

The Purple Heart

1-7. 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, received the Badge of Military Merit, a purple heart with a floral border and the word "merit" inscribed across the center. In practice this award was the precursor to the Medal of Honor introduced during the Civil War. After a long period of disuse, Badge of Military Merit was reinstated in 1932 as the Purple Heart and is a decoration for members of the armed forces wounded or killed in action or as a result of a terrorist attack.

Rank Insignia

1-8. In 1821 the War Department made the first reference to noncommissioned officer chevrons. A General Order directed that sergeants major and quartermaster sergeants wear a worsted chevron on 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 ended in 1829 but returned periodically and became a permanent part of the NCO's uniform before the Civil War. 1-9. In 1825 the Army established a systematic method for selecting noncommissioned officers. The appointment of regimental and company noncommissioned officers remained the prerogative of the regimental commander. Usually regimental commanders would accept the company commander's recommendations for company NCOs unless there were overriding considerations. *The Abstract of Infantry Tactics*, published in 1829, provided instructions for training noncommissioned officers. The purpose of this instruction was to ensure that 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."

Percival Lowe

In October 1849, a young Massachusetts farm boy named Percival Lowe joined the US Army's Dragoons. Having read Fremont's Narrative of 1843-1844 and other Army adventures, he felt that five years of life in the west would round out his education. Lowe was intelligent, well educated and strong, which made him an ideal soldier for the years ahead. During the next few months Lowe proved himself as a soldier. He learned quickly how to keep his horse in sound condition while campaigning. He also learned the ways of the Plains and the various Indian tribes that lived upon it. More than anything, however, he learned about the individual soldiers in his unit and how to lead them. He was promoted to corporal, then sergeant and in June of 1851, a little over two years after he had enlisted, Lowe became first sergeant of his company. Two years after he made first sergeant in 1853, Lowe viewed whiskey as the major source of discipline problems for enlisted men. He talked with other noncommissioned officers about this and cautioned each to give personal attention to his men to ensure they were not drinking to excess. Sometimes Lowe would lock drunken soldiers in a storeroom until they sobered up. Offenders received extra duty as punishment. Lowe and the noncommissioned officers of the company established the "company court-martial" (not recognized by Army regulations). This allowed the noncommissioned officers to enforce discipline, for the breaking of 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 avoided ruining his career by bringing him before three officers of the regiment. 1-10. Field officers and the adjutant frequently assembled noncommissioned officers for both practical and theoretical instruction. Furthermore, field officers ensured that company officers provided proper instruction to their noncommissioned officers. 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. The first sergeant of that time, like today, was a key person in the maintenance of military discipline.