Optio

Profile description

Optio is the second most important person immediately after the **Centvrio**. Polybius describes him as the commander of the rear guard, where he occupies a position from which he can see the entire condition of the unit and control its actions when the **Centvrio** is unable to do so. This position was intended to prepare him for the future full assumption of the duties of the **Centvrio** in the event of his incapacity or death.

Tasks and duties

1. Optio supports the **Centvrio** in all decisions affecting the functioning of the unit in the following areas:
   - organisation and transport
   - training and tactics
   - discipline
   - management of human resources and Legion equipment
2. Inspections by day and by night:
   - Correctness of completed construction works
   - Together with the **Tesserarivs** and **Specvlatores**, he establishes security measures and a defence plan for the camp in the event of natural disasters or an unexpected attack (see the duties of the **Tesserarivs** concerning security)
   - Whether the guards perform their duties in the required and expected manner, and he enforces punishments in the event of insufficient commitment.
   - He assigns and directs men to tasks where additional manpower is needed, whether in the kitchen, transport work, construction work, guard duty, and so on.
3. He conducts additional training if he considers it appropriate, when the soldiers show deficiencies or discipline has become too lax.

Duties during battles and displays

Optio has varied tasks depending on the type of display being conducted. During drill and combat training, most Principales take positions outside the unit for presentation purposes. He supports the **Centvrio** by standing beside the operating unit, always opposite the **Centvrio** on the other side, and by repeating the commands issued by him in a loud voice so that all training milites can hear the order despite disturbances such as music played in the background or ongoing narration. He moves extensively together with the group of soldiers, detects all irregularities and corrects them, whether by drawing attention to them, issuing an additional command, or applying force or physical punishment, without shying away from brutality.

During simulated clashes and battles, all commanders and **Principales** take an active part as the main core of the fighting Centvria, around which the soldiers gather and assume the appropriate formation. **Optio**, as commander of the rear guard, moves during intense fighting along the rear ranks of the Centvria, carrying out the following actions:

- he urges the soldiers on to fight, supports their morale and motivates them to act
- he ensures that the formation remains coherent and does not break apart during the course of the battle, reminding the fighters where their place is and that they must fill gaps in the line
- he indicates the men who are to drag the wounded to the rear for treatment
- in the event of the death of the **Centvrio**, he assumes command by moving to his position and continuing the fight; from that moment onward, the scope of duties presented in the description of the function of the **Centvrio** during battle applies to him.
- in the event of danger, he selects available soldiers and directs them to a given section of the fighting
- if the need or necessity arises, he may personally join the fighting (for example, in the event of a threat to the sacred standards)
- as during combat drill, so too on the battlefield he repeats the orders of the **Centvrio**, enforcing and ensuring the execution of their provisions

Daily running of the camp

Optio, before dusk, together with the **Tesserarivs,** inspects the soldiers' tents, looking for any breaches of discipline, order and organisation. Throughout the entire day, they carefully observe the behaviour of the legionaries, looking for the disobedient and troublesome, to whom he will assign punitive work or guard duties at the evening assembly. If all **Contvbernia** perform their duties exemplarily and there are no visible shortcomings, a competition is held for the best-maintained tent in the Legion in terms of hygiene, order and preparation of equipment, taking care not to select men who have recently performed guard duty.

Staff meetings

Optio takes an active part in all councils, reports and briefings. He has a strong mandate and the right to influence decisions made within the group in every aspect, from the ordinary organisation of the day in the Legion to a military court over the disobedient. Together with the **Centvrio**, he receives statements and reports from functionaries and **Decanvi**, on the basis of which they issue orders and instructions to be carried out.

For discussion and development

External links

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