# William G. Bainbridge

A native of rural Galesburg, Illinois, William G. Bainbridge was born on 17 April 1925. His family lived on several farms in the area, and he attended the nearby rural district schools. Bainbridge remembers his youth as a time of sparse material goods when everyone in his family had to "pull together." Despite the need to work on his family farm and to hire out on other farms for extra cash, he enjoyed school and placed a high value on education. Within a matter of weeks of graduating from Williamsfield High School in 1943, the eighteen-year-old found himself inducted into the U.S. Army.

When the United States entered World War II, Congress required that all incoming soldiers be draftees. This step was taken to allow the War Department more flexibility in assigning newly inducted troops. As a result, William Bainbridge could not immediately follow his older brother into the Army. Instead, he had to volunteer for the draft in June 1943. "I don't have any regrets," he later said,

---

Except as noted, this section is based on an interview given by SMA (Ret.) William G. Bainbridge to SGM (Ret.) Erwin H. Koehler, 10 March 1994, in Palm Bay, Florida

"because the thing to do was to go into the service, if you could . . . it just didn't seem right for me not to go."

After his induction Bainbridge reported to Camp Grant, Illinois, where he received his first uniforms, the usual medical exam and obligatory shots, and a battery of classification tests. He was initially offered a chance to serve in the Navy, but turned it down—-"I can always walk farther than I can swim." He later recalled that his first experiences with the Army were rather confusing because most of the soldiers running Camp Grant had been in the service only a matter of weeks and had little training or experience themselves.

Bainbridge completed basic training at Camp Wallace, Texas, near San Jacinto Beach and the city of Galveston. The future Sergeant Major of the Army remembers the location as having high humidity and mosquitoes so large they must have been "crossed with turkeys.' However, the seventeen-week course, which combined basic and advanced training in anti-aircraft artillery, went well for him. "I was in good physical shape," he said, and "I didn't have any problem with the classroom work." Coming off the farm

he felt "invincible." The toughest part of those first weeks was getting used to the hectic schedule.

Basic training dictated six-day weeks of twelve-hour days beginning at 0500. The regimen included serious physical training, and 25-mile marches were common, together with the ordinary military subjects. There were long classes on aircraft identification, but the troops practiced dismounted drill only once a week, firing the .30- and .50-caliber water-cooled machine guns and old British Enfield and Springfield M1903 rifles. The M1 semiautomatic rifle, so commonly identified with World War II, was not issued to the men in Bainbridge's group until after basic training. Later in their training at Camp Wallace, the men learned to fire 90-mm. antiaircraft guns. Despite the tough training schedule, at formations, when the American flag was lowered each evening, everyone was attired in Class A uniforms.

Life in the rapidly expanding wartime Army often had its dreary side. The newly constructed barracks at Camp Wallace and other posts had no wall lockers, just open bars and beams in the squad bays. The trainees were not allowed

to have civilian clothes, primarily due to the lack of storage space. Every Saturday there was a footlocker inspection. Food shortages and poor preparation made meals “terrible” according to Bainbridge, with various goat meat dishes sometimes appearing in the mess hall.

The war and the rapid expansion of the Army made it impossible to find enough experienced soldiers to act as drill sergeants. Therefore, most basic training cadre came from the existing active duty force augmented by reserve and National Guard personnel of limited experience. With the exception of topics like the Articles of War, which required instruction by an officer, noncommissioned officers carried out all training. Sergeant Simpson, the platoon sergeant, left a permanent impression on young Bainbridge. “He trained us and told us the little things that we should do . . . the things you ought to do right . . . he also took care of us,” Bainbridge said. He did not forget those traits. “You have to take care of soldiers,” he told an interviewer years later, “and you can’t do it by lip service because they will find you out in a heartbeat.”

While at Camp Wallace, Bainbridge applied for flight training. “I wanted to be a hot pilot," he later said, “I liked airplanes . . . it seemed a little bit more

glamorous.” Initially he was sent to Sheppard Field, near Wichita Falls, Texas, for two weeks of orientation. The next stop was the University of North Dakota at Grand Forks. There Bainbridge packed a year of college education into about five months and learned to fly a Piper Cub. Having completed the initial phase of the air cadet program, he next reported to the flight-training center at Santa Ana Army Air Base, California, in February 1944. The trip from North Dakota took six days on a crowded troop train. At Santa Ana there were more tests and orientations to determine what sort of aircraft he was most suited to fly. Shortly after his arrival, however, he was told that there were more flying cadets than there were planes. Anyone with previous ground force training was reassigned.

