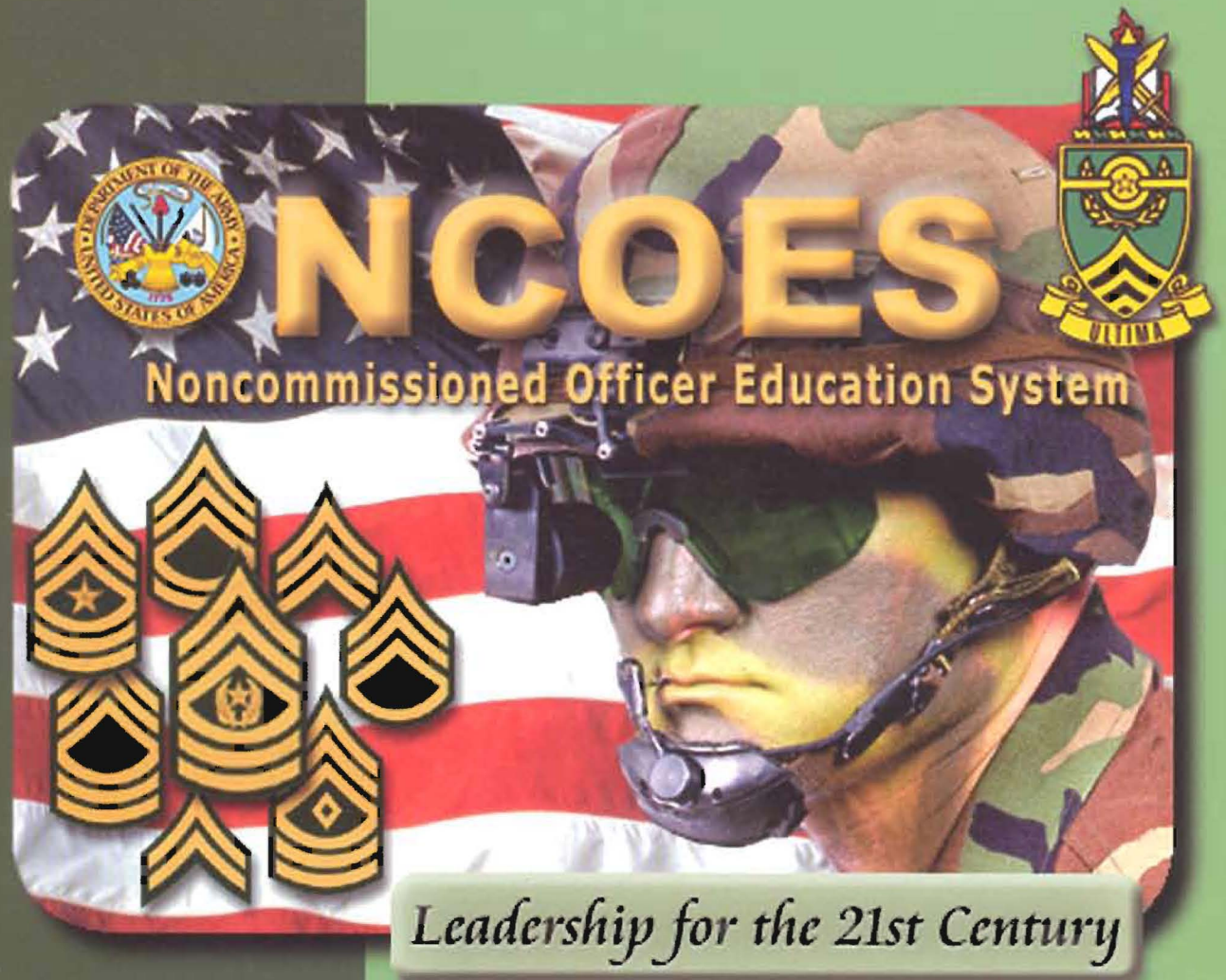


# The NCO Journal

Vol. 10, No. 3 SUMMER 01

A Quarterly Forum for Professional Development



## NCOES

Past, Present & Future

**Who wants to be  
an Alternate?**

It's not as bad as it seems



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*illustration by Gary Boggs*

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Cover Illustration by  
SGM Steven Peterson

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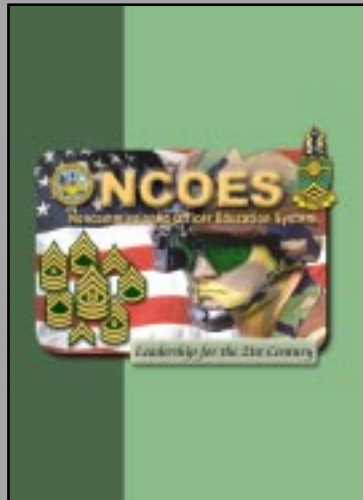
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# About This ISSUE

Earlier this year with the reintroduction of the *NCO Journal* back to the Noncommissioned Officers Corps, our goal was to give the men and women wearing chevrons a publication they could be proud of. Over the past two issues we've spotlighted topics such as training, promotions, reenlistment and esprit de corps. And by the response of the letters we've received, you appreciate the job we're doing. Thank you for your letters of thanks and also your letters of concern.



In this issue, we focus on a theme that is of genuine concern for every enlisted soldier in the U.S. Army -- The Noncommissioned Officer Education System.

Established in 1971, the NCOES is the keystone for NCO development preparing leaders for key areas of responsibility.

In our first article, Sgt. 1st Class William Applegarth lets us know that attending schools shouldn't be our primary source for developing soldiers into NCOs. Nothing takes the place of good old-fashioned experience in what he

coins, "The School of Hard Knocks."

Master Sgt. Eladio Ramirez suggests being selected as an alternate to attend the Sergeants Major Academy isn't a bad deal at all. In his article he tells us that by attending the Sergeants Major Course as an alternate, he was able to interact with other professional soldiers from various career fields.

In our interview with the top enlisted man of the U.S. Army Training & Doctrine Command, Command Sgt. Maj. John Beck, he shares his thoughts on a variety of issues such as the Primary Leadership Development Course, institutional training and TRADOC's role in NCO leader development.

All in all, this issue of the *NCO Journal* represents the past, present and future of the Army's NCOES. As more and more soldiers join the ranks of the NCO Corps, it's imperative that they understand how the NCOES affects their future.

Finally, don't forget the theme for the Fall edition of the *Journal* is the NCO/Officer Relationship and, as always, please support the *NCO Journal*.

On a sad note, the *NCO Journal* lost a former member of its staff. Master Sgt. (Ret.) Gabe Vega, who served as the graphic illustrator of the magazine from 1994-1997, was killed in an auto accident prior to publication of this issue. Our thoughts and prayers go out to his family. He was an integral part of the *Journal's* success and his work is still appreciated and admired by soldiers across the Army.

--The Editor-in-Chief

# Letters



## DON'T FORGET CIVILIANS

I found it quite refreshing to read the *NCO Journal* once again. The soldier community should be happy that it has been resurrected and back in print. However, I write on behalf of the 225,000 Department of the Army civilians "out there" that seem to have been forgotten.

Our corps of DA civilians is ready to assist soldiers when called upon. And, we seem to be cast aside by your publication. Many of us are former NCOs and officers. We have the opportunity to work with high-speed soldiers and can shed quality light on what makes them tick. I would say 95 percent of us would be more than happy to work with NCOs who want to get ahead.

So as you put your call to action out to the soldier community, don't forget about civilians being a member of the Total Army Team. We are here to help, not to hinder a soldier's career. I wish you the best of luck with your publication.

*Dean R. Sprague*  
Department of the Army Civilian  
Manassas Park, Va.

