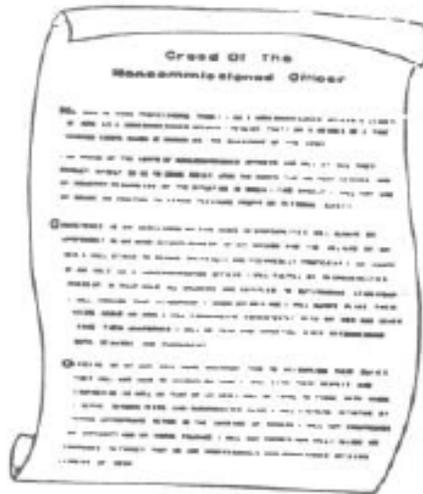


# The Origins of the *Creed of the Noncommissioned Officer*



By  
SGM Dan Elder  
and  
SGM Felix Sanchez

U.S. Army Sergeants Major Academy  
3 May 1998  
Fort Bliss, TX

It started on the fourth floor of Building 4 at Fort Benning, Georgia, in 1973 with a plain white sheet of paper and three letters; N-C-O. From there begins the history of the *Creed of the Noncommissioned Officer*

The *Creed* has been around for many years in different forms and fashions. Sergeants can recall reading the *Creed* on the day they were first inducted into the NCO Corps. Most of us have a copy hanging on our wall in our office, our work place, or at our home. Some have special versions etched into metal on a wooden plaque, or printed in fine calligraphy. One Sergeant Major of the Army could pick up and recite the *Creed* from any place selected.<sup>1</sup> But take a quick glance at any *Creed* and you will notice the absence of the author's name at the bottom. Where the *Creed* originated from has questioned many.

To date, there are few historical collections relating to the noncommissioned officer. In the foreword of one of the premier studies of the NCO, *Guardians of the Republic: a History of the Noncommissioned Officer Corps of the U.S. Army*, Russell F. Weigley pointed out that "Until the publication of this book, the American noncommissioned officers who have provided the backbone of our army have never been appropriately studied by military historians."<sup>2</sup>

In his recent article on the NCO Creed, Museum of the Noncommissioned Officer Director Larry Arms noted that, "History often clouds events, people, ideas, and occurrences deep within a shroud of obscurity." And that, "...until they (events) are considered important, they are often paid little attention."<sup>3</sup> The *Creed* is one of those events. The *NCO Journal* had published a request for information about the origins of the *Creed* in the Spring 96 edition<sup>4</sup>, yet had received little response.

The earliest mention of the *Creed* in official and unofficial publications seemed to be in the year 1989, but the *Creed* is older than that. The problem centered on "which *Creed*?" As Arms mentions in his article, "In the early 1980's I first started seeing NCO Creeds produced by various commands. Though similar in nature, they differed in detail."<sup>5</sup> Research had also turned up different versions of the *Creed*. A reprint of the *Sergeants Book*, prepared in 1982 by then 3<sup>rd</sup> Armored Division Sergeant Major, CSM Robert Haga, discusses the *Creed*. In his timeless book, he expressed his "written talk" to the noncommissioned officers within his Division. On the last page, barely readable, is a small copy of the familiar "Creed of the Noncommissioned Officer."<sup>6</sup> Also, on the inside back cover

was the "United States Army Noncommissioned Officer Creed," which was an oath that a noncommissioned officer would repeat or sign. Obviously multiple *Creeds* were used.

While researching information about NCO responsibilities in *TC 22-6, The Noncommissioned Officer Guide*, there is a reference to the 1989 "NCO Leader Development Task Force," which resulted in the publishing of that Training Circular. It stated that "Drawing heavily from the Professional Army Ethic (FM 100-1), the NCO CREED (emphasis added), and the Oath of Enlistment, the Task Force identified 14 attitudes common to all effective NCO leaders."<sup>7</sup>

The Task Force, directed by LTG John S. Crosby, had as its mission the job of developing "a strategy and action plan for improving the Army's NCO leader development system...."<sup>8</sup> The Task Force was comprised of the Director, the Commandant of the Sergeants Major Academy (Executive Agent), two field grade officers, 14 senior noncommissioned officers, and three civilian specialists. The Task Force began in January 1989 and ran until early June 1989. Their 18 recommendations included aligning the noncommissioned officer education system with promotions, combining two similar courses into one to be called "Battle Staff", and

"Approve the NCO skills, knowledge, and attitudes (SKA),"<sup>9</sup> and resulted in superceding *Field Manual 22-600-20, The Army Noncommissioned Officer Guide, 13 November 1986.*

Recommendation 1 of the study identified that the

"Attitudes" were partially drawn from the NCO Creed!

