

The First Sergeant Champion Six of

by Colonel Charles A. Romeyn

Have you even known your ideal of a First Sergeant? Do you know what you want in a First Sergeant?

In my opinion the First Sergeant is the most important enlisted man in the Army; the perfect one is most hard to find.

In talking to a reserve officer today I grew reminiscent on the subject and he told me he had never known what a perfect First Sergeant should be.

Our ideals do not all correspond and it sometimes happens that in certain companies certain characteristics in a First Sergeant must be more evident than in another company.

World War literature has given many people in and out of the Army the idea that a First Sergeant, "the top kick" is a hard boiled, hard fisted, hard hearted boss like the bucko mate of the sailing ship of a past generation. I have seen such first sergeants and the only time I found one of value was in a troop which, recruited in the spring of 1899, had the toughest enlisted personnel I ever saw and which had practically mutated under a former weak First Sergeant.

In other cases I have found such First Sergeants usually caused dissatisfaction, disloyalty, and desertions.

We cannot always find a perfect First Sergeant in a company—sometimes he isn't there. I had "H" Troop of the 2nd Cavalry from March, 1906, to May 1917,

(less two years, July 1912, to May 1914, when I was at Leavenworth) and commanded troops of the 10th Cavalry and the 13th Cavalry most of the time I was a Second and First Lieutenant. Since those days I have been a Lieutenant Colonel of a National Army, Infantry Regiment, and was in command of the 2nd Cavalry for two years. In all that time I have known but two for my ideal First Sergeants. I have known about a dozen other First Sergeants that nearly met my ideals—perhaps I am unduly prejudiced in favor of my first and last as a troop commander—and I believe it due these men to name them—the finest soldiers I have known. They are Saint Foster, 10th Cavalry, Herbert and Mee, 13th Cavalry; Doyle, Hooper, Rybacki, Aydelot, Washburn, Burnett, Beck, Hiller, 2nd Cavalry.

I am glad to give my two ideals credit by naming them—First Sergeant Barnes (I regret that I have forgotten his first name), Troop "F", 10th Cavalry, and 1st Sergeant Charles Craig, Troop "H", 2nd Cavalry.

These two men, one colored, one white, were sober (absolutely teetotalers); loyal, on the job at all times, knew their paper-work thoroughly and knew also the paper-work and responsibilities of the Supply Sergeant, the Stable Sergeant and Mess Sergeant; physi-

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Diamonds

Kim Holien

Most soldiers agree that the most influential soldier in the Army is a *Top* soldier—the Company First Sergeant. Those of us who've served in the job agree it's the most



satisfying yet demanding job the Army has to offer a noncommissioned officer. The example of leadership put forth by these *Top*

soldiers mold entire units. The noncommissioned officers and soldiers of a company follow the leadership example of their First Sergeant. They then transfer that model to countless others over the course of their careers. It's easy to see how the influence of one First Sergeant over an average two to four year tour impacts many soldiers and the Army over time. Imagine the impact a *Top* soldier might have on the Army if the time served was ten, twelve or fifteen years.

Knox Bellingham was born September 4, 1914 in Regina, Saskatchewan, Canada. He enlisted into the United States Army on February 6, 1936 in Seattle, Washington. He spent six short years as a tanker at Fort Lewis, Washington and Fort Benning, Georgia before his first hitch as a first sergeant in the 6th Armored Division at Fort Knox, Kentucky. He began his service as a first sergeant in January 1942 just one month after the Japanese laid waste to our Pacific Fleet in Pearl Harbor launching America into world war.



During World War II he was the First Sergeant of the First Reconnaissance Company in the European Theater. He saw action in France, Germany, Belgium and Luxembourg.

From January 1942, until his promotion to the Sergeant Major *supergrade* in April 1959 Bellingham had only one break from First Sergeant duty. It was a one and a half-year tour, at the end of World War II, with an ROTC unit at the University of Georgia. When asked about all of his time as a First Sergeant, Bellingham responded "It's the duty I like best so I certainly should be well satisfied." Many of us would remember it as fifteen years of sleep interrupted 0200 telephone calls.

