weapons caused high casualties in formations arrayed in lines on both sides, with a predictable result: linear tactics began to give way to a more open type of warfare.

The new open tactics had an immediate impact on the role of NCOs in battle. Without surrendering their responsibilities as file closers and color bearers, NCOs now also had to lead scouting and skirmishing parties forward to locate enemy forces. This new role was especially emphasized after the Civil War on the western frontier. NCOs in both the cavalry and infantry led patrols that might last several weeks and cover hundreds of miles over the plains and into the mountains in search of hostile Indians. The corporal's eight-man squad was a tight-knit unit which trained and fought together, ate around the same fire, and slept in the same tent.

Squad leaders further expanded their role in the early twentieth century. In the wake of the Spanish-American War, American forces in the Philippine Islands faced a determined resistance that continued for several years. NCOs led short- and long-range patrols of one or more squads into the jungles of Mindanao and other islands in search of guerrillas. This conflict, called the Philippine Insurrection, gave small unit leaders valuable combat experience in a jungle environment, an experience which would be repeated many times in later years.

The tactics that evolved during the trench warfare of World War I brought additional responsibilities to the squad leader. Small unit leaders in that deadly fighting had two main battlefield duties: controlling fire from the trench line and leading patrols across no-man's-land to scout enemy positions and capture prisoners. The fire team became a distinct unit, especially for new weapons such as small mortars and machine guns. For the squad leader this meant an adjustment. Instead of taking care of seven individual soldiers, he now had his own fire team and fire team leader to supervise. To assist in the supervision of the troops in this new era, the Army established a new noncommissioned officer rank, the platoon sergeant, to serve as an intermediary between the first sergeant and the company's squad leaders.

In World War II the squad was reorganized to include twelve men, two of whom were NCOs. The Army's rapid expansion from its small peacetime size to over seven million men and women placed a special burden on the NCOs. To them fell the task of leading small units in 288 infantry regiments and many more separate battalions (including armored infantry and rangers). To meet its small unit leadership need, the Army promoted to NCO rank soldiers who showed leadership potential regardless of age or experience. The experiment was generally successful. Most of the young NCOs performed well, despite responsibilities of increasing complexity. In the combat arms, for example, weapons had developed to such an extent that a squad leader in World War II commanded more firepower than an infantry regiment with attached artillery in the nineteenth century.

Although the most critical kind of small unit leadership took place during actual combat, NCOs also had to shoulder many responsibilities behind the lines. Even during the Revolutionary War, a small number of NCOs were involved in directing and managing the essential elements of administration and support. The company first sergeant took care of personnel records, the quartermaster sergeant supplied units, the mess sergeant fed the troops, and the musicians provided communications. All of these men were recognized leaders. As the demands of warfighting grew, other new support fields—and more small unit leadership responsibilities—appeared in the Army. World War I saw the appearance of technical specialists, who supervised soldiers filling the many new, highly technical occupations associated with modern warfare such as radio operators, truck drivers, and mechanics.

This marriage of technology to war opened a division between NCOs who were troop leaders and those who were specialists. Sometimes, when the Army needed special skills, young specialists received NCO status and higher pay than troop leaders with many years of experience, with a consequent impact on the latter's morale.

The Korean and Vietnam Wars, however, put renewed emphasis on small unit leadership. Intense small unit action by enemy forces had to be countered. In both wars squad leaders and platoon sergeants set ambushes and led patrols



"The Skirmish Line" by Gilbert Gaul *(Courtesy of the U.S. Military Academy Museum, West Point, New York)*

that might last several days, just as NCOs had done on the western plains in the late nineteenth century and in the Philippines in the early twentieth century. For Army leaders at all levels there was something new to contend with: Communist ideology, which targeted every citizen. This brought a new element to small unit leadership. NCOs now had to show an awareness of psychological operations and a sensitivity to how civilians were touched by the war.

