

HEADQUARTERS 24TH INFANTRY DIVISION

OFFICE OF THE COMMANDING GENERAL

APO 112, US FORCES

AETGCG

3 September 1963

MEMORANDUM FOR: MAJOR UNIT COMMANDERS

SUBJECT: Proper Utilization of Noncommissioned Officers

1. On 1 July 1963, I addressed myself to you on the proper utilization of Sergeants Major. I would now like to give you my views on the proper utilization of noncommissioned officers of all ranks. In emphasizing this program, I desire that an immediate survey be made of all directives published by your Headquarters with a view toward eliminating requirements for direct officer supervision wherever possible. In addition, I desire that staff officers at all levels make maximum utilization of their noncommissioned officers in the accomplishment of staff responsibilities. This is even more important now that our TOEs are being line deleted by so many company grade officers.

2. One of the oldest and least controversial of U. S. military maxims maintains that the noncommissioned officer is the backbone of the Army. Unfortunately, it is too often given only lip service. Too many officers mistakenly reason that they are personally required to make all decisions and supervise all details of execution in order to ensure positive results. This reasoning shows a lack of faith in subordinate leaders which invariably results in smothering their initiative, destroying their authority, and reducing the respect and prestige which is due them by virtue of their grade and position. Poor mission performance is the inevitable result.

3. Another common error is the attempt to build noncommissioned officer prestige through such outward measures as granting extra privileges. This approach when used alone will not ensure the Army a Noncommissioned Officers Corps with the initiative, aggressiveness and experience necessary to respond to the demands that would be placed upon it in battle.

4. A unit which does well in an annual general inspection, a technical proficiency inspection and a command maintenance and management inspection is one in which the noncommissioned officers are motivated to carry out their responsibilities. A unit in which the noncommissioned officers are doing their jobs is a unit which is always ready for inspection.

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5. We cannot wait until combat to develop these necessary traits in our noncommissioned officers. Frequently, in combat, rifle platoons are commanded by platoon sergeants. We must train for this now. A primary task of the commander during peacetime must be to give his subordinate leaders experience in making decisions by permitting freedom of action. The noncommissioned officer simply cannot develop his full leadership potential unless he is given the authority to do a job on his own, without having his hands tied through over-supervision by his superiors. In doing this, standards of performance need not be lowered; honest errors must be expected and corrected. In the process, subordinate leaders gain valuable experience which will minimize costly errors in combat.

6. The success of your reenlistment program depends largely on the efforts of your noncommissioned officers. Furthermore, show me a unit with a low AWOL and Courts-Martial rate, with few DRs and SIRs, and I'll show you an outfit in which the noncommissioned officers have taken hold. A unit should be run by its noncommissioned officers and commanded by its officers.

7. All commanders are enjoined to take immediate and continuing action to ensure strict compliance with the spirit of AR 600-20 in identifying, developing, recognizing the prerogatives, responsibilities and authority to be accorded the noncommissioned officer as an enlisted commander of troops. Noncommissioned officers, in their turn, must realize that they cannot assume to these prerogatives without fully demonstrating the integrity and moral character required because of their increased authority and responsibility. The fundamentals of this regulation must be understood and implemented by all officers and non-commissioned officers. Particular emphasis will be given to the measures listed below.

8. Measures to improve the professional stature of the noncommissioned officer corps:

a. Select for promotion to noncommissioned officer grade only competent soldiers of high moral standards and demonstrated leadership ability. Bestowing command authority as a reward for length of service or for exceptional technical skills only is unfair to the recipient and to the unit which must depend upon him as its leader.

b. Give noncommissioned officers every opportunity to exercise leadership. They must be given assignments appropriate to their rank and the authority to get the job done. The choice of personnel and methods should be left to them, so long as they remain within reasonable bounds. If they are competent, encourage them. If they are hesitant, counsel and assist them. If they repeatedly fall down on the job, reduce them and replace them with men who have proven themselves capable.

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It is important to remember, however, that the reduction of a non-commissioned officer is a serious matter for the morale of a unit. The justice of such action must always be clear to the troops.

c. Give command attention to training noncommissioned officers in their duties and responsibilities in order that every noncommissioned officer is indoctrinated with the importance and responsibility of his grade and position within the command structure of the Army. Emphasis must be given to the important qualities of integrity, loyalty, efficiency, dependability, and fairness. Indifference to or abuse of authority cannot be tolerated. Use senior noncommissioned officers to indoctrinate their subordinate leaders.

d. Reduce the requirements for officer supervision or mandatory presence. Let the noncommissioned officer take charge whenever appropriate.

e. Adhere to the chain of command through utilization of the non-commissioned officer. Do not deal directly with the private soldier except as required. Hold the noncommissioned officer responsible for his men and issue your instructions through him.