1989 was an important year for the Noncommissioned Officer Corps. In keeping with the tradition of "themes", the Secretary of the Army, the Chief of Staff, and the Sergeant Major of the Army announced in January that the 1989 theme would be the "Year of the Noncommissioned Officer."<sup>10</sup> In 1989, not only was the Task Force formed, the *Creed* appeared in numerous publications. In their salute to NCO's, the *Military Police* journal printed on the back cover a copy of the familiar *Creed*.<sup>11</sup> And then later in that "Year of the NCO", other publications would ultimately print copies of the same *Creed*, including the *Ordnance* magazine,<sup>12</sup> and the *INSCOM Journal*.<sup>13</sup>

The Leader Development Task Force conducted a "thorough literature search which included 17 previous studies concerning leadership and professional development."<sup>14</sup> Of those studies, one of the most important was the *Noncommissioned Officer Professional Development Study of 1985*. This two-volume study (also known as the

*Soldiers Study*) has been the guiding document for noncommissioned officer development since its release in 1986. The study group considered recommendations applicable for the period 1986 to 2000,<sup>15</sup> and of its 45 recommendations, 34 were approved, 9 were deferred, and 2 were disapproved (one of which, the change of retention control points for sergeant (E-5) was later adopted). These recommendations have shaped our corps, and included tying NCOES to promotion, redesigning the Enlisted Evaluation Report (eventually becoming the NCO-ER), and improving the quality of Reserve Component school training. This was truly an important study for the evolution of the noncommissioned officer.

Though the objective of the study was to evaluate professional development, ALL aspects of NCO professional development were studied. One of the doctrinal publications reviewed was the March 1980 version of *The Army NCO Guide*. The study asserted that, "While the NCO Guide contains no factual errors..."<sup>16</sup> and went on to endorse eight recommended changes proposed by COL Kenneth W. Simpson, Chief, Training and Education, Office of the Chief of Staff, Noncommissioned Officers Professional Development

Study (who later went on to serve as the Commandant of the Sergeants Major Academy).

In his *DA Form 2028, Recommended Changes to Publications and Blank Forms* (endorsed by the Deputy Director of the study, COL Jacques B. Gerard) dated 15 Oct 85, Simpson's last recommendation included one enclosure, a single sheet of paper. His eighth recommendation read:

"The Noncommissioned Officer Creed (copy attached) should be included in the manual (FM 22-600-20). Recommend the creed appear on either the inside, front cover, or in the selection titled 'The NCO Corps.'

Reason: The creed has been around the Army for over 30 years and is well known to the NCO Corps. It is frequently used at NCO ceremonies such as NCO Academy graduations, NCO 'inductions', and dining-ins. However, it currently does not appear in any official publication. The creed espouses principles which are consistent with the theme of the NCO Guide, and including it in the FM will give it "official" status."<sup>17</sup>

The version of the *Creed* that was submitted to the Commander of the Training and Doctrine Command (then

proponent for *The Army NCO Guide*) was a version of the *Creed* that we know today. For the first time, with the publishing of *FM 22-600-20* on 13 November 1986 as an official publication, the *Creed of the Noncommissioned Officer* was formalized.<sup>18</sup>

However, where did the *Creed* that Simpson submitted come from? Now a Major General, Simpson is certain that one of the noncommissioned officers serving on the *Soldier Study* panel provided him a copy,<sup>19</sup> and he does not recollect seeing it before about 1980.<sup>20</sup>

The June 1981 edition of *RB 22-600-20, The Duties, Responsibilities and Authority of NCO's and the Interplay and Relationship with the Duties, Responsibilities and Authority of Officers*, published by the U.S. Army Sergeants Major Academy, in which the summary refers to a creed, "An official ethical code is the Moral and Ethical Responsibilities of Leaders; Creed of the Noncommissioned Officer."<sup>21</sup> However, there is no published copy of the *Creed*.

