



# 2009—The Year of the NCO

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## A Model NCO

*By Sergeant First Class Tommy Davis*

When I think of a Soldier who embodies the ethos and values of today's Noncommissioned Officer (NCO) Corps, Staff Sergeant John Wade Russell's name comes to mind. I have been Staff Sergeant Russell's platoon sergeant for more than two years and have served with him for nearly four years and through two combat deployments. During that time, Staff Sergeant Russell has evolved from an extremely capable, competent team leader to the epitome of a modern-day professional squad leader who is capable of independently planning and executing any mission.

Staff Sergeant Russell became a squad leader in January 2007. He was deployed to Guantanamo Bay, Cuba, and twice to Iraq during three of the last five years. However, just a short thirteen months after his last deployment, Staff Sergeant Russell committed to train and lead eleven other Soldiers for fifteen more months in Afghanistan. On a daily basis, Staff Sergeant Russell sought to train his Soldiers in any way that he could to ensure that they would be capable of deploying and surviving under the most arduous and trying of circumstances. He searched for unique methods to accomplish the tasks set before him, often creating his own methods based on research he conducted on tactics, techniques, and procedures used in Afghanistan. As a platoon level master driver for the M1117 Armored Security Vehicle, Staff Sergeant Russell developed his own training program. And, based on his experience as an Armored Security Vehicle team leader in Iraq, he facilitated the training of eighteen Soldiers while conducting combat operations in Regional Command East, Afghanistan.

Staff Sergeant Russell leads from the front and by example in all that he does. He coordinated with medical officers at his combat outpost to teach college level courses to squad members when they were not on combat missions, allowing the Soldiers to excel and improve themselves. He established and fostered a climate of excellence by competing in and winning two military police battalion NCO boards. His Soldiers strove to follow his example; one of his squad Soldiers was recognized as the Soldier of the Quarter for the company, one of his squad NCOs was recognized as the NCO of the Quarter for the company, and one of his team leaders won the battalion level NCO of the Quarter competition. And as a result of their superior performance in support of a calvary task force, Staff Sergeant Russell's entire squad was awarded combat spurs.

On several separate occasions during Operation Enduring Freedom, Staff Sergeant Russell's squad was tested by enemy forces; each time, the squad prevailed. Every member of Staff Sergeant Russell's squad was awarded the Combat Action Badge for their actions during firefights with a determined enemy. Two specific incidents best highlight the determination, skill, and confidence that Staff Sergeant Russell instilled in his Soldiers through countless hours of drills, rehearsals, and training. The first incident occurred in October 2008, when Staff Sergeant Russell voluntarily led his squad to relieve a cavalry platoon that had been ambushed by a numerically superior enemy force. Staff Sergeant Russell's Soldiers decisively broke the enemy attack and evacuated wounded Soldiers and damaged vehicles. Just one month later, while training Afghan police, Staff Sergeant Russell's Soldiers assisted in defending their combat outpost, taking control of defensive positions and Afghan army personnel while receiving direct fire and multiple rocket-propelled grenade strikes from enemy forces. During this series of engagements, the medic assigned to Staff Sergeant Russell's squad earned the Combat Medic Badge for his treatment of wounded base personnel while under constant enemy fire.

Simply put, Staff Sergeant Russell is an example of the finest the NCO Corps has to offer.

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