The NCO of two hundred years ago achieved and held his leadership position by different means than NCOs today. Through most of the history of the Army, NCOs were chosen by company commanders with the approval of the regimental commander. Accident and luck contributed to the making of an early NCO. Large size and a booming voice were considered necessary traits of an effective NCO. If he was an immigrant born in Ireland or England, he had a much better chance for promotion than men who spoke little or no English when they joined the Army. Whatever specialized knowledge the junior NCO needed could be learned by simply following and copying the actions of a senior NCO. And the techniques of leadership often came down to browbeating soldiers into doing things without explanation.

Reflecting the changes in the role of the NCO, noncommissioned officers today rise to positions of responsibility by a truly professional system. NCOs are promoted by commanders but only after mastering certain skills and passing required tests. Personal favoritism plays no part in the process. NCOs today learn to do their jobs by completing carefully planned basic and professional training experiences. When it comes to specialized MOS training, the quality of instruction and variety of specialties—for example, avionics technician and remotely piloted vehicle crewmember—are beyond the wildest dreams of earlier NCOs. Today's NCOs learn different styles of leadership—authoritarian, participative, and delegative—and apply them in appropriate situations. NCOs make sure their troops understand their mission—why it is important and how to accomplish it. Browbeating the troops has no place in the Total Army. Although an impressive appearance—what is called "command presence"—is desirable in leaders at all levels, the logic and professionalism of an NCO's decision making and orders are much more important than raw muscle.

When most people think of leadership in the Army, they think of the battlefield. Of course, leadership is important in the combat arms, but leadership today is just as important to soldiers in the combat support and combat service support specialties. This seems strange at first, but when we remember that the modern battlefield is not a fixed place between two lines of infantrymen, it becomes easier to understand. The battlefield now is a place of constant movement. The point of contact between two armies will shift as the result of "close operations," "deep operations," and "rear operations." Contact in all these areas may happen at the same time. Obviously, the modern battle can reach beyond soldiers in the combat arms and touch those in combat support and combat service support specialties. This means that every soldier and NCO must be prepared for combat at any time. For example, a sergeant who is a personnel administration specialist has to be ready to take a squad into the field and participate in offensive and defensive operations.

Conversely, even if an NCO's primary MOS is in the combat arms, he needs so much technical skill to get promoted into the NCO ranks that he becomes in effect a technical specialist. For example, if an NCO is assigned as a squad leader on a Bradley Fighting Vehicle, he needs to know how to operate and maintain the vehicle itself as well as to operate a 7.62-mm. coaxial mounted machine gun, a 25-mm. chain gun, two TOWs, three LAWs, communications gear, and night vision equipment. Thus, the split that opened between troop leaders and technical specialists in the World War I period has closed in today's Total Army. Every small unit leader today has to be technically and tactically proficient. The troop leader and the technical specialist no longer work in different worlds. In today's Army they exist side by side in every soldier and noncommissioned officer.

In more than two centuries, small unit leaders in the U.S. Army have thus

experienced continuous change. The units they led went through an evolution, from the militia detail to the eight-man squad, the twelve-man squad, and the modern platoon and company. Small unit functions also went through an evolution, from the colonial "watch and ward" security and defense mission to combat assault and the great variety of specialized missions that are shared in the twentieth century Army.

The Small Unit Trainer

The effective small unit leader must also be a small unit trainer. If a unit is going to accomplish its mission, every soldier in the unit must thoroughly know how to do his or her part in the overall mission. Teaching the "how-to" of mission accomplishment is the small unit trainer's responsibility. Although training today includes the full range of duties, skills, and missions required by a Total Army fully prepared for combat, effective training, as always, begins with the individual soldier in the small unit.

During much of the history of the U.S. Army, the company first sergeant had the primary responsibility for training the individual soldier. Because of his many years of experience, the first sergeant was looked upon as the expert on everything enlisted men needed to know—weapons, tactics, regulations, and the customs of the service. He was also a storehouse of information on the unofficial ins and outs of putting together a successful career. As the highest ranking noncommissioned officer in a company, the first sergeant supervised subordinate NCOs in their training role. He drew up the training schedule and, when it was approved by the company commander, made sure it was carried out. If a young squad leader was weak in a necessary skill, the first sergeant took him aside and personally demonstrated how it should be done. This close, personal supervision remained a common method of small unit training until the World Wars of the twentieth century, when frequent personnel transfers and the need for large numbers of trainers and leaders made it obsolete.

