

Educating Noncommissioned Officers

A chronological study on the development of educational programs for U.S.
Army Noncommissioned Officers

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Introduction

It is too much practice to commit the charge of the elementary drills to non-commissioned officers, by which great many evils are produced... the chance of finding non-commissioned officers who can clearly comprehend and explain the principles of good discipline is not one in twenty.

- William Duane, Regulations for the
Discipline of the Infantry, 1814

Throughout history, training noncommissioned officers of the United States Army had been accomplished using on-the-job training (OJT) in the unit, and many believed that is where it should stay. Training noncommissioned officers was conducted by officers in the regiment and was the commanding officer's responsibility. It was accepted that unit training was the best means of developing noncommissioned officers and potential noncommissioned officers. It was not until the post-World War II era that NCO training was conducted outside the unit at specially designed schools and academies. The first Sergeant Major of the Army, William O. Wooldridge, noted that in those days a soldier had to provide for his own education and training. "I went to night school. There were no requirements to attend school if you didn't want to. Now you must get training or you don't get promoted."

The NCO corps was not always considered as a professional organization. Unlike the officer corps, noncoms did not have a formal system of professional development. Never had there been a prescribed career pattern or explicit career guidance for NCOs, particularly a system of education and training. Up until the end of the draft in 1972, the Army had benefited from a limitless source of manpower through selective service. The draft brought an abundance of educated men to be trained who filled the ranks and many only served one term of enlistment. After the draft ended the need to develop a career management program became evident and educating NCOs became key to building a professional corps of noncommissioned officers.

To date, there has been little detailing of the history of noncommissioned officers and until recently, was given little consideration. In most early writings the NCO was regarded with the enlisted man and as such received little interest. This writing attempts to capture a portion of the history of NCO education and brings together many known sources, expands on the minimal writings, and corrects some deficiencies of recent literature.

Early History of NCO Education

They should teach the soldiers of their squads how to dress with a soldier-like air, how to clean their arms, accoutrements, etc. and how to mount and dismount their firelocks.

- Instructions for the Sergeant and Corporal,
von Steuben's 1779 "Blue Book"

One of the earliest mentions of educating noncommissioned officers outside the unit was during the early days of the Continental Army. When Prussian officer Friedrich von Steuben arrived at Valley Forge he recognized many problems, particularly in discipline, supply, and training. As he set out to restore discipline, Steuben developed tactics using a simple form of manual of arms. In March 1778 General George Washington ordered an additional 100 men to

the Commander in Chief's Guard to serve as participants in Steuben's experiment, the development of a new Continental Army. Steuben began by drilling one squad, then allowed subinspectors to drill other squads under his supervision. Officers distanced themselves from the soldiers in the British tradition, but Steuben encouraged them to use sergeants to pass instructions to the drilling troops. Washington was so impressed with the results that he directed that all drilling stop under the current system and that Steuben's simple methods be used. Though later the officers applied Steuben's techniques to train the soldiers of their troops and regiments, this is probably one of the earliest examples of a specially designed "school" to train both noncommissioned officers and officers outside the unit.



Baron von Steuben

courtesy Center for Military History

The Army was demobilized four days after the war's formal end, except for 600 men to guard the supplies of the Army. Many Americans felt at the time that a large standing Army in peacetime could infringe on the liberties of the nation. In response, Congress called for states to maintain militias. By May 1792 the basic militia law was passed which called for the enrollment of "every able-bodied white male citizen between 18 and 45 and the organization of the militia into divisions, brigades, regiments, battalions, and companies by the individual states, each militiamen providing his own arms, munitions, and other accouterments." These companies predecessor to the National Guard, met regularly and were trained by elected officers.

The Army had suffered without skilled technicians since the Revolution and many, including Gen.'s Washington and Henry Knox, had recommended the development of a military school. In 1802 personnel from the newly created Corps of Engineers were assigned to West Point to serve as the staff for a U.S. Military Academy to teach military science to select officers and formal military training was introduced to the Army. Secretary of War John C. Calhoun proposed the first specialist school in 1824, in that a "school of practice" be established, from which the Artillery School at Fortress Monroe was developed. Unlike modern schools which taught individuals, this school taught entire units, including enlisted men. It was closed 11 years later in 1835 when the students were sent to Florida in response to the Seminole threat and reopened in 1858. By the mid 1870's the school was training noncommissioned officers in the history of the United States, geography, reading, writing, and mathematics.

In 1868, the Signal Corps established a signal school of instruction which was opened at Fort Greble and, in 1869, moved to Fort Whipple (later Fort Myer). By 1871 the Signal School at Whipple had a primary duty to train observer-sergeants and assistant observers in their duties. Candidates were selected from the enlisted men of the signal detachment and were designated as assistant observers. They were taught subjects on military signaling, telegraphy, and meteorology and pursued a regular course of study. The candidate was promoted to observer-sergeant after completing their studies, six-months of practical application and appearing before an examination board of officers. Similar to the Artillery and Signal Schools, other schools appeared. The School of Application for Infantry and Cavalry at Fort Leavenworth, the Engineer School of Application

at Fort Totten, New York and the Army Medical School were also established in the mid to late 1800's. Most of the educating was conducted indoors, except for the less technical courses, such as infantry and cavalry.



Signal School, circa 1920

courtesy Center for Military History

Around the time of the Civil War Maj. Gen. Silas Casey called for NCO training in his book on tactics, insisting that NCOs be formally trained to give commands on the battlefield. But he had to overcome the opposition of company grade officers. They argued that company commanders knew their men's capabilities and limitations best and were in a better position to provide them on-the-job training. A minority of officers doubted that OJT could meet the needs for the combat arms and wanted more post schools. But World War I would begin with NCOs receiving traditional unit instruction, while officers' schools multiplied.

Schools for Noncommissioned Officers

The object of training and instructing a company is to thoroughly knit together its different parts, its various elements (individuals, squads and platoons), into a complete, homogeneous mass, a cohesive unit, that will under any and all conditions and circumstances respond to the will of the captain.

