

They once were Noncommissioned Officers

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Throughout American history, noncommissioned officers have made significant contributions to the U.S. Army and have left an indelible mark on the psyche of our nation. Today's NCO is the most educated, professional and dedicated Soldier in the world's profession of arms. While many NCOs choose to make the Army a lifelong career, many have left the Army, using it as a springboard into other careers. Those former NCOs took a piece of their Army service and have become successful in other areas of our culture. They epitomize the true essence of the NCO.

Cartoonist Charles M. Shultz, known best for his creation of Charlie Brown and *Peanuts*, was an infantry machine gun squad leader during World War II and was discharged as a staff sergeant. Late in his life, Shultz said his proudest possession was his Combat Infantryman Badge. When asked about his Army service, he would simply say, "I was a foot Soldier." For his contributions to the arts, Shultz was awarded the Congressional Gold Medal in 2000, the highest civilian honor Congress can bestow upon a citizen.

In the world of business, Dave Thomas, the founder of Wendy's, served as a mess sergeant in Germany as a staff sergeant and during the Korean War. In his autobiography, *Dave's Way*, he noted that serving food to 2,000 soldiers per day gave him the foundation he needed to open a restaurant chain. He said the Army gave him "some important skills about the big picture of feeding a lot of people." Thomas went on to create the Dave Thomas Foundation, a nonprofit organization dedicated to child adoption services.

Malcolm Forbes, the former publisher, CEO and president of *Forbes* magazine, served as an NCO with the 84th Infantry Division during World War II. Staff Sgt. Forbes was wounded during the Battle of Aachen and was awarded the Bronze Star for heroism. Upon returning home from the war, he took over

his father's magazine and turned it into a multimillion dollar enterprise. Forbes was a philanthropist who gave millions of dollars to charity over his lifetime. He was an avid hot-air balloonist and dedicated motorcycle rider. He was also an advocate and driving force for the passing of many motorcycle safety laws. Forbes became known as the happiest millionaire in America.

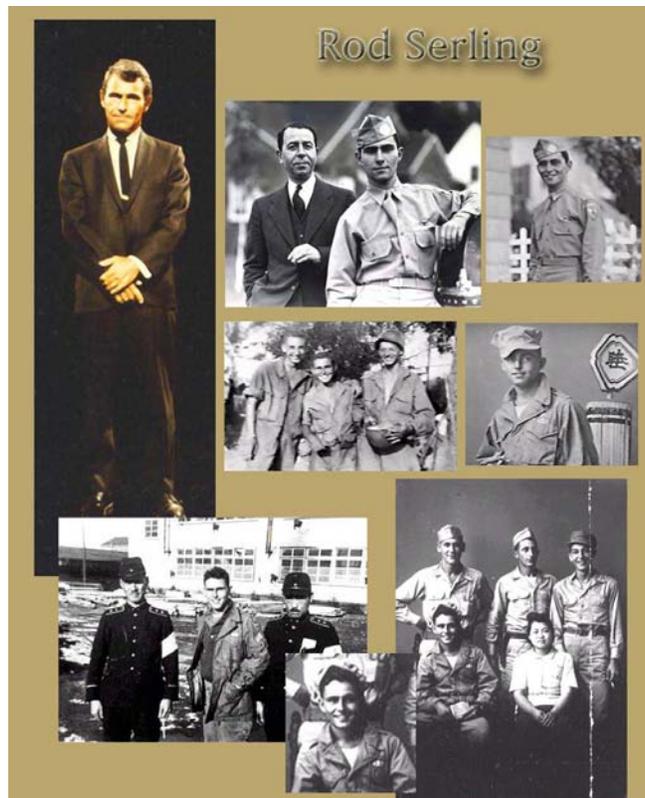
Edgar Perry was born in 1809 in Boston. He enlisted into the Army in 1827 as an artilleryman. He was later discharged as a staff sergeant in order to accept an appointment to West Point. After being at West Point for less than a year, he dropped out. Perry is better known as Edgar Allan Poe, the famous author of gothic horror, crime and detective fiction, such as *The Tell-Tale Heart*. Poe has been called the father of the modern short story.

Frank McCourt, the Pulitzer Prize winning author of *Angela's Ashes*, and *Teacher Man*, was a former Army corporal. He was born in Brooklyn, N.Y., in 1930 to Irish immigrants. He was drafted during the Korean War where he served as a dog trainer and personnel clerk. After his discharge, McCourt used his G.I. Bill to attend New York University to become a teacher. He retired after 30 years of teaching both high school and college. His

book *'Tis: A Memoir*, gives a very candid account of his Army experience.

Mel Brooks, born Melvin Kaminsky in 1926, served in the Army as a combat engineer during World War II as corporal. In the book, *It's Good To Be The King: The Seriously Funny Life of Mel Brooks* by James R. Parrish, Brooks is quoted as satirically commenting on his job as a combat engineer saying, "I was two things I hated, engineering and combat." He was remembered by his fellow Soldiers for his ability to keep them occupied by antics and singing. Brooks is best known as an actor, director and producer who was involved in such production as *Blazing Saddles*, *Young Frankenstein* and the two films, *The Producers*.

