

THE NCO JOURNAL

A MONTHLY FORUM FOR PROFESSIONAL DEVELOPMENT

20 Years

of Service

to the Corps

1991 - 2011

NCO Journal celebrates milestone

By David Crozier

"The NCO Journal is something I am very proud of. It is a publication that can touch every noncommissioned officer in the U.S. Army, certainly, with pertinent information — not only with issues that are primarily an NCO's concern, but an Army concern."



— Former Sgt. Maj. of the Army Julius Gates during his oral history interview in 1994

The year is 1989. Soviet troops withdraw from Afghanistan; the Berlin Wall falls; Vietnamese troops leave Cambodia; Intel introduces the 486 microprocessor; the comic strip *Dilbert* debuts in U.S. newspapers; *Doogie Howser, M.D.* debuts on television; Gilda Radner of *Saturday Night Live* fame dies of cancer; "Like a Virgin" by Madonna, "Eternal Flame" by The Bangles, "Another Day in Paradise" by Phil Collins, "The Look" by Roxette and "Love Shack" by The B-52s are the year's biggest hit singles; serial killer Theodore "Ted" Bundy is put to death via the electric chair in Florida; and the U.S. Army declares it as the Year of the NCO.

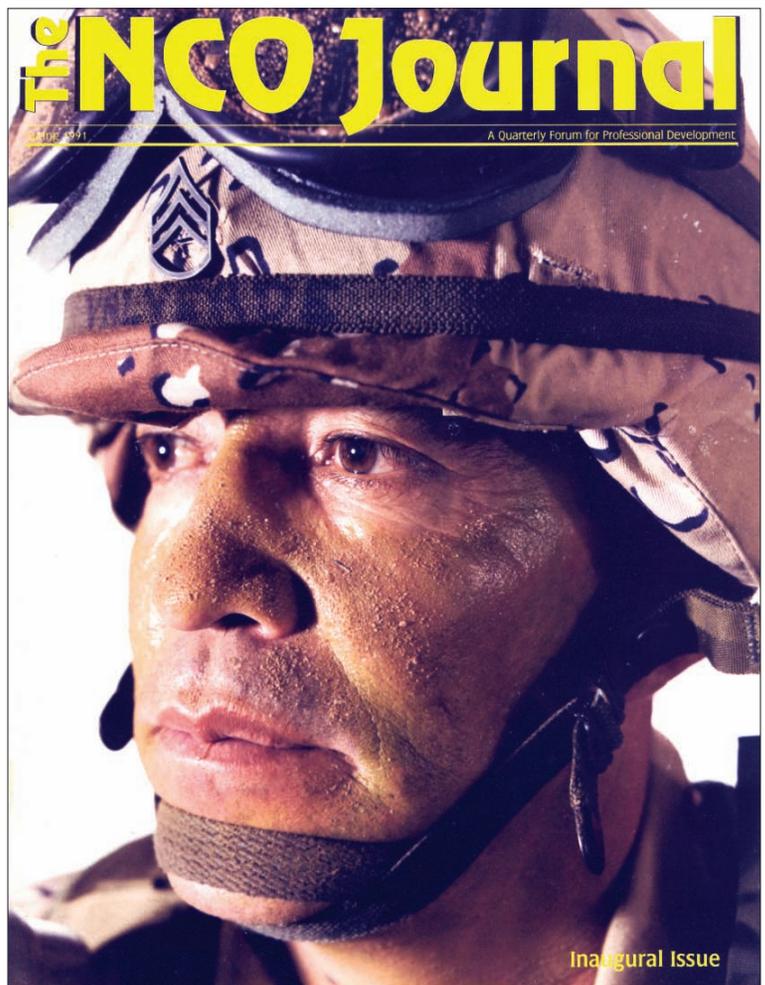
It was a time of change and reflection — a time when the Army needed to address the role of the noncommissioned officer as a trainer of and caregiver to Soldiers and how the complexities of that role changed throughout its more than 200-year history.

As such, Gen. Maxwell R. Thurman, then the commanding general of U.S. Army Training and Doctrine Command, called for the chartering of an NCO Leader Development Special Task Force to develop a strategy and action plan for improving the Army's NCO leader development system.