- Maj. James A. Moss, Manual of Military Training, 1914

It would take the casualties of war to answer the need for noncommissioned officer schools. By the early summer of 1918 the United States had been at war in Europe for over a year. Training camps and recruit depots were established to develop replacements for the force overseas and American NCOs were seen as half-trained and unsophisticated by allied noncoms. Detachments of troops were shipped off to Europe as soon as they could be inducted, clothed, equipped and minimally trained. There was no reserve of soldiers and NCOs for which to draw from and no method to rapidly develop replacement noncommissioned officers for Gen. John J. Pershing's American Expeditionary Force. Because of a shortage of NCOs the Army Staff recalled 648 retired men to serve as recruit trainers. These older noncoms at the training centers were needed to educate the replacements, so noncommissioned officers were selected and

designated from within the ranks. Initially there were no noncommissioned officer training schools and unless the company officers could find the time for additional instruction these new NCOs only received basic instructions for the infantry soldier.

The unacceptable results were evident in the high casualty lists of all ranks. Pershing called out that "more stress be laid upon the responsibility in the training of sergeants. They will be imbibed with the habit of command and will be given schooling and prestige to enable them to replace officers once casualties." The Secretary of War directed that "their [noncoms'] duties and responsibilities will be thoroughly represented to them, by means of school courses and official [interaction] with their immediate commanding officer." The War Department responded by issuing a directive that required out of each detachment of replacements that a "sufficient number of men be selected, segregated, and especially trained as noncommissioned officers." This would insure the development of eleven hundred corporals and sergeants within every thirty-day period of training. This method of training replacement NCOs would be adopted for a different war in a different time, but for this period it served as the "next best" means to secure large numbers of trained noncommissioned officers.

Raw, untrained men were handpicked from among their fellow soldiers and put through a coordinated and standardized program of instruction. This was conducted and supervised by specially selected officers trained for this purpose. Though these graduates were only slightly more competent than their peers who had only completed basic military training, they were an improvement over the alternative. The results far exceeded expectations and the centralized training program spread to other replacement camps. In 1919 the 25th Infantry establish such a school and they recognized a higher standing of efficiency among their noncommissioned officers. Although a call for continuation of this noncommissioned officer training program through a regimental noncommissioned officer school went out, it would not be until many years later that specialty NCO schools would return. Pershing's expedient would not survive demobilization. But the selection and training of noncommissioned officers would continue as a subject of much debate.

Post World War II and Occupation Duty

No two people will agree on how to train NCO's. The book, however, says that training is a command responsibility, and this doctrine must be observed.

- Capt. Mark M. Boatner, School for Noncoms, 1947

Prior to World War II some regiments and divisions had established NCO schools, but as the war progressed, combat attrition rapidly thinned the ranks of these trained noncoms. Hastily devised training programs produced more NCOs primarily trained to fight rather than lead soldiers in a garrison. New inductees would receive hands-on instruction for their basic combat training, then were sent to their unit for additional training. A man was promoted if he showed potential, with privates becoming corporals, and corporals, sergeants. These NCOs were not as capable as their pre-war predecessors, and the experience level of the noncommissioned officer continued to decrease.

By the war's end rapid demobilization and high personnel turbulence conflicted with the Army's role for occupation duty in Europe. Many of the replacements sent overseas had little

training or combat experience and the Army was weakened by a shortage of good noncommissioned officers. Realizing the need to educate soldiers for the specialty duties required of the occupation trooper, the 88th Infantry Division established a training center. The "Blue Devils," on duty in Venezia Giulia, Italy set out to develop a more professional noncommissioned officer, and the division established the Lido Training Center on Lido Island in November 1945. The training center was not a school in the traditional sense, but a model battalion in which the noncoms lived by the "book" for six weeks.



Inspection Time, Blue Devil style

courtesy Infantry Journal

The graduating students showed enthusiasm for the program and the chance to learn by actually *doing*, and commanders were pleased with the results. By mid-1947 the Center had trained almost 4,000 students, but the 88th would return to the United States later in that same year and discontinue this highly successful program.

The Constabulary School

Training difficulties arose (at the Constabulary School) because of the shortage of instructors and the lack of appropriate texts to issue to the students.

- Capt. Dee W. Pettigrew, Historian, U.S.
Constabulary School, July 1946

To replace the inactivating divisions on occupation duty like the 88th, the United States European Command organized the United States Constabulary. Heavily armed, lightly armored, and highly mobile, the Constabulary were enforcers of law, support to authorities and would serve as a covering force in the event of renewed hostilities. In January 1946 the Third U.S. Army Commander, Lt. Gen. Lucian Truscott, gave the task of organizing this force to Maj. Gen. Ernest Harmon. Harmon was given until July to have this force readied to carry out its assigned tasks and would be headquartered in Bamberg. Early in the planning stages the need for a Constabulary school became evident. The Constabulary trooper needed to not only know the customary duties of a soldier, but police methods, how to make arrests, and how to deal with the local population.

The return of units, divisions, and skilled combat veterans to the United States had plagued the theater with an abundance of minimally trained and unhappy soldiers. The majority of military personnel in Europe were re-enlistees or freshly inducted troops, with some lacking even

the most basic training. The 1st and 4th Armored Divisions were selected as the nucleus to form the Constabulary and Harmon set out to instill a Constabulary spirit that would reflect the pride and importance of their duties. Harmon directed that a school be established and Col. Harold G. Holt was selected as the first Commandant. A group of training cadre instructors was assembled in Bad Tölz, and Harmon outlined the mission of the school, the subjects to be taught, and the standards that would be met.

In February, the former Adolf Hitler Schule, located at Sonthofen, was selected as the site for the Constabulary school. The 2nd Cavalry Squadron began preparation for the school's early operation and was replaced in February by the 465th Anti-Aircraft Automatic Weapons Battalion, redesigned the Academic Troop, Constabulary School Squadron. By March 4, 1946, the first class of 129 officers and 403 enlisted men reported to Sonthofen. Harmon explained the need for training on graduation day to this first class that:

The Constabulary School is more than a place of instruction. It is a cradle, so to speak, in which we hope to establish the character, the esprit de corps, high standards of personnel [sic] conduct, and appearance of the Constabulary. As most subjects taught here are entirely new to the soldier and the normal training of soldiers, it was felt necessary to obtain as quickly as possible the maximum number of graduates to act as instructors to their units and to spread the Constabulary standards.

