

HISTORY of THE NONCOMMISSIONED OFFICER (NCO) ESSAY

NCOs IN THE AMERICAN ARMY, 1945 - PRESENT

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Outline

I. Introduction

- A. I am 1SG Dannie Meek of Co D 1-180th Infantry battalion recently returned from a one year deployment to Afghanistan. This is a research essay and it is unclassified.
- B. The purpose and scope of this essay is to gain insight into the history and significant contributions of the NCO Corps of the American Army from 1945 to present.
- C. The outline and procedure includes four main points of focus that I researched. These points are duties, training and education, weapons and heroes of the NCO Corps in the American Army from 1945 to present.
- D. References for research included news articles, internet sites and articles, government manuals, and personal experiences. (see attached Works Cited sheet)
- E. My research consisted of a variety of resources. There was a lot of duplication in many of the resources of information. The single most thorough and readily accessible was the internet.

II. Body:

- A. Duties: The research first took me to the definition of what a NCO was and what are their duties. What was interesting was how these duties have changed slightly but remained mostly intact from all the way back to when General Friedrich von Steuben had spelled them out in 1778.
- B. Training: We will discuss the training and education that a NCO goes through to develop into a true professional leader. Also the expectations of how to train their subordinates for survivability on the battle field.
- C. Weapons: We will discuss the weapons that NCOs used and how they have changed from WWII to the present. The sophistication of the weapons the NCO has to be familiar with, use and train on has dramatically changed in just a few years.
- D. Heroes: My research then took me to some of the NCO heroes of the subsequent wars. These include the end of WWII to Iraq and Afghanistan today.

III. Closing:

- A. Summary

NCOs in the American Army, 1945-Present

Introduction

The Noncommissioned Officer (NCO), also known as a NCO or Noncom, is credited in many cases as being the backbone of the army (FM 7-22.7, 2002). They serve as administrative or training personnel and as advisors to the officer corps. The NCO's most valuable role is a link between the 'common Soldier' and the commissioned officer (Wikipedia Encyclopedia, 22 Aug 07). The NCO helps mentor the inexperienced officer that may have a position of authority but lacks practical experience (Wikipedia Encyclopedia, 22 Aug 07). We will touch on the changes and significant contributions in the NCO corps throughout this essay. We will focus on duties, training, weapons and heroes of the NCO corps in the American Army from post WWII to present.

Duties

Duties of NCOs are an area of interest where there have been some very significant changes since the end of WWII. Basic duties still align very closely with the duties of the NCO spelled out by General Friedrich von Steuben back in 1778 (FM 7-22.7, 2002). One of the most significant changes of duties is taking on more of the direct leadership role at the squad and section level. This transformation started during the Korean War. The rugged terrain, with many hills and valleys, dictated the approach of using squad and section sized elements to conduct missions rather than platoon sized elements. NCO squad leaders had to step up and learn many of the duties that, in the past, were carried out by commissioned officers leading platoons (FM 7-22.7, 2002). They had to learn to participate more in the planning and execution phases of missions. NCOs learned how to communicate at a higher level sometimes.

Missions slipped back to the platoon level during the Vietnam era. NCOs again led a platoon and took on the duties of the commissioned officer. The high casualty rate of platoon leaders and company commanders caused this expansion of duties (Command and General Staff College/ cgsc.army.mil, 23 Aug 07). The two most recent war fronts of Iraq and Afghanistan again dictate the squad and section level missions. The sergeant and staff sergeant positions in the NCO corps definitely added many commissioned officer duties to their other NCO duties. This has become a regular part of their job description. The training for NCOs also evolved with these transitions.

Training and Education

There was not much formal training for NCOs until a few years after the end of WWII. The first class enrolled in the 2d Constabulary Brigade's NCO school on December 17, 1949 in Munich, Germany. The U.S Seventh Army took over the 2d Constabulary functions two years later. The school became the Seventh Army Noncommissioned Officers Academy. AR350-90 established Army-wide standards for NCO academies several years later. The Army encouraged NCOs, in addition to NCO academies, to expand their training and education through other means also (FM 7-22.7, 2002).