The task force was made up of 21 senior leaders (see inset on page 10) led by the deputy commanding general of TRADOC, Lt. Gen. John S. Crosby. The U.S. Army Sergeants Major Academy was designated as the site for the study with the majority of the task force members coming from within its ranks. Oversight of the task force was provided by a senior advisory group that consisted of the senior officers and command sergeants major representing TRADOC, Forces Command, Eighth U.S. Army, U.S. Army Europe, Logistics Center, the National Guard Bureau, Combined Arms Command, Office of the Chief of Army Reserves, Soldier Support Center, Army Materiel Command and the sergeant major of the Army.

The task force completed its study in June 1989 and came up with 18 recommendations that set the stage for the future development and education of the NCO Corps. Recommendation 17 stated, "NCOs should have a professional journal or

other forum that focuses on leader development issues." It recommended the "establishment of an NCO leader development forum to be published as a part of 'Sergeant's Business.'"



The inaugural issue came out in March 1991 and contained seven stories focusing on team building, Operation Desert Storm, School of Sand, Soldiers and the Press, and a history on the American Revolution and NCO tradition.

Even though space had been dedicated in Sergeant's Business for the discussion of NCO leadership, Gen. Carl Vuono, then chief of staff of the Army, and Sgt. Maj. of the Army Julius Gates said it was not enough and called for a separate journal to be published.

"After the Vietnam War, we had to rebuild the NCO Corps. It was obvious to me and to Sgt. Maj. of the Army Bill Gates that the NCO Corps was really the key building block to training in the Army that we wanted," Vuono said. "So in order to develop and retain what I believed was a highly professional corps of NCOs, it was appropriate that we had some kind of a professional journal that would resonate with the emerging NCO Corps."

Vuono added, not only did leadership view the NCO Corps as the backbone of the Army, but also thought it should be deeply committed to the development of training for the ready Army.

"It seemed to me and Bill Gates that it was critical that we had some kind of forum for the NCOs in order to exchange ideas and so forth, a professional development tool for the corps."

Gates agreed, and from there it was decided that the magazine should be based out of USASMA. But, things did not go as planned, according to the transcript of Gates' 1994 oral history interview after his retirement.

"We ran into roadblocks with the [Department of the Army] Public Affairs office, TRADOC and even the Academy. DA Public Affairs wanted to publish the thing, and then it would have turned into another public affairs publication. The same thing with TRADOC," Gates said. "For some reason, the Sergeants Major Academy felt that they could not handle the additional responsibility. So, it was a total roadblock."

Gates said in his interview that he entertained the thought

of not doing the journal altogether and broached that idea to Vuono at his residence one evening. Gates informed Vuono that DA Public Affairs didn't want any other organization to publish the

magazine, TRADOC didn't want to support the idea and the Academy didn't think they had the capability to produce it.

Gates recalled his discussion with Vuono: "By the way, we have a deficit of about 26,000 [expletive] dollars that nobody seems they can find throughout this Army establishment. So, recommendation 14, we ought to just throw it in the damn trash," Gates said.

Vuono, according to Gates' interview, hit his desk and



"I think from the very first issue on, we hit a home run and, of course, the ultimate mission of success was the target audience, the NCO Corps. We were careful to poll the NCO Corps back in those days to get their views. In the best traditions of the after-action report system, they made adjustments in the first publication year. I think the result of the first issue and subsequent issues, that first year, as we looked at the comments and so forth, made the path of the journal right up to today."

— Gen. (Ret.) Carl E. Vuono

said, "Damn it! Do you want a journal?"

Gates replied, "Yes sir, I want a journal."

"Then why in the hell can't you get it?" Vuono asked.

"I just got through telling you the reason why I couldn't get it. Everybody and his brother don't want it. The only people that want the damn journal is you and all of the NCOs in the Army," Gates said.

Vuono then informed Gates in no uncertain terms that he would have the journal. It would be funded and it would be based out of USASMA.

From there, according to USASMA history documents, in August 1989 the Academy public affairs officer, Sgt. 1st Class John D'Amato, began exploring what it would take to publish *The NCO Journal* at the Academy. On June 1, 1990, Col. Frederick Van Horn, then commandant of USASMA, officially tasked D'Amato with the development of the total concept involving the creation of the magazine. Within a week, and with the help of the Academy's Resource Management office, D'Amato put together a decision paper containing recommendations on proponenty, staff, budget, format, content, printing and distribution.