The decision was made after the first course was completed to separate the officer and enlisted students to devote specific training hours to each group. By 1947, every month special trains began at the extreme end of the U.S. Zone heading towards Sonthofen and picked up students along the way. In January 1947 the 7719 Theater School (Special) was consolidated at Sonthofen and the Constabulary School began to lose its identity. A theater-wide Non-Commissioned Officers Course, designed to train NCOs and potential NCOs in their basic duties, was established at the school on June 30, 1947. This course emphasized basic subjects, supply, and administration. Later, the Sonthofen School offered courses called for under War Department Circular No. 9. The school trained students from around the theater, not only from the Constabulary, but also



The Constabulary School in Sonthofen
courtesy Constabulary Headquarters

from the European Command and Trieste, Italy. Besides the NCO basic and enlisted man's courses, the school also taught a Sergeants Major and First Sergeants course. In mid-1948 the

school was closed and the former Hitler Schule became the headquarters for the Field Artillery Group.

The Noncommissioned Officers Course

This new Army of ours is a group of officers and men with a professional interest in their careers; and these men know the part the noncommissioned officers play is extremely important.

- SFC Philip Wharton and SGT Frank Mangin,
graduates of NCO Course No. 1, 1949

In early 1949 the Armor School at Fort Knox, KY, had as its Assistant Commandant Brig. Gen. Bruce C. Clarke. It was Clarke, of St. Vith fame and known as *The Sergeants' General*, who went about improving training for the armored force. One of the courses established during his tenure was the Armor School's Noncommissioned Officers Course. Initially, this four-month course was considered the most comprehensive instruction ever presented to noncommissioned officers. The course was taught by the schools academic groups, employing methods of instruction based on lectures, conferences, demonstrations and practical exercises. In many cases the students were taught in the classroom on a subject, then conducted a practical exercise to actually use the knowledge "hands-on." In this way the lesson was presented, demonstrated, practiced and critiqued all in the same day.

Students typically received instruction on leadership, tactics, command and staff, automotive principles, personnel management, among other subjects. Besides training in physical fitness, guest speakers were used to teach the students. But by mid-1949, the Noncommissioned Officers Course was renamed the Tank Commanders Course and reduced to 13 weeks, and was only available to NCOs in Grades 2 and 3 (in 1949 the Career Compensation Act reversed the grade structure) with duties as tank commanders. Though the renamed course was similar in nature to the NCO Course, only noncoms in the Armored Cavalry force would attend.

The Birth of an NCO Academy

We propose, in carrying out the academy's primary aim of developing you as leaders? to teach you how to teach others? how to reproduce for your men, the subject matter which you are taught here.

-Brig. Gen. Bruce C. Clarke, NCO Academy
Commandant, to first graduating class, 1949

By late 1949, then commander of the Constabulary Maj. Gen. Isaac D. White decided that special training was needed for the noncommissioned officers of the Constabulary. By then, Clarke had assumed command of the 2nd Constabulary Brigade and was enthusiastic about the project. White gave him the mission of organizing a Noncommissioned Officer Academy in unused buildings at Jensen Barracks in Munich, of which he was to also serve as the Academy's Commandant. White explained what he wanted of the curriculum and stated it would be run on a strict military basis. It was to be purely academic classroom instruction, not hands-on training. Clarke set up a six weeks course with White's approval, and in September 1949 the Constabulary

Noncommissioned Officer Academy was established. In later years, Clarke would consider the NCO Academy to be one of the most successful activities he had been charged with in his illustrious career.

Clarke created a staff partly from the officers who had worked under him as students and instructors at the Armored School. Fourteen subjects were decided on to form the basic curriculum and included drill and command, military justice, physical fitness and basic tactics. As in the 88th Division's school, Clarke's academy required rigid discipline. The three major departments, Leadership and Command, Tactics, and Personnel and Administration were charged with the conduct of the training. The students' day began at 5 a.m. and continued until taps played at 11 p.m. Soldiers in the first three grades who were not previously officers or graduates of similar training were considered for attendance at this NCO Academy. As with its predecessor in Sonthofen, the Munich NCO Academy was originally established for



Reporting in at the Constabulary NCO Academy
courtesy Constabulary Headquarters

Constabulary troopers, but the graduates' success spilled over to the other units and soon expanded to the 7th Army and the European and Trieste Commands.

On October 15, 1949 the first class of 150 students reported to the Constabulary Academy. In later classes the Academy reached their full student load of 320 and by 1951 had graduated almost 4500 students. As part of developing future noncommissioned officer replacements the Academy allowed enlisted soldiers from Grades 4 and 5 (corporal and private first class) to attend, providing they had the appropriate educational background and demonstrated potential to become a noncom. To serve as an inspiration to all on the campus, the 10 buildings on Jensen Barracks were all named after World War II Medal of Honor recipients who gave their lives in the European Theater.

One sergeant who graduated from the Constabulary NCO academy as the number-one student, Sergeant Leon L. Van Autreve, would make history in becoming the first non-combat arms Sergeant Major of the Army (SMA). Soon after reporting to his engineer company in Boeblingen, Germany, his first sergeant became upset that few NCOs volunteered to attend the NCO academy. Van Autreve volunteered, and upon graduation was rewarded with promotion to E-7, the highest enlisted pay grade. In later years, after the creation of the "supergrades E-8 and E-9 in 1958, Van Autreve's commander at the Continental Army Command (CONARC) Armor

Board was General Clarke. Clarke recommended Van Autreve for the Engineer Section's only E-8 slot because of his successes at the Constabulary NCO Academy.

Not all noncommissioned officers believed in the importance of NCO education. Platoon sergeant William O. Wooldridge, who would later be selected as the first SMA, ask his first sergeant for permission to attend the Seventh Army NCO Academy. He explained that he intended to stay in the Army, and "wanted to be something more than a rifle platoon sergeant." His first sergeant scolded that "You're a combat veteran. You already know everything." When Wooldridge continued to press the issue, the first sergeant told him, "your wasting my time," and ordered him "out of my orderly room."

Standardizing NCO Academies

The purpose of Noncommissioned Officer Academies is to broaden the professional knowledge of the noncommissioned officer and instill in him the self-confidence and sense of responsibility required to make him a capable leader of men.

