



At the time of my initial 1999 research in to the Skill Development Base Program in 1999 little had been written on the story of not only this revolutionary new way to development sergeants for combat, but the men who were chosen for training for that singular purpose. Since that time there were at least 3 books written, including my monograph *Educating Noncommissioned Officers* (of which this is based on), yet the stories continue to be told.

Even among the attendees or the soldiers of that period, little is known beyond anecdotes, rumors or lore. The

## **Prologue - 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 the U.S. Continental Army Command (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. The commander of the U.S. Constabulary force in Europe Maj. Gen. Isaac D. White decided late in 1949 that special training was needed for the noncommissioned officers of the Constabulary. He turned to the commander of the 2<sup>nd</sup> Constabulary Brigade Brig. Gen Bruce C. Clarke, who expressed his enthusiasm 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.

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. According to CONARC they believed that in a future mobilization that “the need for enlisted leaders would far exceed the number available from both the active Army,” and that the need for NCOs so pressing that they might be required to “appoint leaders before their ability could actually be proved on the battlefield.” One of the early results of the study was the publishing of the USCONARC Pamphlet 350-24, *Guide for the Potential Noncommissioned Officer*, which was a how-to guide for candidates to smooth the transition for enlisted soldiers from within the ranks to a sergeant.



In June 1961 Russia demanded the withdrawal of western forces from the German capital of Berlin and then started constructing a wall to divide the city. In the midst of those studies and field experiments the Army and the Department of Defense was faced with a possible call for mobilization as a result of the Berlin Crisis. 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.

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 the study three experimental training systems were developed. The 1967 conclusions drawn up at the close of the 10-year study were that:

**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.

The CONARC-sponsored Unit NCO project was directly influential on important changes to the way the Army trained initial entry soldiers. In 1963, Stephen Ailes, then Secretary of the Army, made a comprehensive survey of recruit training in the Army. The Ailes Report recommended establishment of schools that would offer formal instruction to trainers newly assigned to duty at Army Training Centers. The project was organized at Fort Jackson during the period 1 February-17 April 1964. 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*

As the war in Vietnam had 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 on the ranks of enlisted leaders 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 called Skilled Development Base (SDB) Program 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 by some was that 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 (NCOCC) 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 NCOC 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 NCOC] 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 NCOC 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. NCOC 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 was 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, NCOC 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 NCOC on December 5, 1967. Some schools later offered a correspondence "preparatory course" for those who anticipated attending NCOC 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 NCOC 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 on 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 [NCOC 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 Wooldridge expressed, all were not suspicious of this new way to train NCOs. After initial skepticism, outgoing battalion commander of 2d Bn, 27th Infantry Lt. Col. Winfried. G. Skelton was asked how he though NCO Candidate Course graduates performed in combat, to which he replied, "within a short time they [NCOC 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."

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 four were Medal of Honor winners. In the end over 26,000 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.



## **Epilogue - 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, NCOC, was selected to serve as the model for the Basic Course. Project Proficiency, to be now known as the NCO Education System (NCOES), was to become a reality.

On the 23<sup>rd</sup> 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.



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."



## **NCOC seeds Army NCO 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, Sgts. Maj. Academy, Oct 1989*

Planning for the development of an education system for enlisted leaders of the Modern Volunteer Army 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 for the senior NCO school.

In July of 1970, during a lull in the NCO Candidate classes at Fort Sill, they conducted the first pilot of the Noncommissioned Officer Basic Course. The NCO Education Program could only begin when NCOC 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 Noncommissioned Officer Advance Courses began and that same year Chief of Staff Gen. Creighton 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 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.

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.



**Dedicated to:**

SSG Robert J. Pruden, Class 2-69

SSG Hammett Lee Bowen, Jr., Class 4-69

SSG Robert C. Murray, Class 38-69

SGT Lester R. Stone, Jr. Class 37-68