The recommendations

Task Force Organization

Sponsor	Gen. M.R. Thurman, CG, TRADOC
Director	Lt. Gen. John S. Crosby, DCG, TRADOC
Executive Agent	Col. Kenneth W. Simpson, Cmdt, USASMA
Members	Lt. Col. Marvin Taylor
	Maj. David E. Robinson
	Mr. Warren P. Rucker
	Command Sgt. Maj. Chesterfield Hargrove Jr.
	Sgt. Maj. Linda K. Boggs
	Sgt. Maj. Manley P. Bush
	Sgt. Maj. John D. Gilland
	Sgt. Maj. Delphus H. Weissenbach
	Master Sgt. Hendrik J. Bos
	Master Sgt. Reynaldo Castaneda
	Master Sgt. Allyn D. Harper
	Master Sgt. Joseph E. Joyner
	Master Sgt. Donald G. Martin
	Master Sgt. Ronald D. Paris
	Master Sgt. Bobby L. Skinner
	Sgt. 1st Class Lorraine K. Brown
	Ms. Marilou A. Roy
	Ms. Diane Solls

were that the magazine should be a DA publication with the Academy as the action agency. The volume and frequency of publication were recommended — 100,000 copies and quarterly distribution — which allowed for approximately 1-in-5 NCOs in the active and reserve components to get a copy. It had the same distribution as *Soldiers* magazine, but in less quantity. The length and format were recommended as 48 pages on glossy paper with four-color process printing. The content was to include letters to the editor; a top NCO column; a guest officer column; world affairs; feature articles; spotlights on NCOs; news from around the Army, in-reserve, on-guard, the schoolhouse, military personnel center and the sister services; self-development; NCO history; and book reviews. Staffing was suggested to be four civilians — editor, assistant editor, illustrator and secretary. Funding was estimated to be \$266,000 for fiscal year 1991 and \$454,000 every year thereafter.

Eventually, the Academy floated four proposals — a 48-page full-color quarterly as stated above; a 24-page two-color semi-annual publication with a staff of two military members and two civilians at a cost of about \$270,000 per year; staffing with only two military and publishing semi-annually at a cost of \$96,000; or continue to piggyback on Sergeant's Business and expand the section to a four-to-six-page pullout.

What eventually came out of lengthy discussions with leadership at all levels, including Vuono and Gates, would be that *The NCO Journal* would be a DA, 24-page, full-color quarterly publication based out of the Academy.

Vuono said he insisted on the magazine being based out of USASMA for a few reasons.

"All of the different branches of the military had their journals in their proponent schools, and the Academy to me was the logical place for *The NCO Journal*," he said. "It is the key, the pinnacle of NCO development in terms of institutional training, and the academy had all the right attributes, which I thought, were needed to support the *Journal*."

Vuono said the *Journal* would benefit from the forward thinking and experience of the students and cadre who walked the

Academy's halls. He added it was also the best place to network with the senior NCO corps.

The first proposed issue was presented to Vuono and Gates on Nov. 5, 1990. It featured three stories by students of the Sergeants Major Course; a skills, knowledge and attitudes column which focused on team building at the sergeant E-5 level; an NCO history article on the first Purple Heart; and a self-development piece titled "Why we should study military history." Because of time constraints, all of the non-student articles were written or co-written by the academy PAO.

In viewing the first issue, Vuono and Gates made several changes. They wanted a sergeant major to be the editor; said the articles were too academy-centric and they wanted a broader list of contributors to be more representative of the whole Army; and finally, Vuono wanted the *Journal* to focus on one theme per year for at least the first year.