## JOURNAL TOO LATE

I have just ETS'd from the Army after seven years of Active Duty service. Today was the first time I came across the *NCO Journal* and after reading the articles, I realized how much I've been missing.

For some reason, the units I've been in either haven't heard of the *Journal* or don't share it with their junior NCOs. While trying to reclassify and reenlist I became discouraged with my fellow NCOs and the Corps as a whole.

I just can't help but think that if more NCOs had the mindset that is being exhibited in the *Journal* many, many, many more of us (junior NCOs) would be reenlisting and the issue of promoting underqualified specialists would be resolved!

*Josh Lopez*  
Former Army NCO

## ARTICLE ON TARGET

Your recent article, "Walking the Talk," is right on target. I've been saying the same thing for years. If only more of our senior leaders could understand that.

Yes, every soldier should know how much an M-16 weighs, but it's more important to know how to teach and train soldiers how to correctly employ the weapon.

I suppose it's because many don't know how to do it themselves. Knowing how much it weighs versus how to adjust point of aim is a no brainer for those who really know what we're doing.

*MSG Jeff Berry*  
First Sergeant

## HISTORY IMPORTANT

I liked the article by Dr. Bouilly on the Civil War. Many NCOs got instant "OJT" on the field of battle for better or worse. The unwise election of officers and NCOs gave way to promotion by merit and by how long he survived, even as it happens today.

Some are naturals who exude "command presence" and men will follow them, while others have to work hard at it.

I have found that many NCOs and officers don't know much about the history of the units they are in and cannot therefore pass it on to their soldiers. Cohesion, esprit de corps and other intangibles are all part of the glue that binds units together.

There is no substitute for "Duty, Honor, Country" and unit history and traditions, though. NCOs are by rights the people to get this through to the troops. After all, officers come and go.

*John R. Pittsenbargar*  
Military Order of the Purple Heart  
White Sands, N.M.

## NOT ABOVE CRITICISM

The criticism of my article is correct. The ID Card is not stamped "INDEF" as I thought. I stand corrected and readily accept the opportunity to be publicly corrected.

My facts were wrong, but my thoughts remain the same. As for me being out of touch with reality, well, I am a CSM and have been accused of that many times in the past. I'm just grateful for the opportunity to express an idea and surprised that anyone would take the time to respond.

*CSM James H. Clifford*  
63rd Ordnance Bn.  
Fort Dix, N.J.

# Letters

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“ I fully concur that, “As NCOs, one of our critical missions is to train soldiers.” Your Spring 2001 cover in fact adversely impacts training. ”

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## COVER COMPLAINTS

First, welcome back! Second, I ask you to tighten up on your “shot group” -- photographs like the cover of the Spring 2001 edition especially.

I fully concur that, “As NCOs, one of our critical missions is to train soldiers.” Your Spring 2001 cover in fact adversely impacts training.

Task #051-191-1501, Perform Individual Camouflage, Soldier’s Manual of Common Tasks (STP 21-1-SMCT), establishes the task, conditions, and standards for applying facial camouflage.

Nowhere in this document is the “clown face” technique identified as the right way to do it.

Your Spring 2001 cover implies “this is OK.” It is not. The standard is well established and we are entrusted to enforce it -- especially in the leading journal for our noncommissioned officers.

**LTC V. J. Nannini**  
**Commander 3d Bn., 6th FA**  
**10th Mountain Division**  
*Fort Drum, N.Y.*

*The NCO Journal* is back, and back with a BOMB. I don’t think you could have found a more embarrassing photo to put on the cover.

The text with the photo should have said, how many things can you find

wrong with this picture?

The next *Journal*, at the very least, should devote a page to INDIVIDUAL CAMOUFLAGE. *The NCO Journal* has demonstrated the wrong way, so lets fix the problem.

I can only assume that the soldier in this photo has a shaving profile, and the caring NCO who is responsible for his welfare is making sure he stays on profile. I know we can do much better than this.

**SFC Michael E. Kucharski**  
**Alpha Battery, 2-15 FAR**  
**First Sergeant**  
*Fort Drum, N.Y.*

Well, my comment is on the picture on the front cover. I think it’s a disgrace to put a soldier on the front of a *NCO Journal* and have him chewed up.

He had no pin-on rank, no name on his kevlar band, his chin strap was unfastened and worst of all there is a private first class in front of him with his rank falling off.

The photographer should have prepared. And if you need to put someone on the front page of one of my favorite magazines, then come get one of my soldiers.

**SSG Christopher Lansaw**  
*Fort Bragg, N.C.*

## FROM THE EDITORS

We won’t debate the photo, but we applaud the attitude. We really are open to criticism here, and we want you to sound off when you disagree.

That’s why this is a forum. The first few issues are only the beginning as we build a network of caring NCOs willing to use this publication as a way to improve the Army by improving the NCO Corps.

We need to know what we can do better so we can bring you a quality product that you’d expect each and every time.

We need to hear your voice when you’re not satisfied. After all, this magazine is yours -- the NCO Corps. Again, thanks for sounding off.

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*Editor’s Note - The NCO Journal* welcomes comments from our readers. Letters to the editor must be signed and include the writer’s full name and rank, unit, post/city and state (or city and country) and mailing address. Letters should be brief and are subject to editing.

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# School of Hard Knocks

By SFC William W. Applegarth

*Noncommissioned Officers cannot thrive on NCOES alone to become leaders of soldiers. Although formal and traditional education has its place, the true final exam for NCOs is on the battlefield. Nothing is more valuable than good old fashioned experience. By combining the two, our NCOs will be better leaders on exam day.*

**T**he Noncommissioned Officer has been a part of the Army of the United States of America since its inception and has recruited, trained, led and cared for soldiers since those humble beginnings. An NCO is a leader whether one is a corporal or the Sergeant Major of the Army and must accept and fill this role to the best of his or her abilities.

One way to ensure that today's soldiers are getting the leadership they deserve is through the Noncommissioned Officer Education System (NCOES).

Today's NCO Corps is the product of its members, both past and present. The Corps, with its professional soldiers and leaders, has implemented leadership development schools from the Primary Leadership Development Course (PLDC) through the Sergeants Major Course.

These courses, while important training tools, are often seen as little more than a rite of passage or a hurdle to be overcome in the pursuit of the next rank and pay raise.

Senior NCOs must insure that those personnel instructing and attending these courses understand that the material taught is a cornerstone of tomorrow's Army leadership, not merely an inconvenience.



*courtesy photo*

***Basic leadership skills including planning and executing training, drill and ceremony and counseling taught at early NCOES courses should be tempered with experience.***

While the formal NCOES is a vital ingredient in the development of NCOs, there is a second equally important part, known colloquially as “HK University,” or the school of “Hard Knocks.”

No traditional education will prepare tomorrow’s NCO Corps for the challenges of leadership as well as personal experience.

In order to provide our future NCO with the tools to succeed and mature, we, the NCOs of today, must be willing to mentor and educate those soldiers under our charge.

Basic leadership skills including planning and executing training, drill and ceremony and counseling taught during early NCOES courses should be tempered with experience.

Soldiers being considered for promotion to NCO ranks must be exposed to the responsibilities of leadership at the unit level prior to attendance at NCOES courses.

Having these future NCOs plan, conduct and evaluate training on a regular basis with appropriate guidance and

counseling from more experienced NCOs will prove invaluable to the soldier at NCOES schools.

Any soldier can be placed in leadership positions during regular workday activities, as well as during field exercises and ARTEPs.

Encourage junior-enlisted members to assume leadership roles in their daily activities, including drill and ceremony practice and conducting Physical Training. Asking them to accept responsibility for formal classes will grant these future NCOs valuable experience.

The experience gained via this training will greatly enhance soldiers’ skills in leadership, time and resource management, oral and written communication and research abilities.

