

Road to professional

By MSG John K. D'Amato

During the American Revolution, education levels of NCOs and soldiers were unimportant. There were no knowledge tests for enlistment, training was conducted within a unit and promotions were determined by each commanding officer.

On Jan. 13, 1992, 469 senior NCOs graduated from the capstone NCOES course at the U.S. Army Sergeants Major Academy. Ten had master's degrees, 161 had bachelor or associate degrees, and the balance had at least some college.

But, the march from a small, rag-tag Army of uneducated soldiers and NCOs to a highly trained and educated corps of professionals has been long and rocky.

As early as 1776, COL Henry Knox, commander of the field artillery, recommended formal schooling for artillery officers, based on the extensive need for his men to know math, according to Robert Arthur's *History of Fort Monroe*. In 1824, the Artillery School was finally established to train both officers and enlisted men. Fifty years later, the school was teaching NCOs in history, geography, reading, writing and math. During World War I, it expanded its curriculum to include clerical, electrical, master gunner and radio courses for enlisted men.

The Signal Corps was not far behind in educating enlisted men. It was the first branch to use written intelligence tests to screen recruits, noted one government publication. With the advent of World War I, the Signal Corps used 45 civilian colleges and technical institutions to prepare unskilled recruits. It was also the first branch to require a high school education for selected aircraft mechanics in its fledgling Air Service branch.

These branches were the exceptions, rather than the norm, according to *Men Wanted for the U.S. Army*, a book by Robert K. Griffith Jr. Through World War I, the basic enlistment criteria was that "Any male citizen between the ages of eighteen and forty, able-bodied, free from disease, of good character and temperate habits, may be enlisted or accepted for enlistment . . ."

He also noted that in 1920, 86,000 soldiers — mostly new enlistees — were enrolled in more than 3,000 classes throughout the Army, including more than 5,000 illiterates and non-English speaking soldiers who received basic language training.

Attempting to raise the quality of its inductees, the Army introduced its first standard testing of all applicants in 1927, although the requirements were lax by today's standards. "A mental age of ten years or below was considered grounds for rejection, but if the recruiting officer felt that the applicant would make a good soldier . . . he could enlist the applicant," wrote Griffith.

The Great Depression led to drastically reducing the size of the Army and, with vast civilian unemployment, a boon for recruiting. According to Griffith, "quality, not quantity" became both a slogan and reality when applicants were required to score an eighth grade education equivalency on entrance tests. Despite higher standards, one commander wrote then that he had "a waiting list of applicants now numbering 850 . . . all high school graduates, many with additional technical education."

The start of World War II required a conscript Army and standards were relaxed. Still, Samuel Goldberg's book *Army Training of Illiterates in World War II* lists recruiting instructions from May 1941 that indicate some restrictions remained in place. "No registrant in the continental United States," the instructions read, "will be inducted into the military service who does not have the capacity of reading and writing the English language as commonly prescribed for the fourth grade in grammar school."

When census figures released in 1942 revealed that 13.5 percent of adults over 24 had completed less than five years of schooling, the War Department was forced to further relax education standards. In June 1943, according to Goldberg, the demand for personnel outweighed the desire for literate recruits and the War Department scrapped education requirements entirely.

The enlistments of illiterates, wrote Goldberg, put the Army back into the busi-

ness of schooling recruits. In a 2½ year period, more than 250,000 soldiers classified as illiterate had received special language training — and two went on to win the Medal of Honor.

World War II-era soldiers, however, were better educated than those of World War I, as reflected in a survey in one infantry division cited by Griffith. The survey showed that 48 percent of lower enlisted soldiers were high school graduates, though nearly 80 percent of all sergeants lacked high school diplomas.

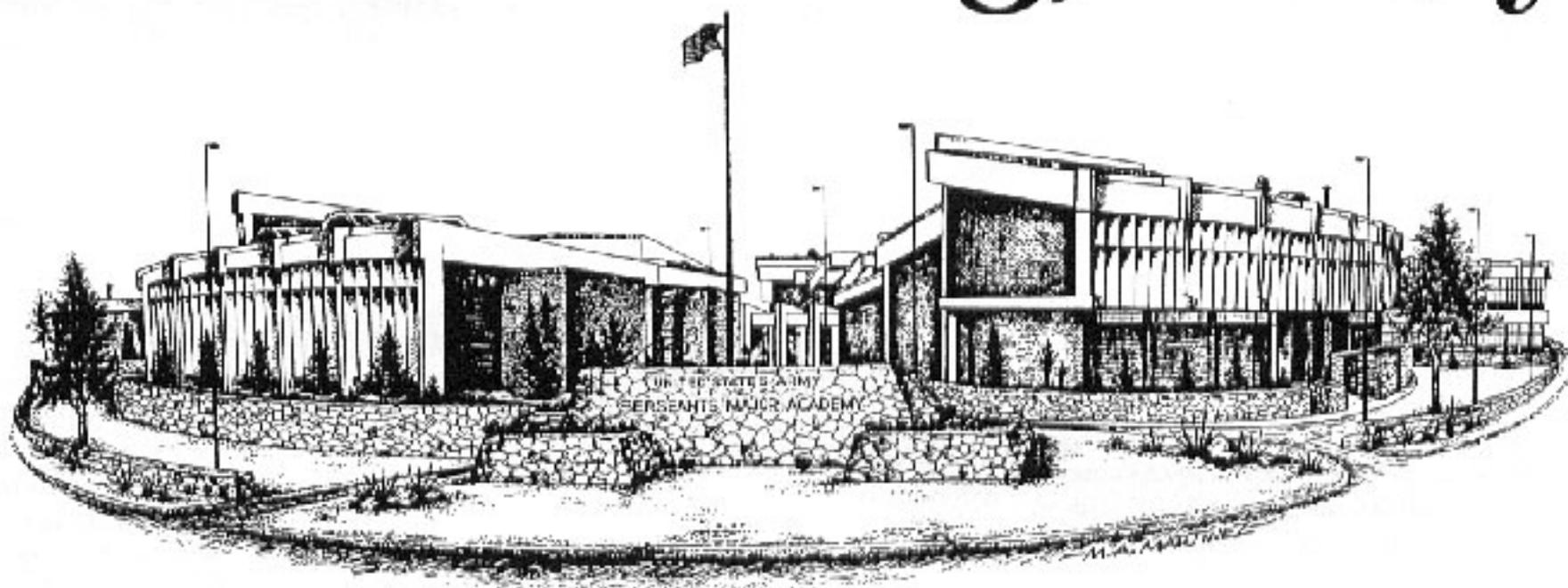
After World War II, the size of the Army dropped drastically and efforts were needed to recruit and retain volunteers. At the same time, Griffith wrote, Universal Military Training was proposed ". . . in which the soldier would be taught to become a civilian of greatly increased earning power after his period of public service. . . ." In effect, the Army would become a national school. Although Universal Military Training was rejected, policymakers and manpower experts became convinced that educational benefits could attract and retain large numbers of soldiers.