"We wanted to ensure it was a professional journal, and the NCOs who read it benefitted by it being a professional publication. So, we wanted each issue to have a central theme ensuring continuity and covering the basic themes that the NCO leaders needed to address," Vuono said. "Bill Gates and I wanted to ensure that the themes the *Journal* stressed were what I believed were the four basic roles of the NCO — an NCO is a leader, a trainer, a role model and

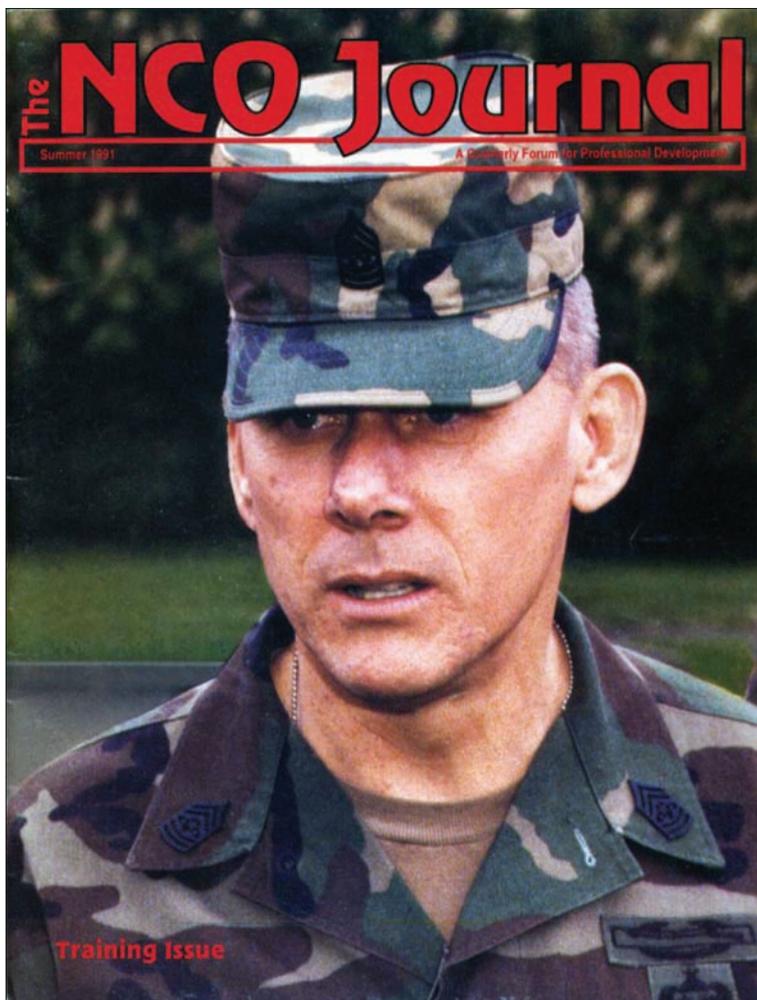
they are the standard bearer. It was important that these fundamental roles were played out in the *Journal*."

With the format and frequency decided, the next steps were for the Academy to find the pieces of the puzzle needed to engineer the publication.

Master Sgt. Gil High, then editor of *Soldiers* magazine, was selected on short notice to become the new editor-in-chief of the yet-to-be published *NCO Journal*. The local civilian personnel office began looking for a managing editor while D'Amato began searching for new authors. Van Horn selected "Desert Warfare" as the theme for the first issue.

By the end of 1990, Jim Collins joined the magazine as the managing editor and Sgt. 1st Class Bill Horner as a staff writer.

The inaugural issue came out in March 1991 and contained



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seven stories focusing on team building, Operation Desert Storm, School of Sand, Soldiers and the Press, and a history on the American Revolution and NCO tradition.

When asked why it took more than a year to get the first issue on the street, Vuono said that, as with anything new, you always want to make the first impression a good one.

“It just takes some time to do that. Bill Gates and I were absolutely anxious to get it started as fast as we could, and we changed a bit of the bureaucracy of the process. But, we wanted to get it right,” he said. “It was a brand new journal that was designed to run out of the professional NCO Corps, the likes of which no Army had ever seen before. We wanted it to be professional in every way.”

Van Horn agreed, adding that during the first year of the *Journal*, the hardest part to overcome was obtaining articles from the field.

“It didn’t take us long to put the first issue together, and in looking at the first issue, you can see that John D’Amato was the guy who really put his leg-work into it. But, the real problem was getting people to write articles for the magazine. It was a chore,” he said. “It got easier after that, but the first two issues, the hardest thing was finding quality articles suitable for publication. Also, getting the format down for the first issue was a challenge because we didn’t want to have to backtrack or suffer too much criticism from the field for the way it looked.”