These areas are generally weighed heavily in service schools (including NCOES courses) and are evaluated on the DA 1059, Service School Academic Evaluation Report.

A perfect time for observing the future NCO as a leader is during unit Sergeants’ Time training.

As junior NCOs progress in rank, senior NCOs must be prepared to challenge them with increasing degrees of responsibility.

The NCO Corps must use all tools available to develop our junior enlisted members professionally. Preparations for these training sessions will differ with each situation.

Leadership training sessions must be challenging but should not expose the soldier to situations that he or she cannot manage.

In the event that an unmanageable situation arises during leader training, a more senior NCO must be prepared to step in and regain “equilibrium” or control the situation.

In the beginning, senior NCOs may have to resort to the “task, don’t ask” method when instituting training for tomorrow’s leaders.

Soldiers must be *made* to take responsibility and to take an active role in preparing and conducting training.

Junior-enlisted members will quickly develop new and diverse methods of training if given the opportunity.

This will often rejuvenate “stale” Common Task training, which has long been a mainstay of “ Sergeants’ Time” and “hip pocket” training.

With appropriate training and counseling, junior NCOs and enlisted will actively seek the opportunity to lead training.

Encourage soldiers to develop personally and professionally through military and civilian education as well as formal NCOES courses.

As leaders it is incumbent upon members of the NCO Corps to challenge our soldiers to higher standards, higher education and higher levels of responsibility.

By allowing our soldiers to become complacent and to accept the status quo we, the professional NCO Corps, do our Army a grave injustice.

The Army has a wide variety of courses, generally taught locally, with fairly lenient attendance fills.

The NCO chain of concern must be willing to allow the best and brightest among our developing junior enlisted to grow professionally through service schools, even if it means ultimately losing those soldiers to another command.

Upon completion of courses, request, encourage or require attendees to act as subject-matter experts, instilling a desire to prepare others for training, to hone their abilities as instructors and to mature as future leaders. It is the Senior NCO’s responsibility to instill in today’s soldier the desire to lead by example.

In today’s Army it is often difficult to impart to our junior soldiers the importance of professional development.

By instilling the desire to lead others we, the NCO Corps, are guaranteeing that tomorrow’s Army will be worthy of the nation and people it serves.

Today’s soldiers need to understand that insignia of rank, skill badges, berets and other accouterments do not make an NCO special.

It is the NCO who makes these items special because of the knowledge, experience, technical proficiency and leadership skills these items denote.

This knowledge, technical and tactical proficiency, and leadership can only come from a mix of formal Noncommissioned Officer Education System courses and experience.

By combining the Army’s formal NCOES and “education through experience” today’s NCO Corps virtually guarantees that future noncommissioned officers will be prepared to face the challenges of the future, regardless of the nature of those challenges.

**No traditional education will prepare tomorrow’s NCO Corps for the challenges of leadership as well as personal experience. In order to provide our future NCO with the tools to succeed and mature, *we*, the NCOs of today, must be willing to mentor and educate those soldiers under our charge.**

*SFC Applegarth is a Special Forces Medical Sergeant assigned to the U.S. Army John F. Kennedy Special Warfare Center and School. He wrote this article while assigned to Co. C, 2nd Bn., 5th Special Forces Group (Airborne) at Fort Campbell, Ky.*



# So you don't Want to be an Alternate?

By MSG Eladio Ramirez

*The question is often debated by many senior NCOs when selected to attend the Sergeants Major Course. The author found himself answering that question.*

**I**n December 1998, I received the good news. Or was it? I had been selected to attend the United States Army Sergeants Major Course (Class 50) as an alternate. I didn't know whether to be excited or not, but how could I? No one was actually able to tell me what being an alternate meant or what it meant to my career. How was this selection going to change my life? I was perfectly happy at my current assignment and loved my job.

That doesn't happen very often. Naturally, like any other person, I was immediately resistant to change. Why? I was supposed to be excited just as everyone else was. I had already reached my goal to be promoted to Master Sergeant and was comfortable with my present unit. What more could a soldier ask for?

I called some friends who worked at the Academy and they told me that being an alternate is a good thing. It means there's a great possibility you will be selected to become a Sergeant Major or Command Sergeant Major.

The truth is that only the top one percent of Noncommissioned Officers from different career fields in the U.S. Army get selected to attend the Sergeants Major Course. When you look at it from that perspective, it's quite an honor to attend the course.

I also sought advice from family, friends and some supervisors. Throughout my decision-making process I felt it would be advantageous to talk to as many people as possible for input. I was able to get help from people unknown to me and was able to easily prepare for attending the course.

The advice and reassurance I received from family and members of my organization was key in helping me make the right decision.

After weighing my options, the thought of being an alternate was not so bad. I was blessed with a challenge to excel in my career field, an opportunity that not everyone gets to experience. Besides, this was a reward for years of hard work and dedication.

Soon after the course started I realized the change I was so resistant toward was not that bad. I had an opportunity to meet and interact with outstanding professionals from different career fields. The knowledge and experiences we shared together are priceless. However, the greatest experience was meeting so many wonderful people and making friendships that will last a lifetime.

I was not selected for promotion last year. Although I was discouraged at first, it has actually turned into a blessing. During my assignment at the Academy, I've had the opportunity to complete my civilian education. But most importantly, I've had the opportunity to spend more time with my family and that is truly priceless.

If I were asked today what's an alternate, my response would be an alternate is a special individual who has the good fortune to experience what many other senior NCOs hope to experience some day. That is, to be in the top one percent of the U.S. Army's NCO Corps and to have the privilege of being called sergeant major.

So to all the alternates, if you don't get selected this year don't be discouraged. Remember that you have been selected in the top one percent of the best NCO Corps in the world. Be proud of your accomplishment. You are on your way to becoming a sergeant major.

---

*MSG Ramirez was the Assistant Operations Sergeant at the U.S. Army Sergeants Major Academy. Since publication, he has PCS'd to Fort Stewart, Ga.*

# NCOES SUCCESS BEGINS WITH PREPARATION

By CSM Robert E. Fox



*courtesy photo*

*The NCOES system is primarily an educational system, but it's only an element of the total system we need to develop NCOs...units have to have a program which identifies shortcomings in their NCOs and provides them ways to overcome those shortcomings.*

*We're not preparing our NCOs in the best way if we just send them off to school without having unit development programs. -- GEN. Edward C. Meyer*

**A**s a former commandant of the U.S. Army Air Defense Artillery Noncommissioned Officers Academy, I always saw soldiers come through the door with an element of uncertainty – not knowing what to expect.

They knew they had to come to the Primary Leadership Development Course in order to get promoted to sergeant, but they didn't know what the subject areas and course content included.

Basically, many of them did not have a complete overview of the course prior to coming to the academy because

of a lack of preparation at the unit.

Seemingly, there is still an element of leaders that are sending soldiers to a Noncommissioned Officer Education System school and telling them to, "wait until you get there, and they'll tell you what you're supposed to do," type of pitch.

I've never had any tolerance for that. As a battalion command sergeant major, it's always been important to prepare personnel prior to going to what I call "The Big Event."

From the time a soldier departs the promotion board, that's a first of a series of big events that they're going to have to

attend as they get promoted.

Once that soldier leaves the board that's the time the NCO leadership should place a student guide into their soldier's hands which tells them what is expected of them at PLDC. In many cases when soldiers were asked if they'd received a student guide on the first day of school, the answer was no.

That's where the unit leadership failed the soldier. Preparation at the unit prior to the soldier arriving at school is essential for any soldier going to an NCOES school. If we talk about wanting to help soldiers realize their full potential, that requires us (NCOs) to do some things.

If I want you to reach your full potential that means I have to sit down and talk to you to find out some key background information.