- Army Regulation 350-90, Noncommissioned Officer Academies, June 1957

In 1951 the Seventh Army assumed the Constabulary functions and the Constabulary NCO Academy became the Seventh Army Noncommissioned Officers Academy, and in November 1958, moved to Flint Kaserne in Bad Tölz. Some 45,000 noncoms had graduated from the Munich school by then, with even several students from the newly formed West German *Bundeswehr* attending. Clarke would go on to establish other NCO Academies in Texas, Hawaii, and Korea, and other divisions began to develop their own versions. The general purpose of these academies was "to teach noncommissioned officers to look, act, and think like, and accept the responsibilities of noncommissioned officers."

Though they were similar in nature and conduct, there were no established standards of instruction, and graduates of one course could later ultimately be required to attend another. Most noncommissioned officers never attended NCO academies and continued to learn from the old methods of OJT. The Korean War brought an urgent need for better-trained small unit leaders. At Clarke's urging, the Army's NCO Academy system was developed in 1957 when the Department of the Army published its first regulation to establish standards for NCO Academies.



Seventh Army NCO Academy

courtesy Center for Military History

This June 25th directive stated that the "purpose of Noncommissioned Officer Academies is to broaden the professional knowledge of the noncommissioned officer and instill in him the self-

confidence and sense of responsibility required to make him a capable leader of men." The hope was that a better-trained NCO would be needed for the new Pentomic organization of the new cold war era.

This regulation authorized, but did not require, division and installation commanders to establish NCO academies. It set forth a standard pattern for training NCOs and fixed the minimum length of a course at four weeks. It did not call for a standardized course of instruction, but mandated seven subjects that were required as part of the curriculum and would emphasize the new concepts of atomic warfare. It required each command to support its academy from its available resources and did not provide additional funding. For the first time, Army noncommissioned officers had an Army-sponsored program for institutional training. Though the Korean War would derail many programs, noncommissioned officer academies would continue to operate throughout the war.

Studying the Effects of NCO Training

The study should answer the questions: What changes occur in a man as a result of Academy attendance? What practices of the Academy seem most important in producing those changes? The above studies would be profitable in considering the kinds of training indicated for NCO Academies in general... .

- Dr. Francis Palmer, HumRRO, trip report after visiting the Seventh U.S. Army NCO Academy, November 1956

In 1957, CONARC and the U.S. Army Leadership Human Research Unit (with support from the George Washington University) began to study the feasibility of identifying and training enlisted soldiers in the event of hostilities to perform in leadership roles. Long-recognized that the NCO was important to the smooth operation of the Army, there had been relatively little research conducted on improving their training. Task NCO was thus born, with the goal of determining how to identify and train enlisted soldiers as NCOs. Parallel research programs were begun, with the Human Resources Research Office (HumRRO) of George Washington University developing initial psychological predictors of leadership potential and the evaluation system for use in identifying competent leaders for senior NCO positions. The U.S. Army Personnel Research Office (USAPRO) had the mission of developing techniques to identify early in the careers of those enlisted men who were capable of becoming good noncommissioned officers in the combat branches. The Army Noncommissioned Officer's Academy system was selected to serve as the framework to measure leadership performance.

Initially, the HumRRO project was to study the effects of academy training on noncommissioned officers job performance and to study the factors that modify effects of academy training. But at the urging of the CONARC Human Research Advisory Committee, HumRRO ultimately settled on a three-phase study. Initially, research was done under the name of Task NCO, but near the end was designated Work Unit NCO. This research project was divided into 3 major phases, dubbed NCO I, NCO II and NCO III (two phases). Under NCO I the Army's training system for enlisted personnel and its methods for selecting and training NCOs was examined. As a result, USCONARC Pamphlet 350-24, *Guide for the Potential Noncommissioned Officer*, was published.

In the midst of these studies and field experiments, the Army and the Department of Defense was faced with a possible call for mobilization during the Berlin Crisis in 1961. HumRRO suggested that a two-week Leader Preparation Course (LPC) between Basic and Advanced training be instituted. The goals were to provide support to the training cadre at advanced training sites and centers, and provide these leader trainees with supervisory and human relations skills. In October, the Leader Preparation Program (LPP) was implemented at Forts Dix, Knox, Gordon, Jackson, Carson, and Ord. In 1963 a one-week Leader Orientation Course was provided to the Women's Army Corps, to be conducted one-week before basic training. The LPP was based on a four-week LPC and consisted of training programs and observations. As to be expected for a program of this type, there was resistance from the "old soldiers." The researchers noted that at each training center they had to contact and persuade approximately 30 officers and 100 NCOs to adjust their procedures, and to convince them the system would work.

During NCO II a series of pilot studies was conducted to examine the problems of junior NCO selection, prediction and evaluation of new recruits. Informal leadership training was conducted using different approaches and techniques, and by the completion of NCO III, three experimental training systems were developed. The conclusions drawn up in 1967 at the close of their 10-year study on how to train NCOs and potential NCOs were as follows:

Leadership Selection. The candidate for leadership training should be above average on BCT (basic training) Peer Ratings and on the appropriate Aptitude Area score. Supervisors' evaluations should be used to eliminate men who are obvious misfits or to recommend men who are outstanding prospects in the opinions of the cadre despite poor aptitude scores or low Peer Ratings.

Leadership Training. The experimental training methods led to better leadership indications on nearly all criteria, with the Leader Preparation Course system exhibiting greatest effectiveness and feasibility among various experimental and control conditions tested.

Training Method. Relatively little criterion difference was found between results from specific training methods (i.e., functional context versus traditional; high cost versus low cost). However, because the time involved in presentation of each different method varied, definitive comparisons could not be made.

A note of interest about the Unit NCO project was the 1964 changes made to basic training at the direction of Secretary of the Army, Steven Ailes. CONARC developed a new concept to transfer responsibility from training committees to the platoon sergeant. Technical advisory in the development of the "Drill Sergeant" was provided by the Work Unit and the LPP served as the model for the Drill Sergeant Program and in developing the Drill Sergeant Course, first conducted at Fort Jackson.