Bainbridge was promptly transferred to Lowery Field near Denver, Colorado, for gunnery school. There he waited six weeks to go into training. During that time he worked double-shift KP **(Kitchen Police)** duty every day. In the end Bainbridge was again transferred when the Army determined that it already had enough gunnery students. Although the end of his flight training was a great disappointment, it turned out to be a lucky break; by early 1944 U.S. bomber crews over Europe were suffering heavy losses.

After a two-week layover awaiting orders at Jefferson Barracks, St. Louis, Missouri, Bainbridge was ordered to Camp Atterbury, Indiana. There he found himself assigned to Company A, 423d Infantry, part of the newly organized 106th Infantry Division. The last division organized for service in World War II, the 106th had just come back from maneuvers in Louisiana. Many of its trained troops, however, had been transferred as fillers to other divisions, and the new men coming in had to fill the ensuing vacancies. As a private, first class, Bainbridge was initially assigned as the company radioman. However, the company commander quickly recognized his leadership potential and made him a squad leader with a direct promotion to sergeant.

The 106th Division received its predeployment training at Camp Atterbury. Bainbridge remembered that he and his fellow soldiers tried to familiarize themselves with the new weapons, such as the 37-mm. antitank gun and the rocket-launching bazooka. With one Browning automatic rifle team, squad tactics were limited. Despite the 25-mile endurance hikes, the division’s morale was high, with the infantry weapons demonstration for Under Secretary of War Robert P. Patterson one of the highlights of his time at

Atterbury. But more important, Sergeant Bainbridge earned a promotion there as well as the Expert Infantry Badge. Beyond the pride, professionalism, and leadership earning the award demonstrated, the pay raise of five dollars per month meant a lot in those days.

In the early fall of 1944 the 106th Division prepared to depart for Europe. In October the division traveled by troop train to Camp Miles Standish, near Boston, to await embarkation. After a coordination “snafu”--their designated ship was too large to enter Boston harbor--the division again traveled by train to New York. There, after loading throughout the night, the men of the 106th Division found themselves on the huge liner *Queen Elizabeth.* On board they were billeted four and five deep in “staterooms," spending one night above deck and one night below. Again, Bainbridge thought the food was “terrible”--British rations with lots of mutton. The trip was uneventful, however, as the fast liner, sailing independent of the slow convoys, **zigzagged** across the Atlantic to lessen the chance of being torpedoed.

After landing in England, the 106th Division spent three weeks at a staging area near Cheltenham. There they were outfitted, honed their skills in the classroom, and

did a little sightseeing. The time, however, proved a brief respite as it had become evident that the war in Europe would not be over that year.

In early **November** 1944 Sergeant Bainbridge and his regiment crossed the English Channel to Le Havre, France, and then moved by foot and truck to the Siegfried Line in the rugged Schnee Eifel **(snow mountain)** sector of Germany, east of St. Vith, Belgium. There they replaced **the 28th** Infantry **Division**. Bainbridge remembers the unit being thinly stretched with squads covering 1,500-meter fronts in their supposedly quiet sector. The 423d sent out combat patrols to gather intelligence, but had little idea of what was to come. In early December, however, the Germans secretly completed the buildup for their Ardennes offensive, later known as the Battle of the Bulge. Then on 16 December 1944, “all hell broke loose.”

For five days the men of the 423d and other units in the Ardennes delayed the German advance. Everyone, including cooks and clerks, was thrown into the line. But the regiment was unequipped to face concentrations of German armor using the element of surprise. Penetrating gaps in the thinly held line, the Germans overran the division rear, and artillery support immediately slackened.

Meanwhile rain, snow, and fog prevented American warplanes from supporting the ground forces. On 18 December, powerful German panzer and infantry units isolated the 422d and 423d Infantry from each other and cut them off from the rest of the division. By then the 423d had suffered over 300 casualties, spent all of its mortar rounds, lost most of its machine guns, and run short of rifle ammunition. The next day German artillery swept the regiment's front, and shortly afterward, enemy infantry coursed over the American positions. With the 423d cut off, tactical control and supporting fire gone, increasing numbers of wounded, and rifle ammunition down to just five rounds per man, the regiment surrendered on 19 December.[1] "We traded our lives and space for time," Bainbridge later said of their action in the snow. The 106th's stiff resistance was a major factor in upsetting the German timetable for reaching the Meuse and cutting off the Allied armies from their vital logistical lifelines at Antwerp.

