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Building Confidence in Soldiers through NCO Leadership

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### Abstract

The purpose of this paper is to discuss how noncommissioned officer (NCO) leadership builds confidence in Soldiers. We will first look at the history of the NCO and discuss how the role of the NCO has changed throughout Army history. Competent and confident leaders produce confident Soldiers. The Warrior Ethos and Soldiers Creed are guidelines for NCOs and Soldiers to follow that reinforce the confidence established in initial entry training. NCOs can attribute their success in training by the Noncommissioned Officer Education System (NCOES) which gives leaders the opportunity to share information and experience that they can later use to impact their Soldiers, unit, and missions. Confident NCOs create confident Soldiers.

### Building Confidence through NCO Leadership

Confidence is built in Soldiers by competent and confident leaders. We only need to look at our NCO Corps to find evidence of such leadership. The more confident the leader, the more confident the Soldier. FM 6-22, Army Leadership defines leadership and covers the creeds, values, and ethics of both noncommissioned officers and Soldiers (2006). Leaders reinforce their confidence and skill sets through training. This vital and pivotal training takes place in the Army's NCOES. Confident and competent leaders throughout history use training, creeds, and values to shape confident Soldiers.

### History of the NCO Corps

Our Army's NCO Corps has a history that reaches back hundreds of years to the beginning of the colonies (Brown 3-4). Brigadier General John S. Brown, Chief of Military History, writes in *The Story of the Noncommissioned Officer Corps* that in colonial times "NCOs merely browbeat the Soldiers to stand fast in the line of battle despite horrific casualties" (Brown 3). It is this type of strength, mental and physical tenacity that the NCO Corps is still known for. NCOs have the ability to encourage, motivate, and ensure the mission is accomplished. One thing a Soldier can count on, whether we are looking in colonial times or the present, is the confident NCO watching over them.

*The Story of the NCO Corps* goes on to explain that "militia units paved the way for the formation of the Continental Army" (Brown 4). Here we see that the NCO Corps is evolving from the British Army to the colonial militia and through the Continental Army. From the birth of the Army in 1775 and for more than two hundred and thirty-two years the NCOs continue to adapt, evolve, and breed confidence in Soldiers. But with the American expansion overseas from 1898-1902, it is evident that the NCO Corps needed training, but "this type of training

would have to wait until after World War I” (Brown 12).

During the Spanish American War, the Army was not prepared to fight overseas, but the NCOs were there with their Soldiers and ensured that the mission was accomplished. Most tactics used were adopted from the time of the colonial militia (Brown 12-13). The Philippine Insurrection yielded a high number of casualties and again the NCO was there in the ranks reassuring Soldiers of their abilities and to press forward in battle.

The Story of the NCO states that World War I brought about change in the ranks. The NCO Corps had to adapt to the “age of modern warfare” (Brown 16). Through the continual change of force during World War I, World War II, and even in Korea the NCO only became stronger more confident and more agile. Through this time of adaptation, as the NCO Corps grew, so did the confidence of its Soldiers. The NCOs role as a “platoon sergeant, squad leader, and fire team NCO” became more apparent during the Korean War and the Vietnam War since small unit tactics proved more favorable (Brown 16-20).

The Story of the NCO tells how the Corps not only suffered great loss of life in Vietnam, but discipline in the ranks as well (Brown 26-27). The need for noncommissioned officers resulted in what is described as “shake and bake” NCOs that lead to dissent in the ranks and a larger, less competent noncommissioned officer (Brown 27). From the time of the Continental Army NCOs were trainers and skilled in their craft, but an emphasis was never placed on being professional. This standard of professionalism came about with the indoctrination of the NCOES system, but the confidence of the NCO Corps. From the conception of the Army until now, Soldiers have drawn strength and confidence from their noncommissioned officers.

### Competent and Confident Leaders

Soldiers' confidence is reinforced through beliefs and values. FM 6-22 publishes those creeds and values that all Soldiers in the Army are to live by (Chapter 4). FM 6-22 displays the Soldiers Creed, the Warrior Ethos, and the NCO Creed. Through these documents the confidence of the Soldier is established and reinforced by their NCO leadership and we see an ever evolving and ever adaptable Soldier and NCO as a result.

#### *Warrior Ethos/Soldier Creed*

The Warrior Ethos cries out to every Soldier of what their minimum responsibilities are. When all else fails, the Soldier can recall that first and foremost they have a mission that they must accomplish. This is evident in the Warrior Ethos as stated in FM 6-22 "I will always place the mission first. I will never accept defeat. I will never quit. I will never leave a fallen comrade" (4-10). Mission, responsibility, and the life of their comrades drives the Soldier's confidence even higher. There is a moral and ethical duty at hand that challenges the Soldier, the Warrior, to continue and hold these truths of mission, victory, and the welfare of their comrade in highest regard.

The Soldiers Creed starts and ends with reminding the Soldier that they are an American Soldier (FM 6-22, 4-10). Not everyone can state this claim and it only reinforces the confidence that the Soldier has in their Army and their nation. The Soldiers Creed goes on to state that we are "Warriors and a member of a team" (FM 6-22, 4-10). The vision of a warrior is that of a strength, skill, and confidence. Soldiers learn the Soldiers Creed in initial training and carry it with them throughout their military service. They are words to live by and increase the confidence of both the NCO leader and the Soldier.

### *NCO Creed*

The NCO Creed reminds NCOs that “No one is more professional than I. I am a noncommissioned officer, a leader of Soldiers” (FM 6-22). The NCO Creed gives guidance in the form of responsibility, competence, and confidence. This creed along with the Soldiers Creed and the Warrior Ethos creates a three-tiered base that supports the confidence of all Soldiers that enlist and ascribe to the Army way of life. It takes the NCO to reinforce these creeds and the words must radiate in their conduct and daily actions.

### The Noncommissioned Officer Education System

The induction of the NCOES set standards Army wide for professionalism, leadership training, and development. Through the NCOES system, NCOs become more competent and confident and produce a more competent and confident Soldier. As a trainer and trainee in the NCOES system, the greatest tool offered in the NCOES is information and experience sharing. NCOES presents the opportunity for noncommissioned officers throughout the Army and throughout the full spectrum of the career management field (CMF) arenas, to share their lessons learned and real-world experiences. During this time of information sharing, training, and professional development the Army produces a more broad-minded NCO and gives the NCO Corps tools to enhance their leadership and their Soldiers. One such tool that is cultivated, groomed, and enhanced is confidence.

### Conclusion

A reflection on the history of the NCO Corps and how confidence has evolved in the troops throughout the years, this reinforced through the Soldiers Creed and Warrior Ethos. Confidence exudes throughout the NCO Creed and the Army continues to produce more competent and confident leaders who in turn build confidence in their Soldiers.

## References

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