From the days of the Continental Army until well into the twentieth century, small unit trainers spent much time drilling their soldiers. As soon as a recruit had signed his enlistment papers he was put in a squad and taught how to march in close order. Small unit trainers instructed and drilled their soldiers, first individually, then collectively, in the "School of the Soldier," the "School of the Squad," and the "School of the Company." Whether a soldier stayed in the Army for only the three- or five-year first enlistment or a full thirty years, close-order drill was a part of his routine almost every day. There was a perfectly logical reason for this continuous drilling. In the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, close-order drill had a direct relation to combat. Armies fought in close order as they carried out the linear tactics of the time. When they ordered their troops to "column left" and "right oblique," noncommissioned officers were practicing the movements

they would use on the battlefield.

There were other advantages of close, personal demonstration and close-order drill. These methods, especially close-order drill, were effective in helping the soldier to make a clean break with civilian life and to develop a feeling of unity in a group of strangers. In the less technical, less diverse Army of the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, personal demonstration and drill were the best ways to get everyone doing the same things at the same time. When an NCO led his squad through the care and cleaning of the rifle by handling and cleaning each part in sequence, he was training them by drilling them. Those who needed additional work to master a skill got it when the squad leader offered personal demonstration and directed more drill by the squad. Thus, when squad leaders trained their men, they used drilling techniques more often than other methods.

When a promising soldier gained promotion to corporal, he entered a group that thought of itself as different from the troops and trained differently than the troops. Senior noncommissioned officers did not train other NCOs by drilling on the parade ground. New NCOs learned their duties from senior NCOs by the informal, age-old method of on-the-job training. If they needed coaching, they usually got it from their seniors after hours in the separate NCO part of the barracks. For nearly a century and a half after the Revolutionary War there was no formal school system to pass along the collective wisdom of senior NCOs. With its heavy reliance on OJT, the training of NCOs remained basically an apprentice system.

With the advance of technology after the Civil War, the reliance on drill and apprentice training methods began to be seen as inadequate. A first sergeant could no longer master all the knowledge required to train all soldiers in his company. The Army had made a start in specialist training by opening an artillery school at Fort Monroe in 1824. But the school operated only on an as-needed basis and did not offer an enlisted course every year. After the Civil War, more specialty training was offered in communications, meteorology, and medical care. When the Army began using the gasoline engine in the early twentieth century, additional specialty training became available in the operation and maintenance of motor vehicles. But for troop-leading NCOs, and especially infantry, training by drill and OJT remained the major methods well into the present century.

When the Army had to prepare for two World Wars, change in small unit training came quickly. The American tradition had been to maintain only a very small Regular Army in peacetime, then to raise a large, mostly volunteer force in wartime. Most NCOs in the Regular Army were used to train volunteers before getting into combat themselves. But experienced small unit trainers were soon spread too thin to handle the huge influx of recruits during the two wars. The Army had to fall back on a faster version of the old OJT. Young soldiers who quickly grasped tactical and technical concepts in their own training cycles were



"Steuben at Valley Forge" by Edwin Austin Abbey *(Courtesy of the Pennsylvania Historical and Museum Commission)*

promoted and made training cadres and squad leaders. The speed with which the Army had to build up and ship units overseas, and the numbers of soldiers involved, made it impossible, however, for NCOs to show the same detailed concern for soldiers that eighteenth and nineteenth century small unit trainers had demonstrated.

In some respects training in today's Total Army is similar to training in years past. General concepts remain the same. Officers set standards, and NCOs train soldiers and small units up to those standards. Training begins with the individual and proceeds to the unit. And the best training is continuous. But in its planning, conduct, and evaluation, training today is much different than in the past.

Planning for effective training today proceeds from large unit mission to individual role. From a clear understanding of the unit mission, a Mission Training Plan (MTP) is written for every subordinate command level. The MTP combines both the *how to train* and the *what to train* of the unit. The lowest level MTP is then broken down into mission-essential soldier skills and tasks. Individual training can now begin.

