

By SGM Robert S. Rush

The Evolution of NCOs in Training Soldiers

In the late 1880s, Noncommissioned officers were called the 'vertebrae of the Army,' not because of their ability to train soldiers, but because they maintained good order and discipline within the unit. It has only been within the past 100 years that sergeants and corporals assumed the individual training role from officers, and it has only been in the last 10 years that senior NCOs have been given the responsibility by regulation to plan and conduct training of soldiers, sections, squads, teams and crews. This is not to say that NCOs in good organizations before this guidance was issued did not train soldiers, because they did. It only made sense. But in many organizations they did not, because it was the officers' prerogative to plan and conduct training of their organizations.

Comments

Regulations or treatises relating to NCOs and Training

1814

Duane's *A Handbook on Infantry*

Do not trust non-commissioned officers to conduct individual training

It is too much practice to commit the charge of the elementary drills to non-commissioned officers, by which many great evils are produced. . . . and the chance of finding non-commissioned officers, who can clearly comprehend and explain the principles of a good discipline, is not one in twenty; from which cause it is twenty to one that the recruits are imperfectly or erroneously taught.

1854

Scott's *Infantry Tactics; or, Rules for the Exercise and Maneuvers of the United States Infantry (Instruction of Sergeants and Corporals)*

Sergeant major to assist the adjutant in training NCOs

72. ...The sergeants and corporals will be held to know, not only how to execute with precision the manual of arms as sergeants, but, also, everything relating to the manual of arms, as rank and file, the firings and marching.

73. The adjutant and sergeant major, under the supervision of the field officers, will be immediately charged with the instruction of the sergeants and corporals. This will commence with the exercises in the School of the Soldier, followed by the manual of arms as sergeants. First mention of sergeants and corporals as trainers of individual skills.

First mention of sergeants and corporals as trainers of individual skills

75. This instruction having principally for object to qualify the sergeant to instruct the men, and the corporals to replace sergeants, the adjutant will explain to them all the principles of the first two schools, at first on the ground, and next in a course of theoretic instruction.

1862

Casey's *Infantry Tactics, Volume 1, Article II, (Instruction of the Battalion)*

Officers to train soldiers. Intelligent NCOs to assist under tutelage

50. Captains will be held responsible for the theoretical and practical instruction of their noncommissioned officers.

52. In the school of the soldier, the company officers will be the instructors of the squads; but if there be not a sufficient number of company officers present, intelligent sergeants may be substituted; and two or three squads, under sergeant instructors, be superintended, at the same time, by an officer.

68. As the instruction of sergeants and corporals, is intended principally to qualify them for the instruction of the privates, they should be taught not only to execute, but to explain intelligibly everything they may be required to teach.

1882

Reed's *Abridged and Revised Upton's Infantry Tactics*

In 20 years, training policy went from "officers will be instructors"

196. The captain is held responsible for the theoretical and practical instruction of his non-commissioned officers. He requires them to study and recite the tactics, so that they can explain thoroughly every movement before it is put in execution; causes it to

of squads" to "frequently requires lieutenants to drill squads"
Sergeants now primary trainers of soldier skills



it to be put in execution; causes them to learn the trumpet signals, and be able to recognize them at once when sounded; to secure uniformity, he also practices them in giving commands.

In the school of the soldier (called the School of the Squad in this work), the captain frequently requires the lieutenants to drill squads, as well as superintend several squads instructed by non-commissioned officers.

1893

Extract from "Annual Report of the Secretary of War"

The sergeant major as assistant to the adjutant

The duties of sergeant-major comprise the supervision of all the clerical work, post and regimental, the preparation of the numerous and intricate papers... the entering of all communications passing through the offices, the proof-reading from the regimental press, the care of the books, accounts... in fact all the complicated work, for which the adjutant is responsible to his colonel, passes through the sergeant major's hands...

Duties entailed everything except training

1941

Extract from FM 21-100, *Soldiers' Handbook*, July 23, 1941

First sergeant as Chief Clerk

51.b. The first sergeant corresponds to the executive or chief clerk, in a civilian office. He handles all the administrative details of the company and publishes the orders of the commander.