The Noncommissioned Officer's Candidate Course

A strained voice shatters the stillness: Pass in Review. And at this moment he knows. This is command reveille. Right Turn March. It is to characterize the next 12 frustrating weeks of training.
- Infantry NCO Candidate Course, Class 4-69 yearbook

By the early-1960's, the United States Army was again engaged in conflict, now in Vietnam. As the war progressed, the attrition of combat, the 12-month tour limit in Vietnam, separations of senior noncommissioned officers and the 25-month stateside stabilization policy began to take its toll to the point of crisis. Without a call up of the reserve forces, Vietnam became the Regular Army's war, fought by junior leaders. The Army was faced with sending career noncoms back into action sooner or filling the ranks with the most senior PFC or specialist. Field commanders were challenged with understaffed vacancies at base camps, filling various key leadership positions, and providing for replacements. Older and more experienced NCOs, some World War II veterans, were strained by the physical requirements of the methods of jungle fighting. The Army was quickly running out of noncommissioned officers in the combat specialties.

In order to meet these unprecedented requirements for NCO leaders the Army developed a solution. Based on the proven Officer Candidate Course where an enlisted man could attend basic and advanced training, and if recommended or applied for, filled out an application and attended OCS, the thought was the same could be done for noncoms. If a carefully selected soldier can be given 23 weeks of intensive training that would qualify him to lead a platoon, then others can be trained to lead squads and fire teams in the same amount of time. From this seed the Noncommissioned Officers Candidate Course was born. Potential candidates were selected from groups of initial entry soldiers who had a security clearance of confidential, an infantry score of 100 or over, and demonstrated leadership potential. Based on recommendations, the unit commander would select potential NCOs, but all were not volunteers. Those selected to attend NCOCC were immediately made corporals and later promoted to sergeant upon graduation from phase one. The select few who graduated with honors would be promoted to staff sergeant. The outstanding graduate of the first class, Staff Sgt. Melvin C. Leverick, recalled "I think that those who graduated [from the NCOCC] were much better prepared for some of the problems that would arise in Vietnam."

The NCO candidate course was designed to maximize the two-year tour of the enlisted draftee. The Army Chief of Staff Gen. Harold K. Johnson approved the concept on June 22, 1967, and on September 5 the first course at Fort Benning, GA began with Sgt. Maj. Don Wright serving as the first NCOCC Commandant. By combining the amount of time it took to attend basic and advanced training, including leave and travel time, and then add a 12-month tour in Vietnam, the developers settled on a 21-22 week course. NCOCC was divided into two phases. Phase I was 12 weeks of intensive, hands-on training, broken down into three basic phases. For the Infantry noncom, the course included tasks such as physical training, hand-to-hand combat, weapons, first aid, map reading, communications, and indirect fire. Vietnam veterans or Rangers taught many of the classes, but the cadre of the first course were commissioned officers. The second basic phase focused on instruction of fire team, squad and platoon tactics. Though over 300 hours of instruction was given, 80-percent was conducted in the field. The final basic phase was a "dress rehearsal for Vietnam," a full week of patrols, ambush, defensive perimeters, and navigation. Twice daily the Vietnam-schooled Rangers critiqued the candidates and all training was conducted tactically.

Throughout the 12-weeks of training, leadership was instilled in all that the students would do. A student chain of command was set up and "Tactical NCOs" supervised the daily performance of the candidates. By the time the students successfully completed Phase I, they were promoted to sergeant or staff sergeant, and shipped off to conduct a 9-10 week practical application of their leadership skills by serving as assistant leaders in a training center or unit. This gave the candidate the opportunity to gain more confidence in leading soldiers. As with many programs of its time, NCOCC was originally developed to meet the needs of the combat arms. With the success of the course, it was extended to other career fields, and the program became known as the Skill Development Base Program. The Armored School began NCOCC on December 5, 1967. Some schools later offered a correspondence "preparatory course" for those who anticipated attending NCOCC or had not benefited from such formal military schooling.

As with the Leadership Preparation Course tested by HumRRO, the "regular" noncoms and soldiers had much resentment for the NCOCC graduates, as those who took 4-6 years to earn their stripes the hard way, were immediately angered. Old-time sergeants began to use terms like "Shake 'n' Bake," "Instant NCO," or "Whip-n-Chills" to identify this new type of noncom. Many complained by voice or in writing that it took years to build a noncommissioned officer and that the program was wrong. Many feared it would affect their promotion opportunities, and one senior NCO worried that "nobody had shown them [NCOCC graduates] how to keep floor buffers operational in garrison." William O. Wooldridge, serving as the recently established position of Sergeant Major of the Army stated that, "promotions given to men who complete the course will not directly affect the promotion possibilities of other deserving soldiers in Vietnam or other parts of the world." In his speech to the first graduating class Wooldridge said that, "Great things are expected from you. Besides being the first class, you are also the first group who has ever been trained this way. It has been a whole new idea in training." As the Sgt Maj. of the Army expressed, all were not suspicious of this new way to train NCOs. After initial skepticism, former battalion commander Col. W. G. Skelton explained, "within a short time they [NCOCC graduates] proved themselves completely and we were crying for more. Because of their training, they repeatedly surpassed the soldier who had risen from the ranks in combat and provided the quality of leadership at the squad and platoon level which is essential in the type of fighting we are doing."



A TAC NCO critiques candidates

courtesy U.S. Army Infantry School

The graduates recognized the value of their training. Young draftees attending initial training at the time knew they were destined for Vietnam. Many potential candidates were eligible for Officer Candidate School, but rejected it because they would incur an additional service obligation. They realized that NCOCC was a method by which they could expand on their military training before entering the war. Some were exposed to the Phase II NCO Candidates serving as TAC NCOs during their initial training and felt they could do the same. Many graduates would later say that the NCO Candidate Course, taught by Vietnam veterans who experienced the war first hand, was what kept them and their soldiers alive and its lessons would go on to serve them well later in life.

Many were assigned as assistant fire team leaders upon arrival in Vietnam and then rapidly advanced to squad or platoon sergeants. Most would not see their fellow classmates again, and in many cases were the senior (or only) NCO in the platoon. Some would go on to make a career of the military or later attend OCS, and three were Medal of Honor winners. In the end almost 33,000 soldiers were graduates of one of the NCO Candidate Courses.

