

THE SERGEANTS MAJOR

OF THE ARMY



Robert M. Mages
Mark F. Gillespie
Michael B. Kelly

Daniel K. Elder
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Center of Military History
United States Army

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Foreword

Last year, we said good-bye to William O. Wooldridge, our first Sergeant Major of the Army (SMA). I think it is fitting that, as we write a new chapter in the Office of the Sergeant Major of the Army, we celebrate those who have come before us. Sergeant Major of the Army Wooldridge was a pioneer, blazing a trail that thirteen of us have traveled. He was instrumental in the creation of this post, and we will always remember his sacrifice and his contributions.

The creation of the Office of the Sergeant Major of the Army in July 1966 represented a major milestone in the development of the U.S. Army. For the first time in history, an enlisted soldier assumed the role of adviser to the Chief of Staff on all issues pertaining to the enlisted force. Even after almost forty years, not much has changed. The Sergeant Major of the Army continues to advise the Chief of Staff on all enlisted matters, including quality of life and pay concerns.

The establishment of the SMA position in 1966 reflected the importance then of soldier-related issues in the Army, and that emphasis continues today. I see myself as a scout for the Chief of Staff and Secretary of the Army.

My charge is to share with the enlisted corps concerns that are being worked on at the Army level and to bring back to the Pentagon matters affecting soldiers and their families.

Offices and titles are essential in any large institution, but ultimately people are the key to an organization's success; the Office of the Sergeant Major of the Army is no exception. The noncommissioned officers chosen to be Sergeants Major of the Army have been individuals who not only have had extraordinary careers, but who have demonstrated exceptional dedication to the welfare of their fellow soldiers. This commitment makes them truly effective advocates and spokesmen on enlisted-related issues.

The careers and life stories of the men who have served as Sergeants Major of the Army are both inspirational and instructive because through them we gain an appreciation for not just the SMAs themselves, but for all the enlisted men and women who over the past two-and-a-half centuries have worked, fought, and sacrificed to make the U.S. Army the finest military organization in the world. As we continue to transform the Army to meet the challenges of the next twenty years, it is always appropriate to look back and learn from our history.

RAYMOND F. CHANDLER III
Fourteenth Sergeant Major of the Army

Preface

The Sergeant Major of the Army (SMA) is the premier noncommissioned officer (NCO) of the United States Army and serves as one of the nation's senior soldiers. The office of Sergeant Major of the Army has evolved into a position of great influence and responsibility, largely as a result of the hard work and exemplary service of the soldiers who have occupied the post.

The Sergeants Major of the Army is an important volume in the official history of the United States Army. The first part of this book describes the origin and growth of the Office of the Sergeant Major of the Army. It explains why some saw a need for such an office and tells who supported it in its infancy, who made it work, and why it has succeeded as well as it has.

The second part is a collection of biographical essays that document the personal and professional lives of the soldiers who have occupied this important post. Through these sections, the reader gains insight into the character and motivations of the select group of soldiers who became the Sergeants Major of the Army. Many SMAs came from humble origins, joined the military to serve their country and see the world, and only gradually decided to make the Army their career. Some fought the Germans in World War II. Others saw combat in such diverse locations as Korea, Vietnam, and the Persian Gulf. All experienced the joys and heartaches of being an ordinary soldier, and over the years all were deeply affected by the men and women with whom they served. Each has used these lessons to help shape the Army.

This essay describes the family life and early career of these exceptional soldiers and highlights the events that molded their points of view and drove their desire to build a better Army. With this perspective in mind, the second half of each biographical chapter examines the achievements of each Sergeant Major of the Army. Lists of duty assignments and decorations are at the end of each chapter. In addition, further readings and an appendix that outlines the Presidents, Secretaries of the Army, and Chiefs of Staff under whom the respective Sergeants Major served provides context and framework.

The history of the Sergeants Major of the Army is more than just an account of bureaucratic institutions and the men that led them. It is also a story of the NCO Corps as a whole. The Army created the Office of the Sergeant Major in part because of important shifts in the nature, structure, and responsibilities of NCOs. During the course of their careers, the SMAs experienced these changes firsthand. They, in turn, helped shape the future of the NCO Corps.

Finally, the history of the Sergeants Major of the Army is a story of the Army itself. The Army has experienced extraordinary and diverse challenges over the past half-century. Interspersed between repeated cycles of war and peace, mobilization and downsizing, have been such momentous developments as the end of the draft, the establishment of the volunteer Army, and the unrelenting advance of technology. Each Sergeant Major of the Army faced these and other potential barriers, as did the dedicated corps of noncommissioned

officers that makes the Army work. The cadre's trials and triumphs underscore those of the entire Army. Thus this book gives today's soldiers a useful perspective from which to appreciate the past. This past undoubtedly

will shape the Army's future, as the Army once again endeavors to transform itself into an even more effective institution with which to serve the American people in both peace and war.

ROBERT J. DALESSANDRO
Chief of Military History

Acknowledgments

This book is the third edition of a U.S. Army Center of Military History (CMH) publication originally produced in 1995. Each edition adds another chapter to the proud history of the Office of the Sergeant Major of the Army. Several people contributed to the writing of the 1995 volume. Maj. Glen Hawkins wrote Part I, which recounts the history of the office. When Hawkins retired, Maj. Michael Kelly took on the project, coordinating interviews and writing three of the biographical chapters. Upon Major Kelly's retirement, Maj. Preston Pierce, an Individual Mobilization Augmentee, authored another three biographies. Finally, Maj. Mark Gillespie wrote two sections and guided the project to publication.

Others outside the Center contributed greatly to the first edition. Sgt. Maj. (Ret.) Erwin Koehler interviewed seven of the eight former Sergeants Major of the Army for the book. His questions form the basis of the individual essays. Sergeant Major of the Army William O. Wooldridge's section is a composite of an earlier interview and published remarks in various Army journals. Both Sergeant Major of the Army Richard A. Kidd and Army Chief of Staff General Gordon R. Sullivan provided wholehearted support for this project. Without their generous assistance,

the first edition of this book could not have been published.

A number of individuals deserve recognition for their important contributions to the book's second edition, published in 2003. Command Sergeant Major Daniel K. Elder revised and expanded the volume, writing new chapters on the men who served as SMAs from 1995 to 2002. Dr. Andrew J. Birtle of CMH provided valuable advice and assistance during the project's research and writing.

In 2011, I was assigned to revise and expand the book, to include writing a new chapter on the career of Sergeant Major of the Army Kenneth O. Preston. Many people assisted me in this endeavor, a few of whom deserve special mention. Stephen J. Lofgren, chief of CMH's Historical Support Branch, served as a patient adviser and editor. Dr. Robert D. Bouilly, the historian for the U.S. Army Sergeants Major Academy, provided much-needed research material. I am grateful to the Chief of Military History, Robert J. Dalessandro; Chief Historian Dr. Richard W. Stewart; and Dr. Joel D. Meyerson, chief of the Histories Division at the time, for entrusting me with this project. Also I want to acknowledge the individuals involved in the production of this volume: Beth F. MacKenzie, chief of CMH's Historical Products Branch; Diane Sedore Arms, editor; and Gene Snyder, graphic designer.

ROBERT M. MAGES
General Editor

Preface to the First Edition

This history of the Sergeants Major of the Army fills a long-standing gap in the history of the United States Army. The Army's noncommissioned officer corps has always stood proudly in the front ranks to serve the nation in war and peace, in good times and bad. For too long, though, this selfless service has passed unnoticed. In one sense the lack of recognition of the NCO is a testimony to his or her professional dedication and sense of duty. The NCO was always there when needed. The NCO always did what was needed. And the NCO was all too often taken for granted.

The advent of high technology warfare placed new demands on all ranks, perhaps none more so than NCOs. Not only did they have to train soldiers, they had to learn along with their squads, platoons, companies, and battalions as the U.S. Army adapted its doctrine and war-fighting to meet the demands of the twenty-first century. Yet many of the Sergeants Major of the Army cut their teeth during World War II. They served in Korea and Vietnam during hot wars and everywhere from Germany to Indonesia during cold wars.

Their stories are the centerpiece of this book. None enlisted or was drafted with the promise of becoming a future Sergeant Major of the Army. None received special treatment. Some left the Army only to reenlist later. Others thought about leaving the Army. But each one of them made the Army his career and reached the top of his profession. Again and again they credit an NCO who impressed them in basic training and became a role model for them. They speak of the bygone massive Army of World War II, of the Army at war in frozen

Korea and sweltering Vietnam, of the all-volunteer Army, of the garrison and post Army, but most importantly they speak of, for, and to the men and women of the Army.

The first part of this book describes the origin and growth of the Office of the Sergeant Major of the Army (OSMA). It explains why someone saw a need for such an office and tells who supported it, who made it work, and why it succeeded so well. Each Sergeant Major of the Army made lasting contributions to the office during his tenure. The sections on individual SMAs uncover their motivations, goals, and accomplishments. About half of each section is a general account of the respective Sergeant Major's service. The other half focuses on his role as Sergeant Major of the Army. The insights and perspectives of the Sergeants Major of the Army come from years of experience, training, professional development, and individual dedication to the Army. At the end of each section is a chronological list of each SMA's duty assignments. The appendix to this book gives a table showing the Presidents, Secretaries of the Army, and Chiefs of Staff under whom the respective Sergeants Major served.

The project was initially beset by changing organizational parameters and/or lack of author continuity. However, in 1992 Col. Fred Van Horn, then commandant of the Sergeants Major Academy, approached Brig. Gen. Harold Nelson, the chief of military history at that time, about reviving the long dormant project. Since then, under the direction of professional historians, four officers share the credit for compiling and writing this volume. Maj. Glen Hawkins began the work, organized the concept, and wrote the

section on the history of the OSMA. Without Major Hawkins' dedication and hard work, the project might again have been delayed. When Hawkins retired, Maj. Michael Kelly took over the project. Major Kelly worked tirelessly to coordinate interviews, administer various details, and write three of the essays. When Major Kelly retired, Maj. Preston Pierce, an individual mobilization augmentee, assumed the project and authored another three sections. Finally, Maj. Mark Gillespie completed the book. He wrote two sections, interviewed Sgt. Maj. of the Army Richard A. Kidd, and saw the work through to publication. Each officer deserves much credit—had any one of them faltered, this book would not have been published.

Sgt. Maj. (Ret.) Erwin Koehler interviewed seven of the eight former Sergeants Major of the Army for this book. His questions form the basis of the individual essays. Sergeant Major Wooldridge's section is a composite of an earlier interview and published remarks in various Army journals. Both Sergeant Major of the Army Kidd and the Army Chief of Staff, General Gordon R. Sullivan, provided whole-

hearted support for this project. Without their generous assistance, this book could not have been published.

A number of individuals at the U.S. Army Center of Military History deserve recognition for their important contributions to this work. Dr. Jeffrey Clarke, chief historian, served as a rigorous and exacting reader; John W. Elsberg, editor in chief, directed the publication of this book; Catherine A. Heerin and Diane M. Donovan edited the manuscript into its final form; John Birmingham designed and electronically produced the pages; and Dr. Lawrence M. Kaplan of the Military Studies Branch helped revise a number of draft chapters of the manuscript.

This book tells the story of more than the Sergeants Major of the Army. It tells about the NCO in the Army. It gives today's soldiers and NCOs a perspective from the past on the Army's future path. The views expressed in this publication are those of the respective Sergeants Major of the Army and do not reflect the official policy or position of the Department of the Army, the Department of Defense, or the U.S. government.

EDWARD J. DREA
Chief, Research and
Analysis Division

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Part I

The Office of the Sergeant Major of the Army



Steuben at Valley Forge, Edwin Austin Abbey

The sergeant major, being at the head of the non-commissioned officers, must pay the greatest attention to their conduct and behavior...He should be well acquainted with the...discipline of the regiment, and...the manner of keeping rosters and forming details. He must always attend the parade, be very expert in counting off the battalion and in every other business of the adjutant...

—Friedrich W. A. von Steuben, *Regulations for the Order and Discipline of the Troops of the United States*, 1794

The Office of the Sergeant Major of the Army

One of the most important office locations in our nation's capital is the Pentagon's "E Ring," or outer hallway. There lie the offices of the most powerful civilian and military leaders in the defense establishment, as well as their key advisers and critical subordinates. The Sergeant Major of the Army (SMA) occupies Room 3E677, just across the hall from the Chief of Staff of the Army (CSA). Here, the Army's top noncommissioned officer, with the assistance of a small personal staff, performs his duties and fulfills his responsibilities as a principal adviser to the CSA.

The SMA is the chief's expert in all matters concerning the enlisted force. He is not only an ombudsman for Army enlisted personnel but, as a member of various boards and committees, also

directly influences policies whose effects ripple throughout the Army. The SMA listens to the complaints and comments of enlisted men and women as someone who has been where they are, considers the impact of policy decisions from their perspective, carries their views and voices their concerns to the decision makers in the Pentagon, and focuses solely on their interests without being pulled or driven by other staff considerations. As such, he serves as a direct and personal communication line from the soldiers in the field to the CSA and senior staff officers. The Sergeant Major of the Army's job is to comment on the enlisted Army, carrying to the chief all the news, good and bad, regarding the state of the enlisted force based on his experience.

Office of the Sergeant Major of the Army at the Pentagon



For the noncommissioned officer corps, the Sergeant Major of the Army also serves as a role model for the youngest corporal as well as the most senior command sergeant major (CSM). Providing career inspiration by example, he motivates soldiers to professional accomplishments and feats of excellence they might otherwise not achieve. The very existence of the Office of the Sergeant Major of the Army (OSMA) supports and validates the position of the Noncommissioned Officer Corps as professional—worthy of special respect for commitment, expertise, dedication, and sacrifice in service to the nation.

It seems natural, even logical, that we should have an Office of the Sergeant Major of the Army, as the pinnacle of achievement for a distinguished enlisted career, with a prestigious location in the Pentagon and ready access to the senior commissioned officer of the Army. After all, this position reflects the situation at many lower levels of command, beginning with battalions, where the sergeant major is the senior enlisted soldier who serves and advises the organization commander in the myriad issues affecting enlisted soldiers. Before 1966, however, the Army Staff had not specifically designated anyone to represent the views of the enlisted Army. There was no one to visit soldiers worldwide, listen to what they had to say, and take the message back to the highest echelons of the Army Staff. No one directly presented the enlisted perspective to the highest levels of Army leadership. No one had as his or her primary duty the advocacy for the interests and concerns of the enlisted ranks. Nor was there anyone to act as a distinct, highly visible role model to noncommissioned officers Army-wide. The establishment of the OSMA is rooted in the history of the NCO Corps, the rank of sergeant major, and the increasing professionalism within the Army over the years.

The Sergeant Major

The title of sergeant major evokes many images: the steady, courageous leader whose very presence calms and settles his troops on the

eve of battle; the articulate, demanding senior NCO of the battalion who accepts only the highest standards of appearance, performance, and training; the experienced senior leader who always seems to have the answer or knows where to get it; and the ever-present representative of higher-level commanders whose ability to communicate directly with line troops is so often taken for granted.

The roots of the sergeant major rank extend far back into history. As early as the sixteenth century the English Army had sergeants major. The title disappeared for a time, but after its reintroduction in the eighteenth century the rank of sergeant major became associated with respect, power, and responsibility. Sergeants major directly commanded troops and saw to the drill, discipline, and administration of their regiments.¹ Such individuals usually boasted years of experience in service around the world, a familiarity with all aspects of Army life, acquisition of command presence, and a demonstrated ability to lead troops in battle. As a group, they greatly influenced the lives of the enlisted soldiers under them.

The U.S. Army first established the rank of sergeant major during the Revolutionary War. Baron Frederick William von Steuben, a Prussian volunteer, spelled out the duties and instructions for the rank in his *Regulations for the Order and Discipline of the Troops of the United States* (1779). The regulations, covering all aspects of infantry duties and conduct, stressed NCO responsibility for care, discipline, and training of the troops in garrison and in the field. Von Steuben, as the man responsible for training the fledgling American Army, placed the sergeant major at the head of all NCOs, making him responsible for their conduct.

During the next 150 years the number and placement of sergeants major changed, but generally they were authorized in various branches at battalion level and above. In June 1920, however, a cost-conscious Congress grouped all enlisted soldiers into seven pay grades (E-1 through E-7) without regard to job or specialty. In the process, the position of sergeant major

was eliminated, and master sergeant (“enlisted man of the first grade”) became the highest NCO rank. For the next thirty-eight years the formal rank of sergeant major thus disappeared, with the position normally filled by the senior master sergeant in the organization. Finally, in June 1958 Congress made the first basic change to the enlisted grade structure since 1920. It authorized two new grades: first sergeant/master sergeant (E-8) and sergeant major (E-9). The grade of sergeant major ultimately returned as the highest level of enlisted service; in April 1959 the first NCOs were promoted into the newly reestablished rank.²

Sergeant Major of the Army: Origins

American noncommissioned officers have usually thought of themselves as professional soldiers because their skills are not easily acquired, and they share a sense of identity as leaders and trainers of the enlisted ranks. For a variety of reasons, influenced by American military and political traditions and the patterns of our national history, both the public and the Army leadership have been slow to recognize that professionalism.

Customarily, at the end of a war Congress has cut defense forces to the bone. The late nineteenth century and the 1930s were particularly painful examples of this trend. Each time this occurred, the NCO Corps suffered: The nation dismissed its wartime skills as useless; some of its most experienced members left or were forced out of the service; its status was lowered; and its pay was cut. In addition to being ignored during peacetime, the Noncommissioned Officer Corps often became the repository for excess officers during demobilization. Time and again the NCOs were reminded that their status as career soldiers meant little.³

Even with the advent of the Cold War (1947–1989), the American people were slow to recognize the need for a continuing, adequately paid force to meet ever-present threats to their security. In fact, it was five years after the

Korean War (1950–1953) that Congress took the significant step of passing the Military Pay Bill of 1958, which created the E-8 and E-9 pay grades. Still, the financial and personnel pressures of a large standing Army stretched to every corner of the globe made it extremely difficult to meet the personal needs and morale requirements of the enlisted soldiers. By the late 1960s, Army leadership was beginning to realize that something beyond traditional methods and measures was necessary to bolster troop morale and increase the attractiveness of enlisted career opportunities.

In January 1963 *Army* magazine published “Sergeant Major at the Top,” which highlighted Sgt. Maj. George E. Loikow, the administrative sergeant major for Army Chief of Staff General Earle G. Wheeler.⁴ In the article, Loikow suggested having a sergeant major serve the Chief of Staff in a manner “similar to what a unit sergeant major provides his commander.” He observed that whenever he accompanied Wheeler on visits to Army installations he was always warmly received by all ranks as the “Army’s Sergeant Major.” Though the title was not official, Loikow believed that his presence during these trips had a positive effect on enlisted pride and morale and enabled him to read the “pulse” of the enlisted man.⁵ Noting the creation of the position of sergeant major of the Marine Corps in May 1957, Loikow recommended to both Wheeler and his successor, General Harold K. Johnson, that the Army formally establish the position of Sergeant Major of the Army.⁶

Loikow’s proposal received a boost during the 1964 Personnel Sergeants Major Conference when, at the urging of the Sergeant Major of the U.S. Army, Pacific (USARPAC), Sgt. Maj. Francis J. Bennett, a council of sergeants major endorsed the creation of the Sergeant Major of the Army.⁷ Based on this recommendation, the Office of Personnel Operations (OPO), Deputy Chief of Staff for Personnel (DCSPER), began to study the idea. Detailed planning began with a series of troop studies followed by a gathering of sergeants major from throughout the Army.

In October 1965, the Council of Sergeants Major, under Bennett's prompting, once again endorsed the proposal. Bennett argued that the creation of a Sergeant Major of the Army would help senior leaders keep in touch with the cares and concerns of the average soldier, promote confidence within the enlisted ranks, and increase prestige, operating effectiveness, and career incentives for senior enlisted personnel. The OPO ultimately agreed, and two weeks after the 1965 conference it officially recommended establishing the new office.⁸ Chief of Staff Johnson also liked the idea, stating that if "we were going to talk about the noncommissioned officers being the backbone of the Army there ought to be established a position that recognizes that this was in fact the case."⁹

There were, however, some issues that needed to be addressed. One of Johnson's concerns was the precise authority to be vested in the office. The SMA, as with sergeants major at any echelon, would not have any legal responsibilities or precisely defined roles. Without legal responsibility, General Johnson observed, you could not "provide the position with much authority." On the other hand, a "sort of de facto responsibility" would arise from the position, as well as "an assumed authority." This authority derived from the nature of the office and from the leadership and personality of the man occupying that office. Subordinates "would see [in the SMA] someone of substantial stature and consequently substantial authority." In other words, their perceptions and expectations provided his authority. This meant that the individual who became the Army's top NCO had to be a thoroughly experienced, energetic professional who would tend to take action on his own initiative as opportunities presented themselves. In this respect, establishing a tradition of activist sergeants major would be more important than any regulatory authority. Their actions and demeanor would enhance the office's authority even more.

The expected dynamic role of the SMA appointees created a second concern. As the post would be an advisory position, not an alternate or parallel chain of command, the SMA



Army Chief of Staff General Harold K. Johnson at His Desk at the Pentagon, 1967

would have to exercise great care to establish proper working relationships between his office and various Army staffs and agencies such as the OPO. In a broader sense, relations with the DCSPER, normally a three-star general, were even more critical.

The DCSPER was concerned that the SMA's office might interfere in the assignment function by creating an "old boy network" to circumvent DCSPER's decisions by arranging assignments and transfers outside of normal Army channels. To address this concern, General Johnson required every request for transfer received by the SMA's office to be handled only through DCSPER rather than, for example, through the Chief of Staff's office. General Johnson intended the Sergeant Major of the Army, like the sergeants major in units Army-wide, to remain an adviser and not to become an operator as many in OPO feared. "We created," General Johnson noted some years later, "what might, for want of a better term, be called an ombudsman. He was a spokesman at the highest echelons of the uniformed side of the Army...to provide a recognition for the enlisted ranks of the Army."¹⁰

In 1966, while addressing the first major command Sergeants Major Conference in Washington, D.C., General Johnson confronted the issue of a “dual chain of command,” cautioning the Army’s senior sergeants major against such a development. “You have to be careful now,” he warned, “that in this sergeants major chain you are not establishing some kind of an end run position, because this, if it ever developed and if it were then ever identified, would be the very quickest way to just torpedo the whole program.”¹¹ Fortunately, it never happened.

Having decided to create the office, General Johnson then had to choose the man who would be the first Sergeant Major of the Army. He wrote a letter to each of the major commands describing his goals for the new office and soliciting suitable nominations for the position. All responded, and General Johnson’s personal staff placed the names in a matrix of different qualities and characteristics on a large spreadsheet. After he reviewed them, his staff went back to the commands to obtain further information, to make additional checks, or to inquire about certain individuals. Although DCSPER was consulted “a little bit,” as Johnson put it, the Chief of Staff and his aides would make the decision. “There was,” said Johnson, “a good bit of exchange between [members of] my personal staff...people that you call aides normally.”¹²

Of the twenty-one nominees, only one was then serving in Vietnam, the single major command with American soldiers in combat during 1966. On some of his visits, General Johnson had seen Sgt. Maj. William O. Wooldridge of the 1st Infantry Division and considered him “a fine figure of a man.” Sergeant Major Wooldridge, a 43-year-old soldier with twenty-five years’ service, had spent sixteen years overseas. A veteran of World War II and Vietnam, he had been awarded the Silver Star with Oak Leaf Cluster and the Legion of Merit with Oak Leaf Cluster, among others.

Although Wooldridge had had brushes with authorities early in his career, the Chief of Staff attributed them to the “exuberance of youth” and considered them an experience factor not neces-

sarily incompatible with the responsibilities of the new position. Also, Johnson firmly believed that “once a man had paid the price you don’t forever hold him to account...particularly where subsequent service has been exceptional in nature and so recognized.”¹³

The decision was made. Wooldridge was General Johnson’s man. Still, because of the great need that the first Sergeant Major of the Army be completely above reproach, the chief instructed his staff to make a thorough review of Wooldridge’s background. General Johnson wanted an individual whom “we can respect throughout the entire time he holds the position.”¹⁴ The extra efforts produced no new information. Although General Johnson later learned that there had been some ongoing investigations in Europe, the allegations later proved groundless.¹⁵

The First Sergeant Major of the Army

General Orders No. 29, dated 4 July 1966, officially established the SMA position, with tenure for the office corresponding to the tenure of the Chief of Staff he served. That same day General Johnson publicly announced the creation of the office.

On 11 July 1966, Johnson administered the oath of office, officially making Sergeant Major Wooldridge the first Sergeant Major of the Army. Since no special rank insignia had yet been developed, Johnson and Mrs. Wooldridge affixed a specially designed collar insignia to the sergeant major’s uniform. This new badge of office, improvised by Johnson’s special projects officer, Col. Jasper J. Wilson, and approved on 4 July 1966, was devised by soldering the shield (minus the eagle) from the insignia of the aide to the Chief of Staff to a standard enlisted brass disk.¹⁶ The Sergeant Major of the Army was to wear a pair of these insignia in place of the branch and U.S. insignia normally worn by enlisted men. It would not be until the fall of 1978 that the Army would adopt a distinctive insignia of rank for the office.



General Johnson Administers the Oath to William O. Wooldridge on 11 July 1966 on the Pentagon Mall.

Sergeant Major Wooldridge assumed his duties in an environment of upheaval and uncertainty. Little could anyone know that the Army was about to face some of the gravest challenges to leadership in its entire history. Years later, in 1984, renowned historian Russell Weigley would assert that “no years since the foundation of the Army have matched the turbulence and the uncertainty of purpose of the time since 1967.”¹⁷ For example, in mid-May 1966, just before Wooldridge assumed his duties, the draft failed to acquire enough soldiers who met the Army’s physical and mental standards. Consequently, Secretary of Defense Robert S. McNamara announced Project 100,000, allowing inductees with heretofore disqualifying Armed Forces Qualification Test scores to enter the Army. The decision obviously affected the overall quality of the force, necessitating more time for recruits to master Army skills and increasing the demands on NCO leadership.¹⁸

The need to sustain and expand the Army without mobilizing a reserve component also put a heavy strain on the Noncommissioned Officer Corps. In Vietnam and elsewhere, combat casualties and noncombat losses already had begun

stretching thin the Army’s mid-level NCO officer grades. Promotions to staff sergeant and platoon sergeant came more rapidly than normal, resulting in inexperienced and less mature leadership. The problems of inexperience intensified in June 1967 when, to meet critical shortages, the Army began depending heavily on a wartime expedient of hastily trained junior noncommissioned officers, derisively called “shake and bake” NCOs, who often lacked the experience and judgment gained from the years such men would normally spend in the junior enlisted ranks.¹⁹

In addition, the Vietnam War grew increasingly unpopular at home and within the Army itself. With many Army draftees questioning both the purpose and conduct of the conflict, a polarization grew between the junior enlisted men (E-1 to E-5) and the professional noncommissioned officers.²⁰ Even in the latter ranks many began to question the need for repeated tours in Vietnam and to reflect the frustration with the perceived absence of any clear objectives.

While the Vietnam War raged, the U.S. armed forces also continued to shoulder the major military burdens of the Cold War for the entire free world. In the United States and Europe, the chronic shortage of experienced NCOs soon forced company grade officers to deal directly with enlisted men. When the available NCOs were bypassed, their roles as small-



Badge Designed
by Col. Jasper J. Wilson

unit leaders eroded. The morale of the Noncommissioned Officer Corps plummeted at a time when the Army most needed their skills and strengths. From 1968 to the mid-1970s, junior officer and NCO leadership was a great concern to the senior Army leaders. Years later, Wooldridge himself generalized that one of the greatest challenges facing the Army during his tenure was “poor officer and NCO leadership.” Both the prestige of the Noncommissioned Officer Corps and expectations of what it could and should do needed major improvement.

In this environment, Sergeant Major Wooldridge energetically assumed his duties. As the first person to hold the office, he faced the awkward and difficult challenges of establishing ground rules and setting precedents for future SMAs. He had no example to look back upon for guidance. There was no predecessor with whom he could consult. By his own account, the greatest challenge that General Johnson’s appointment presented him was thus the establishment of the position itself.²¹ In this effort, he had only his years of military experience and the personal confidence of General Johnson to guide him.

General Johnson’s original letter seeking SMA nominations had devoted a full page to the duties and functions of the office. But when Sergeant Major Wooldridge reported for duty, Johnson provided him with no more than an informal note card on which the following tasks were typed:

Will identify problems affecting enlisted personnel and recommend appropriate solutions. He will advise on the initiation of and content of plans for the professional education, growth, and advancement of noncommissioned officers, individually and collectively. He will advise the Chief of Staff on all matters pertaining primarily to enlisted personnel, including but not limited to morale, welfare, training, clothing, insignia, equipment, pay and allowances, customs and courtesies of the service, enlistment and reenlistment, discipline and promotion policies. He will be available to provide advice to any board or commission dealing with enlisted personnel matters.

Wooldridge folded the card and carried it in his wallet. Those were the only written instructions he received during his tenure.²² With his

own staff—a Women’s Army Corps secretary and a sergeant first class—Wooldridge went to work as General Johnson’s senior enlisted adviser and consultant on all matters concerning enlisted personnel. When Johnson told him, “We’ll give you a couple of weeks for the honors and ceremonies and then you can put on your fatigues and get to work,” he meant it. In the remaining days of July after the swearing-in ceremonies, Wooldridge and his staff handled about three hundred disparate inquiries as they slowly began to define the new post.²³

During his first six months Wooldridge had an intensive schedule of planned activities, as the Army touted and publicized the newly created position, with an emphasis on visits to build rapport with troops in the field. He made weekly trips to Army posts and hospitals in the United States and spent Christmas with Army units in Vietnam. At the end of his first year in office he had traveled nearly 160,000 miles, visited twenty-five continental United States (CONUS) installations, and made four trips to Vietnam and two to Europe. In the course of those trips he also went to Korea, Thailand, and Hawaii. He visited with individual soldiers, observed their training and combat operations, and met with their senior enlisted leaders to discuss various areas affecting morale and welfare. Back in his Pentagon office (whenever he was there—he was in the field 50 percent of the time) he averaged 300 letters, 50 visitors, and 250 phone calls each month.²⁴

About three months after becoming Sergeant Major of the Army, Wooldridge began to clarify what he wanted to accomplish. One item was *not* on his list. Echoing the admonitions of General Johnson, he was determined to avoid having his position in any way become a substitute for the chain of command. “I was not brought to Washington as a one-man replacement for the platoon sergeants, first sergeants, and unit sergeants major. Nothing that the Sergeant Major of the Army is slated to do will in any way take the place of the traditional responsibilities of these non-commissioned officers as the leaders closest to

the individual soldier and the leaders responsible to unit commanders.”²⁵

His first priority was to develop a more regular information-gathering system upon which to base future plans and recommendations. As a start, he wanted an annual Command Sergeants Major Conference to serve as a sounding board for ideas from all elements of the Army. In addition, Wooldridge planned to meet with noncommissioned officers in other forums, such as the annual conference of the Association of the United States Army (AUSA), and to broaden his contacts among the retired and reserve component NCO community. Johnson approved both initiatives.

Wooldridge’s second major area of concern was the enlisted insignia system. Like everyone else, he had developed some pretty clear ideas regarding the matter during his years as a soldier. He wanted to combine them with the opinions of other enlisted soldiers and make some concrete recommendations for change.

Third, Wooldridge wanted to use his office to assist soldiers with personal and family problems. He intended to establish close contact with service and civilian organizations that extended aid to men in need, such as the Army Emergency Relief and the American Red Cross, as well as with other agencies that focused on nonemergency morale support, such as the United Services Organization, the Army Special Services, and various veterans’ organizations. He believed that the conditions imposed by the ongoing war in Vietnam made such initiatives imperative.

Finally, he intended to participate and advise Army boards and commissions that had a direct bearing on the enlisted force. To be of assistance in this capacity, he planned to reinforce his twenty-five years of experience with frequent visits to soldiers in the field during which he could focus on the topics under discussion at higher levels.²⁶

Wooldridge often traveled with the Chief of Staff. Normally, the new SMA would convey the chief’s greeting to the enlisted personnel of the units they visited and sound out noncommis-

sioned officers and enlisted men on matters that were troubling them. Johnson observed: “Lots of times the problems didn’t make their way up [the chain of command] as rapidly or as clearly as they might. Sometimes you thought you had a problem on your hands and you didn’t, and other times you thought everything was fine and it wasn’t.”²⁷ The job of the SMA was to cut through those types of problems. Wooldridge also traveled with President Lyndon B. Johnson, both men undoubtedly hoping that the unique prestige and prominence of the other’s position would reflect on his own. Press relations, or “PR,” was important to the new SMA office from the beginning.

Very quickly, however, the Chief of Staff realized that tying Wooldridge’s travel too closely to his own was somewhat self-defeating. Since the Sergeant Major of the Army’s office was created to provide another avenue of communication with the troops, General Johnson deemed it valuable to differentiate their itineraries to the field. The Sergeant Major of the Army thus received wide latitude in establishing his own travel schedule, with the chief approving where he went on a personal, informal basis.²⁸

Soon Sergeant Major Wooldridge had blanket travel orders with complete freedom to visit where he thought fit without checking with anyone. He quickly developed an effective routine. After arriving at a base and paying a short courtesy call to the commander, he spent most of his time visiting mess halls, supply rooms, and other areas of the installation accompanied by the post sergeant major. Later they visited training venues and often had a social function in the evening. At training posts, the SMA spent the entire day with the trainees, eating with them, firing on the range with them, or participating in their training. Whether at a divisional or a training post, whether observing training or attending a social function, he talked to the soldiers and the noncommissioned officers to find out what was on their minds so he could carry the message back to the Army Chief of Staff.²⁹

It was not long before the enlisted soldiers knew not only that the Sergeant Major of the Army existed, but also precisely what he was supposed to do. One day Wooldridge received a letter from a young private serving in Europe. The young man began: "I understand you are my representative at the Department of the Army. Here is my problem and I want you to please do something about it." Before Wooldridge's staff could get out a reply, he received another letter from the same young soldier that read, "I wrote to you yesterday about my problem and I haven't heard anything yet. I want to know what you are doing about it."³⁰ Although he could not act as swiftly as the impatient soldier in Europe wanted, the Sergeant Major of the Army, as the advocate for the enlisted soldier with unfettered access to the chief, was certainly able to provide previously unavailable assistance and service.

Sergeant Major Wooldridge experienced an incident that well illustrated another important role of the Sergeant Major of the Army. He received a call from Florida Congressman Charles E. Bennett on 18 December. One of the congressman's constituents had a son serving in the 8th Infantry Division in Europe. Although the young man was supposed to be home for Christmas, he had been "bumped off" the Military Airlift Command plane at Frankfurt by a higher-priority passenger. Was there anything Wooldridge could do? Wooldridge immediately called Sgt. Maj. Ken Koon of U.S. Army, Europe, in Heidelberg, Germany, requesting that he pick up the soldier and put him on a plane for the United States as soon as possible. The next day Sergeant Major Koon called from the Frankfurt airport to inform Wooldridge that the plane with the soldier on it had just taken off. The soldier made it home by Christmas to spend the holiday with his family, and the Army had gained the goodwill of all concerned.

When General Johnson learned of the incident, he was pleased. The task of the SMA office, he acknowledged, was to take advantage of the informal chain of communication that

sergeants major have at their disposal. Wooldridge himself later wryly noted that if they had had to rely on the normal bureaucratic channels, "that soldier would have been lucky to be home by New Year's."³¹

General Orders No. 29, which had established the position of Sergeant Major of the Army, set the tenure of the office to correspond to that of the Chief of Staff whom he serves. When General Johnson relinquished his duties on 2 July 1968, after four years as the Army Chief of Staff, it was time to find a replacement for Wooldridge, even though he had been in the position only two years and, in the judgment of General Johnson, had done a "splendid job."³² The new Chief of Staff, General William C. Westmoreland, asked Wooldridge to stay on as Sergeant Major of the Army. However, because of his desire to return to Vietnam and the understanding he had with General Johnson that they would both depart at the same time, Wooldridge declined the offer. He did, however, remain in office until August to provide continuity for the incoming Chief of Staff.³³

Although he had served as Sergeant Major of the Army for just over two years, Wooldridge still had made many significant accomplishments. Perhaps his greatest was to fulfill the single mission that General Johnson had given him: to establish the Office of Sergeant Major of the Army. He and General Johnson had laid the foundation for how future SMAs would work with their Chiefs of Staff. They had carved out a highly visible position on the chief's personal staff with easy, direct access to the Army's top soldier. His presence with the chief on inspection trips enhanced the SMA's prestige and signaled the importance the Army placed on the senior representative of enlisted personnel. By setting his own schedule and traveling widely, Wooldridge had provided the "eyes and ears," the informal, direct communication link to the soldiers in the field that General Johnson had envisioned. He had established invaluable relationships with various staff agencies in the Pentagon to coordinate on matters related to enlisted personnel. Just as important,



Attendees of the First Command Sergeants Major Conference, November 1966

he had gained the trust and confidence of the enlisted ranks. Consequently, most senior non-commissioned officers regarded the creation of the Office of Sergeant Major of the Army as “one of the finest things that had happened to the noncommissioned officer corps in recent memory.”³⁴

If establishing the Office of the Sergeant Major of the Army was Wooldridge’s premier accomplishment, it was not his only one. He also established the annual Major Command Sergeants Major Conference. Soon after taking office in July 1966, Wooldridge had recommended that sergeants major of the major commands accompany their respective commanders to the annual Army Commanders’ Conference in Washington, D.C. This would give Wooldridge the opportunity to discuss matters related to enlisted personnel with the sergeants major concurrent with the commanders’ meeting. General Johnson agreed, and in November 1966 twenty-one sergeants major from commands around the world met at the first annual major command Sergeants Major Conference. As yet another vehicle for soliciting the enlisted viewpoint directly from

the field, the conference proved extremely useful and has continued to the present.³⁵

From the sergeants major conferences in 1966 and 1967 came proposals to change virtually every area affecting enlisted soldiers, especially specific recommendations to improve professionalism and career opportunities within the enlisted force. Among the approved recommendations was a centralized system, put into effect in 1969, for temporary promotions to the top two NCO grades. The new system generally reflected the one used to promote officers to field grade rank: Promotion no longer required a position vacancy in an individual’s current unit of assignment. The result was a more equitable and uniform procedure for selection and promotion to master sergeant and sergeant major. Also, for the first time in Army history, selections and orders for the senior NCOs would be prepared at the Department of the Army level. Wooldridge considered this reform, along with centralized assignments, one of the greatest Army accomplishments during his tenure “because it broke up the old unit promotion system, opening up vacancies in the Army for all eligible NCOs.”³⁶

It also went far to eliminate the necessity for an NCO to be at the right place at the right time to be promoted.

The conference recommendations prompted other changes. One was an Army-wide standardized promotion scoring system, which allowed competing enlisted personnel to compare their individual standings with those of their peers. Another was a standardized enlisted insignia of grade as well as an authorized miniature pin-on insignia of rank for fatigues and other utility uniforms. The latter, perhaps insignificant to outsiders, eliminated the tedium of sewing stripe changes onto multiple uniforms. Based on other conference recommendations, the Army also upgraded the company clerk position from E-4 to E-5, allowing more experienced personnel in the orderly rooms and cutting down on frequent personnel turnovers.

Such reforms succeeded because the Sergeant Major of the Army supported them. With his higher profile, he articulated the concerns of the enlisted ranks and surfaced the issues that the rank and file deemed worthy of consideration by various Army staff agencies.³⁷

A third accomplishment during SMA Wooldridge's tenure was the establishment of the command sergeant major (CSM) rank, which he later called "the single most significant item to evolve from my term."³⁸ The issue had its roots in the Army's longstanding concern about the low prestige of its senior noncommissioned officers. The Military Pay Act of 1958 had established the grades of E-8 and E-9, an important step in improving the situation. The same concern had led General Johnson to establish the Office of Sergeant Major of the Army. Likewise, "greater prestige for the senior noncommissioned officer was the basis for...the establishment of the Command Sergeants Major program."³⁹

The Army took a tentative step toward giving additional recognition to unit sergeants major in 1965, when it proposed new insignia to better distinguish between sergeants major of a command and other E-9s, such as those in staff positions. According to the plan developed by

the chief of Personnel Operations, staff sergeant majors would continue to wear the insignia of sergeants major but would be redesignated "Chief Master Sergeants." The sergeants major of a command, on the other hand, were to receive a new insignia with a wreath around the star in the center of the sergeants major insignia. The plan proved controversial, however, and the Army canceled it before its 1 September 1965 implementation date. The insignia change would languish for two more years while the Army prepared additional studies.⁴⁰

The idea of creating the title of CSM originated with Sgt. Maj. John F. Thomas of the U.S. Army Air Defense Command in December 1966. Thomas felt that sergeants major of the major commands had little official guidance and that their roles and authority frequently changed based on "the boss you are currently working for."⁴¹ When Wooldridge first received the suggestion, he did not think a great deal about it. He felt that while he was a unit's sergeant major, everybody knew who he was. But the more he studied Thomas' concern, the more he began to understand the problem; he eventually backed the CSM proposal.

General Johnson came around to supporting the creation of a CSM program in 1967, in part as a result of a records survey of sergeants major throughout the Army. The survey found that most sergeants major at corps and division level had combat arms specialties, outstanding commander evaluations, overseas experience in long- and short-tour areas, and a sincere desire to serve with troops. The profile of sergeants major above corps level, however, was "not so favorable" in Johnson's view. There, the survey found administrative specialists with limited combat and troop experience, many with extended overseas service in favorable long-tour areas, and "some who [were] motivated more by the opportunity to 'homestead' in an area of their choice than by the challenge of serving with troops." Johnson believed that a strong sergeant major chain required individuals in key positions who were "vigorous, broadly experienced, and dedicated professionals who are

more at home in the field with troops than at a desk in a major headquarters,” rather than “figureheads and administrative specialists.”⁴²

A Command Sergeant Major Program had the potential to remedy the situation, and General Johnson approved the idea at a late afternoon meeting in his office on 13 July 1967. He added that since command sergeants major constituted the “general officers” of the NCO Corps, they would be treated as general officers with Headquarters, Department of the Army (HQDA), handling their selection, assignment, and career management. The program included a new title (Command Sergeant Major), insignia (the sergeants major insignia embellished by a wreath, as proposed in 1965), and a new military occupational specialty (MOS) code of 00Z5 for command sergeants major. The new command sergeants major would fill senior enlisted positions on staffs of commanders from battalion level to HQDA. All other sergeants major were to be known as staff sergeants major—until the word “staff” was dropped in 1969—and continued to wear their old insignia.⁴³

After convening a selection board, the Department of the Army announced the first 192 selectees for command sergeant major in January 1968. On the list were Sergeant Major of the Army Wooldridge and the next four incumbents of that office: George W. Dunaway, Silas L. Copeland, Leon L. Van Autreve, and William G. Bainbridge. In March General Johnson presented the first new CSM rank insignia to SMA Wooldridge.

Confirmation

The creation of the new rank and insignia of command sergeant major was one of Johnson and Woodridge’s last major accomplishments in improving the enlisted corps. Four months later, in July 1968, General Westmoreland replaced Johnson as Chief of Staff of the Army and Wooldridge prepared to return to the field. To choose his new Sergeant Major of the Army, Westmoreland, like Johnson before him, solicited nominations from the field. After narrow-

ing down a final list, he selected George W. Dunaway, then serving in Vietnam as command sergeant major for the 101st Airborne Division. With the choice warmly seconded by Wooldridge, the Department of the Army announced the appointment on 16 July 1968.⁴⁴ While Wooldridge reported back to Vietnam as the command sergeant major of the Military Assistance Command, Vietnam (MACV), General Westmoreland swore in the new Sergeant Major of the Army, George W. Dunaway, on 1 September.⁴⁵ Although Sergeant Major of the Army for only two years, 1968–1970, Dunaway witnessed pivotal changes in the Army. In Vietnam, the Tet offensive in February 1968 became a political turning point. The surprise Communist offensive shocked the American public and America’s political leadership. Militarily the offensive was a failure, but psychologically it proved an enemy victory, encouraging those opposed to the war and demoralizing those who supported it.

Political decisions soon followed, placing the United States on a course to end its involvement in Southeast Asia. Although the U.S. military presence in Vietnam peaked at 550,000 in early 1969, under the Nixon administration’s Vietnamization policy, it decreased to 475,000 by year’s end and to 335,000 by the end of 1970.⁴⁶ Domestic opposition to the Army in general and the war in particular peaked in May 1970 when Ohio National Guardsmen shot and killed four student protesters at Kent State University. Antiwar protesters and other groups organized a nationwide war demonstration, called the moratorium, to march on Washington, D.C., in October.

Much of the animosity over the war was directed at the military, not surprising since U.S. local and national political leaders looked to state and federal military forces to contain such demonstrations. Within the Army, dissen- sion, opposition, and signs of indiscipline increased. Racial antagonisms grew. Drug use became rampant. Desertion and absences without leave skyrocketed, while respect for authority and soldierly deportment declined.



SMA Wooldridge Talking with CSM Dunaway
in Bien Hoc, Vietnam

The Army reflected the society it served and suffered some of the same illnesses. Moreover, serious misdeeds within the Army, such as the My Lai massacre in Vietnam and mismanagement of open mess clubs in various locations worldwide, required extensive investigations. All these incidents received substantial media attention. The Army thus found itself a convenient target for the increasing number of Americans dissatisfied with the political leadership, the seemingly endless war in Vietnam, and the ruinous economic inflation.

An immediate concern for SMA Dunaway was to preserve the gains Wooldridge had made in establishing the Office of Sergeant Major of the Army and to protect it from its detractors. From the beginning not everyone had accepted the position. General Johnson, in a 1972 interview, discreetly talked about “people who resisted the creation of the position.” Wooldridge, after his retirement, noted that he reported directly to the Chief of Staff and sub-

mitted papers and recommendations to him directly, “due in some part to the opposition of the Vice Chief of Staff and the principal staff opposing [Johnson] on his determination to have an SMA position.”⁴⁷

A seemingly trivial issue, the location of the SMA’s office in the Pentagon had stepped on toes and made enemies. When General Johnson directed the establishment of the position, he tasked the DCSPER to make all necessary preparations. As the date neared for Wooldridge to assume his duties, General Johnson learned that the DCSPER had set up an office for the SMA within the OPO in the basement of the Pentagon.

Johnson quickly understood the implications of a basement office and told the DCSPER to put the SMA within the Office of the Chief of Staff of the Army (OCSA), where immediate access was possible. He viewed the new office as similar to the role of a sergeant major at battalion or division level, where the proximity and easy access made it possible for the chief to quickly consult with his senior enlisted adviser. General Johnson made it clear that he wanted to see his sergeant major routinely and often.

There was no vacant space in the OCSA area of the Pentagon, where space was always a premium and vigorously defended commodity. The area selected for the SMA was directly across the hall from the Chief of Staff’s receptionist. Since the space was already occupied, everything on that side of the hall had to move left or right and jam in a little tighter to make room. According to Dunaway, “virtually everyone on that side of the hall in the 600 block of the ‘E’ ring lost space.” There was a noticeable degree of resentment, especially among the senior colonels and general officers, who had been battalion, brigade, division, and perhaps even corps commanders, and understandably resented losing space to an enlisted man and his staff. The consequences of resentment were compounded when General Westmoreland accorded Sergeant Major of the Army Dunaway four-star protocol status.⁴⁸

For the first Sergeant Major of the Army, it had been an uphill battle, as with any newly established agency, but Wooldridge had worked hard to establish himself and the office. His legacy was a series of excellent working relationships with military and civilian personnel within the various general and special DA staffs. Some of Wooldridge's contacts remained open and friendly to Dunaway, while others simply vanished as though they had never existed. "The resentment [toward the Office of the Sergeant Major of the Army] was like a lingering, low-hanging cloud." Whenever Dunaway or his staff had to coordinate official or unofficial matters within OCSA, people within offices cooperated, but often with obvious reluctance and foot-dragging.⁴⁹

With time, Dunaway and his staff were able to reopen many of the doors through personal contacts. But some remained closed and only the backing of the Secretary of the General Staff (SGS), the Vice Chief of Staff, or the Chief of Staff himself could force them open. Generally, Brig. Gen. William A. Knowlton, the SGS, could provide the requisite muscle, but on several occasions Dunaway had to invoke the support of General Bruce Palmer, Jr., the Vice Chief of Staff, to budge more powerful senior officers. At least twice Dunaway had to take delicate matters directly to General Westmoreland for resolution.

Within a year of assuming his duties, Dunaway made clear his priorities as the Sergeant Major of the Army. In an October 1969 *Army* magazine article, Dunaway hammered away at the need for renewed professionalism on the part of the NCO Corps. Harkening to the time not long before when noncommissioned officers were considered on duty twenty-four hours a day as the backbone of the Army, SMA Dunaway praised the NCOs of earlier days who knew every detail of their post and made on-the-spot corrections of incidents of misconduct and uniform violations on or off post. "The soldier knew that any sergeant he encountered would correct him if he needed it, and a sergeant didn't dare let a

superior catch one of his men in a situation which needed correcting."⁵⁰ This sort of work had once helped make the Army a respected institution.

Unfortunately, lamented the new Sergeant Major of the Army, by the late 1960s, despite "no written directive, which discontinued this practice," it seemed "to have fallen by the wayside." Dunaway called for the Noncommissioned Officer Corps to reestablish the level of discipline and professionalism of previous eras. "A disciplined soldier is a well dressed, sharp looking soldier, and represents his country in the highest tradition. I would like to see a concerted effort, fully supported by all enlisted men in the U.S. Army, to return to the true meaning of the old saying that 'NCOs are the backbone of the Army.'"⁵¹

His concerns meshed well with several initiatives of the time. In November 1968 the Army had approved a new enlisted personnel career program. Awkwardly titled the Management of Enlisted Careerists, Centrally Administered (MECCA), the program sought to provide career management for professional enlisted soldiers and to ensure competitive individual professional development through assignments, education, promotion, classification, evaluation, and quality control. In 1969 the Army launched the program, which would be executed in three phases over several years, eventually to include all soldiers in grades E-5 and above. The first phase, scheduled for early 1970, initiated career management operations for grades E-8 and E-9. The second phase included grade E-7, and the final phase would incorporate grades E-5 and E-6.

The MECCA attempted to allow each career soldier to develop to the highest possible level, commensurate with ability and determination. Insofar as possible, the program sought to remove chance and favoritism as career determinants. Key elements included coordinated programs of progressive assignments, selection for schooling, MOS classification, performance evaluation, and selection for promotion. Under its provisions, an Enlisted Personnel

Directorate of the Office of Personnel Operations within DCSPER actively managed career soldiers by selecting them for schooling and assignments, maintaining their DA management files, and advising them of their progress and standing among their peers. The underlying philosophy was to assign each individual to positions of increasing responsibility, with career patterns guiding the manager in the selections, in a manner similar to the officer professional development program.⁵²

Centralized promotion to grades E-8 and E-9, a key feature of the program, began in January 1969. By October the Army Staff was also developing a new, more comprehensive, and rigorous enlisted evaluation report to support the career management effort. Heretofore promotions had been done locally, based on locally maintained and updated records. But on 1 June 1970, the Department of the Army assumed control of selections for promotion to grade E-7 as well and chose candidates from its first list that October.

The second significant program approved during Dunaway's incumbency as Sergeant Major of the Army concerned noncommissioned officer education. In 1969 the Army Chief of Staff approved the Noncommissioned Officer Education System (NCOES), a graduated system of military education. When completely implemented the program would consist of three levels of formal instruction.

At the first level, the basic noncommissioned officer courses trained selected enlisted soldiers in the grade of E-4 and lower for assignment, duty, and responsibility as company level NCOs in the grades of E-5 and E-6. Instructional materials and facilities already existed because the offerings were nearly identical to the then-current Skill Development Base (SDB) courses known as the Noncommissioned Officers Candidate Course. Training was differentiated by MOS and qualified the graduates to lead soldiers in a similar MOS or career group. Instruction emphasized basic leadership skills, knowledge, and attitudes required to effectively command enlisted

personnel as fire team leader, squad leader, and comparable positions of leadership.

At the next level, advanced noncommissioned officer courses trained selected staff sergeants and sergeants, first class, to perform duties in the two highest enlisted grades. This branch-oriented training emphasized the philosophy underlying Army objectives and systems.

The final level was the senior noncommissioned officer courses, where selected master sergeants received training for duty as sergeants major of higher headquarters of the Army, or of a joint or combined headquarters. Sergeant Major of the Army Dunaway helped push through the NCOES program, but his successors had to implement it beginning in 1971.⁵³

By 1969 myriad factors such as opposition to the war in Vietnam, draft evasion, internal Army dissent, and racial issues increasingly undermined the Army's efforts to recruit new soldiers, retain those already on active duty, and maintain morale and esprit de corps in wartime. On 27 March President Richard M. Nixon created the Commission on an All-Volunteer Armed Force. In February 1970 the commission concluded that an all-volunteer force was both feasible and desirable. Two months later the president proposed the concept to Congress. Since the Army relied most heavily on the draft to meet its manpower needs, it immediately created a task group to study, develop, coordinate, and monitor actions designed to reduce reliance on the draft and simultaneously increase the attractiveness of military careers.⁵⁴ To many the task seemed doomed to failure, yet by the end of Dunaway's tour in 1970, the Army was taking some tentative steps to develop programs and implement changes aimed at having an all-volunteer force.⁵⁵

Although Dunaway had served for thirty years in the Army, his retirement came as something of a surprise. The Army originally had envisioned the SMA's serving concurrently with his respective Chief of Staff. But Wooldridge's two-year term, which coincided with the last two years of Johnson's tour as Army Chief of

Staff, and Dunaway's retirement at thirty years' service, appeared to set a de facto limit of two years on the SMA's tenure. Dunaway himself thought a two-year tour best, ensuring a continual infusion of fresh ideas and vigor into the office. He used this argument to convince General Westmoreland to change the assignment length officially. Thus General Orders No. 34, dated 8 June 1970, limited the SMA's tenure to two years, effective 1 September 1970.

At the same time, Dunaway also recommended that Westmoreland reform the ad hoc system of selecting the Sergeant Major of the Army. Instead of the chief's choosing his SMA from a list of names solicited from commanders in the field, Dunaway suggested that a selection board with a general officer presiding choose nominees from which the Chief of Staff could select the Army senior enlisted adviser. As the slightly more formal process would involve more of the Army Staff in the candidate's selection, broadening his base of support, Westmoreland agreed.

An Army-wide message announced the appointment of a selection board composed of Brig. Gen. William W. Stone, Jr., as chairman, two colonels, and two lieutenant colonels. A major served as a recorder, without vote, and represented the command sergeants major career management section in the OPO. The new selection process went according to plan. After receiving nominations from the field, the board screened the candidates, paying special attention to disciplinary records. No candidates with letters of reprimand, Articles 15 (nonjudicial punishment), or courts-martial were to be considered. The board identified five superior candidates, and a sixth was later added at the request of the SGS.⁵⁶ Through the board's recommendation, General Westmoreland selected Sgt. Maj. Silas L. Copeland to succeed Dunaway and become the third Sergeant Major of the Army.

A combat veteran of World War II and Korea, Copeland had been serving as the command sergeant major of the 4th Infantry Division in Vietnam. Like his predecessors, he

came directly from a combat assignment in Vietnam; however, he would be the last. By the time he retired from the office on 30 June 1973, the United States had withdrawn all its troops from South Vietnam and ended its direct involvement in the war.

From the perspective of a professional soldier, the state of affairs in the nation and in the Army could not have been much grimmer than on 1 October 1970, when SMA Copeland sat at his new desk for the first time. The trauma of pending defeat in Asia reverberated throughout the Army. Eventually, the hasty U.S. withdrawal from South Vietnam and an inconclusive truce underlined failure. The military, already a lightning rod for antiwar and antiestablishment sentiments, received more unfavorable press from continuing revelations of the My Lai massacre, alleged misconduct of service club operators, and similar affairs. Furthermore, the Army was in the throes of its largest demobilization since World War II while simultaneously trying to implement an all-volunteer force. Stability, strength of tradition, and certainty of conviction were replaced by institutional turmoil, eroding standards, ineffectual leadership at many levels, and uncertainty—especially uncertainty.

For Copeland, the fact that he worked for three different Army Chiefs of Staff during his two years and nine months as SMA only increased the turmoil within his own position. General Westmoreland retired in July 1972, twenty-one months after choosing Copeland for SMA. General Palmer served as acting Chief of Staff for three and a half months, after which General Creighton W. Abrams was chief for the final eight months of Copeland's duties.

Although two Sergeants Major of the Army had preceded Copeland, he initially did not appreciate the potential impact of his new post on the Army. Just prior to his formal appointment he had visited troops in Vietnam, and the soldiers had given him an overwhelming and surprisingly positive reception. There among the soldiers at war, even before he officially assumed his duties, he began to understand his

role. His experience there convinced him that as a personal staff member of the OCSA with unhindered access to the chief himself, he could really influence critical decisions, challenge poorly developed staff policy proposals, and provide leadership and professional input to the highest levels of the Army to a degree he had never before imagined.

Copeland received his marching orders from General Westmoreland immediately following the swearing-in ceremony at the Pentagon. Once the two of them were alone in Westmoreland's office, the Chief of Staff got right to the point. He looked Copeland in the eye and said, "You were chosen as Sergeant Major of the Army because you are Silas Copeland. We have studied you and we know everything about you from the word 'go.' Now don't you change that!" Westmoreland wanted his new enlisted adviser to be himself—to use his knowledge, his experience, his personality, and the professional conduct he had developed over a long, successful military career. In short, Westmoreland relied on Copeland's instincts, honed over a career of service, to assist him in accomplishing the Army's goals. Emphasizing that Copeland would play an important part in the shift from a traditional conscript army to a modern all-volunteer force, Westmoreland told him to visit as many soldiers as he could and talk to them, explaining the Army's new policies, soliciting their questions and concerns, and allaying their fears and uncertainties.⁵⁷

Copeland faced formidable tasks. The unspoken challenge was of course to complete the work Wooldridge and Dunaway had begun, institutionalizing and strengthening the SMA's office. Despite the hard work of his predecessors, rumors were rampant in senior NCO circles that the Army leadership was considering abolishing the office. Many years later even Copeland noted that at the beginning of his tenure he had "sensed that there were moves by certain people to downgrade the office, to make it look like a useless establishment... [which] served no useful purpose and contributed nothing to the Army."⁵⁸

The signs of such bureaucratic infighting were readily apparent. Early in his tenure, for instance, Copeland learned that a colonel would rate his performance. Yet lieutenant generals and generals rated sergeants major in several subordinate commands. In fact, general officers had rated Copeland for years.

Positions of greater prestige and authority should have higher-ranking raters. Although being rated by a colonel would have little effect on Copeland's career, he could not accept the diminution in stature to the Office of Sergeant Major of the Army that would inevitably result. Rather than give in, he preferred reassignment. In the end the Army decided that the Sergeant Major of the Army would not be rated at all. Copeland's stand increased not only his own stature, but also that of the office itself, and averted the threat of turning the office into some insignificant administrative position that would eventually die a natural death.⁵⁹

Copeland also took other steps to institutionalize the office so it could survive on its own merit instead of depending on the strength and personality of any one occupant. To project a positive image, he made special efforts to win the goodwill of commanders and officers in the field and show them that the Sergeant Major of the Army was a senior noncommissioned officer working with, supporting, and assisting other noncommissioned officers, not a "whistle blower" or spy from the Pentagon. He wanted both officers and enlisted men to understand he was there to help in any way he could. At the same time he also put in long hours with the Army's public affairs office to help improve the public's impression of the Army.⁶⁰

SMA Copeland's willingness to work hard, meet people, and discuss issues, together with his intuitive good sense, successfully preserved the office. Gradually, opponents of the office moved to new assignments, retired, or gave up their opposition. The office became a normal part of the bureaucratic structure as though it had always existed. When Copeland retired in 1973, the constant fight for survival was over. It became more a matter of developing the office's

full potential to advise and counsel the Chief of Staff on enlisted matters.

Rebuilding a Corps

In the larger world outside the Pentagon, Copeland's main challenge was to help move the Army to an all-volunteer force. When President Nixon directed the armed forces to become voluntary, the Secretary of Defense set 1 July 1973 as the "zero-draft" target date. In other words, if the Army could not attract sufficient recruits after July 1973, it would endure crippling vacancies and reduced efficiency. General Westmoreland wanted Copeland to work with the noncommissioned officers focusing on enlisted living conditions, career management, and professional development. The first task involved modernized family and troop housing, improvements in health benefits, and increased pay. The second concentrated on more attractive enlistment options and the expansion of the recruiting service. The third, professionalism, involved improved command stability, upgraded leadership instruction, and refined personnel management.⁶¹

In December 1970 the Chief of Staff announced a number of radical policy changes regarding the enlisted force. He banned all bed checks, eliminated the requirement to sign in and out of barracks, and did away with unnecessary formations and details. The Army's volunteer soldiers would be treated as professionals. At the same time, he established a five-day workweek as the normal routine whenever possible. Army-hired civilians would henceforth perform normal kitchen police (KP) duties, and popular short-order food service would be phased into mess halls around the world. In the barracks, the Army began renovations to provide more privacy and higher living standards for the troops. A modern Army had to keep pace with a changing society.

The Volunteer Army (VOLAR) tests officially began on 4 January 1971 and eventually affected thirteen CONUS and three overseas posts. The program provided selected com-

manders with limited funds to explore new ways to attract and retain combat arms volunteers and raise living, working, and professional standards in their commands. On 30 June 1972, a more centralized experimental program, which ended one year later on the day Sergeant Major Copeland retired, replaced the VOLAR program. Only after these two critical years of experimentation, 1970–1972, did Army leaders finally agree to forge ahead with the programs and initiatives they felt would make the all-volunteer force a success.

Copeland was there for every agonizing minute as the Army tried to find direction in a very new world. His role was to help the non-commissioned officer cadre adjust to the tumult and change and "convince them that now is the time to take a close look at how we handle people."⁶² Both articles he wrote for the annual "Green Book" issue of *Army* magazine focused on leadership. He admonished members of the NCO Corps to avoid passing blame or making excuses and to improve their leadership skills, especially in everyday garrison situations. The NCO, he urged, must return to the fundamentals of soldiering: "Know yourself, know your job, know your men. These are the basic principles of leadership; not new, but still valid." Copeland demanded more professionalism, high ethical standards, and increased communications between enlisted leaders.

Finally, in a concept that would be debated by leaders throughout the Army—seen as sacrilege by many—Copeland stressed the need to answer the soldiers' perennial question, "Why?" "Whether it be a routine duty or a combat mission, the soldier wants to know why. The answer must be a credible one, and providing a credible answer is far from impossible. Meeting this challenge is one of the greatest needs in developing a professional Army, and is an essential for an effective NCO."⁶³

The post-Vietnam demobilization of the Army and the ensuing manpower reductions presented Copeland with another major challenge during his tenure, one that was often personally painful. Involuntary dismissals from



The U.S. Army Sergeants Major Academy, Fort Bliss, Texas

the service presented a twofold problem for leaders like Copeland. Somehow, he had to explain why good soldiers with twelve or fourteen years' service, who had served multiple tours in Vietnam and who had "won their battles, got their battle stars, Combat Infantryman's Badge, Combat Medical Badge," were being involuntarily separated from the service. Time and again he personally faced soldiers who questioned the fairness and reminded him, "I have a family, sergeant major." Often the wives would call, hoping to touch the soft part of his heart. They did so, more often than they knew, but he was powerless to change the situation: "I had to try to explain to families, to parents, why, after we fought him for three years in Vietnam, we're booting him out."⁶⁴

Copeland also had to face enlisted soldiers and noncommissioned officers in the field, who saw what was happening to their peers and understandably questioned their own future in a changing Army. After dealing face-to-face in his office with the personal hardships resulting from the drawdown, Copeland thus found himself often traveling to the field, "ready to take some fire" from angry and concerned soldiers and NCOs. Both tasks he undoubtedly would

have preferred to avoid. Maintaining the morale of the NCO Corps and explaining the new policies were anything but easy during this period in the Army's history.

Still, throughout this darkest time, Army leaders were planning a renaissance. During Copeland's tenure the Army emphasized professionalism. Copeland personally stressed it in his writing, in his travel, and in his meetings with the public. At the Army schools, training centers, and major commands, others emphasized professionalism with equal vigor to officers and enlisted alike.

The NCOES, approved during Dunaway's tour, took a more concrete form under Copeland. Under the guidance of Copeland and other Army leaders, the various schools adjusted and improved their basic-level courses. By June 1973 they offered training in forty-one MOSs, each supported by courses of eight to twelve weeks in length. Advanced-level courses began in the third quarter of Fiscal Year (FY) 1972 and were fully implemented within the next year, with forty-three courses of eight to twelve weeks. During FY 1973 more than 11,500 students entered basic courses and 4,400 attended advanced courses.

No one could quantify the contributions being made to noncommissioned officer professionalism, but the Army that emerged in the 1980s owed much of its excellence to an increasingly focused education system.

Most significantly, the Sergeants Major Academy at Fort Bliss, Texas, the pinnacle of the NCOES, opened its doors to the first class on 8 January 1973 with 105 students.⁶⁵ The academy was the source of special preparation for the Army's NCO elite. It was even more important in its contribution to the prestige of the NCO Corps as a whole and in its symbolism of the Army's commitment to and emphasis upon NCO professionalism. The school's importance was demonstrated in 1975 when the academy's first command sergeant major, William G. Bainbridge, was selected to serve as the fifth Sergeant Major of the Army.⁶⁶

The significance of the NCOES, and the promise it held for the future professionalism and capability of the Noncommissioned Officer Corps, is best understood by comparing the new system with the old. When the first Sergeant Major of the Army, William O. Wooldridge, enlisted in 1940, the only schools available for NCOs were those set up to meet the requirements of a particular commander's unit. Formal education for NCOs was a hit-or-miss affair. Most learned their trade on the job, with all the rewards and failures inherent to such an informal system. Wooldridge later related:

When Seventh Army commander General Manton S. Eddy started a school for the first three graders in Munich, Germany [after World War II], I was a platoon sergeant. I went to my first sergeant and told him I wanted to attend the course. He asked me, "What for?" I told him I intended to stay in the Army and I intended to be something more than a rifle platoon sergeant. "But you're a combat veteran. You already know everything." I told the first sergeant that I knew platoon tactics. "You're wasting my time," he said.⁶⁷

With the NCOES, NCOs no longer had to do everything by themselves. The institutionalization of noncommissioned officer education and training had become a reality.

During Copeland's time in office other changes further increased NCO professionalism. In 1972 the Army started a program to enhance the position of first sergeant by upgrading its status and prestige. Key elements of the program were stabilization of duty tours for first sergeants, priority consideration for family housing for the appointees, early attendance at advanced NCO schools for potential candidates, a change to the enlisted evaluation report to require specific comments on first sergeant potential for all staff sergeants through master sergeants, and priority consideration by all sergeant major boards for those with first sergeant experience.

Elsewhere, the Army changed the Enlisted Evaluation System by combining the efficiency report with occupational specialty evaluation test scores to measure overall performance. It also altered the efficiency report by requiring annual submissions with rater comments on professional development and, as mentioned above, first sergeant potential.

By the conclusion of his tenure, SMA Copeland could note several major accomplishments, none of which had been easy. He had strengthened the Office of Sergeant Major of the Army; the Noncommissioned Officer Education System was up and running; and the first class had graduated from the new Sergeants Major Academy. There had also been a steady stream of changes in the enlisted acquisition, promotion, and training system as the Army moved along the road to an all-volunteer force. Copeland's proudest accomplishment, however, was "to influence the noncommissioned officer corps to alter their method of operating," persuading "noncommissioned officers to change their thinking and leading of troops; [and] to treat a human being as a human being, with dignity and respect."⁶⁸

In September 1972 General Palmer, acting as the Army Chief of Staff, extended Copeland's tenure as Sergeant Major of the Army by four months to allow him to serve in the office until his retirement with thirty years of service.⁶⁹ That same month, HQDA sent out a message

announcing the formation of a nominating board to provide the Chief of Staff a list of names from which to choose the new Sergeant Major of the Army. The board would consist of a lieutenant general as president and four senior field grade officers. For the first time the outgoing Sergeant Major of the Army served as a member of the nominating board. The zone of consideration for nominees included all active Army command sergeants major except those who had applied for retirement at the time the board was to be convened.

In January 1973, one month before Copeland was to retire, General Abrams, the new Army Chief of Staff, asked him to remain in his position as SMA through 30 June 1973, saying it was in the best interest of the Army. Ever the good soldier, Copeland graciously agreed. Finally, on 30 June 1973, after two years and nine months as Sergeant Major of the Army during a period of great upheaval and change, Copeland retired, turning over the reins to Leon L. Van Autreve on 1 July 1973.

Leaving his job as command sergeant major of U.S. Army, Alaska, Van Autreve became the first Sergeant Major of the Army to assume his duties from an assignment other than Vietnam, although he had previously served there for two years. He was also the first engineer selected for the job and, at 53 years of age, the oldest. Wooldridge had been 43 when he took his oath, Dunaway 46, and Copeland 50. Interestingly, Van Autreve was also the only foreign-born soldier appointed as SMA, his parents having immigrated to the United States from Belgium when he was a child. In many ways, his career represented the American dream: Having come to this country not able to speak English, through hard work, persistence, and talent, he reached the pinnacle of his profession.⁷⁰

In selecting Van Autreve, General Abrams had one additional prerequisite, specifying that the new SMA be a married man. Although all previous incumbents had in fact been married, marriage had not been a formal qualification in any way. Abrams, however, thought it essential given the important role families played in

military life. He believed that the SMA's spouse should periodically travel with her husband and meet with the wives of enlisted personnel. In this way she could provide the Sergeant Major of the Army, and by extension the Chief of Staff, with insights into the problems and needs of enlisted men and their families that might not otherwise come to their attention.⁷¹ Although a military force, the Army had also always been a social institution in which family housing, education, health care, and general morale had been a communal responsibility.

Although the Army began its return to order and relative routine during 1973–1975, it remained transitional, with many new ideas and programs being tested and implemented. Symbolic of the returning calm was the fact that Van Autreve's first year in office, July 1973–June 1974, was the first full year since 1965 that the Army was not at war. It was also the first year that the Army relied completely upon an all-volunteer system to procure personnel. When the last draftee left the Army on 22 November 1974, it was a 100 percent all-volunteer force for the first time since 1948.

The post-Vietnam Army increasingly emphasized the importance and role of its reserve components. Although its manpower strength was at its lowest since 1950, its global responsibilities had not diminished with the end of the Vietnam War. Faced with greatly reduced budgets and a fixed active duty strength of 780,000, the Army leadership had to meet the readiness demands with fewer resources. One response was to affiliate reserve units with active units and, through the affiliation program, forge common bonds among the active, reserve, and Guard forces. A primary goal was to improve the readiness of those reserve components most likely to be mobilized first in an emergency. More efficient organization and improved management in this area could provide substantial savings while strengthening the Army's overall fighting potential.⁷²

During this period, the SMA still focused on and emphasized people, the "care and cleaning" of the ordinary soldiers. Improved quality in

the Noncommissioned Officer Corps meant better implementation of programs affecting people. "The quality of the noncommissioned officer corps," Van Autreve wrote, "determines in large measure the quality of the Army. Today, progress throughout the Army, and most especially in the programs that affect people, reflects an upsurge in quality among the noncommissioned officers." He likened the process to an inverted pyramid: the broad base of policies instituted at the top, with implementing policies and instructions from intervening headquarters weighed down on the small, pointed apex representing the unit. The entire weight focused on the NCOs in the companies, troops, batteries, platoons, squads, and sections that had to make the policies work. There, the noncommissioned officer played his most important role in the development and success of the Army.⁷³

During the two years of SMA Van Autreve's tour, Army-wide efforts thus continued toward building an increasingly professional NCO Corps with an institutionalized administrative base to provide uniform training, continuous direction, and progressive growth for every soldier over the course of his career. The departure from a draftee-based Army presented several challenges to this effort. In moving to a smaller force of volunteers, the Army needed more broadly qualified soldiers to ease assignment and personnel management problems. During Van Autreve's first year in office, Army leaders thus decided to decrease the number of MOSs. They expected that broadening the remaining MOS fields would reduce mismatches between the soldier's designated job and what he was actually doing.

Another important development during Van Autreve's watch was the Enlisted Personnel Management System (EPMS). A smaller, all-volunteer Army forced the Army Staff to reconsider its heretofore piecemeal personnel management programs. Policies governing promotion, MOS classification, testing, and evaluation all affected a soldier's career pattern, advancement, and thereby his decision to choose the Army as a profession. Yet the various programs were often

so separate, and sometimes even contradictory, that many soldiers were confused and discouraged at the seeming lack of direction in their careers. In 1973 General Abrams ordered the Military Personnel Center and the Training and Doctrine Command (TRADOC) to review the problems.⁷⁴

Their recommendations culminated in the EPMS, which provided clear patterns of career development and promotion potential for any length of service. It grouped career management fields into related MOSs and redesigned the fields to provide a logical, understandable road map to guide career-motivated soldiers along the most direct route to sergeant major. The system eliminated promotion bottlenecks and provided everyone a fair opportunity for advancement by further centralizing the promotions process. Steps in this direction had already been implemented.

The NCOES was one of the earliest programs to be taken over, integrated, and expanded under EPMS. Under the new system, branch schools developed training plans for each MOS with specific tasks, conditions, and standards. Periodically, soldiers were to verify their ability to perform MOS-related tasks through skill qualification testing (SQT). The entire process aimed to help soldiers advance to the next higher skill level, where they could be considered for promotion to higher grades.⁷⁵

Approved in August 1974, the phased EPMS implementation began in January 1975 when the Department of the Army instructed field commands to change authorization documents to reclassify and convert personnel in certain redesigned career management fields. It took two and a half more years for EPMS to be in place throughout the Army, but it was conceived, developed, and prepared for implementation with Van Autreve's strong support.⁷⁶

SMA Van Autreve also saw the Army take the first steps toward what was termed one-station training. To lower costs and reduce turbulence during the training of new enlistees, the Army devoted considerable attention to the possibility of conducting all stages of most initial-

entry training at a single post. But Van Autreve was more concerned about the quality of soldiers being sent to the basic NCO courses. Units failed to sufficiently emphasize preliminary leadership training and there were serious shortfalls in the number of students in each NCO class. In visits to the field and meetings with senior NCO leadership, he continually emphasized the need to send the best soldiers to these courses. Instead of holding back good soldiers because they were “indispensable” to upcoming unit training or activities, he insisted they be allowed to attend the classes. Units had to recognize the importance of basic course attendance for the individual soldier and for the Army as a whole.