Individual training develops the technical proficiency of each soldier. Building on each soldier's MOS, small unit trainers reinforce and extend

individual skills by several methods: sustainment, train-up, and cross- and supervised on-the-job training. To take an example from the infantry, one squad mission is preparation of a defensive position. To train soldiers for such a mission, the small unit trainer must isolate the individual skills involved: approaching the objective, preparing fighting positions, planning fields of fire for various weapons, and using camouflage, to name only a few.

In turning from individual to collective training, the present-day system relies on the old building-block method. As first used by the leaders of the victorious Continental Army during the Revolution, training began by creating skilled soldiers, then skilled squads, then skilled companies. Collective training builds teams able to accomplish combat missions by coordinating the performance of skilled individuals. An NCO applies collective training when, for example, he teaches and demonstrates the tasks of every soldier in the crew of a 105-mm. howitzer. The artillery crew's training does not end when each man has mastered his assigned task, but continues until each can perform all tasks.

Drill has an important place in small unit training, but today it means much more than close-order movement. Drills are sets of detailed responses to specific situations. They include such activities as dismounting a vehicle under fire and operating a crew-served weapon. Team leaders, crew chiefs, and squad leaders conduct drills in a "talk through–walk through–run through" sequence under increasingly realistic conditions until the team or squad is proficient.

Noncommissioned officers in today's Army fill central roles in both individual and collective small unit training. First, NCOs teach soldier skills. They then reinforce what they have taught by methods such as "hip-pocket" training, in which soldiers use gaps in scheduling to review skills such as first aid and the way to call for fire. Second, NCOs test the skills they have taught, both individual and collective. Individual performance is evaluated with the Individual Training Evaluation Program, which has three parts: a hands-on supervisor's evaluation, a hands-on common task test (CTT), and a written skill qualification test (SQT). Collective performance is tested in the Army Training and Evaluation Program. The goal of all this training and testing is, of course, combat readiness.

The small unit trainer's role in the big picture of Army-wide training is of primary importance. No unit will accomplish its mission unless every soldier and team can carry out its mission. Only effective small unit trainers can ensure that every soldier, crew, squad section, and team is tactically and technically proficient.

The Guardian of Standards

The NCO small unit leader and trainer is also the guardian of standards. These three roles are closely related. To lead effectively, NCOs must train their troops in the tactics and techniques necessary for mission accomplishment, and

to train their troops properly, NCOs must enforce standards of conduct. Historically, the setting of standards has been the responsibility of officers. But the teaching and enforcing of standards, both of soldier discipline and soldier skills, has been the responsibility of NCOs.

At the time of the American Revolution, European armies were held together by the most severe discipline. Enlistments in Europe and England were often as long as twenty-five years, pay was very low, and punishments were cruel by today's standards. To reduce desertion and motivate troops for battle, the threat of flogging, even death, was held over soldiers' heads. Frederick the Great of Prussia set the tone of the period with his view that soldiers should be more afraid of their own NCOs than of the enemy. These practices were considered natural in an age when aristocrat commanders thought of their soldiers not as citizens, but as expendable commodities.

From the founding of the Continental Army, the European tradition of harsh discipline was rejected. Frederick von Steuben, the Army's first trainer and himself a product of the old Prussian tradition, quickly came to understand that it would take more than threats to get American recruits to perform well on the battlefield. General George Washington agreed, though he continued to believe that flogging was a suitable punishment for many offenses. Both leaders recognized that the American soldier was an individual citizen, not an interchangeable commodity. Citizen-soldiers would have to be led by inspiration and disciplined by reason.

Of the roles performed by NCOs—small unit leader, trainer, and disciplinarian—the last has been the least affected by technological or social change. Small unit leaders have worked with tactics that have changed after almost every war. Trainers have taught the use of ever more sophisticated equipment, from the flintlock rifle to electronic communications. But when NCOs teach discipline today, they pass along to their soldiers the same idea that Steuben taught at Valley Forge: that for everything a soldier does there is only one acceptable standard. As the guardian of standards, the noncommissioned officer must ensure that every soldier in his or her charge meets that single standard of excellence.

