

**The History of the NCO, 1945 – Present**

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My research covers the end of WWII to present. This was a period of major transition for the US army. Throughout history, the army has always been accustomed to and adapted to change. During this timeframe some of the major changes were new NCO grades, technological advances in weapons and communications systems, standardization of NCOES, and all volunteer army.

In the years immediately following WWII, the NCO corps was dramatically reduced. Reenlistment rates sank out of sight as many draftees shed their uniforms for civilian life. Most of the combat veterans that chose to stay opted for cushy non-combat arms positions. Approximately one half of the reenlisting NCO's did so for only two years and another quarter for only one. Roughly 92,000 joined the army air corps and only 39,000 joined infantry, armor, and artillery units. Of these three quarters of them were PVT's and PFC's. Many of which were former temporary senior NCO's. These were the ranks offered them when they reverted to permanent grades. Centrally controlled promotions and minimum time and grade restrictions froze E-4 to E-6 in place. E-7 was the highest grade at that time. E-4 Corporals were no longer considered NCO's after the technician ranks were removed. Corporals now became rifleman, gunners, and second cooks with no authority in the chain of command. (New Army) NCO's were now family men how went home at night rather than living in the barracks. Earlier retirement was the goal of many and not the traditional free ride.

The end of WWII also brought an end to the large invasions and assaults by division-sized elements. The NCO role as a combat leader became much more important in the Korean War. Due to the rugged nature of much of the terrain many units found themselves advancing at the squad level. During the Korean War the US Army fought for the first time with a totally integrated force.

Company and Battalion Level training was very minimal following WWII. Budget starved and lacking the discipline of the (old army), NCO's and troops suffered alike at the outbreak of the Korean War. General Douglas MacArthur deployed Task Force Smith in July of 1950. Task Force Smith consisted of two short-handed rifle companies, a battery of 105 howitzers, and a couple of weapons platoons. Total manpower was 540 men, mostly unmotivated teenagers. After only seven hours seasoned NCO's saw their new junior NCO's and men abandon their dead and walking wounded, crew serve weapons, and even rifles in their rush for safety. Before long the army bounced back. Discipline improved, and junior enlisted skills increased under the tutelage of Senior NCO's. Most of which learned their trade in WWII.

Emphasis was being placed on education to allow troops to keep up with advancing technology and to enhance soldiers' advancement possibilities. The first NCOES was created on 17 DEC 1949 as the first class of the 2<sup>nd</sup> Constabulary Brigade NCO School. Two years later it became the Seventh Army Non Commissioned Officers Academy. In 1958 the grades of E-8 and E-9 were added to the enlisted ranks. In 1959 AR-350-90 established army wide standards for NCOES. During this timeframe the army also enacted the Army Education Program, which provided the individual soldier a number of ways to obtain a high school or college diploma. The design was to promote and retain excellent NCO's.

In 1965 the first non-advisor combat troops were sent to Vietnam. With much of the control decentralized, Vietnam became a junior leaders war. Most battles and firefights were fought at the platoon or squad level. This necessitated the need for many more combat NCO's. The army created the Non Commissioned Officers Candidate School. Three schools were formed at Fort Benning, Fort Knox, and Fort Sill. These bases were the home of the infantry, armor, and artillery. The three major combat needs in Vietnam. The course was 10 weeks long, after which the graduate was promoted to Sergeant (E-5) and the top 5% were promoted to Staff Sergeant (E-6). These newly promoted soldiers were referred to as shake and bake NCO's. In 1966 Sergeant Major William O. Woldridge was selected as the first Sergeant Major of the Army. The following year the position of Command Sergeant Major was established. Designed to be the enlisted advisor to the commander at the O-5 and above level.

As was the case with previous wars, the post Vietnam army was in dire need of change. Morale was very low, drug abuse was rampant, and racial tensions were mounting. Add to this poor leadership (especially at the junior NCO and officer levels) and the establishment of an all-volunteer army. The 1970's and 1980's saw the advent of the Non Commissioned Officer Education Program. Initially only three courses were offered, Basic, Advanced, and the Sergeants' Major Academy. The Women's Army Corps was growing by approximately 25,00 recruits per year. This required new roles for female soldiers and more female NCO's to train them, including female drill instructors. In 1986 MILPO message 86-65 established the Primary Leadership Development Course (PLDC) as a mandatory prerequisite for promotion to Staff Sergeant. Recently the name was changed to Warrior leader Course (WLC) with more emphasis being placed on combat leadership. The NCO of today retains the duties and responsibilities given him by Inspector General Frederick VonStuben in 1778.