1942

Extract from AR 245-5, *Companies—General Provisions*

No comments dealing with training

3.b. *Noncommissioned officers*—Noncommissioned officers will be carefully instructed in their duties as such.

4. *Squad Leaders*—Squad leaders will be held responsible—

Goes on to list ten areas of responsibility dealing with soldier and equipment cleanliness and accountability.

1945

Extract from change 1 AR 245-5, *Companies—General Provisions*

First mention to use NCOs command and initiative

3.b. *Noncommissioned officers.*

(2)(f) The delegation to the noncommissioned officers of all authority that is rightfully theirs and the creation of increased opportunity for the noncommissioned officer to exercise command and initiative.

(2)(g) The consultation with appropriate noncommissioned officers in planning the implementation of directives.

First mention of NCOs in planning

1954

Extract from AR 615-15, *Separation of Noncommissioned Officers From Specialists*

NCO professionalism

25. *Enhancement of noncommissioned officers*

...instill the desire in the noncommissioned officer to assume added responsibility and...attain the desired results of a competent noncommissioned officer corps, special attention will be given to the following points:

a. Careful selection of noncommissioned officers.

b. Training of noncommissioned officers in their duties and responsibilities.

c. Prompt removal of noncommissioned officers who fail to attain or maintain the acceptable standards of leadership.

26. *Authority of the noncommissioned officer*

...avoid usurping the authority of the noncommissioned officer as to do so will undermine the prestige upon which his effectiveness is dependent.

c. [Seek] recommendations of noncommissioned officers relative to troop welfare... assignment, reassignment, promotions, privileges, discipline, *training* and supply... to emphasize the responsibilities of the noncommissioned officer...

First mention of NCOs' recommendations and training

1967

Extract from AR 600-20, *Army Command Policies and Procedures*

No mention of training. Sergeant major a key staff member

Section IV. *Enlisted Aspects of Command*

25.b. Sergeant Major. This is the position title that designates the senior enlisted position on the staffs of various commanders. In keeping with the trust, confidence, responsibility, and authority bestowed upon this function, the sergeant major should be considered as a key staff member.

First sergeant as a company administrator... Training is an officer's responsibility

No mention of NCO training responsibility

*NCOs as trainers
NCOs can make recommendations on enlisted training*

No mention of NCO leadership

Separation of officer and NCO business and no tie-in to organization

Senior NCO link to training not addressed

Advisor to the commander on training

In 20 years, first sergeant goes from company administrator to principle trainer

Senior NCOs involved in planning training



25.c. *First Sergeant.* ... It is normal for company commanders to use the noncommissioned officer channels for the conduct of many routine activities, particularly in garrison... He [first sergeant] conducts routine company administration and company operations as directed by the company commander... The functions of the first sergeant do not include responsibilities which cannot be delegated by the company commander or which properly belong to the executive officer or platoon leaders.

25.c. *Section, squad, and team leaders.* ...Platoon leaders hold their subordinate leaders responsible

(1) For personal appearance and cleanliness.

(2) That all Government property issued to members of their units is properly maintained and accounted for at all times and that discrepancies are reported promptly.

(3) That, while in a duty status, they be ready at all times to report the location and activity of all individuals of the unit...

(4) That the unit is prepared to function in its primary mission role.

25.h. *Miscellaneous NCO responsibilities, prerogatives and privileges:*

(2) Be employed as *training* instructors to the maximum degree practicable.

(3) Make recommendations relative to unit mission accomplishment and troop welfare. NCO recommendations have traditionally been of immeasurable assistance to the commanding officer on such matters as assignment, reassignment, promotion, privileges, discipline, *training*, unit funds, community affairs, and supply.

1980

Extract from AR 350-17, *Noncommissioned Officer Development Program*

5.i. *The Commanders of battalions and equivalent organizations—*

(1) Are responsible for developing NCODPs which are responsive to the needs of their unit and the aspirations and development of their junior leaders.

(3) Insure that there is, throughout their units, a clear identification of those tasks that are noncommissioned officer business.