In his travels and in his day-to-day duties, Van Autreve promoted the Army Chief of Staff’s goals of improving the quality of the enlisted force, making the best use of limited resources, and shaping the Army for the future. Since Van Autreve like his predecessors was an adviser and counselor, not an action officer or initiator of policy, he could not unilaterally initiate or implement specific policies. But as the Chief of Staff’s eyes and ears, he reviewed and shaped such policies. Like his predecessors, he remained the most visible spokesman for the enlisted community and the symbolic leader of the noncommissioned officer force.

His peers saw Sergeant Major Van Autreve as a “tough task master, a strictly no-nonsense type who was trying to revitalize the noncommissioned officer corps and restore the lost faith of many noncommissioned officers in the Army.” As one contemporary put it, he “took the noncommissioned officer corps by the collar and shook some sense into [it]...for he has led us a mighty long way in the past year and a half.”⁷⁷ Because of his leadership, senior noncommissioned officers requested that Van Autreve’s tour be extended. General Frederick C. Weyand, who became the new Chief of Staff following General Abrams’ untimely death in September 1974, declined the requests, deciding to uphold the two-year limitation on the SMA’s term of office.⁷⁸ Weyand agreed, however, as Van Autreve’s tour was ending in the

spring of 1975, to make him a member of the next SMA selection board.

Van Autreve’s successor, Sgt. Maj. William G. Bainbridge, also brought a variety of Army experiences to the office. As an infantryman during World War II with the 106th Infantry Division, he had been captured when his unit was overrun during the Battle of the Bulge. Bainbridge knew the bitter taste of being a prisoner of war until liberated by members of the 6th Armored Division. Following his return to the United States in 1945, he left the Army to return to farming but was recalled to active duty in 1951 for the Korean War.⁷⁹ Like others in similar circumstances, he then decided to make the Army a career. Bainbridge subsequently served in a variety of stateside and overseas assignments, including combat service in Vietnam. In 1972 he became the first command sergeant major of the newly formed Sergeants Major Academy.

SMA Bainbridge assumed his office on 1 July 1975; he would ultimately serve longer in that capacity than any of his predecessors. Chief of Staff General Frederick C. Weyand came to believe the two-year tenure for Sergeant Major of the Army was “unduly brief” and took steps in June 1976 to extend it to three years.⁸⁰ General Orders No. 14, dated 16 June 1976, officially made the tenure of the Sergeant Major of the Army three years, retroactive to 8 June. General Orders No. 23, dated 15 November 1977, reaffirmed three years as “the normal tour for the Sergeant Major of the Army.” That same month, the new Chief of Staff, General Bernard W. Rogers, who had succeeded Weyand in October 1977, extended Bainbridge’s tour an additional year. Bainbridge had “earned the confidence, respect, and admiration of the Army’s leadership as well as its soldiers during service as the Army’s senior enlisted member.”⁸¹

Practical measures as well as personal reasons extended Bainbridge’s tenure to four years, setting an important precedent for the future. From the beginning both the tenure of the appointment and its timing had been unsettled. Of the first five incumbents, two had served

concurrently with the Chiefs of Staff who appointed them, but both had served just over two years. Two had their tenure set at two years, and the fifth lasted three years. These irregularities had somewhat undermined the stature of the office.

With Bainbridge, the SMA tour stabilized to parallel that of the Chief of Staff. Though the tour length for the SMA was established as three years, the chief traditionally extended the SMA for a fourth year. Thereafter, most Sergeants Major of the Army assumed their duties on 1 July, served four years with the Chief of Staff who appointed them, then retired from the office and the service. The original concept of having the departing Sergeant Major of the Army return to duty elsewhere, as Wooldridge had done, was finally laid to rest. The SMA assignment would fittingly be a pinnacle of achievement before retirement.

During Bainbridge's tenure, the Army faced major financial challenges. The volunteer Army proved expensive, and inflation and reduced budgets compounded the problem. Furthermore, the Army's desperate need to modernize its conventional forces also proved costly. During the war in Vietnam, the Army had paid for its heavy expenses in Southeast Asia in part by putting off the development and acquisition of new equipment. The high cost of raising, equipping, and maintaining an effective volunteer Army in the prevailing economic conditions, given the anti-military mood of the Congress and the nation, presented serious obstacles.⁸²

At first Army leaders opted to emphasize readiness and training. To ease personnel shortages, they recruited more women and gave them an expanded role in the military. Simultaneously, the Army continued to improve the quality of service life for the average soldier. Meanwhile, as existing equipment was upgraded as inexpensively as possible, the Army developed a five-year plan to deploy new tank, artillery, cargo helicopter, attack helicopter, and vehicle transport systems to prepare the forces for the 1980s. Finally, the Army focused on long-term sustainability, that is,

developing production-planning agreements with private industry and maintaining the Army's investment in government-owned production facilities.

Army leaders also continued to emphasize what was then called the Total Army, the mixing of ready reserve and active component units. The Army added three combat divisions during 1975–1979, without increasing active-force manpower, by cutting active duty headquarters staffs and transferring many combat support and combat service support units to the reserve components. The Army also left some active duty divisions with only two of their three authorized brigades, supplementing them with reserve component roundout combat brigades and battalions. These roundout units regularly trained with their affiliated active-component unit so they could fill out the division in time of war.⁸³

Training emphasized tough, realistic preparation and execution. The Army used the opposition-force concept, replicating likely enemy forces down to the use of tactics, weapons, and equipment. By 1979 plans were well under way for the new National Training Center (NTC) at Fort Irwin, California, complete with an elite opposition force. Sited in the California desert, the NTC would have the task of realistically training heavy combat battalions and brigades. It offered vast maneuver areas for extended periods in near-real battlefield conditions.

Since its inception in 1968 the Command Sergeants Major Program had evolved considerably, yet there was still little understanding of what was expected of a CSM.⁸⁴ In 1970 Chief of Staff General William C. Westmoreland had directed a review of the Command Sergeant Major Program after several people at the annual commanders conference expressed confusion about the role of CSMs. The review attempted to delineate specific duties; however, the results were not widely circulated throughout the Army.⁸⁵ Consequently, the confusion continued, and in December 1975 the commanding general of TRADOC, General William E. DePuy, lamented to his assembled commanders that the command sergeant major “sort of floats around out

there and observes what's going on with soldiers and tells the old man about that. Fine, I think he can do that, but that's a very limited view of what a sergeant major is supposed to do."⁸⁶

To resolve the situation, General DePuy initiated a series of studies that attempted to define the skills, knowledge, and attitudes that CSMs should possess. The Army then codified these in 1977 in Army Regulation 600-20, which formalized the CSM position and assigned specific duties to Command Sergeants Major. It also established the NCO Support Channel, a chain of communication and supervision from the command sergeant major to first sergeant and then to other NCOs and enlisted personnel that paralleled and complemented the chain of command.⁸⁷

The clarification of the duties of the CSM and the creation of the NCO Support Channel were part of the spirit of innovative change that characterized the Army during the years 1975-1979. Realistic training incorporated revised doctrine, reorganized force development, and new equipment. Although the second half of the decade seemed dark and foreboding, the Army would emerge in the mid-1980s as a first-class, professional force, superbly trained and equipped with the best weapons in the world, a testimony to the hard work and intensive planning of this critical period.

Also during this time, the Office of Sergeant Major of the Army matured and gained increased acceptance and greater responsibility. In the final months of SMA Bainbridge's tenure, he recalled, "I have seen this office move from a coordinating office with largely perfunctory and obligatory involvement into an integral element of the Army staff." Bainbridge's professionalism and vision had helped the process as he continually sought more responsibility. In response, the Secretary of the Army had made the Sergeant Major of the Army a member of the Army Policy Council, and the Chief of Staff had made him a member of the Army Staff Council as well as the General Staff Council. The SMA took his rightful place at the table with the Army's other staff principals.⁸⁸

Added exposure and increased interaction within the Army hierarchy increased the credibility and prestige of the office and made the Sergeant Major of the Army a sought-after person in bureaucratic policy-making decisions. The changes reinforced the SMA's existing access to both the Secretary of the Army and the Chief of Staff where enlisted matters were concerned. Moreover, various staff agencies and action officers began to seek him out for input and coordination regarding policies affecting the welfare of the enlisted force. Indeed, any action that would affect enlisted personnel had to be coordinated with the SMA, who finally emerged as the accepted senior adviser and counsel on enlisted matters. His concurrence became essential before actions could be sent to the Chief of Staff.⁸⁹

The SMA also gained exposure outside the Army. Often he was called upon to testify before congressional committees, particularly on recruiting, training, retention, and quality of life for soldiers and their families. For example, Bainbridge testified in 1977 and 1979 on how training budget reductions affected the quality of personnel and on funding for junior enlisted soldiers to move their families overseas. His successors would continue the tradition, testifying repeatedly on the recruitment and retention of the enlisted force and on the general quality of life within the Army.⁹⁰

In his role as Sergeant Major of the Army, Bainbridge personally emphasized increased responsibility, authority, and prestige for noncommissioned officers, as well as readiness through training, education, and moral discipline. If the Army had to do "more with less," it still had to be prepared to fight and win the first battle of the next war against a numerically superior opponent. In his first *Army* magazine "status report" Bainbridge wrote: "A champion fighter wins because he outfights and outsmarts his opponent. The champion steels himself with total discipline—physically, mentally, and morally." He went on to emphasize the tough training needed to achieve high standards of professionalism and fighting skill.

While stressing the importance of civilian education in addition to the NCOES, Bainbridge called upon the NCO Corps to internalize the moral discipline that motivates men to do on their own what is right and to show “the personal courage to say ‘no’ when the crowd says ‘yes.’” SMA Bainbridge saw moral courage as “an inner critic that refuses to tolerate less than your best.” And, finally, as an ominous warning for those who chose to ignore his message, he reminded the noncommissioned officers that promotion boards search for stragglers as well as front-runners, and he would not tolerate mediocrity. “Your volunteer Army,” he declared, “is not going to become a homestead for mediocre performers with mediocre ambitions.”⁹¹ Subsequent articles over the next two years revisited the theme of preparation through training (NCOES, MOS retraining programs, and SQTs as part of EPMS) and the noncommissioned officer’s role in this vital function.

During Bainbridge’s watch, the Army completed and began fine-tuning the Enlisted Personnel Management System. By March 1978 it had converted all enlisted career management and MOS fields to the new system. In the process the Army reduced the 36 enlisted career fields and 451 specialties to 30 fields and 345 specialties. An important element of the system, the skill qualification test, evaluated a soldier’s ability to perform the critical tasks required by his specialty at his current and the next higher grade. Bainbridge, however, also convinced Army leaders to retain a high school education as a criterion for promotion to staff sergeant.⁹² In addition, Bainbridge played a key role in developing the basic and primary NCO courses.⁹³

Perhaps his greatest contribution lay in the moral leadership he provided to the NCO Corps. His last status report in the 1978 *Army* magazine praised the soldiers of the Army but again admonished NCOs for whining about officers’ taking away their authority and tying their hands. He wrote, “No officer ever took anything away from the noncommissioned officer. Rather, it was given away.” He then added,

“We have worked long and hard at restoring our officers’ confidence in the corps of noncommissioned officers. Tomorrow’s Army deserves this confidence to be maintained.” He urged NCOs to develop personal pride—to be worthy of it, to maintain it, and to use it to enhance the prestige of the NCO Corps as a whole, which would work to the advantage of each and every noncommissioned officer. He expressed his belief that the “single greatest contribution to our Army’s improved condition can be directly traced to greater use of the NCO.”⁹⁴

The NCO Corps and the Army were on the mend and markedly improved from six to eight years earlier. Gradually, the Army emerged reborn from the chaos of the final Vietnam years. Bainbridge’s emphasis and efforts during his four-year tenure played a major role in revitalizing the backbone of the Army, its NCO Corps. General Bernard Rogers, General Weyand’s successor in 1976, credited Bainbridge with doing more to improve the image and prestige of the NCO Corps than any other soldier in recent times: “As the Army’s senior enlisted man for the past four years, he has been the driving force in vitalizing and reinforcing the prestige and authority of the NCO corps.”⁹⁵

Stability and Growth

The SMA position was established in 1966 as a small but important part of a larger effort to professionalize the NCO Corps. By 1979 the Office of Sergeant Major of the Army itself rested on a secure foundation, and many other efforts to professionalize the NCO Corps were in motion. The all-volunteer force was established and making the necessary adjustments to improve rather than just survive. In the process, NCOs had gained more responsibility and prestige. Training had improved. Soldiers had improved. The Army itself had improved.

Despite a favorable prognosis, the Army still needed plenty of attention before it could have a clean bill of health. If the first five SMAs had been crucial in reviving the patient, their

successors would have to concentrate on bringing his physical and mental health to a new peak. The cessation of war in Vietnam and the final fall of Saigon in 1975 had only seemed to heighten Cold War tensions, while lesser crises in other areas seemed equally menacing.

Chief of Staff General Edward C. Meyer swore in Sergeant Major of the Army William A. Connelly on 2 July 1979. The first holder of the office to have graduated from the Sergeants Major Academy at Fort Bliss, Texas, Connelly was the command sergeant major at U.S. Army Forces Command, Fort McPherson, Georgia. He was also the first SMA to take office for the officially established three-year tenure.

By this point, use of a selection board to choose the new SMA was routine. In the case of Connelly, the process had begun in September 1978, when General Rogers made the decision to change certain criteria for eligible candidates. He deleted the MOS test score requirement, since the Army had terminated CSM testing in 1975, and increased the required minimum enlisted service from twenty-four to twenty-six years. Although no policy prescribed the position as a terminal assignment, it had become one in practice.⁹⁶ Finally, Rogers specified that SMA recommendations had to come from commanders in the grade of colonel or above, instead of lieutenant colonel as previously allowed. Considering the prestige of the office, it seemed appropriate to have a more experienced commander nominate candidates.⁹⁷

The Army dispatched messages to the field in October 1978, announcing the new criteria and soliciting nominations. Five months later, in February 1979, a board consisting of a lieutenant general, three major generals, and the incumbent SMA selected thirty finalists. Then, after gathering further background on the selectees and their spouses, the board recommended five finalists. In April, after each had been thoroughly checked by investigative agencies, the board ranked them by order of merit for the Chief of Staff, who interviewed them that same month and announced his decision.

When Connelly took office in July 1979, the Army was in the process of several major reorganizations. Plans were under way to redesign combat units at division level and higher; ideas and concepts were coalescing into the dynamic AirLand Battle Doctrine that would replace the more passive “active defense.” The Army was also moving steadily toward fielding exciting and potent new weapons and transportation systems for the mid-1980s. At the same time it was implementing revolutionary new training systems to enhance the preparedness of individual soldiers and their units. Higher standards were demanded Army-wide in virtually all areas. In 1979 there were, of course, many problems, especially in the areas of personnel and recruitment. Nevertheless, the Army was moving in the right direction and the problems were not so widespread as to be overwhelming. For example, the Army had difficulty achieving recruiting goals in 1979–1980, and the quality of recruits was not always as high as the small-unit leaders would have liked. Yet, this situation improved in the next few years as a domestic economic downturn made the Army a competitive choice as a profession. By 1983 the active Army met both qualitative and quantitative recruitment and reenlistment goals.⁹⁸

In retrospect, as Connelly came on board the Army was again changing—this time in a more controlled manner, one in which Army leaders could provide better direction. It was a time of improvement rather than radical restructuring; a time to modernize and move to improved readiness and strength. The Army now emphasized quality through better training, equipment, and education.

The Chief of Staff gave Connelly a twofold mission in rather broad outlines. The first was in the tradition of the sergeant major and the established pattern of the Sergeant Major of the Army: Connelly was to serve as the eyes and ears of the Chief of Staff in matters concerning the enlisted personnel and “to provide open and frank advice and criticism” of what he saw in the field. Connelly’s second responsibility, which the Chief of Staff gave as a mission-type order,

was “to oversee the continued development of the NCO corps.”⁹⁹

Connelly had clear ideas about what he wanted to accomplish. In an interview with the *Army Times*, just three weeks after taking office, he said he had “about 10...enlisted matters, including several dealing with promotions and assignments” that he wanted the Army Staff to review. He refused to divulge those matters until he had time to coordinate with the various staff agencies, but in that same interview he made clear one of his two main points of emphasis.

At the time Congress was taking steps to reduce the number of military dependents overseas in long-tour areas such as Germany and Japan. Connelly strongly opposed such efforts, publicly stating that sending the families overseas with the soldiers was “as necessary to readiness as spare parts” because of its importance to discipline and morale.¹⁰⁰ Taking care of soldiers and issues related to soldiers became a major focus of Connelly’s tour. Although the previous SMAs had similar concerns, they had been forced to concentrate on more pressing issues, such as establishing the office, downsizing the Army, implementing the All-Volunteer Army, and helping set in place programs to professionalize the NCO Corps. Progress in these other areas allowed Connelly more time and energy to look after the enlisted soldier.

A second concern for Connelly, as highlighted in his *Army* magazine articles, was training. He wrote about it often and emphasized it greatly: “Training is the number-one priority in today’s Army.”¹⁰¹ During his second year he reemphasized the point: “Our first priority as NCOs is to make sure the Army, the whole Army, is ready to go to war today, tomorrow or whenever challenged. For us it means leadership and hard work and it is spelled T-R-A-I-N-I-N-G.”

Connelly encouraged the noncommissioned officers to train their soldiers to tough, measurable standards; to standardize the practice of battle drills; to plan better; to “train smart” and share the load; to do a better job of focusing on what is important; and to do a better job of coaching subordinates when they conduct train-

ing.¹⁰² The next year he reiterated the same challenges. Although the Army had improved, he still emphasized the fundamentals of good soldiering that needed attention: get tough, take charge, and stop making excuses; be positive and stop griping; be disciplined and demand it from the soldiers. Finally, echoing the ideas Dunaway had expressed some years earlier, Connelly urged NCOs to show professional courage and always correct the soldier who needs it.

By Connelly’s last year as Sergeant Major of the Army, the new equipment to modernize the Army during the 1980s was about to enter the units. Connelly insisted on technical competence and the need for NCOs to become personally and closely familiar with the new equipment they were responsible for maintaining. They needed to pass on that knowledge, along with their tactical and garrison expertise, to the soldiers as they trained them.¹⁰³

Connelly sponsored or encouraged a number of initiatives to improve the life of the soldier and his family. These included improved dependent travel entitlements for family members and soldiers during changes of station and improved burial entitlements for serving and former senior NCOs and other enlisted soldiers. Other programs and changes by Congress or the Army Staff enhanced the financial rewards of a military career: dramatic pay increases, improved enlistment and reenlistment bonuses, and implementation of the Army College Fund (the Veterans Educational Assistance Program, a substitute for the old GI Bill). All contributed to attracting and retaining high-quality soldiers.¹⁰⁴

Connelly also was instrumental in developing the Noncommissioned Officer Development Plan (NCODP). This program complemented the Enlisted Personnel Management System and mandated that commanders at all levels conduct NCO leadership training within their units. NCO involvement with the execution of this training enabled them to put into practical application the skills acquired through the EPMS and

NCOES. In 1980 the SMA assumed responsibility for overseeing noncommissioned officer professional development throughout the Army's major commands, the National Guard, and the Army Reserve as part of the newly established program.¹⁰⁵

SMA Connelly also began the drive that eventually led to the elimination of the specialist ranks above E-4. To Connelly, the specialist rank served no particular purpose. Moreover, the lack of leadership authority associated with the ranks above the grade of E-4 diminished the respect and prestige of those who held it. Calling all soldiers E-5 and above sergeant, rather than some sergeants and some specialists, eliminated the widespread perception that specialists were mere technical experts with no troop responsibility outside of their work area. This in turn increased the sense of unity within the NCO Corps and encouraged all NCOs to accept greater responsibility.

Of all of Connelly's contributions, however, his greatest was in training. At Connelly's retirement ceremony, General Meyer declared that NCO training had improved tremendously over the previous four years, mainly due to Connelly's leadership.¹⁰⁶ The Sergeant Major's emphasis and efforts, encouraged by his Chief of Staff, had changed attitudes, increased expectations, expanded responsibility, and raised the level of training performance by the NCO Corps in units Army-wide. Key to this effort had been the steady improvement of NCOES instruction, especially in the basic course programs for combat arms, combat support, and combat service support. He also contributed to the ongoing adoption and adjustment of the SQTs. One of many changes implemented in 1982 was the initiation of a common-task test administered to all soldiers up to the grade of E-4.

Connelly best summed up the focus of his tenure and his legacy to the Army himself just after his retirement ceremony. He predicted the Army would continue to improve only if NCOs continued to act like NCOs. Their role was critical. He admonished NCOs to never walk past a deficiency, always stress physical fitness,

always look for new training approaches, and always stand up and be counted as they promoted the welfare of their troops.¹⁰⁷

Selection procedures for the seventh Sergeant Major of the Army began in September 1982 with a decision memorandum to the Chief of Staff proposing that the eligibility requirement be raised to twenty-seven years of service. Since the tenure of the office was still three years, the new requirement would allow the selectee to retire at the end of his tour as SMA. As in previous cases, the current Sergeant Major of the Army agreed to the proposed change before it was forwarded to the Chief of Staff for approval.¹⁰⁸

In May 1983 Chief of Staff General John A. Wickham, Jr., announced his selection of Glen E. Morrell, then the command sergeant major of U.S. Army Forces Command, as Connelly's successor. Morrell became the seventh occupant of that office on 1 July 1983.

Morrell received from his boss possibly the most detailed guidance given to any SMA. Wickham's instructions to Morrell completely filled three pages with themes, specific SMA duties, and instructions to the Army Staff. Some of the themes Morrell was expected to support included "An Army of Excellence," "A Modern Army," and "A Total Army." Wickham also instructed Morrell to be the CSA's primary link with the enlisted force and to maintain high standards within it.

In a June interview with the *Army Times*, just before assuming office, Morrell outlined his priorities. Among his specific objectives were extra pay for first sergeants and CSMs and the final elimination of the specialist ranks: "Nobody relates to it. Everybody knows what a sergeant is. But nobody can explain what a specialist is. We can't even explain what a specialist does in our talks with our sister services." His broader priorities were to encourage NCOs to place more emphasis on teaching basic soldier skills and to "look out for the welfare of the soldier."¹⁰⁹

During Morrell's tour as SMA, stability characterized the Army. Although change

occurred as units received new equipment and the Army created new types of units, his tenure illustrated focus, direction, and continuity. By 1986 increased funds for recruiting, better enlistment bonuses, a new GI Bill, and improved quality-of-life programs were attracting and keeping good soldiers in the Army. As Congress alleviated financial hardships by increasing the household goods weight allowance, travel allowances, and temporary lodging for dependents of enlisted personnel during moves, as well as the annual cost-of-living pay raises, the Army was able to retain more of its best-trained leaders.¹¹⁰

Sergeant Major Morrell focused his attention on training, readiness, and fine-tuning a generally sound organization. He criticized the Army-wide tendency to send whatever soldiers were available to NCOES courses instead of choosing only the best. Year after year, Morrell reiterated his concern because units selected “soldiers for noncommissioned officer development training [who were] available, who [were] more easily released from units for weeks at a time,” and held that commands were “not selective enough about which soldiers we send to school.”¹¹¹ Morrell also admonished the NCO Corps to step forward and accept more responsibility; to focus more on basics and fundamentals; to train for the new equipment and exhibit a pride of ownership in its maintenance; and to have each noncommissioned officer train his or her replacement.

During Morrell’s tenure, the Army restructured the NCOES, giving sergeants in combat support and combat service support branches the same type of professional training, oriented toward leader development, as their counterparts in the combat arms branches received. Now all noncommissioned officer training followed a common track. The Primary Leadership Development Course, formed in FY 1985 by merging the primary leadership course for combat support and combat service support soldiers and the primary NCO course for combat arms soldiers, focused on leadership. The second step, the

Basic Noncommissioned Officer Course, contained standard leader training required throughout the Army along with branch-specific skill training. The common threads of these first two courses bonded the NCOs of all branches. Top-performing NCOs of greatest potential then attended the Advanced Noncommissioned Officer Course and the Sergeants Major Course.¹¹²

The Sergeants Major Academy began to expand its facilities in 1985. Two years later the academy started to provide formal training for all first sergeants and command sergeants major. It also trained senior NCOs in operations and tactical intelligence. The Army’s goal was to increase enrollment in the first sergeants course from 696 to 1,010 NCOs and the sergeants major course from 496 to 624. At the same time, the facilities could handle an enrollment of about 500 students annually in the new senior operations/intelligence NCO course.¹¹³

During Morrell’s tour as SMA, the Army experienced a major problem with MOS imbalances, that is, inconsistencies between existing soldier specializations and those needed or authorized. To better balance the MOS structure, in 1983 the Army asked 12,400 soldiers in overstrength MOSs to transfer to skill fields with shortages. Around 3,500 soldiers accepted the offer that year, and 1,200 soldiers volunteered the following year. Nevertheless, in mid-1985 the imbalances were still a significant problem. To alleviate the situation, the Army required soldiers planning to reenlist in overstrength fields to designate a secondary choice in a shortage field. At the same time, careerists—those on other than their first enlistment—in overstrength fields were given ninety days to begin moving to a shortage MOS or face mandatory reclassification. Such actions, inevitable in an ever-changing Army, always prompted the attention and review of the SMA.

Morrell’s four-year tour ended on 30 June 1987. The following day, Julius W. Gates assumed office as the eighth Sergeant Major of the Army. Gates came to the Pentagon from Korea, where he had just completed a two-year

stint as the command sergeant major of U.S. Forces Korea/Eighth U.S. Army. The first Sergeant Major of the Army to have served in a joint command, Gates would put this experience to good use in the Pentagon's multiservice environment.

Although "a lot of high level, high ranking officers...still didn't totally believe the input from the Sergeant Major of the Army was all that important to the Chief of Staff," the newly appointed Chief of Staff, General Carl E. Vuono, did not share that opinion. General Vuono reserved his first office visit as Chief of Staff for the incoming Sergeant Major of the Army. During a three-hour meeting, Vuono told Gates that he desired to have "a very close relationship" with him, "that his door was always open, and that I was to sit to his right...during the General Staff's weekly meeting." During these and other meetings, Vuono requested that the new SMA always be a voice for the common soldier; indeed, over the next four years, Vuono would frequently rely upon Gates to provide him with advice and opinions on matters pertaining to the enlisted force. General Vuono also used this initial meeting to impart to Gates his goals, particularly the "six imperatives" for building and sustaining the Army: quality soldiers; realistic training; dynamic doctrine; continuous modernization; a force structure properly balanced between heavy, light, and special forces; and progressive leadership development based upon a combination of institutional training, operational assignments, and self-development. With regard to the Noncommissioned Officer Corps, Vuono stated that he expected NCOs to be the Army's "standard bearers," knowing and enforcing the highest standards of professional and ethical conduct. Toward this end, the Chief of Staff wanted all NCOs to be tactically and technically competent, rigorous trainers, and good listeners. Both men agreed that the best way for NCOs to take care of soldiers and their families was to ensure that the soldiers were thoroughly trained and ready for war. Over the next four years, SMA Gates would do his best to ensure that General Vuono's vision became a reality.

Gates' first major challenge was to educate Army leaders on the implementation of the new Noncommissioned Officer Evaluation Report (NCOER), which replaced the old Enlisted Evaluation Report (EER). The new rating system was the first of its kind to have been designed entirely by noncommissioned officers. It employed performance counseling and bullet comments to constructively measure specific standards and objectives. Based on strong recommendations from Gates and other senior noncommissioned officers, General Vuono also made the successful completion of an NCOES course a requirement for promotion for all NCOs. This policy, instituted in 1988, helped ensure that the Army identified the best-qualified soldiers and gave them the training they needed in a timely manner.

Despite the increasingly austere budgetary climate of the late 1980s and early 1990s, Secretary of the Army John O. Marsh, Jr., and General Vuono were fully committed to advancing the cause of NCO professionalism. Toward this end, they endorsed SMA Gates' suggestion that they designate 1989 the "Year of the Noncommissioned Officer." Gates used the opportunity to promote approximately fourteen NCO-related initiatives during the year. He spearheaded the establishment of the Command Sergeant Major (Designee) course, designed to prepare newly designated command sergeants major for their new duties. He also bore a great deal of responsibility for the inauguration of the *NCO Journal*, the first official journal written by and for noncommissioned officers. He secured the publication of *The Story of the Noncommissioned Officer Corps*, the first U.S. Army Center of Military History publication dedicated to recounting the rich heritage of the NCO Corps. The following year Gates, acting on the recommendations of noncommissioned officers throughout the Army, succeeded in replacing the old MOS-based Skill Qualifications Test (SQT) with the new Self-Development Test (SDT). The SDT tested MOS-specific and more general training and leadership skills while encouraging soldiers to

pursue one of General Vuono's three avenues for leadership development: self-improvement. Other changes to the NCO education and training system during Gates' tenure included the establishment of the Noncommissioned Officer Battle Staff Course at the Sergeants Major Academy in 1991.

All the attention the Army paid to training and professionalism paid off during two major combat operations launched during Gates' tour. The first, Operation JUST CAUSE (December 1989), was a model joint operation that restored democratic government to Panama. The second, Operation DESERT SHIELD/DESERT STORM (August 1990–April 1991), was a massive undertaking in which U.S. armed forces in conjunction with allied nations decisively defeated Iraq in a short but sharp war to liberate Kuwait. These operations exorcised any remaining ghosts of the Vietnam War that might have still haunted the Army and its NCO Corps.

Gates made two trips to Panama and three to Saudi Arabia during these conflicts. During these excursions, which he usually made in the company of the Secretary of Defense, the Secretary of the Army, or the Chief of Staff, Gates attempted to boost morale and to identify problems that he could help fix upon returning to the United States. When, for example, he discovered that soldiers were arriving in Saudi Arabia without all of their nuclear, biological, and chemical (NBC) warfare gear, he took prompt action to correct the problem. He also assisted in getting recreational and post exchange facilities out to soldiers in the desert. Everywhere he went in Panama and the Middle East, Gates found dedicated American service men and women performing incredible feats of courage, hard work, and self-sacrifice. His most humbling and moving experiences, however, occurred back in the United States, when he had the opportunity to visit wounded soldiers and freed prisoners of war from the Panamanian and Iraqi conflicts.

Gates took his job of representing soldiers' interests seriously and symbolically demon-

strated that commitment by replacing all of the office's elegant chinaware with simple canteen cups. The cups were rarely used, however, as Gates spent about 70 percent of his time outside the office, visiting units and talking with soldiers around the country and the world. The trips enabled Gates to explain the Chief of Staff's philosophy to rank-and-file soldiers. More important, it gave him the opportunity to listen. From these conversations, Gates was able to keep his finger on the collective pulse of the Army and to report back to senior leaders how Army policies and programs were playing out in the field. The information he gathered frequently allowed him to help correct problems and to improve soldier-oriented programs. For example, although the Army had made great strides in providing services to Army families, Gates found that family-focused programs like the Army Community Family Support Center and the annual Army Family Action Plan did not take the needs of single soldiers into account. Single soldiers who lived in barracks also resented the fact that they had less privacy and were more subject to inspections and details than were married soldiers who lived off base. The airing of such grievances led the Army to minimize barracks inspections and to seek parity in assignments for married and unmarried soldiers. Moreover, the Army introduced a new program, Better Opportunities for Single Soldiers (BOSS), to meet the needs of single soldiers in such areas as morale and welfare services, club operations, self-improvement, and coed activities.

Some of the greatest challenges facing the Army during the late 1980s and early 1990s were those posed by budget and force structure reductions. Two forces drove these reductions: the government's desire to reduce the federal deficit and the sudden end of the Cold War. The latter event began in 1989, as one Eastern European nation after another moved out of the Soviet orbit and replaced their Communist regimes with democratically elected governments. Then, in 1991, the Soviet Union itself collapsed, bringing to a stunning conclusion a

major historical era. The removal of America's archival from the world stage led to calls for a "peace dividend" and the transfer of funding from military to nonmilitary programs. Gates predicted in October 1990: "The shaping of the Army over the next five to six years is not going to be easy. For the first time we are confronted with the difficult task of building a smaller Army from an all-volunteer force."¹¹⁴

Army leaders were determined to carefully plan the downsizing process to avoid the hasty reductions of past decades that had sometimes rendered the Army incapable of fulfilling its basic missions. Although the war with Iraq temporarily delayed the phasedown, everyone understood that this was only an interlude. Consequently, Gates spent a considerable amount of time working on issues related to the projected reductions in Army strength. He played an integral role in helping to formulate the Army Career and Alumni Program (ACAP), a program that helped departing soldiers make the transition from military to civilian life through job fairs, resume development classes, and similar activities. Another program that received his attention was the Early Out Program, which enabled soldiers to electively retire after fifteen years of active service with reduced benefits. On the other hand, Gates actively opposed suggestions that excess officers be transferred to the NCO ranks, arguing that such an action would be demeaning to the officers and would drastically reduce opportunities for promotion among serving noncommissioned officers.

Although Gates focused his energy squarely on the major challenges facing the Army, he also managed to make some minor changes that enhanced the ability of the institution of the Sergeant Major of the Army to function more effectively. One of Gates' first actions after he became SMA was to seek more physical space for the Office of the Sergeant Major of the Army in the Pentagon—not a small feat in a building in which even senior colonels are crammed into tiny cubicles. When Gates became the Sergeant Major of Army, the office consisted

of two small rooms directly across the hall from the Chief of Staff's office. Space was so limited that he had to share his personal office with one of his three staff members. With the assistance of Secretary Marsh, Gates secured nearly double the amount of space allocated to his office, thus achieving a private office for himself, a small conference room, and adequate working conditions for his staff. Then, six months before his retirement, Gates' wife Margaret, with the strong support of Chief of Staff Vuono's wife Patricia, succeeded in having the Sergeant Major of the Army's family quarters moved to a larger house on Fort Myer, Virginia. The move enhanced the ability of future Sergeants Major of the Army to host the many social activities incumbent with the position.

Sergeant Major of the Army Gates concluded his four-year tour and retired from the Army on 30 June 1991. On 2 July, when Richard A. Kidd became the ninth Sergeant Major of the Army, he, like so many of his predecessors, was the top enlisted man of an Army facing an uncertain future. Fortunately, Kidd had their strong examples to provide some light and guidance.

Kidd's tour focused mainly on ensuring that despite severe reductions, the Army remained a capable, sustainable force, able to fulfill its core mission of fighting and winning the nation's wars. A key challenge for Kidd was to make certain that the Army took proper care of those enlisted personnel who left the service as a result of the drawdown. In response to questions relating to the drawdown, Kidd was quick to announce that it would be performed in such a way to ensure the readiness of the remaining soldiers.¹¹⁵ He also reminded audiences that soldiers were not leaving the Army cold because, improving on previous drawdowns, the Army was working to ease their transition into civilian life. In December 1991 the Army fully implemented the Army Career and Alumni Program, developed during Gates' tenure to assist in marketing soldiers to civilian employers. By conducting job counseling and by using an innovative, computer-



General Sullivan Presents to SMA Kidd the New Sergeant Major of the Army Insignia, Which Kidd Designed.

ized job-bank service, ACAP matched soldiers' skills with the needs of potential employers.¹¹⁶

As the Army's budget declined in tandem with the reduction in manpower, Kidd concentrated on maintaining funding for critical programs such as the NCOES. He successfully fought for the opportunity for all promotable soldiers to attend the NCOES schools. In addition, Kidd tackled such tough issues as sexual orientation and women in combat, making the Army's senior leadership aware of soldiers' attitudes, perceptions, and concerns. Meanwhile, Kidd maintained the tradition of visiting troops deployed overseas in the increasing number of noncombat operations to new places like Somalia, Macedonia, and Haiti.

On 17 October 1994, SMA Kidd introduced a redesigned chevron to represent the Sergeant Major of the Army. It included the original two stars, slightly smaller, flanked by a newly added eagle. The eagle symbolized the Sergeant Major's link to the Chief of Staff and was depicted on the SMA shield, collar brass, dress uniform buttons, and rank of the Army specialist. Since a portion of the American eagle is depicted in the rank insignia of every senior enlisted service member, the change brought the SMA insignia into line with that worn by the other services.¹¹⁷

In January 1995 Kidd convened the first meeting of the Council of Command Sergeants

Major, a new organization intended to discuss improvements to NCO professional development programs. One of the council's key recommendations was that job performance be the most important factor in personnel evaluations and promotion consideration. Panel members, drawn from the major commands and the Army Staff, were concerned that soldiers had become more focused on other areas, such as attaining college credits, rather than job performance.¹¹⁸

A secondary result of the council's deliberation was a consensus to abolish the Self Development Test (SDT). The SDT was the 1990 replacement for the Skill Qualification Test developed during Bainbridge's tour. It was a formally administered, written exam that evaluated the soldier's basic leadership skills and knowledge. General William W. Hartzog, the TRADOC commander, accepted the council's recommendation and eliminated the test based on the opinion that it was redundant to the NCOES.¹¹⁹

During Kidd's tenure the Army finally formalized the tour length of the Sergeant Major of the Army to the current four-year term. The original General Orders No. 29 that established the position had directed that the SMA's tenure correspond to the tenure of the Chief of Staff whom he served. Dunaway had recommended that the tour length be shortened to two years to provide opportunities for other sergeants major to serve in this important role. It was while Bainbridge was in the office that Chief of Staff General Frederick C. Weyand had directed that the tour of the SMA be three years, although the chiefs thereafter had generally extended their SMA's tour by an additional year. The SMA tour length is not governed by law, but by Army policy, which states that the sergeant major of the Army is appointed by the chief of staff of the Army and serves at the discretion of the secretary of the Army.¹²⁰

Surrounded by the soldiers of the 3d U.S. Infantry (Old Guard) and The U.S. Army Band, "Pershing's Own," on Summerall Field at Fort Myer, SMA Kidd completed thirty-three years of active duty on 16 June 1995. Fourteen

days later Florida native Gene C. McKinney took his oath as the tenth Sergeant Major of the Army. McKinney, who had served as the command sergeant major for U.S. Army, Europe, was the first minority service member to hold the office of Sergeant Major of the Army. An armored cavalryman for over two decades, McKinney wanted to ensure that noncommissioned officers were prepared for the quickly approaching twenty-first century. He was also a staunch believer in the Creed of the Noncommissioned Officer, so much so that he could recite it in its entirety from memory or finish it given a word or two.¹²¹

As sergeant major of the Army, McKinney saw himself as a “conduit of information” between soldiers and Army leaders. Though aware that modern weapons and advanced technology might require new approaches to training, he recognized that soldier basics would remain the same.¹²² During the 1995 Worldwide Noncommissioned Officer Education System Conference, McKinney impressed on the delegates the idea that universal standards of training must be applied throughout the Army.¹²³

As the Army continued its post-Cold War drawdown, it began to consolidate its extensive network of educational and training centers under a program called the Total Army School System. McKinney asserted that the Army needed to capitalize on the critical methods by which NCO leaders were developed.¹²⁴ Having come from U.S. Army, Europe, McKinney had seen firsthand the revolution that was occurring in improving the quality of life of soldiers and their families. His support for single soldier initiatives, such as relaxed barracks living standards, was based on his belief that young soldiers were smart and trustworthy and that leaders needed only to give them the respect they deserved.¹²⁵

McKinney worked to expand the prestige of senior NCOs and to strengthen the command sergeants major program. One of his lasting accomplishments was in establishing a graduated system of special pay for CSMs commensurate with their levels of responsibility. McKinney explained to the Deputy Chief

of Staff for Personnel (DCSPER) that CSMs did not receive any pay increases as they progressed through duty positions from battalion to major command.¹²⁶ McKinney observed that while an officer who rose from a battalion command to become the commanding general of a major command received pay increases commensurate with his growing responsibilities, a CSM received the same pay regardless of whether he was CSM of a battalion or a major command. To rectify this situation, McKinney proposed instituting tiered special-duty assignment pay (SDAP), the successor to proficiency pay, for CSMs assigned to positions where their rater, senior rater, and reviewer were all general officers. Based on the special qualifications required of CSMs working at senior levels, the DCSPER concurred with McKinney’s recommendation and the Assistant Secretary of the Army approved SDAP for select CSMs in October 1996.¹²⁷

Late in that same year allegations arose that drill instructors and other training center cadre were sexually abusing female trainees. As investigations identified widespread sexual misconduct, the Army established a toll free hotline and within weeks received almost 4,500 calls. In November, McKinney held a town hall meeting at one of the sites where misconduct had occurred, Aberdeen Proving Ground, Maryland. There, he spoke with almost 1,400 soldiers, trainees, and senior non-commissioned officers. During his two-day visit he found that morale for the most part was good, but that the soldiers were frustrated with the media attention. He noted the soldiers trusted that the Army would do what was right in light of the allegations.¹²⁸

Determined to evaluate the entire Initial Entry Training program, Secretary of the Army Togo D. West, Jr., formed an advisory panel to review the Army’s policies on sexual harassment. As he had done when forming a similar panel on extremist activity within the Army, West included McKinney in the task force. West explained that, “when we need to inform ourselves about how our Army is doing



CSM Jerry T. Alley, Interim SMA



CSM James C. McKinney, Interim SMA

what it is doing, whether it is doing it well and what our soldiers think,...we cannot leave out the NCO Corps.”¹²⁹

The task force had been at work for only a few months when McKinney himself became a target of the probe. In February 1997 a former aide accused McKinney of improper conduct, and eventually five female service members came forward with similar allegations. For the first time in history a serving Sergeant Major of the Army was suspended from his duties. Under growing pressure from Congress, Army Chief of Staff General Dennis J. Reimer relieved McKinney, stating that “it was a damned difficult decision, probably one of the most difficult decisions I’ve ever had to make.”¹³⁰

The staff in the Office of the Sergeant Major of the Army was stunned by the development. Reimer temporarily assigned McKinney to the Military District of Washington. McKinney vacated his Pentagon office and relocated to Fort Myer, where he devoted much of his time to working with his lawyers on his case. Meanwhile, the Army asked several senior com-

mand sergeants major to fill in for McKinney on an ad hoc basis.

In May command sergeants major at the Senior Leadership Conference recommended to the Chief of Staff that someone be appointed to the SMA duties on a full-time basis until the investigation of McKinney was completed.¹³¹ Instead, Reimer decided to rotate the position between two command sergeants major, Jerry T. Alley of Forces Command and James C. McKinney of the Training and Doctrine Command. (James McKinney was the twin brother of the suspended Sergeant Major of the Army.) Both Alley and McKinney were to remain in their current positions while sharing the duties of SMA. Without forming an opinion regarding McKinney’s guilt or innocence, Reimer acknowledged that the charges were serious. By selecting two men to serve as acting Sergeant Major of the Army, he anticipated neither would be considered an incumbent and receive an advantage should the need arise to select a permanent replacement.¹³²

In October 1997 an Article 32 investigation referred McKinney's case for court-martial. Reimer immediately reassigned McKinney and began the process to select a permanent replacement.¹³³ Having notified the selectee only twenty-four hours beforehand, on 13 October 1997, Reimer went before the AUSA Sergeants Major Conference and introduced Robert E. Hall as the eleventh Sergeant Major of the Army. In the interest of speed, Reimer had made the selection without convening a board—the first time that had happened since the introduction of the board process in 1970.

Reimer was familiar with Hall. He had been one of the five finalists for selection as the tenth SMA, and the Chief of Staff had interviewed him at the time.¹³⁴ While thanking the two acting SMAs, Reimer noted, "This is not a part time job," adding that he could not "be more pleased by the performance of both NCOs."¹³⁵

An Air Defense Artilleryman, Hall came to the SMA job from the U.S. Central Command. Hall commented that he was humbled by the selection and pledged not to "forget where he had come from." Reimer's instructions to Hall were to be a forceful advocate for soldiers and to keep his eye on the future.¹³⁶ Hall was the first SMA who had not served in Vietnam. He was, however, a combat veteran, having served as the 24th Infantry Division Artillery Command Sergeant Major during Operation DESERT STORM. Cognizant of the damage done by the recent scandal, Hall's first message to nearly three hundred NCOs at the October conference was "keep faith in the Army."¹³⁷

Hall quickly set upon his task and committed himself to communicating with soldiers. When he assumed his duties, the Office of the Sergeant Major of the Army had been vacant for eight months. Hall immediately reestablished ties and brought the office back to its rightful position. Realizing the power of computers and the Internet, Hall published his electronic mail address in *Soldiers* magazine and encouraged soldiers to contact him directly. Regularly toting a laptop computer on his various trips, Hall was

able to communicate easily with soldiers of all ranks through email.¹³⁸

Still reeling from the aftershocks of misconduct accusations, the Army's leadership began a concentrated effort to reemphasize the core values expected of soldiers. Based on recommendations from the Task Force on Sexual Harassment, Hall strove to accentuate the seven Army Values: Loyalty, Duty, Respect, Selfless Service, Honor, and Personal Courage. Hall worked with the sergeant major for the Office of the DCSPER to develop a card bearing the Soldier's Code on one side and the Army Values on the other that was presented to each soldier in the Army.¹³⁹ Hall believed the card would help inculcate dignity and respect for the uniform, for the country, and for the unit. He believed that each soldier should sign the card in the presence of the unit commander and first sergeant in a ceremony designed to signify each soldier's acceptance of the seven values.¹⁴⁰ Meanwhile, the Army expanded Basic Combat Training so as to integrate the core values into its course of instruction.¹⁴¹

During Hall's tenure the Army struggled to meet its recruiting and end-strength goals. Surveys indicated that youths between eighteen and twenty-five years old had a lower propensity toward military service than in previous years, which was obvious when the Army fell short of its recruiting mission by 6,290 in 1999.¹⁴² During the same year the attrition rate for first-term soldiers was enough to cause Hall to voice his concern that "nearly 40 percent of our soldiers never make it to ETS (expiration term of service)." He committed himself to work toward reducing those losses.¹⁴³ The Army instituted and reenergized programs such as the Sergeant Major of the Army Recruiting Team (Project Smart), Hometown Recruiter Assistance Program, GED-Plus (high school equivalency diploma test) and the Corporal Recruiter Program. Hall stressed his belief that the Recruiting Command did not come up short, but that the Army did. The Army developed new recruiting ads targeted at the youth of the "Info Age." Later it changed advertising

agencies and scrapped the popular “Be All You Can Be” jingle. After Hall’s tour the slogan would become “An Army of One.”

By September 2000, while the Army struggled to improve its image among potential recruits, it also faced serious shortages of junior noncommissioned officers. In 1995 the DCSPER directed personnel proponents to conduct a bottom-up review of military occupation specialties, which became known as the Change in NCO Structure (CINCOS).¹⁴⁴ The Army’s goal was to reduce the size of the NCO Corps. As a result of CINCOS, the Army downgraded approximately 6,700 enlisted positions by one grade, cutting the NCO Corps from 49.8 percent to 47.6 percent of the enlisted force and returning it to its 1989 strength. By mid-1999 the leadership decided to “buy back” over 4,600 NCO positions due to leadership shortages and a lack of expertise. By October the force felt the effect of a shortage of sergeants. Hall challenged senior NCOs to take “a risk on young soldiers and allow them responsibilities,” thereby giving them a chance to correct their shortcomings and get promoted.¹⁴⁵

Interacting with soldiers during his many trips throughout the Army, Hall identified four top concerns that contributed to dissatisfaction among enlisted soldiers: pay and entitlements, housing, medical care, and retirement benefits. Hall’s reports to Congress emphasized quality of life and morale, welfare, and recreation issues: “Our nation owes its soldiers a quality of life commensurate with that of the private sector and the peace of mind that their families will be taken care of when they deploy.”¹⁴⁶ Congress responded to the concerns of Hall and other senior leaders by raising military pay, increasing retirement benefits, and funding major modernization programs for barracks and family housing.¹⁴⁷

Although Army regulations stated the tenure of the SMA should be concurrent with that of the Chief of Staff who appointed him, General Reimer, who was due to retire in June 1999, thought it might be beneficial to have

Hall stay on as SMA during the transition of the chiefs. After consulting with senior leaders, Reimer extended Hall’s service commitment for an additional year in December 1998. As a result, Hall, who had become SMA under unusual circumstances midway through Reimer’s tour, would eventually serve thirty-two months as Sergeant Major of the Army for two Chiefs of Staff, Reimer and his successor, General Eric K. Shinseki.

In the midsummer of 1999 the Army unveiled the Sergeant Major of the Army Positional Colors. Never before had an enlisted position of any service been recognized with a representational flag, historically reserved for the Secretary and Under Secretary of the Army, Senior Executive Service personnel, and Chiefs of Staff and their deputies. The idea for a positional flag had surfaced in 1992 during Kidd’s tenure and was seven years in the making.¹⁴⁸ A representation of the OSMA, it also symbolized the tremendous importance of the NCO Corps in the U.S. Army. Designed by the U.S. Army Institute of Heraldry, it was taken from the insignia created in 1966 to distinguish the SMA from all other sergeants major. The flag, divided diagonally in scarlet and white and fringed with yellow, bore the SMA’s shield insignia at its center.

As the Army began to move into a new millennium, technology and modernization were changing the way the Army looked at the future. The Army took an initial step toward transformation by developing two Initial Brigade Combat Teams (IBCT) at Fort Lewis, Washington. The teams were to use off-the-shelf technology to achieve an interim capability as the Army headed toward a long-term force structure reorganization—a goal termed the Objective Force. As part of the transformation the Army needed to produce soldiers who were able to shoot, move, and communicate on future battlefields with new and advanced equipment, and Hall challenged the NCO Corps to train those soldiers and accept responsibility and accountability for individual, crew section, and team training.¹⁴⁹

To chart a course for the NCO Corps of the future as part of the transformation initiative, the Chief of Staff approved the Future NCO Vision, born out of the Future NCO Workshop, hosted by the U.S. Army Sergeants Major Academy and the RAND Corporation's Arroyo Center. McKinney and the Training and Doctrine Command had asked RAND to undertake a research project entitled "Future Leader Development of Noncommissioned Officers." The project, designed to help formulate a vision to articulate important characteristics of Army NCOs, highlighted the strengths and weaknesses the Future NCO Workshop had identified. The goal was to develop:

A noncommissioned officer corps, grounded in heritage, values, and tradition, [which] embodies the warrior ethos; values perpetual learning, and is capable of leading, training, and motivating soldiers. We must always be a non-commissioned officer corps that:

- Leads by example
- Trains from experience
- Enforces and maintains standards
- Takes care of soldiers
- Adapts to a changing world.¹⁵⁰

During his tenure as SMA, Hall traveled around the world twelve times, visited more than sixty thousand soldiers, and spoke to congressional leaders more than seventeen times. Hall's steady leadership and ceaseless efforts helped steer the Army and the NCO Corps through difficult periods. Echoing the thoughts of his peers, a major command sergeant major described Hall as the "right person at the right time." According to Hall, the soldiers themselves guided change.¹⁵¹

On 18 May 2000, the Secretary and Chief of Staff of the Army announced the selection of Jack L. Tilley as the twelfth Sergeant Major of the Army. This nomination was unique in that for the first time a female command sergeant major was nominated, as well as a full-time National Guardsman.¹⁵²

Tilley hailed from Vancouver, Washington. Never expecting to be much more than a good specialist, he came up through the ranks as an

armored cavalryman whose service included a combat tour in Vietnam with the 1st Squadron, 4th Cavalry. He was selected from the U.S. Central Command at MacDill Air Force Base, Florida.¹⁵³ Upon arriving at the Pentagon, Tilley quickly focused on the top issues of concern to the enlisted force—pay, retirement benefits, quality of life, and health care. A strong advocate for the soldier, Tilley's foundation of leadership was built on basic principles: consistent and fair counseling, effective communication, taking care of soldiers and their families, maintaining readiness, and ensuring tough, realistic training.¹⁵⁴ This first SMA of the new millennium consulted with former Sergeants Major of the Army. Tilley noticed a common theme among them, the conviction that "the coming years will be challenging." He believed that soldiers expected him to be honest, fair, and to "tell it like it is."¹⁵⁵

Tilley accepted the challenge and quickly set upon establishing some "firsts." In December he traveled to Europe for two weeks with the sergeants major of the Army Reserves and the Army National Guard to exchange information with thousands of soldiers and to hear their concerns. Tilley, impressed by the soldiers of the European Command, pledged to do what he could to represent their issues when he returned to Washington.¹⁵⁶

In January 2001 Tilley held the first-ever Sergeant Major of the Army's Nominative Command Sergeant Major Conference, a week-long gathering at the U.S. Army Sergeants Major Academy at Fort Bliss of the most senior noncommissioned officers on active duty and in the Guard and Reserve. The weeklong conference featured as guest speakers Secretary of the Army Louis Caldera, Chief of Staff Shinseki, and numerous subject matter experts in fields ranging from medicine, finance, logistics, and installation management. The conference identified subject areas for the Noncommissioned Officer Corps to focus on during the coming year and made recommendations to the Chief of Staff on vital soldier-related issues.¹⁵⁷

Later that same month Tilley hosted the first “Sergeants Time Training” at the Pentagon.¹⁵⁸ At Tilley’s invitation General Shinseki addressed the assembly. Shinseki urged the NCOs to continuously hone their leadership skills, since it was possible that they might have to deploy suddenly in the event of a crisis. He also felt that the Sergeants Time session would help establish special bonds between first-line NCOs and junior enlisted personnel—bonds that would help soldiers during particularly tough missions. Finally, Shinseki acknowledged the benefit of giving sergeants major the opportunity to see all their talented soldiers at one time.

As Tilley filled the role of the top enlisted soldier, the Army transformation initiative began to pick up steam. As a symbol of that transformation, Shinseki directed that the entire Army switch to wearing black berets as the standard headgear on the Army’s 225th Birthday, 14 June 2001. The decision was unpopular with some, particularly past and present Rangers who had worn the black beret for many years and believed it should have remained exclusively theirs to wear. Nevertheless, Shinseki believed that the beret would become “a symbol of unity, a symbol of Army excellence, a symbol of our values,” and he directed Tilley to lead the effort to implement the change. Tilley acted promptly, announcing during his Sergeants Time class that “we are going to do some things to change our Army. The berets are a part of that.” He further noted that “when the chief of staff makes a decision, it’s not time to start debating,” and he urged the assembled NCOs to get behind the effort.¹⁵⁹ Though procurement problems prevented the distribution of berets to all soldiers prior to the implementation date, the Army formally transitioned to the beret on its



General Reimer and SMA Hall During the Unfurling Ceremony for the Sergeant Major of the Army Positional Colors

226th birthday, an event marked by ceremonies across the Army. Meanwhile, the Rangers settled on a tan beret as their distinctive headgear.

As the Army moved toward the future, Tilley foresaw new challenges for the NCO Corps. With new technologies, he recognized that education was to play an increasingly pivotal role in the development of noncommissioned officers.¹⁶⁰ Consequently, he wanted the Army to educate soldiers earlier in their careers and to break the link between education and promotions.¹⁶¹ On the other hand, he was sure that the basic responsibilities of leadership would not change. Tilley expected that noncommissioned officers understand the NCO Vision and know what their priorities should be.¹⁶²

Tilley, respected for his lighthearted demeanor and down-to-earth personality, explained his attitude toward representing the entire enlisted force: "I'm just a soldier just like you, except I have a different job with different responsibilities."¹⁶³ After Tilley spoke to one unit, one of the soldiers admired "the way he addressed issues...it wasn't like you were looking at his position, but you looked at him [as an] NCO that is our voice—the most senior person that represents soldiers to the chain of command."¹⁶⁴ Tilley was fond of saying that soldiers can tell if you are "live or Memorex." To the soldiers he represented, Tilley was truly "live."

On 15 January 2004, Kenneth O. Preston was sworn in as the thirteenth Sergeant Major of the Army. The soft-spoken tanker from the mountains of western Maryland took office while the Army was fighting two wars and undergoing a major transformation in organization, doctrine, and equipment. Preston sought to strengthen discipline and morale by emphasizing fitness, the quality of life of soldiers and their families, and noncommissioned officer education. Preston occupied the office of Sergeant Major of the Army for seven years, serving two consecutive Chiefs of Staff: General Peter J. Schoomaker and General George W. Casey, Jr.

Few understood the relationship between retention and the quality of soldier and family life better than Preston. The all-volunteer force would not survive the unrelenting demands of war if the Army did not help sustain healthy Army families. This required a commitment to properly resource family medical care, child support, quality schools, and youth services. Together with the Secretary of the Army, the Army Staff, and General Casey, Preston helped craft the Army Family Covenant, a simple pledge of the Army's commitment to fund these priorities. Support for these programs was increased from \$700 million to \$1.4 billion in Fiscal Year 2008. From 2005 to 2007 the Army built, privatized, and improved eighty thousand housing units on thirty-six installations and opened over sixty new child care centers.¹⁶⁵

Preston was an advocate for the Comprehensive Soldier Fitness Program. This holistic approach to soldier fitness and readiness was a collaborative effort between the Army and civilian medical researchers and was based on evidence collected by the Positive Psychology Center at the University of Pennsylvania. The purpose was to develop a process for building resilience in the minds and bodies of soldiers stretched to the limit by the demands of combat and the stress of multiple deployments. The Army hoped that focusing on a broader spectrum of fitness would also aid suicide prevention efforts and help stop posttraumatic stress disorder (PTSD). Preston believed that this new approach combined with strong leadership would give the Army the capability to produce more resilient soldiers.¹⁶⁶

Like many of his predecessors, Preston worked to reform the Noncommissioned Officer Education System. His experiences in Kuwait, Kosovo, and Iraq had convinced him that the character of warfare had changed. The increased dispersion of units and volatility of the modern battlefield combined with the expanding spectrum of conflict would require noncommissioned officers to develop a depth of understanding of their mission relative to operational and strategic objectives.¹⁶⁷

Together with the Training and Doctrine Command, Preston devised a new model for training soldiers and noncommissioned officers. The core courses that made up the NCOES were redesigned: the Primary Leader Development Course, Basic Noncommissioned Officer Course, and Advanced Noncommissioned Officer Course were changed to the Warrior Leader Course, Advanced Leader Course, and the Senior Leader Course, respectively. Each curriculum incorporated skills that had formerly been taught in higher-level courses.¹⁶⁸ The intent was to challenge students and prepare them to step into positions of increased responsibility. Distance learning and structured self-development were integrated into the curricula, maximizing the time and resources available for professional education. This method required noncommissioned

officers to shoulder more responsibility for their own education and professional improvement. The new NCOES courses were built into the Army Force Generation (ARFORGEN) cycle, creating periods for qualified noncommissioned officers to leave their units and attend the required classes.¹⁶⁹

Preston was a valued adviser to both General Schoomaker and General Casey for issues regarding transformation and soldier discipline. His views carried considerable weight across the Army.¹⁷⁰ As the thirteenth Sergeant Major of the Army, he had served the longest term in the history of the position. His contribution to Army transformation has left an enduring legacy.

Conclusion

Today the Sergeant Major of the Army still serves as the senior enlisted adviser and consultant to the Army Chief of Staff. As specified in *The Army Noncommissioned Officers Guide*:

The sergeant major [of the Army] serves as the senior enlisted advisor and consultant to the Chief of Staff of the Army. The SMA provides information on problems affecting enlisted personnel and proposed solutions to these problems; on standards, professional development, growth and advancement of NCOs; and on morale, training pay, promotions and quality of life for soldiers and family members. Using command information channels, the SMA keeps soldiers current on important NCO issues, and through the public media informs the American people on the Army mission, soldier accomplishments and future enlisted trends. He directs NCO support channel activities through the major commands' command sergeants major by using written and verbal communications. Other functions of this position include: presenting the enlisted viewpoint to Congress, DA boards and committees, meeting with military and civilian organizations to discuss enlisted affairs, receiving enlisted personnel who visit HQDA, and representing all Army enlisted personnel at appropriate ceremonies.¹⁷¹

The Sergeant Major of the Army's views have meaning as he serves on a great number of boards and committees, including the Army Policy Council, the Army Staff Council, and the General Staff Council. Protocol confirms the prestige and importance of the office by giving

the SMA positional colors and a protocol status just beneath the director of the Army Staff and above all other lieutenant generals on staff.

Many aspects of the office have remained constant since its inception. The Army's top NCO still spends about half of his time traveling worldwide to visit with soldiers and pass on the greetings and policies of the Chief of Staff. He still performs the original role as the eyes and ears of the Chief of Staff. And even though his duties are specified in official Army publications, the duties he performs for the Chief of Staff remain flexible. General Johnson's precedent of instructing Sergeant Major Wooldridge in 1966 continues, as each Chief of Staff provides the specific guidance and mission for his Sergeant Major of the Army. It may be extensive, detailed guidance, such as that General Wickham gave to Sergeant Major Morrell, or it may be simple verbal guidance, as General Westmoreland gave to Sergeant Major Copeland. In any case the guidance has never been a restrictive list of "do's and don'ts" that might circumscribe or limit the SMA's actions. The office remains dependent upon the occupant's initiative to accomplish the mission.

Of course, many things have changed since 1966. Probably the most important is the ready acceptance of the office by the rest of the Army Staff. Wooldridge worked endless hours to open doors and establish contacts in various offices, while Hall had to reoccupy an office that had been vacant for eight months. Today, the office is now a well-established, accepted member of the Army Staff.

The selection process for the Sergeant Major of the Army has become more formal. In a word, it is now institutionalized. Choosing the first two occupants had been simply a matter of sending a message to the field soliciting nominees, with the Chief of Staff then using whatever process he desired to make his choice. Now the selection process involves a formal zone of consideration with a variety of factors considered, including total years of active service, age, and service in positions at the general-officer level.¹⁷² This process can take many months



Eight of the Sergeants Major of the Army in the Sergeant Major of the Army Hall, U.S. Army Sergeants Major Academy, 2000

and involves a prestigious selection board of general officers and the incumbent SMA.

The Chief of Staff of the Army continues to administer the oath of office to the incoming Sergeant Major of the Army, now held in the Pentagon's Hall of Heros. Surrounded by friends, family, and colleagues, the SMA Designee swears to:

I, [name], having been appointed to the Sergeant Major of the Army, do solemnly swear that I will support and defend the Constitution of the United States against all enemies, foreign and domestic; that I will bear truth faith and allegiance to the same; that I take this obligation freely without any mental reservation or purpose of evasion; and that I will well and faithfully execute the duties of the office which I am about to enter, so help me God.¹⁷³

Tenure for the office has also changed. Although the term of the first Sergeant Major of the Army was to parallel that of his Chief of

Staff (roughly four years), the tenure officially changed to two years following Wooldridge and Dunaway's two-year terms. In the mid-1970s it was officially increased to a three-year tour, but subsequent Sergeants Major of the Army—from Bainbridge to Kidd—all served four-year tours, the same as their respective Chiefs of Staff, exactly as General Johnson envisioned in 1966. Special circumstances limited McKinney and Hall to serve less than four years. Preston served seven years due to the requirements of an Army at war and the personal trust he established with the incoming Chief of Staff.

Finally, the emphasis and focus of the office have changed. In the early years, Wooldridge, Dunaway, and Copeland were concerned mostly with establishing the office, making it a meaningful position, and helping the enlisted force as best they could during times of great stress and change. Van Autreve and Bainbridge,

transitional figures in a time of increasing stability, moved from reacting to crises and problems to focusing the office on efforts to bring steady, planned improvement. Connelly and Morrell solidified the gains of their predecessors. By the times in which Gates, Kidd, and McKinney served, the senior Army noncommissioned officer could afford to take a broader view and emphasize specific adjustments. Instead of having the mission to “establish the office” as did Wooldridge, or move the NCO Corps to an all-volunteer force as Copeland had to do, Gates, Kidd, and McKinney could devote their energies to specific problems within the more general areas of professional development, training, and quality of life.

Hall had to overcome a difficult period for the office while the NCO Corps struggled from within. Fortunately, the office had gained much respect and was an integral part of the operation of the Army, and there was little concern of abolishing the position of Sergeant Major of the Army as during the upheaval of Copeland’s tenure. Because of the efforts of each of the previous Sergeants Major of the Army, the office quickly regained its stature, which allowed Tilley to focus early on the future and the transformation of the Army for the twenty-first century. Preston demonstrated the value of the office by effectively assisting the Army in meeting the challenges of fighting a long, bitter conflict with an all-volunteer force.

The Army created the OSMA in 1966 to help professionalize the Noncommissioned Officers Corps and thereby improve its performance and responsibility. The new position gave symbolic and active support to those efforts. The SMA’s office evolved and developed parallel to the professionalization of the NCO Corps.

As the Sergeants Major of the Army established the boundaries of their office and institutionalized their position on the Army Staff, the Army launched new programs to improve the NCO Corps. The Noncommissioned Officer Education System, the Enlisted Personnel Management System, a redesigned rating sys-

tem, and the Noncommissioned Officer Professional Development Program all emerged and prospered simultaneously with the growth of the Office of the Sergeant Major of the Army. The Sergeants Major of the Army did not create these programs, but they and their office were symbols of the Army Staff’s commitment to devote resources, time, and people to restructure the NCO Corps.

While the Sergeants Major of the Army did not create new enlisted programs, they certainly influenced them. The SMAs were actively involved in advising, recommending, and checking at each step along the way as the programs evolved. And as the staff focused more effort on NCO and enlisted issues, the importance of the SMA as a sounding board and point for coordination increased as well. In this way, the new programs and the new SMA office grew in tandem, creating a synergy that allowed those who served to become involved in even more programs and policies.

The SMA also gave prestige to noncommissioned officers. The NCOs now had one of their own across the hall from the Army Chief of Staff; American enlisted soldiers around the globe could be confident that their views could and would be represented to the chief. As a member of the chief’s personal staff with unobstructed access, the SMA was no mere action NCO; the SMA evolved as an individual whose coordination was essential for all matters relating to the enlisted force. The SMA position also offered all NCOs a career goal with greater stature and prestige than had ever been available.

It is clear today that the original goals for creating the office—fostering direct communication between the enlisted ranks and the Chief of Staff, promoting confidence, increasing NCO prestige, and broadening NCO career incentives—are being met. The actions of those who held the office, through their work with the Army Staff and with the units and soldiers in the field, have also contributed considerably toward the professionalization of the NCO Corps.

The Sergeant Major of the Army is not a policy maker. He neither initiates, coordinates, nor implements staff actions. He has no recurring reports to submit, nor does he have any specific responsibilities or projects that his office must monitor or complete. Instead, he works *for* a policy maker and provides information and a point of view to assist the number-one Army officer in making decisions. In his capacity as the eyes and ears of the Chief of Staff he performs an invaluable service, not only by carrying the views of enlisted personnel directly to their chief, but also by communicating to enlisted people Army-wide whatever message the chief wants them to be sure to hear. As the senior enlisted representative he influences the policies and staff actions of the Army Staff whenever they affect the enlisted force and thereby ensures

that their interests are being represented and their concerns are being considered.

The Sergeants Major of the Army have performed invaluable services for the noncommissioned officers and enlisted soldiers of the U.S. Army. They have helped professionalize the Noncommissioned Officer Corps; they have represented the interests of the enlisted force in the highest councils of the Army and have helped bring about many positive changes in policy; and they have raised the morale of soldiers in visits to duty stations around the globe. The powers of the office allowed this to happen, but the men who held that office during its first quarter-century made it happen too. Their strength, their insight, their determination, and their devotion to duty greatly contributed to forming the superb Army that the United States has today.

Notes

1. John C. Chapin, *Uncommon Men: The Sergeants Major of the Marine Corps* (Shippensburg, Pa.: Beidel Printing House, 1993), pp. 1–2.

2. William K. Emerson, *Chevrons: Illustrated History and Catalog of U.S. Army Insignia* (Washington, D.C.: Smithsonian Institution Press, 1983), pp. 183, 195–97.

3. Arnold G. Fisch, Jr., and Robert K. Wright, Jr., *The Story of the Noncommissioned Officer Corps* (Washington, D.C.: Center of Military History, 1989), pp. 21–23; Interv, Erwin H. Koehler with Silas L. Copeland, 19–21 Oct 93, pp. 247–49, author's files, U.S. Army Center of Military History, Washington, D.C. (hereafter cited as CMH).

4. Forrest K. Kleinman, "Sergeant Major at the Top," *Army* 13 (January 1963):26–27. Until Loikow, the position was filled with a warrant officer or higher-ranking person.

5. *Ibid.*

6. Chapin, *Uncommon Men*, pp. 6–7, 75–76; James M. Carr and William O. Wooldridge, *Sergeant Major of the United States Army* (Fort Bliss, Tex.: U.S. Army Museum of the Noncommissioned Officer, 1986), p. 16. According to Wooldridge, on the day his appointment as Sergeant Major of the Army was made public, the office of Sergeant Major of the Marine Corps Herbert J. Sweet was moved upstairs to a location next door to the office of the commandant of the Marine Corps. Chapin says that after the other services created top NCO positions, the position of the Marine Corps sergeant major, which had existed since 1957, was formalized.

7. Memo, Lt Col Fox, DCSPER-CSD, 4 Nov 65, sub: Department of the Army Sergeant

Major, author's files, CMH; "Yes, No and Maybe to Top NCO Pleas," *Army Times*, 29 Dec 65, p. 20. Interv, Daniel K. Elder with William O. Wooldridge, 7 Feb 01, no. 2, pp. 38–39, author's files, CMH. Sgt. Maj. Francis J. Bennett was serving as the U.S. Army Pacific Command sergeant major at the time and was later nominated to serve as the first (and subsequent) Sergeant Major of the Army. He was never selected.

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9. Interv, Rupert F. Glover with Harold K. Johnson, 22 Jan 73, no. 10, p. 5, U.S. Army Military History Institute, Carlisle Barracks, Pa. (hereafter cited as MHI).

10. Interv, Glover with Johnson, pp. 5–6.

11. Speech, General Harold K. Johnson to Sergeants Major Conference, 28 Nov 66, Washington, D.C., copy in Harold K. Johnson papers, box 64, folder 3, MHI.

12. *Ibid.*, pp. 6–7.

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15. Interv, Glover with Johnson, p. 8. According to the 23 May 1973 edition of the *Army Times*, Wooldridge later testified in 1973 that Army Criminal Investigation Division (CID) agents twice came close to finding evidence that he took illegal money in Europe. However, Provost Marshall General Maj. Gen. Carl Turner managed to cover up the evidence.

16. Memo, Col Harry D. Temple, The Institute of Heraldry, for Col McLellan, The

Adjutant General, 20 Jul 66, sub: Comments on the Insignia of the Sergeant Major of the Army, author's files, CMH; Information paper, n.d., sub: Insignia of the Sergeant Major of the Army, National Archives, College Park, Md.; Interv, Elder with Wooldridge, 7 Feb 01, no. 2, pp. 46–47. All in author's files, CMH. The original insignia approved by Johnson is on permanent display in the Office of the Sergeant Major of the Army.

17. Russell F. Weigley, *History of the United States Army* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1984), p. 558.

18. *Ibid.*, p. 570.

19. Interv, Elder with Wooldridge, no. 2, pp. 103–12. These soldiers were selected from the top graduates of their basic combat training and given additional training at the newly created Noncommissioned Officers Candidate Course. The training capitalized on the two-year enlistment of a typical draftee and upon completion, each student was awarded the rank of either sergeant or staff sergeant and the top graduate would be promoted to staff sergeant.

20. Fisch and Wright, *Story of the NCO Corps*, pp. 18–26.

21. William O. Wooldridge, Answers to Historical Interview Questions, 1 Jun 91, p. 1, Encl to Memo, SAPA-LS, 29 Oct 90, sub: Historical Interview Questions, author's files, CMH.

22. *Ibid.*

23. William O. Wooldridge, "First Look at a New Job," *Army* 16 (October 1966):43; Bettie J. Morden, *The Women's Army Corps, 1945–1978* (Washington, D.C.: Center of Military History, 1990), p. 393. WACs served in separate units under female commanders and were attached to the units or offices where they performed their duties. They were integrated into the Army on 20 October 1978, and the Women's Army Corps was dissolved.

24. William O. Wooldridge, "Contact Point with the Top for the Soldier in the Field," *Army* 17 (October 1967):53.

25. Wooldridge, "First Look," p. 43.

26. *Ibid.*, p. 84.

27. Interv, Glover with Johnson, p. 10.

28. *Ibid.*

29. U.S. Congress, House, Committee on Armed Services, Special Subcommittee on Enlisted Promotion Policy Review, Hearings August–November 1967, 90th Cong., 1st sess., 1967, pp. 7052–53.

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32. Interv, Glover with Johnson, p. 9.

33. Ltr, SMA (Ret) William O. Wooldridge to Dr. Ernest F. Fisher, Jr., U.S. Army Center of Military History, 6 Jun 82, pp. 2–3; Ltr, MACJOO, HQ, USMACV (Col R. H. Johnson), to SMA Wooldridge, 10 May 68. Both in author's files, CMH.

34. Ernest F. Fisher, Jr., "The Noncommissioned Officer in the U.S. Army, 1775–1975," pp. 8–9, Unpubl Ms, author's files, CMH.

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signed by Col J. A. Leclair, Jr., Chief, Senior Enlisted Control Branch, author's files, CMH.

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44. Ltr, Wooldridge to Fisher, 6 Jun 82, pp. 3-4; News Release 658-68, 16 Jul 68, Office of Assistant Secretary of Defense (Public Affairs), Washington, D.C.