The Army's search for the origins of the *Creed* was on. Soldiers appearing before boards were being asked questions like "who wrote the *Creed*?", and people wanted to know its

history. In preparing research for the U.S. Army Information Management Support Center's (IMCEN) book *The Noncommissioned Officer Corps on Training, Cohesion, and Combat*,<sup>22</sup> the compiler, Marianna Yamamoto, discovered a significant passage. SFC Michael T. Woodward wrote in the Jul-Aug 1975 issue of the *Infantry* magazine that, "The Creed of the Noncommissioned Officer was developed by the NCOs of the NCO Subcommittee, Command and Leadership Committee, Leadership Department USAIS (U.S. Army Infantry School)<sup>23</sup>." In the Spring 97 edition,<sup>24</sup> the *NCO Journal* printed a story on the *Creed* based on IMCEN's information.<sup>25</sup> Meanwhile, the number of questions increased about the *Creed's* author.

In October 1972, Sergeant Major of the Army Silas L. Copeland stated that "a code of ethics...cannot be developed overnight by edict or official pronouncement. It is developed by years of practice and performance of duty according to high ethical standards. It must be self-policing. Without such a code, a professional soldier or a group soon loses its identity and effectiveness."<sup>26</sup> Could this have been a call for the development of a document to

guide noncommissioned officers? Was this the impetus to develop our *Creed*?

By 1973, the Army (and the noncommissioned officer corps) was in turmoil. Of all the post-Vietnam developments in American military policy, the most influential in shaping the Army was the coming of the Modern Volunteer Army (VOLAR).<sup>27</sup> With the inception of the Noncommissioned Officer Candidate Course (NCOC), many young sergeants were not the skilled trainers of the past and were only trained to perform a specific job, squad leaders in Vietnam.<sup>28</sup> The Noncommissioned Officer System (NCOES) was under development, and the Army was re-writing its *Field Manual 22-100, Leadership*, to set a road map for leaders to follow.

Of those working on the challenges at hand, one of the only NCO pure instructional departments at the U.S. Army Infantry School (USAIS) at Fort Benning, Georgia, was the NCO Subcommittee, of the Command and Leadership Committee, Leadership Department. Besides training soldiers at the Noncommissioned Officer's Academy, these NCOs also developed instructional material and worked as part of the team developing model leadership programs of instruction.<sup>29</sup>

Of those serving on this team were MSG John Cato (Chief), SFCs Earle Brigham and Jimmy Jakes, and SSGs Raymond Brown and Lester Cochran. Michael Woodward would soon join them.<sup>30</sup> They worked under the direction of the Chief of the Command, Staff and Leadership Department, COL Nathan Vail<sup>†</sup>. During one of their many "brainstorming sessions", Brigham recalls writing those three letters on a plain white sheet of paper...N C O.<sup>31</sup> From those three letters they began to build the *Creed*. The idea behind developing a creed was to give noncommissioned officers a "yardstick by which to measure themselves."<sup>32</sup> There was an oath of enlistment for incoming enlistees and an oath of commissioning for the officers, yet the noncommissioned officer had nothing that recognized their induction into the NCO Corps.

The NCO Subcommittee's first drafts did not make it through the Infantry Center's editors, and they rewrote the *Creed* numerous times. When it was ultimately approved, the *Creed* was designed on a scroll, and printed on the inside cover of the Special Texts (ST) issued to students attending the noncommissioned officer courses at Fort

---

<sup>†</sup> With 21 years having passed since SFC Woodward's article, COL Vail had no recollection of the *Creed* and was unaware of any requirement to develop such a document.

Benning, beginning in 1974. Though the *Creed* was submitted higher for approval and distribution Army-wide, was not formalized by an official Army publication until 11 years later. Woodward's *Infantry* magazine article on "Followership" was one of a series of articles discussing leadership. Soon after the article was published, the NCOs serving on the sub-committee moved on to their next assignments.

The "unofficial" *Creed* did not go away. Many of those sergeants who graduated from the Infantry School took their copy of the *Creed* and shared it with the Army. Other commands may have copied, revised, or reworded it, yet they all basically followed the format of the original. When first written, the *Creed* began, "No man is more professional than I...." At the time the *Creed* was developed, the Women's Army Corps (WAC) had not been integrated into the Army. Much later, at a senior NCO conference, several female Command Sergeants Major objected to the masculine wording of the *Creed*. As a result, the Army began using the non-gender specific version we know today.<sup>33</sup>

Though re-written many different ways, the *Creed* still today begins its paragraphs with those three letters, N C O. It continues to guide and reinforce the values of the new generation of noncommissioned officers. At the time of its development, the sergeants of the NCO Subcommittee were unaware of the impact the *Creed* would have in the coming years. However, the goal of providing a tool for measuring the competencies of a noncommissioned officer was achieved, and is forever a part of our history.