We need to ask soldiers questions such as where they are from, what kind of student they were in high school, and did they make As & Bs or were they a Cs & Ds type of student?

NCOs need to tell soldiers that not only do we want them to be a sergeant, but also that we want them to be the best sergeant. If we discover that a soldier is reading only on an eighth-grade level, then we know we have to get them prepared quickly through various educational measures that are available.

---

“  
We, the NCO Corps,  
wait until it's time to execute and  
then we start this cramming mode  
to get a soldier as a specialist  
promotable ready to be a sergeant.  
”

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So again, in order to help soldiers realize their full potential we have to do an assessment. That should be done in the orientation phase in team development according to FM 22-100.

So what if an NCO discovers a soldier has an eighth-grade reading level when the soldier is a private first class and does nothing about helping the soldier improve on his weakness? Then later, the soldier is boarded and selected for sergeant and has to attend PLDC.

That NCO has set the soldier up for failure because that soldier is going to come through the door and struggle academically, eventually leading to dismissal.

Another key critical to preparation, which many soldiers fail to do, is read the different doctrine the Army provides. That is an entire article by itself. Soldiers need to read more in order to try to prepare themselves and avoid trying to take shortcuts.

The reality is, and I consider myself a realist, soldiers spend a lot of money on those study guides at the PX and Clothing Sales, and they may be successful enough to get them through on a promotion board, but they

# Preparing soldiers for NCOES

## KEYS TO SUCCESS

1. Demonstrate a positive mental attitude.
2. Demonstrate good self discipline.
3. Demonstrate a consistently high level of motivation.
4. Keep yourself focused on your specific course. Always be a team player.

## ACADEMIC PREPARATION

1. Be clear of the challenges ahead.
2. Acquire the student guide for a specific course prior to attendance.
3. Know the requirements for your particular course.
4. If possible, visit the academy you're attending prior to attendance.

## GET OFF TO A GOOD START

1. Be prepared for inprocessing requirements.
2. If you are missing equipment, or it is dirty, you're immediately known for the wrong reason.
3. Room/squad/platoon assignments.

## ADDITIONAL EXPECTATIONS

1. Bond with other students - become known as a good member of the team.
2. Manage your time wisely!
3. Motivation -- never let there be any doubt where you stand. Keep your head in the ballgame.

## FINAL SUGGESTIONS

1. Do not hesitate to let the Small Group Leaders know that you have a weakness.
2. Do not be too proud to ask for assistance and take help for your known or later identified weaknesses.
3. Do not hesitate to contact your sponsor or senior leadership if needed.

won't get through an NCOES course.

I discourage that altogether on my promotion boards, because it doesn't make soldiers read the references they need to know such as leadership, map reading and physical fitness.

So if you have a system in place, beginning at the unit, where soldiers are made to read then they will go get the references to prepare themselves.

Doing so not only prepares them for the promotion board, it prepares them for when they enter the group room in an NCOES school.

That's not the case in many of our units. Many soldiers are seeing FM 22-100 for the first time when they get to school.

I used to always ask the students, "how many of you are putting your hands on the manual for the first time?" An enormous amount of hands would go up in the room.

Just so NCOs aren't hypocritical, if I'm the leader and I'm not reading, then I'm not going to encourage the subordinate to read as well. I'm not fooling the soldier that is being encouraged down the line to read. So we need to lead by example.

I personally believe the most important factor in preparing a soldier for any NCOES school is starting them early in their careers.

We, the NCO Corps, wait until it's time to execute and then we start this cramming mode to get a soldier as a specialist promotable ready to be a sergeant.

We should start as soon as the soldier comes through the door right out of AIT. We should ask the soldier what his or her goals are for the future even though they might not understand the language.

Basically what we're asking them is if they want to be something else and do they want to be an NCO.

If the soldier says yes, then we explain the road to follow in order to be a sergeant. For some unknown reason, NCOs act as if it's against the law to teach a private some NCO duties.

Why not introduce and expose a private to FM 25-101, Battle Focused Train-



courtesy photo

“NCOs need to tell soldiers that not only do we want them to be a sergeant, but also that we want them to be the best sergeant.”

ing? Somebody did it to me.

The more we do that, the better off we are as an NCO Corps. Start early preparation at every level. That requires NCOs to place some demands on the soldiers and not give them the latitude to wait until they're notified for a class date.

But we need to give them duties associated with the course they're attending so it will prepare them for success.

Sadly, I've been overwhelmingly disappointed each time we sent a soldier home for failing a school. That was one of the things I never looked forward to as the commandant, dropping a soldier from class.

Each time it happened, I wanted to go out the door and get the sergeant that was responsible for that soldier.

Now that I'm a brigade sergeant major, I can go out and reach and touch one of my NCOs if that should ever happen.

Those NCOs need to be held accountable for failing to nurture those soldiers.

In closing, NCOES is a passion of mine because we need to continue to replenish our NCO Corps from month to month and year to year with NCOs who are capable of carrying out the Army's mission.

We need people who can think on their feet and make decisions at their level appropriately. The more education and knowledge we have keeps us prepared to do that. I always say that knowledge allows one to stay on the offensive rather than be put on the defensive.

If we don't have it, then someone will keep us backing up.

---

*CSM Fox is the Command Sergeant Major for the 11th Air Defense Artillery Brigade and former Commandant of the U.S. Army Air Defense Artillery NCO Academy at Fort Bliss, TX.*

# The Man Who Knows NCOES

CSM JOHN BECK BELIEVES SINCERELY THAT THE ARMY'S NONCOMMISSIONED OFFICER EDUCATION SYSTEM IS THE BEST IN THE WORLD. MORE IMPORTANTLY, HE UNDERSTANDS THAT THE MISSION OF NCOES IS TO TRAIN SOLDIERS AND DEVELOP LEADERS FOR TOMORROW'S FORCE. INTERVIEW AND PHOTOS BY SSG DONALD SPARKS

**O**n a cool Fort Bliss morning, a company of nearly 100 Advanced Individual Training soldiers awaits the arrival of the top enlisted man in the U.S. Army Training & Doctrine Command to lead their PT Run. He is affectionately known as the only command sergeant major wearing a kevlar helmet in his photo near the company's orderly room depicting the NCO Support Channel.

As soon as Command Sgt. Maj. John Beck enters the area, the soldiers' attention wavers from their drill sergeant to take notice of the man in the photo. He's not as large as many thought he'd be, but his presence exudes confidence, leadership and respect.

For Beck, it's just another opportunity to travel across the land to greet the future of America's Army. After the run, he addresses the soldiers and personally thanks them for what they do and mean to the nation's defense.

"You will be the NCOs one day that will be instructors, drill sergeants, first sergeants and maybe the next Sergeant Major of the Army," he says. This draws a round of HOOAHs from the crowd. He adds, "I just want to thank you for serving your country."

Having served as the command sergeant major for Fifth U.S. Army, V Corps, U.S. Army Europe (Forward) and the 2nd Infantry Division, Beck believes that the Army's NCO Corps is a reflection of its education system. And as the TRADOC command sergeant major, he's part of the development, communication and implementation of programs to move NCOs into the 21st Century.



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***NCOJ - How will transformation affect the future of NCOES?***

**Beck** – The Noncommissioned Officer Education System, along with all Army education systems, is going through major transformation.

Let's talk about what has happened in the past first. In the early 1970s, when we started the Army NCOES beginning with the Basic and Advanced Noncommissioned Officers Course and the Ser-

transformation, you will see some changes; we'll transform the small group process. However, the learning technique will be present.