The Germans searched the captured Americans of the 423d and immediately segregated the officers, NCOs, and

[1] The predicament of the 423d which SMA Bainbridge described is amplified by Hugh M. Cole's study, *The Ardennes: Battle of the Bulge,* part of the United States Army in World War II series, first published by the Center of Military History in 1965. Information from that study (pp. 65-66) has been used here to enhance the points Bainbridge made in his interview of March 1994.

privates. Alternating sets of guards then marched them to a railhead. Bainbridge and the other POWs spent the next five nights and four days packed into freight cars with straw-covered floors, with neither food nor toilets. Water was available only once to the prisoners when Allied war planes caused a delay and other POWs forced to work on the railroad gave them some. Bainbridge and his fellow soldiers were finally unloaded at Stalag 9B, Bad Orb, east of Frankfurt. Three weeks later the NCOs were taken to Stalag 9A at Ziegenhain near Geissen.

Prisoner-of-war camp conditions were intolerable. More than 3,000 Allied soldiers filled the camp, with 250 men stuffed in each barrack. Despite the often **sub-freezing** temperatures, outside latrines were necessary supplements to the single one inside. Since baths and mandatory delousing came but every six weeks, the men, their bedding, and clothes were infested with vermin. Rations consisted of two-thirds of a canteen cup of vegetable soup each day with a slice of black bread on Sunday. Sometimes the Germans included a little **horsemeat**. Sergeant Bainbridge later recalled, “my love of country, the way I was brought up, and my family life helped sustain me.”

The American 6th Armored Division liberated Stalag 9A on Good Friday in 1945 and provided needed medical attention and decent food. The repatriated GIs at first received soup and bread, a loaf and a half at a time. After ten days of rebuilding their strength, Bainbridge and his fellow soldiers flew to Camp Lucky Strike, near Le Havre. There they received an additional two weeks of medical care and as much food as they cared to eat. Finally, they convoyed home by ship. The return crossing took two weeks with hundreds of former POWs and rotating **aircrew** members on board.

The war concluded shortly after Sergeant Bainbridge's return to the United States. After three days at Camp Kilmer, New Jersey, he went to Fort Sheridan, Illinois, where he was given sixty days of leave. Like many others, he immediately returned to his hometown for a reunion with family, friends, and other veterans. On 20 June 1945, he married Hazel Smith of Momence, Illinois, a girl whom he had known since grade school.

At the conclusion of his leave, Bainbridge reported to Miami Beach, Florida. There he shared a hotel with nearly 700 other soldiers and dependents all awaiting reassignment. Transferred to Camp Maxie, near Paris, Texas,

he was soon joined by his new wife in an upstairs room and bath, while working as an armorer at an infantry replacement training base. Hazel Bainbridge returned home to Illinois when her husband again transferred to Camp Roberts, California. There, on 7 December 1945, Bainbridge received his discharge and returned to civilian life in Galesburg, Illinois.

When fighting broke out in Korea in 1950 William Bainbridge had been a farmer in Victoria, Illinois, for several years. During that time he had joined the Army Reserve, and in October 1950 he was recalled to active duty. Granted a delay to harvest the crops and settle his personal affairs, he finally reported for duty in January 1951.

Recalled as a staff sergeant, Bainbridge in-processed at Fort Sheridan and was told that he would be sent to Camp Breckenridge, Kentucky. He instead ended up at Camp Atterbury, where he had been with the 106th Infantry Division during the last war. There he served as platoon sergeant, then first sergeant (as a **sergeant first class**, E-6) of the 5012th Army Service Unit, a joint Army-Air

Force food service school.[2] After a year the Army consolidated that and other Army school elements at Fort Sheridan, where Sergeant First Class Bainbridge became the personnel NCO. A year later a second consolidation transferred Bainbridge to Fort Riley, Kansas. As the period of his recall was about to expire, Bainbridge requested enlistment in the Regular Army with the intention of becoming a career soldier. After a grade determination, he reenlisted as a **sergeant first class**.

In February 1958 Bainbridge departed for Fort Leonard Wood, Missouri, to become the operations sergeant of the 3d Battalion, 4th Training Regiment, which then included the Fifth Army food service school. His eleven-month tour there resulted in his first decoration, the Army Commendation Medal. Bainbridge was then assigned to VII Corps in Stuttgart, Germany, in January 1959. His family, which now included two daughters, had been living in house trailers for nearly a decade. In Germany conditions were little better. After traveling to Europe by ship, the Bainbridge family found itself separated due to the lack of family quarters. Hazel and the children lived in Warner Kaserne

[2] Prior to the creation of pay grades E-8 and E-9, the ranks of staff sergeant, sergeant, first class, platoon sergeant, and first sergeant were one grade lower than they are today.

near Munich, nearly three and a half hours by automobile from Stuttgart. "They had been maid's quarters," Bainbridge remembered, "the worst quarters we ever had."