Vietnam proved to be a junior leader's war, with the decentralized control. Much of the training burden fell on the NCOs because of the high casualty rate of both NCOs and commissioned officers. Large numbers of NCOs were needed quickly for combat. The Noncommissioned Officer Candidate School (NCOCC) was created in 1967 to fill this need ("History of NCOCC"/shell.ime.net, 22 Aug 07). This was a 10 week course. Candidates were promoted to E-5 and the top 5 percent to E-6 once they graduated. An additional 10 weeks of practice followed. They were then sent to Vietnam for combat. The course was sometimes

referred to as the “Instant NCO Course” and graduates were called “Shake n’ Bakes” (“History of NCOCC”/shell.ime.net, 22 Aug 07).

The Army implemented the Noncommissioned Officer Education System (NCOES) in the last half of 1971. This progressive system was designed to educate NCOs on subjects and skills needed to improve their performance and abilities (Command and General Staff College/ cgsc.army.mil, 23 Aug 07). It first consisted of three levels of training: Basic Noncommissioned Officer Course (BNCOC), Advanced Noncommissioned Officer Course (ANCOC), and the U.S. Army Sergeants Major Course (USASMC) (FM 7-22.7, 2002).

As NCOES grew through the 70’s and 80’s, a course for the junior NCOs was added. This course was the Primary Leadership Development Course (PLDC) (Command and General Staff College/ cgsc.army.mil, 23 Aug 07). PLDC became a requirement later for promotion to E-6 (FM 7-22.7, 2002). The course is now referred to as the Warrior Leader Course (WLC). Several senior NCO courses were added. Not all were required for promotions. They were the First Sergeants Course (FSC), the Battle Staff Course (BSC), and the Command Sergeant Major Course (CSMC) (FM7-22.7, 2002).

We have covered the various courses offered to train the NCO in their leadership duties. We will now cover duties and responsibilities NCOs use to train their subordinates and sometimes inexperienced commissioned officers.

The NCO ultimately is the key to an effectively trained unit. They are responsible for helping identify, plan, execute, and supervise effective training. NCOs must know their subordinate’s strengths, weaknesses and proficiency levels. They must train their Soldiers in peacetime as if it were wartime. This is called “train the way we fight” (FM 7-1, 2003). Soldiers are trained for combat. The NCO works with the commissioned officer to help plan training

conducted and what the delivery method should be. The actual individual training falls heavily on the shoulders of the NCO once the planning is done. Prior preparation and effective supervision are key elements to effective and meaningful training. The training must also be realistic and as close to true conditions as possible (FM 7-1, 2003).

There are well defined standards for most all Army training. Situation sometimes dictates the exact path the training should take. A good NCO should always have some “hip-pocket” training available, for those downtimes or in between periods (FM 7-22.7, 2002, p4-14). The NCO supervises, evaluates, and conducts an After Action Review (AAR) to check for effectiveness of training. This helps identify strengths and weaknesses to improve or sustain with future training. Two key areas to focus on are equipment and weapons training. Much of the equipment and weaponry have evolved to be very sophisticated and sometimes very complex.

Weapons

The NCOs must stay up to date on the moving technology in weapons to continue to train properly. The evolution of the weapons used by the U.S. Army consists of both the heavy weapons and the light individual weapons. We will focus mostly on the individual weapons. Individual weapons, used and trained on by NCOs, have taken on many changes. The M14 Carbine replaced the heavy WWII M1 Garand rifle (FM 23-5, 1965). The M14 Carbine was easier to load, operate, and lighter to carry (FM 23-8, 1965). The M14 Carbine transitioned to the M16 A1, A2 and A3 rifles. M16 series rifles became a battle field multiplier because they could hold more ammo and were lighter yet (FM 3-22.9, 2003).

Team and section leaders carried a M79 Grenade launcher during the Vietnam era. The M79 resembled a large short barreled shotgun. The M203 Grenade launcher mounted on the bottom of the M16 rifle replaced the M79 (FM 3-22.31, 2003). The individual rifle continues to

evolve to deliver more firepower at the individual level with the M4 Carbine. The M4 is the rifle of today. The M4 is light weight and built to accept quite a host of accessories attached to it. The M4 mounts a bipod, M203 Grenade launcher, flashlight, laser pointers and a variety of optics for both day and night use (FM 3-22.9, 2003). Side arms evolved too. The 9mm M9 replaced the .45 caliber M911 pistol (FM 3-23.35, 2003). Many NCOs in Iraq and Afghanistan carry both the M4 and M9.

NCOs have evolved and adapted as the weaponry evolved to stay effective leaders. NCOs demonstrated many times how to set the example by using their skills with weapons and leadership. Some of these NCOs have been recognized as heroes for adapting and overcoming the adversity of the battlefield.

