



U.S. Army 1st Lt. Chris Neyman, a platoon leader with the 1st Infantry Division, 3rd Brigade Reconnaissance Troop, consults with his platoon sergeant and senior scouts while conducting clearing operations in Fallujah, Iraq, Nov. 15, 2004. (U.S. Army photo by Sgt. Kimberly Snow)

## Bridging the Officer-NCO PME Divide

By Maj. George J. Fust III (75th Ranger Regiment) & Sgt. Maj. Jeffery D. Howard

(Sergeants Major Academy)

*"The enlisted personnel have neither the intellectual skills nor the professional responsibility of the officer. They are specialists in the application of violence not the management of violence. Their vocation is a trade not a profession. This fundamental difference between the officer corps and the enlisted corps is reflected in the sharp line which is universally drawn between the two in all the military forces of the world."*

(Huntington, 1985, p.17)

Originally written by Samuel Huntington in 1957, the above passage could not be more wrong today. The U.S. Army's asymmetrical advantage has always been its Noncommissioned Officer (NCO) Corps. As the backbone of the Army, they are the critical link that enables the execution of mission command. If the Army rejects Huntington's claim, why then does the institution continue the artificial divide between NCO and officer professional military education (PME)?

### A Missed Opportunity

Currently, curriculum overlap exists between the Command and General Staff College (CGSC, the educational institution responsible for mid-career officers) and the U.S. Army Sergeants Major Academy (SGM-A). Both schools focus on the Military Decision-Making Process (MDMP), leadership, and expectation of roles, yet zero formal links exist between the two institutions, making missed opportunities for interaction and collaboration.

Throughout each 10-month course, neither school attempts to bridge the officer-NCO PME gap, even though conditions at these schools are optimal for students to learn from each other. These courses provide ample opportunities to develop understanding and foster teamwork between officers and NCOs well in advance of the time they may serve together. Day one at a new unit should not be the first time senior NCOs and newly-minted field grade officers interact.

Given the necessity and new capabilities of remote learning during the past year because of the global pandemic, geographical distance is no longer an obstacle. The following section proves collaboration between the two schools can be accomplished to the benefit of both officers and NCOs.

## The Collaboration

While studying an article at the SGM-A, Sgt. Maj. Howard realized he had served with the article's author, Maj. Fust, during a previous assignment. He used his personal relationship to set up a guest lecture at the SGM-A which allowed for both officer and enlisted viewpoints to be heard and discussed.

The topic of the lecture was the role of senior enlisted NCOs in civil-military relations and today's policy environment. An important conversation, but certainly not limited to just NCOs (Nielsen & Snider, 2009). The conversation needed the experience and perspective of both officers and NCOs, yet CGSC and the SGM-A's current instructional design does not formally facilitate this type of collaboration. The opportunity that presented itself was in the form of a guest lecture and question and answer session between a CGSC student and an entire SGM-A department. This collaboration demonstrated the effectiveness and possibility of future interactions between the two schools.

While preparing for the interaction, Fust considered the unique perspective of sergeants major. The collaborative event also exposed the sergeants major to an officer's unique perspective. Both parties left the



U.S. Army Staff Sgt. Rheanna Anderson, a signal support system specialist assigned to 5th Armored Brigade, First Army Division West, gives instructions for a land navigation course during an Enlisted and Officer of the Quarter Competition at McGregor Range Complex, New Mexico, Sept. 24, 2020. (U.S. Army photo by Sgt. John Onuoha)

engagement with a new mental model and frame of reference. Imagine the impact if this template spread across multiple centers of excellence. The benefits would multiply exponentially, helping to strengthen trust and build understanding within leadership teams prior to unit arrival.

Numerous touchpoints exist at all military institutions for officer-NCO interaction. In the case of Howard and Fust, a text message and accommodating SGM-A staff were the only necessary requirements. A more deliberate collaborative plan between the two schools could generate many inclusive training opportunities and also meet curriculum objectives.

## Conclusion

The U.S. Army's asymmetrical advantage is the NCO Corps. Strengthening the connectivity and understanding between officers and NCOs on fundamental topics such as MDMP, leadership styles, expectations, training, and operational experience is critical. The creation and expansion of institutionalized opportunities between CGSC and the SGM-A can only strengthen the Army at little to no cost. At a minimum, it would increase awareness of different viewpoints and help foster teamwork and trust, both of which are critical to success in today's complex operational environment. ■

---

## References

Huntington, S. P. (1985). *The soldier and the state: The theory and politics of civil-military relations*. Harvard University Press. (Original work published 1957)

Nielsen, S. C., & Snider, D. M. (Eds.). (2009). *American civil-military relations: The soldier and the state in a new era*. JHU Press.

**Maj. George Fust** is a U.S. Army officer on orders to the 75th Ranger Regiment. He holds a master's degree in political science from Duke University and has published in a variety of publications.

**Sgt. Maj. Jeffery D. Howard** has served in every leadership position from team leader to sergeant major. He is a recent graduate of the SGM-A (Class 71). He has served multiple deployments in support of Operation Iraqi Freedom and Operation Enduring Freedom. He holds a bachelor's degree in health administration from the University of Phoenix.

---



<https://www.armypress.army.mil/Journals/NCO-Journal/>

<https://www.facebook.com/NCOJournal>

<https://twitter.com/NCOJournal>

**Disclaimer:** The views expressed in this article are those of the authors and do not necessarily reflect the opinions of the NCO Journal, the U.S. Army, or the Department of Defense.