

Professionalism for the 21st Century Chemical Soldier: A Lesson From Rome

“... they have never any truce from warlike exercises; ... for their military exercises differ not at all from the real use of their arms, but every soldier is every day exercised, and that with great diligence, as if it were in time of war, which is the reason why they bear the fatigue of battles so easily; for neither can any disorder remove them from their usual regularity, nor can fear affright them out of it, nor can labor tire them; ...”

“... they are moreover hardened for war by fear; for their laws inflict capital punishments, not only for soldiers running away from the ranks, but for slothfulness and inactivity,... and the readiness of obeying their commanders is so great, that it is very ornamental in peace; but when they come to a battle, the whole army is but one body, so well coupled together are their ranks, so sudden are their turnings about, so sharp their hearing as to what orders are given them, so quick their sight of the ensigns, and so nimble are their hands when they set to work; whereby it comes to pass that what they do is done quickly, and what they suffer they bear with the greatest patience ...”

—Flavius Josephus
War of the Jews, Book III, Chapter 5

Professionalism—what does it mean for our chemical soldiers and leaders in this fast-paced world that we live in today? The Merriam-Webster’s dictionary defines professionalism as “the conduct, aims, or qualities that characterize or mark a *profession* or a *professional* person.” A profession is “a calling requiring specialized knowledge and often long and intensive academic preparation” and “the whole body of persons engaged in a calling.” In Josephus’ time, the Roman soldier was disciplined and exercised daily in the military craft and the unit was one of order that moved, acted, and fought with singularity of purpose. Can the words of Josephus, describing the Roman soldier almost 2,000 years ago, provide an azimuth for today’s professional soldier? I believe it can. Using the acronym *PRIDE* (perseverance, readiness, inspiration, discipline, and excellence), we can characterize Josephus’ words and define the meaning and requirement to be a member of the Chemical Corps in the 21st century.

Perseverance. The Romans had a sense of duty and loyalty not only to their commander and each other but also to Rome herself. We can gather from this short quote that when they set their sites on a task, they did not stop until it was accomplished and they persevered, even



Brigadier General
Stanley H. Lillie

under the most arduous conditions. Perseverance is not getting through the tunnel when we see a light at the end; it is getting through the tunnel when there is no light. This is especially true for our leaders—if we falter when times are tough, to what rock will our soldiers cling? We must have the endurance, which requires a great deal of mental and physical toughness, to complete the mission just as the Roman soldiers had so many years ago.

Readiness. The Romans trained as they fought, so much so that Josephus described their “exercises as unbloody battles” and their “battles as bloody exercises.” We too must imbed this mentality in the way we train, starting with our initial entry training. The lessons learned from recent conflicts must be captured in our doctrine and training, and we must never forget the lessons we learned in the past. According to Field Manual 7-0, *Training the Force*, “Training for warfighting is our number one priority in peace and in war. Warfighting readiness is derived from tactical and technical competence and confidence.” Readiness for a chemical soldier is being at the right place, at the right time, in the right uniform, with the right equipment, and with the right attitude. In that short sentence is a host of skills we must be competent in: land navigation, troop-leading procedures, and maintenance. We must have the flexibility to perform nontraditional functions—those tasks that have nothing to do with chemical, biological, radiological, and nuclear defense but are necessary to accomplish the mission.

Inspiration. What inspired the Legionnaire? Was it the signum or standard that was carried in front of the formation? His centurions (officers)? His principales (NCOs)? Or simply a desire to serve the empire?

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are prepared at all times to carry out our obligations. This is our daily mission; we will continue to work hard and improve our readiness. As NCOs and leaders, we are the standard bearers for readiness.

- Transformation is an imperative. Army transformation represents the strategic transition we will need to undergo to shed our cold war designs and prepare ourselves for the crises and wars of the 21st century.

This is a very critical time for our country. We will encounter many challenges that we will conquer together, working as a team. In closing, I must reiterate my focus for soldiers and leaders. I am an NCO; we are the backbone of the Army. I expect all leaders to lead by example, train from experience, maintain and enforce standards, and take care of soldiers. Remember, we are adapting to a changing environment.

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Certainly, our soldiers today should have a desire to serve our great nation and protect the freedoms guaranteed by our previous generations. In the Roman Army, the officers and NCOs were truly the standard bearers. Do our leaders today inspire us to achieve excellence? If not, why not? Our leaders should set the mark for their soldiers to follow. This should not just encompass physical and mental attributes, but rather it should include word and deed. Leaders should be the moral compass for their organizations.

Discipline. Discipline is what set the Romans apart from other armies in their time. Army Regulation 670-1, *Wear and Appearance of Army Uniforms and Insignia*, reminds us that “the Army is a uniformed service where discipline is judged, in part, by the manner in which a soldier wears a prescribed uniform, as well as by the individual’s personal appearance.” Our appearance and the proper wear of our uniform is part of it, but what else can we learn from the Romans? Notice how Josephus’ words on the Romans’ obedience and their actions are viewed as if a single organism. How did they get that way? Self-discipline was woven through every aspect of the Legionnaire’s life. Through daily drills and rehearsals, they became a team. They became one in everything—from marching, to establishing a campsite, to making contact with the enemy. They were obedient, not when the mood hit them, but immediately. Josephus saw this as an exceptional trait. But is that trait unobtainable today? Didn’t we all raise our right hand and take an oath to do just that? It was Aristotle who said, “We are what we repeatedly do, excellence then is not an act, but a habit.” As chemical soldiers, let’s make excellence our habit.

Excellence. One of our greatest temptations is to settle for something less than our absolute best. The US Army ushered in our Army values—*loyalty, duty, responsibility, selfless service, honor, integrity, and personal courage*—in the late 1990s, but these values

were certainly imbedded in the daily life and routine of the Legionnaire. These values should be second nature to us; living them can’t help but push us to the next level. Not a lot separates mediocrity from excellence, just the will to do something and the pride to do it right. Pride should be an individual’s personal commitment to quality, a mind-set that separates excellence from mediocrity. Should our goal be to achieve the minimum standard on the Army Physical Fitness Test or should it be the maximum, with the thought that we may have to carry a buddy out of a firefight? When you go to the range, is it to just wait your turn and hope to qualify so you can get back to work, or do you give an honest attempt to hit every target that comes up, knowing that the skill to do so may save someone’s life someday? Some of the watchwords from our Soldier’s Creed—*member of a team; mission first; never quit; disciplined, physically and mentally tough; trained; and professional*—were undoubtedly etched into the mind of the Roman Legionnaire. History has judged the Romans among the best; they took pride in their uniforms, their equipment, and their training. How will history judge us? Professionalism for the chemical soldier is not just doing the right thing when your subordinates and leaders are watching. It is doing the right thing when no one is watching!

I want to take this opportunity to recognize the Dragon soldiers of our Regiment who are serving our nation in the Global War on Terrorism. I particularly want to commend those serving in Iraq and Afghanistan. I want you to know that the professionalism you demonstrate each day makes the entire Corps very proud of you. I also want to personally thank all who are serving in our great Corps for your hard work and dedication; through my Army travels, I see the great accomplishments you have made. As a Corps, we must remain vigilant and prepared to meet the Army’s commitment to our nation’s security.