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Part II

The Sergeants Major of the Army



SMA Wooldridge

William O. Wooldridge

William O. Wooldridge, the eighth of ten children of William R. Wooldridge and Susan A. Gray, was born on 12 August 1922 in Shawnee, Oklahoma.¹ Five years later, his family left Oklahoma and moved to Cross Cut, Texas, where his father became a farmer and cattle rancher. Wooldridge remembered those early years in rural Texas as “hard but satisfying.” The Southwest’s often-harsh environment and its strong, resolute people undoubtedly helped mold his character. Wooldridge grew up during hard times, when the needs of the family came first; he learned to do without.

William first began to have thoughts about a military career after his older brother enlisted in the Army in 1929. He had two goals in mind: to wear a soldier’s uniform and to leave Cross Cut, where he saw few prospects for his future. Despite being underage, William eventually left school to follow in his brother’s footsteps, but his parents would not allow him to enlist. Not wanting to return to high school, he went to California and spent a year harvesting walnuts. After turning eighteen, William returned to Texas and enlisted on 13 November 1940. The Army assigned him to Company F, 23d Infantry, at Fort Sam Houston, Texas.

Wooldridge recalls that his basic training was very different from what recruits experience today. In those days, the unit to which a soldier was assigned conducted the training. A corporal from the 23d Infantry oversaw Wooldridge’s initiation into military life. Basic training lasted two weeks and was conducted at nearby Dodd Field. Wooldridge joined other recruits in learning how to salute, how to march, how to handle

a rifle, and basic infantry tactics. After this initiation, the recruits returned to their unit and received advanced infantry training in the company area by the same corporal. Wooldridge particularly valued the tactical sessions in which instructors and students gathered around the sand tables in the attic of the company headquarters. Two squads up on line, one back: “that’s the way I learned,” he recalled, “and the war I fought in, we fought the same way.” Upon completion of his training, Wooldridge was assigned to a regular infantry platoon.

As the specter of war loomed on the horizon, draftees poured into Wooldridge’s unit and the tempo of training increased. With little transportation available, the infantry walked everywhere, regularly marching twenty-five miles each way from Fort Sam Houston to Camp Bullis, Texas, for field training. They would bivouac and run night problems and then march back the next day. As the year 1941 progressed, training focused increasingly on tactics and weapons qualification.

Unlike many soldiers who decide only gradually to make the Army a career, Private Wooldridge knew early that he wanted to become a professional soldier. Over forty years later, he remembered the noncommissioned officers (NCOs) in Company F as “true professionals—the company first sergeant, my platoon sergeant, and my platoon guide”—who influenced him to become a Regular Army noncommissioned officer. His platoon sergeant, a three-striper named Hull, was a World War I veteran and Distinguished Service Cross recipient who had served as a private with the same 23d Infantry and had “come up from the line.” “I did



Private Wooldridge

not again, in the U.S. Army, serve under NCOs so qualified in their jobs. They were beautifully trained and dedicated men.”

While with the 23d Infantry, Wooldridge attended the regiment’s Squad Leader’s Course in 1941. Once again, Wooldridge’s training differed significantly from today’s Noncommissioned Officer Education System with its classrooms, tables, and chairs. He and several other privates sat on the ground listening to a corporal, a sergeant, or the S-3 officer, who primarily taught from memory or from charts. The instructors did not use reference material and there was no obvious lesson plan. The three-week course focused entirely on how to be a squad leader.

Wooldridge was quick to follow the example of his sergeants, and he was promoted to corporal within six months of arriving in the 23d Infantry. Wooldridge remembered meeting his former Company F first sergeant, then retired, shortly after World War II and asking

him why he had been promoted to corporal in such a short time. The first sergeant wryly replied, “You weren’t much good as a private so I thought I’d try you as a corporal.”

In the fall the 23d Infantry participated in the famous Louisiana Maneuvers. To get to the maneuver area, the men of Company F had to march from Dodd Field to Camp Polk, Louisiana, covering about twenty-eight miles a day. Wooldridge and his comrades made the march wearing the standard high-top brown shoes and canvas leggings while carrying combat packs and pack rolls.² Company F arrived five days before the maneuvers began, and Wooldridge’s platoon immediately initiated map problems and terrain familiarization. During the exercise his battalion provided security for a horse cavalry unit while it conducted a river crossing.

The pay for a private in 1941 was \$30 a month. By the time a soldier went through the “pay line,” however, the \$30 would likely end up as \$20 after money was taken out for canteen checks, the Soldiers Home, and the Company Fund.³ Soldiers still tried to save part of what they earned, and most soldiers sent half home or put it in a soldier’s deposit.

While with the 23d Infantry, Wooldridge volunteered for overseas duty and had to relinquish his coveted corporal’s stripes to the unit first sergeant, thus reverting back to the rank of private. As Wooldridge explained, “the stripes belonged to the unit, not the soldier. When you left the unit, you left your stripes.” In December 1941 the Army placed Wooldridge on detached service with the British forces in Iceland. (The British had taken over the defense of the island after the Nazi invasion of Denmark in 1940. Because of the German threat, Britain turned over the defense of Iceland to the United States, then still neutral.) The most enduring impression of Wooldridge’s tour of duty in Iceland was the role of the regimental sergeant major (RSM) in the British Army—particularly RSM Tom Knight. Unlike his counterpart in the U.S. Army at the time, the RSM literally ran the regiment, participated in unit training, and “could do anything the troops could do...usually better.” Years

later as a sergeant major, Wooldridge followed the examples of those RSMs he had seen in Iceland. He also held them as a standard for all U.S. Army sergeants major, too many of whom he felt spent an excessive amount of time in their offices as administrators.

In 1942 Wooldridge returned to duty with the U.S. Army and was assigned to the 1st Infantry Division in the European Theater of Operations. There, he joined Company K, 26th Infantry, where he remained until the war's end. The 26th Infantry participated in the invasion of North Africa at Oran, fought at the Kasserine Pass in Tunisia, and landed at Gela, Sicily, where Wooldridge's platoon received a commendation. The regiment invaded OMAHA Beach at Normandy on D-day and drove across France and Belgium. It was among the first units to breach the West Wall, to cross the Rhine at Remagen, and to advance through Germany to the Czechoslovakian border.

Wooldridge distinguished himself for gallantry in action at Aachen, Germany, in October 1944 and received his first Silver Star. He suffered shrapnel injuries and was evacuated to the 187th General Hospital in England. Still bandaged and newly promoted, Staff Sergeant Wooldridge returned to his unit to participate in the vicious winter combat of the Battle of the Bulge in December 1944, when Hitler's army made its desperate thrust toward Antwerp in hopes of splitting the Allied forces.

During the Battle of the Bulge, Company K deployed near a ridgeline close to the Belgian village of Bütgenbach. Wooldridge's understrength 1st Platoon was in reserve, responsible for the defense of the company command post. The 1st Platoon had received a new second lieutenant two days earlier. On the evening of 19 December 1944, the command post, which was located in the basement of an old farmhouse, came under intense tank fire. Wooldridge told the lieutenant that he would exit through a hole in the basement and go to the squad under fire. Unexpectedly, the lieutenant started to climb out of the basement. Wooldridge hollered a warning, but the lieutenant was mowed down by machine-



First Sergeant Wooldridge (*far right*)
Relaxes with Fellow NCOs.

gun fire. After retrieving the dead lieutenant, Wooldridge headed for the engaged squad. As he ran forward, he heard a loud bang and an explosion. The regimental antitank unit had knocked out a German tank, the remnants of which were now burning brightly in the middle of a nearby road.

With the company commander and first sergeant injured and the platoon leader dead, Sergeant Wooldridge was the senior man at the command post until the battalion S-3 officer came forward to take command of Company K. Fearing that German reinforcements would run down from the ridge and overrun their positions, the S-3 directed Wooldridge to retake the ridge with the six remaining soldiers he could locate from his platoon. Because of the earlier tank fire, Wooldridge convinced the officer to detach a tank to his platoon. As they approached a house near the ridge, Wooldridge told the tank commander that he would put four men on the right side of the road, two on the left side, and "we are just going to charge. So don't hesitate to rev it up and let it go, because we will be running like hell." As they moved forward the tank shot at the house, blowing apart a corner and hitting a German tank. Wooldridge and two soldiers

charged toward a nearby barn, kicking open the door and shooting three German soldiers, including a lieutenant. As they returned to their vehicle, they saw a German tank retreating through the snow toward its own lines. For his actions, Wooldridge received a second Silver Star.

After the Battle of the Bulge, Wooldridge's regiment reorganized and began its advance toward Belgium, meeting only scattered resistance. The 26th Infantry finally halted on the Czech border, where Wooldridge remained until April 1945. By then the Army had adopted a point system for determining how long a soldier should serve overseas. Wooldridge was a "high point" man in his company, having been overseas since 1941. After processing through the replacement company and collecting "a stack" of back pay, Wooldridge caught a ride on a boxcar train to Camp Lucky Strike in France. The war came to an end while he was there, and he steamed back to New York on a troop ship.

Following the end of the war in Europe, in May 1945 the Army assigned Wooldridge to Fort Sam Houston, Texas, where he stayed until December 1946. Wooldridge reenlisted and spent his time in Texas working guard details and miscellaneous duties. He was then ordered to go to Japan to join the occupation forces, but while he was en route the Army diverted him to Schofield Barracks, Hawaii, to attend the "First Three Graders Course" at the Oahu Officer Troop and Staff School.⁴ Upon completing the three-month course in March 1947, he went to Headquarters, Eighth U.S. Army, in Japan. There, he served as an acting first sergeant of a Military Police company, processing delinquency reports for the Eighth Army provost marshal. When his hitch was over, Wooldridge, who was not pleased with a non-Infantry assignment, flatly refused to reenlist and was reassigned to Fort Walton, Washington, for separation. After arriving in Washington, Wooldridge went to the major in charge and said, "I am not going to be discharged, I want to reenlist...to get back to the Infantry." Wooldridge wanted to return to his

regiment in Europe but was assigned to the Infantry demonstration battalion at Fort Lawton, Oklahoma.

Soon after Wooldridge arrived in Oklahoma in early 1949, he was summoned to the office of Maj. Gen. Clifton Andrus, a former 1st Infantry Division commander. After swapping war stories, Andrus asked Wooldridge what his duties were to be. Wooldridge used the opportunity to tell the general he wanted to return to the 1st Infantry Division. A week later he departed for Germany and the Big Red One.

Wooldridge returned as the platoon guide to his old wartime outfit, Company K, 26th Infantry.⁵ There, the newly assigned regimental commander, Col. Samuel "Hanging Sam" T. Williams, set out to instill discipline and enforce standards. Together with the old "noncoms" Williams began to whip the unit back into shape. As part of this effort, Williams selected Company K's first sergeant, Theodore Dobil, to serve as the regimental sergeant major. Although the Army did not have a rank or grade of sergeant major at that time, Dobil performed functions similar to today's sergeant major: training and enforcing standards and coaching NCOs on how to perform their duties.

While he was in Germany, Wooldridge, then a platoon sergeant, asked his first sergeant for permission to attend the Seventh Army's NCO School in Munich. When asked why, Wooldridge responded, "I intend to stay in the Army and...I want to be something more than a rifle platoon sergeant." His first sergeant was not persuaded: "You're a combat veteran. You already know everything." When Wooldridge continued to press the issue, his sergeant summarily told him, "You're wasting my time" and ordered him "out of my orderly room." In those days, Wooldridge explained, a soldier had to provide for his own education and training. "I went to night school. There were no requirements to attend school if you didn't want to. Now, you must get training or you don't get promoted."

Wooldridge returned to the United States in May 1954 and was assigned as first sergeant of Company G, 3d Infantry, Fort McNair,

Washington, D.C. The nature of the 3d Infantry's mission in the nation's capital was largely ceremonial, and Wooldridge did not regard the assignment as exceptionally challenging for an Infantry first sergeant. While at McNair, Wooldridge testified before the House Armed Services Committee. Each of the services was sending an enlisted representative to talk about military pay, and Wooldridge represented the Army. The topic was important, given the growing exodus of armed forces personnel from military service. Congress responded to the concerns of Wooldridge and other senior Department of Defense personnel by passing the Career Incentive Act of 1955, which established improved pay and benefits for military personnel.

After testifying before Congress, Wooldridge met with Vice Chief of Staff General Charles L. Bolte. Bolte told him that he could have any assignment he wanted. Wooldridge replied, "in that case sir, I would like to go back to my regiment," which was then en route from Germany to Fort Riley, Kansas. Soon after, Wooldridge had orders in hand and reported to the 16th Infantry until the 26th arrived. He was then assigned as the first sergeant for Company D. Wooldridge went on to become the sergeant major of the 3d Battalion, 26th Infantry, in December 1956.

In 1957 the Army reorganized into "pentomic" divisions that were supposed to be capable of performing both conventional and nuclear missions. During the reorganization his unit formed the nucleus of the 2d Battle Group, 28th Infantry. The unit had just won the Seventh Army Training Award as the command's best unit when Wooldridge assumed his duties. The following year Congress created two new enlisted grades, E-8 and E-9, under the Military Pay Bill of 1958, and Wooldridge subsequently was promoted to E-8.

The following year Wooldridge returned to Germany as part of Operation GYROSCOPE, a revolutionary system of troop rotation in which entire divisions were exchanged between locations overseas and the United States. During GYROSCOPE, the 2d Battle Group, 28th Infantry,

became part of the 24th Infantry Division in Germany. In the summer of 1959 Wooldridge was promoted to the newly created rank of sergeant major. Looking back on his career, Wooldridge considered his service as battle group sergeant major his most significant in terms of professional development and advancement. This assessment was due in part to his attendance in 1960 of the Southern Command Senior Noncommissioned Officers School at McGraw Kaserne, Munich, where he honed his professional skills.

After the Army introduced the triangular ROAD (Reorganization Objective Army Divisions) in the early 1960s, it inactivated the 2d Battle Group, 28th Infantry, thus making Wooldridge the group's first and last sergeant major. Wooldridge's hard work and competence did not go unnoticed, however, and in March 1963 he was selected to become the 24th Infantry Division's sergeant major.

As the division sergeant major, Wooldridge expressed his concern about the underutilization of sergeants major. When the 1958 Military Pay Bill added the grades of E-8 and E-9, little was written on the duties and responsibilities of the sergeant major. Wooldridge noted that many unit commanders used E-9s as chief clerks, rather than as enlisted assistants to the commander. In response, the division commander, Maj. Gen. W. A. Cunningham, prepared a paper with Wooldridge's input, describing the guidelines and duties for unit sergeants major and included his expectations that sufficient authority be bestowed on these men to perform their duties. At least in the 24th Infantry in 1963, the sergeant major finally began to serve at the head of noncommissioned officers, as von Steuben had envisioned in his *Blue Book* in 1779.⁶

In January 1965 Wooldridge again returned to the 1st Infantry Division as the sergeant major of the 1st Brigade. In June he was selected to be the division sergeant major and went to Vietnam with the division's advance party a few weeks later. After the entire division arrived, his main job was to visit units in



Wooldridge in Vietnam with General Seaman, Who Later Nominated Him as the First SMA

the field and take a close look at how the enlisted ranks were faring. Once, he saw a soldier wearing “Ho Chi Minh” sandals, made of pieces of automobile tire and leather straps. Demanding an explanation from the company first sergeant, he was told that no size thirteen boots were available and that the battalion sergeant major had known about it for the past two weeks. Infuriated, Wooldridge had the sergeant major of the support command find boots of the right size by the next day. He later “unloaded on the infantry battalion sergeant major,” who quickly lost his job.

Although Wooldridge relished being a combat soldier and thrived on the demands of the battlefield in Vietnam, he was soon challenged to make his most important contribution to the Army—establishing the Office of the Sergeant Major of the Army (OSMA). One objective was to boost the morale and professionalism of the enlisted force by having one of its own become the personal assistant to the Chief of Staff of the Army on almost all

matters relating to enlisted soldiers. The major reason was to establish an official channel from the enlisted ranks to the highest military echelon in the service on such issues as morale, welfare, training, pay and allowances, clothing and equipment, enlistment and reenlistment, discipline, and promotion policies.

In 1966 the Army had over 4,700 sergeants major, assigned to twenty-one major commands, all of whom were eligible for nomination to the new position of Sergeant Major of the Army. Major Army commanders throughout the world nominated one member each. The final candidates were chosen for their ability as soldiers, their military bearing, their personality, and their skill in expressing themselves on Army matters. Wooldridge, the only finalist then serving in Vietnam, was nominated by his former commander, Maj. Gen. Jonathan O. Seaman, then the II Field Force Commander, and was endorsed by his current commander, Maj. Gen. William E. DePuy. Wooldridge was summoned to report to the Deputy Commanding General, Vietnam, Lt. Gen. Jean E. Engler, for an interview with other nominees from U.S. Army, Vietnam. When Wooldridge’s turn came he was asked if he was aware that the Chief of Staff wanted to establish the position of Sergeant Major of the Army, to which he responded affirmatively. When asked if he was interested in the assignment, Wooldridge replied “no sir.” He was thanked and returned to his unit. Wooldridge assumed that this new position would be administrative and that an “admin NCO,” not a combat infantryman, would fill the slot. Much to Wooldridge’s surprise, Engler nominated him and forwarded his name to Chief of Staff General Harold K. Johnson.⁷

Johnson and his staff carefully weighed the strengths and weaknesses of each of the nominees and eventually selected the combat-experienced Wooldridge. He was on an operation near the Cambodian border when the 1st Infantry Division commander flew in by helicopter to notify him of his selection. Expected in Washington, D.C., by 5 July, Wooldridge departed immediately.

Wooldridge flew to Washington still in his jungle fatigues, with instructions to report directly to the Chief of Staff. During a brief meeting, Johnson told Wooldridge that he was to be sworn in as the Sergeant Major of the Army on 11 July and “not to mention it to anybody.” Meanwhile, the Chief of Staff directed that Special Orders No. 142 be prepared to appoint Wooldridge to the new position.

General Johnson swore in Sergeant Major Wooldridge on 11 July 1966 at the Mall Entrance of the Pentagon, complete with an NCO-led ceremony and a nineteen-gun salute. Johnson escorted Wooldridge first through an honor cordon of troops and then through an inspection of the assembled soldiers from the 1st Battalion, 3d Infantry (Old Guard). With the assistance of Wooldridge’s wife, Johnson then pinned on the distinctive collar insignia for the Sergeant Major of the Army. Before the ceremony, the Chief of Staff gave Wooldridge this guidance:

You will be a member of my personal staff and will be my principal enlisted assistant and advisor on all matters pertaining to enlisted members of the Army. You will report directly to me and there will be no one between your desk and mine. When you need to see me you will use the private entrance to my office. The only other person who uses that entrance is the Secretary of the Army.

Johnson’s instructions laid the foundation for the close relationship between all successive Chiefs of Staff and their Sergeants Major. Johnson wanted the Army’s top NCO to be visible and available to soldiers. “I did not bring you here to sit behind a desk,” he told Wooldridge. “You will have others for the office work who will know something of your habits and thinking because they will be your representatives and during your absence must act for you.” As his only other formal guidance, he presented Wooldridge with a card outlining the duties of the Sergeant Major of the Army:

Will identify problems affecting enlisted personnel and recommend appropriate solutions. He will advise on the initiation of and content of plans for the professional education, growth, and advancement of noncommissioned

officers, individually and collectively. He will advise the Chief of Staff on all matters pertaining primarily to enlisted personnel, including but not limited to morale, welfare, training, clothing, insignia, equipment, pay and allowances, customs and courtesies of the service, enlistment and reenlistment, discipline and promotion policies. He will be available to provide advice to any board or commission dealing with enlisted personnel matters.

Wooldridge’s appointment as the first Sergeant Major of the Army also prompted action in the other services. After taking office, Wooldridge heard from Sergeant Major of the Marine Corps Herbert J. Sweet that Sweet had previously worked for a colonel in Marine Corps Personnel. But the day after the news of Wooldridge’s appointment was made public, the Marine Corps moved Sweet into an office next to the commandant of the Marine Corps. Wooldridge had felt that “the Army Chief of Staff created the first real and effective top enlisted position.” In actuality, he may have created several. Within a year, the other two services followed suit, with Chief Master Sergeant of the Air Force Paul W. Airey and Master Chief Petty Officer of the Navy Delbert D. Black occupying similar positions.

As the first Sergeant Major of the Army, Wooldridge faced tough challenges. No precedents existed regarding the scope of his job, its focus, or its specific responsibilities. Never one to shrink from difficult tasks, Wooldridge evaluated the missions General Johnson gave him and determined a series of goals that would accomplish them. First, to strengthen the overall professionalism of the NCO Corps, he wanted to improve the education of NCOs. Second, Wooldridge resolved to “root out NCOs who had ‘homesteaded’ in soft jobs such as ROTC (Reserve Officer Training Corps), the civil components, West Point, other senior schools, and the U.S. Army Rifle Team. These units, he noted, “were loaded with NCOs holding unauthorized MOSs [military occupational specialties] attained for promotion purposes,” and Wooldridge wanted the Army to require all NCOs serving with such organizations to either serve a tour in

Vietnam or retire. Third, he wanted to upgrade the key enlisted position of company and battery unit clerks from E-4 to E-5. Finally, he set out to see as many of the Army's troops as he could in the continental United States and overseas, especially those engaged in combat in Southeast Asia, so he could gain an accurate picture of the morale, training, and living and working conditions of the Army's entire enlisted force.

Establishing the office would be one of Wooldridge's first priorities. In an interview immediately after his swearing-in ceremony, he stated that his job would be to act as a consultant and adviser to the Chief of Staff of the Army on matters pertaining to the morale, training, pay, and promotion of the enlisted soldier. He felt that to do his job effectively "I want to talk to the men and I want them to talk to me."⁸

The establishment of the SMA position was not popular with everyone. According to Wooldridge, Vice Chief of Staff General Creighton W. Abrams, Jr., reportedly complained, "that's all we need, a sergeant telling the chief of staff how to run the...Army." Soon after Wooldridge assumed his position, a colonel from the Office of the Deputy Chief of Staff for Personnel walked into his office and announced, "I think this is the worst thing that has ever happened to the Army." Wooldridge, taken aback, offered to escort the colonel to see Johnson to discuss the matter. The colonel left without another word.

Some months later, after returning from a visit to the field, Wooldridge was summoned to the Office of the Deputy Chief of Staff for Operations. The deputy proposed that Wooldridge report to him instead of the Chief of Staff whenever he returned from a trip or received a complaint. When Wooldridge asked if this had been cleared with the Chief of Staff, the deputy replied he would clear it with the vice chief. Wooldridge reminded him that he did not work for the vice chief and returned to his office. Wooldridge never mentioned a word of these events to Johnson until the day before Johnson left office.

Wooldridge succeeded in achieving most of the goals he had intended; improving soldier education proved the most difficult. Although raising the consciousness of the Army's leaders in this area, at least enough to see the planning process begin, he later admitted that he had not reached his target because "the Army's resources were committed to war." Wooldridge noted that he solved the homesteading problem and later elevated the authorized grade for unit clerks. As for gaining a reliable understanding of the general conditions affecting the enlisted force, Wooldridge spent almost half of his tenure on the road to attain a sense of "ground truth" that could in turn be communicated to the Chief of Staff.

Wooldridge expended a great deal of effort in visiting soldiers in Vietnam and in pursuing ways to help them through their combat ordeals. In his first year alone, he made four trips to combat zones in Southeast Asia, always seeking out firsthand information on battlefield conditions and then passing on what he learned to the Army at large. Soldiers learned what they would encounter in an *Army Digest* article entitled "So You're Headed for Combat: How To Get Ready and What To Expect," published in January 1968, the same month as the unexpected Tet offensive by the Viet Cong in which dozens of American military installations were attacked. Wooldridge presciently advised, "Even you men who have jobs 'behind the lines' may have occasion to fight, if only to defend yourselves. The experience of our troops in Vietnam has reemphasized an old lesson—every soldier must be able to fight."⁹ There were no front lines in Southeast Asia.

Another aspect of Wooldridge's job as Sergeant Major of the Army was to present a positive public relations image of the Army's enlisted ranks. He spoke at the Washington Press Club and the National Press Club and appeared on nationwide television programs such as "The Ed Sullivan Show" and "The Today Show." In addition, *Life* magazine featured him in an article entitled "The Army's Topmost Sarge" in September 1967. Wooldridge even accompanied President Lyndon B. Johnson



Wooldridge with General Johnson at the Pentagon

on a trip to Fort Campbell, Kentucky. The result of all this “show biz” work was both critical and significant. For the first time it put a major spotlight on the enlisted ranks. Gradually, Wooldridge demolished the “Sergeant Bilko” image of NCOs and gained recognition for them as true professionals.

After his tour as Sergeant Major of the Army, Wooldridge was asked to comment on the major items approved during his tenure that he deemed most beneficial to the Army and to enlisted soldiers in particular. Wooldridge identified three: the convocation of the first Command Sergeants Major Conference in 1966, the establishment of the Command Sergeants Major Program in 1967, and the institution of the Noncommissioned Officers Candidate course in the midst of the Vietnam War.

Wooldridge deemed the 1966 Command Sergeants Major Conference “one of the finest initiatives approved on behalf of the noncommissioned officer.” For the first time sergeants major—enlisted soldiers—had gotten together in a forum and reviewed Army policies as they related to the enlisted ranks. From the conference flowed “the ideas which would influence the advancement of the corps for years to come.” Of the twenty-one recommendations proposed during the conference, Chief of Staff Johnson approved sixteen immediately. Of the five that were disapproved, Johnson sat down with Wooldridge and explained the reasoning behind every decision. When Johnson came to the rejected recommendation to upgrade the company clerk position from E-4 to E-5, Wooldridge pointed out that many units were

already using E-5s as clerks—an unhappy expedient made possible only by taking an E-5 slot away from another portion of the company. Johnson finally relented and approved the upgrade.

Wooldridge took equal pride in the creation of the Command Sergeant Major (CSM) Program, which he felt correctly highlighted the difference between sergeants major in staff positions and those who served as senior enlisted advisers to commanders above company level. Wooldridge also noted great benefits from the institution of a centralized promotion and assignment system for senior NCOs, which “broke up the old unit promotion system, opening up all vacancies in the Army to all eligible NCOs.”

The sergeant major of the Army Air Defense Command, John F. Thomas, proposed the idea of a CSM Program in response to a survey Wooldridge initiated. General Johnson liked the idea and directed Wooldridge to form an ad hoc committee to define what a command sergeant major was, what his duties should be, and what rank and title he should have.¹⁰ Though Wooldridge later admitted to having been shortsighted, initially he wanted to limit the program to sergeant majors working in color-bearing units at the regimental level and below. Based on this assumption, the committee, which included future SMA George W. Dunaway, estimated that there would be between 300–500 sergeants major in the program. Wooldridge felt that the word “command” in the new rank denoted sergeants major who “reported to the commander on behalf of the...troops” and served as the sergeant major of the command.

From the outset there were problems with implementing the program. Misunderstandings existed over which positions and soldiers qualified for consideration as command sergeant major. The Army added to the confusion by not publishing clear guidance on the roles and responsibilities of the CSM. Wooldridge soon received correspondence from sergeants major in the field complaining of the process, and he

brought them to the Chief of Staff’s attention. Though Johnson forwarded these concerns to the chief of Personnel, both he and Wooldridge were nearing the end of their tours and were unable to correct the problems before they left office in the summer of 1968.

Wooldridge received the first set of newly designed CSM stripes, which featured a wreath surrounding the original star in the center of three chevrons over three lower arcs, from Johnson on 22 March 1968. In the citation, Johnson noted that the new rank symbolized “the pride, gratitude, and admiration of the United States Army for the contribution of the Corps of Sergeants Major toward the accomplishment of the mission of the Army.”

Wooldridge considered one of the most noteworthy accomplishments of his tenure the Noncommissioned Officers Candidate Course (NCOCC). During the Vietnam War the turnover of junior NCOs had been extreme, partly due to the twelve-month tour limit and high casualty rates. Units were forced to select the senior soldier, sometimes a private first class, for squad leader without the benefit of experience or specialized training. The Army instituted the NCOCC at Fort Benning, Georgia, to address the NCO shortage. The course provided additional combat related training—and promotion to sergeant—to the top graduates of basic training, and Wooldridge believed it met an immediate wartime need. SMA Wooldridge believed the training program, though not popular, was far better than the alternative of allowing untrained and inexperienced NCOs to lead troops into battle.

When Wooldridge’s two-year tour came to a close in the summer of 1968, the new Army Chief of Staff, General William C. Westmoreland, chose a new Sergeant Major of Army. After receiving a list of finalists from which to choose, Westmoreland asked Wooldridge’s advice. Wooldridge highly recommended the final choice, George W. Dunaway. As Wooldridge turned over the reins to Dunaway, he could be proud of much he accomplished during his tenure. Above all, he had met the tough challenge

General Johnson set for him to establish the Office of the Sergeant Major of the Army.

Wooldridge bid farewell to Washington in September 1968 and assumed his new position as the sergeant major of the Military Assistance Command, Vietnam. He again came to public attention in September 1969, when he was accused during a congressional inquiry of fraud and corruption related to military club systems.¹¹ Notified of the investigation while on leave from Vietnam, Wooldridge was assigned to White Sands Missile Range, New Mexico. The accusations resulted in Wooldridge's being tried in the court of public opinion. Media publicity and innuendo pushed presumptions of innocence aside and provided fuel for opponents of the Office of the Sergeant Major of the Army to level attacks and push for elimination of the position.¹²

After requesting retirement, which the Army refused because of the ongoing investigation, Wooldridge was reassigned to Fort MacArthur, California. He was never tried in a

military court, and he retired on 31 January 1972 after more than thirty-one years of service. Still, the accusations lingered; and in 1973 the Department of Justice and Wooldridge reached an agreement in which Wooldridge pleaded guilty to two counts of bribery for accepting stock equity and profits from a corporation that was engaged in the sale of merchandise to the noncommissioned officers' open mess in Vietnam. The government did not find any wrongdoing on his part while serving as the Sergeant Major of the Army.¹³ After his many years of service to the Army, Wooldridge settled in California and later Santa Teresa, New Mexico. Although the investigation tarnished the final years of Wooldridge's career, it could not diminish his heroic wartime exploits or his arduous labors on behalf of enlisted soldiers and noncommissioned officers as the first Sergeant Major of the Army. On 5 March 2012, William O. Wooldridge died at Beaumont Army Medical Center, Beaumont, Texas. He is interred at Fort Bliss National Cemetery.

Notes

1. Except as noted, this section is based on an interview contained in James M. Carr and William O. Wooldridge, *The Sergeant Major of the Army: The First Twenty Years, 1966–1986* (Fort Bliss, Tex.: U.S. Army Sergeants Major Academy, 1986), pp. 13–27; William O. Wooldridge, Answers to Historical Interview Questions, 1 Jun 91, pp. 1–7, author's files, U.S. Army Center of Military History, Washington, D.C. (hereafter cited as CMH); Carl Martin, "SGM Wooldridge—Enlisted Advisor, Consultant, Spokesman," *Army Digest* 21 (December 1966):49–50; Interv, Daniel K. Elder with William O. Wooldridge, Feb 01, Santa Teresa, N.M.

2. The combat pack consisted of a change of undergarments, toilet articles, and canned rations. The pack roll, folded across the top and strapped to the sides of the pack, was positioned so that it could be discarded easily if the men came under fire.

3. Canteen checks were a line of credit used for purchasing items at the regimental exchange.

4. The enlisted grade structure was reversed during this period, with the senior enlisted grade first and the most junior as seventh.

5. The platoon guide was the logistician of the platoon, responsible for resupply, ammunition, and water, and worked closely with the platoon sergeant.

6. See Friedrich W. L. G. A. von Steuben, *Regulations for the Order and Discipline of the Troops of the United States* (Mineola, N.Y.: Dover Publications, 1985).

7. In nominating Wooldridge for the position of Sergeant Major of the Army, Seaman wrote, "I strongly recommend whether or not Sergeant Major Wooldridge is interested in the assignment he should be considered for it."

8. Carl Martin, "This Is the Man," *Army Digest* 21 (September 1966):5.

9. William O. Wooldridge, "Headed for Combat," *Army Digest* 23 (January 1968):6. Wooldridge regularly published articles in the *Army Digest*, usually on topics of concern that his visits to various installations had revealed, such as the use of reveille, caring, building the Army image, and professionalism.

10. Memo, Sgt Maj (Ret) William O. Wooldridge to M. Yamamoto, 25 Jan 00, author's files, CMH.

11. For additional details on the investigation and subsequent charges, refer to the Further Readings section at the end of this book.

12. Larry Carney, "Reaction of NCOs Concerns Dunaway," *Army Times*, 24 Oct 69, p. 24.

13. Ltr, William O. Wooldridge to Dr. Ernest F. Fisher, Jr., in response to Fisher's request to review a portion of a draft publication, "Sergeant Major at the Summit," 6 Jun 82, author's files, CMH.

Assignments

- 1940 Enlisted at Fort Sam Houston, Texas, Company F, 23d Infantry, 2d Infantry Division
- 1941–1942 Detached Service, British Forces–Iceland
- 1942–1945 Rifleman through Squad Leader, 1st Infantry Division, North Africa; Sicily; France; Belgium; Germany
- 1945–1946 Fort Sam Houston, Texas
- 1946–1947 Student, 1st Three Grades Course, Schofield Barracks, Hawaii
- 1947–1949 Platoon Sergeant, Field First Sergeant, Headquarters, Eighth U.S. Army, Seoul, Korea
- 1949–1954 First Sergeant, Company K, 26th Infantry, 1st Infantry Division, Germany
- 1954–1955 First Sergeant, Company G, 3d Infantry (Old Guard), Fort McNair, Washington, D.C.
- 1955–1958 First Sergeant, Sergeant Major, 3d Battalion, 26th Infantry, 1st Infantry Division, Fort Riley, Kansas
- 1958–1963 Sergeant Major, 2d Battle Group, 28th Infantry, 24th Infantry Division, Germany
- 1963–1965 Sergeant Major, 24th Infantry Division, Germany
- 1965–1966 Sergeant Major, 1st Brigade, 1st Infantry Division; 1st Infantry Division, Fort Riley Kansas; Republic of Vietnam
- 1966–1968 Sergeant Major of the Army
- 1968–1969 Command Sergeant Major, Military Assistance Command, Vietnam, Republic of Vietnam
- 1969–1971 Command Sergeant Major, Sergeant Major, Range Command, White Sands Missile Range, New Mexico
- 1971–1972 Sergeant Major, Headquarters Company, U.S. Army Garrison, Fort MacArthur, California

Selected Decorations and Awards

- Silver Star with One Oak Leaf Cluster
- Legion of Merit with One Oak Leaf Cluster
- Bronze Star Medal
- Purple Heart Medal
- Air Medal with Five Oak Leaf Clusters
- Army Commendation Medal with One Oak Leaf Cluster
- Good Conduct Medal with Ten Oak Leaf Clusters
- American Defense Service Medal
- European–African–Middle Eastern Campaign Medal
- World War II Victory Medal
- Army Occupation Medal (Germany)
- National Defense Service Medal
- Vietnam Service Medal
- Republic of Vietnam Campaign Medal
- Combat Infantry Badge with One Star



SMA Dunaway

George W. Dunaway

In January 1940, at the age of seventeen, George W. Dunaway enlisted in the Virginia National Guard, joining Company A, 176th Light Infantry Regiment, 29th Infantry Division, as a rifleman. Born on 24 July 1922 in Richmond, Virginia, he had grown up working summers on his grandfather's farm along with his two brothers and three sisters. He attended school in Richmond until the tenth grade, when he had to leave school and work to help support his family. He thought that school "was rewarding and I was lucky to be able to attend school, because so many other kids had to work on farms and were not able to go to school." Years later as a sergeant first class, Dunaway earned his high school equivalency diploma at Fort Benning, Georgia.

George Dunaway's motivation to join the National Guard reflected the great strength of that institution—unit cohesion. Everyone knew each other, lived in the same area, and in some cases were childhood friends. "If I hadn't known anybody in the unit, I probably would have felt that the military wasn't for me; but seeing all my friends there, my own age. I decided it was OK. I still have a soft spot in my heart for the National Guard because of those times. We all knew each other, and when they put us on the train early in the morning to go off for maneuvers, many people would turn out to see us off."

Dunaway's company trained every two weeks and was divided into ability groups based on each soldier's previous experience. Biweekly drills focused on individual, squad, and platoon train-

ing: disassembling and cleaning the rifle, wearing a uniform properly, and marching. The annual company level summer training took place at Camp A. P. Hill, Virginia. Dunaway remembers, "We did a great job. We even won an exercise over the Regular Army...at least that's what we were told. We had great morale and felt that no one could touch us." Company A attacked the Regulars, a horse cavalry unit, at dawn while they were eating breakfast, and captured the entire battalion headquarters. Such success was no doubt due to the high morale and the initiative that the commanders encouraged in their non-commissioned officers. It certainly was not due to excellent equipment. Company A's mortar platoon used stovepipes to simulate mortars; its other elements often fared little better.

Dunaway joined the Regular Army in February 1941, when the 29th Division entered federal service, and immediately undertook eighteen weeks of combat skills training at Fort Meade, Maryland. Living and working conditions in the Army of the 1940s were far different than they are today. Dunaway lived in a two-story wooden barracks, heated with coal in winter and without air-conditioning in summer. Each company had its own mess hall, and kitchen police (KP) was performed by soldiers under the rank of corporal instead of by contracted civilians. An onerous but necessary duty, KP entailed "washing trays, pots, and pans, scrubbing floors, peeling potatoes by hand, and cleaning grease traps." Only relatively recently has this long-time Army fixture disappeared.

Unit leaders, not drill instructors, led training. Most of the time, NCOs conducted unit training, except for live-fire exercises,

This section is based on Interv, Erwin H. Koehler with George W. Dunaway, Dec 93, Las Vegas, Nev.

which required the presence of an officer. Instead of bringing in instructors from outside the unit to teach specialized subjects, the company NCOs learned those subjects themselves and then taught them to their soldiers. This approach not only increased their own knowledge, but also enhanced their credibility with their soldiers. After all, in the stress of combat far away from the training environment, no outside instructors would be available for guidance. The unit emphasized all aspects of military skills. World War II was already in its second year of fighting in Europe, and Dunaway and his unit had little doubt that the war would soon draw in the United States. He and thousands of soldiers like him were taught, "there were only two kinds of soldiers—the quick and the dead."

Soldiers in Dunaway's company, as well as throughout the Army, underwent frequent inspections, "in ranks, standing by our bunk, and constantly throughout the day by all superiors." The big inspection came on Saturday. "The Saturday morning inspection was where soldiers learned the proper way to wear and care for their uniforms, awards, and decorations. In those days, each soldier knew how to wear properly each and every item of his uniform, and NCOs knew how to teach them all." Only soldiers who had no deficiencies received weekend passes. Those who fell short remained in the barracks after the inspection and spent the weekend correcting their shortcomings.

In February 1943, at Fort Myer, Virginia, Dunaway married Mary "Peck" Henry from Springfield, Massachusetts. Like thousands of other families in the midst of a rapidly expanding Army, the Dunaways found that family quarters were almost nonexistent. In August they moved to Fort Benning, Georgia, and lived in a barn loft, complete with a well and an outhouse. Peck recalled, "We had to go outside and use the half-moon latrine and we had to pump water from the well and bring it upstairs to cook and bathe with. It was uncomfortable with almost no privacy, but it was better than being back home away from my husband."

A decision that shaped the rest of George Dunaway's Army career had prompted the move to Fort Benning. He volunteered for parachute training. When his National Guard unit was activated, "two or three of the men from my hometown had gone directly to jump school when the rest of us went to Fort Meade. When they returned to the unit wearing wings and spit-shined jump boots, they really looked sharp...they impressed me very much, and I decided I'd go airborne as soon as I got the chance. Everyone was a volunteer, and no one could complain because he didn't have to be there."

The ensuing weeks of jump school were, and still are, tough. For Dunaway, it was tougher. During the preparatory week, a physical uncovered a medical problem requiring surgery. He was given five weeks to recuperate and was assigned as the first sergeant of the stockade—"some learning experience." After recovering, he resumed training and went through the ground, tower, and jump weeks being pushed hard the entire time. NCO trainees attracted more attention from the instructors, because they were expected to meet the highest standards. Twice, Dunaway passed out when he had done as many pushups as he could. "The only time they let you stop was when you lost consciousness." Candidates were "put through the mill without mercy, to see if they could take the pressure." In the end, when Dunaway pinned on his silver wings after his fifth jump, he believed that the agony had been worthwhile.

If Dunaway had any complaint about serving in airborne units, it was the disparity in jump pay between officers and enlisted men. "Enlisted men were paid \$55 a month extra for jumping, which was a lot of money then, and officers were paid \$110 a month. It seemed to us that there must be two doors on the plane, the \$55 door and the \$110 door. We were always looking for the \$110 door but never managed to get through it."

After jump school, Dunaway attended pathfinder school and glider training. Landing



Dunaway Prepares to Jump with His Troops.

in a glider was probably more dangerous than jumping, but glider soldiers received no extra hazard pay. Once released from the towing aircraft, they were on their own in the flimsy wooden aircraft. Without power they depended on air currents for whatever limited range they enjoyed. Pilot skill was critical, and controlling the glider was always problematic. Wires or trees were considered normal hazards. With both jump and glider training, Dunaway could be assigned to either a parachute or glider regiment within an airborne division. He spent the majority of his career thereafter in airborne infantry units—the 501st Airborne Battalion; the 187th, 505th, 517th, and 542d Parachute Infantry Regiments; the 82d and 101st Airborne Divisions; and the Special Forces.

Following a series of airborne courses at Fort Benning, Dunaway became an instructor in basic airborne training. After accumulating seventy-five training jumps, he attended the eighteen-week Noncommissioned Officers' Leadership Course. At the time World War II was reaching

its climax, infantry casualties had begun to mount, and he expected orders for overseas duty at any time. They came toward the end of 1944, assigning him to the 517th Regimental Combat Team (RCT) (Airborne), then in France.

Dunaway found that “getting to France was just as hectic as being in the war there.” In those days, few soldiers were deployed overseas by air. Dunaway and others destined for overseas duty were trucked from Fort Benning to the troop train, which took them to Fort Dix, New Jersey. There, they practiced embarkation, debarkation, and emergency procedures for three days, all followed by a nine-day sea voyage to Liverpool, England. Then, after a train ride across England, a ship across the English Channel, and a cattle-car ride across France, he arrived at Montage, where the 517th, assigned to the Third Army, formed part of the Supreme Headquarters, Allied Expeditionary Force (SHAEF), strategic reserve. As a platoon sergeant in Company H, Dunaway fought in Belgium and Germany during the Battle of the Bulge. Morale and discipline in the airborne units were exemplary. The NCOs were excellent. These were conditions that he found again and again in the elite, volunteer units with which he served throughout his career. Dunaway stayed in Europe until November 1945, when he was sent back to Fort Benning.

With the war over, Sergeant First Class Dunaway had no intention of staying in the Army. His battalion commander in the 517th RCT offered to make him a first sergeant if he would reenlist, “but it wasn’t like it had been back in my original Guard unit where I had known so many guys. Those days were gone and I had to make new friends and acquaintances each place I went.” The day before he was due to be discharged, he visited his family in Washington, D.C. His brother-in-law, just discharged from the Air Force, came in from working late on the railroad, grimy and covered with soot. He told Dunaway that he too would be working for the railroad as soon as he was discharged. Dunaway “took but a few seconds to decide that was not for me. I reenlisted for six years. That turned out

to be the smartest thing I ever did.” He immediately returned to Fort Benning as an instructor for the Airborne Department.

In March 1948 Dunaway was transferred to Fort Bragg, North Carolina, and assigned to the 505th Parachute Infantry as the regimental operations sergeant. In September 1950 he, along with selected members of the regiment, participated in a nuclear test in Nevada. First they observed the detonation from three miles away and, after “experts” determined that ground zero was clear of radiation, examined ground zero. “Two-and-a-half-ton trucks had been demolished, buildings with steel frames had been ripped to pieces, and some twisted up like tangled kite string.” Doctors checked all the men for radiation effects.

While in the 505th, Dunaway became a first sergeant when he was reassigned to Company G. Inexperienced at first, he relied on his company commander and the other first sergeants for guidance. Platoon sergeants handled discipline problems within the platoon, which made Dunaway’s job easier. Only serious cases reached him or the company commander. One of the biggest problems was keeping the troops occupied during the duty day. Training in garrison was often repetitive and boring as the company participated in field training exercises (FTXs) only twice a year, once for practice and once for grade. Usually the platoons conducted the training, with the first sergeant responsible for their administrative and logistic support. During the semiannual FTXs, the company flew to another training area or post, conducted a mass tactical jump with personnel and equipment, and executed all the infantry missions: attack, movement to contact, delay, and defense. As in his previous units, Dunaway was impressed with the leadership qualities of the NCOs who, despite the boredom of the garrison routine, managed to maintain such high morale that 90 percent of the men in the unit reenlisted. In 1952 Dunaway reached the top after only twelve years in the Army, becoming the regimental sergeant major of the 505th.

In early 1954 Sergeant Major Dunaway began his second overseas tour of duty. Posted to the 187th RCT in Japan as the regimental sergeant major, he remained with the “Rakkasans” for seven years through changes of location and unit designation. He had been in Japan for only a year when the regiment redeployed to Fort Bragg in July 1955. Later that year it moved to Fort Campbell, Kentucky, and was redesignated the 2d Airborne Battle Group, 187th Infantry, and assigned to the newly reactivated 101st Airborne Division. This was the era of the pentomic Army, which Army planners developed for operations on a nuclear battlefield. The new force structure dictated a battle group, an organization between a battalion and a regiment in size. Five battle groups constituted a pentomic division, such as the 101st.

As expected, the two moves, not to mention the redesignation, were major headaches for Sergeant Major Dunaway. Before the reactivation of the 101st, the 11th Airborne Division had been the major unit at Fort Campbell. As part of Operation GYROSCOPE, the largest troop movement undertaken in peacetime, the 11th moved to Europe. But only soldiers with thirty-three months remaining on their enlistments deployed with the division. Those who did not and were unwilling to reenlist were assigned to other units staying at Fort Campbell, including the 187th. The apathetic attitudes of these “short-timers” soon to leave the Army understandably affected the battle group despite the best efforts of the NCOs.

Only after all these personnel had been discharged could the sergeant major and his NCOs succeed in “molding a well-trained, highly motivated, efficient, airborne organization of the highest order.” A decade later, during the Vietnam War, similar problems occurred Army-wide as returning combat veterans entered stateside units with only a few months left on their enlistments.

As a restructured unit with many newly assigned soldiers, the 187th had to develop a sense of unity and teamwork. In Dunaway’s words, “One of the major ingredients in a well-

rounded organization is teamwork. Troops are taught teamwork in their jobs, but it takes more than that. There has to be a good sports program and there has to be some social life that involves the family. In the 187th and all of the organizations where I was the sergeant major, we had both.” To do this, Sergeant Major Dunaway recommended and supported several programs: the Soldier of the Month program, unit sports activities (baseball, football, and basketball at the regimental and battle group level), and periodic social events. Social gatherings were always especially significant events for the wives of young soldiers, some of whom “had never worn a long dress before.”

During Dunaway’s long tenure at Fort Campbell, he became closely involved in community activities. In those seven years he managed a Little League team, taught Sunday school, served as president of the PTA, was president of the Board of Governors of the NCO Club, and supervised the post thrift shop. Dunaway later regarded his greatest accomplishment as the 187th sergeant major to be simply his longevity in office. “I guess I stayed with the 187th about as long as anyone. I watched commanders come and go. I watched senior NCOs come and go. Some even went on overseas tours and came back to the 187th and I was still there.” Dunaway and his wife in fact supplied much of the continuity and cohesion that kept the airborne force a first-class unit. One could not mention the 187th in any conversation without bringing up the Dunaways. When he left the 101st Airborne Division in 1961, he never thought that he would return to the division for combat in Vietnam.

Sergeant Major Dunaway’s next station was in Okinawa as sergeant major of the 1st Special Forces Group. The group had troops in Vietnam, Laos, Thailand, and Taiwan, so Dunaway traveled frequently with the group commander. As at Fort Campbell, the Dunaways left their mark, always seeking to enhance unit morale and cohesion. They hosted several parties to encourage young soldiers and their wives to know each other socially, and Dunaway personally introduced the

Special Forces blazer. It became such a sought-after item that soldiers back at Fort Bragg scheduled for an assignment on Okinawa ordered it ahead of time. Another of Dunaway’s measures met with less enthusiasm, but in the end was just as effective at instilling esprit de corps. “When I arrived I noticed in short order that some of the men had mustaches, most of them long, shaggy, and unkempt, sometimes with food caught in them. After getting my commander’s total backing, I announced that the mustaches had to go.” Highly unpopular at first, the clean upper lip eventually became a mark of pride in serving with the 1st Group and Sergeant Major Dunaway.

His frequent travels in Southeast Asia to visit the far-flung teams not only kept them informed and improved their morale, but also acquainted Dunaway with the area, particularly Vietnam, where he would serve next. In June 1966 he departed Okinawa for Nha Trang, Republic of Vietnam, where he was assigned as the sergeant major of the 5th Special Forces Group.

Sergeant Major Dunaway spent most of his time traveling to the Special Forces A, B, and C Teams widely dispersed in South Vietnam’s four corps tactical zones. As in previous assignments, Dunaway had the fortune to serve with top-notch soldiers. He initiated an on-the-spot promotion and award system to reward deserving soldiers immediately without waiting for official command visitations. The occasional disciplinary problem he reassigned immediately. Such soldiers were told to report to the sergeant major, “bag and baggage,” the phrase becoming as well known as the “Dunaway blazer” and the no-mustache policy. His duties and extensive TDY allowed him only one ten-day break to visit his family, living in Australia while he was in Vietnam. In June 1967, after a year with the 5th Special Forces Group, Dunaway received new orders reassigning him as the 101st Airborne Division sergeant major at Fort Campbell.

His stay at Fort Campbell proved short. The airborne unit was then preparing to deploy to Vietnam, and he spent most of his time visiting division units as they prepared for the move. The 101st had many nondeployable soldiers

and NCOs, either because they had too little time left on their enlistments or because they had just returned from Vietnam. Dunaway redistributed the experienced, deployable NCOs throughout the division. The changes ensured that every unit had at least some NCOs with combat experience.

The 101st Airborne Division deployed to South Vietnam in the latter half of 1967. Once in Vietnam, Dunaway did everything he could to increase morale for the soldiers, especially those serving far from major base camps. NCO and enlisted clubs, showers and clean clothes, entertainment, Soldier of the Month competitions, and promotion selection boards helped morale. But often the most effective measure was simply the visible presence in the field of the division commander and his sergeant major, who arrived by helicopter sometimes through enemy fire.

On one occasion, the commanding general, Maj. Gen. Olinto M. Barsanti, was wounded by ground fire and collected yet another Purple Heart. Dunaway later mused that the general might have deliberately guided their helicopter into “hot” landing zones for the purpose of adding to his existing collection of Purple Hearts. As for Dunaway, “I wasn’t interested in getting one...that’s an award they can keep!” But running the risks of enemy fire paid off; often the commanding general and his sergeant major could decorate soldiers on the spot for heroism and see firsthand a unit’s problems and requirements during active combat.

Dunaway did not have to go out into the field to seek danger. In January 1968 the Tet offensive saw both division and brigade base camps hit by enemy attacks. In what he had previously considered a safe place, an NCO standing two feet from him was shot and killed by rifle fire. Dunaway’s role in repelling a two-day North Vietnamese attack on the division base camp—evacuating and treating the wounded, manning defensive positions that were short of personnel, and redirecting troops as needed on the defensive perimeter—earned him the Silver Star.

Personnel continuity challenged the sergeants major for all units in Vietnam. Since the 101st had arrived in Vietnam en masse, most of its soldiers would complete their one-year tour at the same time. Yet if every soldier departed Vietnam at the end of his one-year tour, the division would disappear, or at least new and inexperienced soldiers, officers and enlisted alike, would replace almost all of the combat-seasoned veterans. In such a case, unit efficiency and cohesion would quickly drop to just about zero. To prevent that, Dunaway and the U.S. Army, Vietnam (USARV), sergeant major exchanged personnel with other divisions to more evenly spread out soldiers with the same dates of return to the United States. “It bothered me that men who volunteered to go back to Vietnam with the 101st had to be transferred to other divisions against their wishes, but it had to be done, and it was successful.” In July 1968 Dunaway departed Vietnam for an assignment that his division commander had foreseen. When the XVIII Airborne Corps commander visited Fort Campbell in 1967, General Barsanti introduced Dunaway as “my Division Sergeant Major, and the next Sergeant Major of the Army.”

Less than a year later the prediction came true. In 1966 the Chief of Staff, General Harold K. Johnson, had considered Dunaway for his SMA, but had chosen another. Two years later, General William C. Westmoreland took a closer look, challenging him with “some pretty tough questions” during a 45-minute interview.

In July 1968 at Camp Eagle, Vietnam, the division chief of staff greeted him with a message from Westmoreland: Dunaway had just been selected as the new Sergeant Major of the Army. Coincidentally, that same day General Barsanti turned over command of the 101st to Maj. Gen. Melvin Zais, under whom Dunaway had served in the 517th RCT during World War II and in the 187th at Fort Campbell. After the shock of the news wore off, Dunaway “considered declining the appointment in order to stay on with the fine men of the 101st. I was proud to be their sergeant major and it was great to have General Zais as my commander again. But, I decided, I

could contribute much more from the top than I could from within." All of the division's sergeants major and many first sergeants came to Camp Eagle to see Dunaway off. "I was proud; I was honored; and, let's face it, I was a little scared thinking of what lay ahead."

Despite the doubts and questions Dunaway had on his long flight home, he realized that his twenty-eight years of Army experience, sixteen as a sergeant major, had prepared him well for the top enlisted job in the Army. "I realized that I was, in fact, qualified to do this job, and do it well. From that point on, all the doubts that had plagued me in the beginning suddenly disappeared and I faced each new day with the powerful self-confidence it takes to succeed. The most important thing I always remembered was where I came from. I was a soldier who had dug slit trenches, pulled KP and guard duty, and crawled in the mud. It was that soldier that I came to represent, and I did my best every day I was Sergeant Major of the Army."

Dunaway had little overlap with the incumbent Sergeant Major of the Army, William Wooldridge, who went back to Vietnam to serve as the command sergeant major of the Military Assistance Command, Vietnam (MACV). Wooldridge had made the point that the new office had generated some disgruntlement among senior staff officers who "resented having an enlisted man accorded more privileges than they." He had carefully opened channels of communication with each staff section and was afraid that they would close once he left. Dunaway had to keep those doors open. To assist him, Dunaway enlisted the help of several staff officers in the Pentagon whom he knew personally from previous tours. "Eventually I was able to get cooperation wherever and whenever I needed it. Today, more than twenty years later, most of those 'doors' are permanently open to the Sergeant Major of the Army because the position has been well established. But the first three or four Sergeants Major of the Army had to be the pioneers."

General Westmoreland swore in Sergeant Major Dunaway on 1 September 1968 in the

presence of his family, the 3d Infantry (Old Guard), the press, and sergeants major from all over the Army. Reviewing the Old Guard with General Westmoreland, Dunaway considered it "an honor to have the Chief of Staff of the Army accord an enlisted man a position of such respect." After the ceremony, when Dunaway had his family settled at Fort Myer, Westmoreland welcomed him aboard and briefed him on his vision of the Army's goals and objectives: Mission, Motivation, Modernization, and Management. Rather than give him any specific guidelines, the Chief of Staff challenged him to represent the entire enlisted body of the U.S. Army.

As Sergeant Major of the Army, Dunaway had ready access to General Westmoreland. When he needed to see him on an issue that required his attention, he told Westmoreland's aide and then walked right into the office unless the chief was conferring with a major commander or staff officer. Dunaway was careful not to abuse this privilege by bothering Westmoreland with trivial issues that he could solve himself or through other means. The Chief of Staff also rated the SMA, and having an office directly across the hallway from the chief facilitated access. But Dunaway was aware that even the location of the SMA's office caused resentment, since senior officers had been displaced to make room for the first Sergeant Major of the Army.

It took Dunaway a while to get used to his access to the Chief of Staff, the SMA's spacious office, and the four-star protocol accorded its incumbent. "I had been accustomed to going to the office of a full colonel or brigadier general to report or coordinate, and it took a while for me to get used to them coming to my office."

Despite the fact that some members of the Army Staff still questioned the need for a Sergeant Major of the Army, Dunaway had few difficulties obtaining any information he needed to carry out his duties. He and his counterparts from the other services periodically received briefings from the Department of Defense staff and could request specialized



SMA Dunaway Talks with Trainees at Fort Benning, Georgia, 1969.

briefings on any subject on an informal basis. Secretary of Defense Melvin Laird and Secretary of the Army Stanley Resor even stopped by his office from time to time to talk to him about various Army issues. Besides providing a means of exchanging information, visits from high-ranking officials further enhanced the prestige and credibility of the two-year-old office. Such visibility also encouraged officers of the Army Staff to include the Sergeant Major of the Army in policy-making discussions dealing with issues affecting enlisted soldiers.

One of the most satisfying aspects of his job was the ability to solve problems for soldiers, problems that could or would not be solved expeditiously through normal channels. Dunaway avoided circumventing normal staff procedures, but he found that bringing the attention of the appropriate staff section to a soldier's problem was usually all that was needed for a solution. In such matters, he worked most often with the Enlisted Personnel Directorate (EPD), the Inspector General (IG), the Judge Advocate General (JAG),

and the Deputy Chief of Staff for Logistics (DCSLOG). All, he recalled, were "exceptionally prompt and courteous with their responses."

His assistance to one soldier later had a direct bearing on the Office of the Sergeant Major of the Army. In the late fall of 1968, he received a call from the command sergeant major of the 20th Engineer Brigade, Leon Van Autreve, who was within fifteen days of leaving Vietnam and still had no word on his next assignment. Although willing to serve anywhere, he opted for Alaska or Fort Gordon if he had a choice. Dunaway promptly went to the command sergeant major assignment section. He learned of several options, including the command sergeant major of U.S. Army, Alaska. Dunaway accepted it on Van Autreve's behalf.

Later, however, the position was given to another man. Dunaway went to the chief of EPD, a brigadier general, to inform him of the mix-up. The EPD chief told Dunaway that his directorate made assignments of enlisted members and they would not be changed by a sergeant major. Dunaway politely told him, "Sir, I did not change the assignment, and I did not influence it. I simply asked your people to make an assignment they had overlooked. Therefore CSM Van Autreve goes to Alaska unless you get authority from General Westmoreland to change his assignment." When the general went to the Chief of Staff, Westmoreland backed up his Sergeant Major.

In retrospect, Van Autreve's assignment to Alaska was critical for his future career. It meant that he would be rated by a general officer, one of the requirements for consideration for the position of Sergeant Major of the Army. Soon thereafter, at General Westmoreland's direction, the EPD proposed assignments of command sergeants major to major Army commands, but the Sergeant Major of the Army approved them.

To meet Westmoreland's challenge to represent the Army's enlisted soldiers, Dunaway visited the troops in the field, from Europe to Korea, from Hawaii to Vietnam: "I did not visit all the Army's installations during my two years, but I managed to squeeze in the majority of



Dunaway Visits Hospitalized Soldiers.

them. No doubt I traveled more than was expected of me, and it sure gets hectic living out of a suitcase and never sleeping in the same place two consecutive nights. However, I wanted to be visible and wanted soldiers of all grades to know there is someone who could hear their problems and go right to the top with problems that had merit." He also wanted soldiers to know that they could reach the top if they set high goals and worked toward them.

Dunaway also visited National Guard and reserve units. Because the reserve components usually drilled on weekends, he integrated those trips into his schedule for active units. He believed that the reservists often felt left out of the Army picture and that most people did not know the contribution they made to national defense. He wanted reservists and Guardsmen to know that their efforts were crucial to the war in Vietnam. He proudly told them that he "had been a National Guard man in the beginning," and related that "I could always tell they were proud of me for reaching the top from...[that] beginning."

To set the example of including one's family in Army life, Dunaway took his wife, Peck, with him as he visited installations around the world. Believing that the military wife is an important part of the Army, Dunaway could see no better way to demonstrate his wife's importance to him than by having her accompany him. At first he paid for her travel out of his

own pocket, but he soon found the costs prohibitive. Later the comptroller general "scolded" him for not coming to him right away with the problem; thereafter TDY funds became available for both of them. While Dunaway talked with NCOs and junior enlisted soldiers, Peck talked with their wives and gained an understanding of the problems they faced, later relaying those concerns to her husband. She also accompanied him to ceremonies at the White House, such as the presentation of Medals of Honor or at receptions President Richard M. Nixon gave for the senior enlisted representatives of the armed services, with appropriate coverage by television and print media.

During Dunaway's two-year tenure, he continued to institutionalize the office, focusing greater attention on the concerns of enlisted soldiers. Soon after taking office, he asked the Army Staff to inform him of all proposed policies that affected enlisted personnel. Once the chief approved the request, Army Staff officers became accustomed to seeking his advice and including him in the decision-making process on issues affecting enlisted soldiers. For example, he secured approval for hospital commanders to promote deserving soldiers who had been wounded in Vietnam. Existing policy dropped casualties from the unit rolls, so many wounded GIs were ineligible for promotion because they had been on hospital status. He also started an accelerated promotion for pay grades E-6 (staff sergeant) and E-7 (sergeant first class) who were top NCO Academy graduates.

During Dunaway's tenure, the Chief of Staff approved the Noncommissioned Officer Education System (NCOES), a three-tiered system that trained NCOs in basic, advanced, and senior courses. The capstone was the Sergeants Major Academy at Fort Bliss, Texas, which trained master sergeants for duty as sergeants major at battalion level and above. Although the projected Sergeants Major Academy did not go into operation until after Dunaway retired, he believes that "there can be no question that it is one of the best things that ever happened to the NCO corps."

To improve morale and enhance public perception of the Army, Dunaway changed the Army's uniform policy. His recommendation that reserve component soldiers be allowed to wear three-year service stripes reinforced the "one Army" concept; his recommendation to allow soldiers returning from Vietnam to wear jungle fatigues rather than their khaki uniforms (which became rumpled after soldiers spent hours sitting on an airplane) was equally successful. "We were already under attack from the civilian sector because of the unpopularity of the war...the least we could do was to make our veterans look as clean, neat, and well dressed as possible."

He also changed the policy on the wear of the Pathfinder Badge. The metal badge, which replaced a cloth sleeve insignia, was supposed to be worn instead of the parachutist badge, because Pathfinders were also airborne qualified, a policy the DCSPER had instituted. But this stricture made it impossible for senior and master parachutists to display their advanced proficiency without the traditional wings. When Dunaway brought the situation to General Westmoreland's attention, the chief directed a change to allow those qualified to wear both badges. Westmoreland also announced that he would thereafter personally approve all changes to uniform regulations.

Dunaway also refined and improved enlisted assignments. He saw to it, for example, that the award of the special qualification identifiers (SQI) for open-mess NCOs was limited to those who were fully qualified. The change gradually improved the open-mess system and stopped the loss of mess sergeants from troop units. After a hard battle, he also corrected another longstanding problem—the lack of additional pay for drill instructors. The extra hours of duty and the requirements for well-maintained uniforms merited additional pay to attract and retain good NCOs for this critical duty. Dunaway's persistence resulted in additional funding for drill instructor pay.

Dunaway continued Wooldridge's Command Sergeant Major Program. This program essen-

tially differentiated sergeants major who served as senior enlisted advisers to commanders, based on their own careers of extensive troop leadership experience, from sergeants major who advanced to the highest pay grade through administrative and technical fields with limited troop leadership experience. He also clarified the rank structure for senior NCOs. When SMA Wooldridge started the Command Sergeant Major Program, the titles were confusing and the title of staff sergeant major was not well received. Dunaway recommended that the titles be restricted to three—Sergeant Major of the Army, Command Sergeant Major, and Sergeant Major—and that all three be addressed as "Sergeant Major."

Among the other initiatives Dunaway pushed was a marked stress on ordinary soldiers' use of credit unions, making them less apt to become victims of loan sharks and analogous problems. He also continually emphasized the need for soldiers to work in their military occupational specialties (MOSs). Too often soldiers were trained and tested in one specialty, only to be assigned to another due to unit personnel shortages. Incorrect assignments wasted money, since a soldier trained in a skill he did not use. There was also the issue of fairness, since victims of incorrect assignments were expected to perform in a field in which they had no training. On his trips to troop units, Dunaway sought out soldiers who were not working in their MOS and, if necessary, arranged on-the-spot reassignments. As the representative of the Army's enlisted personnel, Sergeant Major Dunaway testified before Congress on military enlisted matters with his counterparts in the other services. He met senators and congressmen in the Secretary of the Army's office and became close with Senator Mendel Rivers, Chairman of the Armed Services Committee, "the military's best friend." His many meetings gave congressmen a unique perspective on matters affecting the enlisted ranks and the Army in general.

To make the soldier's voice heard at the highest level, the Sergeant Major of the Army



SMA Dunaway (*left*), with His Counterparts from the Other Services, Visits President Richard M. Nixon.

hosted the Major Command (MACOM) Command Sergeant Major Conference in conjunction with the Chief of Staff's Major Commanders' Conference. Before each conference, sergeants major solicited ideas and recommendations from the enlisted ranks and these passed up through the enlisted command channels. At the MACOM level, a panel of command sergeants major examined what had been judged the best or most significant ideas and recommendations. They forwarded their selections to Dunaway's conference.

Before the creation of the Office of the Sergeant Major of the Army, the voice of enlisted soldiers was often silenced before reaching the Army headquarters. Now, at least someone heard their ideas and concerns. That someone, the SMA, had direct access to the Chief of Staff. "In the final analysis," said Dunaway, "we didn't get everything approved, but we got lots of things that never would have surfaced through the officers' chain of command." After the conference, the SMA sent a record of recommendations, approved or not, down to all units. This kept commanders,

NCOs, and soldiers informed of significant matters.

By the time Dunaway became Sergeant Major of the Army, the term of office was to coincide with that of the Chief of Staff, normally four years. Yet after considerable thought Dunaway recommended that it be limited to two years. This had two benefits. First, it allowed the maximum number of command sergeants major to hold the job, motivating many of them to stay in the service longer in hopes of attaining the position. Second, it ensured a fresh flow of ideas to the Chiefs of Staff and meant that the senior enlisted soldier would have recent experience with troops. General Westmoreland approved the two-year term in June 1970. The benefits of recent troop experience also led Dunaway to believe that the candidates for the position should come from command sergeant major slots at or below division level. This would eliminate the requirement that candidates have a general officer as their immediate rater. There were too many excellent brigade and battalion command sergeants major that the existing system had overlooked.

SMA Dunaway retired on 30 September 1970 after thirty years of service in the Army. In a moving ceremony at Fort Myer, he trooped the line of the Old Guard with his Chief of Staff. "General Westmoreland looked at me and said, 'Sergeant Major, you're going to miss all of this.' I said, 'Yes sir, I know.' Yes. I knew I'd miss it, and the tears welled up in my eyes as I thought about what it would be like to leave behind the only life I had known for the past thirty years. But it also felt good to know that I had done my job well every day of the thirty years I had served." A few years ago, when someone asked Dunaway if he ever had any undesirable assignments, the ever no-nonsense soldier replied, "A career is a career. Orders are orders. Loyalty is loyalty. The oath is the oath."

When asked about what he considered his greatest accomplishment as Sergeant Major of the Army, Dunaway humbly pointed out that "nothing can be considered permanent, because any Chief of Staff can change virtually anything

he desires. Probably the most permanent improvements that I am proud of are initiatives that were introduced before my tenure, but which materialized or grew during or after my tenure." The two greatest are the Command Sergeant Major Program and the Sergeants Major Academy. The most rewarding aspect of being Sergeant Major of the Army was "being in the position to influence Army-wide policies pertaining to enlisted personnel, and getting top-level attention and focus on matters that never got to the top prior to the establishment of the Sergeant Major of the Army position."

Dozens of three- and four-star generals, the commandant of the Marine Corps and his sergeant major, sergeants major, first sergeants, sergeants first class, and many other soldiers attended Dunaway's retirement ceremony. Afterward, he and Peck toured Fort Myer in a horse-drawn carriage, hosted a farewell party, and said goodbye to the Army they both loved.

Assignments

1940–1943	Rifleman through Platoon Sergeant, Company A, 176th Infantry, 29th Infantry Division
1943–1944	Student, Jump School, Pathfinder, Glider, Fort Benning, Georgia
1944	Student, Noncommissioned Officer Leadership Course, Fort Benning, Georgia
1944–1945	Platoon Sergeant, Company H, 517th Regimental Combat Team, 13th Airborne Division, France; Belgium; Germany
1945–1948	First Sergeant, Company A, 501st Parachute Infantry, Fort Benning, Georgia
1948–1952	Operations Sergeant, First Sergeant, 505th Parachute Infantry, 82d Airborne Division, Fort Bragg, North Carolina
1952–1954	Sergeant Major, 505th Parachute Infantry, 82d Airborne Division, Fort Bragg, North Carolina
1954–1956	Sergeant Major, 187th Regimental Combat Team (Abn), Japan; Fort Bragg, North Carolina
1956–1961	Sergeant Major, 2d Airborne Battle Group, 187th Infantry, 101st Airborne Division, Fort Campbell, Kentucky
1961–1966	Sergeant Major, 1st Special Forces Group, Okinawa, Japan
1966–1967	Sergeant Major, 5th Special Forces Group, Republic of Vietnam
1967–1968	Command Sergeant Major, 101st Airborne Division, Fort Campbell, Kentucky; Republic of Vietnam
1968–1970	Sergeant Major of the Army

Selected Decorations and Awards

Distinguished Service Medal
Silver Star
Legion of Merit
Bronze Star with V Device
Purple Heart
Air Medal with V Device
Army Commendation Medal with One Oak Leaf Cluster
Good Conduct Medal with Ten Oak Leaf Clusters
American Defense Service Medal
American Campaign Medal
European–African–Middle Eastern Campaign Medal
World War II Victory Medal
National Defense Service Medal
Vietnam Service Medal
Vietnamese Armed Forces Honor Medal, Second Class
Vietnamese Cross of Gallantry with Silver Star
Republic of Vietnam Campaign Medal
Combat Infantryman Badge with Star
Master Parachutist Badge



SMA Copeland

Silas L. Copeland

Born in Embryfield, Texas, on 2 April 1920, Silas L. Copeland grew up on a cotton farm and was educated in a one-room schoolhouse from first grade through high school. Copeland was inducted into the Army on 28 October 1942 in Huntsville, Texas. He was twenty-two years old and married with one baby daughter. Like most of the new World War II draftees, his term of service was for the duration of hostilities plus six months.

Six weeks of basic training in St. Petersburg, Florida, made an indelible mark on the new recruit. His strongest impression was of his drill sergeant: “Here was an individual—from his stature, from the long years of service as indicated by those hash marks running down his sleeve, the way he spoke, the way he conducted himself, the way he moved—here was a person that you could look up to. He just carried himself in such a manner, and spoke in such a manner, that you couldn’t help but have a favorable impression.”

Drill instructors did not scream at recruits in Copeland’s unit. Had they yelled and cursed, he believes that his view of the military might have been much different. Instead, “all because of the first impression that I received at the induction station, all the way through my basic training, out through my first unit assignment,” he saw the Army as a healthy, positive institution.

After basic training, Copeland was assigned to the Army Air Corps and began advanced training at Biggs Army Airfield, near El Paso,

Texas. Copeland was assigned to the 538th Heavy Bomber Group. Within a few days of his arrival, the group departed for England and the war, leaving behind the recruits, including Copeland, to support base operations at Biggs. Initially, Copeland found himself driving an eighteen-wheel fuel truck, but he was soon promoted to sergeant and quickly became a refueling specialist, working for another sharp non-commissioned officer (NCO). His new boss, a master sergeant, was a veteran of Pearl Harbor and was now responsible for the refueling of every flight that landed on the airfield. “He was an articulate NCO. He was an impressive NCO. He’d talk with you, communicate with you. Never hollered at you. He treated people well. All you had to do was your job.”

By late 1944 heavy fighting in the European and Pacific theaters had stretched the U.S. Army’s manpower to the limit. The Army’s projected ninety-division force of more than eight million soldiers was starving for combat arms replacements. To meet that need, thousands of soldiers in support jobs like Copeland were reassigned, “retreaded,” into combat units almost overnight.

Copeland’s civilian experience in heavy automotive equipment, road construction, civil engineering, and maintenance of equipment in general made him a suitable replacement in “Hell on Wheels,” the 2d Armored Division. He became a tank commander before he rode in his first tank, but he recalls his gunner saying, “Sergeant, don’t worry. We’ll teach you the fundamentals of tank operations.”

In December 1944 he received orders for movement overseas to the 2d Armored Division,

This section is based on Interv, Erwin H. Koehler with Silas L. Copeland, 19–21 Oct 93, Huntsville, Tex.

joining Company E of the veteran 66th Armor, near Köln, Germany. The regiment had battle scars from North Africa, Sicily, Anzio, France, Holland, the Ardennes, and the Rhine River. "They had tanks shot out from underneath them, would pick up another tank, get their wounds dressed, and go back into battle. You were there for the duration." In Company E, Copeland began his association with combat-seasoned soldiers and NCOs. "They had to know what they were doing or they wouldn't have survived. They were in some real battles." Again he was told, "Don't worry about it, Sarge, we'll teach you." Sergeant Copeland fought the closing days of World War II in Europe as a member of the 2d Armored Division.

By May 1945 the Nazis were finished. In September Japan surrendered. Home-front public opinion called for rapid demobilization of the military and for bringing the boys home quickly. Copeland also wanted to get home to see his wife and daughter, but he seemed stuck with occupation duty in Germany. Then his first sergeant gave him some advice. If a draftee enlisted in the Regular Army for a three-year hitch, he was eligible for ninety days of leave and a return ticket to the States and would serve with his division upon its return to the States. "It wasn't a career-wise decision that I made. It was a 'get yourself home as quickly as possible' type decision." Copeland signed up for three years and returned to the United States in time to celebrate Christmas with his family. In early March 1946 he rejoined the 2d Armored Division at its new station, Fort Hood, Texas.

