

By Linda Gaunt

**F**inding biographies and histories about Non-commissioned officers has been a difficult task until recent years. Publishers weren't interested in the stories of NCOs. And NCOs weren't writing their own stories. This situation is beginning to change. NCOs are realizing the need to tell their own stories and publishers have discovered a new market for books about NCOs.

Reading the stories of the experiences of NCOs can help you in your professional development. These stories also can provide you with lessons learned, both the how-to and how-done. These stories can tell you about survival, about winning, even about losing. Above all, these stories can help you take pride in the NCO Corps and its accomplishments.

You can begin with some general histories of the NCO Corps. Just published in 1994 is Ernest F. Fisher's *GUARDIANS OF THE REPUBLIC* (Ballantine Books). Dr. Fisher traces the evolution of the status and duties of the NCO from before the American Revolution through Vietnam and its aftermath. The Center for Military History's *THE STORY OF THE NONCOMMISSIONED OFFICER CORPS: THE BACKBONE OF THE ARMY* (Washington, DC, 1989) is a good general overview. It has a good selected bibliography of books on the history of the NCO Corps. A popular short treatment of the NCO Corps is *A SHORT HISTORY OF THE NCO* (1989) by L. R. Arms and is published by the NCO Museum at the U.S. Army Sergeants Major Academy at Ft. Bliss, TX.

For an overall history of the Army with good coverage of the NCO Corps, you can read Russell Weigley's *HISTORY OF THE UNITED STATES ARMY*, enl. ed. (Indiana University Press, 1984) or *UNCOMMON VALOR: THE EXCITING STORY OF THE ARMY* (Rand McNally, 1964), James Merrill, editor. Edward Coffman's *THE OLD ARMY: A PORTRAIT OF THE AMERICAN ARMY IN PEACETIME, 1784-1898* (Oxford, 1986) is a good study of military life when the Army was not at war and includes good descriptions of how NCOs lived and worked. William Emerson's *CHEVRONS* (Smithsonian Institution Press, 1983) is the guide to the history of NCO rank insignia.

Reading about NCO leadership, military ethics, and NCO duties and responsibilities is also a way to enhance your professional development. Some good examples are *THE NCO GUIDE*, 4th ed., revised by Frank Cox (Stackpole, 1992); Roger H. Nye's *THE CHALLENGE OF COMMAND* (Avery, 1986); Robert Taylor and Wm. Rosenbach, editors, *MILITARY LEADERSHIP: IN PURSUIT OF EXCELLENCE*, 2nd ed. (Pergamon-Brassey, 1989); and *THE PARAMETERS OF MILITARY ETHICS* (Pergamon-Brassey, 1989), Lloyd Matheus and Dale Brown, editors.

Books about American wars are very numerous but not all are interested in portraying the NCO. There are a few needles in the haystack, however. For the American Revolu-

tion, I would suggest Robert K. Wright's *THE CONTINENTAL ARMY* (Washington, DC, 1983); Don Higginbotham's *THE WAR OF AMERICAN INDEPENDENCE: MILITARY ATTITUDES, POLICIES, AND PRACTICE, 1763-1789* (Macmillan, 1971); and that first bible for the drill sergeant, Von Steuben's *REGULATIONS FOR THE ORDER AND DISCIPLINE OF THE TROOPS OF THE UNITED STATES* (Dover, 1985).

It can be said that the Civil War was the first literate war America fought. Diaries and letters of soldiers are still being published every year. The classic studies of the common soldier, North or South, are Bell Irvin Wiley's *THE LIFE OF*

*JOHNNY REB* (Doubleday, 1971) and *THE LIFE OF BILLY YANK* (Doubleday, 1971). A follow-up study is James I. Robertson's *SOLDIERS BLUE AND GRAY* (University of South Carolina Press, 1988). Two examples of personal accounts are Frederick Pettit's *INFANTRYMAN PETTIT* (Avon, 1990) and Elisha Hunt Rhodes' *ALL FOR THE UNION* (Orion, 1985).

World War I has not seen as many books about NCOs as the Civil War. However, the standard is *SERGEANT YORK: HIS OWN LIFE AND WAR DIARY* (Doubleday, 1928), edited by Tom Skeyhill. A recent biography of SGT York is David D. Lee's *SERGEANT YORK: AN AMERICAN HERO* (University of Kentucky, 1985). Another book by an NCO is Albert M. Ettinger's *A DOUGHBOY WITH*

*THE FIGHTING 69th* (White Mane, 1992).

Books about NCOs in World War II are also numerous. Suggested reading would be Audie Murphy's *TO HELL AND BACK* (TAB, 1988), Edwin P. Hoyt's oral history *THE GI'S WAR: THE STORY OF AMERICAN SOLDIERS IN EUROPE IN WORLD WAR II* (McGraw-Hill, 1988), and Edward F. Murphy's *HEROES OF WORLD WAR II* (Presidio, 1990).

Books about NCOs in the Korean War are few. One of the best is Edward F. Murphy's *KOREAN WAR HEROES* (Presidio, 1992). Perhaps the best overall history of the Korean War and one which does cover the NCO is T. R. Fehrenbach's *THIS KIND OF WAR* (Macmillan, 1963). [Several subsequent paperback editions exist.]