At the time, the VII Corps included two cavalry regiments, three infantry divisions, and two armored divisions. At the corps headquarters Bainbridge served successively as operations sergeant, G-3 air sergeant, and secret document control NCO for the corps G-3.

Reassigned to Fort Riley in August 1962, Bainbridge found himself returning to Europe four months later. The construction of the Berlin Wall caused that unexpected turn of events. The military and diplomatic crisis that followed led to a partial mobilization, and Bainbridge found himself the acting sergeant major of the 1st Battle Group, 28th Infantry, on its initial deployment to Operation LONG THRUST.[3] In February 1963 he received his permanent promotion to the newly established grade of E-9. The 1st Battle Group was later reorganized into the 1st and 2d Battalions of the 28th Infantry as part of the **Reorganization Objectives Army Division** (ROAD) program.

[3] Operation LONG THRUST was a tactical deployment of troops from the continental United States to Europe during what has come to be known as the Berlin Crisis

In August 1965, three years after his first assignment to the 1st Battalion, 28th Infantry, Sergeant Major Bainbridge deployed with the 1st Infantry Division to Vietnam. During the movement of the division, Bainbridge served as sergeant major of the troopship carrying a portion of the men and their equipment into combat. Serving in the Big Red One first in War Zone C at Phuoc Vinh, north of Saigon, he was later selected by Maj. Gen. Jonathan 0. Seaman, commander of the newly created II Field Force at Long Binh, as his sergeant major. The II Field Force, a corps-level organization, included the 1st and 25th Infantry Divisions, a brigade of the 101st Airborne Division, and the 11th Armored Cavalry Regiment. General Seaman, who had previously commanded the 1st Infantry Division when it was deployed to Vietnam, had obviously been impressed with Bainbridge’s performance.

In Vietnam Sergeant Major Bainbridge had quickly earned a reputation for always accompanying his men on their field operations. At first, he saw improvements resulting from the training changes made since World War II. Later, however, he believed the situation had changed for the worse, especially when replacements came to Vietnam. The one-year tours of duty for soldiers caused a

continual turnover of personnel. Also, NCOs were lost due to battle casualties, the one-year tours, and the lack of any mobilization to tap the senior enlisted men in the reserve components. His experience led him to become a strong supporter of the Noncommissioned Officer Candidate program established to help solve those problems.

In September 1966 Bainbridge became sergeant major of the Infantry Training Center at Fort Benning, Georgia. He remained there until August 1967, when he was reassigned to First Army headquarters at Fort George G. Meade, Maryland. Bainbridge began to identify and solve soldier problems at both posts.

At Fort Benning he drastically reduced the assignment of trainees to post details and reduced harassment. At First Army, Bainbridge believed, his greatest accomplishment was bringing the NCOs together to work as a cohesive group. He also worked on solving the chronic problem of finding adequate quarters for NCOs.

Bainbridge became sergeant major of United States Army, Pacific (USARPAC), at Fort Shafter, Hawaii, in January 1969. After the designee for that post, Sgt. Maj. Joseph **A.** Venable, died in a helicopter crash in Vietnam,

Bainbridge accepted the challenge. There he served as a "voice of the soldiers," establishing a good working relationship with General Ralph E. Haines, Jr., USARPAC commander. Bainbridge traveled with General Haines on numerous trips to U.S. and allied bases around the Pacific rim and coordinated the first command-wide sergeants major meeting, bringing in senior noncommissioned officers from major Army headquarters in USARPAC and on a rotating basis from Thailand, Australia, New Zealand, Korea, and Indonesia. At the same time, he continued to work closely with senior NCOs of the U.S. Army, Vietnam, and Military Assistance Command, Vietnam, as well as the senior enlisted personnel at Pacific Air Force, Pacific Fleet, Marine units, Coast Guard stations, and **Commander in Chief, Pacific (CINCPAC)** headquarters in Hawaii. Bainbridge left USARPAC in October 1972.

