

SIGNIFICANT CONTRIBUTIONS OF THE SERGEANT MAJOR of the ARMY

The first official United States use of the term Sergeant Major was in 1776 in the Continental Army. In 1920 due to the standardization of the enlisted pay grades it was no longer a title of rank or grade. It was re-introduced as a rank in 1958 when Congress authorized the E-8 and E-9 pay grades. The appointment of Sergeant Major of the Army was created on July 4, 1966 by the Chief of Staff of the Army, General Harold K. Johnson. He requested nominations from the field commanders of all the major commands. General Johnson trimmed the list of 4,700 nominees down to 21 and selected the only person serving in Vietnam, William O. Wooldridge.

The Sergeant Major of the Army is a unique rank in the United States Army. The SMA is the senior enlisted member of the Army and is appointed to serve as the spokesperson on enlisted personnel issues. The SMA is the senior enlisted advisor to the Chief of staff of the Army. The SMA duties vary, depending on the Chief of Staff, though he devotes much of his time traveling throughout the Army observing training and talking to soldiers and their families. The SMA also sits on various councils and boards and often testifies before Congress.

With the definition of the Sergeant Major as the senior enlisted noncommissioned officer, the Army wanted to truly recognize these leaders. General Johnson established the Command Sergeants Major Program in July 1967. The Chief of Staff also directed that the insignia of the Command Sergeant Major be changed to make them identifiable. The addition of the wreath around the star was made. Of the first 192 selected in December 1967, five of them would eventually serve as the Sergeant Major of the Army. The program was not extended to the Army Reserve and National Guard until 1974.

In 1967 Army Regulation 600-20, Army Command Policy and Procedure, stated that the position of the Sergeant Major of the Army serves as the senior enlisted advisor and consultant to the Chief of Staff of the Army on problems affecting enlisted personnel and their solutions. Soon after his selection as the eighth Sergeant Major of the Army, Julius Gates stated what he thought his duties would be, “I think the Sergeant Major of the Army’s job is to support and keep the Chief of Staff informed about the enlisted concerns of the Army, and let him know how soldiers are training and living at the canteen cup level.”

In 1977 a Sergeants Major Academy Task Force was formed to develop Army doctrine on the duties and responsibilities of the noncommissioned officer. The Task Force developed Field Manual 22-600-20, The Duties, Responsibilities, and Authority of NCO’s, and when finally printed in March 1980, the noncommissioned officer support channel was finally formalized.

The first Sergeant Major of the Army was William O. Wooldridge. He was sworn in on July 11, 1966 and served until August, 1968. He was born in Shawnee, Oklahoma, on August 12, 1922. He entered the Army on November 11, 1940. He served during World War II in Europe and participated in the North Africa and Sicily Campaigns and the D-Day landings on June 6, 1944. He was appointed Sergeant Major in December 1956, serving in various Infantry units. He was appointed 1st Infantry Division Sergeant Major in June 1965 and deployed to Vietnam. Upon completion of his term as Sergeant Major of the Army in 1968, he returned to Vietnam as Sergeant Major of the Military Assistance Command. Sergeant Major Wooldridge retired after 30 years and 10 months of service on February 1, 1972. As the first SMA, he worked to establish the position of

the SMA. He established invaluable relationships with the various staff agencies in the Pentagon and traveled widely visiting soldiers including several trips to combat zones in Vietnam. To help pass on his experience to soldiers he wrote an article on combat, "So you're Headed for Combat: How to Get Ready and What to Expect," published in the January 1968 Army Digest. He initiated the establishment of the Command Sergeants Major Conference in 1966, which has resulted in many proposals that have improved training, readiness, proficiency, and morale of soldiers.

