Food and retirement
Since most soldiers are from the poorer classes and meat is rare in their diet, they cope well with the basic campaign diet. This is usually only hard biscuits and a porridge of cereal or chickpeas, supplemented by bacon, cheese, and a sour wine called posca. Preserved foods are easier to carry. A jerky of dried game or beef can stand in when salted pork is unavailable.

Organization of the 28 legions
Each legion numbers about 5,000 soldiers, divided into 10 cohorts. A cohort is organized into six ‘centuries’ of about 80 men, under the command of a centurion. The centurion’s second in command is called an optio. The legion also has several standard bearers. The most senior, the signifer, carries the legion’s eagle standard, while each century has a signifer, who also acts as the century’s banker.

Below: Reconstruction of Timgad in North Africa (now in Algeria), the colony for African veterans. Like a military camp, it has two main roads between the gates. Instead of the general’s Praetorium there is the forum. The town has all the luxuries of civilized life: a theater, library, an arena (outside the picture), temples, and many public baths.

CHAPTER 2: A WORKING LIFE

A centurion’s armor is silvered. He wears leg protectors, or greaves, and has a semi-circular crest on his helmet. He wears his sword on the opposite side to the legionary.

A soldier is expected to carry all the essentials he needs with him. In addition to his weapons and armor his kit includes many other items. In all, this kit weighs about 90 pounds.

1. Red-dyed tunic of wool or linen. A woolen cloak for cold weather and sleeping in.
2. Strong, well-ventilated caligae (half-boots) are laced by leather loops across the foot and up the ankle. The hob-nailed soles withstand hundreds of miles of marching. On the other hand, they can slip on hard, shiny paving.
3. Articulated body armor (lorica segmenta) is of several metal plates attached to each other by brass hooks, hinges, and leather straps.
4. Metal helmet to protect the skull, ears, and back of the neck. Its projecting brow is effective in head-buttling.
5. Leather belt to hold a sword scabbard and a groin guard of leather straps with riveted metal disks.
6. Curved, rectangular shield—about 4 ft by just over 2 ft—made of plywood covered in leather. A metal boss protects the handhold and adds battering power. The shield’s bronze rim is used for thrusting up under an opponent’s chin or slashing down on an unprotected shin or foot.
7. Short stabbing sword (gladius) made of hardened iron. Its sharp sides are parallel, rapidly tapering to a wicked point. The scabbard is made of wood and leather, held together with bronze straps.
8. Each soldier carries two pila. These javelins have a wooden shaft joined to the long spearhead by a section of soft iron. This is designed to bend on impact with the ground so that the enemy cannot throw the pilaum back.