The NCOCC graduate had a specific role in the Army—they were trained to do one thing in one branch in one place in the world, and that was to be a fire team leader in Vietnam. It was recognized that they were not taught how to teach drill and ceremonies, inspect a barracks, or how to conduct police call. Many rated the program by how the graduates performed in garrison, for which they had little skill. But their performance in the rice paddies and jungles as combat leaders was where they took their final tests, of which many receiving the ultimate failing grade. But educating NCOs and potential NCOs was firmly in place for the Army.

Project Proficiency

A soldier's attitude towards the Army and his motivation to do his best require the best possible management of these programs to secure decisions which make sense from the individual's viewpoint. These decisions must add up to sound career management development for him.

- Enlisted Grade Structure Study, July 1967

The call was out in the Army to educate noncommissioned officers. In 1963 a council of senior NCOs at Fort Dix called for a senior NCO college, and one of the main topics was NCO education in November 1966 during SMA Wooldridge's first Command Sergeants Major Conference. The Army began to look at educating noncoms in earnest. On August 17, 1965, the Chief of Staff of the Army directed a comprehensive Enlisted Grade Structure Study. This study,

which was completed in July 1967, focused on how to establish and manage a quality-based enlisted force, and dedicated a portion for "improving the vital area of training." In response, the Deputy Chief of Staff for Personnel developed a comprehensive 5-year plan to manage career enlisted soldiers which included many far reaching programs, such as career management fields, MOS reclassification, the Qualitative Management Program, and Force Renewal through NCO Educational Development.

The Project recommended formal leadership training designed to prepare selected career-enlisted personnel for progressive levels of duty, and noted it would enhance career attractiveness and the quality of the noncommissioned officer. This study recognized that "The present haphazard system of career development, as opposed to skill development, had two bad results. First, the image of the NCO as a professional, highly trained individual is difficult to foster; second, the Army's resource of intelligent enlisted men, anxious to develop as career soldiers, is inefficiently managed. The Army has extended great effort to ensure the selected development of its officers. Analagous [sic] effort should be spent in the development of the noncommissioned officers of the Army."

The report went on to recommend a three-level educational program, similar to officers, outlined in the February 1969 NCO Educational Development Concept. The first of the three levels consisted of the Basic Course which was designated to produce the basic E-5 NCO. The Advanced Course was targeted to mid-grade NCOs, and the Senior Course was envisioned as a management course directed to qualifying men for senior enlisted staff positions. The Skill Development Base Program, NCOCC, was selected to serve as the model for the Basic Course. Project Proficiency, to be now known as the NCO Education system, was to become a reality.

On the 23rd of April 1970, President Richard Nixon announced to Congress that a new national objective would be set to establish an all-volunteer force and from that the Modern Volunteer Army was born. But by mid-1971 Army Chief of Staff General William Westmoreland was unhappy with the progress of the MVA and asked then retired Bruce Clarke to travel the Army and find out what could be changed to make it more attractive. On a visit to Fort Hood, Clarke arrived in time for its NCO Academy to close its doors, a repeat of the same story at other installations. Clarke conducted a survey and discovered that there were only four NCO Academies remaining in which to train 100,000 noncommissioned officers. In his report back to Westmoreland, Clarke lamented that "we are running an army with 95% of the NCO's untrained!" NCO academies across the nation were reopened, and Westmoreland approved the Basic and Advance noncommissioned officer courses, and by July the first Basic course pilot began.



Brig. Gen. Bruce C. Clarke

courtesy Constabulary Headquarters

Some of the difficulties facing the Army of 1971 included Westmoreland's concern for leadership inadequacies. He directed the CONARC Commander to form a study on leadership, and noted "the evident need for immediate attention by the chain of command to improving our leadership

techniques to meet the Army's current challenges." He also directed the War College in Carlisle, Pennsylvania to determine the type of leadership that would be appropriate as the Army approached the end of the draft. While these studies were going on, the Army was continually under fire. The May 1971 release of Comptroller General's Report to Congress on the Improper Use of Enlisted Personnel noted that the Secretary of the Army should strengthen existing policies rather than introduce new programs or changes. That same month Westmoreland urged all the commanders of the major commands to grant their noncommissioned officers broader authority. In his list of 14 points he asked them to "expand NCOs education through wise counseling and by affording them the opportunity to attend NCO Academies, NCO refresher courses, and off-duty educational programs."

The Beginning of the Noncommissioned Officers Education System

The purpose of the Noncommissioned Officer Education System is to build NCO trust and confidence, to raise tactical and technical competence and to inculcate the essential values of the professional Army ethic through the corps.

- Col. Kenneth Simpson and CSM Oren Bevins, Commandant and CSM, Sgt. Maj. Academy, Oct 1989

Planning for the development of an education system began in early 1969. Obviously, if the NCO could be school-trained for the jungle, then they ought to be school-trained for the garrison, too. Westmoreland had intended to establish a senior NCO school in 1968, but CONARC commander Gen. James K. Woolnough was not enthusiastic about the plan. Woolnough believed that senior NCOs, like generals, needed no further military schooling. This was the same problem Gen. Johnson was earlier faced with while trying to establish the NCO Candidate Course when CONARC commander Gen. Paul A. Freeman and his headquarters would not accept the idea. Johnson opted to wait until Woolnough assumed command of CONARC to begin the NCO candidate program. Westmoreland would also wait until Gen. Ralph E. Haines Jr. succeeded Woolnough at CONARC.

In July of 1970, during a lull in the NCO Candidate classes at Fort Sill, they conducted the first pilot of the Basic Course. The NCO Education Program could only begin when NCO Candidate Courses were completed because of scarce resources... and the first of the Army-wide courses began in May 1971. In January of 1972 the first two Advance Courses began and that same year Chief of Staff Gen. C. W. Abrams approved the establishment of the Senior NCO Course, to be located at the newly established Sergeants Major Academy at an unused airfield in El Paso, Texas. The draft ended on December 31, 1972 and the Army entered 1973 prepared to rely on volunteers.

