

September 17, 2020

What Makes a Professional

(Pennsylvania Military Museum, T. Gum, Site Admin.)

Every vocation has a definition of what it means to be an expert, a master. Some pursuits even have a rank or grade structure to illustrate advancement or mastery of a skill. Perhaps most notably are the vocations that others judge ability by a mantra similar to, “fear the old man in a profession where men die young.”



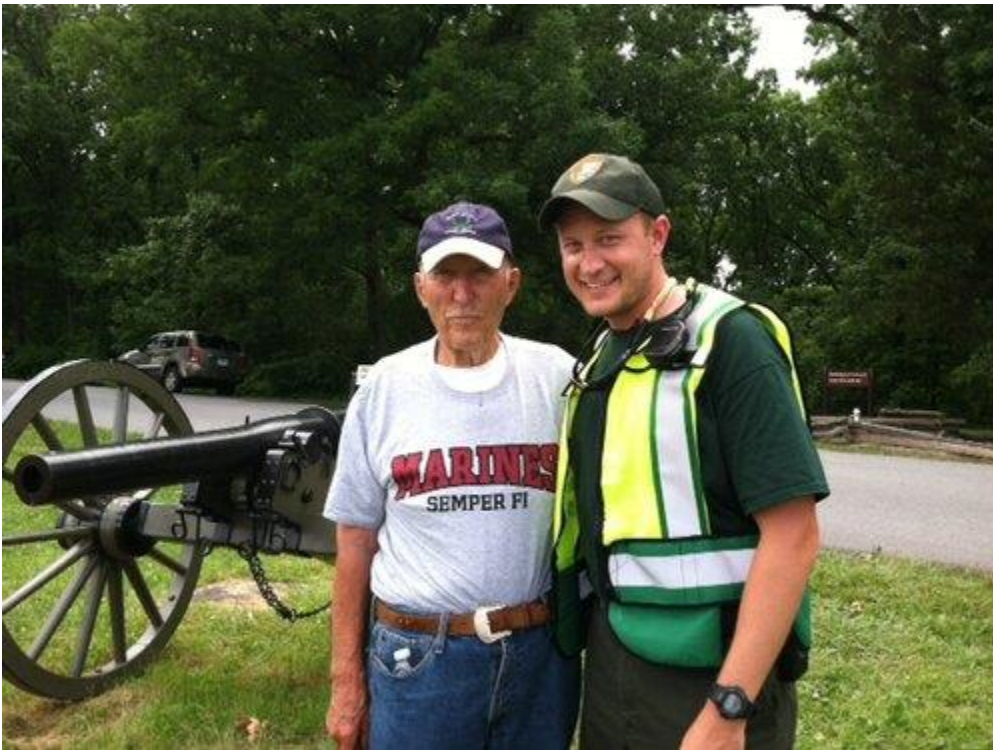
Photo, PA Monument at Gettysburg, Credit: Stone Sentinels.

In the world of military history & battlefield preservation there too exists a particular unspoken advancement highlighted by working at certain locations or publishing research on a particular campaign or theory. Either avenue of dedication to the field is respected, but what makes a professional in our field?

Is it the amount of books published? Is it the quantity of battlefield tours given? Is it the amount of time spent with a particular agency or commission?

I would argue that what makes a professional in our field is the amount of contribution to the ability of others to learn and connect with the history or the resource - through academic pursuit, through public programs, preservation of acreage, and above all else, the preservation of the story.

Perhaps no other individual contributed more to the field of American Civil War studies than Ed Bearss. It mattered little what initials you had after your name, if you were young or old, new to the field, or a seasoned vet. What mattered to Mr. Bearss was your heart. Do you have what it takes to truly understand the topic at hand - including traipsing mile after mile across battlefields to “feel” the terrain? Are you devoted enough to not only give of your money, but give of your time to its preservation (money can be earned, but time is finite)?



Photo, Gum with Bears at the Gettysburg 150th.

I had the honor of attending tours led by Mr. Bearss, watching his interactions with visitors while I was an NPS Ranger, and even listening to him explain a flanking maneuver to a 10 year old. His ability to draw on an unmatched plethora of knowledge while adding wit to make sure the “ah ha” moment was achieved was, and will remain, unmatched.

Mr. Bearss served honorably as a US Marine in World War II, contributed to the efforts that protected countless acres of American battlefields, served as a Battlefield Guide, raiser of gun boats, fort-finder, Chief Historian, and Author.

What makes a professional?

I will add with this to my above statement... what makes a professional is when the contributions you make to your field will not be realized while you are still here, but generations later, when young men and women draw excitement and inspiration from the resources you protected through stewardship to ensure they (a resource or story) were not lost.

Mr. Bearss was the consummate professional of our field.