

NCO History Pt. 9: Current Role of the NCO
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On Sept. 11, 2001, the entire nation watched as terrorists struck the World Trade Towers in New York, the Pentagon in D.C. and attempted to use another plane to strike the White House.

A few days after, President George W. Bush addressed the world, calling for aid in fighting against terrorism, beginning with the destruction of terrorist camps and infrastructures in Afghanistan.

A month later, U.S. and British forces started bombing Afghanistan, as Operation Enduring Freedom officially began. In November 2001, the first forward operation base was established in Afghanistan by U.S. and allied forces.

In January 2002, troops were sent to the island of Basilan, Philippines, to support the Armed Forces of the Philippines by ridding the island of terrorist forces.

Later, in October 2002, Camp Le Monier was established in Djibouti, Africa, to reduce the risk of potential terrorist organizations in the Horn of Africa and to aid in humanitarian missions.

In March 2003, noncommissioned officers were also placed on the front lines in Iraq, as Operation Iraqi Freedom began. By December, U.S. forces captured Saddam Hussein, ending his reign of terror over Iraq.

NCOs became responsible for quickly training their Soldiers on the various types of IEDs and shoot/don't shoot drills, as it became difficult to distinguish who was friend or foe. Unlike previous conflicts where NCOs were leading Soldiers against another nation's Army, they now found themselves fighting against individuals, who were not wearing a distinctive uniform, but blended themselves into the crowd, making it harder to distinguish who was a threat. Urban guerilla warfare also became a prominent means of combat as raids and attacks were carried out placing NCOs in the midst of heavily populated areas, surrounded by noncombatants.

With the new style of warfare taking place, a new field manual for operations was introduced in February 2008, FM 3-0.

FM 3-0 also focused on the transformation of the Army into Full-Spectrum Operations, in which NCOs find themselves filling logistical, theater support cooperation, and reception, staging and integration onward movement roles, in addition to the traditional combat jobs.

In addition to new FMs, NCO training has been re-evaluated and changed to support the current operations being conducted across the globe.

In 2005, the Army changed its Primary Leadership Development Course to reflect a new curriculum, which include lessons learned in Iraq and Afghanistan, a reinforced focus on weapon immersion and an emphasis on small-team leadership; and also changed the name to reflect the overall change in philosophy to the Warrior Leaders Course.

As NCOs continue to lead troops in combat operations supporting OEF and OIF, the role of the NCO Corps has continued to evolve and change back in America.

In the streets of America NCOs are looking for the next qualified applicant to join the Army, as NCOs act as Recruiters, helping maintain the Army's strength. Currently, there are 9,414 NCOs working as Recruiters to ensure that the Army is at full strength.

After an applicant joins the Army, and arrives at basic training, they are met by another select group of NCOs who train, prepare and mentor new Soldiers for what to expect in their Army

career, the Drill Sergeant. “This we’ll defend” is the inscription worn on the badge of Drill Sergeants as a symbol of the determination, devotion and consistent readiness of the American Soldier. Drill Sergeants have nine weeks to mold and prepare the new Soldier in the basic fundamentals of Soldiering before sending them to their advanced individual training, where they again are met by NCOs who instruct them on the specifics of their career field.

Senior NCOs also act as Battle Staff NCOs, which are the driving force in interlacing vital information from various sections in the command to maintain an overview of the fight.

Besides being the primary trainers of new and veteran Soldiers, NCOs are the primary testers of new equipment prior to being approved for mass distribution. Some of these projects include the Land Warrior Integrated Modular Fighting System, the javelin anti-armor missile, the XM25 semiautomatic, the XM312 machine gun and the SM3300 grenade launcher.

In 2009, the NCO Corps has been formally recognized for all its efforts.

“The Secretary of the Army and I have declared [this year], the year of the noncommissioned officer,” said Army Chief of Staff, Gen. George W. Casey. “This is to recognize the role that our NCO Corps has played in holding this Army together and leading it to victory in this long war. I firmly believe that we would not be here today without the role that our NCOs have played every day.”

Now in its 234th year, the NCO Corps has been through numerous conflicts in defense of freedom and the nation.

From fighting for Independence against the British, to fighting family and friends during the Civil War, stopping the Nazis in World War II, preventing the spread of communism in Korea and Vietnam, to now fighting the global war on terrorism, the NCO Corps has always been there when its country needed it the most, continually solidifying itself as the “backbone” of the Army.