

The History of the NCO Creed

The Creed has existed in different versions for a number of years. Long into their careers, sergeants remember reciting the NCO Creed during their induction into the NCO Corps. Nearly every NCO's office or home has a copy hanging on a wall. Some have intricate etchings in metal on a wooden plaque, or printed in fine calligraphy. But a quick glance at any copy of the NCO Creed and you will see no author's name at the bottom. The origin of the NCO Creed is a story of its own.

In 1973, the Army (and the noncommissioned officer corps) was in turmoil. Of the post-Vietnam developments in American military policy, the most influential in shaping the Army was the advent of the Modern Volunteer Army. With the inception of the Noncommissioned Officer Candidate Course, many young sergeants were not the skilled trainers of the past and were only trained to perform a specific job; squad leaders in Vietnam. The noncommissioned officer system was under development and the army was rewriting its Field Manual 22-100, *Leadership*, to set a road map for leaders to follow. Of those working on the challenges at hand, one of the only NCO-pure instructional departments at the U.S Army Infantry School (USAIS) at Fort Benning, Georgia, GA was the NCO Subcommittee of the Command and Leadership Committee in the Leadership Department. Besides training soldiers at the Noncommissioned Officers Academy, these NCOs also developed instructional material and worked as part of the team developing model leadership programs of instruction. During one brainstorming session, SFC Earle Brigham recalls writing three letters on a plain white sheet of paper... N-C-O. From those three letters they began to build the NCO Creed. The idea behind developing a creed was to give noncommissioned officers a "yardstick by which to measure themselves." When it was ultimately approved, the NCO Creed was printed on the inside cover of the special texts issued to students attending the NCO courses at Fort Benning, beginning in 1974. Though the NCO Creed was submitted higher for approval and distribution Army-wide, it was not formalized by an official army publication until 11 years later. Though it has been rewritten in different ways, the NCO Creed still begins its paragraphs with those three letters: N-C-O. It continues to guide and reinforce the values of each new generation of noncommissioned officers.

The Creed of the NCO

No one is more professional than I. I am a Noncommissioned Officer, a leader of soldiers. As a Noncommissioned Officer, I realize that I am a member of a time honored corps, which is known as "The Backbone of the Army". I am proud of the Corps of Noncommissioned Officers and will at all times conduct myself so as to bring credit upon the Corps, the Military Service and my country regardless of the situation in which I find myself. I will not use my grade or position to attain pleasure, profit, or personal safety.

Competence is my watchword. My two basic responsibilities will always be uppermost in my mind -- accomplishment of my mission and the welfare of my soldiers. I will strive to remain tactically and technically proficient. I am aware of my role as a Noncommissioned Officer. I will fulfill my responsibilities inherent in that role. All soldiers are entitled to outstanding leadership; I will provide that leadership. I know my soldiers and I will always place their needs above my own. I will communicate consistently with my soldiers and never leave them uninformed. I will be fair and impartial when recommending both rewards and punishment.

Officers of my unit will have maximum time to accomplish their duties; they will not have to accomplish mine. I will earn their respect and confidence as well as that of my soldiers. I will be loyal to those with whom I serve; seniors, peers, and subordinates alike. I will exercise initiative by taking appropriate action in the absence of orders. I will not compromise my integrity, nor my moral courage. I will not forget, nor will I allow my comrades to forget that we are professionals, Noncommissioned Officers, leaders!

Charge to the Noncommissioned Officer

I will discharge carefully and diligently the duties of the grade to which I have been promoted and uphold the traditions and standards of the Army.

I understand that soldiers of lesser rank are required to obey my lawful orders. Accordingly, I accept responsibility for their actions. As a noncommissioned officer, I accept the charge to observe and follow the orders and directions given by supervisors acting according to the laws, articles and rules governing the discipline of the Army, I will correct conditions detrimental to the readiness thereof. In so doing, I will fulfill my greatest obligation as a leader and thereby confirm my status as a noncommissioned officer.

Sergeant Major of the Army

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 was to be the primary advisor and consultant to the Chief of Staff on enlisted matters. He would identify problems affecting enlisted personnel and recommend appropriate solutions.

In his brief instructions, Johnson included on a 3 x 5 card that he presented to Wooldridge that he was to advise the Chief of Staff on 'all matters pertaining primarily to enlisted personnel, including ... morale, welfare, training,

clothing, insignia, equipment, pay and allowances, customs and courtesies of the service, enlistment and reenlistment, discipline and promotion policies.' Wooldridge kept the folded card in his wallet, the only written instructions he had during his time in office. In a handwritten note to Wooldridge later Johnson stated 'You have shouldered a large burden and I am most appreciative of the way you have done it.' Since the establishment of the position of Sergeant Major of the Army, they have been working to refine and bring back professionalism to the NCO Corps and refining the focus of the Office of the Sergeant Major of the Army. Today's soldier can clearly identify with the top enlisted soldier serving at the head of the noncommissioned officer support channel and we owe a debt of gratitude to General Johnson and the men who have made it possible ... the Sergeants Major of the Army.

The NCO Vision

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

We must always be an NCO Corps that

- Leads by Example
- Trains from Experience
- Maintains and Enforces Standards
- Takes care of Soldiers
- Adapts to a Changing World

Effectively Counsels and Mentors Subordinates

Maintains an Outstanding Personal Appearance

Disciplined Leaders Produce Disciplined Soldiers

SMA Jack L. Tilley
12th Sergeant Major of the Army