6.e. NCO communication linked at battalion levels and higher should be established. Their purpose is to consider, but not limited to, problems and recommendations related to improvements in the development of QOL (Quality of Life) of all NCOs and enlisted personnel. They also serve to provide recommendations to commanders on topics which affect enlisted personnel.

1988

Extract from AR 600-20, *Army Command Policies and Procedures*

3-2 *Noncommissioned Officer Support Channel*

3-2a. ...NCO support channel will assist the chain of command in accomplishing the following.

(3) *Training* of enlisted soldiers in their MOS as well as in the basic skills and attributes of a soldier.

(7) Teaching the soldiers the mission of the unit and developing individual training programs to support the mission.

(9) Administering and monitoring the NCO professional development program and other unit *training* programs.

3-2.b(2) *Command Sergeant Major.* This position title designates the senior NCO of the command at battalion or higher levels. He or she carries out policies and standards, and advises the commander on the performance, *training*, appearance, and conduct of enlisted personnel.

3-2.b(3) *First Sergeant.* The position of first sergeant designates the senior NCO at company level. The first sergeant's principal duty is the individual *training* of enlisted members of the unit.

3-2.b(5) *Section, squad and team leaders.* These direct leaders are the NCOs responsible at these echelons.

Extract from FM 25-100, *Training the Force*

1-9, The CSM and NCO leaders must select the specific individual tasks, which support each collective task, to be trained during the same period. NCOs have the primary role in *training* and developing individual soldier skills.

Officers at every level remain responsible for *training* to established standards dur-

NCOs responsible for conducting individual training

1990

ing both individual and collective training.

4-3, 4. NCOs are responsible for conducting individual *training* to standard and must be able to explain how individual *training* relates to collective mission essential tasks.

1990 Extract from FM 25-100, *Battle Focused Training*

3-5, 6. The key is to train the trainer so he can train his soldiers. This requires the NCO to identify essential soldier and small-unit and team tasks (drills) that support the unit METL and then

- to assess strengths and weaknesses
- to formulate a plan to correct deficiencies and sustain strengths
- to execute the training to standard

4-2. *Roles in Executing Training...Senior NCOs ensure—*

- Prerequisite *training* is completed so that soldiers' time is not wasted.
- Leaders are trained and prepared to train their sections, squads, teams or crews. *They train the trainers.*

Know their units' and soldiers' *training* needs and, based on that assessment, plan appropriate time to train to standard.

- Ensure training is conducted to standard.
- Before presenting training to the soldier, *trainers must prepare for the training.*

Senior NCOs responsible for training the trainer

1991 Extract from AR 350-17, *Noncommissioned Officer Development Program*

4.g. *Commanders of battalions, separate companies, and equivalent organizations will—*

- (1) Be responsible to develop and implement an effective NCODP.
- (2) Ensure the program supports the unit mission and enhances development of noncommissioned officers.
- (3) Ensure that the program has stated objectives with measurable and reachable standards.

4.h. *Command sergeants major (CSMs) first sergeants, or senior NCOs of battalions, separate companies, or equivalent organizations will—*

- (2) Implement the commander's directives and guidance on the unit's NCODP.
- (3) Be responsible for content, pertinence, and implementation of the unit's NCODP.

5.b. As with all leader *training*, the NCODP is a command responsibility. The program reflects command priorities and expectations for leader development, jointly determined by commanders and their senior NCOs.

Senior NCOs responsible for training NCOs

1993 AR 350-41, *Training in Units*

2-32 *Battalion-level and company level commanders*

2-32.a. Assign primary responsibility for collective training to officers and primary responsibility for soldier *training* to NCOs. NCOs will also train most sections, squads, teams and crews.

Primary responsibility for individual and small-unit training rests with the NCO



Our Army and the NCO Corps have come a long way since the initial guidance of not allowing NCOs to conduct individual training. Today we are responsible for individual training of soldiers through the collective training of sections, squads, teams and crews. The Army leadership now trusts us with what used to be considered "officers' business." It's up to the NCO Corps to uphold that trust and responsibility. Our soldiers' lives and our nation depend on it. ■

Rush was the 1st Army command sergeant major, Ft. Meade, MD, when he wrote this article.