## Creed of the Noncommissioned Officer

*FM 22-600-20, The NCO Guide, November 1986*

**N**o one is more professional than I. I am a Noncommissioned Officer, a leader of soldiers. As a Noncommissioned Officer, I realize that I am a member of a time honored corps, which is known as "The Backbone of the Army."

I am proud of the Corps of Noncommissioned Officers and will at all times conduct myself so as to bring credit upon the Corps, the Military Service and my country regardless of the situation in which I find myself. I will not use my grade or position to attain pleasure, profit, or personal safety.

**C**ompetence is my watch-word. My two basic responsibilities will always be uppermost in my mind-- accomplishment of my mission and the welfare of my soldiers. I will strive to remain tactically and technically proficient. I am aware of my role as a Noncommissioned Officer. I will fulfill my responsibilities inherent in that role. All soldiers are entitled to outstanding leadership; I will provide that leadership. I know my soldiers and I will always place their needs above my own. I will communicate consistently with my soldiers and never leave them uninformed. I will be fair and impartial when recommending both rewards and punishment.

**O**fficers of my unit will have maximum time to accomplish their duties; they will not have to accomplish mine. I will earn their respect and confidence as well as that of my soldiers. I will be loyal to those with whom I serve; seniors, peers and subordinates alike. I will exercise initiative by taking appropriate action in the absence of orders. I will not compromise my integrity, nor my moral courage. I will not forget, nor will I allow my comrades to forget that we are professionals, Noncommissioned Officers, leaders!

## Creed of the Noncommissioned Officer

*NCO Subcommittee version, published in 1975 Infantry magazine*

**N**o man is more professional than I. I am a Noncommissioned Officer, a leader of men. As a Noncommissioned Officer, I realize that I am a member of a time honored corps, which is known as "The Backbone of the Army."

I am proud of the Corps of Noncommissioned Officers and will at all times conduct myself so as to bring credit upon the Corps, the Military Service and my country regardless of the situation in which I find myself. I will not use my grade or position to attain pleasure, profit, or personal safety.

**C**ompetence is my watch-word. My two basic responsibilities will always be uppermost in my mind-- accomplishment of my mission and the welfare of my men. I will strive to remain tactically and technically proficient. I am aware of my role as a Noncommissioned Officer. I will fulfill my responsibilities inherent in that role. All soldiers are entitled to outstanding leadership; I will provide that leadership. I know my soldiers and I will always place their needs above my own. I will communicate consistently with my men and never leave them uninformed. I will be fair and impartial when recommending both rewards and punishment.

**O**fficers of my unit will have maximum time to accomplish their duties; they will not have to accomplish mine. I will earn their respect and confidence as well as that of my soldiers. I will be loyal to those with whom I serve; seniors, peers and subordinates alike. I will exercise initiative by taking appropriate action in the absence of orders. I will not compromise my integrity, nor my moral courage. I will not forget, nor will I allow my comrades to forget that we are professionals, Noncommissioned Officers, leaders of men.

**United States Army Noncommissioned Officer Creed**

*CSM Robert L. Haga's Sergeant Book, 15 Nov 82*

I \_\_\_\_\_, do solemnly dedicate myself to uphold the tradition, the dignity, and high standards of the United States Army Corps of Noncommissioned Officers. I willingly accept responsibility for the actions, good or bad, of every man under my command or supervision.

Should I observe errors or actions detrimental to the service, committed by any subordinate, I will have the moral courage to take immediate corrective actions. This I recognize as my greatest obligation as a Noncommissioned Officer.

