

# A History of the NCO



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US ARMY MUSEUM OF THE  
NONCOMMISSIONED OFFICER



# **A HISTORY OF THE NCO**

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NONCOMMISSIONED OFFICER

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# Forward

In 1989, the US Army Sergeants Major Academy published a work entitled A Short History of the NCO. This work provided the U.S. Army noncommissioned officer and researchers of NCO history with a concise, readable overview of NCO history. It contained accounts and actions of NCOs throughout history and brief descriptions of the evolution of the NCO Corps.

A Short History of the NCO went through many printings and received wide dissemination throughout the NCO Corps. It can be found on the NCO Museum's website and several other places on the internet.

In the years that followed, America has called upon NCOs to fight in a number of conflicts. Three chapters have been added to cover the period from 1989 to the present: "Protection of National Interest," "Desert Storm (1<sup>st</sup> Iraqi War)," and "Islamic Fundamentalism and the 2<sup>nd</sup> Iraqi War." This allows the reader to catch up on the history of the noncommissioned officer. However, A History of the NCO seeks to accomplish more than to catch up on the years of NCO history that has followed since the printing of A Short History of the NCO. Additional stories on historical NCOs like Sergeant Patrick Gass, Sergeant Alexander Kenaday, Color Sergeant Peter Welsh, etc. provide for a greater in-depth coverage of NCO history.

The presentation of this history follows a chronological order, based upon a variety of works listed at the end of the paper with the author. Throughout the work, sources are listed in the following manner: (von Steubeun). Two unpublished works in the Museum's reference files greatly helped; these works are the two Fisher Manuscripts noted in the Sources Consulted. Several oral histories and other works drawn from the Museum's archives give depth and a source of primary resources to the work.

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**This work is dedicated:  
To the young, who leave home in search of adventure and find themselves  
warriors in a distant land.**

# Introduction

The history of the United States Army and of the noncommissioned officer began in 1775 with the birth of the Continental Army. The American noncommissioned officer did not copy the British. He, like the American Army itself, blended traditions of the French, British, and Prussian armies into a uniquely American institution. As the years progressed, the American political system, disdain for the aristocracy, social attitudes, and the vast westward expanses further removed the U.S. Army noncommissioned officer from his European counterparts and created a truly American noncommissioned officer.

# American Revolution

In the early days of the American Revolution, little standardization of noncommissioned officer numbers or duties existed. During 1776, General George Washington standardized the infantry regiment at eight companies and one Headquarters Company. The Headquarters Company or regimental NCOs included one sergeant major, a quartermaster sergeant, a drum major, and a fife major. Each company had four sergeants, four corporals, two drummers or fifers, and seventy-six privates.

Amid the long, hard winter of 1778 at Valley Forge, Inspector General Friedrich von Steuben standardized NCO duties and responsibilities in his Regulations for the Order and Discipline of the Troops of the United States (printed in 1779). Among other things this work (commonly called the Blue Book) set down the duties and responsibilities for corporals, sergeants, first sergeants, and sergeants major, which were the NCO ranks of the period. It also emphasized the importance of selecting quality enlisted men for NCO positions. (\*von Steuben) This work served for 30 years as the primary regulations for the Army.

The duties for the noncommissioned officer, as set forth by von Steuben were:

The Sergeant Major served as the assistant to the regimental adjutant. He kept rosters, formed details, and handled matters concerning the “interior management and discipline of the regiment.” (\*von Steuben)

The Quartermaster Sergeant assisted the regimental quartermaster, whose duties he assumed during the quartermaster’s absence. He also supervised the proper loading and transport of the regiment’s baggage when on march. (\*von Steuben)

The First Sergeant enforced discipline and encouraged duty among troops, maintained the duty roster, made the morning report to the company commander, and kept the company descriptive book. This document listed the name, age, height, place of birth, and prior occupation of every enlisted man in the unit. (\*von Steuben)

Sergeants and corporals were expected to instruct recruits in all matters of military training, including the order of their behavior in regard to neatness and sanitation. Outbreaks and disturbances were to be punished. Listings of the sick were forwarded to the First Sergeant.

In battle, NCOs were to close the gaps occasioned by casualties and encourage the men to silence and to fire rapidly and true. (\*von Steuben)

The development of a strong NCO Corps helped sustain the Continental Army through severe hardships to final victory. Von Steuben’s regulations established the centerpiece for NCO duties and responsibilities from 1778 to the present day.

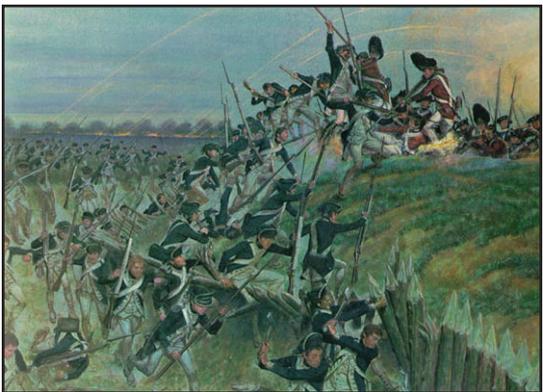
During the early stages of the American Revolution, the typical Continental Army NCO wore an epaulet to signify his rank. Corporals wore green and

sergeants and wore red epaulets. After 1779, sergeants and above wore two epaulets, while corporals retained a single epaulet. (\*Emmerson) The epaulets were color-coded according to branch: white for the infantry and dragoons and yellow for artillery and engineers.

From the American Revolution to World War II, the noncommissioned officer received his promotion from the regimental commander. Soldiers often spent their entire career in one regiment. If a man transferred from one regiment to the next, he did not take his rank with him. No noncommissioned officer transferred in grade from one regiment to another without the permission of the General in Chief of the Army; this rarely occurred. Without permanent Army-wide promotions on individuals, stripes stayed with the regiment.

Three NCOs received special recognition for acts of heroism during the American Revolution. These men, Sergeant Elijah Churchill, Sergeant William Brown, and Sergeant Daniel Bissell, were awarded the Badge of Military Merit, a purple heart with a floral border and the word “merit” inscribed across the center. This award served as the precursor to the Medal of Honor introduced during the Civil War. (\*Robles)

Sergeant William Brown’s act of heroism occurred during the assault of Redoubt #10 at Yorktown. He led the advance party whose mission was so hazardous it received the name the “forlorn hope.” Charging with fixed bayonets, they ignored musket fire and grenades, leaped the barriers surrounding the redoubt, and in the ensuing struggle captured the position. (\*Megehee)



**Assault on Redoubt #10**

The American victory at Yorktown secured independence for the nation. Independence meant the new nation would provide for its own defense. The nation was poor, and the cost of maintaining an army was a heavy burden. Many Americans, like Thomas Jefferson, opposed maintaining an Army during peacetime believing that it could be used against the people. The American

government followed a policy, which reduced the number of troops in the Army to a bare minimum during times of peace, relying upon militia or volunteer troops to prevent uprisings and quell Indian disturbances.

During times of war, the Army enlarged with professional troops forming the basis of expansion. This policy endured to some extent until world commitments and the stationing of troops overseas in the 20<sup>th</sup> century required the nation to maintain a strong professional force.

The system of relying heavily on untrained militia units raised on the spur of the moment received a severe test during the Indian troubles on the Northwest Frontier in the 1790's. In 1790 and 1791, two militia units were defeated by Indians in the Northwest (present-day Ohio and Indiana). In response, Army enlarged from 800 to 1500 men. These troops, known as the "Legion," trained, drilled, and formed into a well-disciplined group before seeing action. In 1794 they marched against the Indians and defeated them at the Battle of Fallen Timbers. (\*Matloff) The action showed the importance of training, drill, and discipline during pitched battles.

## War of 1812

When the United States declared war on Britain on 18 June 1812, the total Army numbered 11,744 men. The real basis for defense of America lay in the militias of the states, totaling 694,000 men. (\*Ferrell) Control of the militias centered in the states, and many would not fight outside the United States or even outside local boundaries.

In addition, the United States could not supply a large field Army. The largest number of fighting troops in the active militia and the Regular Army was 35,000 men in 1814. (\*Ferrell)

To reduce the cost of maintaining an Army, units often received short notice of the call to fight and then returned home shortly after the action. This met with mixed results as troops received little training. Some units raised in this manner fought gallantly, but others ran in panic with the first shots.

In 1813, the U.S. government asked the governor of Kentucky to raise 2,000 men for the invasion of Canada. Disregarding the limits placed on their numbers, the men of Kentucky responded by raising 3,000 volunteers. They proceeded to march to the Northwest (present day Michigan) to unite with 2,500 Army Regulars.

A large portion of the Kentucky volunteers—1200—formed a mounted regiment. These troops dressed in leather hunting frocks and trousers and wore bright handkerchiefs. Each man carried a tomahawk, scalping knife, and long

rifle. Though mounted, they were armed with long rifles instead of carbines or sabers and were taught to charge straight into hostile fire. (\*Mahon)

On the shore of Lake Erie, they united their forces with the Regulars and a handful of men from Pennsylvania. They then marched forward to meet 900 British Regulars and a coalition of Indians, totaling 2,000 men.

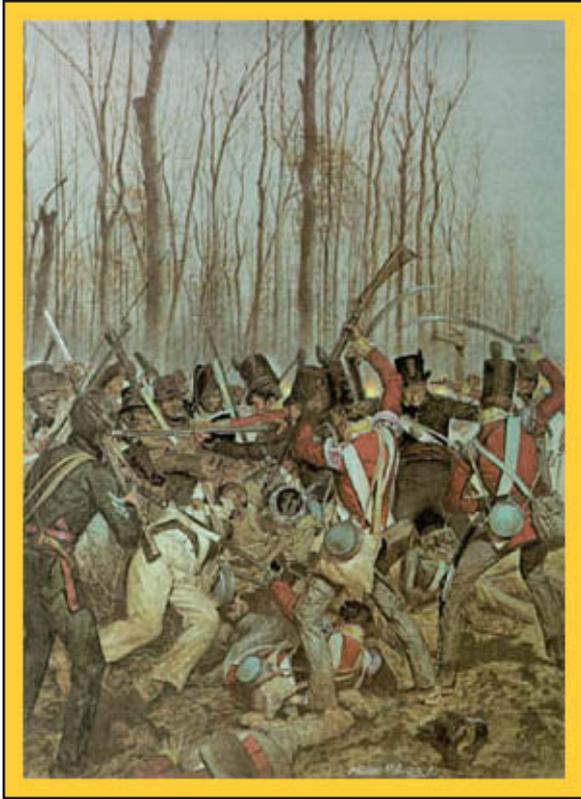
The Indian and British forces slowly retreated in front of the larger American force until they reached a strong defensive position. With the river Thames, two swamps, and woods to assist in the defense, the Indian and British forces stood firm believing their experience would carry the day. (\*Sugden)

The American forces reached the site and without hesitation, the mounted Kentucky regiment charged straight at the British Regulars. The shock of the Kentuckians charging pell-mell crushed the British lines. Within minutes the mounted Kentucky regiment smashed through the British lines and dismounted. They opened fire upon the rear of the British lines as American Regulars and other Kentuckians fired upon their front. Caught between two galling lines of fire, the British panicked and fled, leaving the Indians to fend for themselves.

Turning upon the Indians, who had hidden in the woods and swamps, the Americans pressed forward. The Indians resisted for a short while, but having seen their allies totally routed, they too began to flee. (\*Mahon)

The troops from Kentucky, having accomplished a major victory, returned home shortly after the Battle of the Thames. They served a little over three months and fought only one battle, but they proved that the citizen-soldier stands as a vital part of any war effort.

On 8 January 1815, Sergeant Pierre Dupard waited behind a mud rampart for the British attack on New Orleans. He was a member of Daquin's Battalion, a group of French-African refugees from Haiti. They were free men who had come to New Orleans to escape the slave revolts of Haiti. On 23 December 1814, they had previously played a key role in preventing the British from breaking American lines during the early stages of the Battle of New Orleans. Now he awaited the charge of the enemy.



**Daquin's Battalion & Choctaws**

The British advanced, and Sergeant Dupard and his men stood three or four deep behind the rampart. The first man would step upon the parapet of the rampart and fire. He then stepped down and allowed the second to do the same. Then the third took his place as the other two loaded. The result was a steady stream of fire into the British lines. The British advance withstood volley after volley, drawing nearer. Then, as the fire continued without hesitation, they broke and ran.

When the War of 1812 ended, the land west of the Mississippi River received greater emphasis. The purchase of the Louisiana River system in 1803 added a vast unexplored region to the United States. Prior to 1812, the Army launched five expeditions into these new lands; all included enlisted men and NCOs.