Increasing concern for NCO training led to the creation of the first true NCO academy at Jensen Barracks in Munich, West Germany, in 1949. According to the William Ellis and Thomas Cunningham Jr. biography *Clarke of St. Vith*, the academy's six-week course served as the model for NCO schools that followed, and it was later relocated and renamed the Seventh Army NCO Academy.

"Its purpose," they wrote, "was to develop within the noncommissioned officer an ability to recognize his responsibilities and a willingness to assume these responsibilities; the confidence needed to apply the knowledge he possesses; leadership techniques; and high personal and professional standards."

The academy was highly successful, and by 1959 there were 17 such academies in the continental United States alone. Involved in a Cold War and an arms race, and entering the space race, Army leadership recognized the need for better trained and better educated NCOs. According to Harold Clark's and

education long, rocky



USASMA marks its 20th anniversary in July.

Harold Sloan's *Classrooms in the Military*, "never before has education been so essential... Technological advance has put a premium on knowledge, agile minds, quick responses, and clear thinking."

During that same time, more than 300 education centers around the world were offering courses to enlisted soldiers. In the early 1960s, soldier participation in civilian education programs grew almost as fast as they could be provided.

Then came Vietnam and the draft. In 1966, the rapid buildup resulted in a U.S. force in which less than half of new recruits had a high school education. As in World War II, Griffith found, the swelling of the ranks and the swift "shake and bake" advancement of NCOs diluted the overall professionalism of the NCO Corps.

In 1971, the Board for Dynamic Training discovered that there was "a widespread crisis of confidence in the U.S. Army Non-commissioned Officer Corps... senior NCOs seriously doubt the professional qualifications of their juniors." Combat arms MOS tests supported those perceptions, and the board noted that "our journeymen sergeants... scored on the average only 6 points above random chance — a dismally low level of professionalism."

Because NCO training was, at that time, a local unit's responsibility, school curricula

and standards varied greatly. According to one report, "some (academies)... had improvised classrooms... in abandoned messhalls. One... had an enrollment of only 20 students, another (had) twelve times that number. Some courses lasted for 16 weeks, others for only two." The value of these academies was doubtful and the pressures of an Army at war prevented many NCOs from attending them. One surveyed battalion had only 27 academy graduates among 194 NCOs.

Academy enrollments soon began to further decline and disillusioned commanders started closing local schools. GEN Bruce Clarke, who established the first NCO academy in 1949, was sent by GEN William Westmoreland on a fact-finding mission in 1971. According to Ellis and Cunningham, an astonished Clarke found that "only 5 percent of the NCOs were being formally trained. There were only four academies left to train 100,000 NCOs and these courses were months long." Following Clarke's alarm that, "we are running an Army with 95 percent of the NCOs untrained," the trend was reversed and academies began reopening — this time under new guidelines and standards.

That same year, the Army established NCOES — a standardized, progressive and systematic series of schools for junior and senior NCO leaders. It originally included

BNCOC, ANCOE and the Sergeants Major Course at USASMA. PLDC was added in the mid-1980s.

Today, USASMA also has a First Sergeant Course, Battle Staff NCO Course and a Command Sergeant Major Course, although these are not part of the formal NCOES. Additionally, there are 46 NCO academies training the active Army and more than 155 Reserve Component academies and training sites worldwide.

The Army's emphasis on formal education for NCOs is evident by the linkage between NCOES courses and promotions. And the increasing emphasis on civilian education is supported by the high number of NCOs with college degrees, as noted at the beginning of this article.

At no other time during the past 200-plus years of our Army has the educational push been more pronounced than in the most recent 20 years. Competition for fewer promotions in a smaller Army might place even greater emphasis on civilian education. The result may be that NCOs in the next decade could have little choice about earning college degrees. Like doctors, lawyers and teachers, a college degree might serve to separate professional NCOs from their predecessors.

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