Van Horn lauded the hard work of High and D’Amato during the initial publication, but said the selection of Collins as the managing editor was, in his opinion, the best thing that happened. It gave the *Journal* a dedicated manager and Collins made it look easy over the years, Van Horn said.

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an NCO not in a public affairs-related job.

The Fall 1991 issue, and the last issue for the year, featured an article from a Class 37 student titled, “How Do You Set Their Souls On Fire.” This article took center spread of the magazine and provided a unique look at leadership from the follower’s perspective.

According to the 1991 USASMA history report, in addition to the challenge of producing the magazine’s content, equally challenging hurdles had to be overcome, such as letting contracts for typesetting and printing, and developing funding protocols to include postage.

Monarch Litho Inc. in California and Processing Plus in El Paso, Texas, received spot contracts for printing and typesetting, respectively. They would continue under contract for the balance of the year.

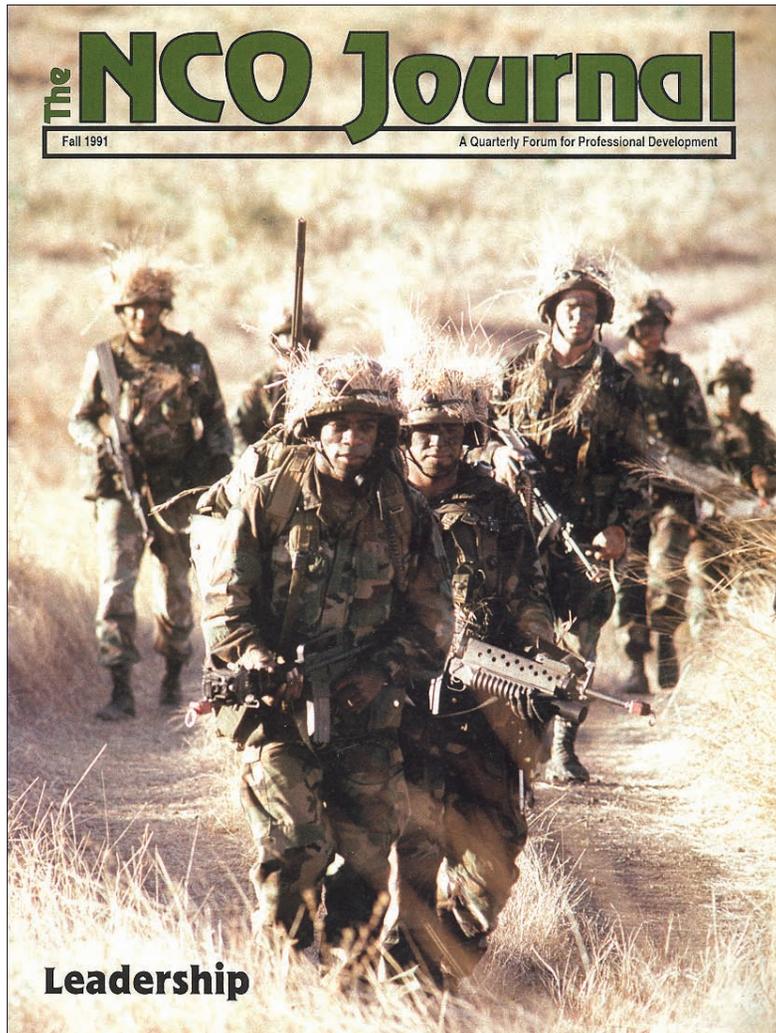
Late in 1991, a desktop publishing system was installed, but was too late to produce in-house typesetting and pagination before year’s end. A second-class mailing permit, saving thousands of dollars, was obtained in time to mail the Fall issue.

During the inaugural year of *The NCO Journal*, Command Sgt. Maj. Ronnie Strahan was selected as the Academy’s 10th command sergeant major and soon found himself immersed in the business of *The NCO Journal*.

“The decision on going with *The NCO Journal* was made before I got to the Academy. So when I got there, we were just trying to get it together. It was basically flying by the seat of its pants for the first couple of issues,” Strahan said. “We had a temporary facility for the *Journal* staff to work out of, so we had to work on that.”

But the hard work was just about to begin, Strahan noted.