Heroes

We are only highlighting a few of the NCO heroes. Many more accepted the challenge of a given situation and set themselves apart by their actions. We had SSG Howard E. Woodford in WWII. On June 6, 1945 SSG Woodford rallied his men in a defensive position and continually exposed himself to the enemy to draw out their positions. He fought off several attacks and was found dead the next morning in his foxhole. A total of 37 enemy dead lay all around him. SSG Woodford set the example for his men enabling them to survive. He paid the ultimate sacrifice. SSG Woodford was awarded the Medal of Honor for his actions (Medal of Honor, WWII Era).

We had SSG Hiroshi Myamura in the Korean War. He was a corporal and a machine gun squad leader then. CPL Myamura was an Army Reserve noncommissioned officer. On April 24, 1951 he directed the heavy and light machine guns of his squad. He repeatedly repelled attack after attack of the Chinese Communists. He charged the enemy at one critical point with his bayoneted carbine. CPL Myamura killed ten of them at close-in-combat. This broke up the

attack. He stayed in the machine gun position and covered his men while they fell back. He fired his machine gun until he ran out of ammo. CPL Myamura destroyed the gun then tried to fall back himself. He had killed 50 communists before being captured. He was released in August 1953 and awarded the Medal of Honor for his actions (Army News Service, March 29, 2005).

SFC Eugene Ashley was another one of those NCO heroes during the Vietnam War. On February 6th and 7th, 1968 he led a total of five assaults against the enemy. He exposed himself continuously to a heavy volume of fire. SFC Ashley adjusted air strikes nearly on top of his position during his fifth assault. He forced the enemy to withdraw. He was seriously wounded by machine gun fire but continued his mission, without regard to his own personal safety. He was killed by an enemy artillery round. He had shown inspiration and heroism with his actions. SFC Ashley was awarded the Medal of Honor posthumously (Medal of Honor, Vietnam Era).

MSG Gary Gordon and SFC Randall Shugart in Somalia on October 3, 1993 went back into a helicopter crash site. They both paid the ultimate price while repeatedly trying to shield the survivors from an onslaught of fire in Mogadishu. They pulled all of the crew out and set up a perimeter, upon reaching the site. They placed themselves in the most vulnerable positions. They both were killed protecting the last remaining crew member, CW02 Shannon Durant. He was captured and later released. Both were awarded the Medal of Honor for their actions (Medal of Honor, Newest Medals).

Another NCO stepped forward in an act of heroism on September 11, 2001, at the Pentagon in Washington, D.C. SSG Christopher D. Braman was in the Pentagon when a terrorist flew a hijacked jetliner into the building. He demonstrated his heroism repeatedly. He sprinted back toward the burning Pentagon, after first evacuating, and crawled in through a window. He

found and carried the first victim to safety then went back in, time after time, to rescue others (DefenseLink News Article, March 13, 2007).

SFC Paul R. Smith set the example in Iraq. SFC Smith's Task Force was attacked by a company-size enemy force. SFC Smith quickly organized a hasty defense perimeter and the evacuation of three wounded Soldiers. He braved hostile fire to personally engage the enemy. SFC Smith then moved under fire to take up a .50 caliber machine gun position. He maintained his exposed position, in order to engage the attacking enemy forces, with total disregard for his own safety. He was mortally wounded during this action. SFC Smith was awarded the Medal of Honor posthumously for his actions. (Medal of Honor, Iraqi War)

SGT Buddy J. "Doc" Hughie displayed his heroism and professionalism in Afghanistan on February 19, 2007. SGT Hughie's vehicle and another vehicle of Afghan National Army (ANA) soldiers were pinned down by enemy fire. He noticed an ANA soldier that was wounded. He left his protected position to help move the fallen ANA soldier to safety and was struck by a round himself. He was mortally wounded protecting others. What SGT Hughie had in common with all of these other NCOs was to lead by example showing their professionalism. These NCOs inspired others to follow under worst of conditions. Sometimes this came at the expense of giving their own lives that others may live.

Summary

In summary we have reviewed changes and significant contributions in duties, training, weaponry, and heroism of the NCO Corps of the American Army post WWII to present. One thing is very evident. The NCO corps has accepted the challenges throughout time. The constant that remains is that NCOs set the example daily for others to follow. They arise to the challenges of upholding a rich tradition in duty, professionalism, and honor, throughout time.

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