# Expansion Westward

The expedition of Captain Meriwether Lewis and Second Lieutenant William Clark provides a good example of the typical Army expedition during this period. The expedition lasted from May 1804 to September 1806. The men of the expedition collected information on plant and animal life, topography, social customs among the Indians, and climate conditions. They encountered 50 different tribes, many of whom they provided peace medals, trinkets, and goods to in return for friendly relations. (\*Jackson County) Several men of the expedition became traders and trappers in the years that followed and became instrumental in opening the fur trade of the Missouri. (\*Time-Life Books)

One man in particular highlights the NCO of this period: Sergeant Patrick Gass. In 1791 when the local militia protecting the Wellsburg, West Virginia area drafted Patrick's father, Patrick volunteered to take his father's place. He saw little action against Indians. When the uprising subsided, he returned home.

For the next seven years, Patrick worked as a carpenter. In 1799, he enlisted in General Alexander Hamilton's 19<sup>th</sup> Regiment and served in various locations. By the autumn of 1803 he had risen to the rank of sergeant. At this time, Captain Meriwether Lewis came looking for recruits for his expedition. Patrick's skills as a carpenter would be vital to the success of the expedition. Captain Lewis quickly agreed, but it meant Patrick would lose his stripes.

Patrick started the journey with Lewis and Clark as one of a number of privates. Nineteen men would complete the full journey; others would proceed as far as the Mandan Village and then return to St. Louis with Corporal Richard Warfington and the keelboat. Three sergeants of the expedition—John Ordway, Nathaniel Pryor, and Charles Floyd all kept journals, as did Lewis and Clark.

As the expedition made its way up the Missouri River, Sergeant Floyd fell ill and died. On August 20 1804, the men of the expedition buried Sergeant Floyd along the river's bluff. Six days later, Clark ordered a vote for sergeant. Private Gass received the most votes and now returned to the rank of sergeant. He would assist in shepherding his men across the continent and back. In addition to his duties as sergeant, Gass maintained a detailed journal of the expedition.

Shortly after his return in 1807, Sergeant Gass published his journal of the expedition. That act made a bitter enemy for him of Captain Lewis who died before ever completing his own account of the expedition. Sergeant Gass' journal recorded the events of the journey, as well as his impressions of those events. Though his notes lacked organization, they did provide an accurate account and a check to the Lewis and Clark journal published by Clark in 1814

Although now a famous explorer, Sergeant Gass remained in the Army. Shortly before the War of 1812, he fought against the Creek Indians at Horseshoe Bend. Afterward, he served at Fort Massac in 1813 and then at Pittsburg in 1814. Later, he took part in the assault on Fort Erie and served with the 21<sup>st</sup> Infantry at

Lundy's Lane where he received recognition for bravery. Ultimately, he received his final discharge at Sackett's Harbor in June 1815 and returned home to become a farmer. (\*Coues)

The Lewis and Clark Expedition opened the Missouri River to fur traders. The fur trade proved to be a highly lucrative business and the Indian's main source of acquiring guns, powder, tinware, steel traps, blankets, and other goods. The government sought to prevent Indian troubles by promoting government-sponsored trade. Friendly or wise tribes sought the establishment of fur factories (small frontier forts) in their areas, often requiring them in treaties or peace negotiations. Such a factory allowed the tribe to dominate the other tribes of the area who lacked such a trading center. To assist in controlling the fur trade and assure friendly relations with the tribes, the Army stationed a small number of troops at each factory. These troops ensured that traders possessed proper licenses and confiscated all liquor brought into Indian areas. (\*Jackson County)

The small, isolated fur factories changed the environment of Army life, requiring NCOs to take greater care and responsibility in the daily lives of their troops. NCOs ensured their men's cleanliness through inspections and closely monitored their activities with five roll calls per day.

Punishments for infractions proved harsh, with floggings and even the cutting off of ears being among the sentences. (\*Talbot)

A typical fur factory, Fort Osage on the Missouri River, consisted of six two-story blockhouses, enlisted quarters, a four-floored factory, a well, and a two-story commanding officer's house. The factory and two of the blockhouses constituted the outer fort, protected from one side only. The other buildings constituted the inner fort, which had gates that closed in case of attack. (\*Jackson County)

A government-appointed civilian known as a factor controlled trade at the fur factory. In addition to protecting the factor and his goods, enlisted men assisted the factor in loading and unloading goods, building or repairing the factory, and on occasion beating and packing furs for shipment.

The factor and the troops worked closely together. In 1820, the Army paymaster, paddling up the Missouri River, overturned his canoe, and money to pay the troops at Fort Osage, already long overdue, washed down the river. The factor at Fort Osage used the factory's cash profits to pay the troops of the fort, receiving a government voucher in return.

In 1822, the government abandoned the factory system. Soldiers continued to control the river traffic, ensuring that no liquor passed upstream, but trade reverted to private traders and trappers. (\*Soldier and Trader on the Missouri)

## 1820's & 1830's

In 1821, the War Department made the first references to noncommissioned officer chevrons. A general order directed that sergeants major and quartermaster sergeants wear a worsted chevron above each arm above the elbow; sergeants and senior musicians, one on each arm below the elbow; and corporals, one on the right arm above the elbow. This practice officially ended in 1829. (\*Emmerson)

The first school for instruction of enlisted men opened at Fort Monroe in 1824. This school instructed entire units, instead of individuals, in the use of artillery. Though suspended from time to time, it served as the precursor for modern technical training.

In 1825, the first systematic attempt at selecting noncommissioned officers occurred. The appointment of regimental and company noncommissioned officers remained the prerogative of the regimental commander. Regimental commanders generally accepted the company commander's recommendations for company NCOs unless overriding considerations determined otherwise. (\*Fisher)

The Abstract of Infantry Tactics, published in 1829, provided instructions for training NCOs. The purpose of this instruction centered on ensuring all NCOs possessed "an accurate knowledge of the exercise and use of their firelocks, of the manual exercise of the soldier, and of the firings and marchings." (\*Fisher)

Field officers and the adjutant assembled noncommissioned officers frequently for both practical and theoretical instruction. Furthermore, field officers ensured company officers provided proper instruction to their NCOs.

The sergeant major assisted in instructing sergeants and corporals of the regiment. Newly promoted corporals and sergeants of the company received instruction from the first sergeant. (\*Fisher)

In 1832, Congress added to the ranks of NCOs, creating the Ordnance Sergeant. His was a specialized position, with duties centering on receiving and preserving the ordnance, arms, ammunition, and other military stores of the post to which he was assigned. (\*Fisher)

Daily rations during the 1830's included beef (1 ¼ pounds) or pork (¾ pounds); flour or bread (18 ounces); whiskey, rum, or other liquor (¼ pint); vinegar (4 quarts per 100 men); soap (4 pounds per 100 men); and candles (1 ½ pounds per 100 men). In 1832, coffee and eight pounds of sugar per 100 men replaced the liquor ration.

The lack of vegetables in the daily ration often proved disastrous at frontier posts. During the winter months, scurvy struck the posts, and the only relief consisted of trading whiskey for vegetables with the local Indians. For the prevention of scurvy, beans became a part of the daily ration in the 1840's. (\*Gamble)

Post gardens provided another source of nutrition outside the daily rations. In an effort to lower the cost of sustaining an Army, many posts grew vegetable

gardens. Enlisted men planted, hoed, and watered the gardens as fatigue duty. In addition to gardens, other posts maintained herds of cattle. Many commanders and enlisted men disapproved of such duty, regarding it as unmilitary. (\*Gamble)

Considered by many to be more military-like, as well as assisting in supplementing the daily ration, hunting proved popular on the frontier. One commander stated that the Army would save a great deal of money and train its troops better if troops were organized into hunting parties, instead of spending endless hours on fatigue duty.

During this period, enlisted men spent their leisure time in a variety of pursuits; card games, horse races, and billiards filled many hours at the frontier post, although sometimes these activities were frowned upon. In contrast, reading, letter-writing, and prayer groups received support throughout the Army. Some moderate or large-size posts established libraries, containing fiction and nonfiction books, journals, and newspapers. Enlisted men and officers were given separate rooms or reading times. Still another common feature of the frontier post consisted of the drama group, with both male and female characters played by the troops. The main dining room or other suitable location became the stage on which troops performed "Don Quixote," "Monsieur Touson," "The Village Lawyer," or other plays. (\*Gamble)

Theatrical performances arrived at the frontier post with showboats. Most frontier posts were located on a major waterway such as the Mississippi or Missouri River. Steamboats traveled these waterways transporting passengers, goods, and the mail. At times, theatrical groups accompanied the steamboat. When a showboat arrived, everyone at the post enjoyed a live theatrical performance. (\*Gamble)

In the 1830's, a policy was established to remove all Indians from the east of the Mississippi to new lands in the west. This policy required building additional frontier forts and led to several bitter struggles with the eastern tribes. The fierce guerilla-style Seminole Indian War raged from 1835-1842 and cost over 1,500 U. S. Army troops their lives.

Other factors that complicated Army life during Indian Removal can be seen in the removal of the Cherokee. In the 1820's, the Cherokee built a society which mirrored white society of the South down to the purchasing of slaves. They owned large plantations, published newspapers, and even developed their own alphabet. Surprisingly, President Andrew Jackson insisted that they needed to move westward to become "civilized."

On 17 May, 1838 the order for their removal started in motion. Troops appeared in squads to capture Cherokee men, women, and children and drive them to detention centers for shipment west. Soldiers crammed nearly 17,000 Cherokee into stockades and disease started to spread. However, many enlisted men sympathized with the Cherokee. One man stated, "When I went into the army, nobody told me this is what I'm supposed to do, cattle people along." (\*Ehle)

Finally, the Army started herding the Cherokee to their new home in

Oklahoma. Discipline among the troops began to breakdown. One enlisted man shot a Cherokee man, because the deaf-mute refused to obey orders. Whiskey flowed freely, and gonorrhea spread among the troops. In addition, measles, whooping cough, pleurisy, and bilious fever spread among the encampments. Burials became an everyday occurrence. In the end, nearly one fifth of the Cherokee population perished in the journey. (\*Ehle)

For the troops the end of the journey served only as a brief respite. The problem now arose as just how they would keep peace among the Cherokee and their old enemies, the Osage—as well as other tribes. This problem, by no means new, became severely exacerbated with the arrival of each new tribe.

In addition to the garrison troops needed to maintain peace among different Indian tribes, the opening of the Santa Fe Trade Trail in the 1820's created a need for mounted troops in the Army. In 1832, Congress created a battalion of mounted rangers. These militia units, not part of the Regular Army, proved expensive to maintain. Accordingly, in 1833, Congress created two dragoon regiments.

Daily life for dragoons while in garrison consisted of reveille at daybreak, stable call 15 minutes later, breakfast, guard mounting, and mounted drill. Carbine drill on foot followed until 11:00 and then an hour of saber exercise; the men then ate dinner from 12:00 to 1:00 with a 30-minute mounted drill before sunset and an hour-long stable call before supper. After supper the men cleaned their accoutrements and pursued leisure pleasures. Taps sounded at 9:00. (\*Lowe)

Dragoons, considered elite troops, were required to be native-born American citizens at a time when the Army consisted of many foreign-born soldiers. To show their elite position in the Army, Dragoons reintroduced the chevron for NCO use. The chevrons pointed down in a “V” shape.

Immigration dramatically changed the Army from 1840 onward. Irish and German immigrants composed large numbers of many units. U.S. Grant estimated that over half the Army during this period consisted of men born in foreign countries. (\*Grant) Many of these immigrants sought to escape the ethnic or religious persecution common in the United States during this era. Newspapers in the Northeast often captioned help-wanted ads with “Irish need not apply.” Immigrants who previously worked as teachers, merchants, or lawyers enlisted in the Army.

Sergeant Thomas E. Maley and First Sergeant Eugene Bandel prove what Irish and German soldiers offered the Army. Sergeant Maley, born in Ireland, distinguished himself against hostile Indians along the Guadalupe River. First Sergeant Bandel, a student of botany and classical languages, entered the Army and rose to the rank of first sergeant in three years. Both served with honor and distinction. (\*Foreign NCOs)

In 1840, NCOs adopted a distinctive standardized sword. Based primarily on a sword used by the French Army, the model 1840 NCO proved somewhat heavy-hilted and ill balanced. For over 70 years, it was widely used by the Army; today its usage is restricted to ceremonial occasions.



Model 1840 Noncommissioned Officer Sword

## Mexican-American War

The annexation of Texas in 1845 coupled with American desires for California, led to war with Mexico in 1846. The war, unpopular in some areas of the United States, required large numbers of troops to serve outside the nation's borders for the first time.

