

Introduction

By CSM Gary L. Littrell, US Army (ret.), MOH

I often think back to when I was a young NCO, a young buck sergeant in 1964 at the ripe age of 19 years old. I remember asking myself what would it take for me to be a great NCO? We didn't have NCO Academies. We didn't have noncommissioned officer guides. We had the experience of our senior NCOs and we had the day to day task of asking **ourselves** whether we wanted to be good sergeants and if so what would it take to make us good sergeants. And I thought the number one thing to becoming the best NCO I could be was to be respected.

You see, respect is something that has to be earned. Respect is not issued to you with a set of orders and a set of stripes. Respect is something you earn by taking care of the soldiers that you train and supervise and prepare for operations. One of the first problems that I encountered as a young sergeant — and I know many NCOs today go through the same trials and tribulations I did — is realizing the difference in being respected and being liked. I couldn't define the difference in being respected and being liked. It is human nature to want to be liked, but we can never sacrifice respect for that. The respect you gain through properly training your soldiers to succeed and in ensuring they and their families are taken care of may not always make you popular, but it will earn their respect. It takes a unique leader to be both liked and genuinely respected. Never confuse the two and never sacrifice respect because you want your soldiers to like you. It is far more important to consistently do the right thing. You will earn your soldiers' respect by ensuring they are trained in all aspects of their job.

Individual training is sergeant's business. I have always had a saying that we as NCOs deprive a soldier of his basic right to live if we send that soldier into combat without proper training. Basic soldier skills are important to all, not just to infantrymen or other combat arms soldiers, but also to mechanics, cooks or clerks — they, too, must be proficient in basic soldier skills. If a soldier goes into combat and these skills are weak, you as a sergeant have deprived that soldier of his basic right to live. He was untrained and he died. We must never forget that the primary duties of a sergeant are to train and take care of that soldier's every need. A good NCO must know his soldiers inside and out. He must know their weaknesses and strengths. He must know the level of training of each individual soldier and if that soldier can work well with others, especially when they are placed in a very stressful situation — like combat. Soldiers will make mistakes in training but be careful not to criticize them too harshly for those honest mistakes. Mistakes happen in training — they are supposed to. Always compliment your troops in public, but if you have to correct them on a serious mistake do it in private. A mistake made in training can benefit everyone as long as you don't embarrass the soldier. Figure out what happened and why in the AAR — demand complete honesty — but then correct the mistake and train to standard. A good leader cannot let a soldier do something wrong and not make an on-the-spot correction. If a soldier does something wrong and he knows that you saw him, he thinks it wasn't wrong because you didn't correct him or that you don't really care about him — either way that soldier is less effective and discipline suffers.

As a noncommissioned officer, we must always lead by example. And just as important we must never have double standards. We can't have a set of standards for ourselves and fellow noncommissioned officers and a different set of standards for our soldiers. We have got to lead by example, always up front and we can never ask a soldier to do something that we can't or will not do. Double standards will ruin the morale of your unit very, very rapidly. Have one set of standards for all and everyone maintains that same, strong set of standards. History can teach us much. Read about our Army's past and the NCOs who led its soldiers — you will find that their experience has relevance yet today. Lead your soldiers with pride. Train them well and care for their needs as best you can. Ask senior NCOs for advice if you encounter a problem you don't know how to solve. You are the defenders of our Nation and the caretakers of its future.

HISTORY OF THE ARMY NONCOMMISSIONED OFFICER

You are a leader in the same Army that persevered at Valley Forge, held its ground at the Little Round Top, turned the tide of a war at St. Mihiel and began the liberation of a continent at Omaha Beach. You lead

soldiers from the same Army that burst out of the Pusan Perimeter, won against enormous odds at the Ia Drang Valley, fought with determination at Mogadishu and relieved terrible misery in Rwanda. Leaders like you and soldiers like yours conducted intense combat operations in Afghanistan while only a short distance away others supported that nation's rebuilding and still others fought fires in the northwestern US. Throughout the history of the Army the NCO has been there, leading soldiers in battle and training them in peacetime, leading by example and always, always – out front.

THE NCO TRANSITION

Today you have started a new chapter in your career in the Army. You are now a part of the noncommissioned officer corps in the profession of arms. The transition from an enlisted soldier to a noncommissioned officer is a historical tradition that can be traced to the Army of Frederick the Great. The journey from junior enlisted to junior NCO is complex. You must now transition from one that was cared for to one who cares for others and from one who was taught to one that teaches, prepares for and supervises tasks. You might stay in the same section or perhaps you will move to a different organization entirely. Either way, you will do the job you have been trained to do – lead soldiers. An NCO's job is not easy. You must speak with your own voice when giving orders - don't show favoritism. This is especially true for your former peers. You must treat each soldier the same and give him the respect he deserves, as you will expect to receive the same treatment in return. Remember that you are now responsible and accountable for your soldiers. The Army expects total commitment from those who are selected to lead, train and care for its soldiers. Being an NCO is extremely rewarding. It is an honor and a privilege to lead America's finest men and women during peacetime and at war. Never forget this awesome responsibility. Army values, the NCO Charge, the NCO Vision and the NCO Creed each provide guidance and inspiration to lead from the front. Live each and every day by the NCO Creed and include it in your daily business. The NCO Creed will help you through tough times and situations.