“We went on a monthly basis to one of the major commands or major installations, say Fort Hood. And, I contacted the sergeant major and told him we wanted to have a video-teleconference; that I would have staff from the academy [available] if he could get NCOs from throughout [his or her] major units on Fort Hood. [I explained] that what we wanted to do was give them the opportunity to talk to our staff and get an update on the Noncommissioned Officer Education System,” he said. “So, we would do these teleconferences and they were really beneficial. We tried



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to spread it around the Army and we asked for articles about lessons learned that could be put out to the rest of the NCO Corps through the *Journal*."

Looking back at the creation of *The NCO Journal*, Van Horn said it was a vital part of the growth of the professional NCO.

"As evidenced by the fact that the chief of staff of the Army made a decision to put this *Journal* on the ground — I mean it wasn't somebody downstream — it was the chief of staff that made that decision," Van Horn said. "After Gen. Vuono, Gen. Gordon Sullivan stood four-strong behind it. Both of those chiefs [of staff of the Army] during my time at the Academy were personally interested in the *Journal*."

Van Horn said it was not uncommon for either chief to talk about the *Journal* during public events, and that both the chief and sergeant major of the Army would send him letters about articles with constructive criticism.

"But, that is just how important it was to the people at the top of the Army," Van Horn said. "*The NCO Journal* has earned its place in the Army. Senior NCOs had to have a way to communicate with each other, have a way to voice their opinions [about] the important things going on in the Army. They have to have a way to demonstrate their competence when doing professional writing as a corps. There are probably many good reasons as to why the *Journal* was important then and remains important today, but those are the ones I regard as most important."

Van Horn added that he believes senior NCOs have always struggled with expressing themselves simply because of the circumstances in which they find themselves, but believes *The NCO Journal* helps to bridge that gap and provides them a means to get their voices heard.

"I think the *Journal* for me was seeing Sergeants Major Course students use their opportunity in the course to sit down and do some reflection and translate that into words and articles for the *NCO Journal*," he said. "It was an opportunity I think, had it not been for the Sergeants Major Course, that they would not have taken advantage of [doing that], the Army would not have been able to benefit from their thinking otherwise."

Reflecting on starting *The NCO Journal* and how it has fared since then, Vuono said the *Journal* has always met his intent.

"I think from the very first issue, we hit a home run and, of course, the ultimate mission of success was the target audience, the NCO Corps," he said. "We were careful to poll the NCO Corps back in those days to get their views. In the best traditions of the after-action report system, they made adjustments in the first publication year. I think the result of the first issue and subse-

quent issues that first year, as we looked at the comments and so forth, made the path of the *Journal* right up to today."

Gates considers *The NCO Journal* one of his best efforts during his tenure as the sergeant major of the Army.

"The *NCO Journal* is something I am very proud of. It is a publication that can touch every noncommissioned officer in the U.S. Army, certainly, with pertinent information — not only with issues that are primarily an NCO's concern, but an Army concern," he said.

Strahan said the success of the *Journal* is a testament of its benefit to the Army.

"If it wasn't accomplishing the purpose it was originally set out to do, I think, like anything else, it would have gone by the wayside," he said. "You either succeed or you fail. So, I think it is a real testament to the staff there that continues to write and [obtain] articles, get it published and get it out to the NCO Corps."

Vuono also lauded the *Journal's* longevity.

"Today, the requirements of the NCO at the small-unit level and above are much more complex than [they have] been over the past 20 years since starting the *Journal*. I think the *Journal* is relevant today because you provide the NCO Corps with information, perspectives, practical experience and directions they all need to take," Vuono said. "This kind of high [operational] tempo that the Army has today as we try and go forward and fight two wars at the same time and continue to develop our leaders, the *Journal* has a key role in filling some of the developmental gaps that NCOs aren't getting. So I think the *Journal*, frankly, is more important today than when we first started it a couple of decades ago."

Today, *The NCO Journal* is published on a monthly basis and has grown from a 24-page four-color magazine, to a 48-page four-color magazine, all thanks to the current chief of staff and sergeant major of the Army and the second Year of the NCO celebration in 2009. 📄

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Editor's note: The NCO Journal staff plans to write a history piece for each of this year's issues that will chronicle 20 years of NCO Journal publication. We are also looking for stories from the field on how articles from *The NCO Journal* helped you in conducting your NCO duties and responsibilities. Send articles to ATSS-SCN@conus.army.mil.