During the Mexican-American War, the United States raised over 115,000 troops; 73,000 were volunteers. Each volunteer received a promise of 160 acres of land when they had completed their enlistment. Raised in local areas of particular states, the volunteers elected their officers and NCOs by popular vote. This often led to a lack of discipline among the troops, but their spirit more than compensated for their lack of discipline. The volunteers, like the Regular Army, hardened in battle and by war's end; proved an effective fighting force. (\*Smith & Judah)

One volunteer unit, the First Regiment Missouri Mounted Volunteers, achieved considerable acclaim. Composed of eight companies from different Missouri counties, the regiment totaled 856 men. Their numbers included farmers, businessmen, teachers, lawyers, and other elements of Missouri society.

The volunteers marched with the Army of the West, leaving Fort Leavenworth on 26 June 1846. Marching in detachments to ensure that they would find enough forage and water, they maintained a pace of 35 miles per day. In August, they captured Santa Fe without a fight. They then turned southward, while the main Army marched west, and engaged the Navajo. In November, the Navajo signed a peace treaty, and the Missourians headed for El Paso.

On Christmas Day, as 450 Missourians rested just north of El Paso, a 1,200-man Mexican force charged the camp; but the men responded quickly, gathering their weapons. When the Mexican force struck the Missourians held fast, forcing the Mexicans to retreat a short distance. Sixty Missourians gained their mounts and charged wildly toward the Mexicans. The Mexicans fled the field, and two days later, the Missourians entered El Paso.

After spending two months enjoying good wine and food, the Missourians headed for Chihuahua. Nearing the city, they encountered a force four times their number. The Mexican soldiers waited in a narrow pass near the Sacramento River. After the Missourians opened with a burst of artillery, the Mexican force wavered and then fell back; the Missourians then charged and broke the Mexican lines. By sunset, the battle concluded: one Missourian lay dead and Mexican losses totaled 300 men dead, 500 wounded, and 40 prisoners.

After several months and many miles of marching, the Missourians reached Matamoros; here they boarded ships and returned home via the Gulf of Mexico and the Mississippi River. Overall, they had marched 3,000 miles without being paid and seldom supplied. Two Mexican armies and the Navajo had fallen to their guns. They were farmers, teachers, businessmen, and lawyers who served to expand their nation westward. (\*Volunteer)

In March 1847, the Americans made an amphibious landing at Veracruz, Mexico and headed for Mexico City. This bold move sought to crush Mexican resistance by taking their capital. The road to Mexico City proved indeed to be a bloody one.



The Assault on Churubusco

On August 20 1847, a major engagement occurred at the village of Churubusco. During the bloody battle, Sergeant Alexander Kenaday, Company G, Third Dragoons commanded the headquarters guard. When a burning munitions wagon blocked the advancing American troops, Kenaday mounted the wagon and helped to unload the ammunition. Sergeant Kenaday's quick actions helped insure the success of the American force and open the way to Mexico City. (\*Fisher)

The Mexican-American War ended with the addition of vast territories by the United States. In the years that followed, a major portion of the Army's responsibilities centered on protecting the Oregon and California emigrant trails. The large area covered by these trails together with the small size of the

Army, made small detachment operations necessary. NCOs often led the small detachments sent out from frontier forts to discourage Indian attacks and assist settlers along the trails.

## 1850's

In October 1849, a young Massachusetts farm boy named Percival Lowe joined the U.S. Army's Dragoons. Having read Fremont's Narrative of 1843-1844 and other Army adventures, he felt that five years (the term of an enlistment during this period) of life in the west would "round out" his education. Intelligent, well-educated, and strong, Lowe proved an ideal enlisted man.

The Army sent Lowe to Carlisle Barracks, Pennsylvania a few days after he first enlisted. Carlisle Barracks served as the school for mounted recruits, and Lowe received training, drill on foot and horseback, and practice with the saber. He also met "Big Mit," a tough Irishman with a crude disposition.

Several weeks after enlisting, Lowe sat eating chicken at a table in the mess hall. Big Mit, a six-foot, two-inch giant weighing 225 pounds, decided he should finish off all the chicken at the table. He looked at Lowe, and then to the chicken, he sneering an insult. Lowe, who sat silently sprang to his feet, drew his saber, and struck Big Mit soundly a number of times.

Luckily for both Lowe and Big Mit, the dullness of the saber prevented serious injury. After a few days in the hospital, Big Mit began a long-healing process. In the end, Lowe explained what had happened and received no punishment for his actions.

During the winter of 1849, Lowe and 75 men (including Big Mit) traveled to Fort Leavenworth to join B Troop, Second Dragoon Regiment. Their trip was to have been by steamboat; however, the river froze solid above Portland, Missouri.

Because of this, the men left the steamboat, hired a couple of wagons for their baggage, and began to walk. Big Mit, recovering from his beating, rode in one of the wagons. The long journey with little money tested the men. The rougher crowd, including Big Mit, started stealing others' heavy coats and selling them for money to buy whiskey. The men, nevertheless, endured due to the assistance of Corporal Wood; he paid for their rations out of his own pocket, keeping vouchers for reimbursement.

They arrived at Fort Leavenworth on Christmas Day and received bread, boiled pork, and coffee for their supper—a poor supper—but at least they were warm.

At Leavenworth, Lowe drilled on foot, horseback, and with saber and waited until spring to go to the field. To supplement Army rations, he purchased vegetables from Missouri farmers.

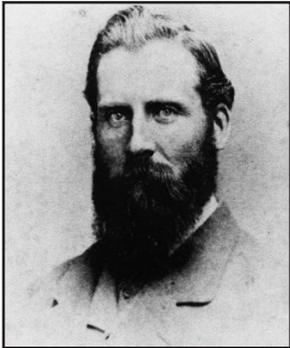
Big Mit and his friends supplemented their daily rations by crossing the river to Whiskey Point or Rialto where wild life and liquor flowed. Although this violated regulations, few cared—even if it meant spending some time in the guardhouse.

Sundays were inspection days. The Troop Commander inspected the men, their barracks, and gear. One Saturday evening, Big Mit decided to trade his dirty gear for Lowe’s clean gear. When Lowe returned from supper, he noticed the dirty gear on his bunk. Looking around, he spied his equipment on Big Mit’s bunk. He proceeded to walk over and gathered his gear, leaving behind Big Mit’s dirty gear.

When Big Mit returned from supper to find his dirty gear lying on his bunk, he became furious. Grabbing a carbine, he charged towards Lowe. Lowe responded by drawing his saber and again beat Big Mit with all his might. Two officers of the guard separated the men. Big Mit ended-up in the hospital and Lowe, upon explaining his actions, returned to his unit. (\*Lowe)

The two episodes with Big Mit did little to damage Lowe’s career. Overall his education, intelligence, and courage proved much more critical to his success.

During the next few months, Lowe proved himself. He learned quickly how to keep his horse in sound condition while campaigning. He also learned of the ways of the Plains and about the various Indian tribes that lived in the region. More than anything, however, he learned about the individuals in his unit, and how to lead them. He received a promotion to corporal, and then sergeant; in June of 1851, a little over two years after he had enlisted, Lowe became the first sergeant of his company.



**Percival Lowe**

Two years after he made first sergeant in 1853, Lowe received orders to go to the Kansa Indian village and demand the return of five stolen horses. He went alone, except for an interpreter. He entered the Kansa village with the interpreter and headed straight for the lodge of the chief. With little introduction, Lowe told

the chief that he had come to demand the return of the horses the Kansa had stolen from the Army. If they failed to return the horses, the Army would take the horses by force. The chief denied any knowledge of the stolen horses. Lowe stated flatly that he knew the Kansa had taken the horses, and if the horses were not return by the time Lowe he reached his own camp, the chief would be sorry. He shook the chief's hand and left.

When Lowe reported to his commander without the horses, he received new instructions. He assembled 20 men in order that they might return to the Kansa village and take the horses. Leaving their sabers in camp because of the noise created by the scabbards, the men took their revolvers and plenty of ammunition and headed for the Kansa village.

Quietly, First Sergeant Lowe and his men rode into the Kansa village and captured the chief as he ran out of his lodge. The village sprang to the alarm; women and children began yelling and wailing. Several young warriors, with guns or bows and arrows, rushed forward as if to give battle. The chief calmed them and rode off a prisoner of Lowe and his men.

By the time, Lowe and his men reached their camp three horses had already been returned; and a promised for the return of the others received. This accomplished, the commander lectured the chief and then allowed him to return to his village. (\*Lowe)

Back in camp, First Sergeant Lowe resumed his duties keeping muster rolls, organizing the company library, and setting fatigue details. Maintaining discipline always constituted a major problem on the frontier.

Lowe viewed whiskey as a primary source of discipline problems for enlisted men. He often talked with other noncommissioned officers about this and cautioned them to give personal attention to their men to assure that they were not drinking to excess. Sometimes drunken men brought before Lowe ended up locked in the storeroom until they sobered up. Offenders received extra duty as punishment.

Lowe and the NCOs of the company established the "company courts-martial" (not recognized by Army regulations). This allowed the NCOs to enforce discipline for breaking minor regulations without lengthy proceedings. In the days before the summary court martial, it proved effective to discipline a man by the company court-martial and avoid running his career by bringing him before three officers of the regiment.

Desertion proved nearly as major a problem as drunkenness. Some men deserted to head west in search of gold or merely because they had grown weary of army life.

One deserter crossed the Missouri River from Fort Leavenworth to the town of Weston. He became a recruiter of deserters, encouraging men to desert in order to rob them. Working with friends, he would then turn them in for a reward.

Upon discovering the deserter's shanty, Lowe informed the company commander, and a party rode out to arrest the man. A lieutenant, Sergeant Peel,

and a group of men arrived at the shanty. There they found another man and six women sitting at a table eating dinner. Sergeant Peel felt certain that the wanted man was hiding under his wife's big hoop skirt and told her so. He further stated that if he needed to go under her skirt to capture the man, he would. The lieutenant, not nearly as brave, told the sergeant to search no further. The lieutenant, Sergeant Peel, and the men left. A month later, the man gave himself up and admitted he had hidden under his wife's skirt when Sergeant Peel had searched his house. (\*Lowe)

During the 1850's, the typical enlisted man's life consisted of garrison duty and campaigning in the west. Campaigns sought to prevent or quell Indian uprisings, protect settlers or traders, and to extend governmental control over far-flung areas. They often lasted for months and covered hundreds of miles.

In 1858, a young man who went by the name "Utah" joined a group of recruits at Carlisle Barracks, Pennsylvania. He joined the Army for a five-year enlistment to participate in the Mormon War. After training at Carlisle Barracks, Utah arrived at Fort Leavenworth as one of the Dragoons.

Utah's unit started their march from Fort Leavenworth to Salt Lake City at a rate of 12 miles per day. Discipline proved lax; drunkenness and desertion were commonplace. Lax discipline combined with severe punishment for those caught committing offenses. A stout bugler flogged the offending individual, drawing blood with every blow. Punishment for desertion ranged from 25 to 50 blows.

On the march, units followed rivers and streams when possible. This usually provided them with water for drinking and some wood. Branches of cedar or cottonwood from the riverbeds mixed with buffalo chips (dried buffalo dung) provided fuel for a cooking fire.

On many days, the total rations consisted of three hardtack biscuits and a piece of salt pork. At other times, wild game or fruit that the men encountered along their journey supplemented the rations.

Because horses needed to graze, troops had time for hunting and other amusements. They played card games, wrote letters, hunted, or sought other pursuits.

During the march, the men often encountered emigrants and Indians with whom, they traded and exchanged information. With the Indian tribes, the Army tried to establish friendly relations. At a camp of the Sioux, Utah and other troops traded old uniforms and feathers for buffalo robes.

At night, the Dragoons established a camp. Fifteen men, along with saddles, valises, blankets, rifles, sabers, and accoutrements found themselves stuffed into a single tent. The tents, Utah observed, were not big enough to hold a good-size double bed, and little comfort existed.

Before Utah's unit arrived in Salt Lake City, the Mormon War had ended. However, the unit stayed in the area for some time, quartered in adobe buildings or tents. Finally, the unit went out to help quell trouble with the Utes. Interestingly enough, Utah's diary stops suddenly; it is not known if he met his death at the

hands of the Utes or simply lost interest in keeping a journal. (\*Utah)

The chevron went through a series of changes during the 1840-1860 period. In 1847, both infantry and artillery wore chevrons in the “V” with point up. The Dragoons wore chevrons in the “V” fashion with point down. Two stripes represented the corporal; three stripes the sergeant; three stripes and the lozenge (diamond) the first sergeant; and three stripes and three rockers the sergeant major. In 1851, all stripes were turned point down and remained so until 1902. (\*Emmerson)

## Civil War

The Civil War marked a radical change in American warfare: it brought the total war to America. This war required a large number of draftees and the launching of massive campaigns. It ended in the trench warfare outside Petersburg, Virginia.

During the Civil War, noncommissioned officers led the lines of skirmishers that preceded and followed each major unit. NCOs also carried the flags and regimental colors of their units. This crucial but deadly task maintained regimental alignment and allowed commanders to define the locations of their units on the field during battle.

