

**NCO History Brief**

**SMA: Top Enlisted position in the Army**

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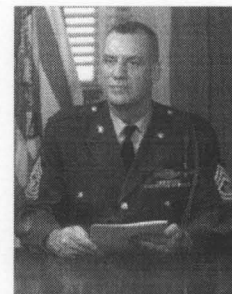
## SMA: Top Enlisted position in the Army

The rank of Sergeant Major (SGM) has been recognize as the top position in the Army for enlisted soldiers from the beginning of time. In 1775, General Washington took command of the continental Army and then established the standardized table of organization for the infantry regiment. This regiment was patterned after the British Army and had a SGM in each regiment or battalion. <sup>LATER</sup> ~~Just a few later~~, in the famous "Blue Book" written by Baron Von Steuben, the responsibilities and duties of the SGM were specified. Surprisingly in 1920, Congress eliminated the SGM rank from the enlisted rank structure as a result of budget. For the next 39 years the Army enlisted ranks consisted of E-1 thru E-7. In 1953 a committee met and one of their goals was to look for ways to enhance the status and prestige of the Non Commissioned Corps (NCO). Five years later, in the Military Pay Bill of 1958, the pay grades of E-8 and E-9 were recommended to be added. However, it was not until 1962 that the chief of Staff of the Army decided the top enlisted rank would once again be called SGM.

In 1964 and again in 1965, the U.S. Army Pacific Command representative at the annual Personnel Sergeants major conference recommended establishing a Sergeant Major of the Army (SMA) position. At this time, the office of the Deputy Chief of Staff for Personnel initiated a study. After researching the issue, the staff made a favorable recommendation to General Harold K. Johnson, Army Chief of Staff, <sup>which</sup> ~~and he then~~ directed the establishment of the SMA and the CSM program. The purpose of the SMA was to serve as the top voice and top advisor over all enlisted ranks, ~~and at the same time~~. General Johnson listed the following ~~four~~ duties and functions that he expected the SMA to perform:

1. Identify problems affecting enlisted personnel and recommend appropriate solution.
2. Advise on the initiation of and content of plans for the professional education, growth, and advancement of Non-Commissioned Officers, individually and collectively.
3. Advise the Chief of Staff on all matters primarily to enlisted personnel, including, but not limited to morale, training, discipline and promotion policies.
4. Available to provide advice to any board or commission dealing with enlisted personnel.

In May of 1966, General Johnson notified the field commanders that he intended to appoint a Sergeant Major of the Army and at the same time solicited their nominations with their recommendations. General Johnson played a critical role in the senior enlisted ranks but he also typed the first duties and responsibilities of the newly created position. In 4 July 1966, the position of Sergeant Major of the Army got established. Once all nominations were received, General Johnson whittled the 4700 candidates down to 21 nominees and then in 11 July 1966 administers the oath to Sergeant Major William O. Wooldrigde as the first Sergeant Major of the Army. He faced awkward and difficult changes. He had no example to look back for guidance, no predecessor with who he could consult. Single-handed, he laid the foundation for how further Sergeant Major of the Army would work with their Chief of Staff. During his tenure, Sergeant Major Wooldrigde also established the CSM conference and the design of the Command Sergeant Major rank.



Sergeant Major George Dunaway became the second SMA on September 1968.

Despite his doubts and questions, he realized that his 28 years of experience had prepared him well for the top enlisted job in the Army. During his tenure the Army Chief of Staff approved a three tiered Noncommissioned Officer Education System

(Basic, Advance and Senior), uniform policy allowing reserve component soldiers be allowed to wear 3 year service strip

reinforcing the "one Army" concept, and probably most important the

Sergeant Major Academy at Fort Bliss, Texas. SMA Dunaway

worked to institutionalize the office of SMA and focused on the concerns of enlisted

soldiers. Soon after taking office, he requested that the Army staff inform him of all

proposed policies that affected enlisted personnel. Once the Chief of Staff approved the

request, Army staff officers became accustomed to seeking his advice and including him

in the decision-making process on issues affecting soldiers. During SMA Dunaway's

tenure, the Chief of Staff approved the Noncommissioned Officer Education System

(NCOES), a three-tiered system that trained NCOs in basic, advanced, and senior

courses. The capstone was the Sergeants Major Academy at Fort Bliss, Texas, which

trained master sergeants for duty as sergeants major at battalion level and above.