The three-tiered (later four, five, and now four) noncommissioned officer education system was initially developed for career soldiers, specifically for those who had re-enlisted at least once. Students would attend the courses in a temporary duty status, with the sergeants major course being a permanent change of station. NCOES was established in late 1971 and phased in across the Army. Funding was a problem, particularly with overseas soldiers and by December 1971 CONARC had to cancel 9 of 12 Basic Course classes because of poor attendance. CONARC convened a NCOES conference in October and implemented incentives including promoting the top graduates, offering promotion points to graduates and mandatory quotas by CONARC.

Reserve soldiers were authorized to attend active courses, and different branches developed correspondence courses. By mid-1973 forty-one basic courses were in operation.

In January 1972 the first two advance courses started, consisting only of E-7s because the Department of the Army did not maintain the files of E-6s to screen. By 1974, forty-two courses had been established through CONARC, and in August U.S. Army Europe personnel were allowed to attend advance courses in the United States.

The Sergeants Major Course

"I feel the program of instruction is very demanding, particularly in the areas of human relations and military organization and operations."

- Msgt. Henry Caro, Excellence in Leadership
Awardee, SMC Class No. 2, 1974

Department of the Army General Order 98 on July 15, 1972 authorized the U.S. Army Sergeants Major Academy. This capstone senior level course was designed to prepare selected E-8s for duty as sergeants major and command sergeants major throughout the Army. Unlike other NCOES courses it was branch immaterial and similar to courses provided to commissioned officers at senior service schools. To develop the initial curriculum a committee was formed consisting of ten command sergeants major from major commands and thirteen educational personnel from throughout the Army's schools systems. Some of the subjects selected included the usual courses on leadership, military organization and military management. But the sergeants major course also included topics on world affairs and human relations. Some within the military were against NCOs studying world affairs. The subject was supported and encouraged by the first Commandant, Col. Karl Morton, and the Command Sergeant Major, then Cmd. Sgt. Maj. William Bainbridge (who would later go on to become Sergeant Major of the Army). It took a decision by the Army Chief of Staff, Gen. Abrams, to keep this topic in the course.



Sergeants Major Academy
courtesy Infantry

In December of 1972 students began to arrive and on January 15, 1973, the first Sergeants Major Course of 105 students was convened. This first class was organized with student leaders who attended to administrative details and organizing committees. This first class also established a new tradition by conducting a dining-in and dining-out for students. These formal functions were a tradition with the officer corps but not for noncommissioned officers, and the first was held March 22, 1973.

The senior course was designated the "capstone" of the noncommissioned officer education system. It consisted of over 600 hours of instruction, mostly classroom centered, using a "small group" process. This method centered on a

participatory method of training in which 10 or 15 students were organized into groups and accomplished a majority of

their learning by doing. This different approach let the students participate in the learning. Currently, the Small Group Instruction (SGI) process shifts the teaching methodology from "what to think" to "how to think" and places the learning responsibility on the student through group participation and assignments as discussion leaders. Typically, the first students were first or master sergeants with between fifteen and twenty-three years of service. As long as a soldier was not a serving sergeant major, he or she could attend.

The Academy offered a comprehensive, professional educational environment in which each individual was offered an opportunity to broaden his knowledge and discover new fields outside his MOS. Besides the academic portion, students were offered a college electives program and received an opportunity to participate in a college degree program.

The Enlisted Personnel Management System

The NCOES complements the Enlisted Evaluation System, except that each course goes deeply into the hands-on skills required in the core duty positions of the MOS while the corresponding test assesses knowledge across the breadth of the MOS.

- Brig. Gen. William Patch, former Director
of Enlisted Personnel, Nov. 1974

Educating NCOs would forever be different after the implementation of NCOES. In Europe, the Seventh Army NCO Academy officially designated that the Commandant would be an enlisted soldier, and Cmd. Sgt. Maj. Lawrence Hickey became the first in January 1972. The purpose of noncommissioned officer academies was to train noncommissioned officers and specialists in fundamentals and techniques of leadership and to offer increased career educational opportunities. Academies also were to prepare them for leadership duty in all environments and to instill in them self-confidence and a sense of responsibility. Academies were still established by divisions or at installations and the CONARC replacement, Training and Doctrine Command (TRADOC), approved the programs of instruction. Graduates of the basic and advance courses (NCOES) were not allowed to attend NCO academies, and academies were discouraged from being used as "pre-NCOES preparation" courses.

As an outgrowth of Project Proficiency the Army Chief of Staff directed that an Enlisted Personnel Management System Task Force be formed to conduct a sweeping review of enlisted personnel management. This Task Force was organized in January 1973 to design a career system that would challenge, develop, reward, and satisfy soldiers so well that more would want to stay for a career. It also would provide the right number of soldiers in the right grades and skills to carry out the Army's mission. It would serve to eliminate the dead-end military occupational specialties? those in which a soldier could only advance as high as sergeant. NCOs were now allowed to merge to specialties at a higher grade in a similar career field without changing having to change jobs entirely.

This plan was to implement a new EPMS through a multi-year plan. As the Army began to phase in EPMS one of the changes was the introduction of a primary level course to be added to NCOES. This 3-4 week Primary Noncommissioned Officer Course (PNCOC) would be for combat arms soldiers, was branch immaterial, and would be taught in the current NCO academies. At the same time the basic course was to be shortened and by 1976 to be redesigned as the Basic Noncommissioned Officer Course (BNCOC). Also in 1976, TRADOC directed that

a Primary Leadership Course (PLC) be developed to train the first line leaders in Combat Support and Combat Service Support fields and to also be taught at the NCO academies. Soon, the Advance courses were also redesigned as the Advance Noncommissioned Officer Course (ANCOC) to support EPMS.

EPMS was implemented on 1 October 1975 and was designed to provide clear patterns of career development and promotion potential. A goal of eliminating bottlenecks for promotion was established by grouping MOSs into career management fields. EPMS quickly took over, expanded and integrated NCOES, and took the basic combat arms courses out of the service schools and placed PNCOC/PLC and BNCOC with the NCO academies.

The Evolution

In some respects training in today's Total Army is similar to training in years past. General concepts remain the same. Officers set standards, and NCOs train soldiers and small units up to those standards.