As the war progressed, organizational and tactical changes led the Army to employ more open battle formations. These changes further enhanced the combat leadership role of the NCO. (\*Fisher)

The battle for Fredricksburg in 1862 proved one of the most costly of the war. The cold days with rain and snow turned the roads to mud. Just before the battle, each man received rations for four days. Rations consisted of hardtack, meat, coffee, and 60 rounds of ammunition.

On 13 December 1862, Corporal William Heatley and Private Alfred Bellard looked across the Rappahannock River from Strafford Heights. They saw Union troops attempting to storm Marye’s Hill in wave after wave—only to fall from a wall of Confederate lead.

The skirmishing continued until four o’clock on 14 December. At that point, both sides accepted a halt in the fighting to clear the dead from the field and allow the troops to rest.

Men began playing cards and singing. Some traded tobacco with Confederate troops. Early on the morning of December the 15<sup>th</sup>, a fight was arranged between a Confederate man and a Union man from the Sixth Wisconsin. As the troops watched, the two men fought to a draw.

Union troops withdrew across the Rappahannock River north of Fredricksburg and established winter quarters. The quarters were made of pine log walls, four-

feet high; a chimney on one side with four-buttoned shelter tents providing the top. This protected the troops from the severe cold and snow. Inside, bunks made from pine sticks covered with spruce leaves served as beds. On Christmas, the troops received a ration of dried apples and whiskey. (\*Winter Campaign)

New forms of technology started to reshape the Army during the Civil War: railroads, telegraph communications, steamships, balloons, and other innovations. (\*Matloff) These innovations significantly affected NCO pay and rank structure.

Pay for U.S. troops during the Civil War varied according to branch and rank, with technical fields receiving greater pay. As early as 1861, Army regulations established the pay scale as follows:

**Cavalry**

Sergeant Major	\$21.00
Quartermaster Sergeant	21.00
Chief Bugler	21.00
First Sergeant	20.00
Sergeant	17.00
Corporal	14.00
Bugler	13.00
Farrier and Blacksmith	13.00
Private	13.00

**Artillery and Infantry**

Sergeant Major	\$21.00
Quartermaster Sergeant	17.00
First Sergeant	20.00
Sergeant	17.00
Corporal	13.00
Artificer, Artillery	15.00
Private	13.00
Principal Musician	21.00
Musician	12.00

**Ordnance**

Master Armorer, or Master Carriage Maker	\$34.00
Master Blacksmith	34.00
Armorer	20.00
Carriage Maker	20.00
Blacksmith	20.00
Artificer	17.00
Laborer	13.00

### **Sappers, Miners, and Pontoniers**

Sergeant	\$34.00
Corporal	20.00
Private, first class	17.00
Private, second class	13.00
Musician	12.00

### **Hospital Stewards**

First Class	\$22.00
Second Class	20.00

(\* Revised US Army Regulations 1861)



**First Sergeant James Wright**

The Civil War witnessed a continuation of the practice of incorporating different racial and ethnic groups into the Army by units. There were Black,

Irish, French, Italian, Indian, and other units formed along racial or ethnic lines. The famed Irish Brigade composed of Irish troops from New York and Massachusetts distinguished itself at Fredricksburg. Six times the units charged up Marye's Heights against heavily fortified Confederate positions. Of the 1,200 men forming that brigade on the eve of the battle, only 280 men lived to see the battle's end. (\*Wiley)

One of the survivors, Corporal Peter Welsh (a member of the 28<sup>th</sup> Massachusetts) saw every man to his right fall in the charges up Marye's Heights. Corporal Welsh later became the Color Sergeant for the 28<sup>th</sup>. In a letter to his wife, he explained that being a color sergeant did not constitute the danger that everyone thinks. "Each company has to take position in line according to the rank of captains...our company's position is the color company which is the third rank...I should be near them (the colors) whether I carried them or not." Welsh further explained that the enemy did not aim at the colors, because there was no such thing as a sure aim on the battlefield. One benefit for Welsh, being the color-bearer allowed him to remain as the company quartermaster/commissary sergeant drawing rations. This, in turn, meant that he did not pull picket or guard duty.

For the most part, Welsh did not mind Army life. He told his wife he had gained weight because of Army food and continued to say that the exercise of marching and fresh air had actually strengthened his body. Those officers he saw as unfit to lead men, constitute his biggest complaint.

Welsh and the 28<sup>th</sup> watched at Gettysburg, as Zook's brigade disappeared into the wheat forty yards in front of their position. Then they followed into the waist-high wheat. From the wheat, they passed into the timber covering a stony hill. Confederate troops opened fire from the crest. The Irish Brigade returned fire and then charged. They broke the Confederate lines and captured a large number of troops.

More units of Confederate troops stormed toward them from the north, and the Brigade formed a defensive line. Firing, the Brigade fell back, only to discover Confederate troops approaching them from the south. Caught between the two lines, the Brigade plunged back into the wheat field. Slowly, they made their way back to Union lines, gathering in a field near Tanyetown Road. Again, like Fredricksburg, the Brigade had lost a great number of men. Out of 530 men that plunged into the wheat field, only 202 remained.

After Gettysburg, Welsh and the Irish Brigade continued to fight. They served at Mine Run, the Battle of the Wilderness, and finally Spottsylvania, where Welsh (now a sergeant) received a minor wound. Sixteen days later, Sergeant Peter Welsh died of complications from his minor wound. (\*Peter Welsh)

After the Civil War, the Army discontinued ethnic units. Racial segregation, however, remained. Black units formed on the model established by the Massachusetts 54<sup>th</sup> during the Civil War. The 54<sup>th</sup> Massachusetts model consisted of units with white officers and black enlisted men. This served as the model for black troops for over the next half century. (\*Luis F. Emilio)

In the post-Civil War era, the Artillery School at Fort Monroe reopened to train both officers and NCOs. In 1870, the Signal Corps established a school for training officers and NCOs. These schools were the first to be established, because both the Artillery and the Signal Corps required men to possess advanced technical knowledge in order to operate complex equipment and instruments. Efforts to provide advanced education for NCOs in other less technical fields, however, failed to attract supporters. Many felt that experience in the field and not the classroom experience made good infantry and other sergeants.

## Indian Wars

The Indian Wars of the 1870's to 1890's saw the Army involved in a long series of engagements. These wars often consisted of numerous scattered skirmishes over wide areas, without any substantial battle or engagement to determine the war's end. This type of war led to the further enhancement of the NCO's role as small unit leader. Often fighting in small detachments, troops relied heavily on the knowledge and abilities of NCO's. (\*Fisher)

An outstanding NCO of the 11<sup>th</sup> Ohio Cavalry, Sergeant Charles L. Thomas, served in the early days of this period. Late in the summer of 1865, the right column of the Powder River Expedition, containing 1,400 men, lost their way. Unable to regain their lines and wandering hopelessly, the column began to despair.

A rescue mission consisting of Sergeant Thomas and two Pawnee scouts rode out to locate the missing column. After 24 hours, Sioux warriors attacked Thomas and the two scouts in a running battle. Near sundown, Thomas sighted the lost column. He spurred his horse and cut a path through the Sioux, finally reaching the column.

He then rallied the men in the camp into a fighting formation and forced the Sioux to give way. Thomas pushed the troops onward for 150 miles to a supply camp. This action prevented the destruction of the column which would have been a major disaster for the Army. (\*The Soldiers)

During the Indian Wars period, enlisted men lived in Spartan barracks with corporals and privates in one large room. Sergeants lived separated from their men, in small cubicles of their own, adjacent to the troops sleeping quarters. (\*Fisher) This gave enlisted men a sense of comradeship, but allowed little privacy.

African-American troops of this period received the name Buffalo Soldiers. The units they served in consisted of the 9<sup>th</sup> and 10<sup>th</sup> Cavalry and the 24<sup>th</sup> and 25<sup>th</sup> Infantry. Providing twenty years of continuous frontier service, these troops campaigned in the Southern Plains, in West Texas, in the Apache lands, and against the Sioux. (\*Chappell)



**Ordnance Sergeant of the 25<sup>th</sup> Infantry, 1885**

One Buffalo Soldier, Sergeant George Jordan, received the Medal of Honor for his actions during the campaign against the Apache leader Victorio. Sergeant Jordan led a 25-man unit to Tularosa, New Mexico to stave off a coming attack. Standing firm against 200-300 Apaches, Sergeant Jordan and his men prevented the town's destruction. (\*Chappell)

The enlisted man of this era spent much of his time engaged in manual labor. Soldiers of the west often built or repaired their housing and fortifications, repaired roads and bridges, served as blacksmiths or bakers, performed guard duty, and other tasks. A hard life with poor pay often resulted in desertion of troops. This tested the abilities of NCOs to maintain an effective fighting unit.

During the 1870's, the Army discouraged enlisted men from marrying. Regulations limited the number of married enlisted men in the Army, and required special permission if a man wished to marry. For marrying without permission, a man could face charges of insubordination. Still, nature proved stronger than the Army's desires or regulations, marriages occurred with the result that posts transformed into communities. (\*Stallard)

Life for the wives of NCOs proved to be hard. They often worked as maids for officers or laundresses. Their meals consisted of beans, bacon, beef, and hardtack, with eggs, sugar, or other staples were too high in priced for their budgets. Many lived in dugouts, sod huts, or adobe buildings. The luckier wives lived in wooden structures or stone buildings. (\*Stallard)



**Sergeant Major and his wife**

## **1880's & 1890's**

One of the more colorful NCOs of this period was Sergeant John T. O'Keefe of the Signal Corps. Stationed on top of Pikes Peak to observe and record the weather, O'Keefe and his wife led a lonely, dull life. In order to free himself for drinking binges, he often prepared the weather reports in advance.

In addition to the fabricated weather reports, O'Keefe fabricated several very unusual stories. The eruption of Pikes Peak, O'Keefe reported, buried the town of Colorado Springs under a mountain of ash.

After the Pikes Peak volcano became dormant, O'Keefe reported an even stranger occurrence: the attack of wild rats. Amid the quiet solitude of Rocky Mountain life, O'Keefe explained, a pack of wild rats, ferocious with voracious appetites attacked him, his wife, and small child. Before he could act, the rats devoured the child. Quickly moving to save his wife, he wrapped her in zinc roofing material and then placed stovepipes on his legs. He battled the varmints for hours, killing large numbers, only to see them replaced with even more wild rats. His energy spent, O'Keefe nearly succumbed to the rats when his wife

lassoed him with a wire connected to a battery. As the rats attempted to bite O’Keefe each met electrocution.

Shortly after this last report, O’Keefe received a transfer. Never again did Pikes Peak erupt or wild mountain rats attack in herds.

In contrast to the colorful Sergeant O’Keefe, the NCOs of the Greely Expedition recorded the weather in one of the harshest climates in the world—the Arctic. In 1881, the U.S. Army Signal Corps sent an expedition to establish a meteorological station as far north as possible. The expedition consisted of three officers, eight NCOs, twelve enlisted men, two Eskimos, and one civilian photographer.

Venturing forth from Greenland, the expedition established a basecamp, Fort Conger, in the Hall Basin, by August. Using several dog sleds, a steam-driven launch, and two barks, they discovered new lands north of Greenland, establishing a record by reaching the farthest latitude north at 83 degrees, 24 minutes North.

For three years, the men continued to operate the meteorological station and explore the far north. By 1884, the men began to question if they would ever see home again. The expedition began to move south, using the steam-driven launch and two barks. Reaching Cape Sabin, they built a stone cabin and again waited; only 50 days of supplies remained. As the supplies dwindled, the men fell ill with scurvy. Drained by lack of nourishment and bitter cold, they began to die slowly. The cabin collapsed, and forced them to take shelter in a tent.

In June 1884, sailors of the *Thetis*, a sailing ship, spotted the remnants of the expedition’s camp. Ripping open the tent, which had collapsed, they found six survivors: Lt. Adolphus Greely, Sergeant David Brainhard, Sergeant J.R. Fredrick, Hospital Steward Henry Biederbick, and two privates. (\*Fisher) The men were unable to stand, their bodies resembling skeletons—eyes sunken deep within their sockets, jaws hanging freely, and joints swollen. Nevertheless they were finally heading home.

The expedition provided the scientific community with valuable information, discovered new lands, and established the record for latitude. To the men of the Expedition, however, it provided a cold, harsh, bitter memory.

In 1885, Congress established the first retirement system. The system allowed a man to retire after 30 years of service with three-quarters of his active duty pay and allowances. (\*Fisher)

Barracks life in the 1890’s consisted of a Spartan atmosphere with rows of beds and footlockers, old potbellied stoves, a few tables and chairs, and rifle racks. Card games, dime novels, and other amusements filled idle time. Footlockers contained personal possessions along with military clothing and equipment.