Noncommissioned officers must discipline others by first disciplining themselves. They know what standards of conduct are acceptable, and they hold themselves to those standards. Whether leading squads in the Revolutionary War or supervising personnel sections in the 1980s, noncommissioned officers have always been closely watched by subordinates. For that reason, NCOs must discipline themselves to present a positive example at all times. They must keep themselves thoroughly prepared in the tactics and techniques of their fields. If NCOs present a negative example, for whatever reason, they encourage their subordinates to violate accepted standards of conduct. Serious discipline problems will soon develop.

From enforcing standards in their own conduct, NCOs move on to enforce



"Cavalryman's Breakfast" by Frederick Remington *(Courtesy of the Amon Carter Museum, Fort Worth, Texas)*

standards in others, first individual soldiers and then units. When Steuben trained his Model Company at Valley Forge, each member of that company then went to another unit to pass along the same standards. That process has been at work in the Army ever since. Individual soldiers learn standards as recruits and during subsequent training cycles. Each time they learn standards, they carry them to other units. In this way standards are continually reinforced throughout the Army.

Throughout the history of the Army, the process of teaching standards began with the idea of a single standard for each task that a soldier must master. All NCOs defend that standard. There is one way for every soldier to wear the uniform, one way to drill in close order, one way to assault a fortified position, one way to perform preventive maintenance on a tank engine. The standard becomes a device for concentrating the soldier's abilities and energies on each of those tasks and missions. When a standard is accepted by soldiers, it becomes almost an instinct. Moreover, disciplined soldiers can observe other individuals or units and know whether or not standards are being properly met.

Noncommissioned officers in every period of Army history have occasionally had to deal with soldiers who have not accepted service-wide standards.

Before 1861, NCOs could bring the offender to the commanding officer, who could sentence the man to be whipped. But the NCO had few options to apply before a confrontation developed. In today's Army noncommissioned officers can use various communication techniques to deal with a potential problem. Once the problem is defined, the NCO uses nondirective and directive counseling techniques to change behavior. While this process is time-consuming, its purpose is to strengthen discipline and defend standards without using threats or raising the old fears of physical abuse. Subsequent actions to enforce standards, if necessary, include documented counseling and judicial procedures.

Every unit reaches a crossroads in its development: the point at which individual discipline may or may not translate into collective discipline. If collective discipline fails to take hold, the unit remains nothing more than a group of individuals, even though many are well disciplined themselves. If collective discipline develops, however, the unit takes on a character all its own. The unit accepts the standards that were taught to individual members and then begins enforcing them without being ordered to do so. Soldiers who join such units can immediately sense the collective discipline—and the collective pride—that accompanies it. Individual members do not have to ask how various tasks should be done; everybody knows. The unit accomplishes its tasks and missions efficiently. The unit seems to drive itself, so that officers and NCOs are hardly visible.

The history of the United States Army is full of examples of units that have displayed outstanding collective discipline under great stress. One such unit helped bring security to the frontier. In the years after the War of Independence, American settlers in the Northwest Territory were harassed by Indians supported by British garrisons. In 1790 and 1791 hastily assembled units were sent against the tribes. The Indians defeated both expeditions. Stunned by consecutive defeats, Congress reorganized the Army and put General Anthony Wayne in command. Wayne gathered his force in what is now Ohio. For nearly a year his noncommissioned officers drilled a band of former civilians until they were a disciplined force. So well had Wayne's NCOs done their job that in August 1794 the Americans defeated a superior number of Indians at the battle of Fallen Timbers.

Another example of a disciplined unit succeeding against great odds was provided by the 20th Regiment of Maine Volunteers in the Civil War. As Union and Confederate forces met at Gettysburg in July 1863, commanders on both sides spotted a key piece of terrain called Little Round Top. Troops from both armies moved to occupy the hill; the 20th Maine won the race. But to hold it the rest of the day, the regiment had to turn back six enemy assaults. Although the 20th Maine endured heavy casualties, this disciplined and determined unit held Little Round Top.

