

The History of the Civil Air Patrol Non-Commissioned Officer

Lesson Objective: To understand the history of the NCO in Civil Air Patrol.

Desired Learning Outcomes (DLO):

1. Understand the history of NCOs in Civil Air Patrol.
2. Understand how NCOS were the backbone of the organization.
3. Identify the time period when NCOs did not exist in CAP.
4. Identify when and why NCOs were reintroduced in CAP.

Reading: Student Guide

Scheduled Lesson Time: 45 minutes

Introduction

1. Understand the history of NCOs in Civil Air Patrol.

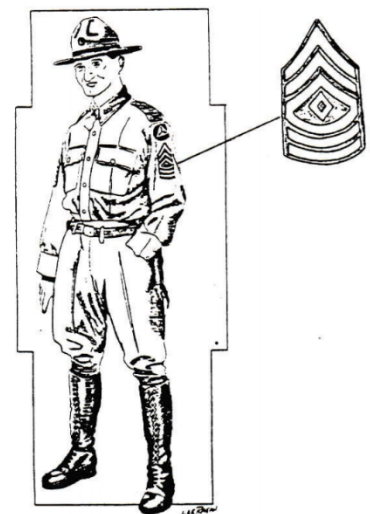
This greeting and title may seem unusual to the members of today's Civil Air Patrol. However, if we turn the clock back to the forties and review our heritage, we can see the importance of the first sergeant. In 1943, CAP Rules 16.2 prescribed the minimum size of a squadron as 50 members and authorized only 5 officers. Even a squadron of over 200 members was authorized only 11 officers. Traditionally the NCO has been called the backbone of the military. They would teach young troops the ins and outs of the functioning of any organization. Supervision, technical training, and general housekeeping all fell under the control of the NCO and ultimately the first sergeant. He was the senior NCO and the de facto administrator of all military functions within the unit. The commander and his staff might plan a project, but it was the first sergeant and his NCOs who saw to it that the job was done.

2. Understand how NCOS were the backbone of the organization.

The CAP NCOs were established in 1942 by General Memorandum 45 dated 17 July. Originally there were no military rank titles or insignia. A member's position was his rank; wing commander, wing staff, group commander, group staff, squadron commander and flight leader were authorized small



white on blue title flashes which were worn below the CAP shoulder patch. Military rank and insignia were authorized by an addendum to General Memorandum 45 dated 27 July 1942. National Headquarters established the requirements to be met before a member could be appointed an NCO. In a flying organization a pilot's skill was useful and he could be appointed a technical sergeant. Other useful skills would authorize other appointments. An



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airframe and engine (A & E) mechanic would become a master sergeant. A "ham" radio operator and First Aid instructor would serve as a technical sergeant. A photographer and observer would be appointed a sergeant, a clerk would serve as a corporal. Promotion depended upon skill, additional training, and the size of the unit. On active duty bases, pilots were appointed flight officers and later lieutenants, but there were at least an equal number of NCOs who took care of the workings of the bases. The administrative personnel, mechanics, radio technicians, guards were all NCOs, while the staff section heads and pilots were officers. The active duty units had no cadets, but in the wings and local squadrons, the cadet program became the mission for Civil Air Patrol. Thousands of airmen were needed to win the war.

Young men interested in aviation could join CAP and receive preliminary testing and training to prepare them for air force service. If they qualified, they became members of the Air Corps Enlisted Reserve while serving as CAP cadets and finished high school. When called for the draft they were guaranteed a place in the aviation branch.

3. Identify the time period when NCOs did not exist in CAP.



During the years 1942 through 1972, Civil Air Patrol appointed noncommissioned officers within the ranks of its senior members. In 1972 it was decided that no more NCOs would be appointed. Members who had previously been appointed retained their rank until they were promoted.

In the early days of Civil Air Patrol, the organizational structure limited the number of officer positions majors and eventually colonels commanded the wing, while most squadron commanders were lieutenants or in large squadrons, captains. As a result, a large number of members served as noncommissioned officers and as a result were a very real and vital part of the organization.

The Civil Air Patrol Handbook in all editions outlined the limited number of officer positions from 1943 through 1945. Even the Civil Air Patrol Manual, Volume 1, Book 1, dated 1 August 1949 explained that the size of the unit would regulate the number of officers authorized. The incentive was to recruit and build more and larger units, with the NCOs being the people to do this work.

The table of organization which limited the number of officer positions was changed in the early 1950s. More and more officer positions were authorized and eventually most NCOs were promoted to warrant officer or an officer grade. New CAP members who had been NCOs in the military would start as NCOs and work their way up. Former cadets would be appointed as NCOs or warrant officers depending upon their experience. New members without any commissioned military service would be appointed NCO during their first year to gain experience working up to warrant and then a commissioned grade. Experience and maturity within the organization came with time in grade and dealing with other members, before an officer grade was authorized.

By 1972 there were few CAP NCOs in service and some of them had been reduced to a menial role by the local units which by that time were commanded by majors and lieutenant colonels. It was felt that some CAP NCOs did not present the proper Air Force image. Additionally, some professional Air Force NCOs were offended by the minimum time in grade and youth of some CAP NCOs. The solution at that time was to remove the authority to appoint additional NCOs within CAP.

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In July 1984, NCOs were re-established. The new system authorized any former military NCO to be appointed as a CAP NCO. Regular or reserve NCOs who did not wish to be CAP officers, were authorized to be appointed to a CAP NCO grade equal to their regular or reserve grade. There was however no provision for promotion as the appointed grades were permanent. There were also no defined roles for NCOs within the organization.

4. Identify when and why NCOs were reintroduced in CAP.

Civil Air Patrol took a step forward October 17, 2013, with the signing and approval to restructure their noncommissioned officer corps to align with the Air Force NCO corps.

For the past 72 years, members of the Civil Air Patrol volunteer forces had completed three key missions – emergency services, aerospace education and cadet programs, with the guidance and expertise of their NCO corps.

Members of the CAP Board of Governors and their commander received approval on the proposal to restructure the NCO corps, which previously didn't allow rank progression within the CAP. Now, with the newly-established NCO corps structure, NCOs are able to progress and promote through the ranks similar to the Air Force.

"It is no small task to create a framework for a professional volunteer force, and I'm very proud of the way everyone came together to create a workable proposal," said Daniel Ginsberg, the Air Force Manpower and Reserve Affairs assistant secretary.

The new NCO corps structure mirrors the Air Force NCO force structure with an established process to promote and develop NCOs.

One similar, but most immediate noticeable change as a result of the restructure was the uniform. The CAP NCO Corps use a chevron system similar to the Air Force, but the difference will include the CAP designating itself with the letters "C-A-P" and a propeller in place of the star on the chevrons.



These changes will:

1. Provide CAP commanders with increased access to the professional military skills, training and experience of former NCOs.
2. Train and advise non-prior service members of CAP in the methods and procedures of military organization, leadership and management.
3. The objective of the restructure of the NCO corps is to bolster CAP's mission capability and readiness to fulfill their congressionally mandated missions.

"The NCO corps is the backbone of any organization and brings a wealth of information to the table," said Maj. Gen. Chuck Carr, past Civil Air Patrol commander (MSGt, USAF, Retired).

"This is the start of success."

Lesson Summary and Closure:

NCOs have a unique role in Civil Air Patrol. The history of the NCO in CAP is an interesting journey. The reintroduction of NCOs has the potential to improve programs as NCOs bring vital skills to CAP from their military service.