Soldiers during this period maintained handbooks. These handbooks contained a variety of information, including a section entitled: “Extracts for Army Regulations of 1895,” “Examination of Enlisted Men for Promotion,” “Take Care of Your Health,” “Extracts from Articles of War,” and others. In the back, sections for the men to fill in consisted of “Clothing Account,” “Military Service,” and

“Last Will and Testament.”

Soldiers carried these handbooks for a number of years. The handbooks provided enlisted men with an accurate record of the important events in his Army life.

William B. Cox, a typical enlisted man of H Company, 18<sup>th</sup> Infantry Regiment, recorded his dates of discharge and clothing received, but failed to write anything in his last will and testament. His clothing records for 1898 are as follows:

\$48.36 Yearly Clothing Allowance

2 Blouses #5	7.02
1 Forage Cap	.57
2 Cap Devices	.22
1 GL Chevrons	.00
1 Coat Canvas	1.04
6 Collars	.24
1 Float	.84
1 Leggings	.55
1 DB Shirt	1.94
2 M Shirts	.58
1 Shoes	1.89
6 Stockings	.36
1 C Trousers	.94
2 Trousers U	3.14
19.33	Total Carried Forward

## Spanish-American War

When the United States declared war on Spain in April 1898, the U.S. Army consisted of approximately 26,000 men. Lacking the troops to conduct an overseas war, the War Department called for volunteers. Many National Guard units, already formed, volunteered and served as units. In all, the United States raised 275,000 men to fight against Spain.

Using the Regular Army as the nucleus, the United States created a fighting force. Major problems for deployment of this force consisted of preparing and transporting the Army to various theaters of war. The troops needed equipment, training, and supplies before engaging the enemy. The pace of preparation proved extremely slow, and months passed before any action occurred. Some volunteer units never reached the front in time to see action.

In May 1898, the Fourth Illinois, a National Guard unit, assembled at Springfield to begin preparations for the fight. The Army quickly transported the

unit to Savannah, Georgia for training. The men drilled daily, wrote numerous letters, played baseball, studied Spanish, stood guard and waited. (\*Morgan)

As the Fourth Illinois waited in Savannah, 17,000 American troops landed in Cuba at Daiquiri, east of Santiago Bay. They included eighteen regular and two volunteer infantry regiments; ten regular and two volunteer cavalry squadrons (serving dismounted); one mounted cavalry squadron; six artillery batteries; and a machine gun (Gatling) company.

Two days after the landing on 24 June 1898, a sharp skirmish occurred at Las Guasimas. Cutting through the mainqua and vine-covered trees, the troops of the First Cavalry, Tenth Cavalry, and Rough Riders neared the Spanish breastworks. A Hotchkiss one-pounder resounded, sending the first shot through the air. Immediately, the Spanish soldiers behind the breastworks responded with volley after volley of hot lead.

Sergeant Andrew J. Cummins and other members of the 10<sup>th</sup> Cavalry continued to advance slowly under a galling fire. The casualties began to mount, and the order came to “bring-up” the nine Infantry regiments at the rear. Soon the column of Infantry regiments appeared, and the Spanish began to retreat. Sergeant Cummins and the other men lurched forward, sending the Spanish troops fleeing from the field in a wild panic.

After Las Guasimas, several days passed before the Army again saw action. Sergeant Major Edward Burkner worried about the men of the 10<sup>th</sup> Cavalry. In their blue wool uniforms, the hot weather drained the men’s strength. Everyone openly stated fears of hurricanes or yellow fever. Poor roads meant a scarcity of all essential supplies. The men needed to move forward.

Early on the morning of 1 July, American artillery opened fire, signaling the commencement of attacks on El Caney and San Juan Heights. Corporal Warren J. Shepherd, Company D, 17<sup>th</sup> US Infantry and his men took part in the first assault on El Caney. Charging forward, they met a hail of Spanish bullets, which sent many to the ground. Corporal Shepherd and his men halted, as did others in the attack. The day became a series of firefights with Corporal Shepherd and his troops inching forward through thickets and open fields.

A little after noon, a concentrated attack of artillery and infantry succeeded in taking a large stone blockhouse, the key to the Spanish defenses. For four hours, Corporal Shepherd and his men continued to fight before all opposition from the Spanish fell silent.

While the action raged at El Caney, the assault on San Juan Heights began. Leaving the high ground at El Poso, Sergeant Alexander M. Quinn, Company A, 13<sup>th</sup> US Infantry traversed a narrow road, forded two streams, and then crossed an open field with dense undergrowth. As he neared the edge of the field, a Signal Corps reconnaissance balloon came into sight. The balloon alerted the Spanish defenders and drew their fire. The balloon’s reconnaissance ended when the balloon sank to the ground, riddled with bullets and shell fragments.

The troops struggled forward through thickets and steep stream banks, and

hail of Spanish bullets took their toll. The Americans responded with four Gatling guns blazing. Under the cover of the Gatlings, the Infantry regiments (including the 13<sup>th</sup> with Sergeant Quinn) continued onward up San Juan Hill. The Rough Riders and dismounted cavalry, on the other hand, made a wild rush for the top of Kettle Hill.

At San Juan Hill, Sergeant Quinn and his men moved steadily forward, clutching their rifles tightly. They struggled through the tall grass as if wading through water. Then they burst forward, sweeping the Spaniards from the field.

Now in control of both San Juan Hill and Kettle Hill, the Americans dug in and defended what they had taken. For the next two days, they withstood heavy rifle fire, but held firm. The Americans sitting on the high ground controlled the field. It became apparent that the Spanish could not dislodge them—Santiago was lost. (\*Taking Santiago)

After the American victory came the occupation of Cuba. Disease proved the primary enemy for American troops during occupation. Even before troops reached Cuba, diseases became commonplace. On 8 August 1898, the first man of the Fourth Illinois, still in Savannah, died of typhoid. Both typhoid and malaria proved fatal to many before they reached Cuba.

In early January 1899, the unit boarded the *Mobile* for Cuba. Men spent most of the time on ship sleeping, writing, or on guard duty. When the ship entered Havana Harbor, the band started playing patriotic songs; excitement filled the air.

The next day, amid heat and dust, the unit disembarked. In Havana with its narrow streets, grated or flowered and vine-covered windows, and pretty women—the men looked around in amazement.

They marched to a hill near the ocean and established camp. Other American volunteer units surrounded them. Hastily, they set up their tents and lay down to sleep. In the middle of the night, they awoke to a hard rain. Water rushed in beneath the tent floor, making sleep impossible. The lesson, quickly learned, did not need repeating: the next day, the men properly erected their tents to prevent further flooding.

Camp life consisted of daily drill, inspection, guard duty, work parties, and writing. Often, different units or Cubans and Americans played baseball. Less frequently, enlisted men received passes to visit Havana.

The unit spent some time in the field marching from one place to another. Along the way, they received a warm welcome by the Cubans. The march consisted of from five to eighteen miles per day. There was time to visit sugar mills and other places of interest.

Finally, in April 1899, the unit returned to the United States and received a release from active duty. They received a hero's welcome with a banquet and reception in their honor. (\*Morgan)

In the years that followed the Spanish-American War, the United States sought to defend her newly won empire. The Philippine Insurrection, Boxer Rebellion,

and other problems required the United States to station over one-third of the U.S. Army overseas. (\*Matloff) The movement of the Army overseas and garrisoning of troops in foreign lands required additional manpower and modernization of the Army.

With the end of the Spanish-American War, the people of the Philippines believed they would receive independence. However, the United States possessed different ideas. The American troops in the Philippines numbered 11,000 men. On 4 February 1899, the situation exploded into open insurrection by Filipinos.

The insurrection in the Philippines became a guerilla war, which required NCO to take strong leadership roles and lasted until 4 July 1902. The fighting required over 100,000 men and \$8,000,000 dollars before it reached its conclusion. American losses numbered 4,243 men killed and 2,818 wounded.

Edward Whitehead, a member of the 46<sup>th</sup> Volunteer Infantry, fought in the Philippines from 1899 to 1901. On the march, he carried a shelter tent, poncho, thirty rounds of ammunition, and a Krag-Jorgenson rifle. At first, they wore cork helmets; but soon they found these unsuitable for tropical conditions and quickly adopted the campaign hat. Their uniforms consisted of blue shirts and khaki trousers. On their arms, they wore bands holding twenty rounds of ammunition. Around their waist were belts with additional ammunition. (\*Whitehead)

On 26 January 1902, Sergeant William Kelleher and Corporal John M. Ward, Company G, 27<sup>th</sup> Infantry, landed in Manila Bay. Soon thereafter, the unit received orders to move to the island of Mindanao in order to suppress Moro insurgents in the region of Lake Lanao. On 21 April, the unit moved against the Moro stronghold of Fort Pualas, taking the fort without suffering any casualties. A few days later, on 2 May, troops advanced under cover of supporting artillery up Fort Binidayan, another Moro stronghold. At the bottom of a hill they fixed bayonets and charged the fort. Upon reaching the fort, they realized the walls were ten feet high. Troops began lifting each other up against the walls so they could crawl over the top. Two hours later, the fort surrendered.

The 27<sup>th</sup> then moved on Fort Pandapatan, which in addition to the high and thick bamboo walls had trenches for protection. With heavy firing from both sides the 27<sup>th</sup> advanced until they surrounded the fort on three sides. Lieutenant Hugh Drum and Sergeant Kelleher lifted Corporal Ward upon their shoulders so that he could fire inside the fort. Night fell, making further attack impossible—until morning.

During the night, several Moros tried to escape; most had not gone far when an American bullet struck and killed them. By morning, the Moros realized the hopelessness of their situation and surrendered. (\*27<sup>th</sup> Infantry Regimental History)

As the Philippine Insurrection ended, modernization and new technologies shaped the Army's future. Adapting to modernization and new technologies altered the NCO Corps in numerous ways.

# Modernization

During the last half of the nineteenth century the increased use of technology, which accompanied modernization greatly affected the NCO Corps. The number of NCO ranks grew rapidly; each advent of technology created another paygrade. The Army competed with industry for skilled technical workers. In 1908, Congress approved a pay bill rewarding those in the technical fields in order to maintain their services. Combat men, in contrast, suffered an inequity of pay. (\*Fisher) A Master Electrician in the Coast Artillery made \$75-84 per month. This constituted a good payday which most civilians failed to match. In contrast, the Infantry Battalion Sergeant Major lived on \$25-34 per month. The Sergeant of the Signal Corps made between \$34-43 per month. Therefore, the average Infantry Battalion Sergeant Major with between twenty and twenty-five years of service made \$33 per month. The average Sergeant of the Signal Corps with five years of service received \$37 per month. (\*Emmerson)

The Army clearly defined the duties of the noncommissioned officer during this period. The five or six pages of instructions provided by von Steuben's Regulations for the Order and Discipline of the Troops of the United States in 1778 grew to 417 pages when the Noncommissioned Officers Manual was written in 1909. Contained in the work were two chapters, one of 15 pages for the First Sergeant and another of 54 pages for the Sergeant Major. These chapters included forms to fill out and maintain, a description of duties, what should and should not be done, customs of service, and things of special interest. (\*Moss)

The Noncommissioned Officers Manual includes a 2 ½ page chapter on discipline. It stresses the role of punishment in achieving discipline. This role, the work states, seeks to prevent the commission of offenses and to reform the offender. (\*Moss) Repeatedly in this section and others, it is stressed that treatment of lower-grade personnel should be uniform, just, and in no way humiliating. (\*Moss)

In 1902, the Army turned the chevron to what we would today call point up and reduced its size. Many stories exist as to why this change occurred; the most realistic is that it simply looked better.

In 1916, problems in Mexico overflowed into the American Southwest when Mexican revolutionaries attacked Columbus, New Mexico. The Army launched a punitive expedition into Mexico to pursue and punish the rebels. Though it failed to capture the rebels, it did prepare American troops for action in World War I.

# World War I

World War I required the first massive training of men the United States had seen since the Civil War. NCOs trained four-million men and the Army would send over one- million men to fight overseas. A typical training day started at six, with breakfast at seven o'clock. Training assembly began at eight, and the workday ended at four. Corporals served as the primary trainers, teaching lessons that emphasized weapons and daytime maneuvers. Troops received twelve hours of training on the proper use of the gas mask, with a trip to the gas chamber included. (\*Brock & Case)

After viewing the differences in American and foreign NCO prestige, General Pershing suggested the establishment of special schools for sergeants as well as separate NCO messes. The performance of noncommissioned officers in the American Expeditionary Force seemed to validate these changes. (\*Fisher)

The First World War proved a brutal struggle, with technology coming to the forefront. Technology resulted in the introduction of gas warfare, the machine gun that ended mounted charges, and the first real use of airpower. Armies measured victory in yards gained per thousands of men lost. Though American forces saw limited action in comparison to British and French troops, the Americans tipped the balance of power in favor of the Allies.

