History of the Noncommissioned Officer Education System

I. Introduction.
B. This informational briefing is UNCLASSIFIED and is intended to provide insight into the history of Non-Commissioned Officer education.
C. Information will be given in a chronological order.
D. The information was taken from several different media’s for more diverse points of view.

II. Body.
   A. History of NCO education system.

III. Closing.
A. Do you have any questions on today’s subject?

B. The NCO Corp has a long and educational history that must continue to evolve in order to provide our Soldiers the quality leadership needed to fulfill current and future military operations that focus more upon “small unit” actions, units led by the Non-Commissioned Officer. Thank you.

C. There are no other speakers.

**History of the Noncommissioned Officer Education**

The educational history of the Noncommissioned Officer has progressed from simple beginnings of unit based development into today’s modern semi-centralized and centralized professional development schools. Soldiers today enjoy development opportunities that were created from decades and even centuries of struggle of past NCO’s who often had no formal training in leadership and relied solely upon personal courage, determination and experience to lead.

Has the role of the Non-Commissioned Officer really changed since 1775? Given all the technological advancements of today’s NCO how different are they really from those men who started, fought, and died in our Nations
Revolutionary War? An easy answer would be yes NCO’s have changed, but how much different can only be determined by researching the past

1775 is credited as the birth year of the Continental Army. General George Washington the newly appointed Commander of the Continental Army organized the fledgling Army using various existing and successful military systems. GEN Washington combined elements of the British, French, and Prussian militaries; each in its own rights a super power of the eighteenth century. GEN Washington did not have to build an army from completely untrained volunteers; rather many of the Continental Army Soldiers were already members of colonial militias (Minute Men) formed by the British. Organization along the same military model as the British Army there were few Corporals and Sergeants within the ranks. The eighteenth century Corporals and Sergeants were not considered officers commissioned or noncommissioned; rather the eighteenth century Corporals and Sergeants were merely enlisted men selected by their officers to carry out distasteful or less glamorous duties such as role call, physical punishment, or provisioning. Corporals and Sergeants were often from the skilled trades members of society such as blacksmiths, saddlers, or musicians; it was their special skills that
set them apart from other Soldiers. Formal training consisted of instruction from the Company Officers and was often different from one unit to another with very few common tasks between units. As a result of this informal/formal training a varying degree of NCO involvement existed this left the Commissioned ranks as the primary leader. In an attempt to rectify the problem of small unit General Washington adopted a plan put forth by the Prussian military advisor Inspector General Friedrich von Steuben.

IG Von Steuben published his Regulation for the Order and Discipline of the Troops of the United States (commonly called the Blue Book) in 1779. The “Blue Book” outlined among other things the positions, duties, and responsibilities of Non-Commissioned Officers. IG von Steuben reorganized the Continental Army in such a way that Corporals, Sergeants, and Sergeants Majors were given leadership positions and responsibilities that would improve the Command and Control of massed troops. The Blue Book formalized the positions, duties, and responsibilities for a General corps of Non-Commissioned Officers (NCO’s). IG von Steuben wanted the NCO to become the “Backbone of the Army” and that is what they became.
Following the Revolutionary War years, the early 1800’s would challenge the resources of the Army due to population expansion into the western territories and Federal Government limitations restricting the size of the military. The combined expansion and Federal restrictions forced the Army to reduce unit sizes over-extending the small number of Commissioned Officers. As a result of too few Commissioned Officers the Army began utilizing NCO’s as small unit leaders with little to no support from Commissioned Officers. Utilizing NCO’s as outpost Commanders the Army could provide small units over larger territories; NCO led units were so successful in quelling conflicts against the Native Americans of the new territories that larger unit Commanders began adding battlefield leadership to the responsibilities of the NCO’s. The success of the NCO leadership was still mainly an individual Soldiers abilities learned or inherited from life experiences; unit Officers using the “blue book” were still conducting NCO training. NCO training was outdated and facing another problem as more Soldiers were recruited from the growing population of emigrants who presented the problem of language and cultural differences. The most prevalent minority groups were Irishmen and Germans. The influx of minorities brought a new element to the NCO Corps
as noted by an unknown writer who stated, “the Irish, physically rugged and usually resourceful in the field, made good privates, corporals, and line sergeants while some few of the mentally superior made good first sergeants.” The Germans, he says “fewer in number but equally aggressive and more precise in their habits, contributed almost all of the sergeants major and a large proportion of the first sergeants. The German noncoms were aloof, rigid, tough minded and generally feared by the enlisted men.”

