

COMMAND SERGEANT MAJOR JOHN P. O'CONNOR

US Army, Retired



CSM O'Connor, just out of Bucknell University in Lewisburg, Pennsylvania, enlisted in the Army in 1964. He completed school at Fort Holabird in February 1965 and was made a Military Intelligence Coordinator. He completed airborne qualification at Fort Benning and was assigned to 526th Intelligence Corps Detachment in Ryukyu Islands. In 1966 he was an Intelligence Analyst with the 801st Intelligence Detachment, 6th Special Forces Group, 1st Special Forces at Fort Bragg.

In May 1967, he began Officers Candidate School and received his commission in November. His first assignment as an officer was as the Plans Officer in the 22nd Field Army Support command at Fort Lee, Virginia. In 1968, then 1LT O'Connor was sent to Vietnam where he joined 1st Cavalry Division and served as a Rifle Platoon

Leader, Reconnaissance Platoon Leader and Executive Officer. His professional leadership and devotion to duty were rewarded after his platoon came under a well-organized attack and they were able to effectively suppress the advancing enemy. His next assignment was Company E, 2nd Battalion, 5th Cavalry. His valor and leadership were again lauded for his actions during another strong enemy assault. In October 1969, he was promoted to Captain and assumed command of the 257th Replacement Company in Okinawa. He was the Commander of this unit from October 1969 until April 1972.

After a number of staff assignments in the Ryukyu Islands, he reverted to his enlisted rank of Specialist Five in 1972. He was soon promoted to Staff Sergeant and assigned as Senior Interrogator with the 101st MI Company, 101st Airborne Division (Air Assault) at Fort Campbell, Kentucky until 1974. During his time at Fort Campbell he served as the Noncommissioned Officer-in-Charge (NCOIC) of the Analysis and Production Section and Assistant Operations NCO, Office of the Assistant Chief of Staff, G2, and later as Intelligence NCO, 2nd Squadron, 17th Cavalry. He was selected as Soldier of the Year for the Division Support Command and runner-up in the 101st Division Soldier of the Year competition. During this time he was instrumental in developing the Aggressor Assistance Team, which enjoyed notable success within the division.

In April 1975, CSM O'Connor was assigned to the US Army Intelligence Center and School at Fort Huachuca. He instructed, and developed training plans for several classes at the Intelligence Center. His work as Senior Faculty Advisor to the Advanced and Basic NCO courses was a source of aid to countless Soldiers who looked to him for career advice and mentorship. His next assignment led him to Korea in November 1976 where he served as the Intelligence Specialist for the S2, 1st Signal Brigade. Upon completion of his Korea tour, he again returned to Fort Huachuca and became a Course Developer, Senior Faculty Advisor and the Primary Instructor for the NCO Advance Course. During this time, he developed, refined and rebuilt the MI NCO course to increase the students' knowledge of leadership subjects and to improve their basic teaching skills.

In 1980, CSM O'Connor's career led him back to Korea once again. He was assigned as the Intelligence Sergeant and Tactical Surveillance NCO for the US Element of the Combined Field Army, Republic of Korea. During this time he was promoted to Major in the US Army Reserve. Returning once again to Fort Huachuca, he was initially assigned as the Senior Instructor for the NCO Advance Course and then as the First Sergeant of Company A, 1st School Battalion, School Brigade. He solved a myriad of problems concerning course flow, instructional responsibilities, graduation criteria, and administrative support to the unit. CSM O'Connor attended the Army Sergeants Major Academy in 1986 and then stayed there to teach the Operations and Intelligence Course.

Once again CSM O'Connor was assigned to Korea where he was the Command Sergeant Major of 3rd MI Battalion (Aerial Exploitation). Returning to Fort Huachuca for a final time in 1988 he assumed command of the Noncommissioned Officers Academy. He made his most enduring contributions while at the academy. He revamped both the technical and philosophical policies of MI NCO training. He encouraged individual thought, showed genuine concern and earned the respect of both subordinates and peers. He championed the emerging concept of small group instruction. His mentorship showed in the numerous NCOs that were advanced, promoted and recognized during his time as the Commandant. The academy passed three TRADOC accreditation inspections during his tenure. From December 1992 until his retirement in October 1994, he served as the Command Sergeant Major of the US Army Garrison, Fort Huachuca.

CSM O'Connor's awards include the Legion of Merit, Bronze Star Medal, Bronze Star Medal (V device), Meritorious Service Medal (2 Oak Leaf Clusters), Air Medal, Army Commendation Medal (4 Oak Leaf Clusters), Army Commendation Medal (V device), Army Achievement Medal, Army Good Conduct Medal (7 Oak Leaf Clusters), National Defense Service Medal (2nd Award), Vietnam Service Medal, Armed Forces Reserve Medal, NCO Professional Development Ribbon (5), Army Service Ribbon, Overseas Service Ribbon (3), and Vietnam Campaign Medal among others

CSM O'Connor was inducted into the Hall of Fame in 2003.