

NCO History Pt. 4: Indian Wars & Spanish-American War
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In the years following the Civil War, the Army found itself involved in numerous engagements across the nation while fighting in the Indian Wars of the 1870's – 1890's.

These battles, unlike the large scale conflicts found in the Civil War, consisted of numerous scattered skirmishes over vast areas, without ever having any decisive battles being fought that signaled the end of the wars.

The noncommissioned officer was heavily looked to during these random engagements for his knowledge, expertise and experience to lead small units into battle.

In the west, besides engaging in random conflicts with the Indians, NCOs and junior Soldiers often had duties requiring them to serve as bakers, blacksmiths or guards, repair bridges and roads, or build and repair fortifications and houses.

With these tedious tasks, constant threat of attacks and very poor pay, desertion was very common in the Army. NCOs were responsible to maintain and improve the quality of life and morale of the troops to reduce the rate of desertion.

By 1870, the Artillery school at Fort Monroe had re-opened along with a new Signal Corps school for training NCOs and officers. Efforts to provide the same training for NCOs in other career fields did not attract the same support, as many believed that experience in the field, not a classroom, is what made a good NCO in combat career fields.

In addition to the stress of their job and constant threat of conflict, in the 1870's, Army regulations came out limiting the amount of enlisted married men in the Army.

Despite the Army's attempt to limit the amount of married enlisted men in its ranks, nature won out and helped begin the transformation of posts into communities.

The first retirement system for enlisted man was created in 1885, where anyone who had served for 30 years could retire with three-quarters of his active duty pay. In 1898, the U.S. declared war on Spain beginning the Spanish- American War.

When war was declared, the Army only consisted of 26,000 men. The War Department began asking for volunteers, allowing National Guard units that were already formed to volunteer and serve as a unit. By the conclusion of the war, the U.S. raised 275,000 men to fight against Spain.

Requiring the volunteers to be fully equipped and prepared for combat, NCOs went to work training the troops for battle. The process started off very slowly with some volunteer units never seeing the front line of combat.

The war lasted only four months in which combat occurred in the Philippines, Guam, Puerto Rico and Cuba. The most immediate threat for NCOs in dealing with these engagements was not the Spanish

Soldiers, but instead the threat of disease. Constantly having to brief and maintain the health of their troops, NCOs found themselves fighting against two enemies instead of one. An estimated 3,000 lives were lost during the war, with 90 percent coming from infectious disease.

After the war, Cuba gained its independence, Puerto Rico and Guam ceded to the U.S., and the victorious power purchased the Philippines from Spain for \$20 million.

With the newly gained land, the U.S. was required to station over onethird of the Army overseas to deal with such conflicts as the Philippine Insurrection and Boxer Rebellion. This expansion created a need for additional troops and modernization across the Army .

This modernization had a direct affect on the NCO Corps, as new technology and new paygrades were born. The Army became forced to fight against the industry for technical workers.

Congress passed a law in 1908 to reward those Soldiers in technical fields, while Soldiers in combat fields remained the same.

An infantry sergeant major made \$25-\$34 a month, while a sergeant in the signal corps made \$34-\$43 and a master electrician would make \$75-\$84 a month.

The NCO instructions provided in Von Steuben's regulations grew to 417 pages in 1909 when the Noncommissioned Officers Manual was formally written.

One of the main topics of the manual was discipline and the treatment of junior Soldiers. Its instructions stressed that discipline should be uniform, just and not humiliating.

With new guidelines governing their role in the Army and the conflicts of the Indian Wars and Spanish-America War behind them, the NCO Corps continued forward not realizing it was preparing itself for a war on a scale than it had never participated in before ... World War I.