



Officers Explore Lewis and Clark Expedition

By Captain Saepyo Choe Warren

In November 2005, twenty-five officers from the 23d Chemical Battalion participated in a staff ride that followed the Lewis and Clark trail along the Pacific Ocean and Columbia River. Nearly 200 years after the Lewis and Clark expedition, the little towns of Ilwaco, Washington, and Warrenton, Oregon, were bursting with bicentennial celebrations—reenactments, dedications, ceremonies, and tours—and educational information to commemorate the three-year expedition.

“What a great opportunity—to be living in this part of the world on the 200th anniversary of America’s greatest expedition. I wanted our officers to understand that the Army Values—[loyalty], duty, [respect], selfless service, [honor], [integrity], and personal courage—so prevalent throughout their [Lewis and Clark] story are timeless and can professionally develop [*sic*] our leaders today,” explains the executive officer (XO) of the 23d and the originator of the Lewis and Clark staff ride.

The 23d Chemical Battalion, consisting of Chemical and Engineer officers, visited the historical sites where the Corps of Discovery waited out bad weather for six days on the Columbia River, first sighted the long-anticipated Pacific Ocean, and set up encampment for 106 days in the winter of 1805. The battalion studied the expedition from an Army leadership perspective, deriving lessons from the mission preparation and execution, preliminary training, logistical and intelligence concerns, command and control, civil affairs with Native American tribes, and examples of the Army Values.

Stephen Ambrose’s book, *Undaunted Courage*, served as the launching point for discussion, while the Fort Clatsop Visitor Center and Cape Disappointment Interpretive Center fortified knowledge with visual and interactive displays and guided tours.¹ Jill Harding, Chief of Visitor Services at Fort Clatsop said, “What we want people to take from the Lewis and Clark story is teamwork. We always hear about Lewis and Clark—the two captains—but it was more than just two guys—there were

thirty-three people in the expedition, and their success cannot be attributed only to the leadership of Lewis and Clark, but to the combined effort of the team.” And the same holds true with unit missions. Unit missions succeed only through the dedication of many people across branches and occupations. Working together breeds accomplishment. We see these accomplishments in our daily successes and in the success of the Army, our Nation, and our combined human history.

Aaron Webster, the interpretive specialist at the Cape Disappointment Interpretive Center said that “the people who create history are not superheroes. They’re ordinary Americans (like the people who visit our museum) who do extraordinary things. I’ve heard it said that people like Lewis and Clark don’t exist anymore. I think that’s dangerous. I want to empower people to believe [that] they can be extraordinary—someone’s got to make history. We all participate in what will be written.”

“Lewis and Clark were such a small part of the victory, yet their pinprick in time created an incredible ripple throughout history—it’s amazing the effect they had,” marvels Harding. “They inspire me to work hard, knowing that maybe someday my small victories will have the same effect.”

“Of all the stories in history, why are people so fascinated with Lewis and Clark?” asks Harding. “Their expedition epitomizes the American story of how great things come about. They start small; they start with a dream; and they are achieved by a dutiful, loyal, selfless, and courageous team.” ●●●

Endnote

¹Stephen Ambrose, *Undaunted Courage*, Simon & Schuster, January 1996.

Captain Warren is a native Korean from Pusan. She previously served as the adjutant for the 23d Chemical Battalion, Fort Lewis, Washington. She is a graduate of the University of Portland.