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THE FRENCH MILITARY ACADEMY OF LAND FORCES



INTRODUCTION

The French Military Academy of Land Forces consists of 3 institutions. The most famous is the Military Special School of Saint-Cyr, created by Napoleon in 1802. The same type is the Military Academy of Land Forces, in Poland, which received the mission of training civilians to become officers. Some of you know this academy because of following studies there last year. The second one, less known, is the Combined Arms School. The purpose of this school is to train former NCOs and privates to become officers. The last one is the Military Administration School, which trains all Non-Commissioned Officers (NCOs) or civilians, who are going to serve in administration positions as officers.



Fig.1. The Combined Arms school

The Combined Arms School has the mission to train former NCOs and privates in order to become officers. Our academy is collocated with the Military Special School of

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Saint-Cyr and that's why most people don't distinguish between both academies. Our academy has its own history, traditions and identity.

1. ENTRANCE

Cadets of this academy are former NCOs or privates, coming from different land forces units: infantry, paratroopers, signals, armour, electronic warfare, military civil protection, artillery, etc. It's the reason why this academy is named "Combined". We have our own experience in the military, and even if this one is short, but it embodies the essential difference with the other academy. Some of us served in Ivory Coast, Gabon, Chad, Senegal, Lebanon, Kosovo, Haiti, Pakistan and Afghanistan for, usually, 6 month-tours. To join this academy, we have to be aged from 23 to 29 years old, to get the equivalent of the French A-level and, at least to have served in the army during three years. Anybody who fulfils these conditions is allowed to take the competitive exam. This exam has the level of a one year of high studies in scientific (engineering), economics or literature course. Every year, around 95 NCOs and privates pass this exam and join the Combined Arms School.

2. SCHOOLING

The course in the academy lasts two years, one of academic studies and one of military training. Talking about academic studies, we have to obtain a bachelor degree (i.e. 3 years of high studies). As we entered with a level of a one year of high studies, we have to learn two years of high studies in only one year to reach the requested level. Cadets have the choice to study scientific (engineering), economics or literature subjects. If you don't pass academic exams, you won't be a career officer but a temporary officer. We are also sent abroad for an internship in different European countries (Poland, for example). Concerning our military course, it's less specialized than in Polish Military Academy of Land Forces. Indeed, we choose our branch at the end of the academy, so we learn a few things about every military matters (engineer, signals, topography, tactical, armament...etc). We practise tactical and combat in different military camps, and every year, units from land forces "lend" us their privates and NCOs in order to train with real troops. We also have rusticity courses in French Guyana with the legendary French Foreign Legion and in commando bases.

3. HISTORY

The Combined Arms School is the heiress of the oldest related officers traditions. It finds its roots in the Branches Schools of Poitiers, Saumur, Fontainebleau, Versailles and Saint-Maixent which trained officers recruited among the NCOs and has been reserving officers since 1878. The most important of these branches schools, the Infantry School of Saint-Maixent was merged with Saint-Cyr in 1942 in the school of Cherchell-Mediouna (Algeria and Morocco), created after the German occupation of southern zone of France. The last one of these academies bequeathed us its flag, and especially its motto: "the work for law, the honour as a guide". After World War II, the Combined Arms School was kept merged with its famous neighbour (Military Special School of Saint-Cyr), to become the Military Special Combined Arms School. 16 promotions were shared with their comrades graduated from Saint-Cyr's diploma in this academy. This system works until 1961, when the training of civilians are separated into the new academy of Military Special School, and former NCOs entrusted to the Combined Arms School. Gradually organized from 1961, the activities of tradition take into account diverse acquired experiences from the Branches Schools and the Military Special Combined Arms School.

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4. TRADITIONS

Each year, 2nd lieutenants of the 1st Brigade (2nd year course) teach the Combined Arms School traditions to the cadets of the 2nd Brigade (1st year course) through a few activities (named “blue nights”) aiming at providing them the specific state of mind of our academy. As an example, during the first activity, each cadet is chosen by a 2nd lieutenant to create a partnership. The purpose is to develop the solidarity between both brigades and to strengthen the moral. During the two years, there are two main celebrations. The first one, two months after our arrival in the academy, is the dubbing and the delivery of sabres. This ceremonial embodies the admission to the officer status. The second is called the Triumph. This ceremony marks the end of the scholarship in the Combined Arms School. The Combined Arms School also participates in the life of the school by contributing to traditional activities common to the three academies and inherited from the period of the Military Special Combined Arms School. Among these activities, we can quote the reconstruction of the Austerlitz battle (famous Napoleon’s victory) or Sports night (sport competition). Finally, in order to promote the class and show its cohesion, representatives of the class manage teams (under control of the command) who participate in different military or civilian international activities such as Monaco Raid (military sport competition), Cambrian Patrol (military raid in Wales) or 4L Trophy (civilians car race in North Africa).

