

While Bainbridge was in office, the status of the office once again changed. As Ernest F. Fisher Jr. notes in his NCO history, *Guardians of the Republic*, "The SMA, no longer under the supervision of the SGS, became a full-fledged member of the CSA's staff... This made it certain that any action or development that impacted on enlisted personnel from a policy standpoint would be routinely coordinated with the SMA. His opinion is now considered essential before an action is sent on to the CSA..."

Over the years, the SMAs have directly influenced decisions on a number of enlisted issues. A partial list includes: creating and hosting the first Command Sergeants Major Conference in Washington, D.C., in 1966; making a relatively bump-free transition to an all-volunteer force in the early 1970s; enforcing draft registration; establishing the first

sergeant and sergeants major courses at Ft. Bliss, TX; linking NCO school attendance to promotion; and fine-tuning the former Skills Qualification Test as an evaluation tool.

Though SMAs have had to deal with the big picture to get enlisted issues resolved, none of them ever forgot the reason they were in Washington, D.C., in the first place: looking out for the individual NCO. In an interview with *Soldiers* soon after he became the fourth SMA, Leon Van Autreve said, "As for the nuts and bolts operation, we're doing the same thing as NCOs that we've done most of our lives—dealing with people. The only difference is there are so many more people involved." ■

Abrams is senior journalist for The NCO Journal.

CSMs — They must be much more than figureheads...

From the day in 1967 when the rank of command sergeant major was established to provide an additional career goal for the Army's most experienced service Non-commissioned officers, the search was on for top sergeants who stood head and shoulders above their peers.

In a letter to major command commanders, Army Chief of Staff GEN Harold K. Johnson wrote:

"If we are to have a strong CSM chain, individuals selected for these key positions must be much more than mere figureheads and administrative specialists. They must be vigorous, broadly experienced and dedicated professionals who are more at home in the field with troops than at a desk in a major headquarters. They should be people who seek opportunities to get out among the troop units and who can see the problems that exist at the grass roots. Their selflessness, personal integrity and moral courage must be unassailable."

Fortunately, there were plenty of good candidates. A Department of the Army level selection board screened hundreds of names submitted by MACOM commanders in three different iterations during 1967 and 1968.

One of the first CSMs to be selected was SGM Theodore Dobil, a World War II veteran of the 1st Infantry Division.

Within its first year of creation, a new insignia was approved for the rank—a chevron with a wreath surrounding the sergeant major star.

While the NCO Corps continued to redefine itself in the

years following the Vietnam conflict, the CSM program expanded to include Reserve Component sergeants major in 1974.

As with most new programs, it took a while to get everyone throughout the Army on an equal footing when it came to knowing how to use CSMs. In his book, *Guardians of the Republic*, Ernest F. Fisher writes: "The duties of the CSM had often been determined more by the perception of individual commanders than by approved and widely

understood Army doctrine... Lines of authority between CSMs and first sergeants were variously understood and practiced from unit to unit."

One thing everyone agreed on was that the CSM should be the epitome of the Corps. At a 1975 Training and Doctrine Command conference, U.S. Commander-in-Chief GEN George S. Blanchard said, "The CSM must reflect the image of the NCO Corps and demand that his fellow NCOs do the same."

A 1976 letter from the academic faculty of the U.S. Military Academy at West Point stated that the "...CSM should be regarded as a role model and goal for NCOs...As a coding and filtering agent, acting almost as a

translator between the officer and enlisted soldier...he filters, interprets and passes on information from the commander along a path parallel to the channels of command." ■

Yzotta L. Nelson and Curtis S. Ramsey promoted to CSM
8 April 1968.

