

## NCO's Are Key Players

The primary role of an NCO is to ensure that every man has the knowledge and training he needs to respond properly when duty calls. Recently one of the guys said to me, "My life is easy if the NCO is doing his job well. All I have to do is follow orders and keep my musket working". I think he's absolutely right. The NCO is the "Key" and when they're doing their job, the *Green Machine* clicks into high gear. So NCO's, here's what is expected of you...

### **Know Your Business.**

- *Know the words of command* – The unfortunate thing about commands is that they're usually given at the top of your lungs. So when you give an incorrect command you are broadcasting to your troops and every other reenactor within ear shot that something's wrong. Do you know the difference between a "right face" and a "right turn"? Do you use the term "rank" when it should be "file"? Can you explain how to perform an arms movement by making reference to the parts of the musket? Like the computer technician, it's important that you know the terminology and the jargon, so your communication is clear and understandable.
- *Know the drill* – It is essential that you are able to do all aspects of the drill yourself, and that your performance sets the standard for the guys in your Section. As an instructor of drill you must be able to demonstrate and explain to others the fine points of arms movements and tactical manoeuvres. And you must be able to recognize when something's not right, so you can sort out the problem and get things back on track.
- *Know the people* – In an organization like ours it is sometimes difficult to keep up with the comings and goings of people. Nonetheless, knowing the guys under your command is critically important. When a new guy shows up for his first event, you should take the time to introduce yourself, get to know him by name, and even introduce him to some of the others he will be with. This helps him feel comfortable and fit in more easily. But even more important, in the field you will be able to address each person by name and call out instructions to them as the need arises. Also it's important that you know the skill level and even the personality of the guys you're dealing with. This will help you match file partners, taking into account experience and compatibility.

### **Give your guys the skills they need to get the job done.**

- *Take the initiative to give instruction* – Depending on the event, there can be a fair bit of downtime at your disposal. That's an ideal time to pull together a few of the new guys for an impromptu drill session. Don't wait for someone to organize it for you. Take the initiative and make it happen. It doesn't have to be long and it can be informal. As a result, skill levels will improve, and you will have an opportunity to practice your role as an instructor.
- *Work on the things that you expect to use* – At some events the focus will be on the parade. At others the emphasis will be on the tactics. Some events require movement through the woods, while others require proficiency with line tactics. When you get the guys together for some drill, think about what they'll need to use at the next parade or battle. Those who were at Quebec City some years ago will recall that the Yorkers practiced a rallying manoeuvre in the morning, that totally surprised the rebels in the afternoon battle. It worked well because we'd practiced it only hours before.
- *Do it in a way that will get the best results:*
  - Keep the guys comfortable. If you're doing something informal, small clothes are just fine. Keep people in the shade when possible. Don't keep people at the shoulder while you're demonstrating something, or talking to someone else.
  - If you're doing foot and arms drill, put them in a single rank, at loose order, so you can be seen when doing a demonstration and you can see each one of them for correction purposes.
  - Drill by the numbers. This gives you the opportunity to see each person, at each step of the drill movement. Otherwise incorrect moves go undetected and people end up practicing their mistakes.
  - Demonstrate and explain frequently. When you see people struggling with some aspect of the drill, stop the action, bring the muskets down, and go through it in detail. It is important that people visually see the does & don't that you are attempting to explain.
  - Be observant and correct mistakes. The larger the group the more difficult this becomes. It is often helpful to have another NCO or an experienced guy to help you emphasize small points and point out errors.

- Talk about safety. Our hobby is very safe, provided people have been instructed in the correct method of doing things. Make sure the guys understand the procedure and the potential consequence of doing it wrong.

**Help your guys anticipate what they may be asked to do.**

- *Think ahead* – It is important that you anticipate what could happen next and consider how you are going to respond. It could be as simple as, “We’re going to go from column into line. Where does my section need to end up to be in the right spot”. Or it could be, “The rebels are in the woods. What am I going to do if they attack?” Be aware of what’s happening around you and think about the consequences of your actions. Forewarn the guys if you’re going to do something out of the ordinary.
- *Talk about what may be expected* – “Alright guys, we’re going up this trail in Indian File. When we get to the field we’re going to Front Form with a three pace interval”. Now everyone has got it. So when you emerge from the woods and you give the command, it will happen in an orderly and disciplined fashion. No surprises. People were forewarned and knew what to expect.
- *Talk about how you want things done* – From your experience you know the pitfalls and understand what can go wrong. Maybe you need to remind guys about the importance of working together with their file partners when in the woods. Maybe you should emphasize the need to lockup when firing in ranks. Or perhaps you should remind the guys to drink water when the opportunity arises. You’re the person who keeps the important details in people’s minds.

The troops look to the NCO to be on top of their game and to make things run smoothly. When that happens, everyone has more fun. Keep up the good work. People are counting on you.

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