In October 1970 Sergeant Major Copeland was selected as the third SMA. His tenure as the SMA coincided with the Army's transformation from a conscript Army to an all-volunteer Army. He created many of the quality of life programs we currently still have to attract and keep soldiers in the Army. At the same time, the first Sergeant Major Class had graduated successfully. By the time his tenure ended, SMA Copeland had strengthened the Office of the Sergeant Major of the Army; the Noncommissioned

Officer Education System was up and running; and the first class had graduated from the new Sergeants Major Academy. There had also been a steady stream of changes in the enlisted acquisition, promotion, and training system as the Army moved along the road to an all-volunteer force. SMA Copeland's proudest accomplishment, however, was having influenced "the noncommissioned officer corps to alter their method of operating," persuading "noncommissioned officers to change their thinking and leading of troops; and to treat a human being as a human being, with dignity and respect."



SMA Van Autreve saw increasing the standards of the Army's noncommissioned officer corps as his highest priority. As part of the rejuvenation of the NCO Corps, SMA Van Autreve gave NCOs more voice in command decisions, reduced the Army's reliance on soldiers' councils, increased professional standards for NCOs, developed the Noncommissioned Officer Education System, and encouraged NCOs to have the moral courage to police their own ranks.



Sergeant Major William Brainridge assumed his office on 1 July 1975 becoming



the fourth SMA. He would service longer than any of his predecessors in this capacity. Sergeant Major Brainridge earned the confidence, respect, and admiration of the Army leadership as well as the soldiers to include senior enlisted ones. He designed the rank insignia of the SMA and later authorized by the Chief of Staff in 1979.



On July 1979 the first to have graduated from the United States Sergeant Major Academy was sworn into office as the fifth SMA. Sergeant Major William Connely greatest contribution was towards training. He focused on the Skill Qualification Test, and in 1982 the implementation of Common Task Testing. His legacy left us with a better-trained force, manned by high quality soldiers. At this time, 90% of our force were high school graduates which were easier to train and more likely to finish enlistment.



The next SMA was Sergeant Major Glen Morrell. During his tenure, the Army restructure the NCOES. In 1985, all sergeants regardless of specialty had the same type of professional training, Primary Leadership Development Course (PLDC).



Sergeant Major Julius Gates sworn in as the 7<sup>th</sup> SMA. During his tenure, concerns for single soldiers cause the establishment of the Better Opportunity for Single Soldiers



(BOSS) program. At the same time, he firmly established the Noncommissioned Officer Battle Staff course, Noncommissioned Officer Evaluation Report (NCOER), and the Self Development Test, which replace the Skill Qualification Test.

Following Sergeant Major Gates, Sergeant Major Kidd took over as the next SMA. He mainly focused on force reduction, sustainable force, able to fulfill their current missions and winning the nation wars. The most serious was reduction of the Army's force from the cold war level to one suitable for a new, but uncertain international environment. SMA Kidd grappled with the steady increase in the Army's

participation in operations other than combat. SMA Kidd also supported the NCOES program, which, like his predecessors, he considered to be the key to the NCO Corps' success. During his tenure, the NCOES program made the final change that more closely linked it to promotion and supported the Army's "select, training, promote, assign" philosophy. He also supported quality of life issues such as the Better Opportunities for Single Soldiers (BOSS) program and improved health care for soldiers and their families. When the Army began downsizing, SMA Kidd showed that it would have little to no effect on the operational abilities of the Army.



In this brief paper, we can determine that since the establishment of the position of SMA, direct communication was established between the Soldier and the Army leadership. At the same time, all Non-commissioned officers will be forever indebted to General Johnson for his concern for Soldiers in his Army and for establishing the SMA position, which continue to provide advice for the best of all Soldiers.

## References

Gillespie, Mark. (2003). Sergeant Major of the Army.