5. INTERNATIONAL COURSE

As a part of the academic course, all the 2nd lieutenants of the Combined Arms School participate in a one-month long internship abroad. So we have been spread all over Europe (United Kingdom, Austria, Poland, Romania, Denmark, Georgia, Spain...) and even in Africa. It could have been as well in a military academy as in an operational unit. The purpose of this internship is two fold: on the one hand, speaking and practicing a foreign language, especially English, as coming back to France, we will sit the STANAG examination. On the other hand, this is a great opportunity to discover a foreign army with different operating and equipment. Concerning the particular case of the internship in Poland, this is the second time that a delegation of the Combined Arms School comes. This year, more 2nd Lieutenants have been assigned to Poland than the previous one, as we are eight. Presenting us briefly, we all have between five and nine years of service time. In our group, there are 2 former infantry paratroopers, 1 fireman and 5 signalers; among these last, 2 were assigned in a cavalry regiment, 1 in a signal regiment, 1 in a military academy and 1 in an electronic warfare unit. Most of us participated in overseas operation, particularly in the Middle East (Afghanistan, Lebanon), Africa (Gabon, Ivory Coast) and also in French overseas department and territories (French Guyana, Reunion Island). Most of our comrades have been appointed to the United Kingdom, so we are very lucky to be in Poland because as we are living in Brittany, close to the UK and with more opportunities to go there. Moreover, it’s obvious that we know less about Poland than England. And, for now, sure that we are not disappointed!



Fig. 1. Officers' recruitment

In French Army, there are many ways to become an officer, all along your career and whatever your age or your rank.

6. DIRECT RECRUITMENT

The Military Special School of Saint-Cyr (ESM) welcomes men and women aged until 22, who have to pass a competitive exam in a scientific, economic or literature branch. Those cadets have to follow a 3-years course divided into 6 semesters including an academic course and a military training, in order to become "career officers". A few cadets join Saint-Cyr after a master degree in a university, if they are less than 26 years old; so, they only follow the 3rd -year course. At the end of their schooling, cadets choose their branch and receive a diploma of the Saint-Cyr Schools, equivalent to a master degree. Their training is completed by a 1-year course in the application school corresponding to their branch; for example, the Infantry school (Draguignan) or the Armour school (Saumur). The school also manages to educate and to train temporary officers. To integrate the ESM in this way, people must be less than 26 years old and they must own a bachelor degree for the executive officer way or a master degree for the specialist officer way. They only follow a 4-months military training. Specialists are supposed to serve in the field of their civilian studies. The temporary contract they sign can be more or less long depending of their future assignment. Temporary pilot officers assigned to the army aviation also follow this course. Concerning administrative officers, the Military Administration School (EAM) recruits men and women bachelor graduated. Their course lasts 2 years and educates them in financial and human resources administration.

7. SEMI-DIRECT RECRUITMENT

The Combined Arms School (EMIA) and the EAM both train former NCOs after they pass a competitive exam for the entrance. To integrate the EMIA, you need to be aged between 23 and 29 years old and to have at least 3 years of experience as a soldier. Usually, most of the cadets at school are former sergeant or staff sergeant, but

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the competitive exam has also been extended to privates since 2010. The schooling in the EMIA lasts 2 years and is divided into 4 semesters, 2 academics and 2 dedicated to tactical and military training. Officer-cadets leave the school with a diploma of the Saint-Cyr Schools which is an equivalent to the bachelor degree. Their training is completed by a 1-year course in the application school corresponding to the branch they choose at the end of their schooling. To sit the competitive exam for the entrance to the EAM, you must be a NCO aged between 25 and 29 years old and have at least 3 years of experience as a soldier. Both of those competitive exams are open to any NCO owning a Baccalaureate level, whatever their branch and posting. Cadets from the semi-direct recruitment are supposed to become Lieutenant-Colonel, at maximum. Furthermore, older NCOs, usually warrant officers, can become officer by passing two specific competitive exams. The first one is dedicated to soldiers from a combat branch, whereas the second one only concerns support and administrative branches. Due to their great experience as NCOs and, for many of them, as a platoon leader, these people have just to follow a 1-year course in the application school corresponding to the branch they have chosen. They are supposed to become Major at maximum. Eventually, the last way to become an officer is called “semi-direct tardif” recruitment, and is dedicated to the oldest NCOs. They have to be warrant officers class 1 and volunteers to become lieutenants. Officers from this kind of recruitment are a few and aim to retire as a Captain.