During the post WWII era the NCO corps kept up with the technological advances in weaponry through intensive training and their progressive NCOES. The Vietnam War found the NCO carrying initially the M14 and then the M16A1 standard infantry rifle. While the privates and specialists in their squads manned the machine guns, grenade launchers, and mortars. The major advances during this era were the (big 5). The M1 Abrams tanks, the Bradley fighting vehicle, the UH60 Blackhawk which replaced the UH-1 Iroquois (Huey), the AH-64 Apache, and the Patriot Air Defense Missile System. With the exception of the two aforementioned aircraft, NCO's to this day play a major role in the operation and deployment of these systems. They can be TC's (Track Commanders) on M1's and BFV's, crew chiefs on UH 60's, and ground maintenance and weapons chiefs on the AH 64's. Add to this, improvements in artillery, MLRS, various wheeled platforms and numerous small arms. Today's NCO's play a vital role in the training, maintaining, and deployment of every combat system in the army. Known as the backbone of the army, the NCO is the leader most responsible for individual and small unit training.

Smith was born in El Paso, Texas and raised in Tampa, Florida. He graduated in 1989 from Tampa Bay Vocational Tech High School. Following graduation, he enlisted in the United States Army. Smith served there for thirteen years, eventually rising to the rank of Sergeant First Class.

As part of the 2003 invasion of Iraq, he was assigned to B Company, 11th Engineer Battalion of the 3rd Infantry Division. His company was supporting the 2nd Battalion, 7th Infantry Regiment as it made its way through the Karbala Gap, across the Euphrates River and to Saddam International Airport(BIAP) in Baghdad.

On April 4, 2003, a 100-man force was assigned to block the highway between Baghdad and the airport, about one mile east of the airport. A brief battle was fought, and several Iraqi prisoners were captured. SFC Smith spotted a walled enclosure nearby with a tower overlooking it. He and his squad set about building an impromptu enemy prisoner of war (POW) holding area for prisoners in the enclosure.

Smith and sixteen other men used an Armored Combat Earthmover(similar to a bulldozer) to knock a hole in the south wall of the courtyard. On the north side, there was a metal gate that Smith assigned several men to guard. These men noticed fifty to 100 Iraqi troops who had taken positions in trenches just past the gate. Smith summoned a Bradley fighting vehicle to attack their position. Three nearby M113 Armored Personnel Carriers came to support the attack. An M113 was hit, possibly by a mortar, and all three crewmen were injured.

The Bradley, running low on ammunition and damaged, withdrew during a lull in the battle. Smith organized the evacuation of the injured M113 crewmen. However, behind the courtyard was a military aid station crowded with 100 combat casualties. To protect it from being overrun, Smith chose to fight on rather than withdraw with the wounded.

Meanwhile, some Iraqis had taken position in the tower overlooking the courtyard, just over the west wall. The Iraqis now had the Americans in the courtyard under an intense crossfire. Smith took command of the M113 and ordered a driver to position it so that he could attack both the tower and the trenches. He manned the M113's machine gun, going through three boxes of ammunition. A separate team, led by First Sergeant Tim Campbell attacked the tower from the rear, killing the Iraqis. As the battle ended, Smith's machine gun fell silent. His comrades found him slumped in the turret hatch. His armored vest was peppered with thirteen bullet holes, the vest's ceramic armor inserts, both front and back, cracked in numerous places. But the fatal shot,

one of the last from the tower, had entered his neck and passed through the brain, killing SFC Smith.

At some point before the battle, Smith had written, but not sent, an email to his parents. In it, he wrote, "there are two ways to come home, stepping off the plane and being carried off the plane... it doesn't matter how I come home, because I am prepared to give all that I am to ensure that all my boys make it home."

For his actions during the battle, Sergeant First Class Smith was posthumously awarded the Medal of Honor. On April 4, 2005, exactly two years after he was killed, his eleven-year-old son David received the Medal of Honor from President George W. Bush. Additionally, for his actions in Iraq, he received the Purple Heart and the Bronze Star.

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