

"...you have a debt and a date. A debt to democracy, a date with destiny..."

Oveta Culp Hobby, first WAC director

When the Women's Army Auxiliary Corps began in 1942, there were no women NCOs. But, month by month, as women graduated from basic and advanced individual training, the leadership ability in some rose to the top and they were assigned to lead and train others.

Women became platoon sergeants, supply sergeants and first sergeants. In their duty sections, they supervised enlisted men and women and were praised for their organizational skills, their attention to duty and their loyalty and reliability. Within six months, women NCOs had replaced all the male NCOs at the WAAC training centers.

By the end of WWII, WAC NCOs worldwide deservedly earned promotions to the highest enlisted grades (E-1, -2 and -3 in those days). Those heroic WWII NCOs were in large part responsible for the Corps' achieving Regular Army status in 1948. Since then, women NCOs have served faithfully and diligently in

MOS after MOS, through every war and national crisis in which our nation has been involved.

The Army added two NCO grades in 1959—E-8, master sergeant or first sergeant and E-9, sergeant major. Carolyn H. James was the first WAC promoted to master sergeant and in 1960 she was the first to be promoted to sergeant major. Later, in 1968, when the Army Chief of Staff created the position of command sergeant

major to serve as enlisted assistant to commanders at battalion level and above, Yzetta L. Nelson, assigned to the WAC Training Battalion, Ft. McClellan, was the first WAC sergeant major to be appointed to hold that position and wear the CSM rank [see page 45].

In 1972, WACs began participating in NCOES that provided progressive training at service schools and NCO academies at all skill levels. Both DA and major commanders scheduled enlisted soldiers for resident, extension and OJT courses from primary technical courses to the Sergeants Major Course. The first WACs to graduate from USASMA at Ft. Bliss, TX, were MSG Betty J. Benson (Class 1); MSGs Helen I. Johnston (Class 3) and Dorothy J. Rechel (Class 3). All three later became command sergeants major. ■

[Editor's Note: For a more in-depth study of the WAAC and WAC read COL (Ret.) Betty J. Morden's book The Women's Army Corps, 1945-1978, CMH Pub 30-14, 1989.]



The Army soon realized its women soldiers were capable of becoming more than typists.

Career management

Rise of a Pr

By Dr. Robert Bouilly

In modern mythology we are tempted to look back at the old "Brown Shoe" Army with admiration and perhaps longing. The Army wore brown shoes until 1958 but most people associate the term with the interwar Army of about 1920 to 1940. It was small and poor. Yet it possessed a long-term cadre of officers and NCOs who worked well together. The Army was efficient and everyone knew his role. To use the words of a much later Army chief of staff, GEN Carl E. Vuono, the officers 'commanded' and the NCOs 'ran' the Army.

The trouble with this mythology was that the small interwar Army was not the Army which fought World War II. Sure, those officers and NCOs were still there. It's just that they were swallowed up by the massive influx of civilians-turned-soldiers during the war. There weren't enough old-time NCOs to go around.

Hastily devised training programs produced more NCOs primarily trained to fight rather than lead soldiers in garrison duty. The small number of divisions fielded in World War II (89) meant there was little chance for divisions to leave the fighting for extended periods to train. The attrition of infantry soldiers was particularly high. A common evaluation of the Army by the end of the war was that the NCO Corps was not particularly good.

Rapid demobilization after the war only made the situation worse. A point system determined who could go home first. In effect, more experienced soldiers and NCOs tended to have the highest number of points and left quickly. Occupation units in Europe quickly found themselves stripped of the leadership expertise which had carried them through the war. Their solution was to establish training schools for both NCOs and officers.

The war had hardly ended, for example, before the 88th Inf Div established perhaps the first NCO academy on Lido Island in Venice, Italy, late in 1945. The Constabulary Brigade in Germany did much the same with its academy, first at Sondhofen in 1947 and then at Munich in 1949. These schools sprang from a deeply ingrained belief in American society that education and training represented progress.

These schools were also the answer to an immediate problem. European units could not wait years for the maturing of junior leaders through on-the-job training as had been the case in the interwar Brown Shoe army. They had to have competent leaders quickly. The Army came to believe that leadership could be taught to NCOs much as it had been taught to officers for many years.

The NCO academy movement grew over time. By 1959, about 18,000 NCOs were graduating each year from 17 academies in the states besides those being trained in the 7th

and NCOES foretell...

Professional NCO Corps

Army in Europe and a scattering of other places. Curricula varied. The length of training varied also. In time the Army attempted to standardize the training through the promulgation of regulations in 1957 and again in 1964.

The Air Force paid the Army the highest form of compliment by copying elements of its academy system as GEN Curtis LeMay introduced NCO academy training in the mid-1950s to the Air Force.