Rod Serling served as a paratrooper with the 11th Air-



Images courtesy 11th Airborne Division

This image, taken from the 11th Airborne Division Web site, shows the many pictures of Rod Serling during his service in World War II. Serling, as well as many other famous people has had his life molded through service to the nation.

borne Division in the Pacific during World War II, where he was awarded a Bronze Star. He is best known for his work on the *Twilight Zone*, where he often reflected on his wartime service for inspiration in writing episodes. He was awarded six Emmys and was inducted into the Television Hall of Fame in 1985.

The world of sports has seen its share of former NCOs. Joseph Louis Barrow was born in Alabama in 1914. He was an impressive amateur boxer who quickly rose to boxing greatness. He was drafted during World War II and first served in a segregated cavalry unit. He continued to box while in the Army as a morale booster for the troops. Sgt. Joe Louis was discharged in 1945 and was awarded the Legion of Merit. He went on to defend his title as a heavyweight champion for almost 12 years. Louis was posthumously awarded the Congressional Gold Medal in 1982.

Many former NCOs have continued to serve their nation as statesmen. Chuck Hagel, the senator from Nebraska, was a sergeant in the 9th Infantry Division in Vietnam, where he was wounded twice.

Charles Rangel, a representative from New York, was with the 2nd Infantry Division during the Korean War. He was discharged as a staff sergeant.

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to keep our soldiers motivated and inspire them to put unit welfare, mission and motivation before individual interests — even in the most demanding situations. If we want to be great leaders, we must recognize the capabilities and limitations of our Soldiers. To do our best, we must ensure that the extent of our missions do not exceed our limitations.

Constant awareness of the contemporary operational environment must be priority on the daily plan. It's easy to lead while the conditions are optimal, but it is hard when things are not going as planned. That is when a real leader emerges and takes command of the situation.

Many times we find ourselves exceeding the expectations of our peers because we were taught to find ways to increase the efficiency of our capabilities.

How many times have we accomplished what seemed impossible?

It should not be surprising to see how we employ those lessons learned during our military careers to our daily lives. Every day we learn something new. Every moment we find a new tool we can use to further our skills and capabilities.

This may not have been possible before we were transformed by the Army.

We were not born this way; we were made this way.

A perishable skill

Leadership is a perishable skill. We must not let our guard down and forget to cultivate and maintain this valuable set of skills. Just like an engine, all parts must be kept clean, maintained, serviced, lubricated and charged. Old parts must be replaced and updated.

Leadership has many enemies that should be avoided at all costs:

Staff Sgt. Sylvestre Reyes, now a representative from Texas, was a helicopter crew chief and was awarded the Air Medal during the Vietnam War. When talking about what the Army had done for him, Reyes said, "I have often wondered how different my life would have been if, in 1966, I had not been drafted into the U.S. Army. I was born and raised on a farm near El Paso, Texas. I believe that had I not served in the U.S. Army, I might still be on that farm today instead of serving in the United States Congress."

Tim Waltz, a representative from Minnesota, retired from the Army National Guard as a command sergeant major. When asked about his service to the nation, Waltz said, "It was my great honor and privilege to serve this nation in uniform for 24 years. The leadership experience that this opportunity provided serves me well every day in Congress."

The United States gave millions of people the framework of success, drive and motivation that carried them through life. Some have made a conscious decision to stay in its ranks for a lifetime, while others have utilized the Army as a stepping stone to another career. Although they did not continue their career in the Army, the individuals outlined above join many others who truly carried on the principle idea that "no one is more professional than I."

- Selfishness can jeopardize the health of our leadership. When we find ourselves focused on what we want without consideration to what others want or need, the very roots of a healthy command become poisoned.

- Power struggles can be mistaken as healthy competition, but often these will erode the communication bridge between elements. Jealousy is not compatible with any leadership style. It is absolutely counterproductive and it will lead to failure.

- Poor communication will also guarantee failure. If we don't communicate effectively, our message will be misunderstood, misinterpreted and misplaced.

- Our behavior and self-awareness are key issues. We need to know ourselves and understand the things that make us lose control. We must learn when to delegate and when to take the lead. A leader must learn to serve, not demand.

When leaders emerge

As our nation is at war against an unorthodox enemy, we should rely on the basic principles of leadership. It is in the trenches where leadership is often tested.

A leader emerges and passes knowledge to others in order to keep the continuity that makes our organization so unique and successful.

We have seen our nation's leaders succeed. We have witnessed their accomplishments, their heroics; their teachings mark the lives of those touched by their feats.

Now, we look to the future and deliver to new generations of Soldiers the skills that will help them become leaders of tomorrow. Just like us, and the leaders before us, they will undergo a transformation and realize that they weren't necessarily born leaders — the Army has made them leaders.