



S M D C / A R S T R A T
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This month we celebrate the birth of our great nation. 233 years ago, the United States declared its independence from England, and then fought to keep it. The birth of the Noncommissioned Officer (NCO) corps occurred a year earlier, in 1775. For 234 years, the American NCO has been the "backbone of our Army." As Sergeant Major of the Army Preston noted, "they helped Washington preserve the Continental Army at Valley Forge, stood with Winfield Scott at Chippewa, and directed Zachary Taylor's guns at Palo Alto. They carried the Nation's colors at Gettysburg and Vicksburg, fought yellow fever in Cuba with Walter Reed, and led Pershing's and Eisenhower's legions into Germany."

The U.S. Army NCO is a uniquely American institution. It was founded using the best traditions of the French, Prussian, and English armies. As America matured as a nation, establishing its deep roots of freedom and democracy, the U.S. Army NCO moved away from our European counterparts... creating the American NCO.

The American NCO is indeed rare breed within the global military structure. So different are the roles and responsibilities of America's NCOs from those of the rest of the world's NCOs, and so much more competent and qualified are the Soldiers filling our ranks, that we have been accused of posing our officers as NCOs by visiting heads of state and military leaders.

The roles and responsibilities of U.S. Army NCOs have evolved continually since our Army was founded 234 years ago. You only need to compare the duties and responsibilities of an NCO when I first enlisted 30 years ago with those of today's NCO to see a dramatic difference. Up through Desert Storm, an NCOs' primary responsibilities were to ensure good order and discipline within the enlisted ranks, and to make sure the orders of the Officers within the organization were carried out to the letter. Fast forward to today, and you see NCOs carrying out duties and responsibilities that were assigned to company grade officers just a generation ago.

Long gone are the days when we expected our NCOs to blindly carry out detailed orders from higher headquarters. On the modern battlefield, we depend upon our Platoon and Squad Leaders to think on their feet, to work independently in order to carry out the missions and objectives.

Today's NCOs are also better educated through the NCO Education System than at any other time in the history of the NCO Corps, and many of today's NCOs either have or are actively working to obtain college level or higher degrees. The end result is a professional corps of Soldiers who continue to evolve to meet the challenges of modern warfare. A group so unique that they can only be called Non-Commissioned Officers!

How appropriate it is that the U.S. Army has designated 2009 as the Year of the NCO, and has continually showcased its NCO Corps throughout the year. Each member of this brotherhood of professional soldiers can be justifiably proud. I also remind each of you that the world's eyes are upon you. I expect each of you to continue to do your part to better inform and educate Congress, government institutions, and the American people of the roles, responsibilities, and the quality of service of our NCO Corps.

Finally, I'm pleased to announce the 2009 USASMD C/ARSTRAT Noncommissioned Officer of the Year - Sgt. Sarah Haskins, and 2009 USASMD C/ARSTRAT Soldier of the Year - Sgt. Travis Parsons (Parsons was promoted to the rank of sergeant after he began competing for the Soldier title). Please join me in congratulating these outstanding Soldiers on a job well done.

SECURE THE HIGH GROUND!