In February 1968 the Command Sergeants Major Board had selected Bainbridge to be one of the first command sergeants major in the Army. That elite group included Sergeant Major of the Army Wooldridge and three other future Sergeants Major of the Army--George Dunaway, Silas Copeland, and Leon Van Autreve. It came as no great surprise when Col. Karl Morton, the first commandant of the

newly established Sergeants Major Academy at Fort Bliss, Texas, selected Bainbridge as the academy's command sergeant major.

The education and training of noncommissioned officers had gradually improved since World War II, but the Army needed a senior NCO school as a capstone for the Noncommissioned Officer Education System, which had evolved **from the Noncommissioned Officer Academies originating in the** late 1950s. Having seen the benefits of enhanced NCO professional development while at the same time being unable to attend an NCO academy himself because of critical duties, Sergeant Major Bainbridge was particularly pleased to be part of the first staff and faculty of the new Sergeants Major Academy, now a formal senior enlisted service school.

The three years that Sergeant Major Bainbridge and his wife spent at Fort Bliss were rewarding, if somewhat disruptive at first. Once again, they had to contend with a shortage of family quarters (a consistent worry for NCOs that Bainbridge would later make a priority while Sergeant Major of the Army), together with borrowed offices and other unfinished facilities. Nevertheless, Mrs. Bainbridge continued the involvement in community affairs, which had

marked her previous tours with her husband, and Bainbridge himself later credited the work of his wife as the foundation of much of his success. In fact, his sense of history, both institutional and personal, was always a part of his life and career. Twenty years later, Bainbridge asserted that "World War II was won in the [prewar] classrooms at the Army War College and the Command and General Staff College," adding that "the conflict in the [Persian] Gulf was won by the NCO Education System." The academy, he felt, was the capstone of that system.

In July 1975 the Army Chief of Staff, General Frederick C. Weyand, selected Sergeant Major Bainbridge to serve as his Sergeant Major of the Army. The president of the selection board was Lt. Gen. John Forrest, with Maj. Gens. James Hamlet, John W. McEnery, and David E. Ott, and outgoing Sergeant Major of the Army Van Autreve serving as members. Bainbridge later remembered the board as one of the two best he had ever faced, the other being the board that chose the previous Sergeant Major of the Army in 1973. "There were fair questions," he said. "There were no trick questions at all. It just was a good board."

In outlining the duties of the office, General Weyand asked him to look for "things you think soldiers need, that

they're not getting. Let us know if we can help from this office." In practice Bainbridge found the new job comfortable and the "formidable" Pentagon generals supportive. Bainbridge had few problems adapting to his new surroundings. "I couldn't travel anywhere or go into any office," he later said, "without running into someone who had been through that academy, or who had served with me at USARPAC or at First Army. So it was sort of like 'old home week,' really."

Bainbridge already knew many on the Army staff from previous assignments. It was therefore easy to work with General Weyand and the various action officers on his staff. "I took issues to the Chief of Staff or the Vice-chief of Staff only if absolutely necessary," he said. "I always found that it was much easier to work with the staff, who used their natural expertise and their desire to get things done in their own bailiwicks, rather than have it come from the Chief as a directive."

From time to time Sergeant Major Bainbridge had to venture into new areas. For example, he began to accompany the Chief of Staff to congressional hearings, even testifying himself. Regarding such topics as commissary operations, troop strength, housing problems, pay, and

personnel policies, not to mention soldier morale, congressmen put special value on the words of the Army's senior enlisted soldier.

Sergeant Major of the Army Bainbridge also traveled extensively during his tour of duty. He made it a point to visit troops in Europe, Korea, and the Far East each year. He also tried to visit as many big stateside installations as possible, often hitting reserve and National Guard units in conjunction with such travels. He later admitted seeing everyone was impossible and his itinerary had to be guided by necessity and events. Although many of his visits were at the request of the host installation, he insisted that his travel would be troop-oriented.

His visit to Johnston Island was typical. The Army troops on that Pacific isle served isolated tours, away from their families and without many of the amenities of normal posts. Their "theater," for example, was merely an open area where a screen and projector could be erected at night when the weather cooperated. In this case Sergeant Major Bainbridge convinced the Army and Air Force Exchange System (AAFES) to bring good entertainment to a hardship duty station at no cost. The prestige of his office was such that he could call the AAFES commander directly and

request that he give attention to the situation on Johnston Island.