He stayed with the 2d Armored Division until mid-March 1950, when he was transferred to the 1st Cavalry Division, then on occupation duty in Japan. There, he became a battalion intelligence sergeant. Previously Copeland had attended a two-week course of instruction at the Fort Hood NCO Academy, as well as a twelve-week course at Fort Riley, Kansas. The training dealt primarily with operations and intelligence, focusing on developing operations orders, formulating plans, conducting research, publishing orders, interpreting photos and order

of battle, and collecting, analyzing, and producing combat intelligence. Little did he know that within five months he would be applying what he had learned in another war.

War in Korea struck suddenly in late June 1950. Sergeant First Class Copeland was with the 2d Battalion, 8th Cavalry, 1st Cavalry Division, and by mid-July 1950 his unit had begun its famous fight to hold the Pusan Perimeter in South Korea. "We went over there with only 55 to 60 percent strength, and that strength was mostly recruits. Consequently we used KATUSA [Korean Augmentations to the United States Army] to fill out our units." The fighting around Pusan was fierce and continuous, and Copeland's battalion was in combat for ninety-three consecutive days.

In Korea, Copeland initially served in the battalion's intelligence and reconnaissance (I&R) platoon as the I&R sergeant. Like most of the other experienced NCOs, one of his basic responsibilities was to make raw American youngsters understand the price of mistakes in wartime. "We made a lot of mistakes and we corrected a lot of mistakes, but not until lives were lost and prices were paid."

General Douglas MacArthur's surprise landing at Inch'on in September 1950 cut off the North Korean forces fighting along the Pusan Perimeter to the south. Then, from 14–19 September, the 2d Battalion spearheaded the 1st Cavalry Division's breakout from the enclave, winning a Distinguished Unit Citation. After a month of rapid northward advance, Copeland's division occupied the North Korean capital, and the North Korean Army was wiped out. He wrote his wife to tell her he would be home by Christmas, but the Chinese had other ideas.

At the end of October 1950 the 8th Cavalry reached Unsan, North Korea, about fifty-five miles from the Chinese border. During the night of 1 November Sergeant Copeland heard what seemed like hundreds of Chinese bugles blowing. They signaled the beginning of an all-out offensive, preceded by heavy rocket, artillery, and mortar attacks. Once the shelling lifted, Chinese cavalry on Mongolian ponies, followed

by waves of infantrymen, charged the unit's positions. The 2d Battalion was quickly engulfed and surrounded. Fighting his way through the Chinese encirclement with a small group of soldiers, Copeland was wounded in the head and leg. Nevertheless, after treating a young soldier wounded by shell fragments, Copeland carried the battalion operations sergeant into the safety of the nearby mountains. The next day he managed to get his wounded comrade aboard a truck and then made his way back to U.S. lines. The 8th Cavalry went into reserve until replacements and rest reconstituted the unit. Then it returned to the fighting, this time near Panmunjom.

In late June 1951 Copeland returned home from Korea. His next duty station was at the Fourth Army headquarters, Fort Sam Houston, Texas, but he had no idea what his assignment would be. Then fate intervened. His old division commander from Korea, Maj. Gen. Hobart R. Gay, spotted Copeland's 1st Cavalry Division shoulder patch and asked him into his office. His reward for bringing the general up to date on the 1st Cavalry Division in Korea was an assignment to Texas A&M University on ROTC duty.

While at Texas A&M, Copeland successfully completed a precommissioning course but, feeling that he was too old, declined the offer of a commission. Nevertheless, he learned a great deal about the military that helped him throughout his career.

September 1953 found First Sergeant Copeland with the 22d Infantry in Kirch Goens, Germany. Family quarters in Germany were scarce, with sixteen- to eighteen-month waiting lists. Such experiences, together with his unaccompanied tours and long family separations, finally convinced him to leave the Army in 1954. Waiting as a civilian to enroll for the spring semester at Texas A&M, Copeland had second thoughts. "In those days you could be out of the Army up to ninety days and then you could come back with your rank, if you could find a vacancy with that rank." Copeland found a vacancy with the 4th Tank Battalion at Fort Hood and was soon back in the Army.

Resuming his career, Copeland served in the 4th Tank Battalion until 1957. He used his training and experience in operations and intelligence as the battalion operations sergeant until December 1956, when he was assigned as the battalion sergeant major. At the time, the battalion sergeant major "handled administration for the commander, met with the company first sergeants, and checked the police of the area." It was not until later that sergeants major actively supervised training and maintenance and "got out with the troops." This change in approach to the role of the sergeant major was officially recognized when Army Chief of Staff General Harold K. Johnson approved the position of command sergeant major in 1967.

When Copeland's unit was moved from Fort Hood to Fort Polk, Louisiana, in 1957, Copeland decided that he wanted to transfer out of the Leesville area. "I [had] never asked for a transfer into or out of a unit before, but this was the time I could better my family by moving them out of the area." He requested a second assignment to ROTC duty, this time at Centenary College in Shreveport, Louisiana. Given primarily administrative duties, he soon enrolled in typing classes, as well as Mathematics and English. The latter he considered helpful, because of his "lack of proficiency and Texas long, drawn-out drawl," at least according to his professor. In addition to the college courses, he furthered his military education by completing Unit and Company Commanders Extension Courses. In turn, his training in operations was of great value in organizing classroom instruction and summer training for the cadets. Copeland would derive much satisfaction years later when he met many of his former ROTC cadets as colonels and generals.

In 1958 the Copelands found themselves on their way back to Germany. This time Copeland was assigned as the first sergeant of Troop B, 8th Cavalry Squadron, 8th Infantry Division, in Sandhoffen, Germany. The Army had just authorized the new pay grades of E-8 and E-9, and Copeland was considered for promotion to E-8 soon after he arrived in the unit. He had one day's notice for a division

promotion board, and his unit was training in the field when he found out about it. Every candidate for the one E-8 slot was in a Class A uniform except for Copeland, who came straight to the promotion board from the field. He recalls telling the board president, "It wasn't feasible to change clothes before coming here to meet the deadline this morning. I chose to appear before the board in field uniform and take my chances." Copeland impressed the board with his knowledge of operations and his efforts to continue his education while at Centenary College, particularly the precommissioning courses. At the end of the interview, he informed the board members that they were "facing the best soldier and that he should get the promotion." At the next day's formation, when his company commander read his promotion orders, Copeland learned that the promotion board had agreed with his self-assessment.

The fact that Copeland was working as a first sergeant proved a decided advantage. The E-8 and E-9 eligibility requirements specified that an NCO had to have been in a first sergeant or sergeant major position. But many NCOs avoided those jobs, "doing all sorts and manner of things to evade troop duty." By staying with troop units, Copeland gave himself an edge over many other candidates. He did not keep his first sergeant rank for long, however. Within a year his squadron commander selected him to be the squadron sergeant major.

Sergeant Major Copeland remained in Germany until November 1962, when he was assigned as sergeant major of the 2d Battalion, 37th Armor, 2d Armored Division, at Fort Hood, Texas. In June 1963 he became the division sergeant major. As with his promotion to E-8, he competed with three other sergeants major for the position. As before, Copeland was not shy about telling the division commander that he was the best man for the job. He also pointed out that he had fought with the division in World War II.

Copeland made a significant jump, over the combat command (brigade) level and up to the

division level. As a squadron sergeant major, he had worked with five first sergeants, all of the same branch; the division had thirty-four sergeants major of several branches. As a squadron sergeant major, he could escape many administrative duties that kept him at his desk and get out to see "Private Joe Snuffy" training in the field or performing maintenance in the motor pool. The division job mandated more paperwork. But, just as he had done as a first sergeant and platoon sergeant, Copeland did not hesitate to learn from others. "Going back to my copy-cat days, in the absence of any formal schooling in the duties of the sergeant major, I watch a guy who's been successful. I'm going to emulate this guy." In this case he took as a model the sergeant major of the 8th Division, who held regular meetings with the sergeants major of the divisional units to establish an informal NCO support channel that paralleled and complemented the officer chain of command. Copeland did the same.

Previously, as a squadron sergeant major, Copeland had hoped that he "might make it up to brigade or combat command." As a division sergeant major, he never had any desire to be a corps sergeant major, because at the division level "is where all the action is." For the next seven years he served several times in that position. He worked as the 2d Armored Division sergeant major until 1966, then moved back to Germany—for the third time—as the sergeant major, 2d Brigade, 4th Armored Division, and later as the division sergeant major. In 1969 he followed his third tour in Germany with his third tour in a combat unit, the 1st Infantry Division in South Vietnam.

Copeland served one tour in Vietnam, split between the Big Red One and the 4th Infantry Division. As the division sergeant major of the 1st Infantry Division beginning in September 1969, he was the eyes and ears of the commanding general regarding the enlisted troops and accompanied the general on inspection trips. While the general received his briefings, Copeland walked around the firebase, talking with the enlisted soldiers and making evaluations: "Are they properly fed? Do they have the



Copeland (*left*) with Troops of the 1st Infantry Division in Vietnam

equipment? Do they have ammunition? Do they have weapons? Are they operable? How's their morale? How can I support you?"

Having a senior noncommissioned officer accompany the young soldier on his mission out in the field seemed to boost his morale. So Copeland encouraged the sergeant major of the division to get out to visit the troops whenever possible. "They should let the young soldier know that they're in the area and their primary purpose of being there is to support that combat soldier and make sure he gets everything that he needs to accomplish his mission and [to assure him] that he is not the only one directly involved in the war." He stressed that "the sergeant major's primary mission in life" was to ensure that everyone supporting those soldiers in the jungle did "everything humanly possible to make the mission as easy and comfortable as possible."

Copeland found the young soldiers and NCOs in Vietnam no different from those of World War II or Korea. However, there was a

difference in the soldiers' attitude toward the war: "I'm the bait. I'm the guy that's going to take the blow in the jungles of Vietnam." Television news and newspapers let them know that the entire nation was sharply divided about the war. The divisiveness took a heavy toll on the soldiers' morale. "The big challenge for NCOs at all levels, from division right on down to fire team leader, is to keep the morale of the soldier boosted. If his morale is good, his fighting ability is good. If his morale is low, you have a problem." He firmly believed that "one way to do that is to show him that he is not alone in the jungle and although you won't be at his side day and night, you are his prime supporter."

The 1st Infantry Division phased out of Vietnam during the middle of Copeland's tour. He then became the sergeant major of the 4th Infantry Division, then operating in Vietnam's Central Highlands. Later in his tour, Copeland went into Cambodia with the division.

Before finishing his one-year tour in Vietnam, Copeland learned that he was under consideration for Sergeant Major of the Army (SMA). Having been previously considered for the position in 1968 when George Dunaway was selected, Copeland felt that the opportunity had passed and that he would retire in 1972. There were five other sergeants major under consideration, all of whom a general officer had recommended and the chain of command had interviewed. That summer Chief of Staff General William C. Westmoreland interviewed the top five candidates, including Copeland. As the only one then stationed in Vietnam, Copeland was asked about conditions in Vietnam and what was happening in the 4th Division area of operations. For the first time at a promotion board, he did not state that he was the best man for the job. He knew that all five candidates for such a prestigious position had to be the best or they would not have been interviewed. Instead his responses were factual and direct. At the conclusion of the interview, he left a phone number where he could be reached and went home to Huntsville, Texas, for a short leave.

He had no sooner arrived home than he learned that he had been selected to be the next Sergeant Major of the Army. At the time, Copeland was instructed to return to Vietnam at the end of his leave to complete his tour. While there as the SMA designee, he was to "visit as many troops as feasible, from the DMZ [Demilitarized Zone] to the Mekong Delta." He found the responsibility and the high expectations for him in Vietnam and in Washington both humbling and a source of pride.

At his swearing-in ceremony, the entire Copeland family, except one, attended—wife Ann, daughters Dorothy and Paula, and son Russell. He elected not to pull his other son Robert out of classes at Sam Houston University, a decision he later regretted: "I should have done that because there is only one swearing-in ceremony and there's only one picture of that ceremony." He told the Secretary of the Army, "Mr. Secretary, you all have chosen the proudest soldier in our Army. You may not have chosen the

best, but you have chosen the proudest, and I plan to carry on to the best of my ability."

Copeland assumed office in October 1970, during a turbulent time for the Army. His task was to further institutionalize the office he had inherited from Wooldridge and Dunaway. Although there was little danger of the office's being abolished, Copeland faced attempts to erode the influence of the office within the Army Staff and to reduce his access to the Chief of Staff. Soon after his swearing-in, a colonel from the General Staff came into his office and announced that he would be Copeland's rater. As a division sergeant major, he had been rated by a general officer; to be rated by a colonel represented something of a demotion. Copeland, considering himself "number one here and not working to obtain a rating," had little personal concern over the rating scheme: "Gee, you know as far as this soldier is concerned, I don't care. Any officer can rate me." However, he also knew that it would affect the image of the Office of the Sergeant Major of the Army, reduce its influence within the Army Staff, and reduce his access to the Chief of Staff. Sergeants major at the division, corps, and major command levels were rated by the commanding general for whom they directly worked. Copeland felt so strongly about the issue that he threatened to resign: "I will have no alternative except to go to the Chief of Staff and inform him that this old sergeant feels that this is not the image he would like to create among the NCOs of our Army and I would just as soon move on." In the end, the Army decided not to rate the SMA at all.

Copeland felt that his performance in the new office was being watched very closely and that it would have a bearing on the decision to continue the office. His professionalism and unwillingness to be "political" earned him the respect of General Westmoreland, who told his major field commanders, "Copeland is the best we have and it would behoove you to pay attention to what he has to say." A young major at the Pentagon learned that the hard way. Peter Dawkins, part of the Chief of Staff's commit-

tee on the all-volunteer Army, was tasked to develop new haircut standards. At his briefing to the Chief of Staff, he realized to his embarrassment that he had not consulted with Copeland over this primarily enlisted matter. Copeland later related, "Pete didn't get his way because I didn't agree with him on the haircuts. Had we coordinated beforehand, we would have come to a determination before the briefing." The Chief of Staff sided with the SMA on the issue, which demonstrated the credibility that Copeland brought to the office. Many other officers, both in the field and on the Army Staff, soon saw the SMA office as an asset once they realized that Copeland "was not out there to tattletale, but to assist."

Although not formally rated, Copeland's performance was nevertheless watched closely not only by the Army, but by civilians as well. Everything he did, every public appearance, seemed to be closely scrutinized, not so much to determine the future of his career but the future of the SMA's office. Copeland quickly felt the stress as he "tried to overcome and improve the image of his office." One of the things that he had to overcome was the adverse publicity created by the open-mess scandal. People who knew nothing else about the Office of the Sergeant Major of the Army knew about the scandal, which was coming to public attention during Copeland's term of office.

Copeland received broad guidance from General Westmoreland when he assumed office. Perhaps thinking of the damage to the office during the open-mess affair, the chief told Copeland not to accept gifts of more than nominal value from soldiers while visiting units in the field. Second, he was not to tread on the toes of the Deputy Chief of Staff for Personnel (DCSPER). "Oh, by the way," Westmoreland added, "I have a three-star general. His name is Lieutenant General Dutch Kerwin. His department handles assignments, transfers, clubs, messes, you name it, for the Army. I prefer that you do not get involved in that sort of thing."

Such strictures made life difficult for Copeland, as he received many calls from com-

manders requesting that a certain sergeant major be assigned to them or requests from sergeants major for assignments to a certain unit or area. But in keeping with the chief's directive, he forwarded such requests to the DCSPER and let that staff handle assignments. By refusing to interfere with the business of the DCSPER, Copeland prevented the "old boy network" from conflicting with the formal personnel assignment policy, one of General Johnson's main concerns when he created the Office of the Sergeant Major of the Army in 1966. Yet at the same time, it prevented the SMA from playing a role in an area where he did have certain natural responsibilities.

The paramount issues in the Army when Copeland assumed office were the drawdown of the Army in the course of Vietnamization, the change from a conscripted Army to an all-volunteer Army, and the need to upgrade the Noncommissioned Officer Education System (NCOES). As Copeland stated, "One of the most gratifying accomplishments during my tenure" was the activation of the U.S. Army Sergeants Major Academy at Fort Bliss, Texas. He attended the first graduation and was asked if he would like to become commandant after leaving the SMA's office. However, the law requiring him to retire at the conclusion of his term precluded him from considering the post.

The shift to an all-volunteer Army required a change in the way that NCOs dealt with soldiers. In the conscript Army, Copeland pointed out, "we could fire a soldier, give him an undesirable discharge, boot him out of the Army, and then all we had to do was ask for a replacement. So another one was drafted off the street." Under the all-volunteer Army, NCOs had to put themselves into the place of young soldiers the Army recruited. How would he or she want to be treated? Although more was expected of such volunteers, they also merited more respect and consideration for their career commitments. Despite the Chief of Staff's directive to "recruit, train, and retain an all-volunteer Army by 30 June 1973," many NCOs resisted the changes needed to carry



SMA Copeland Visits a Young Soldier.

out that directive. Although never established as policy or even communicated as a veiled threat, such attitudes often became discriminators when selecting NCOs for the post-Vietnam reduction in force.

In the effort to recruit and retain an all-volunteer force, Copeland oversaw or was involved in several changes to abolish longstanding Army traditions. The Army upgraded barracks, virtually ended bed checks, and changed enlistment and reenlistment policies and options to attract new recruits and induce soldiers to reenlist. Civilian contractors took over the onerous chore of kitchen police. Copeland, in his travels to units, was the point man who carried the message to the soldiers. He knew that “The Army Wants to Join You” slogan and philosophy had become a lightning rod for NCOs who felt that the changes brought about by the all-volunteer Army undermined discipline. As Copeland and many others saw it, “The Army Wants to Join You” meant “We’ve got to be more lenient on the style of the haircut, their dress, and—I hate to say this—discipline.”

During this period of transition, Congress saw Copeland as the soldiers’ representative and spokesman. Although he never testified before

any committee of Congress, he did frequently receive calls requesting his opinion on the status of the all-volunteer Army: “How is recruiting coming along? What do you see in the field? What do you think some of the soldiers’ frustrations are? Are you going to be able to obtain an all-volunteer force?”

Ironically, at the same time the Army was trying to entice young men and women to enlist voluntarily, it was forcing other soldiers out of the Army as part of the post-Vietnam drawdown. Many of those asked to leave were career soldiers and NCOs with twelve to fourteen years of service and one or more combat tours in Vietnam. Copeland, in the course of briefing Chief of Staff General Creighton W. Abrams related to him that the reduction in force was one of his most frustrating challenges. Unlike officers, NCOs were released without the benefit of any separation pay to ease their transition into civilian life.

General Abrams asked Copeland if he had any experience dealing with the reductions in force after World War II and the Korean War. One of the most galling policies after those two wars, Copeland noted, was the practice of allowing officers to serve in NCO slots at the reduced grade so that they could fulfill their length of service requirements for full retirement benefits. This forced NCOs out of the Army. Worst of all, Copeland felt, was that the former officer often only held the NCO slot, but did not actually work in it. “Other NCOs had to pick up the slack, without the pay or promotion that went with it. I cited myself as being one of those—the way I put it—victims.” General Abrams apparently followed Copeland’s advice not to repeat that mistake, because “although NCOs were released, it was not because a former officer took up his slot.”

SMA Copeland spent at least 50 percent of his time in the field, visiting soldiers and units, usually accompanying the Chief of Staff. If visiting a unit without the chief, he would always advise the post commander of his itinerary. Commanders used many of these office calls to express their feelings about issues such as the all-volunteer Army. Through the SMA,

commanders could share their feelings with the Chief of Staff without their being filtered by the intervening channels. The SMA's direct pipeline to the CSA also worked well for the soldiers. Complaints or comments on issues that normally would never reach the SMA's office reached him directly as he visited soldiers in the field or garrison.

Copeland did not confine his visits to active units; General Westmoreland told him not to forget National Guard and Army Reserve units. As always, visits to reserve units dovetailed with those to active units, allowing him to visit an active unit during the week and a nearby reserve unit on the weekend. Having never worked directly with reserve units, Copeland gained an appreciation for the role they played in the Army. In addition, a visit by the Sergeant Major of the Army helped assure reserve component soldiers that they were part of the "Total Army."

Neither General Abrams nor Sergeant Major Copeland traveled alone. Like his predecessor, the Chief of Staff authorized travel expenses for the Sergeant Major of the Army's wife. To encourage voluntary enlistments and reenlistments, it was now even more critical to make service life more attractive to spouses and families. Ann Copeland thus paid regular visits to wives' groups and post facilities that served the Army families. Copeland later noted that "It was from Ann that I was able to learn, firsthand, some of the frustrations that were going on within families of young soldiers." Unknown to her, these concerns were written into field reports submitted to the Chief of Staff, which brought about needed changes for an increasingly married Army. The Copelands' interest in the Army family did not stop when he left office in 1973. Throughout the next decades, Ann would continue to attend meetings the DCSPER held concerning support for family members, especially those of soldiers deployed overseas. During Operation DESERT SHIELD/DESERT STORM, the sudden and massive overseas deployments of both active and reserve units, as well as the increasing number of single-parent and dual-service families, required detailed family support



Mrs. Ann Copeland Looks in on a Patient at Irwin Army Hospital, Fort Riley, Kansas, 1971.

plans and organizations. Mrs. Copeland's experience and advice in this area were understandably highly regarded.

Silas Copeland's tour of duty as the Sergeant Major of the Army was due to end in October 1972, after two years in office. Because of his break in service in 1954, this would mean that he would be a few months short of thirty years for retirement. Acting Chief of Staff General Bruce Palmer, Jr., accordingly extended his tour until February 1973. Before the end of the year, however, General Abrams took over as Chief of Staff and asked Copeland to remain in office until June 1973, when he would turn over the office to Sgt. Maj. Leon Van Autreve.

Silas Copeland had a fulfilling and well-rounded career, spanning three wars, serving on three continents, and witnessing vast changes in the Army. He served in every leadership level available to a noncommissioned officer, from tank commander to platoon sergeant, from first sergeant to sergeant major. As a sergeant major he had worked at the battalion and brigade levels and for four different divisions. In his two years and nine months as Sergeant Major of the Army, he worked for three Chiefs of Staff and oversaw vast changes in the Army as it reduced its strength from 1.3 million soldiers in 1970 to 788,000 in 1973. During this period he helped pioneer the improvements in service life needed



SMA Copeland “Standing Tall” at His Last Official Army Formation, During His Retirement Ceremony at Fort Myer, Virginia, June 1973

to recruit and retain an all-volunteer Army after the draft had ended. His tour saw the first class of graduates from the U.S. Army Sergeants Major Academy and the strengthening of the NCOES. Finally, his actions as SMA institutionalized the office and made it an integral part of the decision-making process in the Pentagon. After thirty years of service, Copeland and his wife returned to Texas, there to reside in Huntsville in a well-earned retirement.

On 4 December 2001, after a short illness, Silas L. Copeland passed away in Conroe, Texas. Recognizing Copeland as a “leader in both peace and war,” Sergeant Major of the Army Jack L. Tilley expressed

the high regard he held for Copeland and noted Copeland’s role in helping to implement the NCOES and the transition to an all-volunteer force. Army Chief of Staff General Eric K. Shinseki lauded him as a “highly respected leader, a dignified man and a visionary whose positive and very profound influence on the character of our noncommissioned officer corps thrives nearly 30 years after his retirement. A veteran of three wars, his service to our nation represents the best of those Americans Tom Brokaw aptly named ‘the greatest generation.’ He will be missed. Anytime a man of his caliber leaves our ranks, we all suffer a great loss.”

Assignments

1942	Inducted into service, Huntsville, Texas, and Basic Training, St. Petersburg, Florida
1942–1945	Refueling specialist, Base Squadron, Biggs Army Airfield, Texas
1945	Tank Commander and Platoon Sergeant, Company E, 66th Armor, 2d Armored Division, Germany
1945–1950	Operations and Intelligence Sergeant, 67th Tank Battalion and 82d Reconnaissance Battalion, 2d Armored Division, Fort Hood, Texas
1950–1951	Operations Sergeant, Reconnaissance and Intelligence Platoon Sergeant, 2d Battalion, 8th Cavalry Regiment, 1st Cavalry Division, Japan; Republic of Korea
1951–1953	Assistant Instructor, ROTC, Texas A&M University, College Station, Texas
1953–1954	First Sergeant, 2d Battalion, 22d Infantry, 4th Infantry Division, Germany
1954–1957	Operations Sergeant, Sergeant Major, 4th Tank Battalion, 1st Armored Division, Fort Hood, Texas
1957–1958	Instructor, ROTC, Centenary College, Shreveport, Louisiana
1958–1959	First Sergeant, Troop B, 8th Cavalry Squadron, 8th Infantry Division, Germany
1960–1962	Sergeant Major, 8th Cavalry Squadron, 8th Infantry Division, Germany
1962–1963	Sergeant Major, 2d Battalion, 37th Armor, 2d Armored Division, Fort Hood, Texas
1963–1966	Division Sergeant Major, 2d Armored Division, Fort Hood, Texas
1966–1968	Sergeant Major, 2d Brigade, 4th Armored Division, Germany
1968–1969	Command Sergeant Major, 4th Armored Division, Germany
1969–1970	Command Sergeant Major, 1st Infantry Division, Republic of Vietnam
1970	Command Sergeant Major, 4th Infantry Division, Republic of Vietnam
1970–1973	Sergeant Major of the Army

Selected Decorations and Awards

Distinguished Service Medal
Legion of Merit
Distinguished Flying Cross
Bronze Star Medal with V Device and Four Oak Leaf Clusters
Meritorious Service Medal
Air Medal
Army Commendation Medal with One Oak Leaf Cluster
Good Conduct Medal with Ten Oak Leaf Clusters
American Campaign Medal
European Campaign Medal
World War II Victory Medal
Army of Occupation Medal (Germany)
National Defense Service Medal
Korean Service Medal
Vietnam Service Medal
United Nations Korean Service Medal
Republic of Vietnam Campaign Medal
Combat Infantryman Badge



SMA Van Autreve

Leon L. Van Autreve

Leon L. Van Autreve was born in Eeklo, Belgium, on 29 January 1920.¹ His family moved to the United States when he was very young, first settling in Montana and then moving to Delphos, Ohio. He attended an eight-grade elementary school followed by four years at St. John's Catholic High School in Delphos. In the evening, he worked as a projectionist in the local theater. Like many recent immigrants, the senior Van Autreves had a special appreciation for their adopted homeland and expressed their patriotism by flying the American flag every day. The elder Van Autreve had been the second most highly decorated Belgian Army soldier in World War I. Perhaps these two factors motivated his son to enlist in the Ohio National Guard in 1938. The need for additional income during the Depression was certainly another reason.

Private Van Autreve served in Headquarters Company, 148th Infantry, in Spencerville, Ohio. The first sergeant assigned him as the company clerk, because he could "recognize a typewriter and was therefore highly qualified." The Guard trained for only two hours per week and consequently, "one almost had to relearn what had been learned at each session." There was no educational system and the rate of promotion was glacial. "Once you became an NCO [non-commissioned officer], you had to wait until someone died to get promoted." During field training, Van Autreve took turns with other soldiers hauling around a water-cooled, .30-cal-

iber machine gun mounted on bicycle wheels. Training resources were so scarce that no one actually got to fire the weapon.

Van Autreve left the 148th Infantry in 1940 when he landed a job with the Long Island Railroad and later with the Baltimore and Ohio Railroad in Lima, Ohio. In October he was inducted into the Army. Although he was unhappy about leaving his girlfriend, his hometown in nearby Delphos was patriotic and supportive. "When you received your draft notice, people would clap you on the back and say, 'Hey, man, that's all right.'" At the time, none of the draftees called up with Van Autreve knew what the term of service would be. After the Japanese attack on Pearl Harbor, "we thought that the war was going to last only three or four weeks and we would wipe the Japanese off the face of the map. We were not aware on the 7th of December of the consequences of the Pearl Harbor attack. Everybody wanted to go, immediately, to get it over with. Unfortunately it did not last three or four weeks."

After Van Autreve spent several weeks in-processing, he went to Fort Belvoir, Virginia, for eight weeks of basic training. Like most other trainees, he lived in a two-story wooden barracks that contained rifle racks, bunks, and little else. Unlike in today's barracks with triple-locked arms rooms, recruits then could take out their rifle at will to practice the techniques they had learned on the range.

Van Autreve put his marksmanship skills into practice soon after Pearl Harbor. When on guard duty one night, he and a fellow guard saw a car without headlights near their post. Thinking that "the Japanese were intruding into

¹ Except as noted, this section is based on Interv, Erwin H. Koehler with Leon L. Van Autreve, 3-4 Feb 94, San Antonio, Tex.



Van Autreve as a Young Soldier

the confines of Fort Belvoir,” they shot at it. Fortunately, they missed the two cadre members who were trying to sneak back onto post after curfew. When brought before their battalion commander, they were terrified and thought that they “were going to be lined up against the wall and shot.” Apparently attributing the incident to the invasion “jitters” prevalent all over the country, the colonel did not punish them.

Enlisted soldiers rarely saw officers, because NCOs conducted every facet of their training, and lived, ate, and slept with them. Van Autreve’s incentive to become a noncommissioned officer was not monetary, but came from the desire to have the comfort and status of his own room at the end of the barracks. “Besides the private room, I didn’t have to clean latrines. I didn’t have to go on KP [kitchen police]. Oh, I was in ‘hog heaven.’ I’d wear that little corporal stripe down there like a wheel.” The NCOs conducted excellent hands-on training, taking advantage of increased resources available after Pearl Harbor. Van Autreve quickly learned engineer tasks that he would use in combat: demolitions, bridging, and mine clearing. Engineering was not all he learned. His platoon sergeant set an example of “foot locker counseling,” which Van Autreve

emulated later in his career. The sergeant made himself available to his soldiers at night and on weekends in the barracks to answer questions and discuss the day’s training. Noticing that Van Autreve had “fairly decent possibilities as an NCO,” he took the young recruit out to the parade field. There, Van Autreve, under the sergeant’s watchful eye, hollered commands across the field to strengthen his command voice.

In January 1942 Van Autreve left Fort Belvoir for Fort Bragg, North Carolina, where he was assigned to the 15th Engineer Battalion, 9th Infantry Division. His reception at Fort Bragg in the middle of the night impressed him. The mess hall provided food and hot coffee for the half-frozen arriving soldiers. The beds in the barracks were already made. How these newly arriving soldiers were made to feel part of the unit was something he never forgot and always emphasized in the future.

The 15th Engineers conducted hard, realistic unit training in preparation for the upcoming invasion of northwest Africa. Van Autreve’s company commander promoted him to sergeant and included him in the two squads attached to the 60th Infantry Regimental Combat Team (RCT) to provide demolition support. The 60th moved to Little Creek, Virginia, for two months to work in an environment resembling that of its initial objective, French Morocco. Sergeant Van Autreve trained fourteen to fifteen hours a day, much of it at night, learning how to destroy pillboxes with pole charges; to sneak up on sentries, using several U.S. and enemy weapons; and to handle small boats. The small-boat training later proved the most valuable.

Van Autreve and a small demolition group shipped out on a destroyer, the USS *Dallas*. The sailors neglected to brief the soldiers about what “general quarters” meant until after their first terrifying encounter with submarines. The chance of being blown out of the water and the unpleasant rolling of the small ship gave the soldiers an edge, however. “We were so sick and tired of being on that destroyer that we would have fought the entire German Army in French

Morocco, just to get off.” The destroyer’s mission was to sail up a river, cross a chain obstacle, and provide demolition support for the landing. The enemy was not the German Army, however, but the French Foreign Legion, which capitulated after three days of fighting. After the landing, Van Autreve rejoined his unit, which had the dangerous mission of defusing dud shells and breaching minefields. He spent the remainder of his time in North Africa emplacing and removing mines.

Mine removal was every bit as dangerous as fighting with a front-line infantry unit. In fact, many times he found himself in front of them, clearing and marking paths through minefields. Throughout the latter half of the war, the Germans sowed mines liberally and rigged many with booby traps and trip wires. Once, in support of a tank company, Van Autreve was clearing mines in front of the column. Suddenly the lead U.S. tank encountered a German tank in the road. The two tanks exchanged fire over his head for fifteen minutes, then the battle moved elsewhere.

Ground forces were not the only danger. Sergeant Van Autreve and a few of his soldiers found a water well. They had undressed and begun to take a long overdue bath when a *Luftwaffe* fighter flying overhead saw them and dove down to attack. Unsure of the nationality of the out-of-uniform men, the pilot deliberately fired wide and enjoyed himself chasing the naked men across the desert. Terrified at the time, Van Autreve only later could see the humor in the episode. He experienced another problem with his uniform during a mine-clearing operation. Without a helmet, shirt, and tie, he was concentrating intently on locating “bouncing betty” mines and did not see Maj. Gen. George S. Patton’s caravan approaching. The general, a stickler for correct uniforms, chewed out Van Autreve until his company commander rescued him.

Van Autreve stayed with the 15th Engineers as the 9th Division “Old Reliables” invaded Sicily, redeployed to England, landed in Normandy four days after D-day, and advanced

across France. Near the German border, he suffered a relapse of malaria and was placed on a limited assignment. Because he had worked on the railroad before induction into the Army, he found himself as a train guard watching for pilferers until the end of the war in Europe. After thirty months of duty with combat engineers, he out-processed through Camp Lucky Strike in France in July 1945 and was shipped home.

Sergeant Van Autreve left the Army that year, worked for his father for a time, and then enrolled in Ohio Northern University. An automobile accident and a chance meeting with an Army pal who had become a recruiter brought him back into the service. “My insurance expired, so economically I was in a bind. Two or three drinks with my buddy resulted in my being reintroduced to the Army. I thought about the good times and the bad times. How am I going to pay off the damage to my car and [what about] the possibility of a lawsuit?” He drew an assignment to Fort Knox, Kentucky, for two years and then back to Europe in 1950 for his first peacetime overseas tour. Before he reached his European assignment, a stint working for a moving company while on leave changed his life.

While helping his brother-in-law move a family’s furniture, he met Rita Spinoza, originally from Norwich, Connecticut. She was instantly attracted to the thirty-year-old combat veteran whom she invited to dinner, a highly unusual experience for a mover. Thinking the invitation merely perfunctory, he was not sure if he should show up. When Rita’s mother followed up the invitation with a phone call, he accepted. He now realizes, “I was moving into a trap and didn’t know it at the time.” The trap was sprung—after dating a few months Leon and Rita married in November 1950.

That month the newly married Van Autreves moved to Böblingen, Germany, where Sergeant Van Autreve reported to Company A, 54th Engineers, for duty as a platoon sergeant. Soon after he arrived, his first sergeant became upset over the lack of volunteers for the NCO Academy. Seeing an

opportunity, Van Autreve promptly volunteered, a decision that later “really paid off.” He was promoted to E-7, then the highest pay grade, soon after graduation, summoned to the battalion commander’s office, and told “You are going to be the First Sergeant of Headquarters Company.” Although he considered himself unprepared for the job, he remembered that the colonel, impressed with his performance at the academy, thought otherwise, and his new duties began almost immediately.

Unfamiliar with the administrative requirements of being a first sergeant, Van Autreve “studied his head off every night” to learn them. The company had a history of disciplinary problems, which First Sergeant Van Autreve determined to solve by his own methods. Rather than send errant soldiers to the commander for nonjudicial punishment, a measure that permanently marred their records, he preferred marching them in full field gear around the quadrangle under his personal supervision. “That reduced our number of problems, dramatically and rapidly.” At the same time, remembering his own lack of preparation for the job and the lack of transition with the previous first sergeant (who had been relieved), he trained his own platoon sergeants by rotating them into his slot for a week at a time.

In the early fifties overseas duty was pleasant in Germany. The exchange rate between the mark and dollar was favorable, and despite the low pay soldiers could afford to enjoy themselves “on the economy.” Since relatively few were married, Van Autreve did not have to deal with as many family issues as do first sergeants today. Soldiers needed the commander’s permission to marry German nationals, and the low pay also discouraged them from marrying anyone until they advanced in rank. By the end of his four-year tour in Germany, Van Autreve had mastered the intricacies of the first sergeant’s job and was ready to leave Europe for home. He returned to Ohio in an ROTC post at Toledo University.

Master Sergeant Van Autreve owed his assignment to Lt. Col. C. Craig Cannon, his battalion commander in Böblingen. When the colonel and his wife visited the Van Autreves’ quarters, the topic of his reassignment had arisen. Because his father suffered from emphysema, Van Autreve indicated his preference for a duty station near their home in Delphos. With Colonel Cannon’s assistance, the ROTC posting was secured, only eighty miles from his parents’ home. There, as a senior instructor, Van Autreve taught military history and logistics to cadets of all four years. At the same time, the professor of military science allowed him to take courses at the university, provided he maintained a passing grade average. Van Autreve took advantage of this opportunity, majored in history, and became a member of Phi Alpha Theta, the national history honor society. In fact, over the course of his career, he would accumulate some 140 semester hours from six universities. Between instructing and teaching, he had little free time to enjoy the comfortable living conditions, which included air-conditioned quarters on campus.

From Toledo University, Van Autreve moved to Fort Knox for an assignment with the Continental Army Command (CONARC) Armor Board. Working in the Engineer Section, he put to good use his combat experience with mines. The section tested a wide variety of mines, determining the best ways to emplace, detect, and ultimately defuse them. When the Army created the NCO “supergrades” of E-8 and E-9, Van Autreve and seven other NCOs competed for one E-8 slot in the section. Although Van Autreve was unsure of his chances, General Bruce C. Clarke, the CONARC commander, remembered that Van Autreve had graduated as the number-one student at the Constabulary NCO Academy and personally selected him for the E-8 slot. With that promotion, Van Autreve took charge of the Engineer Section.

After two years at the Armor Board, Van Autreve received orders for a one-year unaccompanied tour in Korea. There he served as a company first sergeant in the 8th Engineer Battalion, 1st Cavalry Division, from 1960

to 1961. A steep hill, OP-7, near the company area allowed him to use the same technique he had used in Germany to deal with soldiers guilty of minor infractions. He gave them a choice of nonjudicial punishment by the company commander or a hike up the hill with the first sergeant. As before, most chose the hike over a permanent blemish on their record.

First Sergeant Van Autreve again used his ingenuity to solve a recurrent theft problem. Nearby Korean villagers appeared to be stealing building supplies, vehicles, and anything else not nailed down. When Van Autreve's Christmas lights disappeared, he could take no more. (At the time, first sergeants had greater authority than they do today.) Van Autreve placed the nearby village, the "ville," off-limits to his soldiers. The economic impact of his action encouraged the local "mamasan" to ensure that the lights were returned. The problem with petty thievery quickly ended.

Besides disciplinary problems and theft, he had to deal with fights between his soldiers and KATUSAs (Korean Augmentations to the United States Army), venereal disease, and the most-frustrating constant turnover of personnel. The one-year overseas tour meant that soldiers constantly rotated in and out of the company, making it difficult to keep trained soldiers in key positions. The isolated location of the company required the first sergeant to solve problems himself instead of referring them to higher headquarters. After a year in Korea, Van Autreve returned home and was assigned to the Engineer Center at Fort Belvoir.

Originally slated for another first sergeant position, he arrived to find it already filled and instead became the senior bridge instructor at the Engineer School. After a year of instructing students in mine warfare and Bailey and treadway bridge construction, he became the sergeant major, E-9, of the supporting 91st Engineer Battalion. His elevation to sergeant major was a triumph over the favoritism evident in promotions and selections. His former unit had supposedly sent his records to the promotion board, but

when he appeared before the board, the records were missing. Fortunately, the board president delayed proceeding until Van Autreve's records were found on the post sergeant major's desk, where they had been held up for two days. "Had it not been for the president of the board I would not have become a sergeant major, because he pursued the matter so diligently. You were supposed to play the political program to survive. It was all predicated on someone like the president of that board who feels that you've been maligned and does something about it."

After only a year and a half with the 91st, Sergeant Major Van Autreve was called in by his battalion commander. General Herbert B. Powell, the CONARC commander, would interview him for the position of CONARC sergeant major. Van Autreve was wary. Before the interview, the incumbent sergeant major told him that the job was mainly ceremonial. So he "went in to see the general, saluted, and right off the bat, said, 'Sir, I don't want the job.' He was very gracious and asked me why. I said, 'I've been told that it was primarily ceremonial and I just don't want that kind of job.'" The general told him if he did not want the job, he did not have to take it, and there the matter ended.

While at Fort Belvoir, Sergeant Major Van Autreve saw his battalion load out and prepare for deployment during the Cuban Missile Crisis in the fall of 1962. The 91st remained on stand-by status for a week. Although it never deployed, the entire experience provided the battalion some valuable lessons in readying its equipment and personnel for emergency deployments.

In 1963 Van Autreve became a member of a 65-soldier Military Technical Advisory Team (MILTAG), training Indonesian Army units in combat engineering. At the same time the Soviet Air Force was training the Indonesian Air Force, so Van Autreve had the unusual experience of working next to Russian advisers. He was impressed by the average Indonesian soldier, who routinely participated in a variety of rather dangerous training exercises, such as hurdling over knives, points up, and riding a suspension traverse "slide-for-life" over bayonets and other



Brigade Sergeant Major Van Autreve of the 20th Engineer Brigade with Vietnamese Children

“very penetrating obstacles.” Although he found the work satisfying, he believed that the team did not have enough training in Indonesian customs and language before attempting to advise that country’s army. This was a prophetic observation, applicable to the Army’s advisory effort a few years later in Vietnam.

In 1964, following his tour in Indonesia, the Army sent Van Autreve back to Germany as sergeant major of the 317th Engineer Battalion, located outside Frankfurt. He was immediately appalled by the lack of discipline and generally poor conditions at McNair Kaserne and confronted several soldiers after his arrival. “Rita and I went to the PX and snack bar,” he related. “There was profanity and I told the offending soldier to knock it off. He cursed me and was about to pull a knife on me, when I hit him with a metal tray.” Another time they encountered a soldier who was throwing garbage cans at people waiting in line at the theater. “He was either bombed or on dope and had utter disregard for

what I told him. I brought this to the attention of a passing captain, who said, ‘No, I don’t want anything to do with this.’ Well, that gave me an indication that things were pretty tough.” After this incident, he and the battalion commander met with the officers and senior NCOs to determine how best to improve the discipline of the organization. “It took us, by God, four or five months to get that place squared away.”

In addition to his duties as sergeant major, Van Autreve became the housing coordinator for Fichstein, responsible for ninety sets of family quarters. Conditions there were also marginal, and it took about three years for the sergeant major to turn both the unit and the kaserne around. By enforcing standards, eliminating nonproductive NCOs, and making the working and living areas something of which the soldiers could be proud, he slowly improved the morale and readiness of the 317th. As the senior enlisted man in the battalion, he consistently encouraged the commander to spend

more time with the soldiers in the field, showing them that he could share some of the misery they experienced, for example, while erecting a bridge in the rain.

In 1966 Van Autreve had his first opportunity for consideration as Sergeant Major of the Army (SMA) when the V Corps commander nominated him ahead of his seniors. The Seventh Army and U.S. Army, Europe, commanders agreed, although ultimately Chief of Staff General Harold K. Johnson chose Sgt. Maj. William O. Wooldridge. Van Autreve thus remained with the 317th Engineers until the following year, when his tour in Germany was over and he volunteered for duty in Vietnam.

Although he was originally slated for duty as sergeant major of the 588th Engineer Battalion, circumstance sent him elsewhere. During his standard three-day in-processing, the U.S. Army, Vietnam, sergeant major invited him for a drink at the NCO Club. Since Van Autreve had decided to avoid alcohol entirely in the combat zone, he declined. That night the 20th Engineer Brigade sergeant major, when leaving the club, tripped, fell, and broke his leg. Because he would require hospitalization until the end of his tour, Sergeant Major Van Autreve stepped in as his replacement. The 20th was collocated with the 101st Airborne Division. Since the proximity of the two units required Sergeant Major Van Autreve to coordinate frequently with the sergeant major of the 101st, George W. Dunaway, later the second Sergeant Major of the Army, they soon became close friends and developed a high respect for one another.

As the new brigade sergeant major, Van Autreve faced several problems and tackled them with his customary zeal and innovation. He found that his first sergeants tended to remain in the base camps, enjoying hot food and comfortable quarters, while their soldiers manned the "Rome Plow" tractors clearing roads in the jungle and lived with the risk of enemy fire, mines, and jungle predators. The enlisted man "thought that the platoon sergeant was the senior noncommissioned officer in his company. I finally got together with the brigade

commander and if we went out to the field, I would take the helicopter and go back and get the first sergeant, and he went to the field with me. We had to introduce some first sergeants to line troops, and troops to first sergeants."

Another problem, similar to the one he faced in Korea, was the rapid turnover of soldiers on one-year tours of duty. "There was no capability of bonding people, because people came to you, not as a unit, but as one, two, three, or four replacements. They would take a month in order to get indoctrinated, work for five to seven months, and then prepare to go home." Officers stayed in command only six months, "so you're introduced to this company commander and in two or three months you begin to assimilate his philosophy, and then he leaves. Another company commander comes in and you start all over again. My feeling is that resulted in the loss of lives." The turnover in NCOs meant that by the time they learned how to "fight Charlie," it was time to rotate home. For many NCOs and their soldiers, the enemy did not give them five or six months to learn their job.

The disparity between rear areas and combat areas was another concern. Visiting the 1st Logistics Command sergeant major, whom he knew from his Fort Belvoir days, Sergeant Major Van Autreve was amazed by his excellent living conditions—kitchen, lounge, steak, lobster, and Philippine cigars. "We had some soldiers with Special Forces on top of Nui Ba Den. When you go to the top of Nui Ba Den, these guys are not luxuriating with any steak. Their fatigues were ripped and dirty. The only water they had was what they gathered in this huge tarp-like thing in a hole." It was perhaps fortunate that unlike the infantry who were brought back to the rear after an operation, the combat engineers tended to stay in the field continuously, unexposed to such demoralizing contrasts. They also did not have as much of an opportunity to use drugs or become discipline problems.

Halfway through Van Autreve's tour in Vietnam, Sergeant Major Dunaway came over from the 101st to visit. Having informed Van Autreve that he, Dunaway, had been selected

as the next Sergeant Major of the Army, he also said, "I'm very impressed with your effort and what you do. I'm going to do the best I can to aid you in future." A year later, in 1969, Sergeant Major Van Autreve found out exactly what that meant. Ready to rotate home from Vietnam, he had not yet seen any orders. He informed Dunaway, who saw to it that he received an assignment to Alaska as the sergeant major of U.S. Army, Alaska (USARAL). "I will never, never stop thanking George Dunaway for what he did for me." Without the assignment to Alaska, where he was rated by a general officer, he felt that he would never have been seriously considered for Sergeant Major of the Army.

The USARAL commanding general, Maj. Gen. Kelly B. Lemmon, had selected Van Autreve because he was looking for an outsider to work out some of the problems in his command. With the excellent hunting and fishing there, many NCOs had become "homesteaders," remaining on station in Alaska for five or six years. Too many officers and NCOs, Lemmon believed, focused on recreational activities rather than on training. One Friday afternoon at 1400, General Lemmon and his sergeant major went to the main gate; there they wrote down the names of officers and NCOs departing early for a long weekend and leaving their soldiers unsupervised during the duty day. Such direct actions soon gained the attention of troops and commanders alike.

In the late 1960s and early 1970s, junior enlisted councils, 24-hour hotlines, and the open-door policy were prevalent in many units. Although designed to improve the lot of junior enlisted men and junior officers, these innovations often undermined the chain of command and involved senior commanders and NCOs in petty problems that should have been solved at a much lower level. Sergeant Major Van Autreve insisted that every soldier who came to him or the commanding general with a problem be accompanied by his first sergeant and company commander. He almost reached the end of his tether when he had to respond to a complaint

from a specialist's wife over the size of lettuce heads in one commissary compared to those in another.

As in Germany, Van Autreve ran into disciplinary cases at the post theater—drinking, refusal to stand during the National Anthem, and profanity. Correcting such problems took hard work and persistence. During his four years in Alaska, Van Autreve tightened NCO standards, meeting with the NCOs once a month to discuss problems. NCOs were now expected to stay in the company area until the end of the duty day and to be available for soldiers after duty hours and on weekends. He reviewed personnel records to weed out and reassign homesteaders. With two infantry brigades and several supporting artillery battalions in the command, the combat engineer Van Autreve also hit the books to learn everything he could about the other arms. Before visiting a unit, he gave it twenty-four hours' notice to prepare. He also used the same time to brush up on the organization and missions of the particular unit, always writing down five or six key questions to ask soldiers.

Van Autreve enjoyed his tour in Alaska. Soldiers trained in some of the most arduous conditions possible, where temperature extremes made everything difficult and one mistake could be fatal. Such situations made the soldier in Alaska one of the best trained in the Army. While always teaching others, Van Autreve also found he constantly had new things to learn. One of the contingency missions for USARAL was rescuing survivors from airplanes that crashed while flying the polar route. Van Autreve, then fifty-two, undertook parachute training to prepare himself for the mission, or at least to better understand what the soldier in his command had to endure.

In 1970 Sergeant Major Van Autreve was considered again for selection as Sergeant Major of the Army. When Silas Copeland received the nod, Van Autreve thought that he would finish his career in Alaska in 1974. However, Lt. Gen. Melvin Zais, commanding general of the Third U.S. Army, accompanied



Van Autreve Takes the Oath of Office of Sergeant Major of the Army. Standing Beside Him Is General Abrams.

Van Autreve to his 1973 interview with the Chief of Staff, General Creighton W. Abrams. Before the interview, Zais told Van Autreve, “I personally think that you would do an excellent job but you have never been a division sergeant major.” Van Autreve asked, “General, how does an engineer become a division sergeant major?”

During the interview General Abrams asked only one question, “If you were Chief of Staff of the Army, what would you do?” Van Autreve told him, “I would ensure the restoration of the noncommissioned officer corps to its rightful position. Give [the NCO] the authority to act and if he can’t do it and cut the mustard, get rid of him.” Expecting a third rejection after what he thought was the world’s shortest interview, he was surprised to learn of his selection. He should not have been surprised—his forceful and innovative actions when dealing with severe discipline problems in Germany and Alaska, as well as his efforts to increase standards among the NCO Corps, had made him the ideal man to help the Chief of Staff solve the Army’s post-Vietnam problems.

After his swearing-in ceremony and a very short transition with his predecessor, Silas

Copeland, Van Autreve began to work on what he saw as his highest priority, increasing the standards of the Army’s Noncommissioned Officer Corps. He met with a Deputy Chief of Staff for Personnel (DCSPER) staff officer who gave him twenty NCO personnel files, all for sergeants major, all containing numerous Articles 15 and courts-martial. Van Autreve marked out the names and personal information on them and made copies. When speaking to groups of NCOs, he would throw the copies out into the audience, saying, “It’s your fault that you allow these people to survive.” Then, accompanied by personnel experts, he would answer any questions the NCOs had. After a while, NCOs knew “what was coming and they’d start ducking, because I’d throw the files out there and I’d really get hostile about the fact we tolerated those incompetent people, who survived the system and became sergeants major.”

The new SMA also worked to eliminate favoritism in the NCO assignment process. When he began his tour, he found in the basement office of the Pentagon “a guy who carried a list of seven sergeants major who were the ‘turn-arounds.’ You could guarantee that those people were just going to replace one another in choice assignments as they moved back and forth across the country.” When the Office of Personnel Operations became the Military Personnel Center (MILPERCEN), this process came into the open and ceased. Also, the authority given to Sergeant Major of the Army Dunaway to review proposed selections of command sergeants major became a powerful tool in Van Autreve’s hands for eliminating favoritism.

Unlike his predecessors, Van Autreve did not receive guidance from the Chief of Staff soon after he took office. “I’d been there about three or four weeks and I’m getting a little disturbed because the General hadn’t sent for me yet. The advice I had gotten was that, ‘The General will send for you when he wants to see you. Do not intrude.’” Finally, the new SMA met the chief in the hallway and asked about the matter. Surprised that he had not come in earlier, General Abrams quickly placed the

SMA on his “immediate access” list. Van Autreve later learned that although the chief had directed a major to report on what the SMA was doing, the officer had failed to forward the information to the chief’s office. When Abrams saw the reports, his only guidance was, “Just keep doing what you’re doing.”

Although SMA Van Autreve had direct access to both the Chief of Staff and the Vice Chief of Staff, he often preferred not to go to that level because he “felt that 95 percent of the problems I encountered in the field I should be able to take care of by going to action officers.” Most of the problems he heard about from his travels and phone calls to his office were not caused by high-level policies that required the attention of the chief. Guidance from the experts in the particular field, who could call the affected unit, usually solved the problem.

Given the state of the Army after the war in Vietnam, Sergeant Major of the Army Van Autreve heard a continuous series of complaints as he traveled to Army units. Unfortunately, young soldiers had become accustomed to bypassing their chain of command, as Van Autreve had experienced in Alaska. Twenty-four-hour hotlines, junior enlisted and junior officer councils, and the open-door policies were often overloaded by petty complaints that could have been solved more efficiently at a much lower level. Van Autreve found that “soldiers had been led to believe that they didn’t have to talk to noncommissioned officers. We had to reinforce and kind of reinvent the wheel from the standpoint of the NCO corps.” To gain a more accurate view of the pulse of the Army, he would, after talking to groups of soldiers, talk one-on-one with Soldiers of the Month, NCOs of the Month, and NCOs of the Quarter, that is, some of the most dedicated enlisted men. Once he got them to relax and open up, he was able to tap into the perspectives of soldiers most apt to put the needs of the institution before their own personal wants.

Back in his office, Van Autreve handled complaints flooding in by telephone and mail. In most cases he referred them back to the sol-

dier’s first sergeant or sergeant major, whom the soldier had usually bypassed. This approach reinforced the authority of the NCOs at the unit level and gave the SMA office time to handle such problems. A typical complaint was the lack of transportation in Alaska. When soldiers turned in their automobiles for shipment to the lower forty-eight states a few weeks before leaving, they were left with no personal transportation. For example, walking to the commissary at thirty or forty degrees below zero was an extreme hardship for such soldiers and their families. Having served in Alaska, Van Autreve could appreciate the problem and, as SMA, draw attention to it.

General Abrams reinforced the success of Van Autreve’s predecessors in persuading the Army Staff to include the SMA in decisions affecting enlisted soldiers. In one case the chief asked SMA Van Autreve to listen in on a major briefing about moving missiles out of Alaska. The briefing officer covered the difficulties of moving equipment and the details of its transport. When General Abrams asked Van Autreve what he thought of the briefing, he replied, “Well sir, we haven’t discussed the people problem.” Van Autreve later recalled that “General Abrams hit the table...hard, exclaiming, ‘That’s exactly the point. We spent hours talking about missiles, but we haven’t spent five minutes talking about the people who are going to be displaced. Where are they going and how are they going to get there?’”

Although Sergeant Major Van Autreve learned a great deal from official Department of Defense and Department of the Army briefings, he learned more by talking directly to action officers and noncommissioned officers who dealt with daily issues. Not as concerned about making an impression, they were more candid; in that informal situation, they often passed on more detailed information, often not included in their briefings to the Chief of Staff. In addition, at this lower level, they dealt with problems and issues impacting more on the soldier, while the Chief of Staff himself tended to focus on those which affected the entire Army.

One issue that the SMA had to resolve was that of MOS reclassification. As the Army reduced its strength after Vietnam, it required soldiers, particularly NCOs, to change from overstrength to understrength MOSs to qualify for promotion. In general, the reclassifications were from noncombat to combat MOSs and caused disruptions when, for example, an administrative NCO (71L) suddenly became an infantryman (11B). On his tours of Army posts, the SMA fielded numerous complaints regarding the changes, and it was his job to respond in laymen's terms.

As Sergeant Major of the Army, Van Autreve's greatest challenge was the "reincarnation of the NCO corps." Besides the reclassification of MOSs, the Army initiated the Qualitative Management Program to weed out substandard NCOs in the course of reducing enlisted strength. The SMA received much bitter correspondence from wives whose NCO husbands had told them that their career was on track, when in fact the NCO had major problems he had not disclosed. Such communications put the SMA in a delicate position. The direct approach might well lead to marital problems, compounding an already difficult situation. Instead, Van Autreve tried to contact the NCO's sergeant major, who in turn encouraged the sergeant to talk to his wife. But such problems had always afflicted the Army in periods of demobilization and downsizing, and often there were no easy answers.

As part of the rejuvenation of the NCO Corps, Van Autreve gave NCOs more voice in command decisions, reduced the Army's reliance on soldiers' councils, increased professional standards for NCOs, further developed the Noncommissioned Officer Education System, and encouraged NCOs to have the moral courage to police their own ranks. His tour also saw an increased emphasis on training. Standards were raised and units encouraged to use their training time more efficiently. While on the rifle range, soldiers not firing at the moment trained in another skill. The use of multiechelon training allowed battalions to exercise on one

level while their unengaged companies, platoons, and squads trained on different tasks. The resulting decentralized instruction forced NCOs to take more responsibility for training their squads, sections, and crews; improved their skills; and increased the respect they received from their own soldiers.

As did his predecessors, SMA Van Autreve had numerous opportunities to talk to members of Congress, in both informal discussions and formal testimony before the Senate Armed Services Committee. Many of his acquaintances were committee members who were instrumental in improving Army pay and benefits. As the Office of the Sergeant Major of the Army became more firmly established, members of Congress relied more heavily on the SMAs for information concerning the enlisted soldier. The SMA and his wife also had several opportunities to visit the White House. When Presidents Richard M. Nixon and Gerald R. Ford presented posthumous Medals of Honor, Rita Van Autreve consoled the wives of senior officials as well as family members. Her husband said later, "Rita, for thirty minutes, had a far more demanding job than I had, because afterwards, they will talk about the wife of the Sergeant Major of the Army."

The role of the SMA's wife became important enough that by 1972 the Chief of Staff, General Abrams, decided that every SMA should be married. Earlier, during Dunaway's tenure, the Army had provided travel funds for the SMA's wife because of her important role in family support matters. Rita Van Autreve traveled with her husband on all of his trips in the United States, continuously meeting with groups of Army wives and becoming a polished speaker. She often established bonds with soldiers' wives by reminding them that she too had once been the wife of a junior enlisted soldier and that she understood their problems. As the all-volunteer Army became stabilized, with its increasing number of married soldiers, addressing the concerns of the family became critical. A soldier who felt that his family was suffering needlessly



At His Retirement Ceremony, SMA Van Autreve Is Congratulated by His Successor, SMA William G. Bainbridge (*left*), and Chief of Staff General Frederick C. Weyand (*center*).

because of his Army service would not likely reenlist. Rita Van Autreve was an important answer to this growing need.

Van Autreve had always considered the two-year SMA tour too short, believing that an occupant was only beginning to hit his stride after two years. He personally would have liked another year but also believed that after three years “the length of service takes a toll. Pretty soon you’re getting short with your answers. You’re not responding like you should, because you’re tired. You know, you’re wearing out,” adding that “when I was Sergeant Major of the 317th Engineers, I was there a bit too long.” Many senior noncommissioned officers also requested that Van Autreve serve another year. However, General Frederick C. Weyand, who replaced General Abrams after his death in 1974, decided to keep the SMA tour at two years. In addition,

General Abrams had already extended Van Autreve’s time in service past thirty years so that he could serve a full two years as SMA.

When Sergeant Major Van Autreve retired on 30 June 1975 with over thirty-one years of Army service, he could look back on his tour as Sergeant Major of the Army with great satisfaction. The NCO Corps had regained much of the stature it had lost during the war in Vietnam. The Army’s leadership reestablished the NCO chain of command, tightened NCO standards, expanded the NCO education system, and, as part of the overall reduction in force, forced out marginal NCOs. His two years had also seen improvements in training and equipment as the Army regained its focus after ten years of fighting a low-intensity war of attrition in Vietnam. As SMA Van Autreve admitted: “No Sergeant Major of the Army can say that he really *did* anything. He can say he contributed to an accomplishment.” Nevertheless, Sergeant Major of the Army Van Autreve made significant contributions to the rejuvenation of the NCO Corps. His insistence on uncompromising standards for NCOs, his constant efforts to see troop units firsthand, and his work with Army Staff action officers all ensured that the necessary policies were implemented to put the noncommissioned officer back into the chain of command.

After a brief illness Leon L. Van Autreve passed away in his home in San Antonio, Texas, on 14 March 2002. Secretary of the Army Thomas White noted that the Army lost a patriot, a soldier, and a role model. “We are grateful for Sgt. Maj. of the Army Van Autreve’s selfless service to our great nation and the soldiers he loved,” White said. “His legacy endures forever in our noncommissioned officer corps—the finest in the world.”² Van Autreve was laid to rest at the Fort Sam Houston National Cemetery on 20 March 2002.

² David Schad, “Former SMA Van Autreve Passes Away,” *Army News Service*, 15 March 02.

Assignments

1938–1940	Clerk, Headquarters and Headquarters Company (HHC), 148th Infantry, Ohio Army National Guard, Spencerville, Ohio
1941	Basic Engineer Training, Fort Belvoir, Virginia
1941	185th Engineer Battalion, Fort Campbell, Kentucky
1942–1944	15th Engineer Battalion (Combat), 9th Infantry Division, Fort Bragg, North Carolina; North Africa; Sicily; Europe
1945	Headquarters, 723d Railway Operations Battalion, Europe
1946–1948	Student, Ohio Northwestern University (break in service, 1949–1950)
1950–1954	Platoon Sergeant, First Sergeant, HHC, 54th Engineer Battalion, Germany
1954–1958	Senior Instructor, ROTC, University of Toledo, Toledo, Ohio
1958–1960	Member, Continental Army Command Armor Board, Fort Knox, Kentucky
1960–1961	First Sergeant, Company B, 8th Engineer Battalion, 1st Cavalry Division, Republic of Korea
1961–1962	Senior Bridge Instructor, Engineer Center, Fort Belvoir, Virginia
1962–1963	Sergeant Major, 91st Engineer Battalion, Fort Belvoir, Virginia
1963–1964	Military Technical Advisory Group, Indonesia
1964–1967	Sergeant Major, 317th Engineer Battalion, Germany
1967–1969	Command Sergeant Major, 20th Engineer Brigade, Republic of Vietnam
1969–1973	Command Sergeant Major, U.S. Army, Alaska, Fort Richardson, Alaska
1973–1975	Sergeant Major of the Army

Selected Decorations and Awards

Distinguished Service Medal
Legion of Merit with Two Oak Leaf Clusters
Bronze Star Medal with One Oak Leaf Cluster
Air Medal
Army Commendation Medal with Three Oak Leaf Clusters
Good Conduct Medal with Ten Oak Leaf Clusters
Asiatic-Pacific Theater Campaign Medal
American Campaign Medal
European–African–Middle Eastern Campaign Medal
World War II Victory Medal
Army of Occupation Medal
National Defense Service Medal
Vietnam Service Medal
Republic of Vietnam Campaign Medal
Parachutist Badge



SMA Bainbridge

William G. Bainbridge

A native of rural Galesburg, Illinois, William G. Bainbridge was born on 17 April 1925.¹ His family lived on several farms in the area, and he attended the nearby rural district schools. Bainbridge remembers his youth as a time of few material goods when everyone in his family had to “pull together.” Despite the need to work on his family farm and to hire out on other farms for extra cash, he enjoyed school and placed a high value on education. Within a matter of weeks of graduating from Williamsfield High School in 1943, the eighteen-year-old found himself inducted into the U.S. Army.

When the United States entered World War II, Congress required that all incoming soldiers be draftees. This was to allow the War Department more flexibility in assigning newly inducted troops. As a result, William Bainbridge could not immediately follow his older brother into the Army. Instead, he had to volunteer for the draft in June 1943. “I don’t have any regrets,” he later said, “because the thing to do was to go into the service, if you could...it just didn’t seem right for me not to go.”

After his induction Bainbridge reported to Camp Grant, Illinois, where he received his first uniforms, the usual medical exam and obligatory shots, and a battery of classification tests. He was initially offered a chance to serve in the Navy, but turned it down: “I can always walk farther than I can swim.” He later recalled that his first experiences with the Army were rather confusing because most of the soldiers running Camp Grant had been in the service only a matter of weeks and themselves had little training or experience.

Bainbridge completed basic training at Camp Wallace, Texas, near San Jacinto Beach and the city of Galveston. The future Sergeant Major of the Army remembers the location as having high humidity and mosquitoes so large they must have been “crossed with turkeys.” However, the seventeen-week course, which combined basic and advanced training in anti-aircraft artillery, went well for him. “I was in good physical shape,” he said, and “I didn’t have any problem with the classroom work.” Having come off the farm, he felt “invincible.” The toughest part of those first weeks was getting used to the hectic schedule.

Basic training dictated six-day weeks of twelve-hour days beginning at 0500. The regimen included serious physical training, and 25-mile marches were common, together with the ordinary military subjects. There were long classes on aircraft identification, but the troops practiced dismounted drill only once a week, firing the .30- and .50-caliber water-cooled machine guns and old British Enfield and Springfield M1903 rifles. The M1 semiautomatic rifle, so commonly identified with World War II, was not issued to the men in Bainbridge’s group until after basic training. Later in their training at Camp Wallace, the men learned to fire 90-mm. antiaircraft guns. Despite the tough training schedule, at formations, when the American flag was lowered each evening, everyone was attired in Class A uniforms.

Life in the rapidly expanding wartime Army often had its dreary side. The newly constructed barracks at Camp Wallace and other posts had no wall lockers, just open bars and beams in the squad bays. The trainees were



Bainbridge at Flying School in Grand Forks, North Dakota, 1943

not allowed to have civilian clothes, primarily due to the lack of storage space. Every Saturday there was a footlocker inspection. Food shortages and poor preparation made meals “terrible” according to Bainbridge, with various goat meat dishes sometimes appearing in the mess hall.

The war and the rapid expansion of the Army made it impossible to find enough experienced soldiers to act as drill sergeants. Therefore, most basic training cadre came from the existing active-duty force augmented by reserve and National Guard personnel of limited experience. With the exception of topics like the Articles of War, which required instruction by an officer, noncommissioned officers carried out all training. Sergeant

Simpson, the platoon sergeant, left a permanent impression on young Bainbridge. “He trained us and told us the little things that we should do...the things you ought to do right...he also took care of us,” Bainbridge said. He did not forget those traits. “You have to take care of soldiers,” he told an interviewer years later, “and you can’t do it by lip service because they will find you out in a heart-beat.”

While at Camp Wallace, Bainbridge applied for flight training. “I wanted to be a hot pilot,” he later said. “I liked airplanes...it seemed a little bit more glamorous.” Initially he was sent to Sheppard Field, near Wichita Falls, Texas, for two weeks of orientation. The next stop was the University of North Dakota at Grand Forks. There, Bainbridge packed a year of college education into about five months and learned to fly a Piper Cub. Having completed the initial phase of the

air cadet program, he next reported to the flight-training center at Santa Ana Army Air Base, California, in February 1944. The trip from North Dakota took six days on a crowded troop train. At Santa Ana there were more tests and orientations to determine what sort of aircraft he was most suited to fly. Shortly after his arrival, however, he was told that there were more flying cadets than there were planes. Anyone with previous ground force training was reassigned.

Bainbridge was promptly transferred to Lowery Field near Denver, Colorado, for gunnery school. There, he waited six weeks to go into training. During that time he worked double-shift KP (kitchen police) duty every day. In the end Bainbridge was again transferred when the Army determined that it already had enough gunnery students.

Although the end of his flight training was a great disappointment, it turned out to be a lucky break; by early 1944 U.S. bomber crews over Europe were suffering heavy losses.

After a two-week layover awaiting orders at Jefferson Barracks, St. Louis, Missouri, Bainbridge was ordered to Camp Atterbury, Indiana. He found himself assigned to Company A, 423d Infantry, part of the newly organized 106th Infantry Division. The last division organized for service in World War II, the 106th had just come back from maneuvers in Louisiana. Many of its trained troops, however, had been transferred as fillers to other divisions, and the new men had to fill the ensuing vacancies. As a private first class, Bainbridge was initially assigned as the company radioman. However, the company commander quickly recognized his leadership potential and made him a squad leader with a direct promotion to sergeant.

The 106th Infantry Division received its pre-deployment training at Camp Atterbury. Bainbridge remembered that he and his fellow soldiers tried to familiarize themselves with the new weapons, such as the 37-mm. antitank gun and the rocket-launching bazooka. With one Browning automatic rifle team, squad tactics were limited. Despite the 25-mile endurance hikes, the division's morale was high, with the infantry weapons demonstration for Under Secretary of War Robert P. Patterson one of the highlights of his time at Atterbury. More important, Sergeant Bainbridge earned a promotion there as well as the Expert Infantry Badge. Beyond the pride, professionalism, and leadership earning the award demonstrated, the pay raise of five dollars per month meant a lot in those days.

In the early fall of 1944 the 106th Division prepared to depart for Europe. In October the division traveled by troop train to Camp Miles Standish, near Boston, to await embarkation. After a coordination "SNAFU"—their designated ship was too large to enter Boston harbor—the division again traveled by train to New York. There, after loading throughout the night, the men of the 106th Division embarked on the huge liner *Queen Elizabeth*. On board,

they were billeted four and five deep in "state-rooms," spending one night above deck and one night below. Again, Bainbridge thought the food was terrible—British rations with lots of mutton. The trip was uneventful, however, as the fast liner, sailing independent of the slow convoys, zigzagged across the Atlantic to lessen the chance of being torpedoed.

After landing in England, the 106th Division spent three weeks at a staging area near Cheltenham. There they were outfitted, honed their skills in the classroom, and did a little sightseeing. The time, however, proved a brief respite as it had become evident that the war in Europe would not be over that year.

In early December 1944 Sergeant Bainbridge and his regiment crossed the English Channel to Le Havre, France, and then moved by foot and truck to the Siegfried Line in the rugged Schnee Eifel (Snow Mountain) sector of Germany, east of St. Vith, Belgium. There, they replaced the 2d Infantry Division. Bainbridge remembers the unit's being thinly stretched with squads covering 1,500-meter fronts in their supposedly quiet sector. The 423d Infantry sent out combat patrols to gather intelligence but had little idea of what was to come. In early December, however, the Germans secretly completed the buildup for their Ardennes offensive, later known as the Battle of the Bulge. Then, on 16 December 1944, "all hell broke loose."

For five days the men of the 423d and other units in the Ardennes delayed the German advance. Everyone, including cooks and clerks, was thrown into the line. But the regiment was unequipped to face concentrations of German armor exploiting the element of surprise. Penetrating gaps in the thinly held line, the Germans overran the division rear, and artillery support immediately slackened. Meanwhile, rain, snow, and fog prevented American warplanes from supporting the ground forces. On 18 December powerful German panzer and infantry units isolated the 422d and 423d Infantries from each other and cut them off from the rest of the division. By then the 423d had suffered over 300 casualties, spent all of its mortar rounds, lost most



Bainbridge as a Prisoner of War Shortly Before Being Liberated from Stalag 9A

of its machine guns, and run short of rifle ammunition. The next day German artillery swept the regiment's front, and shortly afterward, enemy infantry coursed over the American positions. With the 423d cut off, tactical control and supporting fire gone, increasing numbers of wounded, and rifle ammunition down to just five rounds per man, the regiment surrendered on 19 December.² "We traded our lives and space for time," Bainbridge later said of their action in the snow. The 106th's stiff resistance was a major factor in upsetting the German timetable for reaching the Meuse and cutting off the Allied armies from their vital logistical lifelines at Antwerp.

The Germans searched the captured Americans of the 423d and immediately segregated the officers, NCOs, and privates. Alternating sets of guards then marched them

to a railhead. Bainbridge and the other POWs spent the next five nights and four days packed into freight cars with straw-covered floors with neither food nor toilets. Water was available only once to the prisoners when Allied war planes caused a delay and other POWs forced to work on the railroad gave them some. Bainbridge and his fellow soldiers were finally unloaded at Stalag 9B, Bad Orb, east of Frankfurt. Three weeks later the NCOs were taken to Stalag 9A at Ziegenhain near Giessen.

Prisoner-of-war camp conditions were intolerable. More than 3,000 Allied soldiers filled the camp, with 250 men stuffed into each barrack. Despite the often subfreezing temperatures, outside latrines were necessary supplements to the single ones inside. Since baths and mandatory delousing came but every six weeks, the men, their bedding, and clothes were infested with vermin. Rations consisted of two-thirds of a canteen cup of vegetable soup each day with a slice of black bread on Sunday. Sometimes the Germans included a little horsemeat. Sergeant Bainbridge later recalled, "my love of country, the way I was brought up, and my family life helped sustain me."

The American 6th Armored Division liberated Stalag 9A on Good Friday in 1945 and provided needed medical attention and decent food. The repatriated GIs at first received soup and bread, a loaf and a half at a time. After ten days of rebuilding their strength, Bainbridge and his fellow soldiers flew to Camp Lucky Strike, near Le Havre. There, they received an additional two weeks of medical care and as much food as they cared to eat. Finally, they convoyed home by ship. The return crossing took two weeks with hundreds of former POWs and rotating aircrew members on board.

The war concluded shortly after Sergeant Bainbridge's return to the United States. After three days at Camp Kilmer, New Jersey, he went to Fort Sheridan, Illinois, where he was given sixty days of leave. Like many others, he immediately returned to his hometown for a reunion with family, friends, and other veterans. On 20 June 1945, he married Hazel Smith

of Momence, Illinois, a girl whom he had known since grade school.

At the conclusion of his leave, Bainbridge reported to Miami Beach, Florida. He shared a hotel with nearly 700 other soldiers and dependents all awaiting reassignment. Transferred to Camp Maxie, near Paris, Texas, he was soon joined by his new wife and lived in an upstairs room and bath, while working as an armorer at an infantry replacement training base. Hazel Bainbridge returned home to Illinois when her husband again transferred to Camp Roberts, California. There, on 7 December 1945, Bainbridge received his discharge and returned to civilian life in Galesburg, Illinois.

When fighting broke out in Korea in 1950 William Bainbridge had been a farmer in Victoria, Illinois, for several years. During that time he had joined the Army Reserve, and in October 1950 he was recalled to active duty. Granted a delay to harvest the crops and settle his personal affairs, he finally reported for duty in January 1951.

