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Since the establishment of the NCO corps, soldiers have relied on training, duties, discipline, and formations in order to better prepare themselves and their subordinates. Prior to the 1920's, units performed training at the company level, and there was no standards in which it was performed. This research paper will focus on how SMA William Bainbridge tailored his life in the enhancement of the NCO corps.

During his first years as a soldier, SMA Bainbridge's role in the Army began to shape his whole career. His first training assignment was in June 1943; quickly he realized the importance of strong leadership. He assumed responsibility for his soldiers, but was sure to perform corrective action so that it would not happen again. He chose to attend the Army Air Corps in 1944. However, he was reassigned to the 106th Infantry due to the lack of ground force replacements. Although his dreams of becoming a pilot were gone, he still joined the Army to be a soldier. On December 19, 1944, he was captured by the German Army and became a POW. He spent four months as a POW. During this

time, he learned the importance of soldier care and the importance of a bonded NCO corps. While at one of the camps, the NCO's formed a council to negotiate with the Germans. The council consisted of mostly NCOs, however, if the group felt that another soldier could contribute then they were given a position. The positions were equivalent to ranks found in the military. The conditions in which they lived were still poor, but as a group they were able to change a few things to make their quality of life better.

After WW II, SMA Bainbridge continued to serve in a variety of assignments all around the world. At each stop, he would leave his mark as strong soldier and great leader. At the same time, he would watch and listen to what was going on around him, so that he may learn from others. Communication with his subordinates was always a priority. Even if his company or battalion were not having a formation that day, he would be sure to have one with his soldiers to ensure that the standards of their discipline and duties were being met.

In 1963, he was promoted to SGM in the 28th INF. The position was not new to him because he had performed the duties of SGM several times in the past. After a couple moves between Germany and Ft. Riley, KS, he was sent to

Vietnam. During his time there, he stressed the importance of his senior NCO's to the battalion and brigade staffs. Whenever the command group met or went anywhere, he was sure to have his company's senior NCO leadership included. He felt that the communication between all leadership levels was key. He trusted his officer corps, however, felt that they were over tasked and that the NCO's would pick up the slack. He was also a lead from the front type of soldier. When a soldier is at his limit and ready to quit, he will go that extra mile if their leaders are out in front. In 1966 he left Vietnam and went on to Ft. Benning.

SMA Bainbridge became the SGM for the Infantry Training Center. One of the first things that he noticed was the unnecessary work that was being place upon new recruits. Discipline must be instilled into every new member of the armed forces, but placing undo strain upon them while they are trying to learn hinders their ability comprehend. New recruits also need to be listened to. A lot can be learned for people from different backgrounds and with life experiences. He also tried not to stay in the office too long. A daily routine included visiting not only the training battalions but down to the company and squad levels. He would just sit back and listen to what was going on. From the information he was receiving at the lowest

level, he would go back and create changes that would be best for the soldiers being trained.

The quality of the soldiers that were coming from their basic training to Ft. Benning was steadily decreasing. When he searched for the reason why, he found that many of the basic training instructors had been in place for several years. Knowing that a drill instructor's job requires a dedication like no other military profession, he knew that the turn over should happen more often. Also, the drill instructors at that time were brought in from and job skill in the Army. Therefore, a cook, mechanic, or infantryman could become an instructor if they were chosen. He quickly recommended that his NCO instructors be sent to Ft. Jackson to improve the quality of the soldiers being sent through basic training. This transformation did occur and did produce a better soldier. It only lasted a short while; however, some of these changes became permanent when he became the SMA.

The next plan he faced was implementing a standardized NCO education system. Since the beginning of the NCO corps there had not been a formalized system in place where NCO could be trained on a variety of MOS and leadership attributes. In the past it was primarily a senior ranking officer that realized the importance and saw the need to

educate and train his NCOs. The implementation of NCOCC at Ft. Benning was not the sole idea or responsibility of SMA Bainbridge, but he did leave his mark on the program. The biggest problem for the NCOCC program was the acceptance of the graduates among seasoned veterans. NCOCC students received promotions based on course completion rather than by time or merit. This stigma was quickly removed when the soldiers that graduated from the program began proving themselves performing their missions in Vietnam.

SMA Bainbridge went through a few more assignments before being chosen as the first SGM for the newly formed Sergeants Major Academy. A lot of the legwork for the Academy had already been done prior to his arrival. Once on ground he ensured that every detail was adhered to. The command immediately felt the effects of his arrival. Also his wife, Hazel, was an integral part of the Academy's beginnings. She laid the foundation in which would provide an extensive program for student's spouses. The first major hurdle that SMA Bainbridge faced was convincing Washington that the Academy was worth all the time and money that was being put into it. The Academy's procedures were based on the officer's War college. Senior Army officers felt that the level of training was too high for an NCO. Because of his experience and the trust he had placed in the NCO

corps, he knew that this was not true. From the time he spent as a POW up until this point, the NCO had been one to understand their orders, mission, and surroundings and make things happen. Along with Gen. Haines, SMA Bainbridge convinced them that the curriculum was right on and that the Academy would be a success. Next, SMA Bainbridge wanted to create a proper coat of arms, should patch, and an Academy color. Because of the awkward and heavy insignia in his past, he searched out a jeweler instead of a blacksmith to create the artwork. During the Academy's fifth class, SMA Bainbridge was chosen to become the fifth SMA.

SMA Bainbridge quickly moved to fix the problems in the NCO education system. He secured permanent funding so that all schools would have the tools and recourses needed to train and shape the NCO corps. While performing is numerous SGM duties, he relied heavy on his NCO staff to research and resolve issues. He knew that a problem would be handled quicker and more efficiently if several people worked the issue rather than one commander blowing up about the issue. He brought the same mentality to the position of SMA. He ensured that there were several senior NCOs on the staff to ensure operations would proceed as smooth as possible. He retired from service on 18 June 1979.

Although his military career was completed, SMA Bainbridge's commitment to the armed forces was not complete. For 12 years he was an officer for the United States Soldiers' Home. He continued performing the same way he had his whole career; taking care of soldiers and finishing every last detail.

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