The trenches consisted of a complex system, interwoven and protected with layers of wire. The trenches not only protected the front line troops, but also connected the front and rear areas. They averaged seven to eight feet deep, with firing steps that permitted the troops to poke their heads and rifles over the top. (\*Case)

Soldiers did not spend all their time in the front-line trenches. They needed to perform various odd jobs which required work details. These details worked in shifts, a new detail relieving the old every four hours. Old houses or pup tents in the rear area provided the troops with places to sleep. (\*Case)

Near St. Etienne, a young corporal named Harold Turner, of Company F, 142<sup>nd</sup> Infantry, engaged enemy troops. Corporal Turner assisted in organizing a platoon of scouts, runners, and signal corpsmen. Serving as second in command, he led the troops forward under heavy fire.

Encountering a machine gun emplacement with four machine guns, Turner rushed forward with fixed bayonet. After a desperate struggle, he succeeded in capturing the position containing four machine guns and 50 German soldiers, thus allowing the advance to continue. (\*Medal of Honor Recipients)

On 8 October 1918, amid the Argonne Forest, Corporal Alvin C. York, of Company G, 328<sup>th</sup> Infantry, 82<sup>nd</sup> Division received orders that his battalion would attack Hill 223 and then press on to the Decauville Railroad. No sooner had the attack begun, than heavy, German machine-gun fire stopped it cold. Corporal

York and sixteen other men formed a patrol to attempt to flank the guns and knock them out of action. The patrol circled the position and captured a number of German soldiers.

The Germans responded with a hail of fire which killed nine, including the sergeant in command of the group. Corporal York assumed command and led the group and their prisoners to American lines. Along the way, York shot a number of German soldiers, killing at least twenty and silencing thirty-five machine guns. As they neared American lines, the number of prisoners grew to 132.

York received many honors and decorations for his actions, including a promotion to sergeant. When he returned home, he received offers for product endorsements and film roles—all of which he declined. He spent most of his remaining years helping the children of Tennessee acquire a basic education through a foundation that he created. (\*Soldiers Magazine)

Not all the heroes of World War I were infantrymen braving machine gun fire. On 10 November 1918, at Haudiomont, France, Sergeant First Class Charles L. Anderson of the 306<sup>th</sup> Field Signal Battalion, kept the communications open between regiment and field battalions amidst a heavy, enemy artillery barrage. Although wounded and gassed, SFC Anderson continued his work impervious to the dangers around him.

Two major lessons came out of World War I: the need for a fireteam leader and the need for a platoon sergeant. The need for a leader to control the firepower that a machine gun or automatic rifle created resulted in a pressing need for a fireteam leader. The attrition rate among leaders on the battlefield created the need for the platoon sergeant.

## Between the Wars

After World War I, Congress reorganized the NCO ranks. Five NCO ranks were established: master sergeant, technical sergeant, staff sergeant, sergeant, and corporal. First sergeant became a position comparable in rank to technical sergeant. Pay from any one of 231 vocational skills could add \$3 to \$35 to the enlisted man's monthly pay. (\*Emmerson)

As the Army drastically reduced the number of troops during the next few years, enlisted men often received a demotion. The records of Alexander Loungeway through 32 years of service provide a good example of the typical enlisted man's career. Joining the Army in 1908, Loungeway rose through the ranks to first lieutenant during World War I. After the war, he was reverted to a first sergeant, and then he became a sergeant, a corporal, and finally, a private first class. He received a promotion to corporal a year before he retired. (\*Loungeway)

All his character references read “excellent.”

These reductions resulted from two things. First, troops received their promotions from the regiment. Since the regiment owned the stripes if a man transferred or his unit disbanded, he arrived at the next regiment as a private first class. It was not until 1940 that enlisted men transferred from unit to unit and retained their stripes. Secondly, in 1922, the Army scheduled 1,600 noncommissioned officer reductions to reduce the force and save money. This caused server hardships for many NCOs, especially those with families. (\*Fisher)

Both post-World War I budget reductions and then the Great Depression led to irregularities in pay: often the enlisted man received only half his pay, or half his pay in money and the other half in consumer goods or food. (\*Case)

During the late 1930’s, technicians were created in grades 3, 4, and 5 (equivalent to SSG, SGT, and CPL) with chevrons marked with a “T.” NCOs constituted only those who were recognized leaders of men. The technician ranks resulted in a rapid growth of promotions for the technical personnel not matched by noncommissioned officers. In 1948, the Army discontinued the technician ranks and in 1955, created the specialist ranks. (\*Emmerson)

The typical first sergeant of this period carried his administration files in his pocket—a black book. The book contained the names of everyone in the company and included all kinds of information on them (AWOLs, work habits, promotions, and so forth). The book passed from one first sergeant to the next, staying with the company. It provided the company with a historical document. (\*Wooldridge)

The first sergeant accompanied men on runs, the drill field, training, or the firing range. He stayed at the forefront of everything the company did. (\*Wooldridge)

## World War II

With the attack on Pearl Harbor in December 1941, the United States found itself at war. Swift Japanese advances in the Pacific cut American supply lines in several places.

In the Philippines, hunger soon became the major problem facing U. S. troops. On 6 January 1942, the Army cut food allotment for troops on Bataan to one half. Fresh meat became scarce, and rice, fish, tomatoes, and canned meat became staple items.

As hunger became widespread, it damaged morale and created a serious problem. In February, rations received a further reduction to 1,000 calories per day—instead of the 4,000 or more needed to sustain an individual.

The men developed an increasing obsession with food as hunger grew. They ate horses, iguanas, monkeys, crows, and carabao (water buffalo). Dreams of men centered on fresh bread, plum butter, blackberry jelly, and pork and beans.

In April, the Japanese intensified their attack, and the situation became hopeless. Literally starving, the American forces began to weaken and their valiant resistance, falter. Night blindness, edema, dysentery, scurvy, and diarrhea—all caused by extreme malnutrition—took their toll.

On 9 April 1942, U.S. forces on Bataan bowed to the inevitable and surrendered to the Japanese. During the final week before surrender, many units went as much as 72 hours without food. (\*RG 407; Rhodes)

While American troops fought in the Philippines, other units formed in the United States. The Army used experienced NCOs as trainers for troops earmarked for duty overseas, in the expandable army concept.

Mobilization greatly increased the numbers of Army noncommissioned officers. Mobilization combined with other factors created a staggering growth in the percentage of noncommissioned officers in the Army. The proportion of noncommissioned officers in the Army increased from 20 percent of the enlisted ranks in 1941 to nearly 50 percent in 1945. This resulted in the lessening of prestige for many NCO ranks. (\*Fisher)

Coupled with this growth in numbers of NCOs, occurred a change from the 8-man infantry squad to the 12-man squad. First, the sergeant replaced the corporal as squad leader. By 1942, the staff sergeant replaced the sergeant as squad leader. Thus, the rank of corporal came to mean very little, even though he served in theory and by tradition as a combat leader. (\*Fisher)

Basic training in World War II centered on hands-on experience instead of the classroom. NCOs conducted all the training of recruits. After basic training, a enlisted man went to his unit for further training. The rapid expansion of the Army led to a decrease in experienced men in the NCO ranks. If a man showed potential, he received a promotion, with privates quickly becoming corporals and corporals becoming sergeants. (\*Van Autreve)



**Corporal Paul Janesk, Signal Corps**

In addition, World War II witnessed a number of heroic deeds by noncommissioned officers. Such were the actions of Staff Sergeant Charles Shea at Monte Damiano, Italy. On 12 May 1944, Company F, 2<sup>nd</sup> Battalion, 350<sup>th</sup> Infantry, 88<sup>th</sup> Division encountered heavy machine-gun fire as they advanced. Staff Sergeant Shea recognized that the advance of his unit depended upon taking the three machine- gun positions, and advanced alone. He hurled a grenade into the first of these positions, capturing four enemy soldiers; moved to the second and forced the two-man crew to surrender. He then proceeded to the third. Coming under fire, he rushed that position and killed its three defenders. With this, Shea's unit continued to advance.

Later in the war, Sergeant Harrison Summers showed the same type of raw courage during the assault at Utah Beach on D-Day, 6 June 1944. Sergeant Summers, of the 502<sup>nd</sup> Parachute Infantry Regiment, 101<sup>st</sup> Airborne Division, led an attack against German coastal fortifications. As Sergeant Summers and twelve men moved against the enemy position, they encountered heavy fire. The twelve men fell back, leaving Summers to advance alone. He ran to the first enemy position, kicked the door open, and with a rain of bullets killed all the soldiers inside. He then moved down a row of stone buildings, clearing the enemy as he went. (\*Fisher)

Fighting in the Pacific and Europe required large numbers of troops. Millions of men enlisted, and millions more were drafted. Still, the Army suffered from

manpower shortages. In 1942, the Army formally added women to its ranks. By 1945 over 90,000 women had enlisted in the Army.

Women served in administrative, technical, motor vehicle, food, supply, communications, mechanical, and electrical positions during the war. Women continued to serve in a wide variety of military occupations after the end of World War II. (\*Treadwell)

**Women in the Army, World War II**

**Number of Women**

1942	11,222
1943	55,946
1944	84,586
1945	93,542

**Enlisted Grade Level**

**Percentage by Rank**

	Women	Men
MSG/1SG	0.6	1.5
Tech Sgt	0.6	2.9
Staff Sgt/Tec 3	3.5	8.1
Sgt/Tec 4	11.8	14.1
Cpl/Tec 5	19.6	21.0
Pvt 1 <sup>st</sup> Class	25.4	28.1
Private	38.5	24.3

**Women's Occupations**

**Percentage as of September 1944**

Administrative/Office	45
Technical/Professional	18
Motor Vehicle	9
Foods	9
Supply	8
Communications	5
Mechanical/Trade	4
Radio/Electrical	2



**Enlisted women of the Signal Corps**

In 1945, Congress passed legislation entitling enlisted men with at least 20, and not more than 29 years of service, to retire. They thereupon drew 2 ½ percent of their average pay for the six months preceding retirement, multiplied by the numbers of years of active service. These men remained in the reserve until completion of 30 years of service. (\*Fisher)

## **Post World War II**

In the post-World War II era, the Army developed two programs affecting NCOs: a Career Guidance Plan and professional schools for NCOs. The Army discontinued technical ratings and service-wide standards for NCO selection, and training received new emphasis. (\*Fisher)

Education also received a new emphasis. Due to the continued growth of technology, the Army stressed education as one way of making young troops ready for advancement.

On 17 December 1949, the first class enrolled in the 2<sup>nd</sup> Constabulary Brigade's NCO school located at Munich, Germany. Two years later, the U.S. Seventh Army took over the 2<sup>nd</sup> Constabulary functions, and the school became the Seventh Army Noncommissioned Officers Academy. Eight years later, AR 350-90 established Army-wide standards for NCO academies. Emphasis on NCO education increased to the point that by 1959, over 180,000 troops attended NCO academies located in the continental United States. (\*Fisher)

In addition to NCO academies, the Army encouraged enlisted men to

advance their education by other means. By 1952, the Army developed the Army Education Program to allow troops to earn credits for academic education. This program provided a number of ways for the enlisted men to attain a high school or college diploma.

In 1950, an ill-prepared United States found it needed to commit large numbers of troops to a nation a half a world away. The North Korean attack on South Korea, America's ally, stressed American responsibilities overseas in the post-World War II era. It became clear from this point forward that American commitments in Asia, Europe, and the Pacific required a strong and combat-ready professional Army.



**Company K, 35<sup>th</sup> RTC, 25<sup>th</sup> Division**

During Korea, the noncommissioned officer emerged more prominently as a battle leader than he had in World War II. The deeply eroded hills, ridges, narrow valleys, and deep gorges forced many units to advance as squads. (\*Fisher)

The United States entered the Korean War with an Army undergoing integration. Black troops and white troops fought side-by-side on the battlefield against a common foe.

Near Surang-ni, Sergeant Ola L. Mize led the defense of “Outpost Harry.” Learning of a wounded man in an outlying listening post during an artillery barrage, Mize proceeded to rescue the man. Returning to the main position with the man, Mize rallied the troops into an effective defense as the enemy attacked in

force. Knocked down three times with grenade or artillery blasts, Mize continued to lead his men.

With the enemy assault halted, Mize and several men moved from bunker to bunker clearing the enemy. Upon noticing a friendly machine-gun position nearly falling into enemy hands, he fought his way to their aid, killing ten enemy soldiers and dispersing the rest. Securing a radio, he directed artillery fire upon the enemy's approach routes. At dawn, Mize formed the survivors into a fighting unit and successfully led a counterattack, clearing the enemy from the outpost.