Recalled as a staff sergeant, Bainbridge in-processed at Fort Sheridan and was told that he would be sent to Camp Breckenridge, Kentucky. He instead ended up at Camp Atterbury, where he had been with the 106th Infantry Division during the last war. He served as platoon sergeant, then first sergeant (as a sergeant first class, E-6) of the 5012th Army Service Unit, a joint Army-Air Force food service school.³ After a year the Army consolidated that and other Army school elements at Fort Sheridan, where Bainbridge became the personnel NCO. A year later a second consolidation transferred Bainbridge to Fort Riley, Kansas. As the period of his recall was about to expire, Bainbridge requested enlistment in the Regular Army with the intention of becoming a career soldier. After a grade determination, he reenlisted as a sergeant first class.

In February 1958 Bainbridge departed for Fort Leonard Wood, Missouri, to become the operations sergeant of the 3d Battalion, 4th Training Regiment, which then included the

Fifth Army food service school. His eleven-month tour there resulted in his first decoration, the Army Commendation Medal. Bainbridge was then assigned to VII Corps in Stuttgart, Germany, in January 1959. His family, which now included two daughters, had been living in house trailers for nearly a decade. In Germany, conditions were little better. After traveling to Europe by ship, the Bainbridge family found itself separated due to the lack of family quarters. Hazel and the children lived in Warner Kaserne near Munich, nearly three and a half hours by automobile from Stuttgart. "They had been maid's quarters," Bainbridge remembered, "the worst quarters we ever had."

At the time the VII Corps included two cavalry regiments, three infantry divisions, and two armored divisions. At the corps headquarters, Bainbridge served successively as operations sergeant, G-3 air sergeant, and secret document control NCO for the corps G-3.

Reassigned to Fort Riley in August 1962, Bainbridge found himself returning to Europe four months later. The construction of the Berlin Wall caused that unexpected turn of events. The military and diplomatic crisis that followed led to a partial mobilization, and Bainbridge became the acting sergeant major of the 1st Battle Group, 28th Infantry, on its initial deployment to Operation LONG THRUST.⁴ In February 1963 he received his permanent promotion to the newly established grade of E-9. The 1st Battle Group was later reorganized into the 1st and 2d Battalions of the 28th Infantry as part of the Reorganization Objective Army Divisions (ROAD) program.

In August 1965, three years after his first assignment to the 1st Battalion, 28th Infantry, Sergeant Major Bainbridge deployed with the 1st Infantry Division to Vietnam. During the movement of the division, Bainbridge served as sergeant major of the troopship carrying some of the men and their equipment into combat. Serving in the Big Red One first in War Zone C at Phuoc Vinh, north of Saigon, he was later selected by Maj. Gen. Jonathan O. Seaman, commander of the newly created II Field Force



CSM Bainbridge Is Initiated into the Pleiku Elephant Riding Society in Phu Nhon District, Vietnam, 1969.

at Long Binh, as his sergeant major. The II Field Force, a corps-level organization, included the 1st and 25th Infantry Divisions, a brigade of the 101st Airborne Division, and the 11th Armored Cavalry Regiment. General Seaman, who had previously commanded the 1st Infantry Division when it was deployed to Vietnam, had obviously been impressed with Bainbridge's performance.

In Vietnam, Sergeant Major Bainbridge had quickly earned a reputation for always accompanying his men on their field operations. At first he noticed improvements resulting from the changes in training made since World War II. Later, however, he judged that the situation had changed for the worse, especially when replacements came to Vietnam. The one-year tours of duty for soldiers caused a continual turnover of personnel. Also, NCOs were lost due to battle casualties and the lack of any mobilization to tap the senior enlisted men in the reserve components. His experience led him to become a strong

supporter of the Noncommissioned Officer Candidate Course (NCOCC) established to help solve those problems.

In September 1966 Bainbridge became sergeant major of the Infantry Training Center at Fort Benning, Georgia. He remained there until August 1967, when he was reassigned to First Army headquarters at Fort George G. Meade, Maryland. Bainbridge began to identify and solve soldier problems at both posts.

At Fort Benning he drastically reduced the assignment of trainees to post details and reduced harassment. At First Army, Bainbridge believed, his greatest accomplishment was bringing the NCOs together to work as a cohesive group. He also worked on solving the chronic problem of finding adequate quarters for NCOs.

Bainbridge became sergeant major of U.S. Army, Pacific (USARPAC), at Fort Shafter, Hawaii, in January 1969. The designee for that post, Sgt. Maj. Joseph A. Venable, had died in a helicopter crash in Vietnam, so Bainbridge accepted the challenge. He served as a "voice of the soldiers," establishing a good working relationship with General Ralph E. Haines, Jr., USARPAC commander. Bainbridge traveled with General Haines on numerous trips to U.S. and allied bases around the Pacific rim and coordinated the first command-wide sergeants major meeting that brought in senior noncommissioned officers from major Army headquarters in USARPAC and on a rotating basis from Thailand, Australia, New Zealand, Korea, and Indonesia. At the same time he continued to work closely with senior NCOs of the U.S. Army, Vietnam, and Military Assistance Command, Vietnam, as well as the senior enlisted personnel at Pacific Air Force, Pacific Fleet, Marine units, Coast Guard stations, and Commander in Chief, Pacific (CINCPAC), headquarters in Hawaii. Bainbridge left USARPAC in October 1972.

In February 1968 the Command Sergeants Major Board had selected Bainbridge to be one of the first command sergeants major in the Army. That elite group included Sergeant Major of the Army Wooldridge and three other future

Sergeants Major of the Army—George Dunaway, Silas Copeland, and Leon Van Autreve. It came as no great surprise when Col. Karl Morton, the first commandant of the newly established Sergeants Major Academy at Fort Bliss, Texas, selected Bainbridge as the academy's command sergeant major.

The education and training of noncommissioned officers had gradually improved since World War II, but the Army needed a senior NCO school as a capstone for the Noncommissioned Officer Education System (NCOES), which had evolved from the Noncommissioned Officer Academies originating in the late 1950s. Having seen the benefits of enhanced NCO professional development while at the same time being unable to attend an NCO academy himself because of critical duties, Sergeant Major Bainbridge was particularly pleased to be part of the first staff and faculty of the new Sergeants Major Academy, now a formal senior enlisted service school.

The three years that Sergeant Major Bainbridge and his wife spent at Fort Bliss were rewarding, if somewhat challenging at first. Once again, they had to contend with a shortage of family quarters (a consistent worry for NCOs that Bainbridge would later make a priority as Sergeant Major of the Army), together with borrowed offices and other unfinished facilities. Nevertheless, Mrs. Bainbridge continued the involvement in community affairs that had marked her previous tours with her husband. Bainbridge himself later credited the work of his wife as the foundation of much of his success.

Bainbridge's own sense of history, both institutional and personal, was always a part of his life and career. Twenty years later, Bainbridge asserted that "World War II was won in the [prewar] classrooms at the Army War College and the Command and General Staff College," adding that "the conflict in the [Persian] Gulf was won by the NCO Education System." The academy, he felt, was the capstone of that system.

In July 1975 Army Chief of Staff General Frederick C. Weyand selected Bainbridge to

serve as his Sergeant Major of the Army. The president of the selection board was Lt. Gen. John Forrest, with Maj. Gens. James Hamlet, John W. McEnery, and David E. Ott and outgoing Sergeant Major of the Army Leon L. Van Autreve serving as members. Bainbridge later remembered the board as one of the two best he had ever faced, the other being the board that chose the previous Sergeant Major of the Army in 1973. "There were fair questions," he said. "There were no trick questions at all. It just was a good board."

In outlining the duties of the office, General Weyand asked Bainbridge to look for "things you think soldiers need, that they're not getting. Let us know if we can help from this office." In practice Bainbridge found the new job comfortable and the "formidable" Pentagon generals supportive. Bainbridge had few problems adapting to his new surroundings.

Bainbridge already knew many on the Army Staff from previous assignments. "I couldn't travel anywhere or go into any office," he later said, "without running into someone who had been through that academy, or who had served with me at USARPAC or at First Army. So it was sort of like 'old home week,' really." It was thus easy to work with General Weyand and the various action officers on his staff. "I took issues to the Chief of Staff or the Vice-chief of Staff only if absolutely necessary," he said. "I always found that it was much easier to work with the staff, who used their natural expertise and their desire to get things done in their own bailiwicks, rather than have it come from the Chief as a directive."

From time to time Sergeant Major Bainbridge had to venture into new areas. For example, he began to accompany the Chief of Staff to congressional hearings, even testifying himself. Regarding such topics as commissary operations, troop strength, housing problems, pay, and personnel policies, not to mention soldier morale, congressmen put special value on the words of the Army's senior enlisted soldier.

Sergeant Major of the Army Bainbridge also traveled extensively. He made it a point to



SMA Bainbridge Talks with a Soldier During Exercise REFORGER 1979.

visit troops in Europe, Korea, and the Far East each year. He also tried to visit as many big stateside installations as possible, often hitting reserve and National Guard units in conjunction with such travels. He later admitted that seeing everyone was impossible and his itinerary had to be guided by necessity and events. Although many of his visits were at the request of the host installation, he insisted that his travel would be troop oriented.

His visit to Johnston Island was typical. The Army troops on that Pacific isle served isolated tours, away from their families and without many of the amenities of normal posts. Their “theater,” for example, was merely an open area where a screen and projector could be erected at night when the weather cooperated. SMA

Bainbridge convinced the Army and Air Force Exchange System (AAFES) to bring good entertainment to a hardship duty station at no cost. The prestige of his office was such that he could call the AAFES commander directly and request that he give attention to the situation on Johnston Island.

Sergeant Major Bainbridge followed the examples of his predecessors and had his wife accompany him when he made official visits. The additional information she gathered and the reassurance her presence gave soldiers’ families were so valuable that the practice has been continued by successive Sergeants Major of the Army. (The positive impact had not been lost on the Chiefs of Staff. During the tenure of Sergeant Major of the Army Dunaway, General

Abrams had made it a matter of policy that the Sergeant Major of the Army should be married.) Remembering his own experiences, Sergeant Major Bainbridge was convinced that Army leaders “have to take care of the family. If you don’t, you’re going to lose a soldier.”

As the others before him, Sergeant Major Bainbridge received dozens of complaints each week from enlisted soldiers. Although he believed that 90 percent of those written complaints could have been handled through command channels, he attempted to resolve every one of them. In many cases, he believed, the soldiers involved simply wanted advice and the personal touch. He took his role as the voice of the soldier in the Office of the Army Chief of Staff very seriously.

Bainbridge served as Sergeant Major of the Army for four years, formally ending the two-year tradition. General Bernard W. Rogers, who replaced Weyand as Chief of Staff in October 1976, had asked Bainbridge to remain in office to push through his initiatives. Although the Sergeant Major was glad to have the opportunity to work with an officer whose confidence he enjoyed, he was reluctant to break the tradition of serving for a short period with one Chief of Staff and thought it important to keep the established selection process intact. He agreed with Sergeant Major of the Army Dunaway that keeping a fresh flow of ideas from recent troop experience was critical.⁵ General Rogers, however, convinced Bainbridge to continue serving as SMA for the duration of his own term as Army Chief of Staff.

Among the accomplishments of Bainbridge’s term as Sergeant Major of the Army, he felt proudest of securing permanent funding for the NCOES. Next he valued his work on the Army Policy Council to which General Weyand appointed him. In keeping with his feeling that the duties of the Office of Sergeant Major of the Army were best carried out by working with the appropriate action and staff officers, Bainbridge was instrumental in having senior NCOs placed on the General Staff. He served on the Army Uniform Board during his entire tenure and

designed the insignia of rank for the Sergeant Major of the Army that was used until October 1994: two stars between three chevrons and three lower arcs.

Bainbridge believed that the Office of Sergeant Major of the Army changed with each incumbent and each Chief of Staff. He enjoyed “having the entire Army to explore.” Although he was not a policy maker, he influenced several key decisions affecting the Army of the future. “What was good enough yesterday,” he said, “certainly is not going to be good enough tomorrow.” A strong believer that command sergeants major, indeed all senior NCOs, are teachers, Sergeant Major Bainbridge judged as vital their role in passing on information to the new soldiers entering the Army.

Despite all his accomplishments, SMA Bainbridge left office recognizing that there were many unresolved issues. He regretted the amount of time it often took to get things done and was especially frustrated by selected non-commissioned officers who declined attendance at the Sergeants Major Academy.

The retirement ceremony for Sergeant Major of the Army Bainbridge took place at Fort Myer on 18 June 1979. It was quite a thrill for him to review the Old Guard with the Chief of Staff and the Secretary of the Army and received the Distinguished Service Medal while his family watched. As Sergeant Major of the Army, Bainbridge had met both Presidents Gerald Ford and Jimmy Carter. Speaking of his retirement ceremony, however, Sergeant Major Bainbridge said, “It can’t get much better than that.”

In a sense, Bainbridge served beyond his retirement. For many years he had been active in the Association of the United States Army and the Noncommissioned Officers Association. That work continued. In addition, he served as secretary to the Board of Commissioners of the Soldiers’ and Airmen’s Home in Washington, D.C., for three years and for nine years as its first director of member services.

The new Chief of Staff, General Edward C. Meyer, honored Sergeant Major Bainbridge

after his retirement by presenting him with the Army General Staff Identification Badge, only recently authorized for NCOs. It recognized that he “was the one individual most responsible for the assignment and recognition of Senior Staff Noncommissioned Officers to positions of responsibility as action officers on the Army General Staff and to the Army Secretariat.”

“He worked continuously,” SMA William A. Connelly later stated, “to expand the role of the Senior Noncommissioned Officer within the Headquarters, Department of the Army.”⁶ As Bainbridge once said, “You’ve got to trust your noncommissioned officers, because that’s what they’re there for.” He devoted his career to that ideal.

Notes

1. Except as noted, this section is based on Interv, Erwin H. Koehler with William G. Bainbridge, 10 Mar 94, Palm Bay, Fla.

2. The predicament of the 423d that SMA Bainbridge described is amplified by Hugh M. Cole, *The Ardennes: Battle of the Bulge, U.S. Army in World War II* (Washington, D.C.: Center of Military History, 1994), pp. 65–66. Information from that study has been used here to enhance the points Bainbridge made in his interview of March 1994.

3. Prior to the creation of pay grades E–8 and E–9, the ranks of staff sergeant, sergeant

first class, platoon sergeant, and first sergeant were one grade lower than they are today.

4. Operation LONG THRUST was a tactical deployment of troops from the continental United States to Europe during what has become known as the Berlin Crisis.

5. Interv, Erwin H. Koehler with George W. Dunaway, Dec 93, Las Vegas, Nevada.

6. Memo, SMA William A. Connelly for the Director of the Army Staff, 13 Dec 79, author’s files, CMH.

Assignments

1943	Inducted into service, Camp Grant, Illinois, and Basic Training, Camp Wallace, Texas
1943–1944	Air Cadet, U.S. Army Air Forces, University of North Dakota; Santa Ana, California
1944–1945	Squad Leader, Company A, 423d Infantry, 106th Infantry Division, Europe (break in service, 1946–1950)
1951–1958	Platoon Sergeant, Personnel NCO, First Sergeant, 5012th Army Service Unit, Fort Sheridan, Illinois; Camp Atterbury, Indiana; Fort Riley, Kansas
1958–1959	Operations Sergeant, 3d Battalion, 4th Training Regiment, Fort Leonard Wood, Missouri
1959–1962	Operations Sergeant, G–3 Air Sergeant, Secret Document Control NCO, Headquarters, VII Corps, Stuttgart, Germany
1962–1965	Sergeant Major, 1st Battle Group, 28th Infantry, 1st Infantry Division, Fort Riley, Kansas
1965–1966	Sergeant Major, 1st Battalion, 28th Infantry; Sergeant Major, II Field Force, Republic of Vietnam
1966–1967	Sergeant Major, Infantry Training Center, Fort Benning, Georgia
1967–1968	Sergeant Major, First United States Army, Fort George G. Meade, Maryland
1969–1972	Command Sergeant Major, United States Army, Pacific, Fort Shafter, Hawaii
1972–1975	Command Sergeant Major, Sergeants Major Academy, Fort Bliss, Texas
1975–1979	Sergeant Major of the Army

Selected Decorations and Awards

Distinguished Service Medal
Legion of Merit with Two Oak Leaf Clusters
Bronze Star Medal
Purple Heart with One Oak Leaf Cluster
Air Medal
Army Commendation Medal with Three Oak Leaf Clusters
Good Conduct Medal with Ten Oak Leaf Clusters
American Campaign Medal
European–North African–Middle Eastern Campaign Medal
World War II Victory Medal
National Defense Service Medal
Army of Occupation Medal
Armed Forces Expeditionary Medal
Vietnam Service Medal
Prisoner of War Medal
Republic of Vietnam Campaign Medal
Combat Infantryman Badge



SMA Connelly

William A. Connelly

William A. Connelly was born on 2 June 1931 in Monticello, Georgia, and lived in a small town or rural setting until he graduated from high school.¹ During the summers he worked in the local peach-packing plants and later in a dairy. He then attended Georgia Southwestern College, driving a school bus in Americus, Georgia, to pay his tuition. He intended to major in agriculture and work in soil conservation, but the lure of \$33.00 every three months in the Georgia National Guard led him to enlist in 1949. His pay more than covered his annual college tuition of \$37.50. He became a private in Company C, 190th Tank Battalion, stationed in Americus. After his first summer at Camp Stewart, he was promoted to private first class and before finishing college had progressed through the ranks to sergeant.

Weekly National Guard drill sessions lasted for only a couple of hours, and soldiers forgot what they had learned from one meeting to the next. Some of the noncommissioned officers (NCOs) and officers, although combat veterans of World War II, had served in the Army Air Corps or in the Seabees (Navy construction battalions) during the war and knew little about tanks or peacetime soldiering. However, the unit benefited from the camaraderie of a group of lifetime friends and neighbors. NCOs and soldiers downplayed rank and deference to superiors. The soldier in charge of a project or detail was the one who knew best how to get it done, regardless of rank.

Sergeant Connelly's time in the National Guard made its imprint on him. He left the 190th with a love for tanks and an understanding of the difficulty of training a National

Guard unit for war. Both impressions impacted on decisions he would make later in his career.

After finishing two years of college, Connelly landed a job in Macon and continued his education. He had to drive seventy miles to attend National Guard meetings, and when he missed some of them his commander told him he might be drafted. Instead, Connelly and several friends decided to join the Marine Corps. The Marine recruiter accepted them, but their company commander declared them essential to the National Guard. In the end, Connelly volunteered to be drafted into the Army. Unaware of the law that allowed him to go into the Regular Army retaining his previous rank, he became a "slick-sleeve" private all over again. However, after a personnel officer had screened his records, Connelly was quickly promoted to sergeant first class (E-6).

In March 1954 Connelly formally entered the active Army at Fort Jackson, South Carolina, where he went through basic training with recruits destined for the 82d Airborne Division. Eight weeks later, he moved to Fort Knox, Kentucky, for Advanced Individual Training (AIT) with the 761st Tank Battalion. Due to his previous experience and rank, he soon became a tank commander and "Trainee of the Cycle."

Being older and senior in rank presented both problems and benefits. He was somewhat out of shape compared with the younger soldiers and despite his rank felt that he did not know what he thought an NCO should know. Age gave him the maturity to see his own shortcomings. He sat down with the instructors at night to talk over what he knew and what he still needed to learn. He developed the habit of

assessing the training techniques of the instructors, using the ones he found effective later in his own career. The exposure to soldiers from different parts of the country and from different ethnic groups broadened the perspective of this country boy from a small southern town.

During his training, Sergeant First Class Connelly took the Officer Candidate Test and scored high enough for the examining corporal to ask him if he wanted to attend Officer Candidate School. Connelly replied, "Hell, no. I want to serve my two years and get out of here." He soon changed his mind, however. He later earned a reserve commission and would serve over thirty years as an enlisted man in the Regular Army.

After AIT Connelly became a tank commander in Company B, 761st Tank Battalion, on a permanent basis. The battalion, assigned to the 3d Armored Division, had two missions, supporting the Armor School and training for its wartime roles. At the time, AIT students normally trained as part of "packet platoons" and later deployed overseas as a unit, maintaining the cohesion developed during AIT. After the first eight-week cycle, Connelly progressed to platoon sergeant and later to company first sergeant, all in the same company in which he had received his training.

He received the assignment as first sergeant by volunteering when the incumbent received orders for Europe. Sergeant First Class Connelly was only twenty-three and had "the least experience of anybody there." But because no one else volunteered and he felt sorry for the lieutenant, Connelly told him, "Well, if nobody else will take the job, I'll take it." Fortunately, the battalion sergeant major took him under his wing and taught him the first sergeant's administrative duties—suspense files, morning reports, AWOL/absentee baggage, and so forth. When a master sergeant reported into the unit, Connelly became the "field first," the NCO who led the company in the field while the assigned first sergeant handled administrative duties in garrison. Later, as the Army grew more complex, an administrative warrant officer appeared in each tank com-

pany to free the first sergeant for his more traditional duties with soldiers.

The pace of promotions became glacial after the Korean War. "It seemed like, for several years, someone had to die or retire to create a vacancy." Even NCOs who had been promoted during the war had to worry about keeping their rank. These were the days of the "blood stripe": Since promotions were more decentralized than they are today, an NCO who got another in trouble could often get his stripe. Recognizing the effect such stagnation of promotions had on morale, the Army eventually created the NCO "supergrades," E-8 (master sergeant or first sergeant) and E-9 (sergeant major) in 1958.

Life for soldiers with families could be difficult. Quarters were available only for senior NCOs and officers, and real estate agents took advantage of soldiers looking for housing downtown. Low pay made it difficult to own a car to commute to work, so many carpooled. "Sergeants first class, staff sergeants, and master sergeants had the same hard time that privates, first class, and specialists have today."

In January 1955 Connelly, still a sergeant first class, received orders for his first overseas tour of duty and a chance to soldier in a tank unit with a wartime mission. The 826th Tank Battalion was in Hammelburg, Germany, the site of General George S. Patton's abortive raid to free American prisoners of war in 1945. The 826th was part of the 19th Armored Group, a combined-arms unit with armored infantry and artillery in addition to tank battalions. Connelly became a tank commander and attended a tank commanders' course on gunnery, maintenance, and tactics at Vilseck. Despite his relative lack of experience in armor, after the course Connelly "knew that tank as well as any of my crew members and as well as any other tank commander." Unlike those at Fort Knox, the tankers in Germany had the opportunity to fire all of the gunnery tables and, before Germany negotiated the Status of Forces Agreement, could freely maneuver over the countryside. Since that assignment, Connelly preferred duty overseas,



Connelly (*right*) Relaxes with Fellow NCOs at the Seventh Army NCO Academy.

which was geared toward a real wartime mission, to that at stateside posts. During his tour, he again became a platoon sergeant.

Not long after Connelly's arrival in Germany, Hammelburg returned to German control and the 826th moved to Schweinfurt. A year later it rotated to Fort Benning, Georgia, as part of Operation GYROSCOPE, exchanging equipment with the 714th Tank Battalion. By moving as a unit, the 826th retained its cohesion and teamwork. At Fort Benning, Georgia, Sergeant First Class Connelly served as a platoon sergeant and later as a battalion operations sergeant until 1958.

Connelly had been in the United States only two years when he returned to Germany. This time he went to Fürth, assigned as a platoon sergeant in the 2d Battalion, 67th Armor. The battalion was equipped with the heavy M103 tank, armed with a 105-mm. gun. The shortage of officers meant that he was a platoon sergeant for a platoon leader who was also a sergeant first class. Although the platoon leader was "a good guy," Connelly was the only NCO drawing proficiency pay. He told his company commander, "If there is going to be a platoon leader in this outfit, it's probably going to be me." Having two NCOs of the same grade in

the same platoon appeared a bad idea. To solve the problem, the captain transferred Connelly to another company, where he served as a platoon sergeant with no officer. While in Fürth, he was promoted to the pay grade of E-7. He served in the 67th Armor until 1961.

Once back in the United States, Connelly was assigned to the 3d Medium Tank Battalion, 32d Armor, 24th Infantry Division, at Fort Stewart, Georgia. His stateside respite lasted all of thirty days. In 1961 the Berlin Crisis erupted as the Soviets threatened to unilaterally disrupt the status quo in the former German capital and allowed the Communist East German government to build the infamous Berlin Wall to prevent East Germans from escaping to freedom in the West. The 24th Division reinforced U.S. forces in Germany, with the 3d Battalion assigned to Augsburg.

Shortly thereafter the battalion was issued the new M60 tank. Sergeant Connelly had "never seen the morale of a unit increase as much as when we got seventeen brand-new M60 tanks. It was like every soldier had a brand-new Cadillac." The M60 was diesel powered, making it less likely to catch fire if hit; carried the more potent 105-mm. gun; was more mobile; and best of all, was almost



Connelly on Duty in the Dominican Republic, 1965

impossible to fuel with five-gallon fuel cans, which relieved tankers of one of their more onerous tasks.² The sense of pride in the new tanks added to Connelly's great satisfaction in serving with several excellent NCOs and officers. Two of his company commanders later became general officers.

In those days before extensive involvement in Vietnam, the Army was stable and units in Europe could spend a great deal of time on training. Experienced officers and NCOs continually taught classes on tank gunnery and tactics, as well as everything from map reading to first aid. The crisis in Berlin and the proximity of Warsaw Pact forces added a sense of urgency to such efforts.

During this tour Connelly was promoted and assigned as the battalion operations sergeant and later company first sergeant. After the promotion, Col. Norman Stanfield, the commander, informed Connelly of his next position in no uncertain terms: "Look, I've listened to the reasons why you didn't want to be ops sergeant, but when you come back Monday morn-

ing, you are going to be the battalion operations sergeant." Acquiescing to the commander's wishes, Connelly "spent a good time as ops sergeant and never regretted it." In 1964 First Sergeant Connelly was reassigned to Fort Stewart, this time to the 4th Battalion, 68th Armor, 2d Infantry Division.

At Stewart, Connelly began what he thought would be a three-year tour in the United States after he had spent so much of his career overseas. That was not to be. Unrest in the Dominican Republic led to the deployment of U.S. forces to protect American lives and stabilize the country. After the lightly armed contingents of the XVIII Airborne Corps arrived under the auspices of the Organization of American States, the need for armor quickly became apparent. A handpicked company from the 68th Armor was selected to deploy as a show of force. As the headquarters company first sergeant, Connelly had been trying to move into a line company. He got his chance when the other first sergeants turned out to be nondeployable and he was selected to go with the deploying company.

The company embarked on a landing ship, tank (LST), and departed without knowing its destination. Upon arrival in the Dominican Republic, it disembarked, met elements of the 82d Airborne Division, and set up a perimeter. After a week, the company sent a tank company through the streets of the capital to run rebel forces out. The tankers operated under strict rules of engagement. They could return fire with their .45-caliber pistols if fired upon but needed clearance from the company commander to fire their tank submachine guns. The XVIII Airborne Corps commander, Lt. Gen. Bruce Palmer, Jr., had to approve the firing of the coaxial .30-caliber machine gun. To fire the .50-caliber machine gun, the tankers had to get approval from the theater commander, a Brazilian general. To fire the 90-mm. main gun, they needed Pentagon approval. Fortunately, the company never got into a firefight that required that it fire its main tank guns. Generally, General Palmer used the company as a show of

force wherever fighting broke out—the arrival of tanks being sufficient in many cases to stop the fighting immediately.

The deadliest enemy was boredom. The company leaders kept the men occupied without allowing them to leave the perimeter by holding area beautification contests and taking organized trips to the beach to swim. Their task was made easier by the fact that the unit was composed of the best 110 soldiers from an already tight-knit battalion. The company remained in the Dominican Republic for ten months, until elections were held and the situation stabilized. Thirty days after the company arrived back at Fort Stewart, it redeployed to Fort Knox and became part of the 66th Armor with a mission of supporting the Armor School.

In December 1966 Master Sergeant Connelly was reassigned to the Georgia National Guard as an adviser. He went to a tank battalion in Macon but moved on to Griffin with the 196th Cavalry Squadron, serving as senior adviser with no officers assigned over him. The squadron was spread out across Georgia, and many of its personnel drilled on weekdays rather than on weekends. This required a great deal of flexibility on Connelly's part. The squadron NCOs held the organization together despite frequent changes and redesignations. "They were a cav squadron one year, then an engineer unit the next year, the next year a straight tank battalion, the next year armored infantry."

Most Guardsmen joined the unit partly to supplement their income, but some enlisted to avoid the draft as the war in Vietnam escalated. Connelly recalls, "We had a waiting list to join...and I don't remember how many times I was offered bribes. Influential people would call me up about getting people into the unit." Personnel turnover, the lack of combat experience, the lack of officer education programs, and the limited 38-day training year made it almost impossible for the squadron to adequately prepare for war: "Every summer camp that I went to was like starting all over again." Although Connelly felt frustrated by having to put the best face on the dismal level of training achieved,



Connelly as First Sergeant of Troop B, 1st Squadron, 9th Cavalry, in Vietnam, 1969

he considered the assignment rewarding because he worked with dedicated NCOs who had a "lifetime invested in their unit."

In October 1969 he received orders for Troop B, 1st Squadron, 9th Cavalry, 1st Cavalry Division, stationed in Quan Loi, Republic of Vietnam. There, he would continue his long line of tours as a troop first sergeant, serving in that capacity for the entire one-year tour. Troop B, an air cavalry unit, flew almost continuous combat missions and became one of the most highly decorated units in Vietnam. Connelly's troop had over 600 soldiers and 54 warrant officers (pilots and copilots), but only a few NCOs had previous combat experience in Vietnam and only one from Korea. Many of the squad leaders were privates first class who had attended the Noncommissioned Officer Candidate Course (NCOCC).³

During one operation, a rifle platoon rappelled from helicopters into a landing zone under enemy fire. All the platoon's leaders were either injured or hit by enemy fire in the first few minutes, and the unit had to be extracted almost immediately. A specialist fourth class

was the only experienced soldier available to direct the effort. First Sergeant Connelly and the troop commander flew overhead, observing, until the commander told Connelly to go down and “get those guys out.” Once inside the landing zone, Connelly recalls, “There were all kinds of fire and noise and everything, but all I did was calm down this young specialist four” who actually handled the extraction. At Connelly’s insistence, the young soldier was awarded a Silver Star for his initiative and bravery.

Tanker Connelly’s experience had not prepared him for the kind of combat in Vietnam or for the lack of discipline among the troops. By late 1969 drug use and racial strife were becoming major problems. Junior NCOs often lacked the training, experience, and maturity to deal with the many situations that arose. Connelly thought himself among the least combat-experienced NCOs, but those with more such experience were often in “soft” jobs, “in Bien Hoa, or in a club, or in the United States. Anybody that had any influence whatsoever didn’t go to Troop B, 1st Squadron, 9th Cavalry. I probably wouldn’t have had to go, if I didn’t want to, but I was just a guy that did what the hell I was told to do.”

Despite his feelings about his own lack of experience, Connelly applied imaginative solutions to the drug problems. He searched tents for drugs without worrying excessively about “probable cause.” As he put it, “I didn’t know what probable cause was, except that I was probably going to get killed over [t]here if I didn’t get these soldiers off drugs.”

Besides drug abuse, the frequent change of commanders prevented an accumulation of combat experience in a unit. To maximize combat command experience throughout the officer corps, the Army rotated officers into six-month command tours. The short command tours resulted in a roller-coaster effect in learning the lessons of combat. Connelly later stressed, “The biggest problem that a soldier, his platoon leader, platoon sergeant, and first sergeant have got is to change company commanders. We can live with that in peacetime, but you can’t do that

during war.” With only six months to learn the job and make their mark, commanders tended to focus on avoiding mistakes and micromanaged operations. This undercut the authority of subordinate leaders. Fortunately for Troop B, First Sergeant Connelly spent his entire one-year tour with the unit, which benefited from his no-nonsense style of leadership.

In November 1970 Connelly left Vietnam for a tour as first sergeant of the Reception Company, 1st Training Brigade, at Fort Knox. Although he preferred an armor assignment, he later admitted that the experience of seeing young men become soldiers gave him valuable insights into a part of the Army he had seen only as a young draftee. Later, as Sergeant Major of the Army, he used some of the lessons he had learned there to improve the process and to adapt it for the all-volunteer Army.

After over ten years of first sergeant duty, Connelly was promoted and became sergeant major of both the 1st and 2d Battalions of the 1st Training Brigade. The advancement occurred at a time when he had felt that he was stagnating in his career and that NCOs who had once worked for him were passing him by. He recalls, “I had been a first sergeant so long that my daughter called me ‘Top,’ because she thought that was my nickname. I never got discouraged. I was a good first sergeant, and I loved what I was doing. I used to tell my wife, ‘Oh well, the Army will recognize my talents one of these days, and I’ll move right along.’” In the next six years, Connelly “moved right along” farther than he had ever thought possible.

In June 1973, Sergeant Major Connelly was selected to attend the Sergeants Major Academy at Fort Bliss, Texas. At the time he was promoted to sergeant major, he was also on the command sergeants major list. In the early days of the Sergeants Major Academy, many sergeants major saw no need to attend. Connelly’s brigade commander, who wanted to keep him in the brigade, offered to help him avoid attending, but he replied, “Colonel, you know, I’ve been going all over Fort Knox here, talking about the NCOES [Noncommissioned Officer Education System]

and the Sergeants Major Academy. I'm one of the guys on the study group at Fort Knox to study the NCO Education System and I sign up for it on the ground floor."

Connelly did well at the academy. There, he met Glen Morrell, who would later succeed him as Sergeant Major of the Army. He graduated from the Sergeants Major Academy in December 1973, about the same time he was commissioned a captain of Armor in the reserves. Then, for the fourth time in his career, he received orders for duty in Germany.

A confident academy graduate, Command Sergeant Major Connelly had orders assigning him to the 1st Battalion, 35th Armor, 1st Infantry Division, in Erlangen. Upon arrival, he met his sponsor, the acting battalion sergeant major, who was on the promotion list for sergeant major. Connelly reported to the battalion commander, Lt. Col. Frederick B. Hull, who told him that since he had an acting sergeant major, he did not need him. Connelly told him "very, very politely" that the Department of the Army, not the battalion commander, had assigned him there and that the commander would have to have the orders changed if he did not want him as his sergeant major. After the commander checked with brigade headquarters, he announced that Connelly was indeed to be the battalion sergeant major. To his credit, he told Connelly that their rocky start would not affect their working relationship.

Connelly's stand and later performance as battalion sergeant major impressed the brigade commander, Col. Thomas P. Lynch. When Lynch was promoted to general and took command of the Seventh Army Training Command in 1975, he took Connelly with him to be his command sergeant major.

The Training Command at Grafenwöhr included the Hohenfels and Wildflecken Training Areas as well as several outlying communities. Sergeant Major Connelly was the commander's eyes and ears for community matters, a task that took up most of his time. He traveled to the training areas and communities, coordinating with the local sergeants major and visiting units

while they trained. Informal discussions with soldiers revealed that they expected tough, realistic training, and Connelly saw that training facilities were updated and made to simulate real combat. Many of the improvements made during his tenure were the forerunners to those later set up at the National Training Center (NTC), Fort Irwin, California, when Connelly was Sergeant Major of the Army.

In 1975 the U.S. Army, Europe, was recovering from the effects of the war in Vietnam. For the previous ten years, it had virtually served as a replacement depot for Southeast Asia. Training facilities had been allowed to deteriorate, and training money was scarce. The attention of both officers and NCOs had been on counterinsurgency warfare, tactics, and doctrine, which obviously could not be applied to the defense of the Fulda Gap. Connelly observed, "We didn't have any trained commanders, from lieutenant colonel on down. We had company commanders, captains, that didn't know as much as a twelve-month second lieutenant knew in the late fifties, as far as maneuvering a tank company."

After a year and a half Connelly took over as sergeant major of the 1st Armored Division. Since one of its brigades had been stationed in Grafenwöhr, he had become familiar with the division. But the 1st Armored was one of the most dispersed in Europe, with units scattered across southern Germany; thus Connelly found himself traveling over the entire area, visiting units and inspecting training programs. In the eighteen months he was in the division, he saw vast improvements in training, a reduction of drug and alcohol abuse, closer community relations with the local German citizenry, and more recreational facilities available for soldiers. Although he regularly put in twelve- to eighteen-hour days, seven days a week, he later judged the improvement in overall readiness and morale well worth the effort. By the time he left Germany in 1977, he had been there four years in three tough assignments.

While in Germany, Connelly was nominated for consideration as the Sixth Army command sergeant major. Since he believed that



SMA Connelly Visits an Infantry Unit in the Field in Germany, 1982.

assignment would not be beneficial for his career and since Maj. Gen. William L. Webb, Jr., the division commanding general, did not want to lose him, his name was withdrawn from consideration. However, General Webb soon found he could not keep Connelly forever.

When Webb was unable to accept an invitation to speak at the Command and General Staff College at Fort Leavenworth, Kansas, he sent Connelly, having a great deal of confidence in the sergeant major's knowledge of training in Europe. Connelly's talk so impressed General Frederick J. Kroesen, the new Forces Command (FORSCOM) commander, that he asked Connelly to consider serving as the FORSCOM sergeant major. Connelly was positive but at the time did not think it would really happen and had only a vague idea of what FORSCOM was or did. He was selected for the post shortly thereafter.

In some ways Sergeant Major Connelly regarded the new assignment as "the only good deal he had in his career." FORSCOM headquarters at Fort McPherson, Georgia, was only sixty-five miles from his home. He expected to serve three years there, followed by a year somewhere else, and then to retire with thirty years of service.

He later learned that he had been selected because of his wide variety of assignments in troop units and because "he had more time as a first sergeant than most of [the other candidates] put together." His tour as an adviser with the National Guard also had been an important factor in his selection.

General Kroesen's marching orders to Connelly were similar to those he would receive later as Sergeant Major of the Army. Kroesen told Connelly to visit as many units as possible during his three years, as well as neighboring reserve and National Guard

units as he traveled to active Army posts. Kroesen and his staff also gave Connelly a thorough briefing on FORSCOM, on the major Army commands (MACOMs), and on how they all related to each other and to the reserve component.

Connelly spent most of his FORSCOM tour on the road, meeting most of the sergeants major of divisions, corps, readiness regions, and armies. At the time the Army was developing the "round-out" concept, whereby National Guard brigades became the third brigades "rounding out" two-brigade active component divisions. Connelly quickly found that the National Guard was no more prepared for war in 1978 than it had been when he was a Guardsman in the 1950s or an adviser in the 1960s. He observed, "I'm seeing the same people. They're just getting older, but they're not getting any better trained."

Guard commanders were responsible for units spread out over the entire state and had no way of visiting all of them during a two-year command tour, except at annual training. Nevertheless, by the time Connelly completed his tour at FORSCOM, he had a broader perspective of the Army than before. He knew how it fit together at the highest levels, became more

aware of the role of the reserve component, and knew the strengths and weaknesses of the mixed system. General Kroesen was confident of Connelly's ability to understand the "Total Army" and highly valued his sergeant major's observations and reports. Because FORSCOM was the largest major command, his tour as its sergeant major, together with his extensive time in Europe, gave him an excellent preparation for his next assignment.

In 1979, as Sergeant Major of the Army Bainbridge was completing his four-year tour, General Robert M. Shoemaker, the new FORSCOM commander, recommended Sergeant Major Connelly for the SMA position. Competing with seventy-six other command sergeants major, he did not expect to land the position because his twenty-five years of service made him junior to most of the others on the list. He thought he would have a better chance next time and told his wife Bennie, "It doesn't make a damn. I could sit here as FORSCOM Sergeant Major for another three or four years."

At the interview, Connelly thought his chances of selection had disappeared when he noted that General John F. Forrest, the FORSCOM deputy commander, was the board president. Earlier, Connelly had seen the general fall asleep in the middle of a briefing he was presenting, and had shaken him, saying, "General, are you awake? Hell, I'm talking to you."⁴ To make matters worse, Connelly himself had not gotten much sleep the night before the interview and had bloodshot eyes from having walked through a dust storm the day before. Fortunately, General Forrest had a sense of humor about the sleeping incident and apparently did not notice Connelly's appearance.

The selection board asked Connelly what he thought of as the greatest problem facing the Army today and, if he were Sergeant Major of the Army, how he would address it. Based on his experience in tank battalions, he identified recruiting, retention, training, and equipment as the Army's most pressing problems. There were no simple remedies—all would need to work hard to correct them.

The candidate list was narrowed to five finalists, and Connelly was pleasantly surprised to find his name among them. Later, General Bernard Rogers, the outgoing Chief of Staff, interviewed the five finalists, starting with Connelly. General Kroesen, who was then scheduled to take command of USAREUR, told Connelly that if he was not selected, he would like for him to be his sergeant major. Connelly was again pleased, but he knew he had lost his last chance for yet another tour in Europe when Sergeant Major of the Army Bainbridge informed him that he had been selected.

After the notification, Connelly and Bainbridge spent a week discussing the current actions and problems facing the office. Although Bainbridge's entire office staff would leave with him, the departing SMA found Connelly an outstanding NCO, Sergeant Don Kelly, who knew how the Army Staff operated and how to get things done in the Pentagon. Throughout Connelly's career, he had never even called the Department of the Army and thus needed an experienced hand to help him with the high-level fundamentals. Later, when Kelly was selected to attend the Sergeants Major Academy, Connelly encouraged him to go regardless of how much he needed him. "After all the hell I have raised about people turning down the Sergeants Major Academy, I can't very well have you not go."

The new Chief of Staff, General Edward C. Meyer, swore in SMA Connelly on 2 July 1979 in a small ceremony with a few close friends. The parades would come later. As SMA-designee, Connelly had stopped by Meyer's office earlier, when the general was still the deputy chief of staff for operations. Meyer told him:

You and I came up in the same way. We spent a lot of time in the armored and infantry divisions, in TO&E [Table of Organization and Equipment] units, and we know how they work. There's one thing I want to do while I'm in office and I want you to help me do it. The majority of the Army is not in divisions. I want you and I to visit as many of those soldiers as we can. When you go to an installation, make sure to visit the support sections. Go to the communications and the engineers. I want you to continue working with the National Guard and reserves.

He further told Connelly to have the MACOMs work out a Noncommissioned Officer Development Program. "Don't write the program yourself, write a regulation that requires them to do it." In conjunction with his office staff, the new sergeant major of the Army, with the assistance of the Army Staff, wrote the regulation, rewrote it, and submitted it to the Chief of Staff for his approval. General Meyer was pleased: "That is absolutely on target. That's what I want. Put it out."

Sergeant Major of the Army Connelly capitalized on the knowledge, experience, and reputation he had gained as the FORSCOM sergeant major. He "just had to broaden himself as SMA. No one in the job ever did it before and the only one who knew the job was the one who just left it and retired. The circumstances, SMA staff, and Chief of Staff under which each SMA served were different for each one." After a week in office, he told General Meyer that he did not yet know how to be Sergeant Major of the Army. The chief simply replied, "I don't know how to be Chief of Staff yet either."

One of Connelly's first official functions was to speak to a group of MACOM chaplains. He had no idea of what to tell them but knew he would have to "clean up his act." In his opening remarks he noted that he been a first sergeant for about five years before he "learned that the chaplain was on his side." This and other anecdotes from his troop duty elicited laughter, broke the ice, and made the rest of his talk go well. It also showed him that he was at his best when being authentic and working from his extensive experience in troop units. That, after all, was the reason that he and his predecessors had been selected for the position.

Like the five previous Sergeants Major of the Army, Connelly spent most of his time traveling. He was fortunate to have a first-rate staff in the office to take care of matters when he was on the road. He later observed that today the use of cellular telephones has made such burdens easier. In his time, Connelly often had to stop at public pay phones to find out what was happening back in the Pentagon.

General Meyer, like his predecessors, expected the SMA to take his wife with him on his travels around the Army. He also told him that there were no restrictions on his travels and that he did not need a written report when he returned. Instead, he was to informally brief the chief in person. With Meyer's support, Connelly also saw that his travels included reserve units—he was their sergeant major too. In many cases weekend drill schedules of National Guard and reserve units allowed him to visit these compounds on Saturday and Sunday while touring active Army units during the week. Connelly also maintained a working relationship with the Readiness Region sergeants major, as well as those at the National Guard Bureau and the Office of the Chief of the Army Reserve. There, his experiences both as a Guardsman and as National Guard adviser gave him insights into the capabilities and problems of the reserve component.

One issue that Connelly wished to avoid was protocol. Years earlier the Sergeant Major of the Army had been accorded the same protocol as a four-star general. He could take his wife at government expense and stay in quarters sometimes better than those given to two- or three-star generals. Connelly told his staff, "Let's not get wrapped around the axle with this business. Don't let me become a controversial Sergeant Major of the Army. We don't need that and the office doesn't need that." He accordingly ensured that travel reimbursements were made strictly according to regulation. Once, when his wife was given temporary duty pay, Connelly found out that the finance officer had been instructed to do so. Connelly immediately had the finance office's instructions changed.

Bennie Connelly traveled with her husband on about one-third of his trips—to Korea, Hawaii, Europe, and all over the United States. She spoke at community centers, to officers' wives, to NCO wives, and to the people who ran the facilities that served families. After a trip, just as Sergeant Major Connelly briefed the Chief of Staff, she would brief the chief and other offices dealing with family support issues. As 55 percent of the Army was married, this

area had become increasingly important. The old phrase, "If the Army wanted you to have a wife, it would have issued you one" was changed to "You recruit a soldier, but reenlist a family." Without the draft, reenlistment was essential to maintaining personnel strength.

Sergeant Major Connelly received about a hundred complaints a month from soldiers throughout the Army. Ninety percent of them could be handled by his office staff over the telephone and usually dealt with minor matters. Often, soldiers had already received responses from their chains of command but were dissatisfied with the answers or simply wanted their feelings aired at a higher level.

One day, one particular soldier would not wait to call. He drove to the Pentagon, walked right into the SMA's office, and told the administrative assistant that he was on orders for Europe and did not want to go. A call to his unit revealed that he had signed out three weeks before and should have already been overseas. Connelly, who subsequently helped the soldier work out his difficulties, felt he could not "let those things get under my skin, because after all, that's what the Sergeant Major of the Army is for."

Other soldiers who came into the office had no complaints, but simply wanted to personally see the Sergeant Major of the Army; they had heard him speak before and happened to be in the area. Connelly was pleased that soldiers felt that freedom. As FORSCOM sergeant major, he himself had never dared to visit the Pentagon, because he was "afraid that someone there would ask him a question and he wouldn't know the answer."

The Chief of Staff considered Sergeant Major Connelly a member of his principal staff and had him attend his daily meetings. There, Connelly had a chance to report on recent trips or other issues and have direct input into all of the Army Staff sections. Connelly also sat on the weekly Army Policy Council, chaired by the Secretary of the Army. In fact, the Chief of Staff told him that there was no briefing or meeting so classified that he could not attend. Connelly, however, had to be selective. There were so many meetings going on in the Pentagon daily that he

could have spent every day of his tour doing nothing but attending meetings.

Connelly's experience at the Seventh Army Training Command and later at FORSCOM proved valuable as the Army activated the National Training Center. The new instructional center had been one of General Kroesen's projects as FORSCOM commander. At first, Connelly could not believe that such an ambitious project would ever see completion. To many at the time, officer and NCO alike, the high-tech tracking and recording of the actual movement of units and the assessment of results of direct and indirect fires seemed something out of "Star Wars."⁵ Yet by the time Connelly left office, the NTC was a fact.

While general officers concentrated on the training facilities and high-tech equipment, Sergeant Major Connelly looked to the establishment of a post suitable for soldiers and their families stationed at Fort Irwin. The fort, originally designed only for temporary use, now needed a chapel, post exchange, family quarters, and a host of other facilities necessitated by the fact that the area is isolated, about forty miles from the nearest town. At first it seemed that the major construction effort was devoted to ranges and training facilities, while construction of facilities to support families lagged behind. After one visit, Connelly told the Chief of Staff, "The Army is not fulfilling its part of the deal. We have ranges second to none in the whole world, and folks living in a damn base camp." Subsequent changes eventually made Fort Irwin a good post for Army families and a desirable assignment.

The greatest test facing SMA Connelly was the accession and retention of soldiers. The Army was still somewhat "hollow," with fully equipped units lacking the soldiers necessary to fill them out. Instead of eliminating whole units, the Army had chosen to retain them on the rolls with reduced manning. Earlier in Germany, Connelly had seen tank companies at gunnery ranges with all their authorized tanks, but with cooks and clerks manning them. He noticed a steady improvement, not only in numbers but also in quality. In 1979 less than 50 percent of recruits

were high school graduates. Four years later it was over 90 percent. High School graduates were easier to train and more likely to finish their enlistment. The appearance, discipline, and morale of soldiers also greatly improved.

Sergeant Major Connelly testified before Congress on several issues that affected soldiers and their families. In 1980 he appeared before the House Committee on Armed Services, along with his counterparts from the other services, to answer questions about medical care for handicapped dependents and dependent dental care. He stressed the importance of such benefits and their ties with recruitment and reenlistment. In 1983 he spoke to the House Committee on Appropriations on the overall quality of life for soldiers and their families.⁶ Such testimonies, as well as congressional interest, did much to help transition the Army to a first-class volunteer force. After fifteen years of existence the Office of the Sergeant Major of the Army, together with counterparts in the other services, had repeatedly proved a reliable source of information about conditions for enlisted soldiers and their families.

Connelly originally was scheduled for a three-year tour, and like his predecessors thought that three years was the right length. Later, however, General Meyer told him that he did not want to break up the team he had assembled when he took office and asked if Connelly would

extend for a year. At long last the idea that the Chief of Staff and the Sergeant Major of the Army ought to serve a four-year tour together had arrived. The precedent would stand. Connelly later said that he “spent the last six months of his fourth year trying not to look tired,” adding that in retrospect, the succession of four-year tours over time had prevented some outstanding NCOs from having a chance at the job. Perhaps the Chief of Staff might have shared these sentiments regarding his own job. Both Connelly and Meyer retired in June 1983.

Their four years had seen a vast improvement in the quality of soldiers, regarding both education and discipline. Connelly himself had tirelessly pushed for improvements in the quality of life for soldiers and families, which paid off in attracting high-quality men and women to the Army and encouraging them to reenlist. Most important, he capitalized on his extensive experience in individual and unit training to involve NCOs from corporal to sergeant major in their soldiers’ training. He drafted the regulation to establish the Noncommissioned Officer Development Program, which created a roadmap of NCO professional development, outlining education requirements and tightening standards of performance. When he became Sergeant Major of the Army in 1979, the Army was hollow. When he left in 1983 it was a better-trained force, manned by high-quality soldiers.

Notes

1. Except as noted, this section is based on Interv, Erwin H. Koehler with William A. Connelly, 24 Jan 94, Monticello, Ga.

2. The fuel inlet was so far recessed in the engine decking that tank crewmen required a long nozzle or funnel to reach it.

3. The term old-timers used to denote those who earned their stripes by attending NCOCC was “instant NCO.”

4. Forrest had been on the road for many days and had not gotten much sleep the night before the briefing.

5. In fact, the computer center at Fort Irwin that tracks movement and fires is nicknamed “Star Wars.”

6. U.S. Congress, House, Committee on Armed Forces, Military Personnel Subcommittee, *Hearings on Civilian Health and Medical Program of the Uniformed Services* (18 June, 15 September 1980), 96th Cong., 2d sess.; Committee on Appropriations, *Hearings on Military Construction Appropriations for 1984* (23 February 1983), 98th Cong., 1st sess.

Assignments

1950–1954	Basic Training, Tank Crewman, Company C, 190th Tank Battalion, Georgia National Guard, Americus, Georgia
1954–1955	Tank Crewman, Commander, Platoon Sergeant, First Sergeant, Company B, 761st Tank Battalion, 3d Armored Division, Fort Knox, Kentucky
1955–1956	Tank Commander, Platoon Sergeant, Company B, 826th Tank Battalion, 19th Armored Group, Hammelburg; Schweinfurt, Germany
1956–1958	Operations Sergeant, Platoon Sergeant, Company B, 826th Tank Battalion, Fort Benning, Georgia
1958–1961	Platoon Sergeant, Companies B and C, 2d Battalion, 67th Armor, 4th Armored Division, Fürth, Germany
1961–1962	Platoon Sergeant, Company B, 3d Medium Tank Battalion, 32d Armor, 24th Infantry Division, Fort Stewart, Georgia; Augsburg, Germany
1962–1964	First Sergeant, Operations Sergeant, 32d Tank Battalion, Munich, Germany
1964–1967	First Sergeant, Company C, 4th Battalion, 68th Armor, 2d Infantry Division, Fort Stewart; Dominican Republic; Fort Knox, Kentucky
1967–1969	Chief Enlisted Adviser, 196th Cavalry Squadron, Georgia National Guard, Griffin, Georgia
1969–1970	First Sergeant, Troop B, 1st Squadron, 9th Cavalry, 1st Cavalry Division, Republic of Vietnam
1970–1973	First Sergeant, Reception Company, 1st Training Brigade; Sergeant Major, 1st and 2d Battalions, Fort Knox, Kentucky
1973	Student, Class #2, Sergeants Major Academy, Fort Bliss, Texas
1973–1975	Command Sergeant Major, 1st Battalion, 35th Armor, 1st Armored Division, Erlangen, Germany
1975–1976	Command Sergeant Major, Seventh Army Training Command, Grafenwöhr, Germany
1976–1977	Command Sergeant Major, 1st Armored Division, Ansbach, Germany
1977–1979	Command Sergeant Major, U.S. Army Forces Command, Fort McPherson, Georgia
1979–1983	Sergeant Major of the Army

Selected Decorations and Awards

Distinguished Service Medal
Bronze Star Medal with V Device and Two Oak Leaf Clusters
Meritorious Service Medal with One Oak Leaf Cluster
Air Medal with V Device
Army Commendation Medal with Two Oak Leaf Clusters
Good Conduct Medal with Ten Oak Leaf Clusters
Army of Occupation Medal (Germany)
National Defense Service Medal
Armed Forces Expeditionary Medal
Vietnam Service Medal
Republic of Vietnam Cross of Gallantry with Gold Star
Republic of Vietnam Campaign Medal
Combat Infantryman Badge



SMA Morrell

Glen E. Morrell

*"I was always fortunate in the Army, I had good people that worked for me."*¹

With those words Glen E. Morrell summarized his four-year term as Sergeant Major of the Army. An unassuming man, Glen Morrell was born 26 May 1936 in Wick, West Virginia, near Wheeling. In this rural environment, young Morrell became an avid fisherman and reader. His father worked for the Hope Natural Gas Company, now part of Exxon, while his mother kept the house in order. Glen Morrell was his parents' youngest, with four sisters and two brothers.

Morrell remembered his parents' instilling discipline in him at an early age—whipping was the standard punishment. Having "respect for other people" and "giving everybody a chance" were hallmarks of growing up in the tiny village of Stumptown, where Morrell learned many lessons that later proved useful in the Army. "People that came from the larger cities seemed to have more problems," he noticed. Glen Morrell attended the public school in Normantown, West Virginia, a six- or seven-mile bus trip from Stumptown. The school building housed all grades, including high school. Morrell felt lucky—their school had a gymnasium. The only school sport was basketball, but there were many outdoor adventures in that mountainous area. "I read a lot," Morrell recalled, and "we never even had a television until after I came into the Army." Even listening to the radio was a rare pastime since the batteries were expensive and the area had no public power.

His best subjects were math, science, and history. His teachers were very thorough and very strict. Some had served in World War II and car-

ried an air of military discipline with them. People took schooling seriously. While in secondary school, Morrell worked at several part-time jobs. Most involved farm work in the local fields, earning him "a lot of money" for that time. A boy normally received \$1.50 for a day's wage, but Morrell worked especially hard and eventually earned up to \$2.00 over the daily average. In addition, his own family always had a large garden and farm animals that kept him busy. Morrell completed his high school courses in early 1954, graduating in May of that year. At the time his local prospects seemed limited. Except for the gas company, that part of West Virginia offered few job opportunities. Not wanting to take on some short-term job, Morrell turned to his long-time interest in the Army.

"All I wanted to do was join the Army and jump out of airplanes," he later said. Morrell's father was a veteran of World War I, and one brother had served in World War II. Another brother had been a paratrooper in the Korean War. But they had all been drafted and had a hard time understanding why young Glen wanted to volunteer. In the fall of 1954, however, he enlisted.

Morrell had enlisted for service in the 11th Airborne Division, but was assigned initially to the 82d Airborne Division.² After a two-day stay for shots and screening at Fort Jackson, South Carolina, Morrell and his fellow recruits traveled to Camp Gordon, Georgia, for eight weeks of basic training. There, they lived in World War II-vintage wooden barracks with coal furnaces. In the open squad bays there were no lockers, only wooden rods behind each bunk. Since the recruits were allowed no civilian clothes and few other

personal belongings, the lack of space seemed inconsequential.

Morrell's fellow recruits came from all over the United States. They were "a pretty good bunch of people" and "we all worked together,...that was the only way you were going to get out of the doggone place." The cadre trained the recruits hard, even on weekends. The sergeants, Korean War veterans, did the instructing. "They were all good people," Morrell remembered, "and knew what they were doing." The only officer he remembered seeing throughout the training cycle was his company commander.

Basic training had not changed much since World War II and Korea. Morrell and the others learned how to use the M1 rifle, still the standard issue. No "bolos" were allowed.³ Each recruit remained on the rifle range until he qualified. The men also learned how to use the early rocket launchers—bazookas—and to defend themselves from the effects of tear gas and chlorine. In addition, they practiced dismounted drill every day and received instruction in general military subjects. Each trainee went through day and night infiltration courses. There were also inspections nearly every day: "You might have a full field layout or just stand-by in the barracks area, or the whole barracks, or you would have a rifle inspection, or an in-ranks inspection in Class A uniform." While there was little formal physical training, the trainees were in good shape since they "walked or ran everywhere."

There were no discipline problems. "You know, everybody was pretty serious back then," he recalled. "They wanted to graduate and get the hell out of there." The only real concern was "trying to clean a weapon to the satisfaction of the people who were inspecting it."

The basic trainees' food ration was small in the mid-1950s. Looking back on his own experience, Morrell recalled eating lots of C-rations "even in the mess hall, about twice a week." At other times the troops ate cold cuts rotated out of emergency storage supplies. Morrell remembered serving on the KP (kitchen police) detail five or six times during his training cycle. After his

retirement, Morrell would bring the benefits of those early experiences to his work on the Task Force 2000 food study that critiqued the new MRE and tray rations.⁴

Private Morrell received a brief leave after his graduation from basic training. Afterward he reported to Fort Bragg, North Carolina, where he was assigned to Battery A, 319th Field Artillery, 82d Airborne Division. He wanted to be in the infantry but was assigned to the field artillery instead, in accordance with the "needs of the service." Morrell recalled that soldiers of that era did not receive any advanced individual training (AIT) in a formal school setting and instead learned from what amounted to on-the-job training in their assigned unit. There were advantages to that system, but it was hard for the unit to track the proper training of each individual, and such informal systems worked best only when the number of replacement troops coming into the Army remained small. Morrell trained on the "split-railed" 105-mm. howitzer especially designed for airborne operations but spent much of his first enlistment working as a forward observer.

Soon after Morrell's arrival at the 82d in 1955, he went to the jump school at Fort Bragg. This three-week course, little different from modern training, kept students on the go all day. Training consisted of a lot of running and jumps from a 34-foot tower, the highest tower then in use.⁵ Morrell had a few problems but quickly got over them. "I was always scared of heights, but it's just different being in an airplane." The new paratroopers made five qualifying jumps before receiving their wings. Morrell liked the thrill of jumping and continued to jump throughout his long career.

When his first enlistment in the Army expired, Sergeant Morrell left the service. He considered becoming a highway patrolman but was told he would have to wait for training. In January 1958 Morrell decided to reenlist in the Army. "I found out that I really liked the Army after I got out," he said. Since a soldier could reenlist for a specific unit, Sergeant Morrell asked for the 82d Airborne Division.

Shortly after reporting for duty, Morrell received orders posting him to Germany. Although he thought he was heading for Baumholder, his orders were changed in transit. "I didn't know I was going to Berlin until I got to Frankfurt." Morrell was assigned to the Combat Support Company, 2d Battle Group, 6th Infantry, a good unit with high morale and good leadership, with several "old combat veterans" providing cohesion and continuity.

Initially assigned as squad leader of a 4.2-inch mortar section, Sergeant Morrell later worked in the Fire Direction Center when the sergeant there went on emergency leave. When that NCO (noncommissioned officer) returned, Morrell filled a vacancy in the mortar platoon as platoon sergeant and later worked in the regiment's reconnaissance unit.

Once a year the Berlin troops trained at Grafenwöhr, Germany. More frequently, they used smaller training areas including the Grünewald forest in Berlin. There, they used subcaliber devices to conduct exercises, but it was hard to train properly in an urban area. Morrell described his unit as "very proficient. The leadership was good. We had good officers. It was just a good unit." Every Friday the Berlin troops held a parade.

While stationed in Berlin, Sergeant Morrell graduated from the local NCO academy. It was a small school, with four training platoons, and all the students were E-5s and E-6s. The academy emphasized drill and ceremonies, the conduct of physical training and inspections, and general "spit and polish." Classes on how to plan and present training classes were also emphasized, and Morrell considered the instructors good, but there was little in the way of tactical instruction.

During his first enlistment Corporal Morrell had married Karen Wade of Parkersburg, West Virginia. When Morrell reported for duty in Germany, Karen remained stateside for nearly a year because the waiting list for quarters in Germany was long. When the quarters became available, they proved among the best the Morrells encountered.

At that time no "structured programs"—organized communities or activities—existed.

Soldiers made friends and found things to do in their off time as best they could. "We survived," Morrell later said, "and had a good family life. I was always home. I didn't have money to go do anything else." Then, an E-5 made \$205 a month. Morrell remembered, however, that a good meal with a bottle of wine cost only \$5.00 on the local economy. With virtually no promotion opportunities from 1958 to 1960, money remained tight for soldiers like Sergeant Morrell.

In 1960 the 6th Infantry's combat support company was phased out, and Sergeant Morrell transferred to the 14th Armored Cavalry, stationed in Fulda. At the time Morrell considered changing his field artillery military occupational specialty (MOS) and remaining in Berlin.⁶ However, he decided to accept the transfer and remain in the Field Artillery to better his chances of promotion. Consequently, he spent the next two years in a mechanized howitzer battery performing reconnaissance and working in the Fire Direction Center.

Shortly after Sergeant Morrell arrived in Fulda, the Soviet and East German governments erected the Berlin Wall. During the prolonged international crisis that followed, President John F. Kennedy extended the overseas tours of all troops in Germany. In the meantime, Morrell and his fellow soldiers of the 14th Armored Cavalry spent most of their time patrolling the critical border areas they shared with the 2d Cavalry. "Every time you turned around you were on alert."

New tensions and discipline problems also began to arise. Unit leadership was inexperienced, and some NCOs were former officers who had accepted positions as noncommissioned officers in order to stay on active duty during previous reductions in the force structure. Morrell remembered that such men often lacked both the skills and motivation required of good NCOs. Then, in the early 1960s, the problems of drugs and racial tension also began to appear in military units. When Sergeant Morrell received orders transferring him back to the United States early in 1962, he looked forward to the new assignment.



Morrell as a Young Soldier in Vietnam

Before leaving Germany, Sergeant Morrell had read about the Special Forces. "I'm always looking for adventure," he said. At reenlistment time he signed up for the new outfit. When he reported to Fort Bragg, North Carolina, he underwent Special Forces training—"survival-type skills and working in small groups." The trainees for what became the Green Berets underwent medical, communications, and engineer training. They learned how to conduct clandestine operations and how to train indigenous people. With his field artillery background, Morrell naturally "was the heavy weapons guy."

After a lengthy field evaluation of the Special Forces skills of the men, they reported to units. As Special Forces soldiers, they later received language training according to probable deployment areas. But at that time they "trained based on what was happening in Vietnam." For that reason he received French

language instruction at first, since the French had worked so long with the peoples of Vietnam. Later in his Special Forces career, Morrell also picked up Spanish.

Morrell was soon promoted to staff sergeant and assigned to the newly activated Company C, 5th Special Forces Group, serving as the heavy weapons sergeant in an "A" Detachment.⁷ Nevertheless, advanced instruction emphasized cross-training in all the occupational specialties of the detachment. There were also many field training exercises and practice airborne operations. Detachment members learned to work with indigenous people, conduct raids and ambushes, and operate from small boats. In January 1963 Morrell's detachment of the 5th Special Forces Group received orders for temporary duty in Vietnam. Deployed for a six-month period, the men found their orders changed when they arrived in Saigon. The U.S. command planned to assign A teams throughout the country. Morrell's detachment was initially assigned to War Zone D in the III Corps area north of Saigon and operated from the tiny village of Nuoc Vang, north of Phuoc Vinh City.

The Special Forces mission around Nuoc Vang was to secure the village area and train the local Vietnamese security forces, including some ethnic Cambodians. Although French forces had operated there nearly a decade earlier and little had happened since that time, there were serious logistical problems. "We went in there and I didn't have ammunition for my M1 rifle," Morrell recalled. He had one clip for the rifle and one for his .45-caliber pistol. To supply their personal weapons, the U.S. forces had to take the ammunition from the machine guns they had already found in the village. The detachment was without adequate ammunition for nearly ten days before the command in Saigon ordered a resupply.

During Morrell's first tour in Vietnam, the U.S. forces had good relations with the local people since they brought in money and purchased all their food from local suppliers. Morrell's detachment also trained the militia-like defense

forces, laid minefields around the village, and staged ambushes. There was little fighting, “just skirmishes here and there,” but “we got ambushed a few times while hauling supplies in from Phuoc Vinh.” At the time, helicopters were scarce, and everything was transported in convoys using World War II–vintage trucks.

After returning from his first tour in Vietnam, Morrell was reassigned to Company B, 5th Special Forces Group. During that time he received his promotion to sergeant first class.

In 1964 Morrell returned to Vietnam for a second tour, this one lasting a full year. The airplane that carried him to Saigon also brought the colors of the 5th Special Forces Group now permanently stationed there. From Saigon, Morrell flew to Pleiku and then convoyed to Dak Pek, the location of a split A Detachment that also covered Dak To. Dak Pek “was way out in the middle of nowhere,” an established but isolated camp “in the high country up in the mountains,” along the north edge of the II Corps area, close to the Laotian border. Morrell’s detachment worked with five companies of Montagnards, the ethnic tribal peoples of that area. The leaders of those well-seasoned troops had served with the French, and Morrell remembered them as good, effective soldiers.

The remote location of the Special Forces camp at Dak Pek posed serious operational and logistical problems. Everything had to be brought in by convoy from Pleiku, and it was difficult to get air support. The mountainous terrain made tactical operations difficult also. “It took you all day to get to the top of one of the mountains, where you had to go back and go down on the other side.” The normal operational routine was to go out for three days and work back to the camp at Dak Pek. During this time enemy activity accelerated, with elements of the regular North Vietnamese Army engaging American forces in January 1965.

At the conclusion of his second tour in Vietnam, Sergeant First Class Morrell returned to duty with the Special Forces Training Group at Fort Bragg. There he attended the Jumpmaster School in 1965 and in late 1966 received orders



Morrell at His Base Camp in Vietnam

assigning him to the 8th Special Forces Group in Panama. Morrell reported there early in 1967 after a period of temporary duty for Spanish language training in Washington, D.C. He was assigned to Company A, 8th Special Forces Group.

At the Jungle Operations Training Center, the Special Forces trained soldiers from many different Latin American nations. Most of the instruction reflected the experiences and tactical doctrine developed in Southeast Asia. “We had a lot of airborne operations.” While there, Morrell also served on the local marksmanship team, but his overall evaluation of the assignment was unfavorable. Although his wife and children joined him in Panama, they had to live in flimsy temporary quarters built on stilts. Morrell judged it “the worst quarters I ever lived in.” His assignment in Panama was supposed to last three years, but in 1969, two years later, Morrell was again ordered to Vietnam.

Since 1966 the 5th Special Forces Group had operated the MACV Reconnaissance-Commando (Recondo) School near Nha Trang. Morrell knew many instructors stationed there, and they requested his assignment to the school. He remained there until the last three months

of his tour. Transferred to the headquarters at Nha Trang, Morrell became the local-purchase NCO. "I'd go down and buy items that the 'A' camps wanted, but you couldn't get through the regular supply channels."

In 1970 Morrell left Vietnam for the last time. Later, he reflected on the two and a half years he spent there: "It was a shame that so many of our young people got killed over there in that quagmire, but that's history." He felt that the Army had done a superb job through more than a decade of commitment there. The political climate back home, however, had steadily eroded the support the American troops needed.

Approved for promotion to E-8 when he left Vietnam, Morrell thought he would be assigned to the 10th Special Forces Group at Fort Devens, Massachusetts. He requested a change in his orders, however, and returned to Panama. During his second tour there, from 1970-1973, Morrell served as first sergeant of Headquarters Company, 8th Special Forces Group, then as the group intelligence sergeant.

In the spring of 1973 Master Sergeant Morrell was selected to attend the new Sergeants Major Academy at Fort Bliss, Texas. For a soldier who had spent nearly twenty years in field assignments, the academic environment proved quite a challenge at first. "I did do some hard work there," said Morrell, noting the great amount of reading required. In addition, the students had to lead discussion groups and take academic classes. There were approximately eighteen other Special Forces soldiers at the academy then, and they assisted one another. "We worked together and studied together. We probably had a 'leg up' on a lot of people that didn't have such a close-knit group." While the informal group support of the Special Forces students was not always popular with the staff and other students, Morrell welcomed the help.

While Morrell was at the academy, he also entered a nighttime Associate Degree program, which he believed would help his career. Although he had previously "worked every correspondence course under the sun," college courses were a new experience. Morrell took

CLEP tests and plowed through the necessary coursework to receive his degree from El Paso Community College.⁸

Initially, other senior NCOs greeted the Sergeants Major Academy graduates suspiciously. For his part, Morrell sympathized with those noncommissioned officers who had been unable to attend the academy for one reason or another and felt that promotion boards often put undue emphasis on college work as opposed to troop experience. Later, as Sergeant Major of the Army, Morrell could influence the situation: "you need to look at the whole person and see where they've been assigned." Unit personnel policies often deprived NCOs of opportunities because it was difficult to "set aside the money and resources and let people go to school." Still, Morrell knew the day was coming when the academy diploma would be the key to promotion to command sergeant major. He graduated in December 1973.

Following graduation, Master Sergeant Morrell moved to Fort Riley, Kansas. There, he served as first sergeant of Company A, 1st Battalion, 2d Infantry, and later of the Headquarters and Headquarters Company of the 1st Infantry Division. Three times during his stay at Fort Riley, Morrell requested assignment to the Ranger school. The 1st Ranger Battalion of the 2d Infantry had been activated, and Morrell was anxious to become part of that organization. Each time his request was denied, however, largely because the 1st Infantry Division was a REFORGER (Return of Forces to Germany) unit and would not release senior NCOs.

In March 1976 Morrell reported to the Reserve Officer Training Corps (ROTC) at St. John's University in St. Cloud, Minnesota. He received his E-9 stripes there in a special ceremony arranged by the local professor of military science. A noncommissioned officer who had always enjoyed being in a field environment with troops, Morrell did not particularly care for ROTC duty. He considered the Army ROTC cadre outstanding, but the duty just was not his "cup of tea." At that time military

personnel were not particularly welcome on college campuses, and Morrell noticed that some members of the staff did not wear their uniforms home. The number of cadets was small, and they focused on academic work; only about a dozen graduates received Army commissions each year.

Nevertheless, duty at St. John's provided Morrell the time to do many things with his family. He could also indulge his lifelong passion for fishing and hunting. He swam a great deal and increased his running capacity. But his primary job at St. John's was to manage the office and the enlisted staff. His small detachment consisted of a master sergeant, a civilian "supply sergeant," and various civilian and military clerks. Morrell handled large amounts of correspondence and helped conduct field training exercises at nearby Camp Ripley. But he never took part in the ROTC summer camp since he arrived too late for the 1976 exercise and left the detachment in January 1977.

In December 1976 Morrell was selected for the position of sergeant major of the 1st Ranger Battalion, 75th Infantry, at Fort Stewart, Georgia. The return to duty with troops excited him and offered the prospect of finally going to Ranger school. He reported to the Ranger training center at Fort Benning, Georgia, in January 1977. The transfer was so abrupt that Morrell had to leave his wife to settle their affairs in Minnesota.

Morrell considered the Ranger school "the best realistic training I ever received in the Army." Difficult as it was in the winter months, Morrell was able to use his lengthy experience to help many other students. He proved particularly proficient in land navigation and often found himself "on the point" during field problems. He lost a lot of weight during Ranger training and was exhausted. "You had to be physically fit and you had to be mentally tough" to make it through the training. The oldest Ranger student at forty-one, Morrell was the Distinguished Honor Graduate of his class.

Upon completion of Ranger school, Sergeant Major Morrell reported to the 75th Infantry at

Fort Stewart. His duty consisted of "training day and night, seven days a week....All we did was train, train, train and running exercises," he said. "We worked a lot with the forerunners of Delta Force, Blue Light." Much of the training focused on counterterrorist operations. Some excellent training took place in the Mojave Desert. There were no double standards determined by duty position or rank. K. C. Leuer and Joseph Stringham, both of whom later became general officers, were "great trainers," who trained their soldiers "in all aspects of what their mission in life was." As a result, the troops always had "sky-high" morale. "You had standards there, and discipline."

As anywhere else, however, there were problems to solve. The battalion's remarkably fast pace caused a high rate of personnel turnover. There was also a general lack of experienced leadership available for assignment to the unit. In addition, the 1st Ranger Battalion had many well-educated soldiers. Some had college degrees, and many went on to Officer Candidate School, college ROTC programs, or the U.S. Military Academy after they left the service. Sergeant Major Morrell regretted that many good soldiers left the unit after three or four years for either officer training or careers outside the service.

