



An instructor at the 7th Army NCO Academy helps a Warrior Leader Course student with her land navigation training at the academy's training area in Grafenwoehr, Germany. (Photo by Clifford Kyle Jones / NCO Journal)

Many NCO Education Milestones Were First Reached At 7th Army NCOA

By Clifford Kyle Jones — NCO Journal

Much of what would formally become the Non-commissioned Officer Education System, or NCOES, had its origins at the 7th Army NCO Academy.

The academy, which was always located in Germany but at several other sites before landing at its current home in Grafenwoehr, started as a school for the Constabulary, the police-like military force that maintained order in Germany and Austria from 1946 to 1952, just after World War II. In late 1949, the commander of the Constabulary, Maj. Gen. Isaac D. White, realized his NCOs needed a special course of instruction. He

assigned the task to Brig. Gen. Bruce C. Clarke, who commanded the 2nd Constabulary Brigade and was an enthusiastic supporter of the project.

Clarke was already a World War II hero after leading the U.S. relief of St. Vith during the Battle of the Bulge, delaying the German advance. Gen. Dwight D. Eisenhower even called Clarke's actions the "turning point" of the war. But it was Clarke's work with NCOs after the war, and even after his own retirement, that would earn him his nickname "the Sergeants' General."

Before his work with the Constabulary, Clarke already had made forays into NCO education. As assistant com-

mandant of the Armor School at Fort Knox, Kentucky, he established a Noncommissioned Officers Course as part of his numerous training improvements. The course included traditional academic settings, demonstrations and practical exercises to enhance learning.

But in Germany, Clarke established an entire Non-commissioned Officer Academy in 10 unused buildings at Jensen Barracks in Munich and was named the academy's first commandant. The six-week course consisted entirely of classroom instruction. The academy was officially established in September 1949, and the first class of 150 students reported to the academy on Oct. 15 of that year.

Clarke was able to partially staff his academy with officers who had worked with him as instructors or had been students at the Armor School in Fort Knox. The basic curriculum consisted of 14 subjects, including drill and ceremony, military justice, physical fitness and basic tactics. The students' days began at 5 a.m. and often ended when taps played at 11 p.m.

At first, the academy served only the Constabulary, but with the success of the program and its graduates, the school eventually expanded to the 7th Army and the entire European Command, as well as the Trieste Command in Italy. The academy's full student capacity was 320 per class, and by 1951, it had graduated almost 4,500 students.

One of its early graduates, Sgt. Leon L. Van Autreve, would take honors as the top student in his class and later make history as the first non-combat-arms Soldier to

be named the sergeant major of the Army, in July 1973.

Another future sergeant major of the Army wasn't lucky enough to attend. As a platoon sergeant stationed in Germany, William O. Wooldridge, asked his first sergeant for permission to attend the 7th Army NCO Academy. Wooldridge explained that he intended to stay in the Army and "wanted to be something more than a rifle platoon sergeant." His first sergeant responded, "You're a combat veteran. You already know everything."

Wooldridge, whose tenure as the first sergeant major of the Army from July 1966 to August 1968 would be marked by a deep dedication to NCO education, continued to press the issue. His first sergeant told him, "You're wasting my time," and ordered Wooldridge out of his room.

In 1951, the 7th Army assumed the Constabulary functions and the Constabulary NCO Academy became the 7th Army Noncommissioned Officers Academy. By November 1958, when it moved to Flint Kaserne in Bad Toelz, 45,000 NCOs had graduated from the Munich school, including several students from the newly formed West German Bundeswehr.

Clarke would go on to establish other NCO academies in Texas, Hawaii and Korea, and other divisions began to develop their own. They were similar in nature and conduct, but there were no established standards of instruction, and graduates of one course could later be required to attend another. Most NCOs, however, never attended the academies at all and continued to learn from the old methods of on-the-job training.



U.S. Army Europe's command sergeant major, Command Sgt. Maj. Sheryl Lyon, sits at "The Patton Desk" at the main entrance to the 7th Army NCO Academy in Grafenwoehr, Germany. The desk belonged to Gen. George S. Patton during World War II. (Photo courtesy of 7th Army NCO Academy)

The Korean War, from 1950 to 1953, demonstrated an urgent need for better-trained small unit leaders, and at Clarke's urging, the Department of the Army, in 1957, published its first regulation to establish standards for NCO academies, thereby establishing the NCO Academy system. This regulation authorized, but did not require, division and installation commanders to establish NCO academies. It set forth a standard pattern for training NCOs and fixed the minimum length of a course at four weeks. It did not prescribe a complete standardized course of instruction, but mandated seven subjects be part of the curriculum. It did not provide any additional funding for the academies, so each command had to support its own academy.

In the 1960s, warfare in Vietnam strained the ranks of noncommissioned officers in new ways — limits to deployment times and stateside stabilization policies combined with an aging NCO Corps ill-suited to the physical requirements of jungle fighting put pressure on junior leaders in unprecedented ways.