In 1958, the Army added two grades to the NCO ranks. The grades, E-8 and E-9 provided for a better delineation of responsibilities in the enlisted structure and offered senior NCO the chance for promotion. An added benefit for the Army consisted of the retention of good NCOs. At this point, the NCO ranks consisted of corporal, sergeant, staff sergeant, sergeant first class, master sergeant/first sergeant, and sergeant major. (\*Fisher)

## Vietnam

In 1965, the first American ground-troops landed in Vietnam. The American policy of containment required the United States to hold the line against Communist aggression. The Vietnamese proved an enemy determined to fight a long, drawn-out war meant to wear down American forces. No clear battle-lines existed, and often friend and foe were hard to tell apart. In 1973, a formal cease-fire signed by American and North Vietnamese delegations ended American troop commitments to the area.

With decentralized control, the fighting in Vietnam centered on both the leadership of junior officers and noncommissioned officers. Much of the burden of combat leadership fell on the NCO. Needing large numbers of NCOs for combat, the Army created the Noncommissioned Officers Candidate Course. The Army established three branches of the course at Fort Benning, Fort Knox, and Fort Sill. After a ten week course, the graduate received promotion to sergeant; the top five percent to staff sergeant. After an additional ten weeks of practice, the NCO went to combat in Vietnam. The program received mixed feelings from senior NCOs, many of whom felt it undermined the prestige of the NCO Corps. Few of these senior NCOs, however, could actually say they knew an unqualified NCO from the NCO Candidate Course. (\*Fisher)

During Vietnam, the actions of Sergeant First Class Eugene Ashley and First Sergeant James A. Diamond stand out as true examples of NCO heroism.

SFC Ashley, during the initial stages of the defense of Camp Lang Vei, supported the camp with high explosives and illumination mortar rounds. Upon

losing communications with the camp, he directed air strikes and artillery support. He then organized a small assault force composed of local friendly forces. Five times, Ashley and his newly formed unit attacked enemy positions, clearing the enemy and proceeding through booby-trapped bunkers. Wounded by machine-gun fire, Ashley continued on, finally directing air strikes on his own position to clear the enemy. As the enemy retreated, he lapsed into unconsciousness. While troops transported him down the hill, an enemy artillery shell fatally wounded SFC Ashley. (\*Recollections)

As the war continued, the Army required more troops for the fighting in Vietnam. On 1 June 1966, the Army activated the 199<sup>th</sup> Light Infantry Brigade at Fort Benning, Georgia. By 10 December, the unit was on the ground in South Vietnam, guarding the approaches to the capital, Saigon.

First Sergeant James A. Diamond, an experienced veteran of both the Korean War and an earlier tour in Vietnam with the U.S. Military Assistance Command; he proved to be a strong, capable leader for younger, less- experienced troops.

On 6 February 1967, First Sergeant Diamond, and his unit formed part of a search and destroy mission near Thu Duc. Viet Cong forces in dug-in bunkers ambushed the lead platoon of their unit. The platoon leader, platoon sergeant, and two other men quickly fell amid the enemy fire. First Sergeant Diamond knew survival of the unit required quick action. He moved into the battle area and established a base of fire, as the Viet Cong attempted to seize the weapons from the fallen men. Diamond's quick reaction and intense fire forced the Viet Cong to fall back. Under fire from the Viet Cong, Diamond moved to the dead and wounded, directing their evacuation.

With the dead and wounded evacuated, First Sergeant Diamond now turned his attention to destroying the Viet Cong. His company responded with sustained small arms fire, as he guided air strikes into enemy bunkers while remaining in range of the exploding shells. Within minutes, the Viet Cong realized that their ambush would cost them dearly. They began to "turn tail and run," to melt back into the local population and disappear into the jungle, or underground tunnels. Diamond had demonstrated that both experience and strong leadership prove vital during an ambush.

In 1966, Army Chief of Staff Harold K. Johnson chose Sergeant Major William O. Wooldridge as the first Sergeant Major of the Army. The SMA served as advisor and consultant to the Chief of Staff on enlisted matters. He sought to identify problems affecting enlisted personnel and recommend the appropriate solutions. (\*Wooldridge)



**SMA William Wooldridge**

During the following year, General Johnson decided to establish the position of Command Sergeant Major. This position served as the commander's enlisted assistant to commanders at and above the battalion level. (\*Wooldridge)

## **NCO Education**

In 1969, the Department of the Army approved the establishment of the Noncommissioned Officer Education System (NCOES) to provide the NCO with a progressive system of career courses. The program objectives of NCOES consist of four basic principles. The Army sought to improve the quality of the NCO Corps; to provide enlisted men opportunities for progressive and continuing development; to enhance career attractiveness; and to provide the Army with highly trained and dedicated NCOs to fill positions of increasing responsibility. Actual implementation of NCOES occurred during the last half of FY 71.

On 17 May 1972, Army Chief of Staff General William C. Westmorland approved the creation of the senior level for NCOES. Acting upon this approval, CONARC issued General Order 98, officially creating the U.S. Army Sergeants Major Academy (USASMA), effective 1 July 1972. The original mission of the Academy was to provide selected NCOs a broad and varied in-depth educational experience, designed to qualify them for promotion to Sergeant Major and subsequent service in top level NCO positions throughout the Army. (\*NCO Education)

In the early years, NCOES consisted of three levels of training. The

Basic Noncommissioned Officer Course provided basic leadership skills and knowledge of military subjects needed at the squad and team level. The Advanced Noncommissioned Officer Course provided the student with advanced technical and leadership skills. The senior most course, the Sergeants Major Academy prepared senior NCOs to perform duties as sergeants major at division and higher headquarters. (\*USASMA AHR 72-73)

The Noncommissioned Officer Education System grew in the 70's and 80's and under-went refinement. The Primary Leadership Development Course developed from combining the earlier Primary Leadership and the Primary NCO courses into a single unit, PLDC. This course stressed how to lead and train troops. In addition, it provided the young enlisted men and women with knowledge of the duties, responsibilities, and authorities of NCOs. (\*NCO Education)

This course was replaced in October 2005, by the Warrior Leaders Course. The Warrior Leaders Course is a twenty-eight day course for active duty troops and a fifteen day course for reserve troops. It teaches leadership skills, training skills, war-fighter skills, and situational training. Implementation dates for this course are: 1 October 2007 for active duty and 1 January 08 for reserves. (\*USASMA Briefing 2007)

The Academy also developed three senior NCO courses outside NCOES. The development of these courses resulted from the Army's need to train NCOs for particular positions. The First Sergeant course began on 5 October 1981. The Battle Staff Noncommissioned Officers Course started in January 1991 with combining of the Operations and Intelligence Course with the Personnel and Logistics Course. Command Sergeant Major Course started in June 1989 with Class 1 and 2 made-up of students which had just finished the resident Sergeants Major Course. (\*NCO Education)

The Army stressed its commitment to NCO education in 1986 with the issuance of MILPO Message Number 86-65. This message established the Primary Leadership Development Course as a mandatory prerequisite for promotion to staff sergeant. For the first time, an NCOES course became mandatory for promotion. (\*USASMA AHR 86)

In 1987, the Army again emphasized the importance of NCOES with the construction of a new 17.5 million-dollar Sergeants Major Academy. This 125,000 square foot structure allowed the Academy to expand course loads and the number of courses taught at the Academy.

The Army further demonstrated the fact that the Academy serves as the primary focal point for all NCO education by establishing the U.S. Army Museum of the Noncommissioned Officer and The NCO Journal as a part of the Academy. The NCO Museum became a part of the Academy's mission on 19 June 1975. The Academy established the museum to portray the history of the NCO, and to establish a center for NCOs' historical research. (\*Museum Registration dated 19 June 1975)

The NCO Journal, established in 1991, serves as a professional journal for

NCOs. Each issue highlights an important aspect of being a noncommissioned officer. The primary mission of the NCO Journal is to provide a forum for the open exchange of ideas and information, to support training, education, and development of the NCO Corps, and to foster a closer bond among its members. (\*NCO Journal)

## **Protection of National Interest**

During the 1980's and 1990's, the United States found itself involved in conflicts in Grenada, Panama, and Somalia. In addition, the United States as a world power found itself trying to maintain peace in Rwanda, Haiti, Bosnia, and Kosovo. These actions required a strong and ready NCO Corps for a successful completion of their mission. Training and preparation for action in times of peace became critical to success in times of the conflict.

In Somalia, on 17 October 1993 an American helicopter crashed in Mogadishu leaving four troops critically wounded in the midst of hostile enemy troops. Master Sergeant Gary I. Gordon and Sergeant First Class Randall D. Shughart, both serving with Task Force Ranger in Mogadishu, volunteered to go to the aid of the men and help protect them until a rescue occurred. The crash area amid the city swarmed with enemy personnel and innocent civilians. The area consisted of narrow streets with shanties and shacks on both sides. Under heavy fire, MSG Gordon and SFC Shughart armed with sniper rifles, fought their way to the crash area and pulled the pilot and crewmembers from the helicopter. They then radioed for help and continued to protect the crew until ultimately, both received fatal wounds. Their actions saved the pilot's life.

In June 1999, after a young enlisted man stepped on a land mine, Sergeant Christine Roberts, a flight medic with the 50<sup>th</sup> Medical Company at Camp Bondsteel in Kosovo, sprang into action. Responding to the call, Sergeant Roberts and her crew arrived on the scene to find the man twenty feet down a steep hill. She rode a jungle-penetrator down the hill to search the area, disregarding the danger of still undiscovered land mines. She located the man, dressed his wounds, and loaded him on a hoist. Because of Sergeant Roberts's efforts, the young enlisted man survived. (\*FM 7-22.2)

# Desert Storm (1<sup>st</sup> Iraqi War)

In August 1990, Iraqi forces marched into Kuwait, setting off a chain of events that as of yet have not reached their conclusion. The United States responded by building a coalition of allies, deploying troops into Saudi Arabia, conducting a relentless air bombardment, and striking hard and fast in a desert campaign that crushed the Iraqi forces after 100 hours of ground combat. The operation was known by the name Desert Storm.

Men and women served side-by-side in Desert Storm. Women like meteorologist Sergeant Barbara Bates, 28, served with a self-propelled howitzer artillery unit of the 24th Infantry Division. Her duty assignment declared she had a noncombat specialty, but she supported a combat unit in a combat situation. She provided her unit with swift, precise readouts of wind, temperature, and other conditions necessary for accurate artillery fire. (\*Schubert)

During the consolidation of a US armor task force in February 1991, SSG Michael Duda displayed remarkable skill and professionalism amid the chaos of battle. After engaging and destroying two Iraqi T-55s, members of Duda's unit spotted two vehicles moving toward their position. Fog, dust, and smoke filled the air, reducing visibility to less than 1500 meters. When the two vehicles reached 2700 meters, the task force commander initiated a fire command. SSG Michael Duda recognized the "hot" road-wheel thermal signature characteristic of the Bradley Fighting Vehicle, and he immediately alerted the commander. It was quickly determined that the two vehicles were a disorientated Scout section from an adjacent battalion. (\*FM 7-22.7) SSG Duda's skill and professionalism, and quick actions prevented a serious tragedy.

# Islamic Fundamentalist and 2<sup>nd</sup> Iraqi War

In the last part of the 20<sup>th</sup> Century, religious fundamentalism grew in power and influence in many places of the world. Anti-Western and anti-secular, these forces sought the domination of the state by clerics. States like Iran and Afghanistan fell under the influence of Islamic fundamentalists with a stated goal of destroying the United States. On 11 September 2001, members of the al-Qaeda terrorist network attacked the World Trade Center and the Pentagon; these acts plunged the United States into a war with Islamic fundamentalists. Seeking to destroy one haven for the terrorists, the United States launched attacks on Afghanistan. Afghanistan's government, a radical Islamic fundamentalist group known as the Taliban, openly supported the terrorist al-Qaeda organization. They wrongly assumed that their

landlocked Central Asian country was impenetrable to attack by the United States and its allies.

On 10 October 2001, the 5<sup>th</sup> Special Forces Group deployed to Karshi Kanadad in Uzbekistan; and ten days later, the first insertion of Special Forces teams occurred and within hours, these teams started directing air strikes against Taliban positions. In the passing days, the teams split into three-man sub-teams to cover a greater area. (\*Peltier) As the collapse of the Taliban began, the Northern Alliance approached the key northern city of Mazar-e Sharif.

By 5 November, the Special Forces units and their Northern Alliance allies had readied their assault on Mazar-e Sharif. At a key position in the defense of the city Tangi Gap, the Taliban and their foreign allies massed for a determined fight. However, Special Forces unit called in devastating airpower, which allowed the Northern Alliance to charge forward with horses, foot soldiers, and troops mounted in trucks to crush the Taliban and foreign forces with ease. (\*Peltier)

The Taliban and al-Qaeda forces reeled in defeat. On 13 November 2001, Kabul, the capital, fell to the Northern Alliance. The remnants of the Taliban and al-Qaeda forces fled the country or sought refuge in the mountains. Doggedly, the US and their allies tracked these forces down as each month passed. Finally, the largest concentration of enemy forces dug into the mountain location known as Tora Bora, just south of Gardez, Afghanistan.