Morrell returned to Germany in July 1979 and was assigned to the 10th Special Forces Detachment at Flint Kaserne in Bad Tölz until October 1981. Duty as the command sergeant major of Special Forces, Airborne, Europe, was demanding. "Every day saw something new in that place," Morrell recalled. As the command sergeant major, Morrell assisted the commander in overseeing the kaserne and conducting military operations. The Seventh Army NCO Academy there received many official visitors. In addition, the Special Forces ran a Platoon Confidence Course, providing mini-Ranger training for platoons from units all over Europe. Sergeant Major Morrell still found time to ski, hunt, and fish.

Following his second tour in Germany, Morrell was reassigned to Headquarters, U.S.



SMA Morrell with Chief of Staff General John A. Wickham, Jr.

Army Recruiting Command (USAREC), Fort Sheridan, Illinois. At the time Morrell regretted an assignment that took him away from troops. However, he found recruiting duty rewarding, and he learned a great deal. With no previous experience in this field, he found it difficult at first to function as the command sergeant major. However, the large number of combat veterans serving as recruiters gave Morrell a common frame of reference. He was pleased to find the USAREC commander, General Howard G. Crowell, Jr., interested in working with him “to make life a little bit better for recruiters. Good people recruit good people.” He found that the noncommissioned officers assigned to the Recruiting Command were excellent and highly motivated soldiers.

In his new position, Morrell focused on soldier and family problems of the recruiters in the field. One critical task, he found, was to

match areas of assignment with specific recruiting sergeants. Morrell saw firsthand the problems with housing and medical care the recruiters and their families faced when there were no military installations in the area. He also had to work with the command to overcome the special difficulties recruiting offices faced in high-crime neighborhoods, while also working to secure better housing for recruiters, especially in high-cost areas. But he gave particular attention to Army pay and promotion policies that caused a hardship for recruiters, since recruiting duty often diminished their promotion prospects. He made several recommendations to the Recruiting Command regarding the issue, including assigning fewer sergeants (E-5) to recruiting duty and providing retention incentives. Although he achieved limited success in these areas, the experiences at USAREC provided him with important

insights that he later used to the Army's advantage as sergeant major at the U.S. Army Forces Command (FORSCOM) and as Sergeant Major of the Army.

The FORSCOM commander, General Richard E. Cavazos, was looking for a command sergeant major to replace outgoing Sgt. Maj. Robert Ivey in June 1982. At Ivey's suggestion, Cavazos selected Glen Morrell. At FORSCOM, Morrell again focused on training. Moreover, he found that he had to spend a lot of time "going out and really trying to find out about the policies that were implemented by the Department of the Army and FORSCOM." He sought to ascertain if they were actually workable in the field. It was a big field, one that included all divisional units in the continental United States (CONUS) as well as in Alaska and Panama. In addition, it included all of the major National Guard and reserve commands.

At FORSCOM, Morrell found a considerable number of problems to solve. For example, it was difficult to find qualified people to man the readiness regions established to assist the reserve components. The soldiers who staffed those regions faced many of the same difficulties as the recruiters. Morrell found that the reserves were good soldiers who really wanted to do an outstanding job. "The reason you find good units or some bad units" depended upon "leadership, getting people qualified, and resources." When the Guard and reserve senior NCOs began attending the annual FORSCOM Command Sergeants Major Conference, closer working relationships began to develop with the active force as well as between the Guard and reserve.

When General John A. Wickham, Jr., became the Army Chief of Staff, he began the selection process for the Sergeant Major of the Army who would serve with him. General Cavazos recommended Sergeant Major Morrell. After careful deliberation, Wickham selected Morrell, who received his formal appointment three weeks after his interview. He took his oath in a "very moving ceremony" in the office of the new Chief of Staff. With his

family and many friends looking on, SMA Morrell began a fast-paced four-year tour. From Morrell's perspective, General Wickham had the interest of the whole Army—the enlisted people, the noncommissioned officers, the officers, and the families—at heart.

In his initial guidance to the new Sergeant Major of the Army, Wickham told Morrell to be himself and "go do the things that needed to be done in the Army." The chief seated the SMA on his right at staff meetings and "we pushed a lot of things through that would not have been accomplished if it hadn't been for all of us working together."

Morrell spent about 25 percent of his time as Sergeant Major of the Army in his office at the Pentagon. Answering the many official inquiries and letters from the field required a lot of research. Besides his small staff, Morrell brought young soldiers to the office from the administration school at Fort Jackson, South Carolina. Even when he was not present, he knew that his office staff worked many nights and weekends handling requests from congressional committees, soldiers, families, and retirees.

He often gave testimony to Congress on such issues as soldiers' quality of life, the needs of service families, and related financial matters. In addition, Morrell also gave periodic briefings to members of the general staff, to Secretary of the Army John O. Marsh, Jr., and to Secretary of Defense Caspar Weinberger. Morrell felt Weinberger "was interested in soldiers;...interested in families; and...interested in the services." In turn, Morrell attended many briefings by agencies such as the Military Personnel Center (MILPERCEN).

Sergeant Major Morrell focused on several major initiatives during his tenure. Chief among them was the continued development of the Noncommissioned Officer Education System (NCOES), which he believed was vital to establishing a solid corps of NCOs. During Morrell's term of office the Primary Leadership Course and the Primary Noncommissioned Officer Course combined to form the Primary Leader Development Course, while the Sergeants



Morrell (*second from right*) with Command Sergeants Major

Major Academy took over the responsibility for developing the common core training for the NCOES. Morrell constantly battled for resources to enhance NCO educational programs. Many commanders, and even a few noncommissioned officers, still needed to be convinced of the need for the NCOES.

Sergeant Major Morrell's other initiatives included the improvement of enlisted quarters. Among other things, he felt better quarters would encourage noncommissioned officers to live on post, closer to the men with whom they worked. Morrell also endeavored to improve the quality of life of single soldiers by bringing their concerns to the attention of the General Staff.

In fact, Sergeant Major Morrell could remember few goals that he did not achieve, at least in part, while he was Sergeant Major of the Army. He had hoped to correct an overbalance

in some occupational specialties. He also wanted to see stricter enforcement of weight, physical training, and substance abuse standards. He convinced the Army Staff to reduce the time an NCO could remain on active duty after refusing to take an assignment or to attend the Sergeants Major Academy.

As Sergeant Major of the Army, Glen Morrell took several major trips to military "hot spots." He found constant stress among American troops in Korea and examined their training along the Demilitarized Zone. He noted the difficult living conditions U.S. troops and dependent families endured there and made several recommendations for improvement. Morrell also recommended lengthening the tour of duty in Korea to alleviate the personnel problems resulting from the constant turnover of soldiers—a suggestion that was not supported.

While Morrell did not go to Grenada during Operation URGENT FURY, he did visit later to discuss the operation with the sergeants major at their locations in CONUS. He noted the confusion during that operation, the problems with airborne and interservice cooperation, and the need for more combined operations training. He later regarded with pride the effect increased emphasis on NCO training had on Operation DESERT SHIELD/STORM.

Sergeant Major Morrell traveled with General Wickham to South America, China, Fort Bliss (to speak at the Sergeants Major Academy), and Fort Bragg. For the most part Morrell tried to travel alone. He found that "they had a structured briefing everywhere General Wickham went," and he thus preferred to divorce himself from such "dog and pony shows" when possible. Although he tried to visit as many active and reserve installations as possible, when it came to choosing destinations, "a lot of the determination was made by calls from the major command sergeants major."

The Sergeant Major of the Army wanted to meet with troops and families and gather information on training and policy issues that the Chief of Staff might have missed. "I always enjoyed talking to soldiers," Morrell said. "That's what I wanted to do." During a visit he would routinely get up early and take physical training with the troops or by himself. Later he would pay a call to the commander and the host sergeant major then meet with small groups of troops. He was careful never to interfere with training. Twice each year Morrell visited Germany and traveled to American troops stationed in Italy, Turkey, and Greece less frequently. His wife often accompanied him and visited dependent quarters, the Army community service organizations, commissaries, medical facilities, schools, and post exchanges. She also spoke at women's luncheons and wives' clubs.

The highlight of Morrell's tenure as Sergeant Major of the Army was his ten-day trip to the People's Republic of China in the fall of 1986. This first major visit by Army person-

nel since General George C. Marshall was Secretary of State reestablished an American military presence there. Incidentally, its purpose was to enlist the support of the Chinese for talks with North Korea. Sergeant Major Morrell and his wife accompanied Army Chief of Staff Wickham and his wife, as did Col. John Shalikashvili, a Medical Corps officer, a political affairs officer, and others. The Chinese arranged a special program for the wives while their military officials arranged tours and meetings for the military staff.

The demonstration of a Chinese division on the attack impressed Morrell. He inspected their equipment, which he found obsolete, and talked to Chinese soldiers who showed little reluctance to speak their minds. Morrell conducted briefings on the role of the noncommissioned officer in the U.S. Army. He also visited a Chinese military academy, a field artillery school, several ships, and an air force base. He noted wryly that it was difficult to figure out who was in charge in Chinese military formations. They appeared to have no pattern of control, although the performance of Chinese counterterrorist teams impressed him greatly. Visits to the Great Wall and the Forbidden City added interest to the trip and a perspective on the Chinese culture.

As Sergeant Major of the Army, Glen Morrell of course participated in many social events and ceremonies. With other senior enlisted personnel, he met President Ronald Reagan at the interment of the Unknown Soldier of the Vietnam War and attended embassy affairs, congressional breakfasts and luncheons, as well as Memorial Day and Independence Day celebrations. The governor of West Virginia honored Sergeant Major Morrell, as did the Veterans of Foreign Wars. In turn, he presented many medals, certificates, and letters of commendation to enlisted soldiers.

Of all his accomplishments as Sergeant Major of the Army, Morrell felt that the most rewarding was "being able to do something for the good of the enlisted people and the non-commissioned officer corps." It was an honor

“being their representative to the Chief of Staff, the Department of the Army staff, the senior leaders in the Department of Defense, and at the congressional level.” Throughout his tenure, he stuck by his principles and “always treated people like I’d like to be treated.”

SMA Glen E. Morrell retired from active service on 30 June 1987. General Wickham attended the impressive ceremony at Fort Myer. The Old Guard honored Morrell with a

review conducted entirely by its noncommissioned officers. Morrell affirmed that the “American soldier...has been trained and has the desire to be the best that there is at whatever their job might be. They’ll go the extra mile time and time again if they are trained and provided excellent leadership.” Glen E. Morrell had served as an American soldier for thirty-three years.

Notes

1. Except as noted, this section is based on Interv, Erwin H. Koehler with Glen E. Morrell, 31 Mar 94, Port St. John, Fla.

2. At that time Army volunteers could enlist for service in specific units.

3. A bolo, technically a shot that completely missed the black bullseye on the firing range, was also the name given to a soldier who failed to make a passing grade in marksmanship. The term was often extended to cover any instance of failing to achieve a qualifying standard.

4. The meal, ready to eat (MRE), is a prepackaged field ration that replaced the combat ration (C-ration). The C-ration, which was canned and packaged in cardboard, was bulkier, but the MRE requires water for preparation. When water was scarce or hard to transport, the MRE caused logistical and morale problems. Tray rations are meals prepackaged on serving trays to be heated and served in field kitchens, much like airline food. Morrell felt that the initial problems with tray rations resulted from a lack of training in the proper use of the new equipment.

5. As Sergeant Major of the Army, Morrell tried to end the use of the 250-foot towers at Fort Benning. He felt too many soldiers were injured there.

6. The numbered and assigned career field to which each soldier was assigned and which, in part, determined promotion opportunities.

7. Although Morrell appreciated his promotion, he was frustrated by and confusing uniform change that occurred at nearly the same time. New pay grades were added and the rank structure was adjusted in such a way that Morrell found himself a rank higher wearing the same stripes.

8. College Level Examination Program (CLEP) tests were administered by a college board. Many colleges awarded undergraduate credit based upon a given score on any one of the several tests.

Assignments

1954–1957	Cannoneer, Forward Observer, Battery A, 319th Field Artillery, 82d Airborne Division, Fort Bragg, North Carolina
1958–1960	Squad Leader, Platoon Sergeant, Combat Support Company, 2d Battle Group, 6th Infantry, Berlin, Germany
1960–1961	Artillery Operations and Intelligence Sergeant, 14th Armored Cavalry Regiment, Fulda, Germany
1962–1963	Heavy Weapons Sergeant, Staff Sergeant, Company C, 5th Special Forces Group, Fort Bragg; Republic of Vietnam
1964–1965	Heavy Weapons Leader, Company B, 5th Special Forces Group, Republic of Vietnam
1965–1966	Heavy Weapons Instructor, Sergeant First Class, Special Forces Training Group, Fort Bragg, North Carolina
1967–1969	Heavy Weapons Leader, Company A, 8th Special Forces Group, Panama
1969–1970	Heavy Weapons Leader, Headquarters and Headquarters Company (HHC), 5th Special Forces Group, Republic of Vietnam
1970–1973	Operations Sergeant, Company B; Assistant Intelligence Sergeant, First Sergeant, HHC, 8th Special Forces Group; Intelligence Sergeant, Headquarters and Headquarters Detachment, 3d Special Forces Battalion, 7th Special Forces Group, Panama
1973	Student, Class #2, Sergeants Major Academy, Fort Bliss, Texas
1974–1976	First Sergeant, Company A, 1st Battalion, 2d Infantry; First Sergeant, HHC, 1st Infantry Division, Fort Riley, Kansas
1976–1977	Chief Instructor, Reserve Officer Training Corps Detachment, St. John's University, St. Cloud, Minnesota
1977–1979	Command Sergeant Major, 1st Ranger Battalion, 75th Infantry, Fort Stewart, Georgia
1979–1981	Command Sergeant Major, Special Forces Detachment (Abn), Europe, Bad Tölz, Germany
1981–1982	Command Sergeant Major, U.S. Army Recruiting Command, Fort Sheridan, Illinois
1982–1983	Command Sergeant Major, U.S. Army Forces Command, Fort McPherson, Georgia
1983–1987	Sergeant Major of the Army

Selected Decorations and Awards

Distinguished Service Medal
Meritorious Service Medal with Two Oak Leaf Clusters
Army Commendation Medal with Three Oak Leaf Clusters
Good Conduct Medal with Ten Oak Leaf Clusters
Army of Occupation Medal
National Defense Service Medal
Armed Forces Expeditionary Medal
Vietnam Service Medal
Overseas Service Ribbon
Army Service Ribbon
NCO Education Ribbon
Republic of Vietnam Campaign Medal
Combat Infantryman Badge
Ranger Tab
Master Parachutist Badge
Recruiter Badge



SMA Gates

Julius W. Gates

Born in the Piedmont region of North Carolina on 14 June 1941, Julius W. (Bill) Gates was the sixth of nine children.¹ With a farm to maintain, the Gates family “believed in hard work.” When Gates was eight years old, his father bought a service station and built a new home nearby. His family operated the service station and continued to work on the farm.

Gates attended grade school in Carrboro, North Carolina, and high school in Chapel Hill. School was a good experience, and the teachers maintained constructive professional relationships with the parents. They concentrated on the basics and made sure that each student had a firm foundation. In school, Gates’ best subjects were history and geography. Math was a real challenge. Gates loved sports, but family responsibilities prevented his involvement in team sports. At age sixteen he quit school and accepted employment as an assistant service manager with the local Ford dealer to help support his family.

After working at the dealership for a year and with his parents’ reluctant consent, Bill Gates enlisted in the Army on 12 August 1958. He was seventeen when he signed up for three years. “It’s what I always wanted to do,” he said. “I was influenced by people coming back from the Second World War....I was impressed by all the uniforms...when they came home.” His brother had served in the Pacific during World War II. Two of his uncles had served in the European theater, and one of them had participated in the D-day invasion at Normandy. A third uncle had served in the Korean War.

After initial processing at Raleigh, North Carolina, Gates reported to Fort Jackson, South Carolina, for further processing, basic training, and Advanced Individual Training (AIT). Gates spent a week and a half at the reception station, where he and his fellow recruits were administered tests, issued clothing, and given medical examinations. Restricted to the company area, the new recruits could not even visit the post exchange. “We pulled a lot of details....We found out what KP [kitchen police] was. In fact, we volunteered for KP, because everybody was saying how great it was. I never volunteered for it again.”

At the reception station, Gates and his fellow recruits listened to stories from the “old soldiers,” who themselves had been in the Army a month or less. The new men were told of the tough discipline and terrors of life on “Tank Hill” at Fort Jackson. Gates found some basis of truth in the stories when he reported to his basic training company. The trainees were “herded like cattle” and billeted in World War II-era, two-story, open-bay barracks with rows of double bunk beds. Successful completion of basic training required teamwork, Private Gates discovered. The eight weeks of training were not difficult for the future Sergeant Major of the Army, which he attributed to the way his parents raised him and the challenges associated with farm life.

The basic training cadre consisted of platoon sergeants rather than drill sergeants. The only distinctive part of their uniform was a helmet liner—there were no special patches, badges, or hats in those days. The cadre presented basic military subjects, such as physical training, drill and ceremonies, and proper fit and wear of

the uniforms. Committee group instructors taught the more technical skills, including marksmanship.

In basic training the day began at 0430, with “lights out” at 2200 hours. Gates remembered many of his fellow recruits’ working late in the latrine and under the fire lights. Training continued on the weekends with Saturday inspections and makeup training on both Saturday and Sunday. Trainees also were required to attend church services. Physical training consisted of the “daily dozen” standard exercises including the push-up, sit-up, and side straddle hop. Drill and ceremonies instruction began with the trainees’ learning to stand at attention, parade rest, and how, when, and whom to salute and progressed to marching drills in formation under arms.

Daily inspections were made of the trainees’ lockers, living area, and equipment. Gates and his fellow recruits had to buy a display for footlockers. The display had to have specific items, with specific name brands. They used the display items only for inspections. The experience left Gates with a strong distaste for discipline without purpose, a feeling that would influence him throughout his career. Like the instruction in drill and ceremonies, inspections were progressive: the individual, his area, his equipment, the barracks, and the company area. Except during inspections, Gates did not see the company commander or the first sergeant, although the executive officer spent a great deal of time with the troops.

During basic training in the 1950s, recruits qualified with the .30-caliber M1 rifle. They also underwent extensive chemical-biological-radiological (CBR) training, including a gas chamber exercise. The infiltration course, with live explosives, overhead machine-gun fire, and barbed wire, gave the recruits a convincing, memorable experience.

Plenty of food was available, although the trainees had to run into the mess hall and eat quickly. The food was different from the meals served today. Pork, beans, and potatoes were frequent staples, while in the field the trainees ate combat rations, which provided a constant

topic for discussion. “You were not allowed to waste any food,” Gates remembered. The old rule “Take all you want, eat all you take!” definitely applied. During the sixth week of basic training the trainees gained post privileges, which meant they could go to the post exchange and other on-post facilities. But the most important thing Gates earned at the completion of basic training was a title—“soldier.”

After basic training, Private Gates remained at Fort Jackson for eight weeks of infantry AIT. He learned to use the Browning automatic rifle, the 3.5-mm. rocket launcher, the 106-mm. recoilless rifle, the 81-mm. mortar, and the .30-caliber machine gun. The advanced trainees also learned about mines and land navigation as well as squad-level tactics and live-fire exercises, developing in the process a sense of team spirit. “We all had something in common, we were aspiring to become infantrymen.” Again, committee group instructors conducted most of the training.

Private Gates graduated from AIT in December 1958. He then shipped out to Fort Dix, New Jersey, en route to Germany to join the 3d Battle Group, 6th Infantry, in Berlin. It took fourteen days for Gates to reach Germany by ship, a voyage that seemed an eternity because he was on KP duty every day.

One of Gates’ first special assignments in Berlin was standing guard at Spandau Prison, where Nazi war criminals including Rudolf Hess and Albert Speer were still confined. Forces from the four victorious powers of World War II—the United States, Great Britain, France, and the Soviet Union—provided the prison guard detachments that rotated quarterly.

The city of Berlin was itself divided into sectors controlled by the four occupying powers and was a focal point of Cold War confrontation between East and West. Gates and his fellow soldiers toured Communist East Berlin, but there was a “sense of possible confrontation...a definite separation of the two sides.” When Soviet troops delayed an American military convoy at “Checkpoint Charlie” along the border, the West Berlin commander deployed his only company of tanks and threatened to fire on

the Soviets. "There was [a Soviet] army right there in East Germany, and that one company of tanks would have gotten sucked up in no time at all. But we fully intended to defend a part of that city," Gates recalled. Fortunately, the incident was resolved peacefully; but tensions remained high.

While stationed in Berlin, Gates served as a sniper, senior rifleman, and fire-team leader. Periodically, his unit would travel to the training areas in West Germany, such as Hohenfels, Grafenwöhr, or Wildflecken, for infantry tactical training. In Berlin, they spent a great deal of time preparing for parades. Gates remembered the annual Armed Forces Day parade in particular. "We rehearsed for the parade a hundred times. We were supposed to impress the Soviets, and we did."

Gates became a specialist fourth class and attended a local noncommissioned officer (NCO) academy, which taught leadership principles and the methods of presenting physical training, writing lesson plans, conducting dismounted drill, and presenting classes. The academy also featured map reading, which would grow in importance as the Vietnam War heated up. All things considered, however, Specialist Gates did not learn much at the school. "The academy was geared toward [polishing] the pipes in the shower room and spit shining floors and making them look like glass....The time that was wasted doing those things probably wasn't worthwhile. But those were the types of things that we learned more in the NCO academy in Berlin than anything else."

In comparison, the Third Army NCO Academy at Fort Jackson offered more meaningful classes and "hands-on" instruction. As a student platoon sergeant, Gates had to inspect barracks, write operation orders, conduct peer counseling, and prepare for and conduct training sessions. Gates proved to be an apt student and was selected as the Distinguished Honor Graduate of his class. As a sergeant, Gates would learn to appreciate the academies as "an opportunity...to see and talk to NCOs from the



Gates with His Jump Equipment

rest of the Army." Gates also made progress in his civilian education. On the advice of his platoon sergeant in Berlin, he successfully passed the General Educational Development (GED) tests and received a high school diploma.

At the end of his three-year enlistment, Gates left the Army and returned to his hometown. He resumed working for the Ford dealer but soon missed the Army. He had little in common with his old friends, many of whom had married or left the area. Shortly after his release from active duty, Gates reenlisted in the Army. "I made up my mind...to go all out and make the Army a career." Part of that resolve came from the opportunity to select airborne duty at Fort Campbell, Kentucky, for his next assignment, as Gates always appreciated a challenge.

In the early 1960s airborne volunteers went directly to airborne units, each of which conducted its own jump school. However, until the new recruits became jump qualified, they had to live apart from the rest of the unit to some extent. Nevertheless, assigned to the “Rakkasans” of the 3d Battle Group, 187th Infantry, Specialist Gates quickly became part of the 101st Airborne Division. After a week of attending a pre-airborne school, which focused on intensive physical training, he entered the division jump school. Airborne school at Fort Campbell was similar to the training at Fort Benning today, except that Fort Campbell did not have a 250-foot tower. Each airborne recruit had to make five qualifying jumps from C-119 airplanes. Within a month Gates received his jump wings.

Duty in the 101st Airborne Division left an “everlasting impression” on Gates. The senior noncommissioned officers were “colorful folks,” whose knowledge, experience, and judgment he came to respect highly. Many had served in World War II and Korea, and since the NCOs rotated back and forth between Fort Campbell and other airborne units in Okinawa and Germany, they were all well known to the soldiers of the 101st Airborne Division. The senior sergeants conducted tough, realistic training, which made their soldiers physically and mentally sharp.

The paratroopers developed a strong unit cohesiveness as a result of their shared danger, close acquaintance, and the fact that they had all volunteered for airborne duty. Unit cohesiveness was important to the division, which served as part of a quick-strike reaction force. During the domestic disturbances of the early 1960s, the 101st Airborne Division was deployed to several trouble spots within the United States. For example, when James Meredith, an African American, enrolled at the University of Mississippi, Gates’ unit provided security.

Elite troops like those of the 101st Airborne Division were beginning to take counterinsurgency training in the early 1960s. To hone operational readiness, Gates trained at Natchez Trace in Tennessee, in the swamps of Florida, and in

the Monongahela River valley of West Virginia. By the time he left Fort Campbell, he had made nearly seventy jumps and earned his “Master Wings.” Before his career was over, he would tally almost 300 jumps.

With his mind firmly fixed on making the Army his career, Gates took advantage of every opportunity to acquire new knowledge and skills. While he was stationed at Fort Campbell, he attended the Jumpmaster, Pathfinder, Aerial Delivery, Air Transportability, and CBR Schools. As part of his professional development, Sergeant Gates also attended the Army’s rigorous Ranger course. At the time, the 101st Airborne Division required its Ranger school candidates to first attend a two-week Reconnaissance-Commando (Recondo) school, “the toughest damn school I have ever been to in my life,” according to Gates. “They harassed the hell out of you, and they kept you in a total state of stress...the entire time you were there.” However, the discipline, patrolling, mountaineering, and survival training prepared the men for the Ranger school. The men who passed the division Recondo course “were those guys who could continue to put the left foot in front of the right, and continue to go, and react under the stressful situation.” The three-mile “Recondo march,” with full packs, was “the fastest march I have ever been on in my life.”

Ranger school was more of the same, with an even greater emphasis on teamwork. Ranger students learned to make terrain models, formulate operation orders, coordinate support, and lead patrols in difficult situations over tough terrain. They learned a variety of skills, from operating small boats to mountaineering. Gates’ tenacity paid off at the completion of Ranger school. Once again, he was selected as the class Distinguished Honor Graduate.

In 1965 Sergeant Gates returned to the 101st Airborne Division, where the division commander promoted him to staff sergeant and assigned him to the Recondo School as an instructor. During the summer months his duties included training cadets at Camp Buckner, West Point, New York. All of Gates’

experiences in the 101st Airborne Division paid significant dividends during his two tours in Vietnam, the first from 1966–1967 and the second in 1969–1970. Both times he went overseas as an individual replacement.

Gates served his first tour in Vietnam with Company B, 2d Battalion (Airborne), 502d Infantry, 101st Airborne Division. The battalion had deployed to the Central Highlands of Vietnam near Pleiku as part of the 101st Airborne Division's 1st Brigade. When Gates reported to the battalion's base camp at Phan Rang (south of Nha Trang, along the coast), he received a week of training. From there, he went to the field as a rifle squad leader. The 1st Brigade, 101st Airborne Division, was the reaction force for the I Field Force, covering the entire Central Highlands. Gates spent his first tour in Vietnam entirely in the field carrying out independent platoon search-and-destroy missions. However, "every couple of weeks we would...form a company perimeter [to] resupply...change clothes, and give the guys an opportunity to take a bath." During his first tour in Vietnam, the 502d made only one jump, a rehearsal for an operation that never materialized.

After about two weeks in country, Staff Sergeant Gates got his first taste of live combat, the "most dynamic thing that can happen to an individual." When the 95th Regiment of the North Vietnamese Army (NVA) attacked a Special Forces camp at Dak To, Gates' unit rushed to the scene. There was no time to think about the situation. He and his men simply fought as they had trained.

Morale was outstanding throughout his tour. The soldiers of the 502d Infantry were tough, well trained, and highly disciplined. Midway through his tour, Gates was wounded while leading his squad during an assault on an enemy base camp. He completed his first year of combat as a platoon sergeant and returned to the United States in the spring of 1967.

Promoted to sergeant first class, Gates served as an instructor in the Ranger Training Command at Fort Benning. His responsibilities included teaching basic subjects like hand-to-hand combat, bayonet training, land navigation,

physical training, forced marches, and basic patrolling techniques. He was the principal instructor for bayonet training and assistant principal instructor for land navigation.

While Gates was with the Ranger Training Command, he became the first American to attend the British Army Tactics School in South Wales. His attendance at the course paved the way for a future student exchange program. While there, he also made three parachute jumps from a balloon with the British parachute regiment. Meanwhile, Gates found time to complete the precommission correspondence course and the Infantry School instructor training course, in addition to serving as the Webelow leader for a local Cub Scout troop.

In January 1969 duty called Gates to Southeast Asia a second time. He reported to Company K of the 75th Infantry, the Ranger element of the 4th Infantry Division. As part of the I Field Force, Company K was based at Pleiku. "Our mission was to patrol within the area of operation, detect the enemy, and then report that information to the next higher headquarters." Operating primarily on the Cambodian border, the unit conducted surveillance, reconnaissance, targeting, and ambush operations. While there, he served as operations sergeant, first sergeant, and platoon sergeant.

Two operations during Gates' second tour in Vietnam stood out. During the first, six four-man Ranger teams from Gates' platoon went into the mountains of Pleiku. Their mission was to place surveillance on a suspected NVA infiltration route into the division's area of operations. The Rangers provided critical information about enemy movements that prevented a surprise attack on the division's base camp at Pleiku. The second operation, an area ambush between Pleiku and An Khe, resulted in the capture of a high-ranking North Vietnamese officer. Years later, Gates recalled with pride the conduct of American soldiers in Vietnam.

In 1970 Sergeant First Class Gates was posted to Germany directly from his second tour in Vietnam. He served three years with the

2d Battalion, 54th Infantry, 4th Armored Division, later redesignated the 1st Armored Division. Gates served for two years as the battalion S-2 Intelligence Officer, since there was a shortage of commissioned officers. He also served as battalion operations NCO. Although Gates was confronted with shortages in personnel, equipment, and spare parts; tense race relations; drug abuse cases; and the many difficulties incumbent to the transition to an all-volunteer Army, he had fond memories of that tour. The quarters were among the best he ever had, and his family accompanied him. He also took advantage of professional development opportunities by taking courses in combat intelligence, personnel, and physical security.

Upon his return from Germany in 1973, Gates reported to the Mountain Ranger Camp in the national forest at Dahlenega. He served as chief instructor of the patrolling committee, supervising instruction in patrolling and aggressor operations. He greatly admired the local residents, calling them "some of the finest people" he had ever met.

As an instructor, Gates accompanied extended patrols, complete with jumps into the cold winter weather and rugged terrain. While at the Mountain Ranger Camp, he also attended the Advanced Noncommissioned Officer Course at Fort Benning and graduated as the Distinguished Honor Graduate of his class.

In 1974 Gates was promoted to master sergeant and returned to Fort Benning as first sergeant of the 3d Ranger Company. After a year he moved to the Basic Noncommissioned Officer Course, also at Fort Benning, as the enlisted company commander. Gates spent many hours leading, training, and providing support for the students.

Gates knew that he would need an associate degree to maximize his career opportunities. He began taking college courses at night while attending the Advanced NCO Course during the day; later, he earned an Associate Degree from the Community College of El Paso while attending the Sergeants Major Academy. After he graduated from the academy, he continued

his education at the University of Maryland, majoring in management.

As a master sergeant, Gates attended the Sergeants Major Academy and graduated in January 1977. He regarded the academy experience as unique, since he was responsible only for himself and his family. The academy introduced its students to small-group instruction, a new idea in the Army. Gates particularly enjoyed associating closely with a wide variety of top NCO students, calling it a time to "see, hear, and experience working with NCOs from our Total Army." The academy emphasized the unique role of the non-commissioned officer as a leader who had to "get weapons to fire, equipment to work, soldiers properly trained, enforce standards and discipline, and take care of soldiers and families."

The academy was also family oriented. Many of the spouses developed leadership skills through peer instruction, work in family support centers, and volunteer work. Always a family man, Gates gained a new appreciation for the idea that "the more we get the spouses and families involved, the healthier the Army becomes." He saw more clearly that the work of spouses was vital to the preparation of soldiers for deployment. During contingency operations overseas, the spouses of senior soldiers increasingly gave valuable assistance to soldiers' families, often providing the working staff at family support facilities and operating family communications centers.

After graduation, Gates reported to Company A, 1st Ranger Battalion, 75th Infantry, at Fort Stewart, Georgia, and served as first sergeant. He spent most of his time training in the field and preparing for emergency deployments. Tough, realistic training took the men of the 1st Ranger Battalion to faraway places such as Panama, Alaska, and the Nevada desert. A typical practice emergency deployment mission would be planned and executed within twenty-four hours. Such a mission would include a lengthy flight, with in-flight rigging, a night jump, mission accomplishment, and return to home base. The men of the 1st Ranger Battalion were the "best sol-

diers in the world,” men of exceptionally high physical, mental, and emotional standards reflected in their total commitment to accomplishing their mission. Many of the officers and noncommissioned officers who served in the 1st Ranger Battalion went on to serve with distinction at higher levels of responsibility in the Army. Many were promoted to general officer or command sergeant major.

Gates was selected to organize the newly developed 24th Infantry Division Noncommissioned Officers Academy and to serve as its first commandant. Building the organization from the “ground, up” was a tough and rewarding experience that gave him an appreciation of the quality, capability, and high performance standards expected of the Noncommissioned Officer Corps.

In 1978 Gates was promoted to sergeant major and shortly afterward began a two-year assignment with the Army Reserve Officer Training Corps (ROTC) staff at the Virginia Military Institute (VMI). It was a unique experience for Gates, the chief instructor. The institute had a Ranger platoon and a tank platoon equipped with M48 tanks. Gates trained the cadets in individual, squad, and platoon tasks and accompanied them during summer training at Fort Bragg, North Carolina. Service at VMI was “not the real Army,” and he longed for an assignment with soldiers. He received his promotion to command sergeant major in 1979 while serving at VMI.

In 1980 Gates reported to the 2d Battalion (Mechanized), 50th Infantry, 2d Armored Division (Forward), in Garlstadt, Germany. He served as battalion sergeant major and later as the sergeant major of the 2d Armored Division (Forward) Separate Brigade Task Force. He found in Garlstadt good soldier support facilities and “the best soldier and family housing in all of Europe.”

The missions of the 2d Armored Division (Forward) included preparing for the deployment of the rest of the division from Fort Hood, Texas, and preparing to fight as a separate brigade working with the North Atlantic Treaty

Organization (NATO) allies. Division personnel also assisted with the pre-positioning of materiel in southern Germany. Command Sergeant Major Gates’ “time was almost totally occupied training soldiers.” Elements of the division rotated through the Hohenfels training site, at one point remaining there nearly ninety days. They also trained in Denmark and Belgium and participated in the annual REFORGER exercises.²

After serving three years in the brigade, Gates was selected as the 3d Infantry Division’s command sergeant major, which required another family move, this time to Würzburg. While assigned to the 3d Infantry Division, Sergeant Major Gates spearheaded the effort to refurbish its NCO academy. With the introduction of new equipment such as the Abrams tank, the Bradley fighting vehicle, computers, and the tactical artillery fire control system, NCO education and capabilities took on new importance. Realizing the need for unit-duty-performance-oriented NCO training, Gates assisted his commander in producing an NCO development program that would later become the Army’s model.

From Germany, Gates returned to the Sergeants Major Academy in 1984. As the school’s command sergeant major, he worked closely with its commandant, Col. Fitzhugh H. Chandler, Jr. Although this tour at the academy lasted less than a year, it gave Gates the opportunity to influence NCO training policies throughout the Army. Among his projects at the academy were the further development of the common core subjects for the basic and advanced courses and construction of the new academic building. Although he attempted to keep his travel time to a minimum, he visited both the Command and General Staff College (CGSG) at Fort Leavenworth, Kansas, and the Army War College at Carlisle Barracks, Pennsylvania, to explain the academy’s programs and the role of command sergeants major in supporting and assisting commanders.

In addition, Command Sergeant Major Gates worked through the Fort Bliss chain of command to have constructed a new gym and



CSM Gates in the 2d Armored Division
(Forward) in Germany

additional housing for the academy students. Foreign students also began to attend the academy during this period: NCOs from the armed forces of the Philippines, Italy, and Great Britain came to the academy either as students or as supplementary staff. Meanwhile, Gates' wife Margaret administered the academy spouse program. She championed the acquisition of a permanent facility for spouse and community activities, and she initiated an informational exchange program between CGSC and Sergeants Major Academy spouses.

Gates' selection as command sergeant major of Eighth Army and U.S. Forces, Korea, came in May 1985. Accompanied by his family, he saw firsthand the problems facing the American

forces there. From the command headquarters at Yong Son, Gates worked to improve the training of both U.S. and Korean forces. During his tenure, the Republic of Korea established an NCO academy system and began sending non-commissioned officers to the United States for training. In addition, Gates assisted in the development of the new Noncommissioned Officer Evaluation Report and spearheaded the needed renovations of the Eighth Army NCO Academy. He was also instrumental in making sure that the airborne-qualified soldiers of the Aviation Brigade's Pathfinder Detachment received jump pay.

The presence of unsponsored family members caused problems for the American forces in Korea. In addition to the financial burdens they imposed on the soldiers, Gates found that available quarters and schools were often inadequate, with some U.S. troops still living in unheated Quonset huts. As the command sergeant major, Gates worked hard to have more soldier barracks and recreation facilities built. He established throughout the command additional soldier programs, such as the Soldier of the Quarter program, supported by the Association of the United States Army. Gates' wife worked with other spouses and the chain of command to improve conditions at a local orphanage. Despite the sometimes-harsh living conditions, "the soldiers' morale and esprit de corps were outstanding."

Near the end of his tour in Korea, Command Sergeant Major Gates requested reassignment to the Joint Readiness Training Center (JRTC) at Fort Chaffee, Arkansas. Instead, he found that he was one of thirty candidates for the position of Sergeant Major of the Army. With a selection board consisting of a lieutenant general, four major generals, and incumbent SMA Glen E. Morrell, the field narrowed quickly.

The board asked Gates a wide variety of questions about Army priorities and policy issues such as the role of women in the Army. They gave particular concern to family issues and asked for his opinion about his wife's role.



SMA Gates (*top right*) and Chief of Staff Carl E. Vuono (*top, second from right*) with Troops in the Field

True to his usual course, Command Sergeant Major Gates told the selection board that he thought the top priority of the Army should be training. “That means everybody training, regardless of what their MOS is...for their war-time mission.” When they asked Gates what he thought his duties would be, he replied, “I think [most of] the Sergeant Major of the Army’s job is to keep the Chief of Staff informed about the enlisted perspective of the Army, and let him know what soldiers feel, or believe, or how they perceive different programs and policies...at the canteen-cup level.” Chief of Staff General Carl E. Vuono agreed with Gates and endorsed his selection as Sergeant Major of the Army four days later.

The next four years proved busy for the new Sergeant Major of the Army. As Gates met the demands of office calls by the Secretary of the

Army and other high-level officials, serving on the General Staff, and attending hundreds of meetings and functions, he found that his “greatest challenge” was keeping in touch with unit soldiers and providing soldier feedback to General Vuono and the Army Staff.

Visiting Army installations throughout the world was one way of taking the Army’s pulse. As Sergeant Major of the Army, Gates visited sites ranging from small radio communications stations in Germany to troop elements stationed in remote Pacific islands. He attempted to visit every division and major command annually as well as to address every class at the Sergeants Major Academy. He also visited every NATO REFORGER exercise, all TEAM SPIRIT maneuvers in Korea, and made many trips to the National Training Center (NTC) at Fort Irwin, California, JRTC, and National Guard

and Reserve training sites. In addition, Gates participated in the observance of the forty-fifth anniversary of the D-day invasion and often traveled with the Chief of Staff. He later estimated that he spent only about 20 percent of his time in his Pentagon office. During his tenure as Sergeant Major of the Army, Gates served on twenty-seven boards and commissions ranging from the Army and Air Force Exchange Service board of directors to the Army Clothing and Equipment Board. He testified annually before three congressional committees and made countless media releases, both live and written. On one occasion, President George H. W. Bush invited Sergeant Major and Mrs. Gates to attend a dinner honoring the queen of Denmark at the White House.

The wife of the Sergeant Major of the Army had an important role in supporting her husband's career. Gates had married Margaret Wilson on 13 June 1964. A native of Pontotoc, Mississippi, Margaret had grown up in a farm family similar to her husband's. The couple began their married life in a trailer, experienced the full range of military quarters, and once had to live in a twenty-foot camper for nearly six months with two children and a dog. Their two daughters, Melissa and Laura, also endured their father's long separations and abrupt transfers and sometimes had to take intercontinental flights to attend school. While Sergeant Major Gates believed such experiences built self-confidence in his family, they also made him acutely aware of the strains that the families of soldiers faced.

Margaret Gates worked hard as an "extension" of her husband's office. Since the number of families in the Army had vastly increased since 1958, she recognized early on the importance of family support. As she had in Germany, Korea, and the United States, Mrs. Gates continued working to improve childcare centers, hospitals, support centers, and schools for military personnel and their families. She was involved with selecting talent for the Soldier Show and served on numerous boards and commissions in support of Army families. She took the greatest pride, however, in helping to orga-

nize Fisher House, a national network of non-profit "homes away from home" designed to provide on-site accommodations for families with a family member in a hospital.

While Bill Gates was Sergeant Major of the Army, world events moved rapidly. During his term of office the Berlin Wall came down and the Communist governments of Eastern Europe collapsed. In the fall of 1989 Gates accompanied the Chief of Staff on a visit to the Soviet Union. He toured the Kremlin, as well as several major cities and military training sites. He watched as Soviet officers using American computers war-gamed an assault on Western Europe. As he observed the Soviet Army, however, Gates was not always impressed, in part because the Soviets did not have a professional NCO corps and could not understand the role of the American noncommissioned officer.

The visit to the Soviet Union abruptly ended when the Chief of Staff returned to Washington to help plan for Operation JUST CAUSE in Panama. Gates spent Christmas 1989 with the troops in Panama. "The soldiers who were required to fight and win Operation JUST CAUSE were highly trained, disciplined, and motivated to do what was right, and they did a great job." His foreign travel with the Chief of Staff also included a tour of the Middle East, where they visited Egypt, Jordan, Saudi Arabia, Israel, and U.S. troops in the Sinai Desert. During Operations DESERT SHIELD and DESERT STORM, Gates visited Southwest Asia three times and spent Christmas 1990 with the troops in Saudi Arabia. With information gathered on those trips, he helped solve problems concerning replacement centers, post exchange services, and soldier mail.

Despite the extensive travel Gates undertook as Sergeant Major of the Army, he had time to improve training, enhance the status of the NCO, and improve the quality of life for soldiers. As a member of the Uniform Board, he influenced more than 150 minor uniform changes including the introduction of desert boots and a belted overcoat with improved styling. He was also instrumental in ensuring that a bottle of hot sauce was



General Vuono and SMA Gates with a Young Soviet Soldier

included in all Meals, Ready to Eat (MREs). Though seemingly minor, these changes were often exceedingly important to average soldiers. Also introduced during Gates' tenure was the Army Communities of Excellence (ACOE) program, designed to encourage soldiers to help themselves by making facility improvements that otherwise would not have been possible. His concern for single soldiers caused the establishment of the Better Opportunities for Single Soldiers (BOSS) program as well.

To Gates, however, training remained the Army's critical issue. "Making training the number one priority in the Army...had a lot to do with pulling the Army together, and causing us to focus on our wartime tasks." The NCO Battle Staff Course, the Command Sergeant Major Designee Course, a new NCO Evaluation Report, and the self-development test (a replacement for the Skill Qualification Test) were firmly established during Gates' tenure. Working closely with General Vuono, Gates assisted with

the success of the Year of Training followed by the Year of the NCO. Sergeant Major Gates believed that a strong NCO Corps was critical for a strong Army.

He regarded with pride the many accomplishments made during his term of office, including the first NCO historical volume and the introduction of Army Field Manual 21-101, defining the training role of the noncommissioned officer.³ He also admired General Vuono and the general's support for NCO training. With Vuono's total support, Gates launched the *NCO Journal* as an official publication. At the same time, he recognized that the time had come to "build the Army of the future, and make it a smaller, more deployable, more lethal, better trained, and better equipped Army." To that end, Gates closely followed the introduction of new technology, training techniques, the changing roles of women, the assurance of equal opportunity, and the systematic reduction in force. He called for additional efforts to assist

soldiers leaving the Army prior to their normal retirement. His efforts and concern resulted in the establishment of the Army Career and Alumni Program.

Near the end of Gates' tenure, he was asked to comment about his most difficult and most rewarding experiences: "My most difficult experiences were seeing our great soldiers committed to combat...visiting our wounded and injured in medical facilities...and attending memorial services for our fallen soldiers... seeing the pride on the faces of our soldiers returning safely home from war in Panama and the Middle East...and seeing my wife survive heart surgery were, beyond a doubt, my most pleasant experiences."

Sergeant Major of the Army Julius W. Gates retired with an impressive ceremony at

Fort Myer on 30 June 1991. He used even that opportunity to enhance the prestige of noncommissioned officers. As had several of his predecessors, he saw to it that the ceremony, with the Chief of Staff and other dignitaries attending, was carried out entirely by the noncommissioned officers of the Old Guard. True to his form of placing soldiers before himself and showing pride, affection, and admiration for soldiers who serve in the ranks, Gates remarked during his retirement address that he hoped the audience had come to see examples of the best trained, best equipped, best led, and best soldiers in the world instead of to see an old soldier retire from the Army. "On the field in front of you are your nation's finest, your soldiers. Thank you for allowing me the opportunity to serve in the ranks with them."

Notes

1. Except as noted, this section is based on Interv, Erwin H. Koehler with Julius W. Gates, 24 Mar 94, Huntingdon, Tenn.

2. Return of Forces to Germany, large-scale military exercises intended to demonstrate the capability to reinforce NATO with forces based in the United States.

3. Department of the Army, Field Manual 22-102, *Soldier Team Development* (Washington, D.C.: Department of the Army, 1987).

Assignments

- 1958–1961 Rifleman, Sniper, Fire Team Leader, Company A, 3d Battle Group, 6th Infantry, Berlin, Germany (break in service)
- 1961–1966 Rifle Squad Leader, Company A, 3d Battalion (Airborne), 187th Infantry, 101st Airborne Division, Fort Campbell, Kentucky
- 1966–1967 Rifle Squad Leader, Company B, 2d Battalion (Airborne), 502d Infantry, 101st Airborne Division, Republic of Vietnam
- 1967–1968 Platoon Sergeant, Instructor, Ranger Training Command, Fort Benning, Georgia
- 1969–1970 Operations Sergeant, Platoon Sergeant, First Sergeant, Company K, 75th Infantry, 4th Infantry Division, Republic of Vietnam
- 1970–1973 Battalion Intelligence Officer and Battalion Operations Sergeant, 2d Battalion, 54th Infantry, 1st Armored Division, Germany
- 1973–1974 Chief Instructor, Ranger Training Command, Dahlonge, Georgia
- 1974–1975 First Sergeant, 3d Ranger Company, Ranger Department, Fort Benning, Georgia
- 1975–1976 Enlisted Company Commander, Basic NCO Course, Fort Benning, Georgia
- 1976–1977 Student, Sergeants Major Academy, Fort Bliss, Texas
- 1977–1978 First Sergeant, Company A, 1st Ranger Battalion, 75th Infantry, Fort Stewart, Georgia
- 1978 Commandant, Noncommissioned Officers Academy, 24th Infantry Division, Fort Stewart, Georgia
- 1978–1980 Chief Instructor, ROTC Detachment, Virginia Military Institute, Lexington, Virginia
- 1980–1982 Command Sergeant Major, 2d Battalion, 50th Infantry, 2d Armored Division (Forward), Garlstadt, Germany; Würzburg, Germany
- 1982–1983 Command Sergeant Major, 2d Armored Division (Forward) Separate Brigade Task Force, Garlstadt, Germany
- 1983–1984 Command Sergeant Major, 3d Infantry Division, Würzburg, Germany
- 1984–1985 Command Sergeant Major, U.S. Army Sergeants Major Academy, Fort Bliss, Texas
- 1985–1987 Command Sergeant Major, U.S. Forces Korea/Eighth U.S. Army, Yong Son, Republic of Korea
- 1987–1991 Sergeant Major of the Army

Selected Decorations and Awards

- | | |
|---|---|
| <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Distinguished Service Medal Defense Superior Service Medal Legion of Merit Bronze Star Medal with V Device and Three Oak Leaf Clusters Purple Heart Defense Meritorious Service Medal Meritorious Service Medal with Four Oak Leaf Clusters Air Medal Army Commendation Medal with Three Oak Leaf Clusters Army Achievement Medal Good Conduct Medal with Ten Oak Leaf Clusters | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Army of Occupation Medal National Defense Service Medal with Service Star Vietnam Service Medal NCO Professional Development Ribbon Army Service Ribbon Overseas Service Ribbon Republic of Vietnam Campaign Medal Combat Infantryman Badge Ranger Tab Master Parachutists Badge Army Staff Badge |
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SMA Kidd

Richard A. Kidd

Richard A. Kidd, the second of five children, was born into a military family in Morehead, Kentucky, on 24 June 1943. His father, Samuel D. Kidd, had served in the infantry in World War II when his National Guard unit was called to federal service. Shortly after leaving the Army at the end of the war, Kidd's father returned to active service in the administrative field and, after serving over twenty-eight years, retired as a chief warrant officer. As an Army family member, Kidd lived at posts in many different places throughout the United States as well as Nürnberg, Würzburg, and Schweinfurt in Germany.

Although his father never stressed the military as a potential career for his children, Kidd remembers his parents teaching him things that were instrumental to his later success in the Army, especially discipline, belief in God, and frankness and honesty. While growing up at home, he also learned the importance of committing to do a job properly. "My parents were firm believers in 'if it's worth doing, it's worth doing well.'"

Kidd was an avid athlete. Although he was good enough to be on the school basketball, baseball, and wrestling teams and even boxed in Golden Glove competitions for a short period, he most enjoyed the challenge of playing football. As both a running back and a defensive linebacker, he learned from football, above all the other sports he knew, the value of teamwork. "As

This section is based on Intervs, Mark F. Gillespie with Richard A. Kidd, 1 Sep 94, and Glen R. Hawkins with Richard A. Kidd, 23 Feb 93, Washington, D.C.; Mark Kalinoski, "Straight from the Top," *Soldiers* 48 (June 1993):21-23.

a running back, especially, you learn that you don't go anywhere without the rest of the team." This lesson would pay great dividends when he traded in his football jersey for Army fatigues.

As a student, Kidd's favorite subject was mathematics. He also found history a fascinating field of study when taught by a teacher who made the subject "come alive." Although he did not go on to earn a college degree immediately after attending high school, Kidd accumulated college credits at various times throughout his later years and earned both Associate and Bachelor degrees in Science.

Kidd was no stranger to hard work. In addition to chores at home, his studies, and athletic activities during the school year, he ran a thriving paper route and worked at the post swimming pool and bowling alley during summer vacations. The future Sergeant Major of the Army (SMA) also achieved considerable acclaim working at the local Army post exchange as one of its youngest branch managers and even considered a career with the Army and Air Force Exchange Service (AAFES). However, with the draft a reality in the early 1960s, he decided to get his military obligation behind him to allow continued upward mobility with AAFES without interruption. He therefore chose to join the Army for a three-year enlistment, which at the time would fulfill his entire military obligation.

With the full intention of staying in uniform for only three years, Kidd left his home in Arlington, Virginia, and was sworn into active service at Fort Holabird, Maryland, on 30 March 1962. As a private, he attended basic training at Fort Gordon, Georgia, and was



Kidd in Basic Training, Fort Benning, Georgia, 1962

shocked at two things about the Army—how much he liked the challenge and how little privacy was afforded to the basic trainees. Kidd's upbringing helped him to make an almost natural adjustment to military life, such as saying "yes, sir" and "no, sir," keeping physically fit, and maintaining a short haircut, "but even all my playing sports in high school didn't prepare me for the lack of privacy I encountered in basic training such as rows of toilets in the open without stalls. We've really come a long way since then with respect to improving the living conditions and privacy for soldiers."

The cadre at Fort Gordon quickly noticed substantial leadership potential in the new private. He rapidly gained positions of responsibility within his platoon and was asked to take the Officer Candidate Test, which he passed. His cadre strongly recommended he appear before the Officer Candidate School review board, but Kidd declined the offer because it incurred an obligation exceeding three years.

The professionalism of the drill sergeants Kidd encountered in basic training made a lasting impression on him. "They were good role models with positive attitudes and gave plenty of encouragement." The training "was realistic, well presented, and kept you challenged." Although he never had to do KP (kitchen police) duty as a punishment during basic training, Kidd recalled having to do his fair share of peeling potatoes, washing dishes, serving food, and so forth, from dawn to dusk. "It was a learning experience that was very humbling. There are times I think it ought to be brought back as something that brings you into total touch with reality."

Upon enlisting, Kidd had wanted to be in the Special Forces. However, since one had to be at least a sergeant to join the Green Berets, he sought airborne and infantry training as these seemed the most challenging alternatives. Because he was only assured of one choice, he opted for airborne training, on the assumption that infantry would be easier to obtain later. That assumption proved wrong when Kidd was slated to become a radio repairman instead of a combat infantryman when he moved to Fort Benning, Georgia, in June 1962 for Advanced Individual Training (AIT). After arriving at Fort Benning, he requested to talk to his new company commander about transferring into infantry training. The company commander told him it was indeed possible, but that he would have to wait a few months until a slot opened. When Kidd asked what he would be doing in the meantime, he learned he would "pull KP and other details." Thereupon he decided it was better to be a radio repairman "communicator." In retrospect, Kidd found his decision to have been sound because the Army expects its combat units to be able to "move, shoot, and communicate." His early training in the communications field enabled him to thoroughly understand the last of those key tasks.

After AIT, airborne school proved especially challenging for Kidd because of his fear of heights. "I wanted to pit myself against the toughest challenges and push to overcome those things that I considered weaknesses." Although



Kidd (*right*), as a Young Soldier, Ready to Jump in Germany, 1963

he dreaded heights, he learned to control his fear. Later in his career, he even took military free-fall training, commonly referred to as HALO (High Altitude, Low Opening), as well as mountain climbing.

Kidd never informed his parents about his airborne training until after he had completed four of the five jumps required to qualify as a military parachutist. He enjoys telling that when he at last called home to relate his airborne experiences, his mother, Mona P. Kidd, nearly fainted and had to sit down. Kidd had injured his leg on the fourth jump but wanted to graduate with his buddies so badly that he made his fifth jump on the bad leg. After graduation, he was hospitalized.

In November 1962, after leaving the hospital, Kidd went to his first troop assignment

in Mainz, Germany, as a radio maintenance specialist in the 504th Infantry, “Devils in Baggy Pants,” the airborne element of the 8th Infantry Division. The previous month had seen Cold War tensions escalate to the brink of open conflict during the Cuban Missile Crisis, and units stationed in Germany were on constant alert.

Kidd’s first day with the 8th Infantry Division provided him with a valuable lesson on soldier morale. Upon arriving at the front gate of the post wearing the hard-earned hallmarks of airborne soldiers—glider patches on their garrison caps and trousers bloused over jump boots—he and two other airborne-qualified soldiers were shocked and dismayed at being informed of the division commander’s policy forbidding such wear. Kidd’s spirits, along with



Kidd at a Temporary Base Camp in Pleiku,
Republic of Vietnam, 1966

those of his fellow paratroopers, were soon lifted when the division commander's replacement flew down to Mainz one morning and announced to the assembled troops that henceforth airborne soldiers could wear their distinctive patches and jump boots. He endeared himself even further with the enlisted men by ordering all troops to be dismissed for the rest of the day, much to the consternation of the company commanders and first sergeants.

Kidd rapidly advanced through various positions in the communications field while stationed at Mainz and ended his European tour in December 1965 as a sergeant and the

chief of radio maintenance for his battalion. During his assignment in Germany he encountered the first leader who would set him on the path to an Army career spanning more than thirty-three years. Sgt. Leo Santerre, a young platoon sergeant, epitomized the successful noncommissioned officer (NCO). He looked sharp and was competent, confident, caring, physically fit, mentally alert, morally straight, and dedicated.

While still stationed in Germany, Kidd volunteered several times for duty in Vietnam, which by then had become an active combat theater, but his requests were always denied. Instead, he was given orders to report to the 82d Airborne Division at Fort Bragg, North Carolina. During this tour of duty Kidd met his future bride, Sylvia E. J. Gooch. Her father, also a military man, was stationed in Heilbronn, Germany, where Kidd's father was stationed. They became

engaged and set a marriage date for immediately upon Kidd's return from Vietnam, since he was still determined to get his orders changed.

En route to his new post, Kidd stopped at the Pentagon personnel office to find out how he could land a combat assignment in Vietnam. The personnel officer asked him which unit he preferred. Upon hearing Kidd's reply of "173d Airborne," the officer disappeared into a back room for a few minutes and returned with the news, "Sergeant, you're on your way!" Although his new orders assigned him to the 173d Airborne, by the time he actually got to a troop unit in Vietnam in January 1966, he had been diverted first to the 101st Airborne Division and finally to Company C, 2d Battalion, 5th

Cavalry, a nonairborne infantry company in the 1st Cavalry Division.

Although initially requesting reassignment to the division's airborne brigade, Kidd later regarded himself fortunate for having stayed in the "Cav" and "Charlie" Company. There he met Capt. Charles H. Fry, his company commander, who became the second major force in convincing him to make the Army a career: "If you want to be part of a professional Army and you and the other good NCOs we have are willing to stick it out, you can help make a difference in the quality of tomorrow's Army."

Although assigned as the company's communications chief, Kidd longed to serve as an infantryman. Captain Fry gave him that opportunity on the condition he also fulfill his communications responsibilities. Kidd accepted, serving admirably first as a squad leader and later, after promotion to staff sergeant, as a platoon sergeant in combat. His combat tour was only briefly interrupted by a short stay in a hospital in Japan to recover from malaria and an infection caused by an only partially effective Viet Cong booby trap.

Before Kidd finished his year of duty in Vietnam, Captain Fry recommended him for a direct commission as a first lieutenant. Although the division headquarters approved the commission, the approval arrived as Kidd was en route to the 82d Airborne Division at Fort Bragg. Because direct commissions had to be approved and given by the division to which the soldier was assigned, the recommendation package had to be forwarded to Fort Bragg. Although the package arrived intact, a few additional prerequisites had to be fulfilled. Then, mysteriously, half of the package was lost and had to be restarted. By then, however, Kidd felt it was not meant to happen and had decided to discontinue pursuing the matter. He later acknowledged this as a stroke of luck because many of those who received direct commissions were involuntarily forced out of the service or returned to their former enlisted ranks during the massive reductions in force after the Vietnam War. Moreover, he would not have been eligible

for the post of Sergeant Major of the Army, since any commissioned service now disqualifies one from consideration.

As planned, Kidd married Sylvia in Olympia, Washington, immediately upon his return from Vietnam in January 1967. Three weeks later, they arrived at Fort Bragg, where he began working as the wire foreman in the 82d Airborne Division's 3d Battalion, 325th Infantry. But after Captain Fry inspired him to stay on active duty beyond his initial enlistment and since he had the opportunity to serve as a combat leader in Vietnam, Kidd was anxious to transfer into the Special Forces, the organization he had originally sought to join. Several months later he finally managed to break through the bureaucratic barriers and entered the rigorous Green Beret training program.

To become fully qualified in Special Forces in that era, a soldier had to pass a basic Special Forces training course and then master three of the five Special Forces military occupational specialties. Kidd's communications specialty counted as one of them. With his combat experience and strong determination to overcome challenges, Kidd excelled in all phases of Special Forces training and graduated as the Distinguished Honor Graduate. He was also the Distinguished Honor Graduate of the light weapons course that qualified him for another of his three required specialties. In 1969 he attended the Operations and Intelligence courses at Fort Bragg and Fort Holabird. At Fort Bragg, the Kidds' first child, daughter Shelly, was born in June 1970. Kidd received orders to return to Vietnam in November 1970 and found himself serving there during the same period as his father.

This time, Kidd found himself working as a light weapons infantry adviser with South Vietnamese units as part of a MACV five-man mobile advisory team. He was quite surprised at how much had changed since his last tour, especially regarding the sharp increase in restrictions on how, when, and where the enemy could be confronted, which later became known as the rules of engagement.



Kidd as First Sergeant of Company B, 1st Battalion, 32d Infantry "Buccaneers," at Camp Howze, Korea, 1977

He also perceived deterioration in the professionalism and performance of American forces in the field during operations. In one instance, an American infantry company was assigned to cooperate with the South Vietnamese force he was advising in setting up a night ambush. Late that night, Kidd first checked the Vietnamese soldiers, who appeared alert, and then went to check on the Americans. He was appalled to find most of them asleep with the unmistakable odor of marijuana smoke wafting from their position. "We took corrective actions to ensure the safety of the force and requested no further joint operations with that particular unit." As did many soldiers who returned to Vietnam in the early 1970s for a second or third tour, Kidd recalled that during his first tour in 1966–1967, the attitude of the soldiers was gen-

erally much more idealistic and drug use was virtually nonexistent.

Kidd's next station was with the U.S. Army Advisory Group, Fifth Army, at Fort Sheridan, Illinois, as the senior enlisted adviser to the Army National Guard and Army Reserve in the region. While there, he was sent to Fort Benning, Georgia, to attend the Advanced NCO Course in September 1972. Kidd continued his tradition of academic excellence by being an honor graduate, missing the award of Distinguished Honor Graduate by only a fraction of a point. Upon his return from the professional development course, he continued his duties as a senior enlisted adviser. The Kidds' second child, son Ryan, was born in September 1974 in Appleton, Wisconsin. During his tour, Kidd was also selected for promotion to master

sergeant and for immediate attendance at the U.S. Army Sergeants Major Academy (USASMA) in Fort Bliss, Texas.

He attended Class 8 at USASMA in 1976–1977 and first met his predecessor, SMA Bill Gates, as a fellow student. Despite his best efforts to return to Fort Bragg and the Special Forces after graduating from the Sergeants Major Academy, Kidd was given orders to Korea with a follow-on assignment to Fort Lewis, Washington. The posting to Fort Lewis after Korea came as a surprise because “I put it down as one of my preferences at the urging of my wife, Sylvia, fully expecting not to be given any of my choices.”

Kidd began his tour in Korea in February 1977 and reported for duty with the 1st Battalion, 32d Infantry (“Buccaneers”), at Camp Howze. His new battalion commander, Lt. Col. Stephen Silvasy, appeared enthusiastic about obtaining an academy graduate and informed him to be prepared to be an intelligence sergeant, an operations sergeant, and one of his company first sergeants. When Kidd asked him which assignment to be ready for first, Silvasy replied, “All three!” In reality, Kidd started as the intelligence NCO but soon had to replace the outgoing operations NCO while still keeping the intelligence section functioning.

Two months later, a first sergeant was relieved and Master Sergeant Kidd became his replacement. Kidd quickly found the cause of his predecessor’s downfall: The former first sergeant had been micromanaging his platoon sergeants. This became apparent at Kidd’s first meeting with the platoon sergeants to go over the weekly training and routine taskings. At first they all wanted to find out exactly how he wanted them to accomplish their missions. “You’re the platoon sergeants,” Kidd replied. “If I have to tell you how to do your job, I don’t need you.” He swiftly instituted a system of issuing tasks and missions and letting the NCOs take full advantage of their experience and initiative to accomplish them—letting people do what they were trained to do.

Additional morale problems in the company stemmed from the former first sergeant’s holding the company to more restrictive rules than he himself had followed regarding Korean nationals visiting the camp. Moreover, the KATUSA (Korean Augmentation To United States Army) reinforcements were not being properly integrated into the company to receive their training. Kidd announced that “the same rules applied for everybody” and set about integrating the Koreans into the company. Although the KATUSA issue was more difficult to solve, the new first sergeant’s leadership had a major part in curing the company’s ills. Soon the company was passing IG inspections and winning division-wide sports and military skills proficiency competitions with regularity. “Teamwork gets it done every time.”

In March 1978 Kidd returned to Fort Lewis as first sergeant of the “Can Do” Combat Support Company in the 2d Battalion, 1st Infantry Regiment (“Always First”), 9th Infantry Division (“Old Reliables”), commanded by Capt. Charles Moore. Proving that even good first sergeants can make an occasional unintended mistake, Kidd started off his first morning’s PT formation almost literally on the wrong foot. He had arrived at Fort Lewis shortly after the switch had been made from wearing combat boots to athletic shoes as the required footwear for physical training (PT). Upon seeing the company in formation for the morning’s exercise in such informal footwear, he had the company return to the barracks to put on their combat boots. No one apparently had the presence of mind to inform the new first sergeant of the change; thus everyone returned to formation in combat boots. The company then proceeded to do exercises and a company run in the prohibited footwear. Only later in the day did a fellow first sergeant telephone him about the new rule. Kidd’s strong leadership and experience overcame the mishap, and soon the company gained a reputation as the best in the division, the one through which distinguished visitors to the battalion, brigade, division, and even the post were regularly escorted to make a favorable impression.

While at Lewis, Kidd was selected for promotion to sergeant major and designated as a command sergeant major (CSM). Despite his background in infantry and Special Forces, he was summoned to an interview with the commander of the division's aviation battalion, Lt. Col. Dean Owen. When it became obvious that the battalion commander was briefing on his goals and vision for the battalion rather than conducting an interview, Kidd stated that the battalion CSM should be the most knowledgeable NCO in his unit. He protested that he was not qualified in aviation and therefore not qualified to hold such a position. The battalion commander countered that he needed Kidd's experience and leadership skills as an NCO—the battalion was already strong in technical expertise. The division CSM ultimately encouraged Kidd to take on the challenge, and he accepted the assignment.

Although he initially considered his lack of knowledge about aviation a disadvantage, Kidd later termed the job “one of the greatest learning experiences for me, especially working with pilots and aviation warrant officers.” The vexing issues he eventually solved included getting everyone into the same uniform for formations and finding time and motivation for physical training. “I wasn't very popular with a lot of them because of that.”

This was also Kidd's first assignment to a unit with female soldiers. He candidly admitted his lack of experience and his need to become more familiar with the rules that applied to them. “I discovered that all they wanted was to be treated like soldiers...equal, pull the same duties, etc.” One example that came to his attention concerned guard duty. Although minor to an outsider, it was important to those involved. Regulations required female soldiers to pull guard shifts in pairs based on concerns for their safety at isolated guard posts. Every so often, one of the pair was selected as the colonel's orderly—an honor bestowed on a soldier detailed to stand guard as a reward for exceptionally outstanding appearance and knowledge at the formal inspection preceding the actual

posting—which usually entitled the soldier to take the day off. Even if selected, however, female soldiers had to accompany their partners to the guard post. Kidd carefully read the regulations and determined that the guard posts his soldiers manned were not isolated, since they were at the airfield directly behind battalion headquarters. Subsequently, double posting of females ceased, and morale in the battalion improved measurably.

In November 1979 Kidd was reassigned to the 2d Battalion, 2d Infantry Regiment (“Devil's Deuce”), as the command sergeant major. Feeling more at home with the infantry, Kidd also carefully watched how others handled problems of morale and discipline. One memorable aspect of his new battalion was “court night,” when battalion-level Articles 15 were adjudicated. The battalion commander, Lt. Col. Alan Wetzel, required all new officers and soldiers to attend the first available session after they arrived. In the first session Kidd attended, an NCO was charged with using illegal drugs. When the NCO was found guilty and sentenced to a reduction in grade, his first sergeant and the battalion sergeant major, Kidd in this instance, stood on either side of him and ripped the stripes off his uniform. “You could see everyone in the room flinch when that happened. It sure got the former sergeant's attention as well as everyone else's in attendance.” Kidd considered this just one of many reasons why the battalion was best in the division and had the least number of problems.

Kidd received orders posting him back to Germany in July 1981 as the commandant of the 1st Armored Division's NCO Academy at Katterbach. Upon arrival, Kidd was dismayed at the shabby state of the academy's facilities. It did not even have a sign in front to indicate the academy's existence. During his initial office call with the commanding general, Maj. Gen. John C. Faith, Kidd stated that he would prefer assignment with a troop unit. Learning this was not an option, Kidd gave a litany of the things wrong with the facility. The general asked him to outline the deficiencies in a formal paper.

Kidd was pleased to find the new commanding general, Maj. Gen. Thomas F. Healy, who assumed command shortly after Kidd's arrival, very interested in the Noncommissioned Officer Education System (NCOES) and willing to order the corrective action needed. "It took three whole years to get it completely fixed. When I arrived, everyone wanted to go to the Seventh Army NCO Academy. By the time I left, after much work by a great team of soldiers, NCOs, and civilians, everyone wanted to go to the 1st Armored Division's 'Old Ironsides' Academy instead."

Sergeant Major Kidd returned to Fort Lewis in July 1984 and began a remarkable five-year progression of assignments as command sergeant major of the 4th Battalion, 23d Infantry ("Bar None"), commanded by Lieutenant Colonel Cima; the 3d Brigade ("Red Devils"), 9th Infantry Division, commanded by Col. Barry R. McCaffrey; the 9th Infantry Division, commanded by Maj. Gen. Donald S. Pihl and later Maj. Gen. John M. Shalikhshvili; and finally, the I Corps ("America's Corps"), commanded by Lt. Gen. William H. Harrison and later Lt. Gen. Calvin A. H. Waller. Acting corps commander Maj. Gen. Thomas H. Tait, in concert with General Waller (who had been called away to be General H. Norman Schwarzkopf's deputy commander during Operation DESERT SHIELD/DESERT STORM), nominated Command Sergeant Major Kidd to be the Sergeant Major of the Army. Kidd found the nomination quite an honor. Although he knew he had a competitive record, he did not think he had much of a chance of being selected because he did not come from a major command as the previous Sergeants Major of the Army had and because he had never previously worked for the incoming Army Chief of Staff, General Gordon R. Sullivan. "I am glad I was wrong," Kidd later noted.

Kidd traveled to Washington, D.C., in May 1991 for a personal interview by Sullivan along with the other finalists. He was uncertain what to expect when outgoing Sergeant Major of the Army Gates asked him to leave his hotel room

and pick up the house phone in the lobby. It was Sullivan on the line to congratulate him as the new Sergeant Major of the Army. Kidd experienced a cascade of emotions—happiness and pride at being given the great honor, sadness at leaving the I Corps and Fort Lewis which had become the place he wanted to live upon retirement, anxiety about being able to fulfill the imposing responsibilities entailed in the job, and concern about the effect on his family.

For Kidd's family, the move to Washington, D.C., was difficult. Allowing their son Ryan to remain behind was a most trying and emotional decision. Ryan was to begin his junior year at Spanaway High School just outside of Fort Lewis, and Shelly was attending college at Western Washington University. Ryan asked to be allowed to stay and finish high school with his friends as well as continue with his involvement in many school activities, programs, and sports. After they made arrangements for Ryan to finish school at Fort Lewis—with the stipulation that his 4.0 grade point average not slip—the new Sergeant Major of the Army and his wife headed east for the nation's capital. The Kidds' faith in Ryan proved well founded when he graduated two years later as valedictorian of his class with a 4.0 GPA and a write-up in the national *High School Who's Who in Sports*.

Many challenges confronted the incoming SMA. The most serious was the turbulent reduction of the Army's forces from the Cold War level to one suitable and sustainable for a new, but uncertain international environment. Finding ways to ease the hardship and pain of soldiers and their families who elected to leave the Army as a result of the massive reductions soon proved the toughest issue he had ever dealt with. As the senior representative of the enlisted force, Kidd needed to ensure that the concerns of the soldiers, especially with respect to the method and fairness of the reduction process, had been heard and taken into account by the Army's leaders faced with this difficult, unpleasant task. Critical to his efforts in this area was the provision of adequate services to ease transitions to civilian life.

During Kidd's visits with soldiers, it quickly became apparent that soldiers hungered for information about the Army's restructuring effort and its potential effect on their careers. Kidd swiftly addressed soldiers' concerns by making himself available through internal command information media, i.e., Army News Service, Soldiers Radio and Television, *Soldiers* magazine, newspapers, and radio and television stations at installations he visited. Taking an aggressive approach, he told the Army's story to the various external audiences through interviews with the print and electronic media. Kidd felt that whatever success the Army had with its restructuring effort was attributable to the availability of information to soldiers and their families. He strongly believed that soldiers make better-informed decisions about their future in the Army if they have current and accurate information. An indicator of the Army leadership's success in communication was that the Army did not need an enlisted reduction in force during the drawdown (other than a one-time reduction in force for sergeants major).

The Army Chief of Staff and his sergeant major also grappled with the steady increase in the Army's participation in operations other than war. Despite the Army's participation in humanitarian assistance missions like PROVIDE HOPE, PROVIDE RELIEF, and PROVIDE PROMISE, Kidd believed that the Army's core mission was not changing. "We have built-in communications, self-sustaining capability, a logistics system and a chain of command, so we can superimpose ourselves into all those operations other than war. But that is not our primary mission. Our primary mission is [still] 'warfighting'—fighting and winning our nation's wars."

The Army's increasing participation in joint and noncombat operations was at least in part the reasoning behind the redesigning of the Sergeant Major of the Army's chevrons. Kidd felt that adding the American eagle to the chevrons would be symbolic of an era of increased joint operations, and that it would bring his insignia more closely in line with those of every service senior enlisted representative with an

eagle or part of an eagle depicted. On 13 October 1994, Sullivan pinned the new insignia, designed by Kidd, to the SMA's sleeve at a ceremony in the CSA's office.

The newly redesigned stripes featured the original two stars centered on the chevrons, but the stars were now separated by the familiar eagle found in the SMA shield, CSM brass, and specialist rank. The stripes, stars, and American eagle represented every enlisted rank in the Army. The American eagle symbolized the Army's link to the nation as well as the SMA's link to the Chief of Staff and to the enlisted soldiers.

Kidd, like his predecessors, traveled extensively to measure the pulse of the enlisted force and keep the Army leadership informed of the soldiers' hopes and concerns. Although he occasionally accompanied General Sullivan on his trips, more often he traveled elsewhere to better cover the Army, periodically meeting with other senior enlisted service representatives to share joint concerns or to exchange information prior to testimony before Congress. He also made several trips to check on troops engaged in every Army mission, always impressed by soldiers showing "the same zeal and capability as they did during the warfighting missions." During visits with soldiers in Saudi Arabia, Croatia, Haiti, Cuba, Panama, the Sinai, and many other foreign places, as well as at hurricane relief, flooding, earthquakes, and forest fires here at home, Kidd observed Guard, reserve, and active components working extremely well together, noting that "with the downsizing, we will all become even more interdependent—truly America's Army."