**NCOJ** – *Currently there is a lot of controversy on how the Army is teaching the Primary Leadership Development Course, particularly with the differences between the Active and Reserve Component.*

*Which direction has TRADOC*



**“ But if you take this person who makes his living as a soldier and you're going to send him on his weekends for three bites of PLDC, in addition to his normal duty week, it's going to be difficult.**

geants Major Academy, at that time the instruction in the world was lecture format.

That's the way people were taught. Later academia learned about that same time that a good way to learn was in a small-group process.

That was picked up quickly by the Army War College, and we took that technique and incorporated it in NCOES starting with the Sergeants Major Course, and it evolved through all NCOES by the mid 1980s.

I think that now with NCOES and

*looked at in teaching the course, either the current 30-day course or something better to implement both the Active and Reserve Component?*

**Beck** – Right now there are two separate and distinct programs of instruction for the Primary Leadership Development Course.

The one that is taught at the Reserve Component is called Reserve Component Courseware, but what we have to go to in PLDC is something called the Total Army Training System (TATS).

Right now we're in the process of developing that TATS courseware so that we can train that promotable specialist, no matter what component, to the same tasks, conditions and standards. Let's look at an example.

Let's say there are 160 academic hours to complete the course. A regular Army soldier will do that in four continuous weeks.

A Reserve Component soldier might do that in three ADT weekends, which translates into three months, in an ADT period.

So what you see there are two ways to deliver the course – one continuous block or in one smaller block with some small bites.

It would be fine for a regular Army soldier to attend the Reserve Component structured course.

But if you take this person who makes a living as a soldier and you're going to have him go on his weekends to three bites of PLDC in addition to his normal duty week, it's going to be difficult.

So I don't know if a regular Army commander wants to send his soldier to that kind of PLDC.

And in the same way, the Reserve Component has to deal with an employer who knows he's going to lose a soldier for two weeks of the year for Annual Training but isn't going to want to sign up for losing an employee for an additional four weeks.

So I don't think you're going to see many of the Reserve soldiers going to the Active Component course either.

**NCOJ** – *One of the primary functions of NCOES is to develop stronger leadership skills. Yet many NCOs express that BNCO and ANCO are focused more on learning the different Army policies.*

*Some feel that a lot of the institutional training, such as Equal Opportunity and Sexual Harassment, should be honed at the unit level prior to arriving for school, and that the schools should focus primarily on leadership and MOS skills.*

*Is that a legitimate concern to you,*

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*and what's your response to those NCOs?*

**Beck** – There is legitimacy to the concerns, but also all those subjects you just mentioned are part of your people skills.

And it doesn't bother me that we do some work on that in NCOES.

That's part of being a leader. If I can't implement and live Equal Opportunity, then I'm not a good leader. That's one of the check blocks on the Noncommissioned Officer Evaluation Report.

**NCOJ** – *Do you believe TRADOC is effectively communicating to Army NCOs the importance of duty in TRADOC, especially in instructor and training-developer duties?*

*Are we selling to the field that these assignments are equally important in their career?*

**Beck** – What I want the NCOs in our Army to recognize as important in their career is that whatever jobs they get they should perform them to the best of their ability.

And we as leaders should try to ensure that NCOs get exposed to the right types of jobs that are going to round them out in their leadership skills within their career management field.

So if an NCO gets a job to write training doctrine within his or her career management field, that's very valuable in developing that NCO.

They're considered a subject-matter expert and you learn by teaching and writing.

**NCOJ** – *With some of the problems highlighted by soldiers on recent deployments, how difficult will it be to adapt training for future missions of our Army across the globe?*

*How can we better teach and train our NCOs to be more flexible to adapt to any environment they're placed in?*

**Beck** – With improved development in technologies, you're going to see an increase of capabilities to conduct 'just

in time' training.

If you're going into Kosovo and the culture is a different kind of culture that your unit is not exposed to at all, you would be able to reach back to whoever may be the subject-matter expert on the citizens of Kosovo and get the information you need so the training vehicles will be there to prepare you for any situation.

I think that if you introduce a new piece of equipment on the move, you

and groom leaders. That's a quote from the Chief of Staff of the Army. TRADOC stands for Training and Doctrine Command.

So that puts us in the lead of leader development. We're the executers for the Army for how you go about developing leaders.

**NCOJ** – *Any other points you'd like to pass on to the NCOs in the field concerning NCOES?*



**“ “ We are here to train soldiers and groom leaders ...So that puts us in the lead of leader development. We're the executers for the Army for how you go about developing leaders.**

can get the training support packages to train up on the move on that new piece of equipment.

**NCOJ** – *NCOs right now are given even greater responsibility than at any other time in our Army's history.*

*How important then is TRADOC's role in NCO leader development to remain critical in future training processes?*

**Beck** – We are here to train soldiers

**Beck** – The role of the NCO is the individual and squad-level training of the soldiers in an organization.

That was true when I became a sergeant in 1969 and that is true while I'm a command sergeant major in the year 2001.

And I envision that continuing to be true in the future. So your and my role does not change in transformation.

We are still individual and squad-level trainers. That role will never change for NCOs.



# The Future of NCOES: Where do we go from here?

By SGM Felix McNair

*Is the Army's Noncommissioned Officer Education System broken? According to some senior NCOs, the system is in need of an overhaul, while others state it's a good system that needs minor revision. The debate goes on. However, the system will change just as the Army is changing with one goal -- to prepare better NCOs.*

**C**ontrary to popular belief, the Noncommissioned Officer Education System is not broken. However, as with any system, there is always room for improvement so that our NCO Corps will benefit. All the NCOES schools – Primary Leadership Development Course, Basic Noncommissioned Officers Course and Advanced Noncommissioned Officers Course, have undergone numerous changes over the years.

Looking at our OPTEMPO, changes had to be made and NCOES is better now. Personally, I don't think we need a lot of time spent in the classroom, but we need more performance-oriented measures, especially in the leadership arena. Soldiers need to understand how to deal with soldier issues, and that's a number one priority.

We must implement more performance-oriented training. We need to listen more to what the commanders and first sergeants in the field are telling us, as well as soldiers, because they know training requirements.

The Army always undergoes changes, and we can't keep year after year teaching the same doctrine to soldiers.

At the U.S. Army Sergeants Major Academy's Directorate of Training & Doctrine, we're going to improve what we have and try to forecast down the line to make it better for our soldiers.

We have to because the Army doesn't have the same caliber of soldiers as when I first enlisted in the 1970s.

Back then we'd have had to beat a soldier across the head to get them to do anything, sometimes. Our soldiers

entering the service today are smarter, computer literate, and technology savvy.

So in many instances, we are learning from them. That's where we have to instill those leadership traits and that happens over time.

The role of NCOES is critical at all levels to ensure that the Army's leadership framework is effectively passed down to each soldier.

As an infantryman, I was taught under the old system, when the lesson plans adjusted according to the way we fight. We were taught just the basics, and I took those basic skills and utilized them at the unit.

There wasn't a Primary Leadership Development Course, but back then it was called the Primary Noncommissioned Officers Course.

All in all, PLDC is the foundation of the NCOES. It affords soldiers the opportunity to develop skills they will utilize throughout their entire military career. During the course, soldiers develop camaraderie and learn the importance of team building.

While the current course is an outstanding vehicle for junior soldiers, future courses will include even more hands-on performance-oriented training, event-driven practical exercises and vignettes.

The intent will be to get soldiers out of the classroom environment more so than now. As the Army continues its march towards transformation, NCOES will continue its efforts to draw ever closer to the One Army concept.

Those days when Active Army soldiers went to Active

Army NCO academies and Reserve Component soldiers went to Reserve Component courses are just about over.

The NCOES will soon train all soldiers attending the same course with the same standards.

It starts with the stand-alone common core Basic NCO Course (BNCOC) and the stand-alone common core Advanced NCO Course (ANCOC), under The Army Training System.