Despite the lack of uniformity in the academies, leadership training predominated. Discipline was a mainstay. Most NCO academy graduates have vivid memories of their training—the student battalions, the rigid inspections which prompted such practices as gluing school supplies to boards at the bottom of desk drawers so everything would be in good order. Students learned to inspect! They learned leadership in a garrison setting. The academics helped professionalize the NCO Corps by developing and refining both NCO leadership skills and standards.

Another factor in the professionalization of the NCO Corps was career management. During World War II, the Army adopted a system of classifying military jobs. It adopted the military occupational specialty (MOS) system, which codified what skills were needed to do a particular job. MOS classification helped define the necessary skills needed in a job and helped acquire those skills.

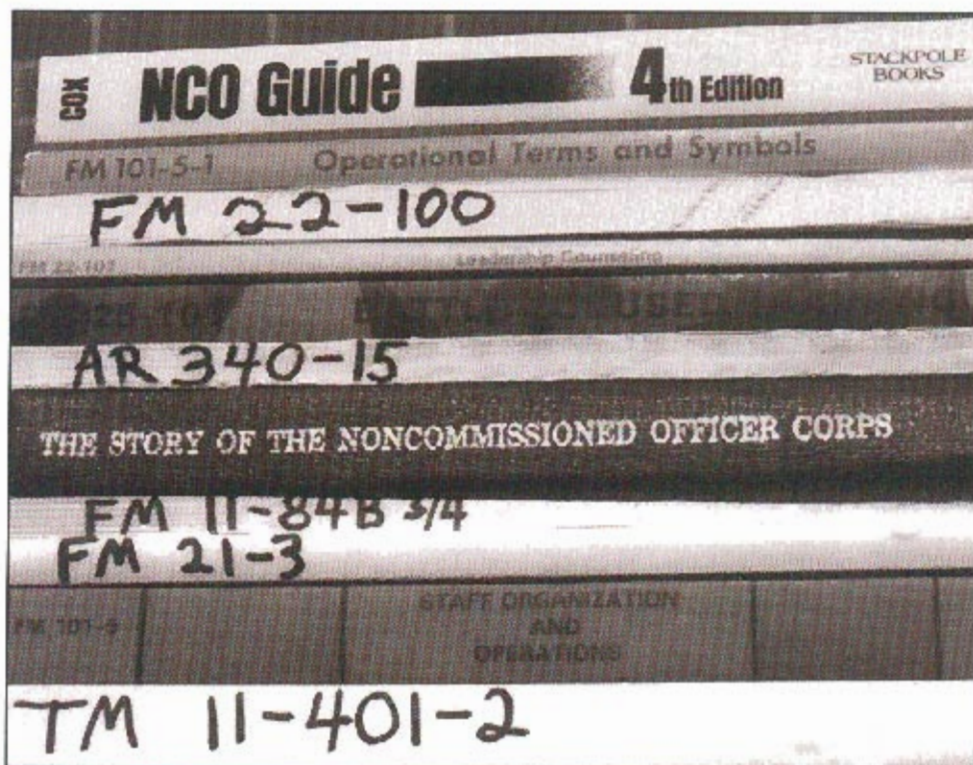
But, the Army needed more than a classification system to establish careers for NCOs. It needed to provide mobility for soldiers. NCOs needed upward mobility (in rank) while they continued to practice their MOS specialty. They also needed, like officers, to move from unit to unit while retaining their rank. NCOs needed to work in career fields. Eventually, the post-WWII Army provided both.

Progress toward creation of career fields was hesitant. In 1948, the Army announced the creation of a career management system. By 1949, tests were given in a limited number of MOSes to determine qualified NCOs for promotion. Then came the Korean War. It overwhelmed the career management system and killed it. After the war the Army didn't pick up where it had left off. Enlisted soldier career management was dead and would remain so until after the

Vietnam War. Mobility for NCOs from unit to unit while retaining their rank began in small measure before WWII. Forward positioning of Army elements in the Philippines over extended periods began at the turn of the century. Manning these units raised the issue. Could the Army expect to send units to a country outside the continental United States for indefinite periods—perhaps 20 or more years at a time—a career or more? If the Army were to maintain such long-term foreign presence, would it rotate units or individuals? If it rotated individuals such as NCOs whose rank depended on their staying with the unit, was it fair to rotate these soldiers? If unfair, would soldiers vote with their feet and leave the Army? Ultimately, the Army sought to rotate individuals but made provision for them to retain their rank as they moved from the Philippines to stateside units.

World War II sent many more soldiers overseas—but only for a matter of a few years. It was a temporary situation, an emergency. But the Cold War changed all that. By 1949, it was quite evident that occupation forces in Europe could not go home any time soon. The Philippine experience was being repeated on a massive scale.

The Army, like it or not, was becoming forward-based. Massive numbers of officers and enlisted would have to be rotated through units in Europe and eventually Korea. This could only be accommodated by allowing NCOs to carry their rank with them as they rotated in and out of the forward units.