Still another example of superior collective discipline was given by the 116th

Regiment of the 29th Division on D-Day in 1944. Landing on OMAHA Beach, the regiment was met by concentrated enemy fire. In the first half hour the 116th lost two-thirds of its men. But the regiment held together, and before noon the 116th was atop bluffs behind the beach, ready to continue the invasion of what the German defenders called "Fortress Europe."

General Wayne's men at Fallen Timbers, the 20th Maine at Little Round Top, and the 116th Infantry on OMAHA Beach could have turned and run in the face of intense enemy fire. But they stayed and fought and accomplished their missions because they had developed strong collective discipline, through the essential work of their NCOs, before the battles began. The success of these units and their NCOs is now part of history. In a larger sense, as the Army's guardians of standards, NCOs embody its institutional memory of excellence.

Professional Development

Professional development is a continuous process in the career of the noncommissioned officer starting on the first day of basic training. The term "professional development" involves those factors that affect an NCO's status in the Army, such as pay, rank, education, and career management. The influence of these four factors on status was not always clearly understood by the Army's leaders. For long periods in the history of the Army, NCOs had to work without those benefits and career programs that convey professional standing.

Pay was a major NCO problem for many years. Not only was it low, but it usually differed very little from the pay of privates. In 1775 privates in General Washington's army received 40 shillings a month, while corporals got 44 and sergeants 48 shillings. Thus, despite the heavy responsibility he carried, a corporal received only ten percent more than the privates he supervised. By 1838 a corporal's pay had risen to $9 a month, by 1854 to $13, and, at the next pay adjustment in 1871, to $15 a month. But a corporal still got only two dollars more each month than a private. A demoralizing reality remained for NCOs: a private who took extra duties for pay could still earn more than his corporal or sergeant, who were ineligible for extra duty pay.

After the Spanish-American War, the issue of pay became critical. The Army found it had to compete with private industry for skilled personnel. The recruit who had the potential to be an NCO also had the potential to be a factory foreman. Congress responded with the first Army-wide pay act in nearly forty years. Under the act of 1908 an infantry corporal received $21 a month and a private $15.

Another issue was that military pay as a whole remained the same for long periods and, occasionally, was even reduced. Congress habitually raised pay to attract recruits during wartime, only to reduce it when hostilities ended and soldiers were no longer needed. For example, in the last year of the Civil War a

corporal was paid $18 a month. Six years later he received $15 monthly. In the 1930s military pay was reduced for a new reason. As the Great Depression worsened, President Herbert Hoover proposed and Congress approved a series of pay cuts that eventually totaled 15 percent for all government employees, civilian and military.

Peacetime pay reductions finally ended after World War II. In 1946 a corporal's monthly pay was set at $90, a private's at $75. Now the difference between NCOs' and privates' pay was enough to preserve the incentive to seek promotion, and for those who achieved NCO rank, their pay was sufficient for them to support families while following a military career. In 1958 Congress created grades E–8 and E–9, giving privates and junior NCOs a chance to strive for both more pay and greater status.

Until the twentieth century certain features of the rank structure also threatened NCO status. For nearly two centuries an NCO's rank was treated as company property. Company commanders selected and promoted their own corporals and sergeants, with the regimental commander's approval. Most NCOs then spent their entire careers in the same company or at least in the same regiment. If an NCO wanted to transfer, he left his rank behind and reported to his new command as a private. This old custom finally ended in World War II. To build up hundreds of regiments rapidly, the Army had to be able routinely to transfer experienced or specially trained NCOs.

Professional education for the NCO corps was neglected even longer than pay and rank. Steuben had made noncommissioned officer training the responsibility of company commanders. But that ideal was not supported by a standardized policy for all NCOs. Only if a company commander took an interest in NCO education did his corporals and sergeants benefit. In the nineteenth century the only formal education offered NCOs, or any enlisted men, was primarily technical.

The situation improved somewhat in World War I. Compared to their British and French counterparts, the hastily promoted American noncommissioned officers were only half-trained. In response, General John J. Pershing directed that special schools for sergeants be established to improve small unit leadership and NCO professionalism. This was a step in the right direction. But the sergeants' schools were held only within the American Expeditionary Forces in France, and after the Armistice they were discontinued. Special schools for NCOs were not revived during World War II, although some leadership training was made a part of all unit training cycles before deployment.

