



2009—The Year of the NCO

The Military Police NCO

By Command Sergeant Major David M. Bruner

As the command sergeant major of the U.S. Army Training and Doctrine Command (TRADOC), I spend much of my time in airports, traveling to visit Soldiers who are in training. I am always honored when American civilians approach me while I am in uniform to tell me how highly they regard the Army and to ask me questions. When I explain that this is the “Year of the NCO,” the most common response is a two-part question: “What is an NCO?” and “Why are they so important?”

The heart and soul—indeed the fighting spirit—of any competent, effective military is the noncommissioned officer (NCO). By design and implementation, NCOs are our asymmetric advantage in present and future wars. Regardless of the garrison or battlefield situation, NCOs adapt, overcome, and prevail. The NCOs of the Military Police Corps provide examples of this truth every day; thus, they fill me with pride.

Because they belong to one of the most deployed branches in the Army, military police warriors are constantly in the fight. Evidence of their fighting skills and heroism can be found in NCOs like Staff Sergeant Timothy Nein, who earned the Distinguished Service Cross, and Sergeant Leigh Ann Hester, who became the first female to earn a Silver Star since World War II. These two military police were serving as citizen Soldiers in the Kentucky National Guard when their convoy was ambushed near Salman Pak, Iraq. Their brave counterattack through a fortified trench line was certainly reflective of their personal professionalism and bravery, but it was also reflective of the Military Police Corps. Their swift and adaptable reaction was like that of the Military Police Corps in every American conflict since its official inception in 1941. Like all military police, they were sworn to kill the enemy while saving American lives.

The same heroic spirit that was displayed by Staff Sergeant Nein and Sergeant Hester is present in every NCO in the Military Police Corps. Military police conduct patrols through city streets and mountain passes, guard detainees, train local security forces, and perform anything and everything in between. The law enforcement skills honed by military police NCOs who are protecting our Soldiers in garrison contribute to their adaptability on the battlefield. Part of what makes the Military Police Corps so successful on the battlefield is the professionalism, knowledge, critical thinking, and leadership ability developed while patrolling in garrison.

Military police have a hard job to do, and they do it well. Within sixty days following a deployment, most military police sergeants are carrying 9-millimeter pistols again and protecting their communities; this is amazing in itself. But, the fact that they do this while enjoying time with their families, training new Soldiers, and attending professional schools and phases of the NCO Education System is humbling. We ask so much of our military police—and they deliver. As an Army and as a Nation, we owe our Military Police Corps warriors a huge debt.

Assist. Protect. Defend. This motto touches every NCO in the Military Police Corps as surely as the NCO Creed touches every sergeant in the Army. Our NCOs deserve the very best the Army can provide. TRADOC recognizes this, and it is one of the reasons that the NCO Education System is undergoing changes. We are pushing complex leadership training down to lower ranks.



Staff Sergeant Nein and Sergeant Hester

The mind is one of the most important tools for NCOs and adaptable leaders. Just as daily physical training is necessary to stay in physical shape, the mind must also be exercised regularly. Soldiers now have the opportunity to sharpen their proficiency, expand their character, and earn a college degree through the College of the American Soldier.¹ This system helps produce the ideal NCO—an adaptable leader of rock-solid integrity who will make the right decisions in the hard moments, just as Staff Sergeant Nein and Sergeant Hester did in their own moments of truth.

Endnote:

¹The College of the American Soldier is a new, TRADOC-developed, Army program designed to maximize the potential college credit granted for military training and education to NCOs who complete courses through select colleges. Associate’s and bachelor’s degrees can be earned through the program.

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