George W. Dunaway, the second Sergeant Major of the Army, was sworn in on September 1, 1968 and served until September 1970. He was born in Richmond, Virginia on July 24, 1922. He joined the Army in 1940 and served in France during WW II. He was appointed Regimental Sergeant Major of the 505th Parachute Infantry, 82nd Airborne Division in 1952. He served with the 5th Special Forces Group in Vietnam and joined the 101st Airborne Division as it conducted the largest unit deployment by air in the history of the Vietnam War in 1967. He was selected the second SMA in July 1968. SMA Dunaway worked to institutionalize the office of the Sergeant Major of the Army and focused on enlisted soldiers issues. During SMA Dunaway's tenure, the Chief of Staff approved the Noncommissioned Officer Education System (NCOES). The pinnacle was the Sergeants Major Academy at Fort Bliss, Texas.

Silas L. Copeland was sworn in as the third SMA on October 1, 1970 and served until June 1973. He was born in Embryfield, Texas on April 2, 1920. He joined the Army in 1942 and served in Germany as a Tank Commander and Tank Platoon Sergeant in 1945. He landed by assault boat in Korea on July 18, 1950. He was appointed sergeant major in 1954. He served as the Division Command Sergeant Major of the 1st Infantry Division in

Vietnam in 1969. The first class graduated from the Sergeants Major Academy during SMA Copeland's tenure. The Army moved towards an all volunteer force at this time also. SMA Copeland's proudest accomplishment was influencing the NCO corps to change their method of operating, persuading NCO's to change the way they lead troops and to treat a human being with dignity and respect.

The fourth SMA was Leon L. Van Autreve, sworn in on July 1, 1973 and serving until June 1975. He was born in Eeklo, Belgium on January 29, 1920. He joined the Army in August 1941 and served during WW II in Europe. He was promoted to Sergeant Major in 1962. He served as the Sergeant Major of the 20th Engineer Brigade in Vietnam from 1967 to 1969. SMA Van Autreve saw increasing the standards of the NCO corps as his highest priority. He gave NCO's more voice in command decisions, increased professional standards for NCO's, developed the NCOES and encouraged NCO's to have the moral courage to police their own ranks.

William G. Bainbridge served as the fifth SMA from July 1, 1975 until June 1979. He was born in Galesburg, Illinois on April 17, 1925. He entered the Army in June 1943 and was appointed Sergeant Major in 1962. He served in Vietnam from 1965 to 1966. In October 1972 he became the first Command Sergeant Major of the newly created United States Army Sergeants Major Academy and remained there until his appointment as SMA. Among his accomplishments as SMA was securing permanent funding for the NCOES. He valued his work on the Army Policy Council and was instrumental in having senior NCO's placed on the general staff.

The sixth SMA was William A. Connelly, he was sworn in on July 2, 1979 and served until June 1983. He was born in Monticello, Georgia on June 2, 1931. He was ordered to

active duty in March 1954 and served four tours in Germany. He served in Vietnam from October 1969 to November 1970. He was a member of class #2 of the Sergeants Major Academy in 1972. During SMA Connelly's tenure the Army improved in quality of soldiers' education and discipline. He sponsored many initiatives that improved the quality of life for soldiers and their families, which helped recruit high quality men and women to the Army and encouraged them to reenlist. He involved unit NCO's in their soldiers training. He drafted the regulation establishing the NCO Development Program.

Glen E. Morrell served as the seventh SMA from July 1, 1983 until July 1987. He was born in Wick, West Virginia on May 26, 1936. He served in the Army for over 31 years including two tours in Europe, three tours in Vietnam and two tours in Panama. He was a student of the USASMA in 1973-1974 and appointed a Sergeant Major in 1977. During his tenure as SMA the Primary Leader Development Course was established with the Sergeants Major Academy having the duty for developing the common core training for the NCOES.

The eighth SMA was Julius W. Gates, sworn in on July 1, 1987 and serving until June 1991. He was born in North Carolina on June 14, 1941. He entered the Army on August 12, 1958, and served three tours in Germany, two combat tours in Vietnam, and a tour in South Korea. He was a student of the USASMA in 1976-77 and appointed Sergeant Major in 1980. Training was the most critical issue for SMA Gates. The NCO Battle Staff Course, a new NCO Evaluation Report, and the Self-Development Test were established during his tenure. Army Field Manual 25-101, Battle Focused Training, and the NCO Journal as an official publication along with Operations Desert Shield and Storm occurred during his tenure.