Active Duty NCO academies, U.S. Army Reserve Forces Schools and Army National Guard Regional Training Institutions will all teach the same program of instruction with the same standard.

In the past, it was determined what training institution you would attend by what component you were. If you were Active Army, you went to an Active Army NCO Academy. If you were National Guard, you went to a National Guard Academy, and if you were Army Reserve, you went to an Army Reserve Forces School.

We are getting to the point where we will determine what training institution you will attend based on which is closest to you.

If you are an active-duty soldier, and the nearest Active Army NCO academy with the course you need is 100 miles from you, but there is a TASS training battalion or USAR school that teaches that course 50 miles from you, you will go to that TASS training battalion or USAR school 50 miles from you.

Active-duty soldiers will attend Reserve Component schools and Reserve Component soldiers will attend Active Army NCO Academies. The goal is to allow AC/AGR soldiers to receive credit for attending training at accredited TASS battalions. We are there!

The U. S. Army Sergeants Major Academy recently conducted its annual NCOES conference for BNCOC and ANCOC. There were 138 representatives from all over the world from all three Army components, including 14 Active Component NCO academies that teach BNCOC and ANCOC, and 55 Reserve Component training sites including Germany, Puerto Rico, Virgin Islands, Alaska, Hawaii and Guam.

The purpose of the conference was to bring together the course managers, operations sergeants or training NCOs and identify problems the schools were having, develop solutions and resolve issues.

The top issue supported overall by the attendees, especially the Reserve Component representatives, was the "One Army, One Standard" concept.

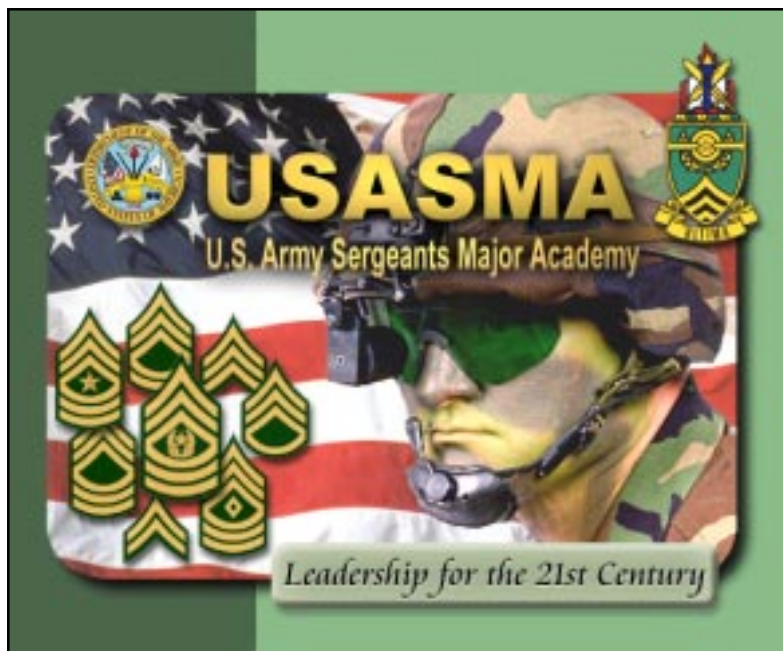


illustration by Sgt. Maj. Steven Peterson

*The U. S. Army Sergeants Major Academy is the Army's proponent for the Noncommissioned Officer Education System and will spearhead future changes in the education process.*

The results of the workshop are posted at the USASMA website at <http://usasma.bliss.army.mil>.

There are also efforts underway to offer the stand-alone common core BNCOC and ANCOC through distance learning overseas via Video Tele-Training. The training will go out to six different sites: Hanau, Vilseck, Landstuhl, Mannheim, Bamberg, and Vicenza.

Additionally, there are also efforts being made to transform PLDC into a Primary Noncommissioned Officer Leader Course and to improve the Sergeants Major Course.

As part of the Army Division Redesign Study XXI initiatives, USASMA will redefine NCOES and improve it by moving portions of the training curriculum to an earlier period in the educational development process.

This will prepare NCOs earlier to meet demanding and diverse Army requirements; for example, first sergeants/master sergeants may be selected earlier to attend the Sergeants Major Course.

So the future looks outstanding for NCOES. The non-commissioned officers in our future NCO Corps can rest assured that they will be better than the NCOs today because the system will make it that way.

*SGM McNair, an infantryman, is the Chief of NCOES at the U.S. Army Sergeants Major Academy.*

# WINNING SPIRIT

By SSG Patrick B. Rose

*(Note: The following article demonstrates one unit's introduction of a results-oriented approach to growing Noncommissioned Officers. It would be easy for the reader to think this is a news story about a unit that has accomplished a marvelous feat in winning a series of soldier and NCO boards. Rather, it is an article about how a unit has built a tradition of excellence in developing NCOs for the future. Winning boards or achieving unit awards is a byproduct of the real news here. NCOs can take professional development to the leading edge through the daily application of Total Army Quality principles. — Editor)*

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## Proving leadership skills, proficiency in soldier skills key to recommendation for boards

**B**oards have long been a method of identifying soldiers and NCOs who excel in their duties, responsibilities, knowledge, soldier and leadership skills.

Promotion boards identify and recommend those who are ready and willing to assume the greater responsibility of the next higher NCO grade, whereas the soldier and NCO of the month boards help to prepare troops for that next position.

Some may argue that anybody can memorize a bunch of questions and answers, however, there is much more to a board candidate than being able to answer questions.

In order to be nominated as a board candidate, a soldier must prove to his superiors that they are proficient in their skills, both as a soldier, and as a technician within their MOS, as well as prove their potential leadership skills.

They must show the willingness and readiness to accept more responsibility. Also, battalion Soldier of the Month/Quarter and NCO of the Month/Quarter boards are usually won by soldiers and NCOs from various units within the battalion.

It's a source of pride for individuals and units to say they are or have the best soldiers in the battalion. This causes an atmosphere of competition between the units for those bragging rights.

Within the 4<sup>th</sup> Squadron, 3<sup>rd</sup> Armored Cavalry Regiment,

however, the soldiers and NCOs of the 571<sup>st</sup> Medical Company (Air Ambulance) have set a new precedence of excellence.

For the past 11 months, since June of 2000, the soldiers and NCOs of the 571<sup>st</sup> have won every soldier of the month, NCO of the month, soldier of the quarter, and NCO of the quarter board within the 4<sup>th</sup> Squadron. This is from among nine troops in the squadron.

There is also a correlation between these soldiers' quality of board performance and the quality in their daily duties and performance in NCOES and other schools.

Boards directly contribute to the foundation of a soldier's confidence, knowledge and attention to detail for which to grow upon.

This accomplishment is a testimony to the motivation, intelligence and quality of soldiers in the 571<sup>st</sup>. However, these soldiers could not achieve such feats without the support, experience and expertise of the NCOs in the unit.

While the soldiers bring the motivation, intelligence and raw skills to the table, the NCOs guide and mentor these soldiers into the success they are.

NCOs start early on young soldiers to mold them into fine, outstanding examples of future leaders. It is not uncommon to see a young private first class in front of the company PT formation giving commands during Reville or stretching the company out before a notorious first

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sergeant's run over the speed bumps.

You would also see these same privates conducting "in-ranks" inspections, teaching them the details and fine points. During the time these young soldiers are under the proverbial microscope, there is an NCO right next to him or her to guide and teach as they go along.

Sergeants' Time Training is also often prepared and conducted by the specialists/corporals and below, while a sergeant or staff sergeant points them in the right direction to accomplish their mission, and evaluates and critiques the soldier after the training is complete.

