



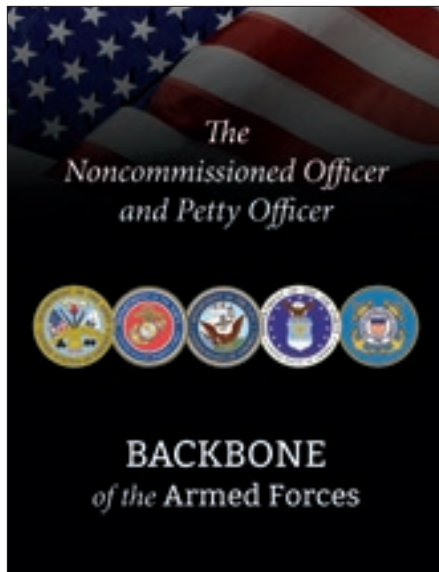
*Washington and Lafayette at Valley Forge*  
(John Ward Dunsmore/Library of Congress)

# Backbone of the Armed Forces

It was December 17, 1777, and General George Washington's Continental Army had just returned to winter quarters in Valley Forge, Pennsylvania. They were exhausted and had gained minimal success in their fight against the British army. But this period in Valley Forge proved critical for the fledgling army and led General Washington to recruit former Prussian officer Baron Friedrich Wilhelm von Steuben. His new title: Inspector

General. His mission: strengthen the professionalism of the Continental Army. Von Steuben's training objectives constituted the first written plan for standards, discipline, and duty for Washington's army, and he created the first manual that outlined the duties and responsibilities of the noncommissioned officer (NCO). So in an important way, December 17 is considered the birthdate of the U.S. Armed Forces NCO corps.

Across the years, from its birth to the present, the NCO corps (and the petty officer corps of our sea-going Services) experienced an enormous professionalization, diversity, growth, skill, and empowerment. For nearly two and a half centuries they have proudly carried the battle colors; stood tall in rank and file; maintained ships, planes, and tanks; led the patrols; inspected the lines; and manned the rails.



I was fortunate to lead an effort in developing a book that captures the significance of these military leaders throughout the history of America's Armed Forces. Why so fortunate? Because I had a team of intellectually savvy and extremely talented leaders who served as the A-team of chapter writers. I would like to introduce the *Joint Force Quarterly* readership to the Defense Department's newest book, *The Noncommissioned Officer and Petty Officer: Backbone of the Armed Forces* (NDU Press, 2013).

As a symbolic testament to our obligation and affirmation to our calling as noncommissioned officers, December 17 was chosen specifically as the official release date of the book. A ceremony took place in the Pentagon, officiated by the 18<sup>th</sup> Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff. I truly find this book to be a "best seller" not only because of the knowledge of the folks who wrote it and the role of the people who will read it, but also because of the story it tells. It is written by, for, and with noncommissioned officers and petty officers. It is an inspiring, thought-provoking, leadership-enhancing book that captures the character of the noncommissioned officer and petty officer. It is grounded in the Profession of Arms, complementary to the *Armed Forces Officer* book and our enlisted Service manuals, yet written to be distinctive in its own right. You will enjoy its contents as it exposes and captures

noncommissioned officer and petty officer attributes and competencies without diluting Service branch expectations or standards. The book defines why our NCO corps is historically and traditionally branded as the "Backbone" of the U.S. Armed Forces.

It is a privilege to serve as a non-commissioned officer or petty officer in America's all-volunteer force. We represent a professional and empowered cadre of enlisted leaders that society respects and admires and a community of leaders that many nations envy. Each of us carries an obligation, a responsibility, and a professional, moral, and ethical bond toward every American we have sworn to protect.

The book is available through the U.S. Government Printing Office. It is also available online at these sites:

- NDU Press: [www.ndu.edu/press/nco.html](http://www.ndu.edu/press/nco.html)
- Joint Electronic Library: [www.dtic.mil/doctrine/nco.htm](http://www.dtic.mil/doctrine/nco.htm)
- JDEIS: <http://jdeis.js.smil.mil/jdeis/index.jsp?pindex=97>

You can also download the book onto your device by scanning this code:



We hope you will acquire a personal copy and enjoy its contents. JFQ

**BRYAN B. BATTAGLIA, USMC**  
Senior Enlisted Advisor to the  
Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff  
and the Senior Noncommissioned Officer  
in the U.S. Armed Forces

## New from NDU Press

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*Next Steps in Syria*

by Judith S. Yaphe



Syria has been in a state of sectarian civil war since early 2011. The conflict has spread to its neighbors

in Iraq and Lebanon and, if left unchecked, could destabilize Turkey, Jordan, and a much wider swath of the Middle East region. Regardless of whether President Bashar al-Asad survives or fails, resolution of the civil war poses especially difficult problems for U.S. strategic planning at a time when the Obama administration is trying to focus on the pivot to Asia rather than the constant crises in the Middle East.

The Syrian crisis risks redefining the traditional balance of power in the region as well as relations between the United States, regional friends, and Russia. Russia's proposal that Syria cooperate with United Nations restrictions on its chemical weapons and the unease expressed by Iran's new president over Syria's possible use of chemical weapons have raised speculation that the Syrian crisis could be resolved without U.S. military intervention.



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