In a relentless pursuit of their enemy, the US and its allies launched Operation Anaconda. During this operation two MH-47 Chinooks with Navy Seals entered the Shah-I-Kot Valley on a mission to secure the top of Takur Ghar Mountains. The Chinooks took incoming from below, one being hit with a rocket-propelled grenade. Navy Seal Neil Roberts fell from the rear ramp and six men launched an effort to rescue him. Soon they too were in urgent need of rescue.

Staff Sergeant Raymond M. DePouli, and thirty-two other men, boarded two MH-47 Chinooks and rode to the rescue. They possessed little knowledge of exactly how many enemy troops they would face, or the exact location of the Navy Seals. As they neared the landing site, the enemy opened fire, damaging their Chinook and wounding four men.

Staff Sergeant DePouli quickly ran out the back of the helicopter with his M-4 assault rifle blazing. Three Rangers never made it off the plane before the concentrated fire from two enemy positions—about 50 to 75 yards away—gunned them down. Amid knee-deep snow, the other Rangers ran from the chopper, seeking cover and firing at the concealed enemy troops.

Within minutes, the Rangers reacted to the attack and regrouped. Staff Sergeant DePouli and three other men charged the enemy position with guns blazing. They discovered the enemy troops were well dug-in, and another course of action would prove prudent. They again took up positions behind rocks.

Then F-15's and F-16's joined the battle with cannons and bombs. After a series of well-directed bombing runs on the enemy troops, the Rangers found they had survived the worst. The enemy fire subsided, and they took inventory; quick

reactions had saved their lives.

After the war in Afghanistan, the United States turned its attention to the unresolved issue of Iraq. In preparing for the Second Iraqi War, the United States formed a coalition with Britain, Spain, and a number of other nations.

In the opening months of 2003, the 3<sup>rd</sup> Infantry Division deployed to Kuwait to prepare for the invasion of Iraq. The division would spearhead the Coalition force attack upon Iraq and prepared accordingly. Part of the 3<sup>rd</sup> ID consisted of the 2<sup>nd</sup> Platoon, B Company, 11<sup>th</sup> Engineer Battalion which was attached to Task Force 2-7. (\*Medal of Honor) After months of preparation on 19 March 2003, the United States plunged into war against Iraq with devastating air strikes. On the next day, the 3<sup>rd</sup> Infantry Division and the Marine Expeditionary Force streamed across the border and captured the Iraqi oilfields in Rumaila intact. By the 22<sup>nd</sup>, the 3<sup>rd</sup> ID crossed the Euphrates River streaming northward. In the days that followed, the Iraqis crumbled without major resistance, and the operation slowed due to high winds and dust storms. In places called Najaf and Nasiriya, Iraqi forces found it impossible to match American firepower and technology. The Americans found that controlling the large numbers of prisoners of war provided a major challenge to their continued advance.

By 31 March, the 3<sup>rd</sup> ID struck at Baghdad's outer defensive rim, engaging the Republican Guard's Nebuchadnezzar Division at Hindiya. Two days later, the 3<sup>rd</sup> ID moved into Karbala and across the region to the outskirts of Baghdad. On 3 April, the 3<sup>rd</sup> ID moved north from the Euphrates river town of Musayyib and attacked Iraqi forces on the southern edge of Baghdad, including the international airport. The airport proved a key objective, because it allowed for the rapid build-up of troops and military equipment. (Center for Security Policy) As the 3<sup>rd</sup> ID attacked the airport, Task-Force 2-7 was given the mission to establish a blocking position against a brigade-sized counterattack. (\*Medal of Honor) The 2<sup>nd</sup> Platoon of B Company would play a key role in their success or failure.

Among the 23,000 men attached to the 3<sup>rd</sup> ID was Sergeant First Class Paul Ray Smith, the Platoon Sergeant for B Company. SFC Smith was a veteran of Desert Storm, Bosnia-Herzegovina, and Kosovo; he was a seasoned veteran with over thirteen years of service. (\*Medal of Honor)



**SFC Paul Ray Smith**

After fighting for three consecutive days, Smith and his men pushed forward to Baghdad on the night of 3 April. They reached an area to be used as a blocking position between the airport and Baghdad at 0600 on 4 April. The road to the airport, Highway 8, consisted of a four-lane highway with a median. On each side of the highway were large masonry walls with towers about 100 meters apart. Early in the morning on 4 April, the Platoon Leader went on a reconnaissance mission with the B Company, Task Force 2-7 Commander, leaving Smith in charge of the troops. (\*Medal of Honor) Firing could be heard to the south; however, around the 2<sup>nd</sup> Platoon's area, all was quiet.

About 9:30 a.m., word came down instructing the 2<sup>nd</sup> Platoon to create an Enemy POW Holding Area, and SFC Smith chose an enclosed courtyard with an adjacent tower. (\*St. Petersburg Times) SFC Smith called upon Sergeant Joshua Dean to knock a hole in the wall with an Armored Combat Earthmover to allow access to the courtyard. As the men of the 2<sup>nd</sup> Platoon cleared the courtyard of debris, PFC Thomas Ketchum and Pvt. James Martens stood guard at the metal gate on the courtyard's northern edge. When Sergeant Joshua Henry checked on PFC Ketchum, he spotted ten to fifteen Iraqi soldiers moving toward the wall. (\*Medal of Honor)

SFC Smith quickly moved to the position with SSG Lincoln Hollinsaid and Sgt. Derek Pelletier and spotted additional enemy forces. SFC Smith sent SSG

Hollinsaid to get a Bradley Fighting Vehicle; and shots rang out. Three Bravo company M113 Armored Personnel Carriers with .50 caliber machine guns joined in the fight as the Bradley knocked down the metal gate. SFC Smith hurled a grenade at the enemy and moved outside the courtyard along with the Bradley and several of his men: Private Gary Evans, Sergeant Matthew Keller, Private Martens, and Specialist Tony Garcia. Sgt. Pelletier joined the others outside the gate; he and Smith fired several AT-4's (bazooka type weapon) at the enemy. (\*Medal of Honor)

Armed with rifles, RPGs, and 60mm mortars, the Iraqis sent a hail of fire onto the 2<sup>nd</sup> Platoon's position. Their fire resonated both on the street and within the courtyard as they moved along the buildings on the north side to gain position in the towers. An Armored Personnel Carrier manned by Staff Sergeant Kevin Yetter, Sergeant Louis Berwald, and PV2 Jimmy Hill moved alongside the Bradley as the firing became increasingly intense. The Bradley, having taken several RPG hits, ran low on ammunition and retreated to reload. With reduced firepower, SFC Smith and his platoon continued. The APC then took two hits (a RPG and a mortar round), wounding SSG Yetter, Sgt. Berwald, and PV2 Hill which forced them to evacuate the vehicle.

Private Michael Seaman joined SFC Smith on the APC as he assumed the track commander's position behind the .50 caliber machine gun. As the weapon poured fire into the Iraqi position, SFC Smith had Pvt. Seaman backed the APC into the courtyard so firepower could be directed at those Iraqis in the tower and climbing the walls. (\*Medal of Honor)

While SFC Smith manned the .50 caliber machine gun, B Company First Sergeant Timothy Campbell organized a fire team to attack enemy troops in the tower from the south side. Both SFC Smith and ISG Campbell knew that if the Iraqis were successful at the courtyard, a mortar platoon, medics at the aid station, the infantry at the highway roadblock, and those at the command center a few hundred yards down the road might all be lost. (\*St. Petersburg Times)

As ISG Campbell and three men stormed the tower from the south, SFC Smith's .50 cal fell silent. Pvt. Seaman pushed open the drivers hatch. As Pvt. Gary Evans jumped on the APC, both Seaman and Evans looked at SFC Smith and realized he was dying. Evans drove the APC out of the courtyard. The men of B Company pulled SFC Smith out of the APC and carried him to the aid station. (\*St. Petersburg Times)

Having suffered many casualties and thus losing control of the tower, the Iraqi troops began to disburse; they no longer posed a threat to the American troops guarding the road to the airport. The entire fire-fight lasted about one hour. Through courage and valor, SFC Smith and the men of 2<sup>nd</sup> Platoon had stopped the Iraqis and made them pay dearly for their challenge.

With the capture and consolidation of the Baghdad International Airport, the 2<sup>nd</sup> Platoon moved on. SSG Lincoln Hollinsaid assumed the position of Platoon Sergeant upon SFC Smith's death. Three days later, as part of the 3<sup>rd</sup> ID assault

on Baghdad's center, he too fell in battle. (\*Medal of Honor)

The rapid collapse of the Iraqi government and army led to wide-scale looting throughout the country. The United States and its coalition found that they had insufficient forces to control the country. By the time the situation stabilized, the beginnings of an insurrection against the Coalition had taken rise. In the months that followed, the insurrectionists became more organized and instituted a policy of guerilla warfare directed at American and other Coalition forces and against any Iraqi who dared join their cause in creating a new Iraqi government. The primary weapon used against American forces was the improvised explosive device.

The improvised explosive device would claim a number of lives, including Sergeant Lindsey James of Urbana, Missouri. Sergeant James joined the Army following high school and after a brief stint as a welder in Amarillo, Texas. He felt he was doing something important, trying to make a better life for the Iraqi people (\*NPR Morning Edition, Greg Allen). During his second tour to Iraq, a day before the scheduled January 30<sup>th</sup> elections, an improvised explosive device detonated near his dismounted patrol and mortally wounded Sergeant James. (\*Casualty Report, US Army)

The bright, blue-eyed young man who loved to hunt was returned to Urbana, Missouri to be buried. (NPR Morning Edition, Greg Allen) Members of the town mourned his death and honored him as a hero of their community.



**Searching the Streets in Iraq**

On Sunday afternoon, March 20, 2005, a convoy of thirty civilian tractor-trailers moved down the road on the southeastern outskirts of Baghdad. As they passed a field with two dry irrigation ditches, a line of trees, and seven

automobiles with doors and trunks open, approximately forty insurgents opened fire with rocket-propelled grenades and machine gun and rifle fire. Three Humvees carrying ten troops from the 617<sup>th</sup> MP Company, Kentucky National Guard who had been shadowing the convoy responded quickly. (\*Wood & Crisp)

As a group of insurgents approached the disabled vehicles of the convoy, the MPs opened up with .50 caliber machine guns and Mark 19 grenade launchers. The MPs turned up an access road at a right angle to the convoy and continued to fire. The insurgents turned their fire to the three Humvees. One of the MP vehicles sustained a hit by a rocket-propelled grenade, knocking the gunner at the turret unconscious. In the firefight that erupted, several men dismounted from the Humvees; two were wounded almost immediately.

Staff Sergeant Timothy Nein, armed with a M-4 rifle and grenades, and Sergeant Leigh Ann Hester, armed with a M-4 and a M-203 grenade launcher, rushed an irrigation canal about twenty meters away. Their fire—together with the .50 cal. and M-249 (Squad Automatic Weapon-SAW) machine gun fire took a heavy toll on the insurgents.

As SSG Nein and Sgt. Hester swung into action, Specialist Jason Mike, a combat medic, treated three men for their wounds; and then shot an insurgent with his 9-mm pistol. Acting upon instinct, he grabbed a wounded man's M-4 in his left hand and a Squad Automatic Weapon in his right and began firing at the insurgents.

As the smoke cleared from the field, twenty-four insurgents lay dead, two others dying, six insurgents wounded, and one lay quietly awaiting his capture. SSG Nein, Sgt. Hester, and SPC Mike were each awarded the Silver Star for their actions on that day. (\*Wood & Crisp)

Even as the war continued, elections were held to create a new Iraqi government. Unfortunately, the majority of votes were cast along ethnic and religious lines. The Shiites dominated the new government; and soon their militias became as major a problem for peace in Iraq as the Sunni insurgents and al-Qaeda. At the beginning of 2007, began the US started a “surge” to purge all militia and insurgent groups from Baghdad. This effort sought to stabilize the Iraqi government and bring peace to a troubled land.

# Conclusion

On the road, young noncommissioned officers with their troops amble by in tanks and personnel carriers; they will soon go to war. Today's noncommissioned officer retains the duties and responsibilities given to him by Von Steuben in 1778. However, both the duties and responsibilities, and the role of the noncommissioned officer have evolved for over two-hundred years as the nature of warfare and technology have shaped the Army. Men like Sergeant Elijah Churchill, First Sergeant Percival Lowe, Sergeant Peter Welsh, Sergeant Harrison Summers, and SFC Paul Ray Smith stand out as a few examples of the noncommissioned officer at his best.

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