- PLDC Handbook, Army Chief of Staff and SMA., 1989

Among other things, The EPMS plan was to tie NCOES to pay grades and promotions. Its impact on NCOES was long range and far reaching, phased to be accomplished by 1977. Pilot courses of the PNCOC were held in the summer of 1975 at Forts Carson and Campbell. The transition from NCO academy leadership courses to PNCOC, and later PLC, took well into 1978. A separate group of courses was developed in 1976 for the combat support and combat service support NCOs that were technical in nature. The PLC for CS/CSS were mainly leadership oriented and for the most part MOS immaterial, but there were no BNCOC leadership equivalent courses. But as the combat soldiers learned job-related skills in PNCOC, the Primary Technical (PTC) was introduced to complement PLC, and the Basic Technical Courses (BTC) became the CS/CSS soldiers basic level course. These were typically conducted at the service school responsible for the management of the particular career field.

Over the next five years, NCOES would continue to undergo implementation and changes. Overseas soldiers had difficulty in attending courses in the United States and TRADOC did not want to establish PTC/BTC overseas for CS/CSS soldiers. Attendance regularly fluctuated throughout the period due to travel fund shortages and lack of interest. By 1979 and 1980, the TRADOC commander called for a survey of BNCOC and ANCOC in conjunction with a revision of the governing regulation, AR 351-1, *Individual Military Education and Training*. A result was a Common Leader Training portion added to both courses in the early 1980s, and TRADOC announced that a new course would replace the current primary level courses.

On July 23 1982 TRADOC directed that PNCOC and PLC be combined to form a Primary Leadership Development Course (PLDC). This combined course would be implemented in January 1984 and the Sergeants Major Academy would become the proponent for its development. The initial courses were conducted at Forts Leonard Wood and Polk in 1983 with much success. When released in 1984, the new AR 351-1 mandated the establishment of Order of Merit (OML) lists at the battalion level, which would cause better attendance and decentralize control over which students were selected to attend the primary courses. The Sergeants Major Academy had become the proponent for ANCOC common leader training in June 1981, and in with the release of the new regulation in 1984, assumed CLT for BNCOC.

Implementation of PLDC was nearly complete by the end of 1985, so when PTCs were abolished in December, PLDC became the sole MOS nonspecific primary leadership course. PLDC was the NCOs first step to education, and the leadership and tactical training was aimed at the junior noncom. Also in December, the NCO Professional Development Study Group (Soldier's Study) released its results and recommended linking NCOES to promotion. The Army Chief of Staff approved the concept that NCOES be made mandatory, sequential, and progressive, and with NCOES-promotion linkage. Also in 1985, the small group instruction method became standard for all NCOES courses. January 1986 began with the redesignation of BTCs as BNCOC-CA/CSS and the establishment of an Operations and Intelligence Course at the Sergeants Major Academy. This functional course would become the predecessor of the Battle Staff NCO Course. Effective July 1986, PLDC became mandatory for promotion to staff sergeant and became a prerequisite for BNCOC attendance that Army-wide in that October.

The 1990s, and Beyond

A noncommissioned officer corps, ground in heritage, values and tradition, that embodies the warrior ethos; values perpetual learning; and is capable of leading, training, and motivating soldiers.

- Vision of the Noncommissioned Officer Corps, Future Leader Development of Army NCOs Workshop, 1998

The Noncommissioned Officer Education System underwent many studies, improvements, and revisions from the mid-1980s to the mid-1990s. A 1989 NCO Leader Development Task Force noted that NCOES was not completely aligned with unit levels of leadership and went on to recommend requiring attendance to promotion; PLDC for sergeant, BNCOC for staff sergeant, ANCOE for sergeant first class, and the sergeants major course for sergeants major. At its peak in 1992, about 90,000 students had graduated from noncommissioned officer education system courses.

Some of the recommend improvements included adding rifle qualification requirements, train-the-trainer course and "shared" field-training exercises. Automated systems were being used to track order of merit lists and in scheduling students for training. Special NCOES courses were designed for Reserve Component schools and a special task force was established to evaluate RC training. By 1991, NCOES was an integral part of the Enlisted Personnel Management System and has been widely credited for contributing to the success in the Gulf War.

Today's soldier must receive appropriate training for the next grade level under the Select, Train, Promote system prior to promotion. The Sergeants Major Academy has been a major force in the recent history of training noncommissioned officers. Not only does the Academy serve as proponent for PLDC and the common leader training of the other NCOES course, it also is responsible for the functional course Battle Staff NCO, the First Sergeants Course, and the Command Sergeants Major Course. The current goal of the NCOES and noncommissioned officer training is to prepare noncommissioned officers to lead and train soldiers who work and fight under their supervision and assist their assigned leaders to execute unit missions.

By utilizing new high-tech methods which brings the classroom to the student, computer technology, and the Internet, new methods are being researched and tested to offer "distance learning" to the remotely located student. In the spring of 1995 a pilot course was conducted to teach PLDC using a video teletraining (VTT) techniques across the airwaves in an interactive session to soldiers on duty in the Sinai. And in 1997 the common leader portion of ANCOC was taught to reserve component NCOs at Fort Hood, Texas.

Todd A. Weiler, the Deputy Assistant Secretary of the Army for Reserve Affairs, Mobilization, Readiness and Training, who had been instrumental in the development of the Army Distance Learning Program strongly emphasized that distance learning is a must and that the future of the Army must involve distance learning. Computer based CD-ROM courses tied to a workstation now assist the student



49th AD ANCOC via distance learning

courtesy *NCO Journal*

in learning as new technologies are

introduced to the digital classroom. As methods for institutional training become more complicated, the need for trained NCOs remains the same.

The recently approved "Vision" for the future NCO has established a path for perpetual learning for the noncommissioned officer corps to bring it solidly into the twenty-first century. Training has been a part of our Army since the days of von Steuben, however, training noncommissioned officers has not. It was not until the Army was faced with large groups of untrained NCOs and soldiers in the aftermath of World War II that the focus turned to training the leaders in the occupation force. After the war in Vietnam and the success of the Skill Development Base Program, the idea of a career plan for NCOs would increase the professionalism of the noncom. The Modern Volunteer Army required a strong corps of enlisted leaders, and education has proven to be one of the driving factors in developing a true professional force.

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