



Paratroopers assigned to the 173rd Airborne Brigade, pull an M81 igniter to detonate a brazier charge during Exercise Rock Spring 19 at Grafenwoehr Training Area, Germany, March 6, 2019. (U.S. Army photo by Sgt. Henry Villarama)

The Professional NCO

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Webster's dictionary defines being a professional as "characterized by or conforming to the technical or ethical standards of a profession." As noncommissioned officers we are the "backbone" of the Army profession. It is our inherent duty to uphold our responsibilities, be both technically and tactically competent, quality leaders and trainers and maintain the welfare of our Soldiers and their families. NCOs are the foundation of our Army, the rock upon which the greatest fighting force the world has ever known is built upon. Though the battlefields, uniforms, tactics and society itself may change, the NCO remains true to our history.

From our earliest days crossing the Delaware with Washington to the mountains of Afghanistan today, the NCO remains the consummate professional and standard bearer for all our Army holds to be good and true.

From the outset, during the establishment of the Continental Army in 1775, the NCO Corps proved to be quite unique. It became a Corps like no other previously seen in any Army around the world. The new NCO Corps changed the way many Armies around the world would structure their forces in the years to come. Gone was the all too startling gap between the conscript Soldier and an elitist officer corps; the NCO stood as the ex-



U.S. Army Staff Sgt. Brad Balsley, a shooter/instructor with the U.S. Army Marksmanship Unit's Instructor Training Group works with a drill sergeant of 2nd Squadron, 15th Cavalry Regiment, 194th Armored Brigade, at Fort Benning, Georgia, March 28, 2018. The event was part of a week-long course covering everything from fundamentals to holds to minute of angle positions. (U.S. Army photo by Maj. Michelle Lunato, U.S. Army Marksmanship Unit)

perienced professional that Soldier and officer alike came to rely so heavily upon. Standardization with duties and responsibilities were laid out in an effort to legitimize the professional role of the NCO. These duties and responsibilities were first defined by Baron von Steuben in 1776 during the early phases of the Revolutionary War. Just as our country was being born from conflict and molded into a new nation, our Army was transformed from a rag tag, unorganized militia into a disciplined, professional fighting force. At the heart of this transformation was the NCO, with defined roles for corporals, sergeants, first sergeants and sergeants major designed to lead this new force. NCOs became an integral part in leading their Soldiers during battle as well as administrative and other tasks. Although not as glorious, these other tasks were vital in ensuring the smooth operation of a professional fighting force. Another key factor von Steuben identified was selecting quality individuals to serve within the NCO ranks, something that we still hold true today. As the Army changed and re-organized over the next two hundred and thirty seven years, so too did the duties and responsibilities of the NCO.

The noncommissioned officer of today is far more educated than the fearless NCOs that stood at Valley Forge, as they receive professional military education and other functional training and education which enhances their technical and tactical knowledge. The NCO of today must also seek out personal development through the attendance of civilian education programs while simultaneously juggling the rigors of leading Soldiers, maintaining their own professional standards and dedicating time for their own families at home. There is no place in the

NCO Corps for those content with the minimum, whether that minimum be in the NCO education system, civilian education, leading Soldiers or even pushing their own boundaries during physical training. The professional NCO demands much more of themselves, as do those around them, always striving further, farther, harder and faster. They complete the minimum and then some, often well ahead of others be it when completing an online advanced or senior, Advanced Leaders Course or Senior Leader Course, leadership course or on a company run. A professional NCO is not

one who rationalizes his failure to prioritize his time and effort and ends up not completing the task at hand. The true professional is one who is always physically and mentally prepared so when he is required to attend a military school there are no reasons why he wouldn't be prepared or successful in its execution.

The NCO today is also asked to be the expert on multiple systems and procedures in order to be a well-rounded leader. The professional NCO understands this and works to ensure they are the best qualified in order to train and lead their Soldiers. As combat over the past twelve years has shown, NCOs who are able to function as a multi-faceted, subject matter expert on the multitude of systems and procedures within their purview and be able to effectively train their Soldiers in return, are quite successful. For example, a communications NCO may find himself in charge of leading a combat logistical patrol and although he might be technically competent in the communications field, if he isn't tactically competent then he endangers his Soldiers and detracts from mission accomplishment. The professional NCO also looks for well-rounded or broadening assignments throughout their career and field. Broadening your assignment selection enables you to be more versatile and able to adapt to any operating environment, be it in a home station or deployed. Being the expert and having well-rounded assignments helps to ensure that the NCO is able to set the example in all that he does.

The professional NCO is the enforcer of standards and discipline. He accomplishes this through his personal example and holding his Soldiers accountable. The Army is not a nine to five job; the professional NCO ad-

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U.S. Army Staff Sgt. Jaime Linares, a satellite communication systems operator-maintainer assigned to the Headquarters and Headquarters Battery, 94th Army Air and Missile Defense Command climbs a rope while negotiating the "Tough One" obstacle course during the command's 2018 Noncommissioned Officer and Soldier of the Year Competition at Schofield Barracks, Hawaii, May 9, 2018. (U.S. Army photo by Sgt. 1st Class Claudio Tejada, 94th Army Air and Missile Defense Command)

heres to all regulations, lives the Army Values and Warrior Ethos twenty four hours a day. Being a professional noncommissioned officer is a privilege for which few are chosen. Once part of the NCO Corps, all Soldiers expect their NCOs to provide quality leadership and guidance. Whether conducting an effective counseling session with his Soldiers or teaching them how to shoot their weapon, Soldiers look to the professional NCO as their guide to learn the Army Profession. Joint operations, digital systems and working in varied cultures are just a few of the challenges that today's NCOs have adapted to.

As our Army and our Nation move forward and adapt to an ever-changing enemy presence in a non-contiguous battlefield, the professional NCO must continue to adapt as well. Those that both learn from the past and embrace the future will be best suited to lead and train the professional NCOs of tomorrow, always placing the success and welfare of their Soldiers above one's self. As the Army draws down the size of the force, there will be a two-fold affect on the NCO corps; it will become even more imperative that the seasoned, professional NCOs of today continue to groom the future of the Corps while we as an Army will only be able to select the very best for continued service. Education of systems, equipment, force structure and continued self-development will

all be important to the success of the NCO. Individual and unit readiness for combat or other missions, with a strong sense of purpose, will all be dependent on the professional NCO.

History has shown that we will always need to maintain a strong, combat ready and professional NCO Corps. We must continue to build upon the foundation established by the first NCOs from 1776 by enforcing and setting the standards through our example and by training and leading our Soldiers. The success, or failure, of our Army as it transitions in an unpredictable future will hinge largely on the professionalism of the NCO; we cannot afford to fail our Army or our nation. In a time of peace or war it is paramount that the NCO be a professional whom Soldiers look towards to lead them from the front in all that he does. From the corporal in the garrison motor pool to the staff sergeant on patrol in Afghanistan, we must continue to reinforce the foundation of our Army as professionals, leaders, noncommissioned officers.

If you would like to learn more about this topic it is recommended that you read *Field Manual 7-22.7, The NCO Guide, Army Doctrine Publication 6-22, Army Leadership, Army Doctrine Reference Publication 6-22, Army Leadership, and Army Doctrine Reference Publication 1, The Army Profession.* ■

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