



# Training, Training, and More Training Is How the Army Builds Readiness

*An Interview With  
Gen. (Ret.) Leon E. Salomon*

■ By Roger RyDell Daniels



*Gen. (Ret.) Leon E. Salomon discusses a range of topics including leader development, talent management, and the future of the Logistics Corps and reflects on his 37-year Army career. (Photo by Brandy D. Sims)*

## FEATURES

Distinguished logistician Gen. (Ret.) Leon E. Salomon discusses lessons he learned during his 37-year Army career.

This year marks the 20th anniversary of Gen. Leon E. Salomon's retirement from the Army. *Army Sustainment* recently sat down with this distinguished logistician to discuss lessons he learned during his 37-year career, which included time as the commander of the 1st Cavalry Division Support Command (DISCOM) and culminated with his last assignment as the commanding general of the Army Materiel Command in 1996. He discussed the importance of training to build readiness and gave his observations on leadership.

*What traits do you look for in leaders?*

Good leaders are good listeners. Good leaders have vision. Good leaders also take bad news well. I used to say, "You have to be a good bad-news taker." But you don't hang on to that bad news very long because you want your staff to make recommendations to make things better. But if you're not a good bad-news taker, you won't get the bad news, and you'll be constantly surprised.

*What are your thoughts on leader development and talent management?*

When I was on active duty, we had this thing called doctrine, organization, material, training, and leader development. I've always been of the opinion that the most important of those was leader development.

Whenever I made a decision, regardless of whether it was logistics or operational, the last implication or the last lens that I looked at was from the leader development aspect. What does this do to leader development? Is it going to improve leader development or not? Because you can do some technical things, you can consolidate, and what does that do to build leaders?

Leaders need to set and enforce standards, and those standards

must be achievable. Leaders need to stretch their subordinates and stretch themselves, and when they set standards, they've got to enforce them.

*What can leaders do to ensure their formations are ready?*

Train, train, train, and train some more. When the Army created the combat training centers, that was a great thing to do. We did a lot of technical training, but we didn't do enough training in operational logistics, supporting in the field. That's been one of the big advantages of the brigade combat teams because the logisticians are involved all the time. It is also good to see the emphasis again being placed on the combat training center rotations.

*As a company grade officer operating in the Army's Communication Zone in Europe during the Cold War, what lessons did you learn?*

It was probably the first job that I had where I was involved in operational logistics. I was a chemical officer at the time, and I was in charge of the chemical inventory control point for Europe, so I learned all about stockage levels, reorder points, inventory management, and all those kinds of things. It was a very profitable assignment for me to have those types of responsibilities.

That's what later led to my decision to transfer from the Chemical Corps to the Ordnance Corps, which had more logistics responsibilities. When I was there [stationed in Europe], we were evicted from France by Gen. Charles de Gaulle; we had built up this infrastructure, and we had to take that infrastructure down and move it to Germany. I learned a lot.

*You commanded the 1st Cavalry DISCOM when AirLand Battle was the Army's capstone doctrine. In 2014, the Army issued the Army Operating*

***Concept as its new capstone doctrine, focused on globally distributed operations. Based on your experience, what should leaders be thinking about?***

The challenges get greater every year. Today's Army is much more dispersed. The Army has small units operating independently. I think we need to relook at our force design to determine if our "tip of the spear" units—platoons and companies—need to have more embedded or organic logistics in their formations.

In Afghanistan, platoons go out for two to three weeks at a time and pretty much take everything with them. So, you're really looking at the concept of the basic load, the combat load, and the Soldier's load. Should the Army push more stuff or have more organic logistics capability? For example, increasing combat and basic loads. I'm not saying that is the way to go, but we need to look at some alternatives. The battlefield is becoming more dispersed and complex.

I have done a lot of work with the Army Science Board and the Board of Army Science and Technology, and I have found that the Army staff, CASCOM [Combined Arms Support Command], and G-4 have always been very receptive to getting different views. Naturally, it's their responsibility to determine if a relook is necessary.

***What is the difference between distribution in the Army and in the private sector?***

One of the big differences is that in the private sector you have a zip code; you know where this person is because now you can look at a Google map. In the Army, when you're in this new area of operations and you're maneuvering a lot, you've got to pick a place to send stuff.

The distribution system becomes more challenging even with GPS. When we would have to decide do we do "just in time" [logistics] versus

"just in case," I always came out on the side of just in case.

***What are your thoughts about the future of the Logistics Corps?***

I think its future is bright. We first had the idea of a LOG [Logistics]

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Corps when Gen. William G.T. Tuttle was the LOG Center commander. We were thinking, with the multifunctional battalions, how do we staff them and who should command the battalions. If you were a heavy division, you put an ordnance officer in charge; if you were a light division, you put a quartermaster officer in charge; and, if it was a mobile or airborne division, you'd put a transportation officer in charge. But all the battalions were multifunctional. We needed logisticians so we created a functional area 90, logistician, skill set. Lt. Gen. [Mitchell H.] Stevenson formalized things by creating a Logistics Corps, which is much stronger than having just a functional area. I think we're on the right track, because we are expecting more from our logisticians.

We always felt that we needed to keep some experts in things like petroleum, explosive ordnance disposal, and special weapons and ammunition. However, there are very few command positions for those skill sets.

***What is your most memorable logistics assignment or command?***

It's hard to pick one out. I loved my time in the 1st Cavalry Division as the DISCOM commander.

I liked the TRADOC [Training and Doctrine Command] assignments as well. I had a position as a two-star as the deputy chief of staff for readiness in AMC [Army Materiel Command] where I got to work with all the divisions on their readiness issues. I learned so

much. From there I went to CASCOM and had firsthand knowledge of the current DOTLM [doctrine, organization, training, leader development, and materiel] issues facing our divisions.

***What propelled you to become a four-star general?***

On the second day of basic training my platoon sergeant said, "You scored well on the test. Do you want to go to OCS [Officer Candidate School]?" I said, "What's OCS?" When he answered my question, I said, "Why not?" I graduated, liked what I was doing, and decided that I'd stay in if I got selected for a regular Army commission, which I did.

I was very fortunate in my career in that I had many very good mentors, which is another important part—to me the most important part—of leader development.

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