

NCO History Pt. 8: Post Vietnam, 1980s and 90s.
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After the creation of the Noncommissioned Officer Education System in 1971, NCOs continued to see growth in their professional development schooling with the creation of the Primary Leadership Development Course.

PLDC was created to emphasize training, duties and responsibilities for newly promoted NCOs and those about to be promoted into the NCO ranks.

At Fort Bliss, Texas, the US Army Sergeants Major Academy became the core location for which all NCOES courses were written.

In addition, the academy also operated three separate NCO courses for specific positions in the NCO Corps. The courses were the First Sergeants Course, the Operations and Intelligence Course and the Personnel and Logistics Course.

In 1986, the Army for the first time established a prerequisite for promotion with the creation of MILPO Message Number 86-65.

The message made it mandatory for all NCOs to attend PLDC before being promoted to sergeant; now its required for promotion to staff sergeant.

The Army now has mandated that all NCOs attend Basic Noncommissioned Officers Course prior to being promoted to sergeant first class and attend Advanced Noncommissioned Officers Course prior to promotion to master sergeant.

A new Sergeants Major Academy was built in 1987, again confirming the strong emphasis on a well educated NCO Corps. It was a \$17 million structure that allowed the expansion of the Academy to offer new courses and more NCOs a chance to further their career.

Four years later, in 1991, the first publication of the NCO Journal was produced. The publication was a year in the making, with the original titles being Sergeants Business and NCO Call, before it finally became the NCO Journal.

The NCO Journal, which was a result of the NCO Profession Leader Task Force, is a professional publication for NCOs and is the second largest Army publication.

Amidst continued progress in NCOES's and NCO development, the 1980s and 90s saw NCOs engaged in numerous conflicts across the globe. Unlike previous large-scale, drawn out wars such as World War I and II, the Korean and Vietnam War, these conflicts were on a much smaller scale.

Only a few countries were involved in the conflicts and the amount of time fighting significantly reduced versus previous wars.

In addition, in a majority of these conflicts, NCOs found themselves leading troops into peacekeeping missions to help build relationships over a long period of time instead of traditional combat missions.

Conflict first broke out in June 1982 after Israel invaded southern Lebanon. The initial Israeli objective was to push the Palestine Liberation Organization 40 kilometers back north away from the border.

The U.S., along with the British, French and Italians, which were known as the Multinational Forces in Lebanon, would send servicemembers into the region to help restore peace between Israel and Lebanon.

A year later, in October 1983, the U.S. invaded Grenada, which was the first major military operation since the Vietnam War. The conflict began after the assassination of Grenadian Prime Minister Maurice Bishop.

Besides helping restore the pre-revolutionary constitution to the people of Grenada, NCOs would also lead a rescue search for American students located at a local University. The entire conflict would last less than two months.

In December 1989, 27,000 U.S. servicemembers invaded Panama to remove Manuel Noriega, after a rigged Presidential election in which Noriega proclaimed himself "President for Life" over Panama.

A few days after the invasion, Noriega surrendered and was flown back to the United States to face trial.

1990 saw NCOs in Saudi Arabia after Saddam Hussein invaded Kuwait. Operation Desert Shield was initiated as a defensive measure to stop the Iraqi Army from potentially invading Saudi Arabia.

On Feb. 24, 1991, after a month of air strikes, NCOs led Soldiers against the Iraqi Forces in the largest armored battle in the history of warfare. The operation was such a huge success that less than 100 hours after the initial attack, President George Bush Sr. ordered a cease-fire.

A humanitarian aid mission forced NCOs back into conflict in Somalia from 1992-1993. Mass famine struck the nation, as a result of Gen. Mohamed Farrah Aidid and his soldiers preventing poverty stricken civilians getting food to eat.

The U.S., along with the United Nations, intervened to aid the local populous. Unknown to them at the time, the guerilla warfare fought in the streets of Mogadishu and surrounding cities would be a prelude to the type of warfare NCOs would face in the 21st Century during Operations Iraqi and Enduring Freedom.

The U.S. again assumed the role of peacekeeper and helped prevent "ethnic cleansing," after conflicts broke out in Bosnia in 1994 and in Kosovo in 1999.

To this day, Soldiers remain in both countries as part of North Atlantic Treaty Organization peacekeeping missions.

After participating in numerous conflicts across the globe, each with its own unique lessons, the NCO Corps looked toward the new millennium with high hopes for the future.