The Vietnam War presented some of the same problems that appeared in WWII. Massive U.S. involvement in Vietnam began in late 1965 and continued into 1970. Both wars took a heavy toll on the officer and NCO Corps. Both wars tended to exhaust the leadership pool provided by the pre-war army. New leadership had to be trained and put into the field quickly. In Vietnam the 12-month rotation policy, combined with the 25-month stabilization tour quickly went through the pool of NCOs available for rotation to Vietnam.

The Army needed to be find a way to develop small-unit combat leaders within the two-year tour of duty provided by the draft law at that time. The Continental Army Command (CONARC) provided a solution as it developed the Skill Development Base (SDB) Program in 1967. The SDB Program sought to enhance the skills of specialists and NCOs in about 75 MOSs. In practice, most of the program consisted of the Noncommissioned Officer Candidate Course (NCOCC).

The NCOCC graduates were better known by the slightly derogatory moniker as "Shake and Bake" NCOs. These soldiers went directly from Advanced Infantry Training (AIT) to combat leader training in service schools at Forts Benning, Bliss, Knox and Sill. Instruction started in the classroom and continued with field training. Most students also got some on-the-job training in TOE units. All were trained within a year. They received an NCO commission as an E-5 or E-6; went to Vietnam and had a year left in their military obligation to serve as small-unit leaders.

Over four-and-a-half years the NCOCC Program produced about 33,000 NCOs. They did well in their limited role. Like the WWII NCO, they needed additional training in garrison duty leadership when they returned.

The Army came out of the Vietnam conflict somewhat the worse for wear. Winning would have helped, but the U.S. didn't win. Instead, there was a widespread perception that the NCO Corps was especially in need of reconstruction. Again, as had happened in WWII, the clear distinction in duties between officers and NCOs had become blurred in practice. Too many junior officers tended to both 'command' and 'run' their units. Deficiencies in NCO leadership skills had allowed officers to take over many NCO prerogatives and duties. The ideal represented by the myth of the "Brown Shoe" Army no longer represented practice.

A number of senior officers in the late 1960s and early 1970s had been impressed by NCOs who were products of the NCO academies and the Shake and Bake Program. Army Chief of Staff GEN William Westmoreland, his special assistant, GEN (ret.) Bruce C. Clarke and the commanding general of CONARC, Ralph E. Haines, Jr., all sought to continue these training programs to reconstruct the NCO Corps.

The idea of education for NCOs had been around for years—at least since 1955. As early as 1963 the Department of the Army first considered a proposal for establishing a senior NCO "college." This proposal came from the Ft. Dix NCO Council and had the backing of nearly all of the service school commandants. It was the first of several similar proposals to die over the next few years for want of money and qualified instructors.

Gradually, the proposals broadened to include several levels of NCO education and training. Progress toward establishing such a system came in early 1971 when Westmoreland, as Army Chief of Staff, gave CONARC the go-ahead to establish a system of basic and advanced NCO education. He withheld approval for a senior level of instruction but promised to reconsider its approval at a later date.

Westmoreland probably deferred a decision on the senior school because he knew the commanding general of CONARC at the time, James K. Woolnough, was not in favor of education for "super" NCO grades. Woolnough believed that high-grade NCOs, like general officers, needed no further schooling. His successor was GEN Ralph E. Haines, Jr., who was a champion of the NCOCC, and he saw to it that a senior NCO academy at Ft. Bliss, TX, was established on his watch. At much the same time, Westmoreland heeded the advice of GEN Bruce C. Clarke and directed the revival of the NCO academy system, which had dwindled to almost nothing during the war in Vietnam.

The Army called the new, three-tiered educational structure the Noncommissioned Officer Educational System (NCOES). The first formal classes started in May 1971, and early basic courses were very similar to the shake-and-bake course they supplanted. The system is still with us today. At its peak in 1992, about 90,000 students graduated. It has been credited widely with providing the glue for victory in Desert Shield/Desert Storm.

There's a larger aspect to professionalization of the NCO Corps as well. NCOES is just one part of it. The larger part is the Enlisted Personnel Management System (EPMS), which also rose out of the post-Vietnam reconstruction effort. A truly professional corps requires career management. Officers have had it for many years. Since they were relatively few in number, their careers could be centrally managed.

The advent of computers made it come about for NCOs. Even with computers, assignment to schools at the lower levels of NCOES was only possible in the mid-1980s. It's no accident that the creation of an Army Personnel Command (PERSCOM) is a relatively recent phenomenon.

So here we are in 1995. Career management, along with progressive education and training, have professionalized the NCO Corps. Increasingly, the two have been linked together. One must attend and graduate from the Advanced Noncommissioned Officer Course (ANCOC). In time, it seems likely that promotion for virtually all grades will be tied to attendance and graduation from some level of NCOES. Professionalism is upon us. ■

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