Another vital issue to command Kidd's attention was the NCOES, which, like his predecessors, he considered the key to the NCO Corps' success. With the reduction of personnel and major cuts to the Army's budget spurring significant realignments, the NCOES program changed to link NCO courses with promotions and supported the Army's "select, train, promote, assign" philosophy. Sergeant Major Kidd convinced the Army leadership of the impor-

tance of NCOES and of maintaining adequate funding so that at a minimum all promotable soldiers have the opportunity to attend NCOES schools.

Other challenges included maintaining and improving the quality of life for soldiers and their families. In particular, Kidd strongly supported initiatives such as Better Opportunities for Single Soldiers, which provided “soldier feedback to commanders and the communities...[and] provide[d] soldiers with a quality of life that is more like home.” Kidd also made health care for soldiers and their families a top priority. Here, one problem was regulatory: The number of health care professionals available to the Army was congressionally mandated to correspond with the number of troops, not with the population of family members. He thus worked hard to support innovative ways to combine the assets from military facilities and the network of health professionals in the civilian community to produce the best overall care possible for soldiers and their families.

Other matters that absorbed Kidd’s attention were the Army’s policies regarding homosexuals and women in combat. Kidd did not shy away from the difficult issues, about which enlisted soldiers and their families had strong feelings. It was part of Kidd’s mission to listen to their concerns and convey them to the Army leadership. “The bottom line, overwhelmingly [was] that soldiers and family members did not want the ban [against homosexuals] lifted. The women in combat issue was more an officer issue than an enlisted issue. The enlisted females feel they truly have the opportunity to go from private to CSM.” Kidd placed equal importance on his duty to communicate and clarify the Army’s policies whenever questioned about them during his visits to the field. “I tell the soldiers what the requirement is, make sure they understand it, and that they follow it. Informed soldiers make better career and lifetime decisions for themselves and their families.”

Kidd’s working relationship with the Chief of Staff was much the same as that of his predecessors with their chiefs. “I have unobstructed

access to the chief whenever I need it. Obviously I show the courtesy not to barge in on him whenever he has a visitor, but it has never been a problem to see him. Whenever I return from a trip, my report goes directly to him first, and then it goes out to the Army staff to handle any actions that it requires.” Kidd did not receive an NCO evaluation report. Sullivan commented that since he did not rate three-star generals, it made no sense to rate the Sergeant Major of the Army. Their relationship, as Kidd described it, was similar to that of any commander and his sergeant major: They often sat down and informally discussed the focus and direction of their unit—only in this case, that unit was the entire Army. Kidd spent better than one-half to two-thirds of his time traveling, to better allow him to stay in touch with the concerns of the enlisted force.

In addition to keeping the chief and Army Staff informed, Kidd conferred with the Secretary of Defense, the Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff, the Secretary of the Army, and the Under Secretary of the Army, among others, concerning enlisted issues. Kidd’s membership on myriad boards and councils also ensured that the voice of the enlisted ranks was heard in the government’s policy-making circles. Kidd’s wife Sylvia was indispensable in keeping him abreast of the morale and condition of the enlisted force and their families. Having been raised in a military family, she had considerable experience to draw on in making her many contributions to improve conditions for military families. In particular, Mrs. Kidd was one of those responsible for the development of the Army Family Team Building Program. “She is a great Mom and Army wife,” Kidd declared, recognizing all she had accomplished.

Reflecting on the future of the Office of the Sergeant Major of the Army, Kidd noted that with each SMA the office had grown somewhat. Each SMA had looked for new ways to provide input to the Chief of Staff, participate with the Army Staff in the formulation of enlisted policies, and better represent soldiers and their families. He and other senior NCOs

agreed that downsizing the force and the great changes in basing and deployments would be some of the major challenges facing his successors. "I have found above all, however, that soldiers just want to know what's going on and to know the truth. They want to know that they are appreciated and that their families will be taken care of. They are proud of who they are, what they are, what they do, and how very well they do it. They do everything the nation asks of them and they do it in a most professional manner. We have the finest Army ever assembled....God I pray we can keep it that way. America's Army all the way—Hooah!"

After thirty-three years of service and as part of the leadership responsible for transforming the Army of his early days, Kidd truly made a difference. Drawing his energy from the soldiers who surrounded him, Kidd's only regret was that he had not been able to visit

every soldier. On 16 June 1995, in an all-enlisted retirement review on Fort Myer's Summerall Field, Kidd conducted one last inspection. With the 3d U.S. Infantry (The Old Guard) Command Sergeant Major, Kidd trooped the line of the enlisted soldiers of the Old Guard. Ceremony host Sullivan expressed his admiration and went on to proclaim Kidd as an outstanding soldier and warrior: "Men and women of America's Army, the soldiers and noncommissioned officers, warrant officers and officers of America's Army know how to perform to standard. That's what this parade is all about, that's what these men and women are all about, that's what Sergeant Major of the Army Richard A. Kidd has been all about for 33 years. The Army is a better place to serve because of Sergeant Major of the Army Richard Kidd's service to the Army and our Nation."

Assignments

- 1962 Inducted into service, Fort Holabird, Maryland; Basic Training, Fort Gordon, Georgia; Infantry Radio Maintenance Course and Basic Airborne Training, Fort Benning, Georgia
- 1962–1965 Radio Maintenance Specialist, Headquarters and Headquarters Company (HHC), 1st Airborne (Abn) Battle Group, 504th Infantry; HHC, 1st Battalion (Abn), 509th Infantry; Radio Mechanic and Chief, Radio Maintenance, HHC, 2d Battalion, 509th Infantry, 8th Infantry Division, Mainz, Germany
- 1966–1967 Communications Chief, Squad Leader, Platoon Sergeant, Company C, 2d Battalion, 5th Cavalry, 1st Cavalry Division, Republic of Vietnam; Patient, Medical Holding Company, 106th General Hospital, Japan
- 1967–1970 Wire Foreman, HHC, 3d Battalion (Abn), 325th Infantry, 82d Airborne Division; Weapons Training (Special Forces), Company B, U.S. Army Special Forces Training Group (Abn); Light Weapons Infantryman, Heavy Weapons Leader and Operations Sergeant, Company B, 6th Special Forces Group, Fort Bragg, North Carolina
- 1970–1971 Light Weapons Infantry Adviser, U.S. Army Mobile Advisory Team, Military Region 3; Third Regional Assistance Command, U.S. Military Assistance Command, Vietnam, Republic of Vietnam
- 1971–1976 Senior Enlisted Adviser, U.S. Army Advisory Group, Fifth Army, Fort Sheridan (duty in Appleton, Wisconsin)
- 1976–1977 Student, Class #8, U.S. Army Sergeants Major Academy, Fort Bliss, Texas
- 1977–1978 Infantry Operations and Intelligence Sergeant, HHC; First Sergeant, Company B, 1st Battalion, 32d Infantry, 2d Infantry Division, Republic of Korea
- 1978–1981 First Sergeant, Combat Support Company, 2d Battalion, 1st Infantry; Command Sergeant Major, HHC, 9th Aviation Battalion; HHC, 2d Battalion, 2d Infantry, 9th Infantry Division, Fort Lewis, Washington
- 1981–1984 Commandant, NCO Academy, 1st Armored Division, Katterbach, Germany
- 1984–1991 Command Sergeant Major, 4th Battalion, 23d Infantry; 3d Brigade; 9th Infantry Division; I Corps, Fort Lewis, Washington
- 1991–1995 Sergeant Major of the Army

Selected Decorations and Awards

Distinguished Service Medal with Oak Leaf Cluster
Defense Superior Service Medal
Legion of Merit with Oak Leaf Cluster
Bronze Star Medal
Meritorious Service Medal with Two Oak Leaf Clusters
Air Medal
Army Commendation Medal with Oak Leaf Cluster
Good Conduct Medal with Ten Oak Leaf Clusters
National Defense Service Medal with Service Star
Vietnam Service Medal
Republic of Vietnam Cross of Gallantry with Gold Star
Republic of Vietnam Campaign Medal
Combat Infantryman Badge
Master Parachutist Badge
Special Forces Tab



SMA McKinney

Gene C. McKinney

Born on 3 November 1950 in the deep south of Monticello, Florida, Gene C. McKinney knew he wanted to join the military even as a youth.¹ He and twin brother James, along with their six siblings, were raised by hard-working parents who served as role models for their children. Elizabeth, a stern person, taught her children “not to hate” and to never say unkind words about anybody, no matter who they were. Their father, Henry, instilled in his children the principle that if you worked hard and kept at it, you would succeed. Though Henry did not have much education, his message to his children was to be consistent, remain focused, and not to let outside interferences deter them from pursuing their goals.

The twins helped their father work in the fields and saved their money to buy their own school clothes. Their Florida town had 2,400 residents, and the eight McKinney children grew up in a house with only two bedrooms and no indoor plumbing. After graduating from high school in 1968 in nearby Tallahassee, Gene’s first goal was to “get out of Monticello.” Though unsure about what exactly he wanted to do in life, he knew he wanted something better, and he was determined to see what was beyond Tallahassee.

While in school, Gene was drawn to soldiering and it had “stuck in his mind” to join. He recalled seeing soldiers drive up Route 90, which ran through Monticello, during the Cuban Missile Crisis and that sold him on military service. While others wanted to be doctors or lawyers, he wanted to be in the U.S. Army.

James joined the Army right away, but Gene wanted a taste of the world first and headed north to Detroit. Having experienced

riots and killing in Detroit’s turbulent streets, Gene decided, “I can be paid for doing this,” and followed his brother James into the Army. He attended basic combat and advanced individual training at Fort Knox, Kentucky, and graduated as a cavalryman. He then went on to Airborne and Parachute Riggers training and was the honor graduate of his Riggers course. After the completion of his training and like so many others of that era, McKinney, now a private first class, was shipped off to Vietnam. He served with the “Sky Soldiers” of the 173d Airborne Brigade as part of the 2d Battalion, 503d Infantry. The 173d was the first major unit deployed to Vietnam and had made history as the only U.S. Army unit to conduct a combat parachute assault in Vietnam. McKinney joined the 173d in 1969 and celebrated his nineteenth birthday in Vietnam, hauling grenades and watching his step for fear of mines.

McKinney recalled the magnificent job performed by the soldiers and noncommissioned officers during his time in Vietnam. A volunteer himself, he did not notice a distinction between draftees and enlistees, with each pulling his fair share of the load. His toughest problem was preventing his youthful exuberance from leading him to take unnecessary risks. Reflecting later that he might have been naïve, he did not recall drug, racial, or discipline problems in his unit. Though there were tensions among the different groups, it was not excessive or unusual for the times. Being a minority, McKinney saw the Army as a place of opportunity.²

In December 1969 McKinney was promoted to sergeant, and in 1970 he left Vietnam. He returned to Fort Bragg, North Carolina,



Private McKinney in Vietnam

where he became a parachute rigger with the 612th Quartermaster Battalion. He was later assigned to the installation's transportation section but decided to leave the service to attend college at home in Florida. McKinney got out of the Army and went to work installing heating and air conditioning units to earn money for tuition, but he was not happy.

It was while McKinney was in Florida that he began courting his sweetheart, Wilhemina, a Florida A&M student studying music education. They both wanted to attend college, but unable to afford both tuitions he decided to reenter the Army with only a 38-day break in service. McKinney recalled that his mother had a lot to do with his decision to return. She said "You've been to Vietnam, seen some of the hardest combat known to man, and they made you a sergeant. You've obviously done well for yourself in the service. Why leave it now?"³ Her words made sense, and he joined the Army for a second time in 1971. He was assigned to Fort Benning,

Georgia, and served with the 1st Battalion, 58th Infantry, as a scout team leader. He and Wilhemina married on 19 August 1972.

During this period the Army was in turmoil. The war in Vietnam had drawn to a close, the draft had been abolished, and the recruiting slogan was "Let the Army Join You." Drug use was rampant and racial tensions were high, as integration remained controversial in southern states like Georgia. McKinney was assigned to the battalion's School of the Soldier program developed to help overcome the discipline problems of the time. He served in that position until he left Fort Benning.⁴

In 1973 McKinney attended the Basic NCO Course at Fort Knox, Kentucky. His first personal experience with the Army's education system offered him a perspective on learning and a realization of how much he needed to learn. In hands-on courses students typically taught themselves, with the ever-present cadre nearby to assist when required.

McKinney completed the course as the Honor Graduate.

The following year, Staff Sergeant McKinney and his wife left for their new assignment to the 3d Squadron of the 12th Cavalry at Büdingen, Germany. Confronted with problems similar to those McKinney had faced in Georgia, the squadron commander tried to overcome the frustrations of his men by fostering healthy competition. He developed a unit sports program and selected McKinney to lead it. By now McKinney had noticed that soldiers were changing their attitudes and becoming more professional, primarily because they were volunteers, not draftees, and truly wanted to be in the Army.

It was during this assignment that McKinney decided he wanted to make the military his career. The Army had “grown on” him, and he felt a strong sense of patriotism in serving his country. McKinney served four years in Germany before reassignment to Fort Bliss, Texas, with the 3d Squadron, 3d Armored Cavalry Regiment (ACR).

While at Fort Bliss, he met First Sgt. Felix Helms, who would be a positive influence in his life. Helms was McKinney’s first sergeant, and he saw the young soldier’s potential from the moment he met him. McKinney described Helms as “tough as nails, but he always looked out for my best interests.” One day he called McKinney into his office and asked him to take over the communications section because he said it “lacked leadership.” McKinney told him he could barely spell communications, let alone run the section with all of its different radios and specialized equipment. Helms responded, “You’re an outstanding leader and good leaders always find a way.”⁵

McKinney continued his work in the signal section for almost a year. He then returned to a scout section and later was selected as a master gunner.⁶ He credited Helms’ faith in his leadership ability for his success with that assignment. “He was always trying to teach me something. I would be on my way out the front door for the day and he’d call me in and say, ‘Come here, let me show you how to run a



Sergeant McKinney Surrounded by Sheridan Tanks

suspense file.’ Or, maybe it was how to counsel or how to set up a duty roster. It doesn’t really matter. When you get down to it, it’s not about what skills he taught me, it’s the fact that he gave a damn about me.”

As an African American, McKinney was always aware of the ethnic tensions in American society. When he and his brother James would visit home, sister Essie recalled they would discuss racial harmony in the Army. But a particular incident stuck with the young staff sergeant. As the squadron master gunner, McKinney was selected to go along with other unit personnel to Georgia to train an armored unit. For the initial briefing he picked a seat in front near his squadron commander, as the discussion that morning would be on gunnery. A colonel walked to the front of the room and upon seeing McKinney, responded with “hmmm.” Feeling a bit apprehensive, McKinney fell back a bit. His squadron commander, Lt. Col. Jerry C. Rutherford, however, stood up and looked the colonel in the eye and said “Let me tell you, if you don’t accept that sergeant, you don’t accept the team and I’ll pack my bags and we’ll be gone tomorrow.”⁷

McKinney realized that some people evaluated him not on his performance, but on the color of his skin. By speaking up, his commander created an environment that made everyone feel like they were a part of the team. McKinney wanted to prove his commander right, so he set out to show them what he should really be judged by—his actions. At night when others were on ranges, he stayed longer. He made sure the gun bores were correctly aligned and the ammunition was secure. He made it his priority to ensure everything was done correctly. And when he traveled with other NCOs of the organization, he told them the story of his commander so they could feel he would support them as well.

Upon completion of his tour in Texas, McKinney returned to Germany in 1983 and was assigned as a platoon sergeant to Troop G, 2d Squadron, 2d Armored Cavalry Regiment, in Bamberg, Germany. Soon after his arrival McKinney was tapped again for his leadership qualities. The commander and first sergeant of Troop F were relieved and the squadron sergeant major placed him in the vacant first sergeant position. There he faced some tough challenges, yet he would soon realize his greatest impact would be the training of his subordinate noncommissioned officers.

Due to a restructure of military occupational specialties, his unit received platoon sergeants coming directly from the medical field. These sergeants were not skilled at their duties and McKinney needed to come up with a plan to train them quickly. As a unit responsible for an important border security mission during the Cold War, the competency of each leader was of extreme importance. McKinney developed an NCO professional development program; each morning at 0500 he taught basic skills, such as map reading and land navigation, to his newly acquired cavalry sergeants. It took time and personal commitment, but he quickly saw the improvement among his men.

When McKinney returned to the United States, he again went to Fort Bliss and the 3d Armored Cavalry Regiment as an operations sergeant with Headquarters Troop, and later as

the first sergeant of the Air Cavalry Troop. When the regiment reorganized, the Air Cavalry Troop became a provisional 4th Squadron and McKinney, now selected for sergeant major, became the new squadron's sergeant major. Then, in 1987 he left the 3d ACR to attend the U.S. Army Sergeants Major Academy, located at nearby Biggs Army Airfield.

McKinney enjoyed the course presented at the academy. A graduate of the First Sergeant Course, he was familiar with the school's small group instruction process and was physically and mentally prepared for the training. Though he would not realize it until later in his career, the exposure the school gave him to international studies would pay off in future assignments. Just as important as the academics, however, was the fact that the school gave senior noncommissioned officers serving in positions of increased responsibility some "down time" to relax and reflect. All in all, he felt it was a great experience.

Upon graduation in July 1988, McKinney and family headed back to Bamberg and to the 2d Squadron of the 2d Armored Cavalry Regiment, where McKinney became the squadron command sergeant major (CSM). McKinney realized that his duties had not really changed as he progressed through the ranks, he just had a larger "police area." He believed that his job at the squadron level was to listen to soldiers, to provide input on decisions affecting enlisted soldiers, to oversee the maintenance of the unit's equipment, to maintain a relationship with the unit's first sergeants, and to oversee training and leader development. He particularly felt that coaching and mentoring those subordinate to him was of great importance and a "big part" of CSM duties.

To many it was no surprise when McKinney was selected as the 1st Brigade, 1st Armored Division's command sergeant major. Confident that he was qualified for his duties, McKinney set out to share his philosophy with a larger audience. As the senior noncommissioned officer of the brigade, he focused on making sure that his units were prepared to "roll out of the gate" when the call came. The 1st Brigade

served as the forward element of the 1st Armored Division and had the mission of protecting the Fulda Gap as part of the Cold War defense of Central Europe.

McKinney worked to maintain unity of command and cohesiveness within the squads and teams of his units. Toward this end, he tutored his senior NCOs on how to organize routine details. Instead of forming ad hoc groups of duty soldiers to perform necessary chores, McKinney had his NCOs assign tasks to entire teams and squads. This approach both maintained command and control and provided junior NCOs valuable training and leadership opportunities that otherwise would have been lost.

As McKinney progressed, he felt confident that he was able to perform effectively at each level of command. For that, he credited the Noncommissioned Officer Education System (NCOES), of which he was a product. Confident in his own abilities, he tried to focus on what his commanders were thinking. By 1990 McKinney was being considered for an even higher position, this time as the 8th Infantry Division sergeant major.

With the nation transfixed by Iraq's invasion of Kuwait in August 1990, McKinney was torn between staying with his brigade, which he was sure would need him for eventual deployment, or moving to the 8th Division. It took words from his commander, Col. Daniel R. Zanini, to convince him that his talents would be best used in the 8th Infantry Division. As it turned out, neither unit fully mobilized for Operation DESERT STORM.

McKinney arrived at the division headquarters in Bad Kreuznach on a Thursday and found himself on a field exercise in Hohenfels the very next day. The division commander, Maj. Gen. John P. Otjen, called for McKinney within twenty-four hours of his arrival for his initial counseling session. Otjen spelled out the environment as he saw it and what he expected from McKinney. He charged McKinney to "train every soldier and noncommissioned officer from individual tasks to Tank Table VIII gunnery."⁸ When asked if he could do it, McKinney replied,



CSM McKinney at Welcome Ceremony as the 8th Infantry Division CSM

"sir, I have broad shoulders." General Otjen asked what he could do to help, and McKinney responded that he only needed to make sure that the officers allowed the noncommissioned officers to execute the training plans.

With that, McKinney set out to develop NCO-led ranges. The events leading up to the qualifications would encompass all levels of individual and team training. He felt that dormant sergeants major blossomed at the opportunity to truly lead their crews through the training. With the support of his division commander, McKinney was able to assist the NCOs of his division to train individual soldiers and then hand off the qualified crews to the officers. The officers, who had been preparing themselves for the "Superbowl of tank gunnery,"

Tank Table XII, received prepared small units, and the division crew qualification went extremely well.⁹ McKinney recalled that his commander referred to him as the “American Express” of noncommissioned officers, meaning that he would “not leave home without” him.

After two years with the 8th Infantry Division, McKinney was selected for the prestigious position of command sergeant major of the U.S. Army, Europe (USAREUR). With only four years of service in successive command sergeant major billets, McKinney was somewhat apprehensive to assume his duties because he was slated to replace a popular and well-respected noncommissioned officer. McKinney knew there was little training for duties at this level, so he decided his best approach to the position was to “be who you are.” He continued to listen to soldiers, develop leaders, and provide input to commanders on issues relating to the enlisted force.

It was during this period that the Army initiated a major force reduction. While McKinney was the USAREUR command sergeant major, the command shrank from 190,000 to 67,000 soldiers.¹⁰ Meanwhile, the number of deployments was on the rise as soldiers were being called to places like Macedonia, Rwanda, and Somalia. McKinney toured all of USAREUR to talk to soldiers and their families about issues that concerned them and visited soldiers in the field and deployed areas. He felt that showing concern for soldiers paid large dividends. While receiving briefings on equipment, he would ask the soldiers to “tell me something about you.” He felt that when you tell people how much you care for them, they would not disappoint you.

McKinney stressed quality-of-life issues while he was in Europe. He thought that a good quality of life brought soldiers peace of mind. Arguing that young people were smart and trustworthy, McKinney was an early supporter of the Single Soldier Quality of Life program, which provided single soldiers the same freedoms and responsibilities afforded their married counterparts. The new standard for single-soldier housing provided increased privacy for all sol-

diers and promoted a dormitory-type environment.¹¹ Unfortunately, while the concept was good, the execution of the program was “horrible” in McKinney’s opinion, because too many leaders did not support the initiative. He felt that for the initiative to have succeeded, the Army should have first sold the idea to the officers and NCOs who make the difference in the ultimate success or failure of any program.

After three years at USAREUR, McKinney competed with his brother James among others for the position of Sergeant Major of the Army (SMA). The finalists were ordered to Forces Command headquarters to confer with the incoming Chief of Staff, General Dennis J. Reimer. Reimer interviewed him for over an hour, and then McKinney returned to Germany. A few days later Reimer called and asked, “am I speaking to the right McKinney?” After being assured that he had reached Gene McKinney, Reimer announced his congratulations. Reimer later noted that “You look so much alike, if one of you went on leave I could use the other to backfill and nobody would know the difference.”¹² McKinney was sworn in on 30 June 1995 in the Chief of Staff’s private office at the Pentagon, the first ever African American to serve in this prominent position.

As was the case with previous Sergeants Major of the Army, McKinney had an open door to General Reimer whenever he needed to see him. Reimer did not give McKinney any specific guidance as to his duties. Again McKinney relied on the techniques that got him to his new position—being authentic and taking care of soldiers. He set out to go where the soldiers were. After each trip to the field, he furnished Reimer with a trip report that outlined his observations.

One of McKinney’s first priorities was to work on preparing noncommissioned officers for the twenty-first century.¹³ Several weeks after assuming his duties as SMA, he addressed the 1995 Worldwide Noncommissioned Officer Education System Conference. He affirmed that because of emerging technology, NCO education needed to focus more on leadership.



SMA McKinney with Soldiers in Macedonia

Moreover, the education system needed to have a single standard so that soldiers going to different academies received the same training.

As SMA, McKinney realized that the level of responsibility being thrust on young specialists and sergeants was far different than in the past. He feared that many first-term soldiers believed that the jobs they were doing were going unnoticed and unrewarded. On deployments he observed sergeants manning observation posts, running patrols, preparing operations orders, and taking care of logistics—all without an officer or senior NCO in sight. He felt that young soldiers needed more opportunities to get promoted and promised to look hard at those issues.¹⁴

In late 1995 the nation was shocked when three soldiers from Fort Bragg, members of an extremist group known as skinheads murdered

a black couple in Fayetteville, North Carolina. In partial response, Secretary of the Army Togo D. West, Jr., immediately formed the Task Force on Extremist Activities.¹⁵ West selected McKinney as one of the panel's five members. The task force found minimal evidence that there was extremist activity in the Army and concluded that the killings were an isolated incident. The task force called for increased education and a review and clarification of Army regulations.

Before the task force completed its final report to the Secretary, McKinney and his wife Wilhemina suffered their own tragedy. Their only son, eighteen-year-old Zuberi, a college freshman, was critically injured in a car accident. Previous to the accident, McKinney had been carefully preparing for an appearance before the

House Appropriations Committee to discuss an issue dear to his heart, quality of life. Reimer urged McKinney to stay with his son, saying, "We'll cover this. Your primary job is to stay there." McKinney replied that the soldiers needed him and that it was his duty to appear before Congress. So while his son was in a coma, he journeyed to Capitol Hill to speak on behalf of the enlisted force. Reimer recalled that, "even during that time, the soldiers were always on his mind."¹⁶

In his testimony to the Military Construction Subcommittee, McKinney focused on three problem areas: adequate family housing, improving single-soldier living conditions, and child-care. He told the committee he believed that quality of life must be at the forefront to attract and retain quality soldiers, civilians, and family members.¹⁷ After the testimony, McKinney quickly returned to his son's bedside in Florida. Zuberi succumbed to his injuries sixteen days after the accident. McKinney would later say that the only true wish he ever had was to "have his son back on this earth."

McKinney worked to expand the prestige of senior noncommissioned officers and to strengthen the Command Sergeants Major Program. He noted that most senior NCOs had more education, preparation, and responsibility than when McKinney had first entered the service. Consequently, he proposed a tiered system of special duty assignment pay (SDAP) for CSMs who were assigned to positions where their rater, senior rater, and reviewer were all general officers. Based on the special qualifications and the demanding nature of the position of command sergeant major, the Assistant Secretary of the Army approved the proposal.¹⁸

Within his first sixteen months as Sergeant Major of the Army, McKinney traveled to eight overseas locations and twenty stateside installations. The soldiers and family members he met repeatedly stated that their lives were adversely affected by the changes going on in the Army.¹⁹ McKinney noted that in a seven-year period, from 1989 to 1996, the Army had reduced the total force by 463,000 soldiers, slashed the bud-

get by 38 percent, closed 674 facilities worldwide, and cut the number of divisions from 18 to 10. Meanwhile, operational deployments increased by 300 percent, placing great strains on the soldiers and units that remained. The changes were occurring so quickly that many soldiers were uncertain of their role and future in the Army. McKinney challenged NCOs to take charge of change in their respective areas, to consider the "big picture," and to understand why things were being done and what the result would be. He believed the role of the noncommissioned officer was to keep those soldiers who were filled with uncertainty focused on their goals and on the missions at hand.²⁰

Late in 1996 allegations surfaced that cadre personnel and drill instructors were sexually abusing female recruits at Army training centers. Secretary of the Army West responded to the allegations with a promise to take a hard look at the entire Initial Entry Training program. He formed an advisory panel and selected McKinney to serve as a member of the Task Force. Meanwhile, McKinney held a town hall meeting at one of the affected training sites, Aberdeen Proving Ground, Maryland. There he spoke with almost 1,400 soldiers, trainees, and senior NCOs, including drill instructors. During his two-day visit he found that morale for the most part was good, but that the soldiers were frustrated with the adverse media attention. During a question-and-answer session McKinney affirmed that "the system we have works...but if soldiers want to fix the problem, they must come forth—not only for themselves, but for those who will come after."²¹ He trusted that most soldiers had faith that the Army would do what was right in light of the allegations.

As the task force explored the allegations, McKinney himself became a target of the probe. In February 1997 a former aide accused him of making sexual advances. She charged that it was improper for McKinney to sit on a panel investigating sexual misconduct when he may well have been guilty of similar behavior.²² Under growing pressure from congress-

sional leaders, Reimer suspended McKinney from his duties a week after the allegation surfaced. The Army announced that the suspension was in the best interest of both the individual and the institution, since continued public attention was making it difficult for McKinney to fulfill his responsibilities as Sergeant Major of the Army.²³

General Reimer gave McKinney an office at Fort Myer, Virginia, which afforded McKinney the opportunity to devote much of his time to working with his lawyers on the case. The Army began an Article 32 investigation of the charges against McKinney that lasted twenty-seven days. During the investigation five more female soldiers came forward to accuse him. In October the investigating panel cleared McKinney of charges of sexual impropriety but referred his case for court-martial based on alleged improper behavior during the investigation. Reimer permanently reassigned McKinney to the Military District of Washington and stripped him of his position as Sergeant Major of the Army, returning him once again to the rank of command sergeant major.

In March 1998 a military panel of eight senior-ranking soldiers convicted McKinney of obstructing justice but acquitted him on eighteen sexual misconduct-related charges.²⁴ The court reduced him to the grade of E-8 and issued a reprimand. McKinney retired in September. Because the United States Code entitled soldiers serving in the senior enlisted position of each service to receive retirement pay at the highest rate achieved, he collected retirement pay as a Sergeant Major of the Army.²⁵

Though the final days of his career were marred by investigations and accusations, McKinney recalled that there was not a day in his military service he did not enjoy. The events leading up to his removal from office, while stressful, gave time for introspection and allowed him to be “introduced to himself.” He believed he had done his duty as a soldier and would do it all over again. McKinney was a soldier who understood soldiers’ concerns and who made those around him feel they were a part of his team.

Notes

1. Except as noted, this section is based on Interv, Daniel K. Elder with Gene C. McKinney, 26 Nov 01; Lee N. Coffee, Jr., "Carrying the Baton," Unpubl Ms, Oct 96, author's files, U.S. Army Center of Military History, Washington, D.C. (hereafter cited as CMH); Wil Haygood, "A Soldier's Story," *The Boston Globe*, 14 Mar 99, p. A01.

2. Elaine Sciolino, "In Limbo: A Soldier's Soldier Reviews His Rise and Fall," *The New York Times*, 16 June 97, pp. A1, A14.

3. David Abrams, "SMA McKinney Launches each day with NCO Creed," *NCO Journal* (Fall 1995):14.

4. School of the Soldier was an informal course loosely based on the Civil War-era program of instruction that taught drill and the manual of arms. The 1970s version was for those lacking discipline and attempted to rehabilitate poor performers through extensive training given by dedicated leaders.

5. Abrams, "NCO Creed," pp. 15-16.

6. Master gunners were put through intensified training in maintenance, weapons, ammunition, conduct of fire, range operations, and other aspects of armored warfare and were authorized to teach their unit personnel.

7. Transcript, Address by McKinney to Pre-Command Course, Fort Leavenworth, Kans., 22 Aug 96, pp. 7-8, author's files, CMH.

8. Tank Tables are the different levels of tank-weapons qualification, which are published in the Field Manual 17-12 series. The qualification levels are typically Tables I to XII taken from these manuals.

9. Gene C. McKinney, "Meeting Leadership Challenges as a Team," *Parameters* (January-February 1996):10-13.

10. General Dennis J. Reimer, Speech notes, SMA Swearing-in Ceremony, n.d., Washington, D.C., copy in Dennis J. Reimer papers, Military History Institute, Carlisle Barracks, Pa.

11. Karen Peterson, "The Good Life at Graf," *Soldiers* (October 1994):30.

12. Sciolino, "In Limbo," p. A14.

13. David Abrams, "NCOES Conferees Set Future Course," *NCO Journal* (Fall 1995):18-19.

14. Abrams, "NCO Creed," p. 15.

15. Rpt, "The Secretary of the Army's Task Force on Extremist Activities: Defending America's Values," 21 Mar 96, pp. i-ii, copy in CMH library.

16. Memo, Maj. Michael Galloucis, Public Affairs Officer, to the Chief of Staff, n.d., sub: Approved Quotes by Gen. Dennis J. Reimer, author's files, CMH.

17. Transcript, "Statement by Gene C. McKinney, Sergeant Major of the Army, before the Military Construction Subcommittee of the House Appropriations Committee, House of Representatives, Second Session, 104th Congress, on Quality of Life," 29 Feb 96, pp. 1-6, author's files, CMH.

18. Memo, SMA Gene C. McKinney for DCSPER [Deputy Chief of Staff for Personnel], 4 Apr 96, sub: Request for Special Duty Assignment Pay (SDAP), author's files, CMH.

19. Gene C. McKinney, "The NCO Corps: Leading through Change," *Army* (October 1996):27.

20. *Ibid.*, p. 28.

21. Gil High, "Combating Sexual Harassment," *Soldiers* (February 1997):4-5.

22. Sciolino, "In Limbo," p. A14.

23. U.S. Army News Release 97-15, "Sergeant Major of the Army Suspended Pending Outcome of Investigation," Washington, D.C., 10 Feb 97.

24. Greg Jones, "Court-martial Panel Finds McKinney Guilty of Obstruction of Justice, Former Sergeant Major of the Army Gets Rank Reductions, Reprimand," *Army News Service*, 17 Mar 98.

25. Gerry J. Gilmore, "Federal Statute Entitles McKinney To Retire with Top Enlisted Pay," *Army News Service*, 13 May 98.

Assignments

1968	Inducted into Service, Basic Training, Advanced Individual Training, Fort Knox, Kentucky
1968–1969	Airborne School, Parachute Riggers Course, Fort Benning, Georgia
1969–1970	Infantryman, 2d Battalion, 503d Infantry, 173d Airborne Brigade, Republic of Vietnam
1970–1971	Rigger, 612th Quartermaster Battalion, Fort Bragg, North Carolina (break in service, 38 days)
1971–1973	Scout Team Leader, 1st Battalion, 58th Infantry, 197th Infantry Brigade, Fort Benning, Georgia
1973	Basic NCO Course, Fort Knox, Kentucky
1974–1977	Squad Leader, Light Armored Vehicle Section Leader, 3d Squadron, 12th Cavalry, 3d Armored Division, Büdingen, Germany
1977–1983	Scout Section Leader, Communications Sergeant, Platoon Sergeant, 3d Squadron and 4th Squadron, 3d Armored Cavalry Regiment, Fort Bliss, Texas
1983–1984	First Sergeant, Fox Troop, 2d Squadron, 2d Armored Cavalry Regiment, Bamberg, Germany
1984–1987	First Sergeant, Sergeant Major, Air Cavalry Troop and 4th Squadron (Provisional), 3d Armored Cavalry Regiment, Fort Bliss, Texas
1988	Student, Class #31, Sergeants Major Academy, Fort Bliss, Texas
1988–1990	Command Sergeant Major, 2d Squadron, 2d Armored Cavalry Regiment, Bamberg, Germany
1990	Command Sergeant Major, 1st Brigade, 1st Armored Division, Vilseck, Germany
1990–1992	Command Sergeant Major, 8th Infantry Division, Bad Kreuznach, Germany
1992–1995	Command Sergeant Major, United States Army, Europe, and Seventh Army Training Center, Heidelberg, Germany
1995–1997	Sergeant Major of the Army
1997–1998	Military District of Washington

Selected Decorations and Awards

Legion of Merit
Bronze Star Medal with One Oak Leaf Cluster
Meritorious Service Medal with Three Oak Leaf Clusters
Army Commendation Medal
Army Achievement Medal
Good Conduct Medal with Ten Oak Leaf Clusters
National Defense Service Medal with Service Star
Vietnam Service Medal
Republic of Vietnam Campaign Medal
Combat Infantryman Badge
Parachutist Badge



SMA Hall

Robert E. Hall

Born a self-described “country boy” on 31 May 1947, Robert E. Hall grew up in his birthplace of Gaffney, South Carolina.¹ Hall was a playful child, enjoying outdoor activities with others and occupying his time playing baseball or war on the nearby mountain.

Both his parents worked in the textile industry, and his grandparents owned a farm where they grew cotton and corn. Raised around a table where military service was expected, he regularly interacted with male role models who would influence his future. His father was a World War II veteran who had received a battlefield commission and the Silver Star and Purple Heart. His uncle had been a prisoner in Germany during the war, and though it was never openly discussed, Robert knew that he would also serve his country.

After graduating from high school, Hall attended Limestone College in Gaffney. Unsure which ran out first, his money or his grades, he decided to leave college. It was 1968, and Hall did not doubt that he would be drafted; it was just a matter of when. Since his relatives had served in the Army, he knew that was the service for him. After a visit by a recruiter he was sold on Air Defense Artillery (ADA), and he enlisted with no expectation other than serving his initial hitch and getting out. In February 1968 his parents drove him fifty miles to Charlotte, North Carolina, where he left on his first bus ride to attend basic training at Fort Bragg, North Carolina.

Upon arrival, Hall met his drill instructor, a very solid noncommissioned officer (NCO) who, like most of the trainers, had recently returned from Vietnam. At that time drill

instructors did not conduct much of the training. Rather, they focused on the discipline and movement of their platoons to the training sites, while committee groups performed the actual instruction.² Although Hall admitted he was “not necessarily a model trainee,” he quickly learned to do what he was told and mastered the tasks expected of him.

After graduation, Hall went on to Fort Bliss, Texas, where he received his Advanced Individual Training (AIT) to become an “air defender.” Expert instructors conducted the schooling. He was trained on the Nike-Hercules system, designed to shoot down high-flying Russian aircraft during the Cold War.³ After completing his training, Hall was confident that he knew the basics of soldiering and was ready to go on to his first assignment to learn how to be a good missile crewman.

He was posted to Fort Story, Virginia, as a Nike-Hercules missile crewmember. Private First Class Hall was made an acting sergeant after only about nine months in the Army. There were plenty of Specialists Four and Five in his unit, but there was a shortage of “hard stripe” noncommissioned officers. As soldiers rose through the ranks, those who were deemed technicians were selected to become specialists. Those who were able to lead were made sergeants.

The NCOs of Hall’s unit had been around missile systems for a long time, and he felt he had to struggle to attain their level of proficiency. Though aware of the leaders above him, Hall did not recall a lot of oversight and supervision. Soldiers did not see their first sergeant unless they were in trouble, and he was not a



Hall in Korea, 1971

person they wanted to see. Soon after Hall entered the service the Army established the rank of command sergeant major, but he never saw one at Fort Story.

Hall began to study his supervisors to find the best traits that each had to offer and adopted them for his own. Occasionally, however, Hall would come across a poor leader make a note not to repeat that person's mistakes. He relied on the discipline instilled in him at a young age to allow him to differentiate between right and wrong.

After a year at Fort Story, Hall, now an E-5, married Carolyn Atkins. He was then selected to serve as a Chaparral missile system crewmember in the newly formed 8th Battalion, 61st Air Defense Artillery.⁴ After attending a five-week NCO transition course at Fort Bliss, Hall and the rest of the battalion underwent a grueling six-month unit-training period at White Sands

Missile Range in New Mexico. During the training Hall would at times return home at 0200, only to get up at 0500 to resume training at the Doña Ana Range. Not only were Hall and his comrades learning a new weapons system, they were also learning how to come together as a unit, with privates and sergeants learning at the same time.

In 1971 Hall's unit moved to Korea, where it provided short-range air defense for the 2d Infantry Division. Because of his role in area defense, squad leader Hall moved throughout the 2d Division area supporting multiple units. While there, he received a good perspective on the division area and was able to visualize the doctrine of the battlefield. Divisional air defense was a new concept, and Hall's unit spent an average of three to four days a week in the field. When deployed, his squad was responsible for engaging any hostile aircraft that might fly into its sector from the north. While in Korea, Hall was promoted to staff sergeant, and he soon found himself on orders to return to Fort Bliss.

Hall would eventually spend many assignments at Bliss, the home of air defense artillery. He was first assigned to the 5th Battalion, 67th ADA, and later to the 3d Battalion, 6th ADA, in support of the ADA School. Both were support units that assisted the NCO and officer courses conducted at Bliss. They did everything from air-defense missions to indirect-fire missions with 13.5-mm. training simulators.

Hall recalled that team training during that era was not as focused as it would be later in his career. The training plans usually were only as good as the noncommissioned officer executing them. If an NCO had a wide range of experience, he taught a wide range of subjects. Hall felt this resulted in a lack of focus, but the situation improved over time as the Army developed standards for training events.

While Hall was at Fort Bliss, the government abolished the draft. Hall felt that the new philosophy that accompanied the transition to the all-volunteer Army caused much confusion. On one hand, the Army's new recruiting slogan,

“Let the Army Join You,” gave many people the impression that the Army was willing to lower its standards in order to appeal to the youth of the day. Colored furniture began appearing in barracks rooms, while more substantive changes did indeed seek to make life easier for the common soldier. On the other hand, “where the rubber meets the road,” there were many NCOs who were still trying to adhere to the old ways, saying “hell no, this is not what we are supposed to be doing.”

Contributing to the turmoil was the fact that the Army was also suffering from a shortage of noncommissioned officers. During the Vietnam War era, mid-grade NCOs were in high demand and frequently had to serve multiple combat tours. Many were killed, injured, or simply left the service to escape the burdens of repeated overseas assignments. Still others, including Hall, were offered commissions, thus depleting the pool of experienced NCOs even further. The end result was a dearth of quality leadership in the NCO ranks at a time when the Army was going through the difficult transition to a peacetime, volunteer force—a situation that further undermined the overall discipline and efficiency of the force.

In 1974 Hall was selected to attend the Advanced Noncommissioned Officers Course (ANCOC) at Fort Bliss. This was a newly developed course under the Noncommissioned Officer Education System (NCOES). Though the training was geared toward specific military occupational specialties (MOSs), it did not compare to current training. The courses were not conducted in a “live in” environment as the students went to classes during the duty day and returned home at the conclusion of training.

Upon graduation, Staff Sergeant Hall was reassigned to Germany, initially as a squad leader and later as a platoon sergeant in the 2d Battalion, 59th ADA, 1st Armored Division. Still a relatively young soldier, Hall initially struggled with his new role supervising a platoon. He soon realized that his troubles stemmed from the fact that he was trying to act as a “super squad leader,” running four squads, rather

than pulling them all together as one. But as his experience increased he was able to expand his leadership skills.

In 1975 the battalion sergeant major selected Hall to serve on the battalion staff as the operations sergeant. Without the benefit of any specialized training or without a key trainer for the position, Hall was forced to learn his responsibilities on the job. Sometimes it was through mistakes that he learned how to do things correctly. He continued to develop and challenge himself. Hall was selected as the 1st Armored Division Noncommissioned Officer of the Year and was inducted into the prestigious Sergeant Morales Club, only the fifty-fifth soldier to earn that honor.⁵ It was through these opportunities that Hall felt that he gained an advantage over others who may not have received as in-depth an education into their profession. By researching and studying the regulations in preparation for the competitions, Hall recognized he was better prepared for his job.

Throughout his tour, Hall was disappointed by the lack of money available to conduct the type of training that he thought should be done. Nevertheless, his unit maintained a rigorous training cycle and he believed that it was ready to fight if called. The battalion spent a large amount of time taking part in field training at locations in Grafenwöhr, Wildflecken, and Hohenfels, Germany. It also went to Crete, Greece, every summer. Comparing the pace to that later in his career, Hall noted that though busy, he at least knew with a fair degree of certainty where he was going to be and when he would return home.

Upon completing his tour in Germany, Hall returned to Fort Bliss, where he was selected for promotion to sergeant first class. He initially was assigned as the Intelligence NCO for a training battalion but eventually became the battalion's senior instructor. After a month or two the Department of the Army selected him to go to Drill Sergeant School.

It was 1977, and the Army's drill sergeant training program had undergone significant changes since its inception in the early 1960s.



Hall on His Promotion to Staff Sergeant

In 1962 Secretary of the Army Cyrus R. Vance had directed Assistant Secretary Steven Ailes to study recruit training in the Army. Ailes had found that the staffing at Army training centers was inadequate and that the caliber of the noncommissioned officers was below the standards of other services. As a result, in 1963 the Army conducted pilot trainer courses at Fort Jackson, South Carolina, using techniques developed by the George Washington University Human Resources Research Office. This experiment led in turn to the establishment of the Drill Sergeant Program at Fort Leonard Wood, Missouri, in September 1964. Over the years the course continued to evolve and spread to other locations.⁶

Hall attended the Fort Sill, Oklahoma, Drill Sergeant School and was surrounded by good soldiers. At the time he was a sergeant first class and had little desire to become a drill sergeant. He had already served as a squad leader and platoon sergeant, and his main desire was to be a first sergeant. Little did he know that becoming a drill sergeant would help him achieve his goal. In any case, his opinion about drill sergeant school changed the moment he arrived at Fort Sill and saw the professionalism of the drill sergeants—and “the hat,” the distinctive headgear worn by those who completed the course.⁷

The course was tough, and Hall walked the fields at night practicing his commands and

techniques. He recognized that the burden of basic training was shifting from committee group instruction, as he had experienced as a recruit, to a system that included more involvement by the drill sergeant.

Soon after graduation, Hall returned to Fort Bliss and joined the 4th Training Brigade. He was assigned initially to an AIT company but later moved on to a Basic Combat Training (BCT) company. At one time, Halls' BCT company had only four drill sergeants for three platoons and the duty was long and hard. He would start his day by waking the troops and spend the day training them. The drill sergeants also had other routine duties, such as charge of quarters, staff duty, and courtesy patrol. If he had all-night duty he would quickly return home to change clothes, shine his boots, and then go back to work until it was time to put the trainees to bed.

The new inductees at that time ranged from very good to poor and included a few individuals who probably had little choice but to join the military. The drill sergeants were not supposed to discharge more than 5 percent of the recruits in a unit, so he had to identify early those who were not going to make it. He remembered one soldier who was having a tough time in every subject, from map reading to the code of conduct and general orders. He just could not catch on. Late one night Hall saw him going into the latrine to meet with one of his fellow trainees. He followed them and saw that the other soldier was trying to teach him to read. Evidently, his peers had been covering for him as they all pitched in to help him succeed. Still, the Army could not keep a soldier who could not read, and Hall was saddened by the loss of that soldier.

In 1979 Hall was selected as the Fort Bliss Drill Sergeant of the Year. He was sent to Fort Monroe, Virginia, to represent his command at the Training and Doctrine Command (TRADOC) drill sergeant competition. Competing against twenty-five other candidates, he was selected as the Army's Drill Sergeant of the Year. Along with the accolades that accompanied

his selection, the award included a one-year assignment at TRADOC headquarters to serve on the staff of the TRADOC commander, General Donn A. Starry. Hall would be the only soldier on Fort Monroe authorized to wear the coveted campaign hat.

Hall returned to Fort Bliss and quickly moved his family to Virginia. In his new job he reported directly to the TRADOC command sergeant major and provided input to the TRADOC staff. Occasionally, Starry himself would walk up the stairs and sit down beside him and ask, "Hey drill sergeant, what's going on around the Army today?"

Hall's primary responsibility was to travel to the Army's training centers and provide feedback to TRADOC headquarters, usually traveling every week to a new location. He would typically meet with his counterpart at the installation, the unit's drill sergeant of the year. They would exchange ideas, and Hall would provide suggestions based on his visits to other installations. Contrasting these trips with those he would later make as Sergeant Major of the Army (SMA), Hall recalled that when he was SMA people would eventually take his suggestions to heart.

After Hall's one year had expired, he joined TRADOC's Office of the Deputy Chief of Staff for Training. Although there for only a short period, he was involved in evaluating a new training concept for NCOs, the fledgling Primary Leadership Development Course (PLDC). Traditionally, sergeants from the combat and noncombat arms trained separately. Combat-arms soldiers attended the Primary Noncommissioned Officer Course (PNCOC), while others attended the Primary Leadership Course (PLC). The Noncommissioned Officer Academy at Fort Stewart, Georgia, however, was testing a new training program in which NCOs from all the arms and branches trained together. The TRADOC CSM dispatched Hall to "go find out what they are doing." After observing soldiers from different career fields and backgrounds training together, Hall was impressed.

He notified the TRADOC CSM that he should come to Georgia to see the course for himself, and they spent a few days observing the pilot program. Upon his return to TRADOC, Hall prepared a staff study on combining the current NCO courses into PLDC and briefed the idea to the TRADOC deputy commanding general, who agreed with the proposal.

During Hall's assignment at Fort Monroe, the Army began the First Sergeant Course. With the course still in its infancy, Hall participated in the self-paced pilot program at Fort Bliss. He completed his studies ahead of the other students and was the first ever to graduate from the new course.

While at TRADOC, Hall was selected for promotion to master sergeant. After convincing the TRADOC CSM that he should be a first sergeant in Germany, he learned that his former unit, the 2d Battalion, 59th ADA, had vacancies and they wanted him. However, when he arrived in 1982 as a promotable sergeant first class, the battalion had eight excess E-8s. It was a blow to Hall, and he ended up working as a platoon sergeant with a first sergeant who was a peer. Hall joined the Stinger Platoon for the unit's participation in the training exercise REFORGER.⁸ When he returned from the exercise, Hall's superiors appointed him the headquarters platoon sergeant to help the unit get through its annual general inspection. Afterward, he moved to battalion headquarters to write an NCO development program.

One day Hall went into the battalion headquarters when the unit was on alert. The battalion commander asked him "why aren't you rolling out with your battery?" By then, Hall had been in Battery A, Battery B, and Headquarters Battery and was not sure which unit he was in anymore. The commander informed him that he was the new first sergeant of Battery B. Elated to have finally landed a first sergeant position, Hall jumped in one of the last trucks leaving the motor pool.

Hall's Battery B earned a reputation as the best unit in the battalion, earning thirteen of the

fifteen streamers available for top performance. He recognized that the soldiers and NCOs of his unit were hard workers who were looking for good leadership, which he strived to provide. Though his unit did not have the same personnel shortages that had bedeviled him during his previous tour, money for repair parts was a major concern. During one training exercise, Hall suggested that the unit should drive from its base at Schwabach to the training site at Vilseck—a distance of seventy miles—rather than follow the traditional method of shipping its equipment by rail. After some convincing, his commander gave in and they drove. The lack of spare parts, maintenance time, and equipment soon became evident, as the unit "left equipment from the front gate of Schwabach to the back gate of Vilseck." For the rest of their thirty-day exercise the unit worked on its equipment, and at the end all vehicles drove home under their own power.

With a little over one year's time as a master sergeant, Hall was selected to attend the Sergeants Major Academy. His attendance would coincide with the completion of his three-year tour in Germany. Together with wife Carol, who was eight-and-a-half months pregnant with son Jason, and his two daughters Apra and Rea, Hall left for Fort Bliss a month ahead of his June reporting date for the six-month-long Sergeants Major Course.

Hall enjoyed much about the course and his return to Texas. The academy conducted training through the small-group process, and he appreciated his new-found skills.⁹ Through the course he met people from around the Army, all of whom had different experiences, and they all learned from each other. The course was right on target for Hall, and he felt that the students were better prepared for their next level of assignment as a result. He believed the presence of his family was an important aspect of the program. It allowed him to spend more time with them without the rigors of a typical duty assignment, and he was able to enjoy the time together with them.

Hall finished the course with high marks and graduated in the top 10 percent of his class.

He was selected to remain as an instructor for the course he had just finished. After a little over a year on instructor duty, he was selected for promotion to command sergeant major and was sent to Fort Stewart, Georgia. There, he became the battalion command sergeant major for the 5th Battalion, 52d Air Defense Artillery (later redesignated as the 1st Battalion, 5th ADA).

CSM Hall typically started his day with physical training. The battalion had its own parade field, and every morning started with exercises and a four-mile run. After cleaning up and breakfast, the soldiers would undergo training. The unit began a program in which the battalion commander would turn the unit over to Hall for one week every quarter and he would take it to the field. At first, Hall had the unit perform maneuvers, gunnery, and collective training tasks. The battalion would then march back on Friday afternoon for a brief recovery period and close out any business at hand, at which point Hall would turn the battalion back over to the commander. Hall soon realized that he had the wrong focus during these training sessions, that he should have focused on individual and small-unit training. He therefore decided to alter these sessions to concentrate on the type of tasks NCOs were expected to perform, such as conducting road marches, setting up rifle ranges, and overseeing weapons qualification tests.

As a result, his battalion soon had a reputation as one of the top units in the 24th Infantry Division (Mechanized). By then, a new training doctrine had emerged that required units to focus on tasks they would have to perform in combat. Hall saw it as his responsibility to train his first sergeants, oversee the training of platoons, and spend time with his soldiers. He spent the majority of his time making sure the troops and their leaders were properly trained and prepared for whatever might lay ahead.

In 1989 Hall was "directed by the division commander to report to a new duty station." He became the commandant of the 24th Infantry Division NCO Academy, the same academy that he observed conducting the first PLDC when he

worked at TRADOC. Located twenty miles from the division headquarters, Hall's camp encompassed 5,000 acres of training area and had its own dining facility, exchange, barbershop, and bachelor enlisted quarters (BEQ). Besides PLDC, the academy taught the Basic Noncommissioned Officer Courses (BNCOC) for five different combat specialties and averaged 3,000 students per year. With good facilities, adequate funding, and the finest noncommissioned officers as cadre, Hall went to work turning out superb NCOs for the 24th Division.

In the early days of August 1990, Iraqi leader Saddam Hussein invaded Kuwait. Anticipating that the Army would deploy the 24th Infantry Division (Mechanized), Hall immediately sent his academy into 24-hour operations. Within six days he had graduated both the BNCOC and PLDC students. He then convinced the division commander to close the academy on the grounds that the school cadre were the finest NCOs in the division and that their services were now needed with the division's units.

After closing the academy, Hall learned that the division needed someone to take an advance party overseas. He volunteered immediately and was put on an aircraft bound for Saudi Arabia. His job was to get the advance party safely to Saudi Arabia and to map out the ground for the follow-on units. In those early days he was not sure what he would find when he got to Saudi Arabia and he was quite relieved that the advance group did not have to fight its way in.

As the rest of the division arrived in the Middle East, Hall spoke with the division sergeant major about assigning him to a unit, especially when he learned his old unit, the 1st Battalion, 5th ADA, did not have a CSM, but without success. With no particular unit responsibilities, Hall set about establishing a rest and relaxation (R&R) area for the weary front-line troops. He then established Victory Station, a replacement camp that included the division's personnel, replacement, and finance elements. It became the transit point for new arrivals before they moved forward to their assigned units.



CSM Hall During DESERT STORM as Division Artillery CSM in Iraq, 1991

In October 1990 the division commander, Maj. Gen. Barry R. McCaffrey, selected Hall to represent the division at the annual Association of the United States Army (AUSA) conference in Washington, D.C. When Hall returned to Saudi Arabia, he assumed duties as the division artillery command sergeant major. Not an artilleryman, Hall had to learn about the howitzer weapon system. Nevertheless, he never once felt out of place with the division artillery. When he was promoted to CSM, he replaced his branch insignia with that of the command sergeant major. As far as he was concerned leading and training were the same, and he knew he was fully prepared for his new assignment.

He recalled one day standing on a hill watching a lieutenant maneuver his platoon into an area. Hall knew how to deploy a unit, but was not sure what was going on. After a few minutes the lieutenant approached Hall apologetically

explaining he knew that he had taken some shortcuts. Hall asked, "What should you have done?" The lieutenant drew the platoon area in the sand, describing how he could have set up his platoon differently. Hall asked him if he was going to do it right the next time, and the lieutenant responded affirmatively. About a week later Hall was again on a hill watching a unit deploy when the same lieutenant ran up the hill and said, "I told you I'd do it right the next time." Hall agreed and told him "lieutenant, you are all right."

There was great confidence among the soldiers and noncommissioned officers of the division artillery. Over the years Hall had prepared soldiers to go to war, and now war had come. They had a job to do and were not hesitant, the prevailing attitude being "let us do what we came to do and let's get it over with." The soldiers focused intently on their training as they waited for their next mission—indeed there

were no distractions and little else to do but train and maintain their equipment until ordered to go to war.

That order came in February 1991, when the commander of the U.S. Central Command (CENTCOM), General H. Norman Schwarzkopf, instructed the 500,000 troops under his command to push the Iraqis out of Kuwait. Within 100 hours, the coalition destroyed almost 4,000 Iraqi tanks, captured an estimated 60,000 Iraqi soldiers, and ruined 36 Iraqi divisions at the cost of 148 American dead.¹⁰

Hall stayed in Saudi Arabia until April 1991. He had arrived on one of the division's first flights into Saudi Arabia and left on one of the division's last flights out. Once home the division resumed normal training. He was just becoming reacquainted with the daily routine of garrison life when he was nominated for the job of the 2d Infantry Division CSM in Korea. Soon thereafter, the commander of the 2d Division, Maj. Gen. James T. Scott, called Hall and asked, "Do you want to come to Korea?"

The Hall family moved to Yongsan in December 1991, and the new division sergeant major reported for duty twenty miles to the north at Camp Casey in Tongduch'on. The transition to his new duties was facilitated by the fact that General Scott had been the assistant division commander of the 24th Infantry Division and Hall's senior rater when he had been commandant of the NCO Academy. Having worked with Scott before, Hall was able to set to work right away.

Scott and Hall instituted a program where squad leaders became solely responsible for the weapons qualification training of their troops. The division tasked different units to run the ranges, but squad leaders would bring their squads to the ranges as a team. Leaders would teach and coach their soldiers on proper techniques and then qualify them on their weapons. This technique improved qualification scores throughout the division.

When Hall arrived in Korea, the division employed a nine-month training cycle. During the first three months of this cycle, the divi-

sion focused on individual training. Company level training occupied the second three months, and battalion-level training the third. But Scott and Hall were troubled by the nagging question, "What if we had to fight while we are only in the individual stage?" Consequently, they dropped the nine-month training in favor of a three-month cycle in which the division accomplished the entire range of training tasks, from individual to battalion, every ninety days.

When Hall became the CSM of the 2d Division, he knew that many of the other sergeants major in the division had more seniority. Anxious to avoid any resentment, he set out to build a team. He was impressed with the high quality of the division's sergeants major. Unfortunately, the high turnover rate due to the one-year rotation policy in Korea made it difficult to maintain a tight-knit team. Determined to fix this problem, he convinced the Department of the Army to establish two-year tours for brigade CSMs in Korea. Eighth Army supported the concept and set aside quarters to accommodate family members of 2d Division brigade CSMs. The new policy brought greater stability and cohesion to the 2d Division.

Despite the fact that the division was highly dispersed, Hall did not find it difficult to meet with the soldiers under his charge. He had access to vehicles and a helicopter and was able to visit all the division's units. While Hall was in Korea the 2d Division hosted two presidents, George H. W. Bush and William J. Clinton. When President Clinton arrived in 1993, Hall knew he played the saxophone and that he loved the tune "B Flat Blues." As the president was greeting the soldiers, the 2d Infantry Division band swung into that tune and someone held up a saxophone. Clinton, who gave them a "thumbs up," climbed on the bandstand and joined them in the song, much to the appreciation of the gathered crowd.

As Hall's two-year tour drew to a close, his commander nominated him to be the First Army CSM. He flew to Fort Meade,

Maryland, and interviewed for the job. After returning to Korea, he learned he had been selected and packed up the family once again. The First Army's primary mission was to oversee the U.S. Army Reserve and Army National Guard units in twenty states and the District of Columbia. The Department of the Army had recently changed the mission of the armies from commanding reserve component (RC) units to supporting them. Hall gained a new appreciation for the RC, not having previously spent much time with them other than working with the Georgia Army National Guard while assigned to Fort Stewart. He was impressed by the dedication it took for a soldier to work a full-time job, have a full-time family life, and serve in one of the reserve components. He quickly realized that the advertisements about the RCs were only half right, because "this ain't part-time work."

Hall learned patience. Accustomed to a full training year, he now oversaw units that trained for only thirty-nine days a year. He felt he had to learn a new language with different rules, regulations, and acronyms. He also gained a new appreciation for the citizen-soldier. One of his toughest challenges was balancing annual training (AT) and schooling requirements. A unit typically had a choice—it could either send a soldier to school or to AT, which was its one chance a year to train as a unit. Although a champion for NCOES and MOS-producing schools, Hall realized that sending soldiers off to school sometimes meant that an infantry brigade would have as few as nine full squads on the ground during training.

As First Army CSM, Hall noted how much the National Guard had changed since the days prior to Operation DESERT STORM. Before DESERT STORM Hall had felt that the Guard had not truly focused on training. Now, however, all that had changed, in part, Hall believed, because of the influx of combat veterans from the Gulf War.

After only eleven months with First Army, Hall was interviewed for consideration as the

command sergeant major for Central Command in 1994. Several days after the interview, the television news reported that Iraq was once again massing troops on the Kuwait border. Later that evening, the CENTCOM commander, General J. H. Binford Peay III, asked Hall to be his sergeant major and informed Hall that he intended to deploy to Kuwait immediately. Four days later Hall flew to Tampa, Florida, was issued his desert camouflage fatigues, and deployed to Kuwait.

Fortunately, a second war between Iraq and the United States did not occur at that time, and Hall soon found himself attending to the myriad tasks associated with the administration of a forward-deployed force in peacetime. The job was nevertheless challenging. CENTCOM was a joint command, and Hall soon discovered that the services each viewed the senior enlisted position a little differently. He found that not only did he have to tell someone what to do, but why they should do it.

Hall had to wrestle with four different sets of rules for physical training, weight control, awards, and evaluations. He had not been exposed to this level of "jointness" before and felt that the Department of Defense did adequately prepare service members for that type of environment. Later, as Sergeant Major of the Army, he would recommend that the Army establish a training program for soldiers destined for assignment to a joint command. Still, the soldiers, sailors, airmen, and marines that comprised CENTCOM were more alike than not. The concerns of the enlisted force were generally the same, no matter the service, and all personnel were devoted to the same mission.

Hall was one of the final candidates during the selection process for the tenth Sergeant Major of the Army. Incoming Chief of Staff General Dennis J. Reimer interviewed him, but he was not selected. Instead, he went back to work as CENTCOM's command sergeant major.

After the Gulf War Hall had promised himself that he would never return to that part of the world. It was a promise he would not be able to keep. The United States had troops deployed in twenty countries throughout

Southwest Asia and the Middle East, and Hall believed they all deserved his time. Consequently, he would make twenty-nine trips to the area during his tenure as Central Command's CSM.

In October 1996 the Army suspended SMA Gene C. McKinney amid accusations of impropriety. In June 1997 Chief of Staff Reimer appointed two acting Sergeants Major of the Army and by October had decided that he would appoint a permanent replacement for McKinney. Hall, who had just returned from the Middle East, received a phone call from Reimer asking if he would be in Washington for the annual AUSA Convention. When Hall answered affirmatively, Reimer asked if Hall would stop by his quarters that Sunday. Hall went to Reimer's house as expected, only to discover that the Chief of Staff wanted him to be the new Sergeant Major of the Army.

The following morning General Reimer stepped before an audience of three hundred of the Army's top NCOs at the AUSA CSM Conference and introduced Hall as the eleventh Sergeant Major of the Army. Hall took the opportunity to speak from the heart and asked those present to "keep the faith. Faith in the Army, faith in the leadership, and faith in themselves." Later, at his Pentagon swearing-in ceremony on 24 October, Reimer asked Hall to be a forceful advocate for soldiers and to keep his eye on the future. He took those comments as his marching orders.

With the office's having been vacant for almost eight months, Hall quickly set about filling the void and reminding the Army there was still a Sergeant Major of the Army. He felt that the enlisted force at the time was strong and was functioning pretty much as usual. Probably the first SMA to tote a laptop computer on his travels, Hall published his electronic mail address in *Soldiers* magazine so soldiers could contact him directly. However, he was keenly aware that the connectivity provided by modern technology raised the risk of soldiers' circumventing the chain of command, and he was not one to allow the computer to replace face-to-face leadership.

With the Army still dealing with the repercussions of the sexual harassment scandal, Hall noted that "we can't do a lot about making yesterday perfect, but we can do an awful lot about making tomorrow better."¹¹ A former drill sergeant with experience during troubled times in the late 1970s, Hall likened discipline and related issues to a pendulum. "When it seems to sway too far towards leniency, it rights itself."

Hall felt that his experiences in basic soldiering skills gave him credibility when addressing concerns at the training centers. The Army had conducted opinion surveys across the force, and one of the recommendations was that the Army needed to do more to foster strong values and beliefs. In response, the Department of the Army identified seven core values—loyalty, duty, respect, selfless service, honor, integrity, and personal courage—and gave Hall the responsibility to "figure out what to do with them." Hall responded by developing a tag to be worn and card to be carried by every soldier that enumerated the Army's values. He put special emphasis on the wording that appeared on the card. He hoped to instill pride—pride in uniform, pride in country, and pride in service. Secretary of the Army Louis Caldera, General Reimer, and Hall unveiled the new cards at a Pentagon ceremony on 17 July 1998.

During Hall's many trips to Capitol Hill, his message remained the same: Improve the quality of life for the enlisted force. He pared his concerns down to four major issues—pay and entitlements, housing, medical care, and retirement benefits. As a result of testimony by Hall and other senior military leaders, Congress reinstated 50 percent pay benefits for military personnel who retired after twenty years of service. Hall also testified frequently about quality of life and morale, welfare, and recreation issues, telling Congress that "our nation owes its soldiers a quality of life commensurate with that of the private sector and the peace of mind that their families will be taken care of when they deploy."

Hall believed that the Sergeant Major of the Army was the leader of the NCO Corps.



SMA Hall in a Bunker in Bosnia with 1st Cavalry Division Soldiers

Though he realized that all NCOs worked for their commanders, the SMA provided direction and focus for the noncommissioned leaders of the Army. He felt his primary job was fourfold: to visit with soldiers wherever they worked, whether in the motor pool or in the field; to foster the development of the noncommissioned officer corps; to work with the Army Staff on actions affecting the enlisted force; and to represent the interests of enlisted men and women before the Department of Defense and Congress. After finding out what the soldiers in the field were concerned about, Hall made it his responsibility to return to Washington and “do something about it.”

Hall believed that a particular challenge to the NCO Corps, and a busy Army, was to make sure that the troops were trained and ready. He knew that NCOs were responsible for the indi-

vidual and crew/squad/section training of their soldiers. They were also responsible for the good order and discipline of their units; consequently, Hall was concerned that noncommissioned officers maintain the highest standards. He knew that through leader development and tough, realistic training those standards could be achieved.

In June 1999 General Eric K. Shinseki was sworn in as the new Army Chief of Staff. In an effort to bring all components of the Army together, he declared, “we are the Army—totally integrated, with a unity of purpose—no longer the Total Army, no longer One Army. We are The Army.”¹² Hall had seen integration at its best when he had served at First Army, and he readily picked up the Chief of Staff’s message. Indeed, during his first trip to Bosnia he found it was nearly impossible to tell who was active,

Guard, and reserve. He would sit around a table with soldiers and the conversation would usually turn to “where are you from and what do you do?” When somebody would say “I am in the Guard” or “I am a Reservist,” another soldier at the table would inevitably turn and say, “I didn’t know that.” He saw that soldiers did not care who was active and who was in the reserves. They only cared whether a soldier could do the job.

Shinseki set out to transform the Army to carry it into the twenty-first century. As Hall kept his eye on the future, he believed that non-commissioned officers would still have to exhibit the same qualities that had always characterized their profession. Despite all the technology and digitization, Hall knew that the NCO would still be the one to tell a soldier “take off your boots so I can see your feet,” and to shake a canteen to ensure the troops had water. While the Army certainly needed NCOs who could master emerging technologies, these NCOs still had to be able to lead soldiers on the battlefield.

Hall’s highest honor and most memorable experience came on a day he did not look

forward to. His career ended just as it had started three decades earlier, on a parade field. This time it was a special ceremony to honor him for his faithful service. Hall had brought credibility back to soldiers, the Army, and to the Office of the Sergeant Major of the Army. He had also served as a forceful advocate for soldiers. After traveling around the world twelve times and talking with more than 60,000 men and women in uniform, Hall walked across Summerall Parade Field at Fort Myer, Virginia, for the last time on 22 June 2000. For only the second time, the positional colors of the Sergeant Major of the Army, which were established while Hall was in office, were displayed together with the colors of the Chief of Staff of the Army. In a Concurrent Resolution, both the South Carolina House of Representatives and the Congress of the State of South Carolina commended Hall on his thirty-two years of dedicated and distinguished service to the U.S. Army as he returned to his childhood home of Gaffney, South Carolina.¹³

Notes

1. Except as noted, this section is based on Intervs, Frank R. Shirer with Robert E. Hall, 9 Jun 00, Washington, D.C., and Daniel K. Elder with Robert E. Hall, 5 Oct 01, Gaffney, S.C.

2. Committee groups were teams of military instructors who specialized in specific topics, such as communications, first aid, or marksmanship.

3. The 41-foot Nike-Hercules surface-to-air-missile had a range of over seventy-five miles and traveled at speeds of greater than mach 3.5. It was in service from 1958 to 1974.

4. A mobile, light air-defense system with a turret mounted on a tracked vehicle carrying four ready-to-fire missiles, the Chaparral was a ground-launched version of the air-to-air Sidewinder.

5. Lt. Gen. George S. Blanchard created the Sergeant Morales Club in 1974 to recognize the professionalism of VII Corps soldiers. General Blanchard and CSM William Strickland later expanded it to all of U.S. Army, Europe. Soldiers were recommended by their chain of command to appear before a series of selection boards.

6. Paul D. Hood, "Implementation and Utilization of the Leader Preparation Program," George Washington University Human Resources Research Office, Washington, D.C., Mar 67, p. 13.

7. The headgear worn by drill sergeants was based on the 1883 U.S. Army campaign hat. The Army reintroduced it in 1964 for wear by those serving on drill sergeant duty.

8. The Stinger is a man-portable, shoulder-fired, infrared homing (heat seeking) air defense guided missile. Return of Forces to Germany (REFORGER) was an annual exercise in which joint services participated in overseas training to reinforce the North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO).

9. Small groups were used to develop skills such as problem solving, interpretation of concepts, and application of principles and basic information to practical problems. The small-group process promoted collaboration and the development of interpersonal skills better than traditional classroom lectures.

10. David W. Hogan, Jr., *225 Years of Service: The U.S. Army 1775–2000* (Washington, D.C.: Center of Military History, 2000), pp. 34–35.

11. "Reimer swears in Hall as 11th SMA," *Pentagram*, 24 Oct 97, p. 3.

12. Transcript, "Army Chief of Staff Arrival Ceremony," 22 Jun 99, author's files, U.S. Army Center of Military History, Washington, D.C. (hereafter cited as CMH).

13. Concurrent Resolution 1720, "Sergeant Major Robert E. Hall, Resolutions," South Carolina Congress, adopted 31 May 00, author's files, CMH.

Assignments

1968	Inducted into service, Basic Training, Fort Bragg, North Carolina
1968	Advanced Individual Training, Fort Bliss, Texas
1968–1970	Switchboard Operator, Launcher Crewman, Assistant Section Chief, Battery D, 4th Battalion, 59th Air Defense Artillery (ADA), Fort Story, Virginia
1970–1972	Squad Leader, Battery D, 8th Battalion, 61st ADA, Fort Bliss, Texas; Republic of Korea
1972–1974	Squad Leader, Battery C, 5th Battalion, 67th ADA and Battery C, 3d Battalion, 6th ADA, Fort Bliss, Texas
1974–1977	Squad Leader, Platoon Sergeant, Operations and Intelligence Sergeant, 2d Battalion, 59th ADA, 1st Armored Division, Schwabach, Germany
1977–1979	Instructor, Senior Drill Sergeant, Battery C, 4th Training Brigade, Fort Bliss, Texas
1979–1980	Army Drill Sergeant of the Year, Headquarters, U.S. Army Training and Doctrine Command, Fort Monroe, Virginia
1980–1982	Operations and Training Staff NCO, Deputy Chief of Staff for Training, U.S. Army Training and Doctrine Command, Fort Monroe, Virginia
1982–1985	First Sergeant, Battery B, 2d Battalion, 59th ADA, 1st Armored Division, Schwabach, Germany
1985–1986	Student, Class #26, Sergeants Major Academy, Fort Bliss, Texas
1986–1987	Instructor, Sergeants Major Academy, Fort Bliss, Texas
1987–1989	Command Sergeant Major, 5th Battalion, 52d ADA, 24th Infantry Division (Mechanized), Fort Stewart, Georgia
1990–1991	Command Sergeant Major, Division Artillery, 24th Infantry Division (Mechanized), Saudi Arabia; Iraq
1991–1993	Command Sergeant Major, 2d Infantry Division, Yongson, Republic of Korea
1993–1994	Command Sergeant Major, First U.S. Army, Fort Meade, Maryland
1994–1997	Command Sergeant Major, U.S. Central Command, MacDill, Air Force Base, Florida
1997–2000	Sergeant Major of the Army

Selected Decorations and Awards

Defense Distinguished Service Medal
Distinguished Service Medal
Defense Superior Service Medal
Legion of Merit with One Oak Leaf Cluster
Bronze Star Medal
Defense Meritorious Service Medal
Meritorious Service Medal with Five Oak Leaf Clusters
Joint Service Commendation Medal
Army Commendation Medal with Four Oak Leaf Clusters
Army Achievement Medal with One Oak Leaf Cluster
Good Conduct Medal with Ten Oak Leaf Clusters
National Defense Service Medal with Service Star
Armed Forces Expeditionary Medal
Southwest Asia Service Medal
Kuwait Liberation Medal (Kingdom of Saudi Arabia)
Kuwait Liberation Medal (Government of Kuwait)
Drill Sergeant Badge



SMA Tilley

Jack L. Tilley

Jack L. Tilley was born on 3 December 1948 and grew up in Vancouver, Washington.¹ A people person who liked dealing with others, Tilley had a goal—to enjoy life. Not a particularly scholarly student, Tilley was a sports enthusiast who had boxed for about five years as a youth and occasionally sparred with professionals in Portland, Oregon. Without a family background in the military, he was only slightly aware of the war in Vietnam and how it might affect him.

While at the beach soon after graduating from high school, Tilley and five friends decided to join the Army. Only two, Tilley and Prentice (Barney) Boykin, would eventually follow through with their plan. Tilley went to the recruiter in June 1966 and filled out the forms and took the required tests. He was not too concerned about what he wanted to do in the Army, so the recruiter suggested that he become a “tanker.” Remembering tanks from the movies, Tilley agreed as long as he would be able to “jump out of airplanes.”