Sergeant Major Bainbridge followed the example of his predecessors and had his wife accompany him when he made official visits. The additional information she gathered and the reassurance her presence gave soldiers' families were so valuable that the practice has been followed by successive Sergeants Major of the Army. Its impact was not lost on the Chiefs of Staff. During the tenure of Sergeant Major of the Army Dunaway, General Abrams made it a matter of policy that the Sergeant Major of the Army should be married. Remembering his own experiences, Sergeant Major Bainbridge was convinced that Army leaders "have to take care of the family. If you don't, you're going to lose a soldier."

As the others before him, Sergeant Major Bainbridge received dozens of complaints each week from enlisted soldiers. Although believing that 90-percent of those written complaints could have been handled through command channels, he attempted to resolve every one of them. In many cases, he believed, the soldiers involved simply wanted advice and the personal touch. He took his role as

"the voice of the soldier" in the Office of the Army Chief of Staff very seriously.

Bainbridge served as Sergeant Major of the Army for four years, formally ending the two-year tradition. General Bernard W. Rogers, who replaced Weyand as Chief of Staff in October 1976, had asked Bainbridge to remain in office to push through his initiatives. Although the Sergeant Major was glad to have the opportunity to work with an officer whose confidence he enjoyed, he personally was reluctant to break the tradition of serving for a short period with one Chief of Staff and thought it important to keep the established selection process intact. He agreed with Sergeant Major of the Army Dunaway that keeping a fresh flow of ideas from recent troop experience was critical.[4] General Rogers, however, convinced Bainbridge to continue serving as SMA for the duration of his own term as Army Chief of Staff.

Among the accomplishments of his term as Sergeant Major of the Army, Bainbridge felt proudest of securing permanent funding for the Noncommissioned Officer Education System. Next he valued his work on the Army Policy Council,

[4] lnterv, SGM (Ret.) Erwin H. Koehler with SMA (Ret.) George W. Dunaway, Dec 93.

to which General Weyand appointed him. In keeping with his feeling that the duties of the Office of Sergeant Major of the Army were best carried out by working with the appropriate action and staff officers, Bainbridge was instrumental in having senior NCOs placed on the general staff to which he himself was appointed by General Rogers. He served on the Army Uniform Board during his entire tenure in office and designed the insignia of rank for the Sergeant Major of the Army that was used until October 1994: **two stars between three chevrons and three lower arcs**.

Bainbridge believed that the Office of Sergeant Major of the Army changed with each incumbent and each Chief of Staff. He enjoyed "having the entire Army to explore." Although he was not a policy-maker, he influenced several key decisions affecting the Army of the future. "What was good enough yesterday," he said, "certainly is not going to be good enough tomorrow." A strong believer that command sergeants major, indeed all senior NCOs, are teachers, Sergeant Major Bainbridge judged as vital their role in passing on information to the new soldiers entering the Army.

Despite all his accomplishments, Bainbridge left office recognizing that there were many unresolved issues. He regretted the amount of time it often took to get things done and was especially frustrated by selected noncommissioned officers who declined attendance at the Sergeants Major Academy.

The retirement ceremony for Sergeant Major of the Army Bainbridge took place at Fort Myer on 18 June 1979. It was quite a thrill for him to review the Old Guard with the Chief of Staff and the Secretary of the Army while his family looked on. It was there that he received the Distinguished Service Medal for his service. As Sergeant Major of the Army, Bainbridge had met both Presidents Gerald Ford and Jimmy Carter. Speaking of his retirement ceremony, however, Sergeant Major Bainbridge said, “It can’t get much better than that.”

In a sense, Bainbridge served beyond his retirement. For many years he had been active in the Association of the United States Army and the Noncommissioned Officers Association. That work continued. In addition, he served as secretary to the Board of Commissioners of the Soldiers’ and Airmen’s Home in Washington, D.C., for three years and

served for nine years as its first director of member services.

The new Chief of Staff, General Edward C. Meyer, honored Sergeant Major Bainbridge after his retirement by presenting him with the Army General Staff Identification Badge, only recently authorized for NCOs. It recognized that he "was the one individual most responsible for the assignment and recognition of Senior Staff Noncommissioned Officers to positions of responsibility as action officers on the Army General Staff and to the Army Secretariat."

"He worked continuously," SMA William A. Connelly later stated, "to expand the role of the Senior Noncommissioned Officer within the Headquarters, Department of the Army."[5] As Bainbridge once said, "You've got to trust your noncommissioned officers, because that's what they're there for." He devoted his career to that ideal.

[5] Memo, SMA William A. Connelly for the Director of the Army Staff, 13 Dec 79. Author's files, CMH