After ROTC duty, Bellingham moved on to be First Sergeant of the Training Company at Camp Robertson, California and from there to First Sergeant duties at Fort Jackson, South Carolina and Fort Lawton, Washington. Before the outbreak

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Diamonds

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of hostilities on the Korean peninsula, he served as a First Sergeant in the 7th Infantry Division in Sendai, Japan. During the Korean War he saw action as a First Sergeant through five campaigns as denoted by the silver combat star on his Korean Service Campaign Ribbon. At the end of the conflict, Bellingham served as a first sergeant with the Korean Military Assistance Group in Taegu, Korea before turning up at Fort Myer, Virginia in February 1955 to become the first sergeant of Headquarters Company, United States Army. He served as the *Top* soldier in Headquarters Company until receiving

one of the Army's first *supergrade* promotions to Sergeant Major in April 1959.

In 1957, Dave Garroway the original host of NBC's *Today Show* asked the Army to get him a *real live First Sergeant* to appear on his show. The Army responded to the request by sending him their longest serving First Sergeant - Knox Bellingham. Garroway interviewed Bellingham on the topics of juvenile delinquency and how American youth reacts to authority. Bellingham told him that today's draftee (late 1950's) "has a good education and early homelife and little resentment to authority". He also told Garroway it was an *illusion* that soldiers hate First Sergeants saying, "I don't remember ever having a man really hate me."

Just before his promotion to Sergeant Major, Bellingham was ordained as the champion First Sergeant in a contest conducted by *Army Times* to locate the Army's longest serving First Sergeant. His 15 years and five months time as a *Top* soldier was documented.

A photograph taken of newly promoted Sergeant Major Bellingham in April 1959 shows him wearing the following awards: The Korean Presidential Unit Citation, the United Nations Service Rib-



Bellingham's promotion to SGM in 1959

bon, the United Nations Korean Medal with a silver star denoting five combat campaigns, the National Defense Service Medal, the Army of Occupation Medal, the World War II Victory Medal, the European Theater of Operations Ribbon with silver campaign star denoting five combat campaigns, the American Campaign Ribbon, the National Emergency Ribbon, the Good Conduct Medal (a service record check indicated 8 awards at retirement), the Purple Heart, the Army Commendation Medal, the Bronze Star with two Oak Leaf Clusters, the Soldier's Medal and a Silver Star with one Oak Leaf Cluster.

Knox Bellingham retired from the

Notables

Excellence Award Winners

Drill Sergeant of the Year

SSG Joseph Martinez
Fort Knox, Kentucky

BSC Class 1-98

SFC Craig E. Arnold
SFC Irwin Cabrera
SFC Michael W. Salzman

ISG Class 2-98

ISG Roy E. Odom
ISG Michael F. Love

ADA BNCOC Class 1-98

SSG Joseph Martinez

Ft. Bliss PLDC Class 5-98

Santiago

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opposition from the Spanish position fell silent.

While the action raged at El Caney, the assault on San Juan Heights began. Leaving the high ground at El Paso, Sergeant Alexander M. Quinn, Company A, 13th US Infantry traversed a narrowed road, forded two streams, and then crossed an open field with dense undergrowth. In the tropical

sun, the men sweltered in their blue wool uniforms. They could not see their objective until they reached the opposite side of the field.

As they were nearing the edge of the field, a Signal Corps reconnaissance balloon came into sight. The balloon alerted the Spanish defenders as to the exact location of the American forces. The balloon's reconnaissance quickly came to an end when the balloon sank to the ground riddled by bullets and shell fragments.

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Association forms Board of Advisors

The U.S. Army Noncommissioned Officer Museum Association has sought the assistance and guidance of senior Command Sergeants Major to serve on the newly established Board of Advisors. These advisors, co-chaired by the Sergeant Major of the Army and the Sergeants Major Academy Command

Sergeant Major, will assist in guiding the Association into the future. They will provide information and advice to the Association's elected council, and serve as a steering committee.

The four permanent members on the council include both chairpersons, the U.S. Army Reserve Command Ser-

geant Major, and the National Guard Command Sergeant Major. The remaining positions will be rotated thru various commands. The current Advisors are the Command Sergeants Major of TRADOC, FORSCOM, USAREUR, USARPAC, and AMC. Future Advisors will be selected as