The NCOs do not afford the soldiers the opportunity for any excuses, failure or not meeting the standards. The NCOs are step-for-step with these young troops, ensuring that the soldiers do not miss a thing.

This type of delegation builds responsibility in the subordinates, starting them thinking like NCOs as privates and specialists.

The NCOs are also extremely committed to their soldiers and to being professional noncommissioned officers. The one-on-one counseling, training, and mentoring that squad leaders give to their soldiers is a critical link in the development of these soldiers.

assurance plan in place, which we call NCO Call. This is separate from NCODP, which is also conducted regularly.

NCO Call is a specific monthly forum for NCOs to discuss pertinent situations that are on our mind, to get us all on the same sheet of music with certain issues and to resolve any differences NCOs may have with each other.

NCOs can discuss what to do to motivate certain soldiers and keep checks and balances upon us. Also, senior NCOs give guidance to the younger NCOs, pass along valuable lessons learned, and give encouragement and recognition to those NCOs that need some help.

By keeping up on NCO issues, and having a good communication channel open between NCOs, the Corps within our company is better able to lead and help the soldiers in daily activities, board and NCOES preparation, and to mold them into the future leaders of the Army.

The high standards enforced by the NCOs are also evident in the performance in the NCOES schools and other schools. The quality of preparation and leadership is reflected with the soldiers and NCOs leading the way.

More than 40 percent of all PLDC attendees have obtained honors on the Commandant's List within the last 12 months.

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## The success & confidence from attending boards has a direct effect when attending an NCOES school

It allows the subordinates to give and receive direct input and develop into strong and productive soldiers. NCOs spend countless hours during and after duty hours ensuring soldiers are ready for boards, knowledgeable on the subjects and have razor-sharp delivery.

The soldiers aren't limited to their squad leaders alone for guidance, though. All the NCOs assist each other and the soldiers. There are many times, due to the nature of the mission for a medical evacuation company with both military and civilian missions, that a soldier's squad leader isn't available.

This is where the company's NCO Corps truly shines as the other NCOs pick up where the squad leader had left off. There is no shortage of times when an NCO from one platoon is helping many soldiers from all the platoons, asking questions, inspecting uniforms or just giving advice.

Also, the company conducts several company-level boards per month. These boards are usually tougher and more structured than the squadron boards. This prepares the soldier with experience, knowledge, and confidence.

The high level of commitment to the soldiers and high standards for boards bleeds into all other facets of daily life at the 571<sup>st</sup> Med Co (AA). The NCOs have a quality

**A**lso, numerous soldiers have graduated from other DA and service schools, such as the Flight Medical Aidman Course and Emergency Medical Technician Course, as distinguished and honor graduates,

The high standards of excellence are also seen in the proficiency of our primary duty, MEDEVAC. For three consecutive years, the DUSTOFF Association has recognized the unit with the Rescue of the Year Award.

The leadership and proactive attitude of the NCOs of the 571<sup>st</sup> Medical Company (AA) have directly led to the success of the soldiers with boards and NCOES and other schools.

By preparing the soldiers early, while instilling responsibility, confidence and the desire to achieve, soldiers are set up for success in whatever they do.

The NCO is the key element in their preparation and mentorship, and is not a job taken lightly with any of the NCOs of the 571<sup>st</sup> Medical Company (Air Ambulance).

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*SSG Rose wrote this article in collaboration with the Noncommissioned Officers of the 571<sup>st</sup> Medical Company (Air Ambulance) located at Fort Carson, Colo.*

# A look back at NCOES

By Steve Ball



photo courtesy of Army Museum of the NCO

*“The U.S. Constabulary opened a Noncommissioned Officers Academy - the Army’s only school of its type on October 17, 1949, in Munich, Germany. It has been an answer to developing the NCO as a leader - the role which must be his in our modern Army. And it is a challenge in sharpening his know-how, expanding his background, and lifting his prestige.” -- Brig. Gen. Bruce C. Clarke, 1950.*

**T**he origin of today’s U. S. Army NCO Corps dates back to the early days of the American Revolutionary War, when the Army’s Inspector General Fredrich von Steuben standardized NCO duties and responsibilities. He did so in 1779 by publishing the “Regulations for the Order and Discipline of the Troops of the United States.”

This document commonly called the “blue book” by the sergeants of the day, set down the duties, responsibilities and expectations for corporals, sergeants, first sergeants, quartermaster sergeants and sergeants major who were the

NCO ranks of that era.

Since then, the Army NCO Corps rank structure has seen many changes as have the roles, duties and responsibilities.

The rank structure has grown to include corporal (E-4), sergeant (E-5) team leader, staff sergeant (E-6) squad leader and sergeant first class (E-7) platoon sergeant for continuity of duty assignments.

In 1958 two more grades, master sergeant (E-8) and sergeant major (E-9) were added to the NCO ranks. It was determined that the addition of these two grades would provide for better delineation of responsibilities in the

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enlisted structure.

Now the Army had a structure that could truly complement and support the Army Officer Corps' traditional command responsibilities and mission accomplishment.

This NCO Corps, however, still lacked in that it did not have the kind of standardized professional development education system it needed to instill the technical competence, battlefield tactics and leadership skills its members would be expected to emulate for soldiers.

In 1965, at the escalation of the Vietnam War, this shortcoming became emphatically clear. Vietnam proved to be a junior leader's war and with far more decentralized control than previously experienced, much of the burden of combat leadership fell on the NCO.

The need for large numbers of squad-level NCOs was so great that the Army created the "NCO Candidates Course."

This 10-week course, followed by 10 more weeks of practice, promoted its graduates to sergeant with the top five percent to staff sergeant. Though many senior NCOs felt that this undermined the quality and prestige of the NCO Corps, most of these new NCOs performed admirably.

In 1966, Army Chief of Staff General Harold K. Johnson chose Sergeant Major William O. Wooldridge as the first Sergeant Major of the Army (SMA). His job was to be advisor and consultant to the Chief of Staff on enlisted matters.

The following year, General Johnson established the position of Command Sergeant Major to serve as the

commander's enlisted assistant at and above battalion level.

It wasn't until the last half of 1971 that the Army implemented what has evolved into today's Noncommissioned Officer Education System (NCOES).

This progressive system was designed to manage NCO training to ensure it was progressive, sequential and job-related.

At first there were just three levels:

Basic NCO Course to train squad leaders; and

Advanced NCO Course to train platoon sergeants;

The Sergeants Major Academy, which trained senior NCOs to perform duties as sergeants major at division and higher levels of command.

In May 1972, CSA General William Westmoreland approved the establishment of what is today the U.S. Army Sergeants Major Academy.

The first course, started in 1973, was 23 weeks long and trained senior E-7s and E-8s for key positions at division and higher-level headquarters commands.

NCOES continued to be refined and grow during the '70s and through the mid '80s. Initially, Training and Doctrine Command developed programs of instruction which were used with actual lessons developed by each Career Management Field proponent.

In 1984 the TRADOC commander designated the Sergeants Major Academy as the single Army proponent for progressive and sequential development of all NCOES

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“NCOES is the catalyst for the magnificent training NCOs are receiving today. I always quote Gen. William DePuy, who said NCOs went into World War II with training ‘...just above ridiculous.’ The staff sergeant of today is better equipped to do his job, and more, than my commander was in WWII. And that’s not taking a shot at my commander, who was great. But it’s all due to NCOES.”



SMA (Ret.) William Bainbridge



SMA (Ret.) Leon L. Van Autreve

“ Understand that I am a positive supporter of NCOES. However, there are still some shortcomings ...Some NCOs feel that simply attending an academy makes them better soldiers. All that attendance does is enhance the intellectual capabilities of the NCO ...When you leave ANCOC you are a role model, a mentor. And if you fail in this area, you fail as a leader. ”

common core phases of instruction.