The Army tackled its NCO issues by taking a lesson from its officer training. Qualified enlisted personnel could attend the 23-week Officer Candidate Course and be accepted to Officer Candidate School. The Army started a similar system for NCOs, the Noncommissioned Officers Candidate Course, in 1967. Potential candidates were selected from groups of initial entry soldiers who had a security clearance of confidential, an infantry score of 100 or more, and demonstrated leadership potential. Those selected to attend NCOCC were made corporals and later promoted to sergeant upon graduation from phase one. Those who graduated with honors were promoted to staff sergeant. The top graduate of the first class, Staff Sgt. Melvin C. Leverick, recalled, "I think that those who graduated [from the NCOCC] were much better prepared for some of the problems that would arise in Vietnam."

Wooldridge, who by now had been named the first sergeant major of the Army, told the first class, "Great things are expected from you. Besides being the first class, you are also the first group who has ever been trained this way. It has been a whole new idea in training."

Some were skeptical of the compressed promotion schedule. The course's graduates were called "Shake n' Bakes," "Instant NCOs," and "Whip n' Chills" by naysayers. But one early skeptic, former battalion commander Col. W. G. Skelton, said, "Within a short time, they [the NCOCC graduates] proved themselves completely, and we were crying for more. Because of their training, they repeatedly surpassed the Soldier who had risen from the ranks in combat and provided the quality of leadership at the squad and platoon level, which is essential in the type of fighting we are doing."

Even before the success of the NCOCC, some segments of the Army had begun to clamor for structured

NCO education. In 1963, a council of senior NCOs at Fort Dix, New Jersey, called for a senior NCO college. In 1966, Sgt. Maj. of the Army Wooldridge called the first Command Sergeants Major Conference and one of the main topics was NCO education. The chief of staff of the Army ordered a comprehensive study, completed in 1967, on enlisted personnel and grades, called "Educating Noncommissioned Officers." It focused on how to establish and manage a quality-based enlisted force, and dedicated a portion for "improving the vital area of training."

That report's recommendations and the success of NCOCC would result in the 1969 NCO Educational Development Concept. The first of the three levels consisted of the Basic Course, which was designated to produce the basic sergeant grade NCO. The Advanced Course was targeted to mid-grade NCOs, and the Senior Course was envisioned as a management course directed to qualifying Soldiers for senior enlisted staff positions. The NCOCC served as the model for the Basic Course.

On April 23, 1970, President Richard M. Nixon announced to Congress that establishing an all-volunteer military would be a national objective. But by mid-1971, Chief of Staff of the Army Gen. William Westmoreland was unhappy with the progress of the all-volunteer force and he sought help to determine what could make the Army more attractive to enlistees. He tapped then-retired Gen. Bruce Clarke to head the project and visit installations across the Army.

On a visit to Fort Hood, Texas, Clarke arrived in time for its NCO Academy to close its doors, a repeat of the same story at other installations. Clarke conducted a survey and discovered that there were only four NCO academies remaining in which to train 100,000 noncommissioned officers. In his report back to Westmoreland, Clarke lamented that "we are running an army with 95 percent of the NCOs untrained!" NCO academies across the nation were reopened, and Westmoreland approved the Basic and Advance noncommissioned officer courses, and by July 1970, the first Basic course pilot began at Fort Sill.

The first Advance Courses weren't conducted until early 1972, and later that year, the new chief of staff of the Army, Gen. C.W. Abrams, established the Senior NCO Course at the newly established U.S. Army Sergeants Major Academy at an unused airfield in El Paso, Texas.

The draft ended Dec. 31, 1972, and the Army entered 1973 prepared to rely on volunteers. The then three-tiered NCO Education System was spread throughout the Army and permanently altered both the education of and expectations from NCOs.

The Army's first NCO Academy would make history once again when the Army decided in January 1972 that NCOs should lead NCO academies. The 7th Army

NCO Academy was the first to appoint its new enlisted commandant, Command Sgt. Maj. Lawrence Hickey. The academy's Dining Facility still bears his name.

Over the next decade, the three tiers of system would grow to four and then to five. Then in 1983, Training and Doctrine Command directed that a military-occupational-specialty immaterial course be created, known as the Primary Leadership Development Course, or PLDC. In 1984, TRADOC made USASMA responsible for developing all NCOES Common Core phases of instruction.

NCOES became further emphasized and integrated into the promotion process in ensuing years, and new methods of instruction, including virtual learning, were

introduced. In the early 2000s, a major study recommended overhauling the NCO Education System, and in late 2005, PLDC was replaced by the new Warrior Leader Course. The 7th Army NCO Academy would achieve another major milestone in NCO education, when it graduated the first class of WLC students, when 179 students walked across the Tower Theatre stage Nov. 4, 2005, in Grafenwoehr.

SOURCES: "[Educating Noncommissioned Officers: A chronological study on the development of educational programs for U.S. Army Noncommissioned Officers](#)," by Command Sgt. Maj. Daniel K. Elder.

"[Chronology of the U.S. Army Noncommissioned Officer Education System](#)," by Daniel K. Elder. ■



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