Richard A. Kidd was the ninth SMA, sworn in on July 2, 1991 and serving until June 1995. He was born in Morehead, Kentucky on June 24, 1943. He enlisted in 1962 and his career included two combat tours in Vietnam (1966-67 & 1970-71) and multiple tours in Korea and Europe. He was a USASMA student in 1976-77 and appointed Sergeant major in 1980. During his tenure as SMA the NCOES program made the change that linked it to promotion and supported the philosophy of select, train, promote and assign. He supported quality of life issues such as the Better Opportunities for Single Soldiers (BOSS) program and improved health care for soldiers and their families.

Gene C. McKinney was the tenth SMA, sworn in on July 1, 1995 and serving until October 1997. He was born in Monticello, Florida on November 3, 1950. He entered service with the Army in August 1968 and served for more than 30 years. He served one combat tour in Vietnam from 1969-70. He focused on improving professionalism of the NCO and enlisted corps, and on increasing training, education, pay, facilities and opportunities for all soldiers while being the SMA. During his tenure the Army celebrated the 30th anniversary of the establishment of the position of SMA with a conference that all ten SMA's attended.

Robert E. Hall was sworn in as the eleventh SMA on October 21, 1997 and served until June 23, 2000. He was born in Gaffney, South Carolina on May 31, 1947. He entered the Army in February 1968 and served for 32 years. SMA Hall was a graduate of class #26 of the USASMA and served as an instructor upon his graduation. He focused on training and quality of life for soldiers and their families during his tenure as SMA.

The twelfth SMA was Jack L. Tilley, sworn in on June 23, 2000 and serving until January 15, 2004. He was born in Vancouver, Washington on December 3, 1948 and

entered the Army in November 1966. His 34 year career included tours in Vietnam and Fort Benning, Georgia. SMA Tilley left the Army for two years before enlisting again in 1971. He is a graduate of the USASMA and basic airborne course, drill sergeants school and master gunner course. SMA Tilley was serving at the time of the attacks on the Twin Towers and Operations Enduring Freedom and Iraqi Freedom and his focus was on soldier related matters.

The thirteenth SMA is Kenneth O. Preston, sworn in on January 15, 2004. He was born in Mount Savage, Maryland on February 18, 1957 and entered the Army on June 30, 1975. A graduate of the USASMA, SMA Preston has held many leadership positions during his career. His most recent assignment before being assigned as the SMA was as the Command Sergeant Major for Combined Joint Task Force 7 serving in Baghdad, Iraq. His contributions are yet to be written, but to say that he is serving in one of the most difficult eras for the transitioning Army and Army Reserve.

Two former SMA's, William O. Wooldridge and George W. Dunaway were decorated heroes from WW II and Vietnam. SMA Wooldridge was wounded during the battle for the fortress city of Aachen and awarded the Silver Star for gallantry in action. He received a second silver star in the Battle of the Bulge Campaign in December 1944. SMA Dunaway's awards include the Silver Star, the Bronze star with "V" device, the Air Medal with "V" device and the Vietnamese Cross of Gallantry with Silver Star.

There have only been thirteen Sergeants Major of the Army to date to hold this most prestigious position and their contributions to the advancement of the NCO corps and enlisted soldiers are enormous. SMA Preston said, "We have the greatest Army in the world because we have the greatest Soldiers. As the enemy becomes more complex and

lethal, our soldiers deserve the most current and useful equipment to enhance their capabilities and reduce risk to injury or loss of life. I am amazed and impressed everyday with the dedication and determination of these young men and women. It is the soldier who wins wars. The “backbone of the Army” is still the NCO and his soldiers.

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OF
THE SERGEANT MAJOR OF THE ARMY**

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