Despite being faced with the challenges presented by budget, manpower, and prejudice few changes were made to the training, roles and responsibilities of the Army’s Non-Commissioned Officer Corps. General Pershing further improved the definition of the NCO by suggesting that a standard or special school for Sergeants be built and implemented. General Pershing made his suggestions and changes based upon personal observations of foreign Army NCO’s during the war. Unfortunately, it was not until 1949 that a school opened for NCO’s.

On December 17, 1949, the 2d Constabulary Brigade’s NCO school located in Munich, Germany became the Army’s first school specifically for NCO’s. The creation of this academy was a response to the large numbers of NCO’s
promoted as a result of combat actions during World War II; these men were skilled combat leaders they lacked administrative and developmental leadership skills needed in the “peacetime” Army. Ten years after the 2d BDE’s NCO school opened the Army published AR 350-90 which established Army wide standards for NCO academies.

The combination of traditional roles and improved selection and education would transform the Army’s Non-Commissioned Officer Corps into a model few if any other modern military can compare. Today the U.S. Army provides enhanced professional development for NCO’s through a system of academies.

The first course of an NCO is the Primary Leadership Development Course (PLDC) today known as the Warrior Leader Course (WLC). WLC prepares selected Soldiers who qualify for promotion to Sergeant. The training focus for WLC is physical fitness, Drill and Ceremony, land navigation as well as other leadership essential tasks such as small group trainer skills and Soldier Counseling.

Next is the succession of academies is the Basic Noncommissioned Officer’s Course (BNCOC). BNCOC is a MOS specific school that varies in length from two to nineteen weeks. BNCOC refines the skills of Sergeants selected for promotion to Staff Sergeant and designed to enhance the
Soldiers abilities with more specific MOS leadership tasks such as squad leader.

From BNCOC Soldiers selected for promotion to the rank of Sergeant First Class, Master Sergeant, and soon First Sergeant must attend the Advanced Noncommissioned Officers Course (ANCOC). ANCOC is an eight week course that focuses upon higher level MOS specific tasks as well as Army writing style, communications, automation systems, military history, environmental awareness, logistics, personnel management, and military history. Prior to 2010 Soldiers selected to be unit First Sergeants were required to attend the First Sergeants Academy. Tasks formerly taught at the First Sergeant Academy will now be included in ANCOC.

The final academy for NCO development is the United States Army Sergeants Major Academy (USASMA) located at Ft Bliss, Texas. A nine-month resident or a two-year, self paced course USASMA prepares Sergeants Major and Master Sergeants through instruction in subjects such as leadership, resource and training management and military operations.

While WLC, BNCOC, ANCOC and USASMA are the formal academies used to develop Soldiers for promotion to higher levels of leadership other Army training schools known as Additional Skill Identifiers (ASI) further improve
individual Soldier abilities. ASI schools include Battle Staff NCO, Special Forces, Ranger, Sapper and Drill Sergeant School to name a few. In all the United States Army of today is a model for all others to admire. Foreign Armies throughout the world envy the quality and professionalism of our NCO’s to such a degree as to emulate our NCO academies in an effort to develop their own Noncommissioned Officer Corp.

Throughout the history of the Army’s Non-Commissioned Officer Corps heroes such as SGT Alvin York, SGT Audie Murphy, MSG Gary Gordon and SFC Randall; all Medal of Honor (MOH) recipients provide us with example of courage, resourcefulness, and leadership. These MOH soldiers are the epitome of professional Soldiers and just a few examples of how far the Army’s NCO Corps has advanced since the days of the Revolutionary War. Today’s military is once again facing Federal budgeting issues and decentralized small unit deployments but unlike the past it is better prepared through the dedication of those Soldiers affectionately called “Corporal”, “Sarge”, “Top”, or “Sergeant Major” that will insure the missions will be a success.
References:

5. Fredrick William Baron von Steuben 1794, Baron Von Steuben’s Revolutionary War Drill Manual
7. U.S. Army Historical Foundation, www.armyhistory.org