A more lasting impact on NCO professional education came after the war. In 1947 an NCO academy system opened in occupied Germany. The Army attempted to develop service-wide standards for NCO education. The one-month course emphasized leadership skills such as map reading and methods of small unit training. While the course content was useful, some major problems

remained unsolved. Too few academies were opened to reach most NCOs, the quality of instruction was uneven, and the academies prospered or suffered depending upon the changing budgets of parent commands.

The Vietnam War provoked a crisis in NCO education. The small unit nature of the war, its eight-year duration, and the one-year tour of duty in Vietnam combined to cause an NCO shortage, even though some NCOs served three tours in the war zone. The Army's first response was NCO Candidate School, modeled on Officer Candidate School. Following an intensive ten-week course, candidates were promoted to sergeant, and after ten more weeks as basic training instructors, they were sent to units in Vietnam.

The Army's long-term response to the NCO shortage was the NCO Education System (NCOES). Implemented in 1971, NCOES offered a three-level educational progression including both MOS-specific and nonspecific stages. NCOES aimed at giving NCOs more attractive career opportunities while providing the Army with more capable NCOs. With the transition to the All-Volunteer Army in 1973, NCOES was expanded to four levels of professional education beyond MOS training. PLDC, of course, is today the first of these professional levels of training. The capstone of the system is the instruction given at the Sergeants Major Academy at Fort Bliss, Texas.

While NCOES improved the competence of the NCO corps, it did not provide clear patterns of career development and promotion potential. Those issues were resolved by the Enlisted Personnel Management System (EPMS), introduced in 1975. EPMS expanded professional opportunities while at the same time improving skill levels. Dead-end career fields were eliminated by grouping related specialties, thereby opening career paths from E-1 to E-9 for all soldiers. At the same time, to remain eligible for promotion, soldiers had to demonstrate their abilities at required levels through Skill Qualification Tests.

In 1980 another professional system related to career management became available. The NCO Development Plan (NCODP) amounted to formal NCO leadership training. A "doing" rather than "testing" experience, NCODP enables NCOs to apply in their own units the training and skills learned in NCOES and EPMS. A major reason for the effectiveness of NCODP is its relation to tradition. Just as NCOs for over two hundred years informally exchanged information on their duties in quarters or on pass, they now gather in more formal NCODP sessions to examine professional topics.

Today, the status of NCOs as professionals is abundantly clear to both officers and soldiers. Their pay is competitive with that of their civilian counterparts. The formal Army-wide education system allows NCOs to develop tactical and technical skills. The personnel management system clearly describes career paths and preserves incentives. Because NCOs acquired these professional rewards, a better paid, better trained, and better motivated Army now serves the nation.

From this historical sketch of the U.S. Army noncommissioned officer corps it is clear that until recently NCOs worked under very different conditions from those of today. The changes that have resulted in unquestionable professional status for NCOs have come particularly fast in the twentieth century. As the Army geared up for a major American international role, many old practices were abandoned. Pay was made more adequate and competitive with civilian employment. Rank was recognized as belonging to the NCO, not his unit. Troop leaders were recognized as equally important as technical specialists, but all troop leaders had to gain more technical competence to keep up with a flood of technology. More status was granted the NCO corps with the addition of two new ranks, and new approaches to NCO training and management were put into effect.

Through all of these changes, NCOs have continued to carry out their historical functions: small unit leader, trainer, and guardian of standards. And regardless of the professional conditions under which they worked, NCOs have always been role models. When NCOs lead teams, crews, squads, and sections, they act as role models for future small unit leaders. When NCOs train soldiers, they act as role models for future small unit trainers. When NCOs guard standards for their subordinates, they act as role models for future guardians of standards. And when NCOs seek to improve themselves professionally, they act as role models for future professionals. NCOs thus bear a special trust: while carrying forward the best traditions of the past, they also help to shape an Army of Excellence for today and tomorrow.



PIN: 066048-000