The Army shipped Tilley and his hometown buddy to basic training at Fort Lewis, Washington, where they received “the biggest shock of their life” when they stepped off the bus. Tilley was quickly introduced to Army push-ups, recalling he did about fifty just getting from the bus to the reception station. His life had taken a 180-degree turn, and he was unsure that he was ready for Army life.

Private Tilley and his platoon were assigned to Drill Sergeant Lewis, a tall, thin staff sergeant. Lewis commanded respect just by his presence and was a true professional. Lewis lived upstairs in the same open platoon bay as

the trainees. While committee groups conducted training and testing, drill instructors like Lewis were mostly charged with molding the character of the recruits.

Graduation was a big day. Tilley marched around the Fort Lewis parade field with the rest of his platoon while his family looked on. He was proud of wearing the Army uniform and being a soldier. The accomplishment of completing basic training, having a “little money” in his pocket, and being allowed to shop in the post exchange were the early highlights of Tilley’s budding career—a career that would eventually take him to the top of his chosen profession.

Tilley never thought much about promotion until he was a staff sergeant. While watching others move up the ranks, he also hoped he would someday get promoted. Not expecting to be more than a good specialist, Tilley tried to do the best he could and to focus on his job, whether he was a private first class or, later, as a non-commissioned officer (NCO).

After a few weeks of leave, Tilley was off to Fort Knox, Kentucky, for Advanced Individual Training (AIT) as an armored crewman. Although the trainees were surrounded by drill sergeants, the atmosphere was more relaxed and Tilley enjoyed some additional freedoms, including occasional passes to nearby Louisville. With the ongoing war in Vietnam, the trainees began to talk more of combat, noticing that the school stayed filled to capacity. Tilley’s training consisted of learning how to operate an M48 tank, mastering each task and moving to the next one. At times Tilley wondered if he would be able to retain it all.



Private Tilley at Airborne School

Upon graduation, Tilley went directly to the Airborne School at Fort Benning, Georgia. Though the parachute training would not be of much use to him in his first assignment to Vietnam, Tilley gained additional confidence from the course. It prepared him both physically and mentally for the rigors he was about to face.

After completing “jump school,” Tilley and Boykin, along with five of the other 400-plus graduates, were bound for Vietnam. Both Tilley and Boykin were sent to the 173d Infantry Brigade (Airborne) in Pleiku. Several days after their arrival, Tilley was reassigned to the 1st Infantry Division and sent to Camp Zion, leaving Boykin behind. Tilley would have the unfortunate duty of escorting home the body of his boyhood friend a few months later.

On his first night with the Big Red One, Tilley was given a room with only a set of box

springs to lie on. He put his duffel bag behind his head to sleep, only to be awakened by two drunken soldiers fighting over a mattress. The next day he was issued an M14 rifle without ammunition and sent in the back of a truck to Phu Loi to join his unit, “Quarter Cav,” Troop A, 1st Squadron, 4th Cavalry. Fortunately for the ammo-less Tilley, the trip proved uneventful.

After a short period of in-country training on booby traps, the terrain, and the M48A3 tank, Tilley was shipped out to the field, where his platoon was pulling airfield security duty. He was initially assigned duties as an assistant gunner on an armored cavalry vehicle (ACAV), a gasoline-powered M113 tracked troop carrier armed with a .50-caliber machine gun. Soon after his arrival his platoon was attacked and suffered a high number of casualties, including the platoon leader and platoon sergeant. Because of the losses, Tilley was reassigned as a loader for A-25, one of his troop’s M48A3 tanks, and later became a driver.

Troop A regularly conducted search-and-destroy and route-security missions. Each morning it would “sweep” the roads to ensure they were clear of mines and then sit along the roads to make sure they stayed clear. Since the enemy often placed mines on the sides of the road, the tankers were careful to drive straight down the center. During monsoon seasons the tanks were limited to improved roads, and in one operation Tilley mired his tank up to the turret ring and required a tank retriever to extract him.²

The greatest lessons he learned in Vietnam were to listen to his NCOs and to pay attention to detail. He realized that situations were apt to change quickly, and he always wanted to be prepared. People got hurt most when they became complacent and let down their guard. He also learned that if he was going to do something he had to do it to the best of his ability. He owed that to himself and the soldiers around him. He was confident in the people with whom he served and knew they were among the best. Tilley did not witness much indiscipline within the ranks in 1967, and he was proud of his unit and its accomplishments.

The final days of January 1968 represented a turning point in the war in Vietnam. Tet, the Vietnamese New Year, began with a bad omen for Tilley and his comrades. After taking fire in the early morning from friendly “gunship” helicopters, his troop moved toward Saigon, the South Vietnamese capital, which was under attack from all quarters. Skirting Highway 13, which had not been cleared, the troop advanced slowly until the division commander, Maj. Gen. John H. Hay, Jr., demanded that Quarter Cav get on the road and pick up the pace. Tilley, second in line, grabbed his seldom-worn armored vest and sat on it for added protection. The first vehicle struck a mine, but the troop, with Tilley now in the lead, continued past the damaged vehicle toward Saigon, running over barriers placed in the road by the enemy.

Soon after arriving in Saigon, Troop A was dispatched to Tan Son Nhut Air Base, a primary target of the Viet Cong offensive. A large enemy force had infiltrated the Vinatexco textile factory across Highway 1, and Tilley’s troop was sent to dislodge it. During the operation, an ACAV fell off an eight-foot cliff and Tilley was sent to help retrieve it. His tank was supposed to knock down a wall so two ACAVs could reach the damaged vehicle. The plan was for one of the ACAVs to provide covering fire while the other towed out the disabled vehicle. Tilley’s tank broke through the wall, but the two ACAVs were unable to make it in. Seizing the initiative, Tilley maneuvered his tank up to the disabled ACAV and pulled it to safety. He then rejoined the defensive perimeter guarding Tan Son Nhut. For his actions that day, Tilley received the Bronze Star for valor.

By the time Tilley’s tour was complete, he had been promoted to Specialist 5.³ He returned to the United States and took leave to just “gear down.” He then reported to Fort Benning, Georgia. The armor unit to which he was assigned was full, so the assignments NCO asked Tilley if he “could sing.” He replied, “if I do, people will leave.” The NCO then promptly assigned Tilley duties as a drill sergeant. Posted to Fort Benning’s Sand Hill area, Tilley first



Drill Sergeant Tilley

served as a drill sergeant candidate for about a month and a half and then went off to Drill Sergeant School. It proved to be one of the toughest schools Tilley would attend. Not comfortable talking in front of a large group, Tilley later credited the course for giving him maturity and “pulling him out of being a young adult.”

Now a sergeant (E-5)—the conversion from specialist occurring when he became a drill instructor—Tilley enjoyed training recruits. He was exposed to Secretary of Defense Robert S. McNamara’s Project 100,000 social experiment when he lost a coin toss with a fellow drill instructor and assumed command over an unpromising collection of recruits.⁴ The soldiers in his platoon had only 3d- or 4th-grade educations, yet they did a great job. Admittedly, it took longer to teach them, but for the most part he believed they were pretty good soldiers.

Many were smart, Tilley recalled. They just had not had the opportunity to go to school.

Now promoted, Staff Sergeant Tilley's first hitch was coming to a close in 1969 and he decided to get out of the Army. Unhappy with his company commander, Tilley rationalized: "I'll show him. I will get out." He first went to Georgia and then to Washington, working in a paneling factory and later for a chemical company. But Tilley, who had enjoyed the Army, continued to be drawn to military service. One day while on vacation he visited Fort Lewis and sat to watch the soldiers train. Tilley began to reconsider, thinking how one man (his former commander) had caused him to readjust his entire life and do something he had not wanted to do.

Tilley continued to consider the idea of returning to the Army, visiting his local recruiting office and becoming friends with one of the recruiters. One day in 1971 his friend called him and told him that if he intended to come back in he must do it within the next couple of days, or he would not be able to retain his previously earned staff sergeant rank. Tilley filled out the required forms and told his civilian boss he was leaving so he could reenlist in the Army.

Tilley and his wife Gloria, whom he had married in 1970, moved to Fort Polk, Louisiana, in 1971. He was again assigned duties as a drill sergeant. Tilley noticed that the quality of recruits had improved compared to his earlier tour. He also experienced the increased scrutiny that the Army was beginning to apply to drill instructors as it moved to an all-volunteer force. While at Fort Polk, Tilley met some first-class noncommissioned officers who would serve as role models later in his career. As Tilley put it, he picked up their traits and put them in his "rucksack" to use as his own.

When Tilley's oldest son Brian contracted pneumococcal meningitis, the family was reassigned to Fort Lewis, Washington, in 1974 so Brian could receive the specialized care he needed. Tilley went back to tanks and became a tank commander in the 9th Infantry Division's 2d Battalion, 77th Armor. Over the next five

years he rose from tank commander to section sergeant and eventually to tank platoon sergeant. He assumed the last post with the 3d Battalion, 32d Armor, in Friedberg, Germany, the same installation that Elvis Presley had served at from 1958 to 1960.

By now Tilley was thoroughly proficient in tank operations and was assigned to Fort Knox, Kentucky, as an instructor. He taught small-arms qualification and tank gunnery to AIT students as part of the Armor School's training committee. He also provided instruction on the .50-caliber machine gun and land navigation. Tilley was eventually selected as a senior tank commander and was responsible for conducting the first-ever M1 Tank Training course at Fort Knox.⁵

By 1980 the Army had been experimenting with the XM1 Main Battle Tank (Abrams), a revolutionary combat vehicle that would be the centerpiece of the future Combined Arms battlefield. The Abrams initially was equipped with a 105-mm. smoothbore barrel and a 1,500-horsepower turbine engine, capable of reaching speeds of up to forty-five miles per hour. Tilley was involved early in the process of preparing lesson plans and training devices for the M1. According to Tilley, changing from M60A1-series tanks to the M1 was like "going from a Volkswagen to a Cadillac."

Tilley continued to gain experience with the M1 and went to Florida to assist in evaluating a new concept for tank training, the Unit Conduct of Fire Trainer (UCOFT) tank simulator.⁶ Colonel A. P. O'Meara, Jr., made Tilley a gunner during a few trial exercises. When Colonel O'Meara asked his opinion of the simulator, Tilley responded, "buy the system," convinced it would take training to a higher level. Tilley would later caution, however, that simulators could not completely replace hands-on training. In his opinion, soldiers still needed to "mount the tank, feel the breech recoil, and smell the smoke coming off the main gun round." Those actions differed profoundly from simply pulling a trigger and watching a laser beam in a simulator.

Near the end of the first OSUT cycle at Fort Knox, Tilley was tapped to fill in as company first sergeant. Shortly thereafter, the battalion commander reassigned Tilley as the battalion operations sergeant, a master sergeant position. Within a matter of days Tilley went from senior tank commander, to first sergeant, and finally to operations sergeant. With little advance training or preparation, Tilley was now on the battalion staff, faced with publishing operations orders and training schedules. He appreciated the personal development that came from this experience and would later put it to use as a first sergeant and sergeant major.

Tilley was accustomed to field duty by now and longed to return to the line. After being selected for promotion to master sergeant in 1984, Tilley was selected for first sergeant duty in Company B, 1st Battalion, 1st Brigade, the unit responsible for conducting OSUT for M1 tank crews. His company had trainees, drill sergeants, and committee group instructors. Tilley discovered that some tank commanders had never been drill sergeants, some drill sergeants had never been tank commanders, and that a rivalry existed between them. To remedy this situation, Tilley began rotating his personnel between drill sergeant and tank commander slots. For each training cycle, Tilley put a different drill sergeant into a tank commander slot, while making a tank commander a drill sergeant. After a few cycles the group began to realize the importance of both roles, and the friction disappeared.

Tilley found that a special relationship existed between a commander and his first sergeant. Soon after assuming his duties, Tilley explained to his company commander that he had never been a first sergeant and might need some help. The commander replied that he had never been a commander and might need Tilley's help. As Tilley was probably the oldest soldier in the company, all the soldiers looked to him for advice. He believed it was his job to make the company commander and the unit successful and that he would share in their successes as he pushed them forward.

During Tilley's time as first sergeant, the Army began to investigate allegations that drill instructors and cadre personnel were abusing trainees, a problem that Tilley believed was widespread. The drill instructors were watched closely, and Tilley began to fear that they were apprehensive in performing their duties. OSUT carried soldiers further than normal basic training and allowed the trainees more freedoms. It thus posed somewhat different problems for the cadre from what they were accustomed to. Tilley set high standards for himself and expected others to follow his example. Communication, counseling, and staying focused on his responsibilities were the keys to Tilley's leadership style.

In 1985 Tilley became the Basic Noncommissioned Officer Course (BNCOC) chief at the Fort Knox Noncommissioned Officer Academy. As the course chief, he counseled soldiers and monitored training to ensure that the course was conducted to standards. He also rewrote the program of instruction for the M1 armored crewman NCO course. Tilley felt that M1 crews needed to be able to react quickly and to understand thoroughly the complex system at their disposal, and he hoped that the course he had developed would instill those traits.

As a senior NCO, Tilley was unable to attend such newly instituted Noncommissioned Officer Education System (NCOES) courses as the BNCOC. His exposure to the academic environment at the Fort Knox NCO Academy, however, had given him a good grasp of how the Army was educating NCOs. He felt his time at the academy, coupled with his experience as a tank commander, platoon sergeant, operations sergeant, and first sergeant, had rounded him out and allowed him to put his position as a senior noncommissioned officer into perspective. His depth of experience and fine qualities as a leader led to his early selection to attend the Sergeants Major Academy after being a master sergeant for only one year. Leaving his family in Elizabethtown, Kentucky, Tilley departed for El Paso to attend the six-month-long course.



CSM Tilley and General William W. Crouch Award NATO Medals to Redeploying Soldiers.

Tilley's initial apprehension about attending the course quickly gave way to excitement, not only about the opportunity to receive the advanced training, but also at the prospect that somebody might "mess up and actually promote me." Attending lectures, completing research papers, doing foreign country and national security studies, Tilley felt the course provided excellent training for future and serving sergeants major.

Tilley was assigned to Korea after graduation in 1987. Upon his arrival in Seoul, a senior NCO explained that they needed a first sergeant right there at the reception center. Tilley thought, "great, I am going to be able to stay right here in Seoul." After walking him around

the installation the NCO noticed Tilley's nametag. He gestured to the nametag and said "Tilley? Oh, they already called about you. You are going to Camp Casey," forty miles away in the city of Tongduch'on. There, Tilley assumed duties as the first sergeant of Company C, 1st Battalion, 72d Armor.

Tilley replaced a first sergeant who had just been relieved and quickly set to work. First, he sat down with the commander and they established a plan that Tilley immediately executed. He developed standard operating procedures for actions on alert—procedures that allowed his company to finish loading equipment ahead of the others. Soon his company achieved the highest scores in tank gun-

nery and performed extremely well during the annual Inspector General visit. Tilley credited the motivated soldiers of his unit with their many successes. He felt the unit's proximity to a hostile border, its focus on training and preparation, and the limited number of distractions in Korea all contributed to Company C's high morale and winning spirit.

Upon completing his tour in Korea, Tilley returned once again to Fort Knox, Kentucky. Working primarily as a chief instructor, he was soon selected for command sergeant major (CSM) and moved to the 1st Battalion, 10th Cavalry, 194th Separate Armored Brigade, in 1988. The 1st Battalion, 10th Cavalry, was a COHORT unit, and Tilley found that his responsibilities were similar to those of a first sergeant.⁷ He felt that as the battalion's senior NCO, he needed to be visible to the soldiers and to talk to them in their environment. Tilley could usually be found walking through the battalion area on the weekends visiting with the soldiers of his battalion. He tried to keep his commander informed and to serve as an "honest broker" within the unit. After a year and a half with the 10th Cavalry, Tilley became the 194th Armored Brigade's command sergeant major and served with the 6,000-plus soldiers of the brigade for almost two years. As the Army reshaped its force, the 194th was selected for inactivation and Tilley was nominated for the 1st Armored Division CSM position.

In 1992 Tilley went to Germany along with five or six other sergeants major to interview with 1st Armored Division commander, Maj. Gen. William M. Boice. After the interviews, Boice announced that all had done a great job, but that he had selected Tilley for the position. After handshakes and congratulations, within a few moments Tilley was left alone. He went to his new commander's office and said "sir, I've never been a division sergeant major before. What do you want me to do?" Boice answered, "go home, get your stuff, and come back to work as quickly as you can." Tilley went on to serve for over five years as the 1st Armored Division's sergeant major.

From the division's headquarters in Bad Kreuznach, Tilley would begin his days sometimes as early as 0330, driving to the remote locations occupied by subordinate units for physical training or to meet with the soldiers of the command. He improvised a unit checklist to keep track of which units he had not been around to see in a while. Although it was sometimes difficult because of the division's dispersion, Tilley attempted to develop his subordinate leaders by doing things they liked to do. Whether running or playing racquetball, Tilley found his best method of mentorship was simply to communicate with those around him.

In June 1991 civil war erupted in Yugoslavia when Croatia and Slovenia proclaimed their independence. The fighting soon spread to the former Yugoslav state of Bosnia-Herzegovina, and in 1992 the United Nations deployed 18,000 U.S. peacekeepers and 7,000 multinational forces to the Balkans as part of the United Nations Protective Force (UNPROFOR). The following year UNPROFOR extended its activities to the former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia in an effort to prevent ethnic violence from spreading out of Bosnia-Herzegovina into Macedonia. Soldiers from the 1st Armored Division's Task Force 3-12 joined the UN's Macedonian operation in 1995. As the war in Bosnia raged on, international mediators met in Dayton, Ohio, to work out a peace agreement, which was finally signed in November 1995. As part of the agreement, the North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO) agreed to assume responsibility for enforcing the peace in Bosnia through a special Implementation Force (IFOR). The U.S. Army chose the 1st Armored Division to spearhead its contribution to IFOR.

Prior to December Tilley had been alerted twice to go to the Balkans. Each time he had readied himself, but his unit had soon stood down. The third notification occurred in December 1995. After arriving at the division headquarters soon after learning of the alert, Tilley knew by the flurry of activity that this time it was for real. Initially he was concerned that the division would have to fight its way into Bosnia.

Fortunately this did not occur, though there was no shortage of obstacles for the division to overcome. Flooding on the Sava River, a French rail strike, and the bitter Bosnian winter all complicated the deployment, yet in the end Task Force EAGLE was able to move more than 25,000 troops, their equipment, and 11,000 vehicles into the IFOR sector within sixty-five days of notification—a tremendous feat.⁸

Tilley and the division commander, Maj. Gen. William L. Nash, arrived by air at their new headquarters in Tuzla, Bosnia, three days before the transfer of authority from UNPROFOR to IFOR. At the time the rest of the division was stalled at the Sava River on the Bosnian-Croatian border at Zupanja, Croatia, as the division's engineers attempted the largest river crossing since World War II. Just as the engineers were poised to cross, a thaw caused the Sava to swell from 300 to 600 meters wide. The sudden flood swamped most of the engineers' equipment. The engineers overcame the dilemma by rebuilding the approaches to the Sava and by using Chinook helicopters to deploy ribbon bridge sections into the river. Their efforts paid off when the bridge was finally completed at 1000 hours on 31 December 1995.⁹

Nash's primary directive to Tilley during the Bosnian operation was to enforce basic standards. Tilley went to the river to check on the situation there and then traveled throughout the division's area of operations to meet with the troops. He observed that the soldiers were well trained, in good spirits, and focused on the mission at hand. He was also aware of the difficult conditions under which the troops had to operate—the cold, the mud, the sometimes unfriendly populace, and the ever-present threat of mines.

Having served a one-year tour in a combat zone early in his career, Tilley was concerned that soldiers might lose their edge in what was also predicted to be a one-year deployment. To overcome his concerns about complacency, Tilley felt he needed to be among the troops, giving encouragement and listening to their concerns. He occasionally traveled with a band that entertained the "Iron Soldiers" of the divi-

sion and was always careful to scrutinize the amount of recreational equipment available. The United Services Organization (USO) assisted the division's morale-building programs by bringing performers from the United States to entertain the troops and demonstrate public support for the soldiers overseas.

The 1st Armored Division returned to Germany in December 1996, and for Tilley it was like coming to a new unit. Many people in the division had rotated and returned to the United States, and Tilley had to get to know a whole new crop of soldiers. In July 1997, after more than five years as the division sergeant major, Tilley intended to head back to Fort Knox, Kentucky. He would serve as a battalion sergeant major there for eighteen months and retire. A couple of weeks before he left Germany, however, a friend encouraged him to contend for the position of the Space and Missile Defense Command (SMDC) sergeant major in Arlington, Virginia. He was ultimately selected.

Coming from a command of about 18,000 soldiers, Tilley had to adjust to the size of the SMDC, which numbered only about 1,200 soldiers and 1,500 civilians. Working with civilians was nothing new to Tilley, since he had worked with them in the 1st Armored Division. Tilley felt that "civilians were soldiers too," only that "they elected" to serve their country out of uniform. He noted they had the same desire as soldiers to make things better for those around them.

While serving with the SMDC, Tilley took part in a conference sponsored by the U.S. Army Sergeants Major Academy on the future development of Army noncommissioned officers. The five-day workshop focused on identifying issues for NCO professional development, to include the strengths and weaknesses of the present system and its ability to meet future challenges.¹⁰ A by-product of the workshop was the development of a "Future NCO Vision" that charted a course for Army NCOs into the twenty-first century.

After only five months with SMDC, Tilley was selected as the Central Command (CENTCOM) senior enlisted adviser to replace

Robert E. Hall, who had become the eleventh Sergeant Major of the Army. Tilley was excited to move to Tampa, Florida, and to work with enlisted soldiers from all services. As a unified combat command, CENTCOM had a “real world” mission with an area of operations covering a 25-nation area around South-east Asia.

Tilley’s approach to leadership at CENTCOM flowed from his earlier assignments. He felt that no matter what their service, enlisted personnel had similar needs and concerns and he needed to be active in meeting them. After learning about the different cultures and rules that characterized each service, he set about routine operations at the joint headquarters.

In late 1999 Tilley was nominated for the position of Sergeant Major of the Army. The following May the SMA nominating board interviewed him and twelve other candidates. The board selected five finalists, Tilley among them. Chief of Staff General Eric K. Shinseki then interviewed each of the finalists—an experience that Tilley recalled as “picking his brain.” Confident after his interview, Tilley returned to Tampa, took leave, and went golfing. He was on the second hole when SMA Robert Hall called to tell him that he had to return to Washington for an interview with Secretary of the Army Louis E. Caldera. Tilley asked if that was another step in the selection process and Hall told him he was “one of one” for this last meeting. At the conclusion of this last interview, Caldera told Tilley to “tell Sergeant Major Hall I am giving you a thumbs up.”



SMA Tilley in the Driver’s Compartment of a Fox NBC Vehicle at Fort Hood, Texas

On 23 June 2000, Jack L. Tilley was sworn in as the twelfth Sergeant Major of the Army in the Pentagon’s Hall of Heroes. With friends and family looking on, Tilley anticipated that this moment would be the highlight of his career. He was soon to discover that his new position entailed “a lot more responsibility.”

General Shinseki instructed him to “stay focused on noncommissioned officer and soldier” issues and to visit with soldiers. Tilley quickly learned that accomplishing these goals was not just a matter of “doing the same thing at higher levels.” Rather, once again in his career he was working in new territory. He was advising the Chief of Staff, the Secretary of the Army, and Congress on soldier issues. He was traveling the globe to visit with the enlisted force. And he was constantly working to get information flowing from the lowest enlisted ranks in the field to the highest officials in Washington.

As the representative of the enlisted force, Tilley had unrestricted access to the Army Chief of Staff. Typically, he would sit down with General Shinseki every Monday for a candid discussion about how things were going in the Army. Cognizant that he had only four years as Sergeant Major of the Army, Tilley believed that he owed it to every soldier in the U.S. Army to give 150 percent of his effort every day.

From his initial selection as the twelfth Sergeant Major of the Army, Tilley was immersed in an Army of change. In 1999 General Shinseki had announced, “We will transform the most respected Army in the world into a strategically responsive force that is dominant across the full spectrum of operations.” As the first step in a three-phase plan, in April 2000 the Army initiated the transformation process by converting two brigades at Fort Lewis, Washington, into Initial Brigade Combat Teams (IBCTs). The IBCTs were designed to enable the Army to deploy faster and to be ready to fight upon arrival. Shinseki’s ultimate objective was to transition the entire Army to a new generation of combat systems that were more mobile, more deployable, and more lethal than those of the past.¹¹ Tilley assumed the SMA mantle in the midst of these important initiatives, and they would occupy much of his attention.

One of the more outward signs of the transformation process was the Army’s decision to

adopt the black beret. In October 2000 General Shinseki announced that all soldiers would don berets as the standard headgear. He stated that the beret was “symbolic of our commitment to transform this magnificent Army into a new force.” Though initially there was some grumbling, Tilley felt that if the force could not agree on such a basic issue, “you couldn’t transform the Army.” The Army officially transitioned to the beret on 14 June 2001, the Army’s 226th birthday.

As part of transformation, Tilley believed that the NCOES would have to be restructured. Through forums like the first-ever Nominative Command Sergeants Major Conference, which Tilley created in January 2001 at Fort Bliss, Texas, he gathered suggestions and feedback about necessary reforms. He proposed to include more nonpromotable master sergeants in the Sergeants Major Course. Such an action would help ensure that NCOs received training earlier in their careers, something he believed was critical given the increasingly decentralized nature of Army operations. Having himself attended the academy after only seventeen years of service, Tilley felt that the general requirement that attendees have at least twenty years of service could be reduced.

While transformation issues dominated much of Tilley’s time, he never forgot the basics. During his tenure, Congress authorized a significant and welcome pay increase for soldiers. Nevertheless, in Tilley’s testimony before the Senate Armed Services Subcommittee on Personnel in February 2002, he asserted that there was still “room for improvement in future funding.” As always, the welfare of Army soldiers and Army families remained uppermost in Tilley’s mind.

As much as Tilley loved the Army, the most rewarding times of his life were those he spent with his wife Gloria and their two boys, Brian and Kevin. Acknowledging that Gloria was “in the military just like me,” Tilley considered her to be his best friend and sounding board. After a particularly demanding trip he told her that he had “been to 40 installations in

both Germany and Korea.” She replied, “What have you done for your Army?” Her advice and counsel would help Tilley focus on what was really important, and she was always quick to give him an honest assessment of how he was doing.

On 11 September 2001, a hijacked commercial jet liner loaded with passengers slammed into the side of the Pentagon, killing and injuring many civilians and service members. Tilley was on his way to a Better Opportunities for Single Soldiers Conference when he learned the news and immediately returned to the building. Once there, he went to his office to ensure that everyone had been evacuated. He then went outside to provide first aid and comfort where needed.

After the terrorist attack, he was quick to remind soldiers to “focus on the basics” during the uncertain times. He told soldiers that “the need for communication was more important than ever,” and that the best way to help people was to simply talk with them. As the military increased its antiterrorist activities after September 11, he further cautioned that what people were most afraid of was the unknown. Reflecting on his service in Vietnam, he remembered that as a young soldier he had learned to “listen carefully to what my sergeant had to say and that if I knew the basics, I didn’t have much to be afraid of.”¹²

In less than three years, SMA Tilley traveled more than 500,000 miles to 200 CONUS and OCONUS locations, visiting approximately 200,000 soldiers. He believed that soldiers expected him to be honest, fair, and straightforward—in short, to “tell it like it is.” Having done just that for thirty-three years, he felt he would continue to succeed as Sergeant Major of the Army. His unique position as the Army’s senior-most enlisted soldier gave him the opportunity to speak out on the behalf of all servicemen and women, and he did so with vigor. Yet Tilley avowed: “I don’t feel I stand out. . . . I am just a soldier getting a job done. I am no different than anybody else, I just have a different job.” With that, Tilley continued to get the job done.

On 15 January 2004, Sergeant Major of the Army Jack L. Tilley retired from the U.S. Army ending thirty-five years of active service. He has spent his time in retirement advocating for soldiers and their families. He has served on the Secretary of Veterans Affairs’ Operations ENDURING FREEDOM and IRAQI FREEDOM Special Advisory Board and the Army Retirement Board. He is cofounder of the American Freedom Foundation, an organization that honors the armed forces and raises money for foundations and charities that support veterans and Army families. Jack Tilley continues to be a valuable asset to the U.S. Army.

Notes

1. Except as noted, this section is based on Interv, Daniel K. Elder with Jack L. Tilley, 4 Feb 01, Fort Myer, Va., and 24 Jul 01, Fort Riley, Kans.

2. The point where the turret of a tank mates with the chassis is commonly referred to as the turret ring, named after the large gear that couples the two together.

3. Prior to 1989 the Army had specialist ranks ranging from Specialist 4 (E-4) to Specialist 8 (E-8).

4. Secretary of Defense McNamara directed in 1966 that the armed forces begin permitting recruits from the bottom percentile of the physical and mental categories. Eventually over 350,000 such individuals were admitted.

5. OSUT melded Basic Combat Training and Advanced Individual Training into one course at one location.

6. The UCOFT was a virtual-reality tank simulator in which the tank commander and gunner could practice their skills in both day and night scenarios while under the scrutiny of “master gunners” or specialists.

7. COHORT, or Cohesion, Operational Readiness, and Training, was a program designed to develop vertical and horizontal cohesion in units by permitting soldiers and leaders to do their training with the same company or battalion for three years.

8. U.S. Army, Europe, News Release, 20 Feb 96.

9. David L. Treleaven, “Engineers in Bosnia: an Overview,” *Engineer* (March 1996):36–37.

10. John D. Winkler et al., *Future Leader Development of Army Noncommissioned Officers: Workshop Results* (Santa Monica, Calif.: RAND Corporation, 1998), p. xi.

11. “Army Officially Begins Creation of Initial Brigade Combat Teams,” *Army News Service*, 20 Apr 00.

12. “Tilley Tells Soldiers To Know Basics,” *Army News Service*, 25 Sep 01.

Assignments

1966	Inducted into service, Basic Training, Fort Lewis, Washington
1966	Advanced Individual Training, Fort Knox, Kentucky
1967–1968	Scout Vehicle Operator, Troop A, 1st Squadron, 4th Cavalry, 1st Infantry Division, Republic of Vietnam
1968–1969	Drill Sergeant, Company A, 10th Battalion, 2d Brigade, Fort Benning, Georgia (break in service, 1969–1971)
1971–1974	Drill Sergeant, Company C, 5th Battalion, 1st Brigade, Fort Polk, Louisiana
1974–1975	Tank Commander, Company B, 2d Battalion, 77th Armor, 9th Infantry Division, Fort Lewis, Washington
1976–1977	Tank Commander, Company B, 4th Battalion, 64th Armor, Aschafenberg, Germany; Company A, 3d Battalion, 32d Armor, 3d Armored Division, Friedberg, Germany
1977–1978	Platoon Sergeant, Section Leader, Company B and Headquarters Company, 3d Battalion, 32d Armor, 8th Infantry Division, Germany
1979–1985	Platoon Sergeant, Senior Instructor, 1st Training Brigade, U.S. Army Armor School; Senior Tank Commander, Operations Sergeant, First Sergeant, Sergeant Major, Companies A, B, and C, 1st Battalion, 1st Brigade, Fort Knox, Kentucky
1985–1986	Basic Noncommissioned Officer Course Chief, Noncommissioned Officers Academy, Fort Knox, Kentucky
1986–1987	Student, Class #28, Sergeants Major Academy, Fort Bliss, Texas
1987–1988	First Sergeant, Company C, 1st Battalion, 72d Armor, 2d Infantry Division, Republic of Korea
1988–1990	Command Sergeant Major, 1st Battalion, 10th Cavalry, 194th Separate Armored Brigade, Fort Knox, Kentucky
1990–1992	Command Sergeant Major, 194th Separate Armored Brigade, Fort Knox, Kentucky
1992–1997	Command Sergeant Major, 1st Armored Division, Bad Kreuznach, Germany; Tuzla, Bosnia
1997–1998	Command Sergeant Major, Space and Missile Defense Command, Arlington, Virginia
1998–2000	Command Sergeant Major, U.S. Central Command, MacDill Air Force Base, Tampa, Florida
2000–2004	Sergeant Major of the Army

Selected Decorations and Awards

Defense Superior Service Medal
Legion of Merit with One Oak Leaf Cluster
Bronze Star Medal with V Device and One Oak Leaf Cluster
Meritorious Service Medal with One Oak Leaf Cluster
Army Commendation Medal with Two Oak Leaf Clusters
Army Achievement Medal with Two Oak Leaf Clusters
Good Conduct Medal with Ten Oak Leaf Clusters
National Defense Service Medal with Service Star
Armed Forces Expeditionary Medal
Vietnam Service Medal
Armed Forces Service Medal
Vietnam Service Medal
Republic of Vietnam Cross of Gallantry with Palm
Republic of Vietnam Campaign Medal
NATO Medal
Parachutist Badge
Drill Sergeant Badge



SMA Preston

Kenneth O. Preston

Kenneth O. Preston was born on 18 February 1957 in Annapolis, Maryland, into a military family.¹ After his father was discharged from the U.S. Army and his mother completed her service with the U.S. Air Force, the family relocated to Garrett County, Maryland, settling in the farm community of Mount Savage. The oldest of four children, Preston worked on the family farm and enjoyed a sheltered, happy childhood. He took pleasure in school work and excelled in the study of mathematics, history, and foreign languages. The young Preston was also an enthusiastic athlete who played baseball and basketball and competed in gymnastics.

Preston was a diligent student. His goal was to complete a university education, but he did not want to be a financial burden to his family. He knew the chances of winning either an athletic or academic scholarship were slim, so he considered enlisting in the Army during his senior year of high school. His primary enticement was the possibility of earning future tuition assistance with the Montgomery GI Bill, but he was also conscious of his family's long tradition of service to the country. In addition to his parents, his grandfather had been a "doughboy" in the U.S. Army during World War I, and his great great grandfather served in the Union Army during the U.S. Civil War. In January 1975 he met with an Army recruiter, and two months later he decided to enlist as an armored vehicle crewman. He graduated from high school and in June went to Fort Knox, Kentucky, to begin his career as a soldier.

Preston was apprehensive, but he soon discovered that he was well prepared for the chal-

lenges of basic training. Physically fit, accustomed to working outdoors, and familiar with firearms, Preston excelled. Basic training built a foundation for his career as a soldier, and the discipline and leadership provided by his drill sergeants made a profoundly positive and lasting impression on him. The professionalism, technical competence, and uncompromising standards of his drill sergeants were the model that Preston followed throughout his career. He would later recall, "They could just look at you with one of those stern looks and you knew exactly what you were supposed to accomplish."

Preston remained at Fort Knox for Advanced Individual Training. During the autumn of 1975, he practiced his new trade on the M60A1 main battle tank, taking a turn at each crew position. This intense, eight-week training program instilled in Preston an enduring fascination with tanks and tank gunnery.

After graduation, Private Preston returned home to Mount Savage and married Karen Smith, his high school sweetheart. In November 1975 the newlyweds packed up their 1971 Ford station wagon and headed to their first duty station with the 1st Cavalry Division at Fort Hood, Texas. He was assigned to Headquarters and Headquarters Company, 2d Battalion, 8th Cavalry.

Preston's military bearing made quite an impression on his new unit, and he was offered a position as the battalion commander's jeep driver. He declined, preferring to begin his apprenticeship as a loader on the battalion commander's tank. He soon built a reputation as an outstanding soldier. His technical competence and performance of duty earned him rapid promotion.

Within a year he was promoted to specialist and assigned as a gunner, and within two years he was a sergeant.

Preston had joined an Army in transition. The drawdown at the end of the Vietnam War, reduced budgets, and a renewed focus on the conventional deterrent in Europe meant that stateside units were undermanned and underfunded. The Army was desperately short of senior noncommissioned officers; as a consequence, junior sergeants like Preston were assigned duties beyond their rank and experience. Preston made the most of his opportunities. He assumed responsibility as “a sort of assistant platoon sergeant” for the headquarters tank section, supervising daily vehicle maintenance and training the tank crews.

During his tour, Preston participated in many field and gunnery training exercises. He took great pride in the performance of his unit during force-on-force engagements, and he became a student of the complex art of tank gunnery. Assignment to the 1st Cavalry Division also afforded him the opportunity to observe testing and fielding of new equipment. The division participated in the testing of a simulated tactical engagement system that was a predecessor to the Multiple Integrated Laser Engagement System. The division also assisted the armored units of the Texas Army National Guard in their transition from the M48 to the M60 tank. Preston was assigned to a cadre unit that helped prepare and execute the new equipment training program for an armored battalion in the Dallas–Fort Worth area. The experience that Preston gained would pay off handsomely later in his career.

Kenneth and Karen Preston had two children during their tour at Fort Hood. Denied quarters on post, Kenneth and Karen rented a mobile home in Killeen, Texas. Fortunately, several of the senior noncommissioned officers from the company looked after the young family. They shared guidance, thoughtful advice, and a helping hand. The Prestons were grateful for the assistance, and they felt “very blessed” that the unit leaders provided support and attention. As a



Preston at Basic Training, Fort Knox, Kentucky, 1975

result, the importance of Army families and the critical role that leaders play were lessons that Preston learned early in his career.

Thirty months after reporting to Fort Hood, Preston received orders assigning him to U.S. Army, Europe (USAREUR). Preston’s initial period of enlistment was nearly complete. He could not receive permission to bring his family to Germany unless he reenlisted and committed to serving a full tour overseas. Preston chose to remain in the U.S. Army. In addition to the enormous satisfaction he derived from his job as a soldier and a leader, the experience of family life at Fort Hood was the deciding factor. Preston later reflected, “The quality of life that I was able to provide for my family at Fort Hood and in the Army was better than what I would have been able to provide coming back to the mountains of western Maryland.” In February 1978 Preston left for Europe and was assigned to Company B, 1st Battalion, 33d Armor, 3d Armored Division, in Gelnhausen, Federal Republic of Germany.

Upon arriving in Gelnhausen, Preston discovered that his new unit was away at the

Hohenfels Training Area. He restored a disabled M60 tank to operational readiness while awaiting the return of the battalion. In March he was selected to attend the Basic Noncommissioned Officer Course and was away at class when his family arrived in April. Upon graduation, he immediately deployed to the Grafenwöhr Training Area, pausing only to change from his Class A uniform to fatigues.

At Grafenwöhr, Preston was assigned as a gunner on his platoon leader's tank. He was surprised to discover that the personnel situation in his new company was not much different from the one he had left at Fort Hood. The unit was undermanned and short of senior noncommissioned officers. The situation went from bad to worse when the platoon leader and tank commander received a compassionate reassignment to the United States. Preston was assigned as the tank commander. Determined to make the best of things, he promoted his driver to gunner and convinced a turret mechanic to act as his tank driver. Preston quickly trained up his ad hoc crew and led the men through the gunnery cycle and qualification. This demonstration of technical proficiency and leadership was not lost on his company commander. When the unit returned to garrison, Preston was made the gunner on the company commander's tank. He also returned to discover that his family had moved into new quarters while he was away, and, as he would later recall, "I actually had to ask somebody where I lived."

Preston was building a reputation as an outstanding noncommissioned officer and tank gunner. During the next tank gunnery cycle, his tank crew achieved the second highest score in the battalion. Once again, his company commander took notice, and the young sergeant was given the opportunity to command his own tank.

United States Army, Europe, underwent a transformation in doctrine and organization during Preston's tour. The Army's focus on countering the Soviet threat in central Germany caused changes in tank gunnery standards. The emphasis was on successfully engaging multiple targets

at long range. New tank gunnery ranges were being built at the Grafenwöhr Training Area in accordance with the new qualification standards. Preston studied the new guidelines and visited the new range complex. He then formulated a training plan for his crew and executed it with vigor, spending hours in the motor pool rehearsing target engagement and crew drills. The test came in the winter of 1979 when the 3d Armored Division returned to Grafenwöhr to conduct tank gunnery qualification. The new qualification standards proved daunting, and many crews had to make several runs down the range course in order to make the grade. Preston's crew not only qualified on the first run but also achieved the highest score in the battalion. He topped that performance in the next gunnery cycle by attaining the highest qualification score in the 3d Armored Division. The division commander, Maj. Gen. Walter F. Ulmer, Jr., presented Preston with an Army Commendation Medal in recognition of this accomplishment. Preston said, "I love gunnery and I loved taking a crew and training it to perform like a world class athlete."

In September 1980 Preston was selected by his chain of command to compete for a position in the prestigious Sergeant Morales Club. This organization was established in 1973 to promote "the highest ideals of integrity, professionalism and leadership for the enlisted force serving in Europe."² Preston prepared for the difficult series of board interviews while simultaneously training for another gunnery cycle and a Return of Forces to Germany, or REFORGER, exercise. He was promoted to staff sergeant on the day of the final interview. Karen sewed the new chevrons onto his Class A uniform the night before the board meeting. He passed through the selection process with flying colors. It was a great honor and a true reflection of his commitment to duty, professionalism, and leadership. Before his time in Germany ended, Preston was assigned as company master gunner. It was a fitting end to a successful tour.

In February 1981 the Preston family arrived at Fort Knox, where their third child was born in June. Staff Sergeant Preston had hoped to attend



Preston (*third from the left*) Receiving the Army Commendation Medal for Achieving the Highest Tank Gunnery Score in the 3d Armored Division, Grafenwöhr, Germany, 1979

Drill Sergeant School and serve in a training brigade, but he was instead posted to the Armor School as an instructor in the Weapons Department. For the next fourteen months Preston would teach armor officers attending the Armor Officer Basic Course the fundamentals of tank gunnery. This was an exciting time to be assigned to the armor schoolhouse. The M60A3 tank was entering the inventory, and the new XM1, the prototype of the M1 tank, was undergoing testing and evaluation. Preston observed these developments while honing his skills as a

trainer. He presented platform lectures on tank gunnery to armor officers and spent long hours on Wilson Range at Fort Knox, climbing in and out of tank turrets as he trained future tank platoon leaders in crew drills, turret operations, and gunnery fundamentals.

The Armor School required Preston to train soldiers on the M60A1, M60A3, and the new XM1. He quickly mastered all three programs of instruction and was one of the first noncommissioned officers selected to work on the training team for the M1 Abrams tank. Being one of the



Preston in the Commander's Cupola of His M60 Tank, Grafenwöhr, Germany, 1980

few instructors qualified on all three tanks meant that he would “teach armament controls and equipment on an M60A1 in the morning, teach the laser range finder on an M60A3 in the afternoon, and the next day be out on a range firing Tank Table VII on the Abrams tank.”

In recognition of his abilities as a trainer, Preston was selected to participate in an instructor exchange program between the U.S. Army Armor School and U.K. Royal Armoured Corps Gunnery School. In October 1983 he and his family moved to Lulworth, England, where he served as a gunnery instructor on a variety of different vehicle types, from tanks to reconnaissance and infantry fighting vehicles. Once again, Preston demonstrated his ability to master new weapon systems and train diverse groups of soldiers in the art of tank gunnery. While in England, Preston was promoted to sergeant first class.

Preston returned to the Armor School at Fort Knox in October 1985. He became the

project officer for fielding the M1A1 tank in the Gunnery Training and Doctrine Branch. He wrote the gunnery manual for the new tank and traveled around the country helping units transition to the vehicle. He also made presentations to senior Army leaders on the capabilities of the M1A1 and the training programs developed by the Armor School.

In February 1987 Preston's tour with the Armor School ended, but he remained at Fort Knox as a platoon sergeant with Company C, 1st Battalion, 12th Cavalry. One of the unit's missions was to support the training activities of the Armor School by providing training vehicles and range support. Sergeant First Class Preston put his knowledge of tank gunnery to good use, and within a year he was assigned as first sergeant to the battalion's headquarters company.

One year later he transferred to Company C, 2d Battalion, 10th Cavalry, 194th Armor

Brigade (Separate), and again assumed duties as a tank platoon sergeant. His new unit was experiencing a number of difficulties. The battalion had transferred many of its most seasoned soldiers to a sister battalion scheduled to rotate to Korea. As a result of these levies many senior noncommissioned officer positions were unfilled. This was unfortunate for Company C because it had recently completed the transition from the M60A3 to the M1 and the soldiers were still learning how to handle their new tanks. Preston had faced these circumstances before. He assumed the role of company master gunner and prepared and executed a training plan focused on vehicle maintenance and crew drills. In five short months Company C was able to perform all tasks to standard. It was a fitting end to his long tour at Fort Knox.

In the summer of 1989 Preston received orders to report to the 11th Armored Cavalry in Fulda, Federal Republic of Germany. The commander of the regiment, Col. John Abrams, had served with Preston in the 1st Battalion, 33d Armor, in Gelnhausen. Colonel Abrams remembered Preston's expertise in tank gunnery and made him the regiment's tank master gunner. For the next nine months Preston worked to improve gunnery training programs and crew performance. His efforts culminated in a successful platoon qualification course (Tank Table XII). Preston explained, "I put together a Tank Table XII scenario that really tested those platoons. At the end, Colonel Abrams knew which of the twenty-seven tank platoons in the Regiment were the most lethal."

Preston was also the noncommissioned officer in charge of the regimental tactical command post. He was responsible for the maintenance, readiness, and performance of the soldiers and vehicles assigned to this forward headquarters, including two M2 Bradley infantry fighting vehicles, four M577 armored command post carriers, and a small collection of trucks and light, wheeled vehicles. It was Preston's job to supervise the positioning, assembly, disassembly, and movement of this

small but vital unit. It was an experience that he would draw on years later in the deserts of Iraq.

Preston's reputation as a leader and trainer continued to grow. Colonel Abrams chose Preston to serve as first sergeant of Troop A, 1st Squadron. Preston recalled, "There were a lot of discipline issues there in the troop, there were a lot of things that had been deferred and hadn't been taken care of so there was some housecleaning work that needed to be done." Together with his new commander, Preston reestablished discipline and executed a demanding training program. Within a year, Troop A was one of the best outfits in the 11th Armored Cavalry, achieving the best gunnery scores in the regiment and winning the prestigious USAREUR Cavalry Cup in 1990. In July Preston's name was posted on the E-8 promotion list, and he was frocked to the rank of first sergeant.

In August 1990 Iraqi leader Saddam Hussein ordered his armed forces to invade Kuwait. The United States, acting in coalition with its allies, sent forces to the Persian Gulf to defend Saudi Arabia. U.S. Army units were sent to the Middle East from their bases in Europe, but the 11th Armored Cavalry was not among them. Instead, the regiment moved to the Wildflecken Training Area where it trained replacements from the Individual Ready Reserve. In the dead of winter, the disappointed men of Troop A built tank ranges and prepared the reservists for combat. Preston remarked, "Everybody was a little depressed. We felt we were being left out of the fight." However, the troopers of the regiment would have an important role to play in securing the peace. In May 1991 the 11th Armored Cavalry deployed to Kuwait to help protect the shattered country in support of Operation POSITIVE FORCE. Troop A spent several months patrolling the Iraqi border, clearing roads, and protecting American diplomats and facilities. In the fall of 1991 the regiment returned to Fulda.

The end of Operations DESERT SHIELD and DESERT STORM marked the beginning of a period of great change for the U.S. Army. The force that had guarded the ramparts of freedom in Europe and had achieved a spectacular victory

in the Persian Gulf was to be significantly reduced in size. The Army was also undergoing many cultural changes with a focus on improving the quality of life of single soldiers. The commander of USAREUR, General Crosbie E. Saint, began a "Single Soldier Initiative" designed to improve barracks life and increase recreational opportunities for single and unaccompanied soldiers. Under this directive, units removed headquarters and work spaces from barracks, providing soldiers more private living space and common areas. This concept was embraced by the senior leadership of the Army and codified as the Better Opportunities for Single Soldiers program. Preston believed this was long overdue, and he worked with his soldiers to improve their living and common areas. First Sergeant Preston stressed the need to maintain standards. "You can still have a disciplined, clean, healthy barracks environment," he said, "and give soldiers the same kind of comforts and freedoms that their married counterparts enjoy." Preston and his men reconstructed the barracks day room using their own labor and materials. Troop A became a model for the rest of the regiment, and Preston would never forget the positive effect this program had on the morale and performance of his soldiers.

In June 1992, after two years on the promotion list, Preston advanced to the grade of E-8. In July he joined the Master Gunner Branch of the Weapons Department of the Armor School at Fort Knox. Preston's first task was to consolidate the maintenance and gunnery divisions of the branch, turn in excess equipment, rewrite programs of instruction, and realign training facilities. He rewrote the gunnery manuals and traveled around the Army checking training and ensuring that gunnery standards were being followed. Once again, the chain of command recognized his problem-solving and leadership abilities. He was assigned as the first sergeant of the Basic Noncommissioned Officer Course Company, Noncommissioned Officer (NCO) Academy, nine months after arriving at Fort Knox. The company was the largest in the academy, and the students were drawn from six military occupational specialties. Preston's new

responsibilities included leading the students assigned to his company and supervising the work of the training cadre. He would note, "It was very busy. It was more challenging than I had ever imagined." Preston proved equal to the task, and a year later he was promoted to deputy commandant. His duties were to supervise the staff of the academy, write policy, and direct programs for the commandant. Preston enjoyed his work at the academy, but as he approached the start of his twentieth year of active service he began to contemplate retirement. He felt he had achieved everything that he had set out to accomplish. He submitted his request for retirement in October and looked forward to returning to the mountains of western Maryland. The command sergeant major of the NCO Academy urged him to delay his final decision until the results of the next promotion board were released. Preston took his advice. In December 1994 the list for promotion to E-9 was published and his name was among the selectees. After consulting with his family, he accepted the promotion and the additional service obligation. The Army was not finished with Kenneth Preston.

In June 1995 Preston reported to the Sergeants Major Academy at Fort Bliss, Texas. He excelled throughout the nine-month course and was selected to participate in a two-week exchange program with the German Bundeswehr, *Unteroffizierschule des Heeres* (NCO Academy), in Weiden, Germany. He also was afforded the opportunity to participate in war game exercises at Fort Leavenworth, Kansas. Preston was selected to be command sergeant major while attending the academy. In August 1996 he received orders to report to the 1st Cavalry Division at Fort Hood, where he became command sergeant major of the 3d Battalion, 8th Cavalry, of the 3d Brigade. He arrived in November to discover that his new battalion was undergoing an emergency deployment to Kuwait. He barely had time to draw his personal equipment before he was put on a plane and flown out to join his new unit. He was introduced to his battalion commander just as the unit was lining up in a convoy prior to

moving to positions along the Iraqi border. Although his introduction to his new battalion was abrupt, it was not long before Preston was familiar with every NCO in the battalion.

The 3d Battalion, 8th Cavalry, was one of the first battalions in the Army to be equipped with the new M1A2 tank. Preston had become familiar with this model during his last tour with the Weapons Department at Fort Knox, and he put this knowledge to good use during the battalion's four-month deployment to Kuwait. When the battalion returned to Fort Hood, Preston launched a number of NCO professional development initiatives and instituted a new soldier nutrition and fitness program. The battalion drew on Preston's technical expertise during each gunnery cycle and when fielding new equipment like the M88A2 recovery vehicle. He built on the lessons learned as a first sergeant and focused on realistic training, family readiness, and soldier quality of life. He would recall, "It was rewarding to have your piece of the Army and to mold it and grow leaders. I enjoyed that as a first sergeant and as a battalion sergeant major."

In August 1998 Preston was promoted to command sergeant major (CSM) of the 3d Brigade, 1st Cavalry Division. As brigade CSM, Preston focused on field discipline and the construction and distribution of unit logistical packages. Drawing on his experiences as a first sergeant with the 11th Armored Cavalry, he rewrote the brigade's logistics and casualty evacuation standard operating procedures. These efforts contributed to the success of the 3d Brigade's National Training Center rotation in the early autumn of 1999.

With a little over one year's time as a brigade sergeant major, Maj. Gen. George W. Casey, Jr., the 1st Armored Division commander, asked Preston to submit an application package for the position of command sergeant major, 1st Armored Division. After a whirlwind interview process, General Casey selected Preston as his CSM and requested that he report as soon as possible to the division headquarters at Bad Kreuznach, Germany. This marked the end of

his tour at Fort Hood. In three short years Preston had risen from battalion to division command sergeant major. After taking a brief period of leave, he again set off for Germany.

The 1st Armored Division was a busy unit in January 2000. In addition to providing forces for North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO) peacekeeping operations in Kosovo, the division was moving subordinate units to new permanent locations throughout Germany. General Casey asked CSM Preston to act as his eyes and ears by traveling around the division to observe training and talk to soldiers. General Casey also directed Preston to develop a physical fitness program that would increase soldier fitness and build teamwork and pride at the company/troop/battery level. Preston coordinated with the division staff to establish the Commander's Physical Fitness and Excellence Award. Preston supervised the formation of an evaluation team that tested every company-size unit in the division by administering a weigh-in, body fat test, and an Army physical fitness readiness test. The highest scoring unit received a special streamer and division-wide recognition. This represented the culmination of a competitive year-long process that focused on the effectiveness of company-level physical fitness programs. Preston also strove to strengthen unit discipline by reviewing and standardizing the procedures for all change-of-command ceremonies.

In March 2001 Preston became the command sergeant major, V Corps. He moved his family to Heidelberg, Germany. Preston's duties and responsibilities as V Corps CSM were less clear-cut than those at the 1st Armored Division. The divisions assigned to V Corps did not require the close supervision of another CSM, so Preston decided to focus on the 3d Corps Support Command and the assigned, independent brigades. He acted as a type of "division CSM" for these large, disparate, and dispersed units, mentoring senior NCOs, inspecting training, and advising the V Corps commander on the condition of his force multipliers.

On 11 September 2001, terrorists flew hijacked airliners into the World Trade Center in

New York City and into the Pentagon in Arlington, Virginia. The V Corps commander immediately issued orders to secure corps facilities and housing areas against attack. Preston inspected the construction of barriers and the conduct of security patrols. He saw his primary task as teaching soldiers “the lost art of guard duty.”

In the early months of 2002, the V Corps was ordered to make arrangements for a possible invasion of Iraq. In November 2002 the V Corps headquarters deployed to Kuwait and assumed command of all U.S. Army ground forces. During the long winter months the V Corps received and deployed reinforcing units while continuing to train and prepare. The ground attack was launched on 20 March 2003. CSM Preston moved with the V Corps assault command post, circulating through the corps area, functioning as the eyes and ears of the commander, assisting units with equipment and logistical issues while providing guidance and leadership to his soldiers. When Baghdad fell, Preston acted as the V Corps liaison with U.S. Army Central Command and helped establish unit boundaries and headquarters locations for V Corps units. Preston selected the Al Faw Palace in Baghdad as the location for the V Corps headquarters, and, together with the command sergeants major from the corps brigades, he laid the boundaries, architecture, and defenses of what would grow into the Combined Joint Task Force–7 headquarters and Camp Victory.

Over the summer, the responsibilities of the headquarters continued to grow, and Preston not only worked with representatives of the U.S. State Department to establish the enlarged embassy and governmental area in Baghdad that became known as the Green Zone, but also continued to visit units throughout the country, talking to soldiers and acting as the eyes of the corps commander.

In August 2003 Sergeant Major of the Army Jack L. Tilley decided to retire. One of his final acts was to ask Preston to apply for the position of Sergeant Major of the Army. Preston was reluctant to do so while the soldiers of V Corps were engaged in the difficult task of sta-

bilizing Iraq, but Tilley was insistent. The new Chief of Staff, General Peter J. Schoomaker, also asked Preston to apply.³ After discussing the matter with Karen and the V Corps commander, Lt. Gen. Ricardo Sanchez, Preston submitted his application packet and flew back to Washington, D.C., for an interview. A few weeks later the Chief of Staff called to congratulate him for being selected as the top enlisted soldier in the U.S. Army. Preston remained with the V Corps, however, until it was relieved by the III Corps in December 2003.

On 15 January 2004, Kenneth O. Preston was sworn in as the thirteenth Sergeant Major of the Army. Before being sworn in, he attended the Nominative Command Sergeants Major Conference at Fort Bliss, Texas. He took this opportunity to meet with the senior noncommissioned officers of the Army and to get a sense of the challenges faced by their respective commands. In February he testified before Congress, discussing “everything from housing to child care, youth services, military pay, medical and dental access, Tricare and force protection.” Preston would later remark, “It was a busy time.”

The main effort of his term as Sergeant Major of the Army would be to support an Army at war by building healthy soldiers, developing highly trained noncommissioned officers, and strengthening support for Army families. Together with General Schoomaker, Preston worked to transition the force to a wartime Army. General Schoomaker directed Preston to focus on improving soldier fitness and discipline across the force. Preston reminded the Army’s noncommissioned officers that “standards and discipline are related.” It was not enough to establish and enforce standards. Leaders at all levels must be held accountable. This was how the Army would “grow sergeants” and empower junior leaders.⁴ Schoomaker and Preston synchronized their travel schedules, moving throughout the combat theaters and across the Army, sharing their observations with each other and the Army Staff.



SMA Preston Addresses Members of Congress on Army Family Quality of Life Issues.

Preston learned quickly that crisis management was a large part of the job. In January 2004 Headquarters, Department of the Army, investigated reports of detainee abuse at the Abu Ghraib prison in Iraq. The report of the investigation, known as the Taguba Report, was leaked to the media in the spring of 2004.⁵ The resulting scandal damaged the reputation of the Army. Preston engaged with the media and explained the process of the investigation and the facts as he knew them. He also sought to maintain morale by communicating with soldiers and leaders in the field, expressing confidence in their ability, reminding them that there were “hundreds of thousands of soldiers deployed around the world that are doing the right thing and treating people with dignity and respect, and serving as role models and ambassadors in all these locations.”⁶

The experience caused Preston to ponder the possible causes of the events at Abu Ghraib.

It was clear to him that the attention this scandal received reflected “the nature of the current fight and potentially the modern day battlefield where the actions of a few leaders and soldiers have strategic level impacts.” The soldiers and leaders at Abu Ghraib had failed to maintain fundamental standards of leadership and discipline. The Army would have to do a better job of preparing soldiers and leaders for the rigors of this kind of war.

On 10 April 2007, General George W. Casey, Jr., was sworn in as Chief of Staff of the United States Army. He asked Preston to stay on as Sergeant Major of the Army. Preston readily agreed, re-forming the successful command team that had led the 1st Armored Division.⁷ General Casey established four strategic imperatives that would frame the work done during his term as Chief of Staff: sustain the all-volunteer force; prepare forces to succeed in the current conflict; rebuild unit readiness;

and continue to transform the force “to meet the demands of the 21st Century.”⁸

Preston believed that the first step in achieving General Casey’s imperatives was to enhance soldier fitness. With General Casey and the Army Staff, he worked to develop the Comprehensive Soldier Fitness Program. The program, based on research conducted by the Positive Psychology Center at the University of Pennsylvania, represented a new, holistic approach to measuring the emotional, social, spiritual, and family dimensions of individual readiness.⁹ The purpose was to build resilience in the minds and bodies of soldiers stretched to the limit by the demands of combat and the stress of multiple deployments.¹⁰

Preston thought that traditional measures of soldier fitness were too narrow, and he advocated a comprehensive approach to soldier fitness. He traveled around the Army educating leaders and soldiers about the benefits of the program. While he encouraged leaders to make the most of these new tools, he reminded them that there is no substitute for strong leadership. No program, regardless of how well conceived or funded, could succeed if noncommissioned officers did not look after the health and welfare of their soldiers. Soldier fitness would no longer be simply measured by scores achieved on the physical fitness test. Leaders were tasked to take a more holistic view, focusing on diet, mental health, and family issues.

Preston also realized that the unrelenting demands of war would eventually drive a soldier “to a point where he has to choose between his family and the Army.” Recalling his days as a young married soldier at Fort Hood, he knew that quality of life was one of the most important factors in retention. Quality of life went beyond “just soldier pay.” It included “medical, dental, housing, youth services” and “things we provide for all families.” He was determined to raise the quality of life for Army families. Together with General Casey and Secretary of the Army Preston M. “Pete” Geren, he helped create the Army Family Covenant in 2007. This simple statement of principles recognized the



SMA Preston (*right*) and Sfc. Dale Green Prepare to Drive an M1A1 Tank at Camp Arifjan, Kuwait, 2006.

sacrifices that Army families make in support of the mission and declared the Army’s commitment to improve housing, schools, and youth services; to expand educational opportunities for family members; and to enhance access to health care. The Army increased funding for these priorities from \$700 million to \$1.4 billion in Fiscal Year 2008.¹¹ It also built nearly eighty thousand new housing units on thirty-six installations and opened over sixty new child care centers. Preston’s dedication to Army families made a significant contribution to the long-term health of the Army and is one of his most significant achievements.¹²

Preston served as a valued adviser to General Casey for all issues regarding force structure and transformation. He was a driving force behind the fielding of the new Army Combat Uniform, improved body armor, the M4 rifle, and other

associated equipment. In the words of General Casey, “He worked with the precision of an engineer and the capability to understand what a Soldier needs.”¹³

The demand for troops by the combatant commanders in Iraq and Afghanistan placed an enormous strain on the Army. Preston was a tireless advocate, and he never missed an opportunity to describe to leaders at the highest levels the burden being shouldered by his soldiers. In January 2009 President Barack H. Obama assumed the duties of Commander in Chief. Shortly after his inauguration the president called a meeting of all his senior enlisted advisers to get a sense of the challenges being faced by the men and women of the armed forces. Preston used the opportunity to explain the relationship between “recruiting, retention and stress on the force.” He made clear that the stress does not end with the fifteen-month deployment; the year spent recovering at home was nearly as busy. Units had to repair and replace equipment, transition to new leadership, begin a new training cycle, and prepare for the next deployment. It was an important message to carry to the new Commander in Chief.

Together with Secretary Geren and General Casey, Preston sought ways to bring greater attention to the sacrifices of soldiers and their families while emphasizing the amazing feats these soldiers were accomplishing in service to the country. Throughout 2009, “The Year of the NCO,” he traveled around the Army, meeting with soldiers, conducting interviews with the media, and speaking to civic organizations. He reminded his audiences of the sacrifices being made by Army personnel and their families while recognizing their achievements. He explained the role and value of the NCO Corps, calling it the “glue” that held the Army together. Everywhere he connected with audiences and shared the stories of soldiers working to protect our country and its way of life.¹⁴

Perhaps Preston’s most important and enduring legacy was his work to transform the Noncommissioned Officer Education System



SMA Preston and Wife Karen During His Retirement Ceremony at Conny Hall on Fort Myer, Virginia

(NCOES). Drawing on his experiences in Kuwait, Kosovo, and Iraq, Preston realized that warfare had changed. Platoons and squads no longer operated under the close supervision of their officers. Small units had “to be able to operate while dispersed and fragmented across the battlefield.” Noncommissioned officers needed a deeper understanding of how their tasks tie in with the larger mission at the strategic level. The Army needed to build strong, junior leaders with the “maturity and depth of understanding” to make good decisions in difficult, often chaotic environments.¹⁵ Preston felt the NCOES was not adequately preparing the Army’s junior leaders “to think systematically and strategically.”¹⁶ The NCOES, he believed, should promote lifelong learning, emphasize self-development, and focus on the needs of an Army at war. Working together with the

Training and Doctrine Command and the Sergeants Major Academy, Preston sought to transform the way the Army trained and prepared noncommissioned officers.¹⁷

The first step was to expand basic training from nine to ten weeks to increase the time that young soldiers would spend learning in a “simulated operational environment.” Basic training would emphasize “warrior tasks” like field craft, advanced rifle marksmanship, and battle drills. Advanced individual training would also take on a combat focus, moving away from practicing basic skills toward the fundamentals of leadership.¹⁸

The core courses that made up the NCOES were redesigned: the Primary Leader Development Course was changed to the Warrior Leader Course; the Basic Noncommissioned Officer Course was revised to the Advanced Leader Course; and the Advanced Noncommissioned Officer Course became the Senior Leader Course. Each curriculum incorporated skills that had formerly been taught in higher-level courses. The intent was to challenge students and prepare them to step into positions of increased responsibility. Distance learning and structured self-development were integrated into each curriculum.¹⁹ Soldiers were required to complete many hours of online instruction and mentored distance learning before they were qualified to attend a residence course.²⁰ This maximized the time and resources available for professional education by taking advantage of new technologies. It also required noncommissioned officers to shoulder more responsibility for their own education and professional development.²¹

Preston worked to integrate the new NCOES with the Army Force Generation cycle, a process that produced trained and ready units to meet the requirements of combatant commanders. Preston helped synchronize the academic calendar with unit deployments, creating periods for qualified noncommissioned officers to leave their units and attend the required courses. Preston’s vision, determination, and thoughtful guidance played a critical role in changing the way the Army prepared junior leaders for combat. General Casey recognized him as “the architect of the greatest renovation in career development for our NCOs since the Vietnam War.”²²

In January 2011 Preston began his seventh year as Sergeant Major of the Army. General Casey’s tenure as chief of staff was scheduled to end in the spring, and Preston decided he would step down as well. On 1 March 2011, Kenneth O. Preston retired. As the thirteenth Sergeant Major of the Army, he had served the longest term in the history of the position, helping guide the Army through two wars. Preston had helped change the way the Army measured soldier fitness, improved the quality of life for Army families, and assisted in the redevelopment of the manner in which NCOs were trained. His dedication to duty, professional competence, and hard work were an inspiration to all who served. Preston would often remind his noncommissioned officers, “The knowledge that you gain is not solely yours to keep, but yours to take and pass on to the Soldiers of your organization. Use what you learn to teach your Soldiers and make them better.” SMA Preston lived that ethos for thirty-six years of exemplary service to his country.

Notes

1. Except as noted, this section is based on Intervs, Stephen W. Lehman with Kenneth O. Preston, 15 Mar 11, and Robert M. Mages with Preston, 14–15 Feb 12, author's files, U.S. Army Center of Military History (CMH), Washington, D.C.
2. U.S. Army, Europe, Regulation 600–2, 8 November 2005, author's files, CMH.
3. Linda Crippen, "Casey and Preston," *NCO Journal* (March 2011):16.
4. Sergeant Major of the Army Kenneth Preston, Standards and Discipline, 2005, author's files, CMH.
5. The report of the Article 15–6 Investigation of the 800th Military Police Brigade was conducted by Maj. Gen. Antonio M. Taguba. The media labeled the document "the Taguba Report," after the author.
6. Sergeant Major of the Army Kenneth O. Preston, Sergeant Major of the Army Leader Book Notes, May 04, author's files, CMH.
7. Crippen, "Casey and Preston."
8. Transcript, Statement by General George W. Casey, Jr., Chief of Staff, United States Army, before the Senate Armed Services Committee, U.S. House of Representatives, on the Army's Strategic Imperatives, 110th Cong., 1st sess., 15 Nov 07, pp. 2–3, author's files, CMH.
9. University of Pennsylvania, Positive Psychology Center, Comprehensive Soldier Fitness: An Overview, author's files, CMH.
10. U.S. Army, Comprehensive Soldier Fitness: Frequently Asked Questions, author's files, CMH.
11. U.S. Army, 2009 Posture Statement, Comprehensive Soldier Fitness Program, author's files, CMH.
12. Elizabeth M. Lorge, "Army Leaders Sign Covenant with Families," Army News Service, 17 Oct 07, author's files, CMH.
13. General George W. Casey, Jr., "Remarks for the Retirement Ceremony of Sergeant Major of the Army Ken Preston," Army News Service, 1 Mar 11, author's files, CMH.
14. Peter J. Chadwick, "SMA Visits Fort McPherson for 'Year of the NCO' Event," Army News Service, 5 Mar 09, author's files, CMH.
15. Linda Crippen, "Preston Has Left the Building: The Longest Serving SMA Retires," *NCO Journal* (March 2011):14.
16. Briefing, USASMA Reorganization, United States Army Sergeants Major Academy, 10 Apr 09, author's files, CMH.
17. David Melancon, SMA Outlines Changes to Army Education during Visit to Europe, <http://www.ArmyNCOES.com>, 1 Nov 07, author's files, CMH.
18. Ibid.
19. U.S. Army, Welcome to NCOES, Information About the U.S. Army NCOES System, author's files, CMH.
20. John Harlow, "Turning NCOES into a life-long learning strategy," TRADOC News Service, 22 Oct 07, author's files, CMH.
21. "NCOES Adding More Self-Development Courses," Army News Service, 25 Jan 11, author's files, CMH.
22. Casey, "Remarks for the Retirement Ceremony of Sergeant Major of the Army Ken Preston."

Assignments

1975	Inducted into service, Basic and Advanced Individual Training, Fort Knox, Kentucky
1975–1978	Armored Vehicle Crewman, Headquarters and Headquarters Company, 2d Battalion, 8th Cavalry, 1st Cavalry Division, Fort Hood, Texas
1978–1981	Armored Vehicle Crewman, Tank Commander, Company B, 1st Battalion, 33d Armor, 3d Armored Division, Gelnhausen, Germany
1981–1983	Gunnery Instructor, Weapons Department, U.S. Army Armor School, Fort Knox, Kentucky
1983–1985	Gunnery Instructor, U.K. Royal Armoured Corps Gunnery School, Lulworth Camp, England
1985–1987	Project Officer, Gunnery Training and Doctrine Branch, U.S. Army Armor School, Fort Knox, Kentucky
1987–1988	Platoon Sergeant, Company C, 1st Battalion, 12th Cavalry, the School Brigade, Fort Knox, Kentucky
1988–1989	Platoon Sergeant, Company C, 2d Battalion, 10th Cavalry, 194th Armor Brigade (Separate), Fort Knox, Kentucky
1989–1990	Regimental Master Gunner, Headquarters and Headquarters Troop, 11th Armored Cavalry, Fulda, Germany
1990–1992	First Sergeant, Troop A, 1st Squadron, 11th Armored Cavalry, Fulda, Germany
1992–1993	Instructor, Master Gunner Branch, Weapons Department, U.S. Army Armor School, Fort Knox, Kentucky
1993–1994	First Sergeant, Basic Noncommissioned Officer Course Company, Noncommissioned Officer Academy, Fort Knox, Kentucky
1994–1995	Deputy Commandant, Noncommissioned Officer Academy, Fort Knox, Kentucky
1995–1996	Student, Class #46, Sergeants Major Academy, Fort Bliss, Texas
1996–1998	Command Sergeant Major, 3d Battalion, 8th Cavalry, 1st Cavalry Division, Fort Hood, Texas
1998–2000	Command Sergeant Major, 3d Brigade, 1st Cavalry Division, Fort Hood, Texas
2000–2001	Command Sergeant Major, 1st Armored Division, Bad Kreuznach, Germany
2001–2002	Command Sergeant Major, V Corps, Heidelberg, Germany
2002–2003	Command Sergeant Major, Combined Joint Task Force–7, Baghdad, Iraq
2004–2011	Sergeant Major of the Army

Selected Decorations and Awards

Legion of Merit with One Oak Leaf Cluster
Bronze Star Medal
Defense Meritorious Service Medal
Army Meritorious Service Medal with Three Oak Leaf Clusters
Army Commendation Medal with Four Oak Leaf Clusters
Army Achievement Medal with Two Oak Leaf Clusters
Southwest Asia Service Ribbon
Liberation of Kuwait Ribbon (Kuwait)
Kosovo Medal
NATO Medal
Joint Meritorious Unit Award

Appendix

Chronological List of Presidents, Secretaries of the Army, Chiefs of Staff, and Sergeants Major of the Army

Presidents of the United States Secretaries of the Army Chiefs of Staff of the Army		Sergeants Major of the Army
Lyndon B. Johnson	Nov 63	
Stephen Ailes	Jan 64	
Harold K. Johnson	Jul 64	
Stanley R. Resor	Jul 65	
		Jul 66 William O. Wooldridge
William C. Westmoreland	Jul 68	Sep 68 George W. Dunaway
Richard M. Nixon	Jan 69	
		Oct 70 Silas L. Copeland
Robert F. Froehlke	Jul 71	
Bruce Palmer, Jr. (acting)	Jul 72	
Creighton W. Abrams	Oct 72	
Howard H. Calloway	May 73	Jul 73 Leon L. Van Autreve
Gerald R. Ford	Aug 74	
Fredrick C. Weyand	Aug 74	
Martin R. Hoffman	Aug 75	Jul 75 William G. Bainbridge
Bernard W. Rogers	Oct 76	

Appendix—continued

Presidents of the United States
Secretaries of the Army
Chiefs of Staff of the Army

Sergeants Major
of the Army

James E. Carter	Jan 77	—		
Clifford L. Alexander, Jr.	Feb 77	—		
Edward C. Meyer	Jun 79	—	Jul 79	William A. Connelly
Ronald W. Reagan	Jan 81	—		
John O. Marsh, Jr.	Jan 81	—		
John A. Wickham, Jr.	Jun 83	—	Jul 83	Glen E. Morrell
Carl E. Vuono	Jun 87	—	Jul 87	Julius W. Gates
George H. W. Bush	Jan 89	—		
Michael P. W. Stone	Aug 89	—		
Gordon R. Sullivan	Jun 91	—	Jul 91	Richard A. Kidd
William J. Clinton	Jan 93	—		
Togo D. West, Jr.	Nov 93	—		
Dennis J. Reimer	Jun 95	—	Jun 95	Gene C. McKinney
			Jun 97	CSM Jerry T. Alley (acting/rotational) CSM James C. McKinney (acting/rotational)
Louis E. Caldera	Jul 98	—	Oct 97	Robert E. Hall
Eric K. Shinseki	Jun 99	—		
George W. Bush	Jan 01	—	Jun 00	Jack L. Tilley
Thomas E. White	May 01	—		

Appendix—continued

Presidents of the United States
 Secretaries of the Army
 Chiefs of Staff of the Army

Sergeants Major
 of the Army

Peter J. Schoomaker	Aug 03		Jan 04	Kenneth O. Preston
Francis J. Harvey	Nov 04			
Preston M. Geren	Mar 07			
George W. Casey, Jr.	Apr 07			
Barack H. Obama	Jan 09			
John M. McHugh	Sep 09			
			Mar 11	Raymond F. Chandler III
Martin E. Dempsey	Apr 11			
Raymond T. Odierno	Sep 11			

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