More and more, personal accounts of the Vietnam War are being published. Among the best by NCOs are USASMA graduate and Medal of Honor winner Franklin D. Miller's *REFLECTIONS OF A WARRIOR* (Presidio, 1991), Charles Gadd's *LINE DOGGIE: FOOT SOLDIER IN VIETNAM* (Presidio, 1987) and Timothy S. Lowry's *AND BRAVE MEN, TOO: THE UNFORGETTABLE STORIES OF THOSE WHO WERE AWARDED THE CONGRESSIONAL MEDAL OF HONOR IN VIETNAM* (Crown, 1985).

## BOOKS

### For And About NCOs



The overall story of the black soldier in the US Army is best represented by Jack D. Foner's *BLACKS AND THE MILITARY IN AMERICAN HISTORY* (Praeger, 1974) and Irvin H. Lee's *NEGRO MEDAL OF HONOR MEN* (Dodd, Mead, 1967). For the Civil War, I would suggest Luis F. Emilio's *A BRAVE BLACK REGIMENT*, 3rd ed. (Ayer, 1969); Thomas Wentworth Higginson's *ARMY LIFE IN A BLACK REGIMENT* (Corner House, 1984); and James Henry Gooding's *ON THE ALTAR OF FREEDOM: A BLACK SOLDIER'S CIVIL WAR LETTERS FROM THE FRONT* (University of Massachusetts Press, 1991).

The number of books about the 9th and 10th Cavalries is also growing. William H. Leckies' *THE BUFFALO SOLDIERS: A NARRATIVE OF THE NEGRO CAVALRY IN THE WEST* (University of Oklahoma Press, 1967) and *THE BLACK MILITARY EXPERIENCE IN THE AMERICAN WEST* (Liveright, 1971) are among the best. Blacks in World War II are represented by Lou Potter's *THE LIBERATORS: FIGHTING ON TWO FRONTS IN WORLD WAR II* (Harcourt, 1992), Thomas S. Arnold's *BUFFALO SOLDIERS: THE 92nd INFANTRY DIVISION AND REINFORCEMENTS IN WORLD WAR II, 1942-1954* (Sunflower University Press, 1990), and *THE INVISIBLE SOLDIER: THE EXPERIENCE OF THE BLACK SOLDIER IN WORLD WAR II*, an oral history. The story of blacks in the Vietnamese Conflict is best discussed in Wallace Terry's *BLOODS: AN ORAL HISTORY OF THE VIETNAM WAR BY BLACK VETERANS* (Random House, 1984), with oral histories of 12 black NCOs.

There are very few books about women as enlisted soldiers or NCOs. The best overall history is Bettie J. Mordlen's history of the Women's Army Corps, *THE WOMEN'S ARMY CORPS, 1945-1978* (Washington, DC, 1990). Other histories about women in the military are Jeanne Holm's *WOMEN IN THE MILITARY: UNFINISHED REVOLUTION*, rev. ed. (Presidio, 1992) and Judith Hicks Stiehm's *ARMS AND THE ENLISTED WOMAN* (Temple University Press, 1989). Betty Sowers Alt and Bonnie Stone chronicle the experiences of other women associated with the military in their *CAMP-FOLLOWING, A HISTORY OF THE MILITARY WIFE* (Praeger, 1991).

For the Hispanic soldier, I would recommend *THE THREE WARS OF ROY BENAVIDEZ* (Corona, 1986) by Roy Benavidez and a companion biography, *THE LAST MEDAL OF HONOR* (Swan, 1990) by Pete Billac.

A forthcoming book to look for is *TOP SERGEANT* (Ballantine, 1995) by SMA (Ret.) William Bainbridge.

This essay merely suggests a starter reading list. There are many books available that contain information about NCOs. Often, though, the problem is that the books have no indexes or other means to guide to that information. Always ask your nearest librarian for help to find materials about NCOs.

If you want to read any of these books, go to your nearest post library and/or school library. If you don't find a copy of the book there, then ask the librarian to get it for you through interlibrary loan. ■

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## The Sergeants Major of the Army

By Mark Gillespie, Glen Hawkins, Michael Kelly and Preston Pierce

At the highest levels of the Army, the Sergeant Major of the Army represents the enlisted soldier. But, he's only done so since 1966, when the position was first established.

Before that time, the Army staff had no one designated to represent the enlisted soldier's view.

*The Sergeants Major of the Army* is a newly published book on the history of the office and the nine men who have served there. It's a must read for ALL NCOs.

Center for Military History, Pub 70-63  
1995, 180 pages (HB), \$29.00

## TOP SERGEANT

THE LIFE AND TIMES  
OF SERGEANT MAJOR  
OF THE ARMY

WILLIAM G. BAINBRIDGE

By SMA William G. Bainbridge  
(U.S. Army, Retired)  
and Dan Crogg

Foreword by General Bernard W. Rogers  
(U.S. Army, Retired)

Ballantine Books, New York, NY  
1995, 368 pages + 8-page insert (HB), \$23.00