• \_\_\_\_\_ •

## Works Cited

- 
- <sup>1</sup> Abrams, SSG David "SMA McKinney launches each day with NCO Creed," *NCO Journal* (Fall 1995) Fort Bliss, TX, pp. 14-15"
- <sup>2</sup> Fisher, Ernest F. Jr, *Guardians of the Republic, the History of the Noncommissioned Officer Corps of the U.S. Army*. Ballantine Books, NY 1994 p. ix
- <sup>3</sup> Arms, L.R. "The NCO Creed." *The Chevron*, Winter 1998, p. 4
- <sup>4</sup> *NCO Journal*, editor Spring 96 issue, Fort Bliss, TX, inside back cover.
- <sup>5</sup> Arms, L.R. "The NCO Creed." *The Chevron*, Winter 1998, p. 4
- <sup>6</sup> Haga, CSM Robert L. *Sergeants Book*, Headquarters, 3D Armored Division Memorandum, APO, NY 09039, 15 NOV 1982, p. 10
- <sup>7</sup> TC 22-6, *The Army Noncommissioned Officer Guide*, signed by GEN Carl E. Vuono, Chief of Staff, Department of the Army publication, 1990 p. 46
- <sup>8</sup> Action Plan, *Noncommissioned Officer Leader Development Task Force*, prepared by Noncommissioned Officer Leader Development Task Force, Headquarters, US Army Sergeants Major Academy, Fort Bliss, TX, June 1989 p. v
- <sup>9</sup> - - Task Force, p. A-3
- <sup>10</sup> Memorandum *The 1989 Army Theme: The NCO*, by HON John O. Marsh..[et al.], Headquarters, Department of the Army, Washington DC
- <sup>11</sup> *Military Police*, Fort McClellan, IL, Jan 89, back cover
- <sup>12</sup> *Ordnance The Professional Bulletin of the Ordnance Soldier*, Aberdeen Proving Ground, MD, Nov 89, p. 21
- <sup>13</sup> *The INSCOM Journal*, designed by Ron Crabtree, Fort Belvoir, VA, Aug/Sep 89, back cover
- <sup>14</sup> Action Plan, *Noncommissioned Officer Leader Development Task Force*, p. ix
- <sup>15</sup> *Noncommissioned Officer Professional Development Study (Final Report Volume I)* , prepared by the NCO Professional Development Study Group, Washington D.C., Feb 86, p. 1
- <sup>16</sup> *Noncommissioned Officer Professional Development Study (Final Report Volume II)* , prepared by the NCO Professional Development Study Group, Washington D.C., Feb 86, p. F-2
- <sup>17</sup> - -p. F-4 thru F-6
- <sup>18</sup> FM 22-600-20, *The NCO Guide*, TRADOC, 13 November 1986, inside cover
- <sup>19</sup> Simpson, MG Kenneth W., Letter to Elder, undated
- <sup>20</sup> - -Simpson
- <sup>21</sup> *RB 22-600-20, The Duties, Responsibilities and Authority of NCO's and the Interplay and Relationship with the Duties, Responsibilities and Authority of Officers*, by the U.S. Army Sergeants Major Academy, Ft Bliss, TX June 1981, p. 7-2
- <sup>22</sup> *The Noncommissioned Officer Corps on Training, Cohesion, and Combat Information Management* Support Center, Washington, DC, 16 December 1997, p. 31
- <sup>23</sup> Woodward, SFC Michael T. "The Subordinate: The Art of Followership" *Infantry*, Fort Benning, GA Jul-Aug 75, p. 25-27.
- <sup>24</sup> Abrams, SSG David, "Origin of the NCO Creed...Still Searching" *NCO Journal*, Spring 97 Fort Bliss, TX p. 21
- <sup>25</sup> Yamamoto, M. Merrick, phone conversation with Elder, Jan 98.
- <sup>26</sup> Copeland, SMA Silas L. "The NCO Must Grow with the Army" *Army*, Washington, DC, Oct 72, pp24-25
- <sup>27</sup> Fisch, Arnold G. and Wright, Robert K., *The Story of the Noncommissioned Officer Corps*, Center of Military History, Washington D.C., June 1989, p. 130
- <sup>28</sup> Bainbridge, SMA William G. *Top Sergeant* Ballentine Books, New York, 1995 p. 203
- <sup>29</sup> "TRADOC Leadership Conference Report", Fort Benning, GA 28 July-1 August 1975, p. 1
- <sup>30</sup> Woodward, Michael T. Phone conversation with Elder, 7 March 1998
- <sup>31</sup> Brigham, Earle G. Phone conversation with Elder, 7 March 1998
- <sup>32</sup> - -Brigham
- <sup>33</sup> - - Abrams, "Origin of the NCO Creed...Still Searching", p. 21