This led to the creation of the Primary Leadership Development Course (PLDC) which was designed to train sergeants to perform duties as squad leaders.

In 1986, PLDC became the first prerequisite NCOES course for promotion to E-6. In 1989, this was changed to E-5 when NCOES began phasing into the Enlisted Personnel Management Systems (EPMS). All NCOES courses were an integral part of EPMS by 1991.

Soldiers today are trained under a select, train, assign and promote system and must receive training for the promotion grade level selected prior to being promoted to that rank.

PLDC graduation is a prerequisite for promotion to sergeant, BNCOE for staff sergeant, ANCOC for sergeant first class and the Sergeants Major Course/Command Sergeants Major Course for sergeant major and command sergeant major.

Additionally, two functional NCO courses have been added: the First Sergeants Course and Battle Staff NCO Course. These two courses only train soldiers selected for assignments as first sergeants and/or Battle Staff TOE Additional Skill Identifier 2S positions.

NCOES has created a truly professional NCO Corps. Today our NCO Corps is envied by the rest of the world as the “backbone” of our Army.

In 1997, the Sergeants Major Academy held its first “Future Development of the NCO Corps Workshop.” This forum set the stage for further improvements to the NCOES and our future Corps.

A new “vision” has evolved of what the NCO’s role in the 21<sup>st</sup> century and beyond will be. The “Future Vision” was presented by USASMA and approved by Army Chief of Staff Dennis J. Reimer in January 1998.

The approved future vision statement is:

#### FUTURE VISION

An NCO Corps, grounded in heritage, values and traditions, that embodies the warrior ethos; values perpetual learning; and is capable of leading, training and motivating soldiers.

We must always be an NCO Corps that—

#### **LEADS BY EXAMPLE**

#### **TRAINS FROM EXPERIENCE**

#### **MAINTAINS AND ENFORCES STANDARDS**

#### **TAKES CARE OF SOLDIERS**

#### **ADAPTS TO A CHANGING WORLD**

With a small Army and rapid advancements in technological weapons of war, today’s and tomorrow’s NCOs are more challenged than at any time in our nation’s history.

An NCO’s principal duty, responsibility and role, however, is still caring for, training, maintaining and sustaining the force, and “taking care of soldiers.”

One can only imagine that this is what General von Steuben meant in his “blue book.” But that’s how it was yesterday and today, and how it always will be!

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*Steve Ball is assigned to the U.S. Army Training & Doctrine Command Leader Developmental Branch at Fort Monroe, Va.*

# SUMMONS OF THE TRUMPET

*U.S. - Vietnam in Perspective*

BY SFC VERNON E. YATES

**S**ummons of the Trumpet author Dave R. Palmer writes a straightforward, tell-it-like-it-is book on the American involvement in Vietnam.

He paints a picture to the reader on how military and political strategy, or the lack of one, became the longest running war in American history.

Palmer introduces the reader to the Vietnam War through the advisory period of the conflict.

The period begins right after the fall of the French at Dien Bien Phu. The American advisors began their thankless task of training South Vietnamese forces to battle the Viet Cong.

It was at this point Palmer shows where the American involvement becomes somewhat cloudy at best, because more and more troops were beginning to be sent to Vietnam at the request of the American commander -- General Westmoreland.

It became an American war at this point. Palmer shows through his observation, which still holds true today, the one thing that strikes a nerve in the American public.

That's when the conflict became a war of attrition against the Viet Cong. In simple terms, the strategy was to kill more Viet Cong than the Viet Cong could kill Americans.

We came to measure the success of our battles and our victories based on body count.



Also prolonging the war was President Lyndon B. Johnson's placing of targets in the North off limits to bombing from American aircraft.

In his book, Palmer does mention a few bright spots in the war. One such bright spot was the Tet Offensive.

It was a military victory for the Americans and South Vietnam.

Under no certain terms, it became the meat grinder against the Viet Cong that Westmoreland

had searched so long for.

But like everything else in

Vietnam, it was short lived and the American

public turned against the war.

The other bit of bright spot was President Nixon's

ordering of unrestricted bombing of

the North. It was one of the few times the North had anything to fear.

In my view, *Summons of the Trumpet* is a must read. It provides many lessons of war and leadership. However, the most important lesson it gives is that the nation's forces should never go to war without the backing of the American public.

*SFC Yates is currently serving on deployment to Kosovo and is assigned to the 200th Materiel Management Center in Germany.*

SUMMONS OF THE TRUMPET: U.S. - VIETNAM In Perspective

By Dave R. Palmer

Paperback, 348 pp

Presidio Press;

March, 1995; \$14.95



# One School, Two Standards

By SGT Socorro Spooner

“I did it, Mommy,” says my 2-year-old each time she accomplishes a task she didn’t think she could overcome. This is exactly how I felt when I passed the “land-nav” portion of the Primary Leadership Development Course at Fort Bliss, Texas earlier this year. I had already attempted PLDC at Fort Polk, La., in

August of 2000 when I failed the land navigation portion and returned to my duty station, then Fort Carson, Colo., as a PLDC No-Go. Nothing could have prepared me for the emotional toll that I experienced after pushing myself to the limit, only to come short of my goal.

Although I failed, I still learned a lot about being the best sergeant that I could be. I also learned a lot about myself in the three weeks I was there. As a PLDC student, I learned what it really meant to earn the right to be called sergeant, which I didn’t take for granted.

I worked hard at trying to absorb as much information from the Small Group Leaders as I could so that I could become an NCO who deserved to be called sergeant and not just another specialist promoted to sergeant.

So to do this I utilized all of the available resources to help myself prepare for every exam: books, notes, talking to fellow students and SGLs and the group study sessions. All of these helped me with the book tests but land-nav was the last task that I had to tackle.

As I prepared myself mentally to take on the woods, I didn’t expect for it to be as difficult as it was. After all, I had passed the land-nav course at Fort Carson. Nonetheless, I convinced myself that I could do it. I tried but failed.

Upon arriving back at my unit, my first sergeant asked me if I wanted to go back to PLDC and I said emphatically, “no.” I was exhausted and very disappointed. What else was I supposed to say?

So prior to PCSing to Fort Bliss, I had contacted my new office and asked if it would be possible to go to the next PLDC class. Upon making the cutoff for sergeant, I went to PLDC at the Fort Bliss NCO Academy. I told myself that I’d been through this before so I shouldn’t have too much trouble until I get to the land-nav portion, but that wasn’t exactly the case.

The first few days seemed to be a waste because we were

settling into the barracks, unlike at Fort Polk where we actually got cranking with classes right off the bat and I really felt a sense of direction there.

As the course continued, I started noticing how the standards were slightly different from one school to another. I addressed this to my SGLs, and they accounted some of it to the lack of funds and some to the way the schools are run.

I really believe this can hurt our soldiers in the future because all of their NCOs will not know what the proper standards are. Especially if one PLDC is teaching different standards in the practical tests than the other.

As the land-nav day approached, I was anxious and all I wanted was to do my best. This time I passed without any problems, but I wondered whether or not I could have done the same at Fort Polk. I proved to myself that I could get a “Go,” but somehow I felt as if I didn’t have to work hard for it here.

Maybe it was because of the way I was taught or it was the different types of tests that were administered, which was exactly the case as I later found out.

Even though this was the case, it still made me question if I was really ready to be a sergeant. I had many new skills and knowledge that I acquired from both PLDCs, but I now know that each PLDC isn’t the same.

There were differences at each school that I agreed and disagreed with, but I do believe that upon graduation I was ready to be an NCO. I could finally hold my head high and say, “Yes, I am a sergeant in the United States Army who earned her stripes.” I could finally tell my daughter, “I did it,” like she has told me many times before.

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