f. Issue mission-type instructions rather than detailed orders. Give the noncommissioned leader a chance to display and develop his initiative. Back him up on his decisions. If a decision is based upon incorrect judgment or false information, and you are able to give him the correct slant before any action is taken, do so. But once he starts out to do something with a group of men, do not halt the operation unless really serious or injurious results appear imminent. Normally he should be counseled privately on his mistakes, after the job is finished. The officer must correct errors, but fundamentally he must be a "builder-upper". A sharp distinction must be made, however, between backing up a subordinate leader and granting him undue liberties. The sole reason for this support is to increase his operating efficiency. Abuse of authority or disregard for directives should not be permitted.

g. Grant noncommissioned officers a greater voice in matters relative to troop welfare in terms of assignment, reassignment, promotion, reduction, privileges, discipline, training, and supply. Let the men know that the noncommissioned officers greatly influence your decisions in these matters. When appropriate, permit key noncommissioned officers to attend staff conferences and commanders' briefings.

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h. Employ noncommissioned officers as training instructors to the maximum degree practicable. Let the squad leader train his squad and the section chief train his section; utilize the platoon sergeant to train the platoon. Demand that they do a good job of it. Next to supervision, the noncommissioned officer's biggest job is instruction; and a demonstration of ability, knowledge and competence before a group of men will do much to earn prestige. Of course, the commander must see to it that the noncommissioned officer instructor is provided the necessary time and materials to prepare himself properly for the job. Except as they are needed in supervisory roles, noncommissioned officers should be exempted from attending basic instruction or repeated training in which they have demonstrated proficiency. Allow them to use this time for self-improvement, study and preparation for their roles as instructors. Noncommissioned officer schools conducted at battalion level, by the noncommissioned officers, are most effective. These should be headed by the Sergeant Major assisted by the 1st Sergeants, as a planning group, utilizing the maximum number of non-commissioned officers as instructors. The battalion commander should attend as many classes as possible in order to critique the instruction, later, with the Sergeant Major.

i. Encourage self-improvement to raise the professional competence, technical ability and leadership qualities of noncommissioned officers through participation in the off-duty education program.

j. Make greater use of noncommissioned officers in planning, preparing, and executing athletic, recreational, and social programs. Give them the opportunity to exert their influence in all activities in which their men participate.

k. Keep noncommissioned officers informed of plans affecting the unit. Train them to keep confidential information in-violate.

l. Correct and discipline noncommissioned officers in such a manner as to protect them from degrading embarrassment in the presence of their subordinates. Avoid mass withdrawal of noncommissioned officer privileges, but take punitive action against individuals concerned.

m. Utilize noncommissioned officers on fatigue duty in supervisory roles only, but this does not mean that when the job is long and hard the noncommissioned officer cannot, as a matter of good leadership lend a hand. On guard duty use noncommissioned officers only as non-commissioned officers of the guard.

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n. Demand that all personnel, officer and enlisted, address non-commissioned officers as "Sergeant Major", "1st Sergeant", "Sergeant", or "Corporal". Addressing noncommissioned officers by their first name breeds contempt. Addressing them by their last name, without reference to grade, is disrespectful. Referring to them as "Sarge" is improper. Refer to them as noncommissioned officers, not as NCOs or Noncoms.

o. Encourage initiative and do not worry about the noncommissioned officer exceeding his authority before it actually happens. There is a great deal more to be gained than lost by this attitude. Show your approval of jobs undertaken without you suggesting them.

p. Place a high value on dependability. It is a vital quality in a noncommissioned officer. Demand completion of every job tackled, as a matter of self-esteem. Let it be known that the only actual values are results.

q. In addition to the Company/Battery/Troop commander, the battalion commander should know all of his noncommissioned officers by name and duty assignment. If he has not accomplished this in a reasonable period of time indications are that he is not spending sufficient time among his units during training and inspections, during field exercises, and everyday activities; instead he is commanding his battalion from behind a desk.

r. Compliment the noncommissioned officer on a job well done. Do not cheapen your praise by extending it when it is not deserved, but do not withhold it from the man who has earned it. In cases of outstanding performance of exceptionally important tasks, or for prolonged periods of superior performance, letters of appreciation or commendation, certificates of achievement, or the Army Commendation Medal should be awarded.

s. Actively "sell" your noncommissioned officers to your men. The best way to do this is to hold them in high regard yourself and let your men see that you do. If the officer has a real respect for his assistants, the men will share this feeling. If the noncommissioned officers are ignored, they will be prevented from doing an effective job, and it will be because of circumstances beyond their control.

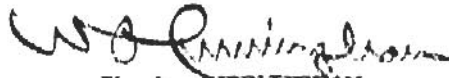
t. Never forget that the noncommissioned officers comprise the first echelon of command -- that echelon having direct contact with the men. The noncommissioned officers alone exercise control over the detailed performance and conduct of the men in the unit. They alone are in the best position to maintain the standards that the unit commander sets.

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The noncommissioned officer most emphatically is the backbone of the Army - when he is given the requisite responsibility and authority and is allowed proper freedom of action.



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Commanding