



Military training, a reference for civil society?

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Le GCA (2S) Patrick ALABERGÈRE

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L'Armée de Terre dans la société

In a French society that is, to say the least, disoriented and, according to some, in the grip of a crisis of authority and values, reference is often made to the essential role that education of young people must play in trying to put right what can be put right. The French education system remains within the average of OECD countries according to the PISA 2018¹⁸ study, while France invests much more than others in national education, particularly in terms of budget. According to some analysts, this discrepancy can be explained in part by problems of operation, pedagogy and even values.

So why not look in the field of training, models that work and in which it is undoubtedly possible to come up with good practices to move in the right direction.

Having benefited from the excellence of our Army's training system throughout my career, having commanded one of its schools, I believe that training, as it is practised in the Army, is the best way to improve the quality of the service. In our armies, is finally one of the models that our society can usefully draw on in order to rediscover certain values that are essential to the construction of its future.

A training system based on values and a rewarding pedagogy that continues throughout one's professional career

Among the six key values put forward by the Army in 2019 (Merit, Altruism, Fraternity, Demand, Overcoming, Fairness), three in particular characterize our training system. These are merit, fairness and exigency.

Merit, because each one, if he or she shows will and determination, can progress within the institution. However, one must have the will to do so and work hard to succeed. This is the hallmark of the social staircase often put forward in our military community, not to be confused with the social elevator that some idealists or utopians call for. For to stay within the metaphor, with an elevator, all you have to do is press the button to go up to the top floor. In the army, no button, you have to make the effort to go up the steps, one after the other. This is part of the legitimacy of our management, because whoever takes on command responsibilities has been able to "rise through effort", to quote the ENSOA¹⁹ motto.

¹⁹ Merit is also the corollary of equity, because everyone has their place in the Army, without distinction of gender, religion or origin. His or her place simply stems from his or her merit, which naturally generates a selection to identify the most deserving. We are far from egalitarianism, which some ideologues naively consider to be the most accomplished form of equality, especially since the word selection is not taboo in armies, as it may be today in the French university system, for example.

Finally, the requirement in one's training, for oneself as well as for others, because to carry out one's mission with excellence, one must have learned the skills of one's profession. "The greatest immorality is to do a job you don't know," wrote Napoleon. This requirement is unfortunately less and less shared today. But the singularity of the military profession, where death, both the death we give and the death we receive, is part of our environment, undoubtedly explains this particular requirement for competence. There are professions in our army where you only make a mistake once, and the deminer is a good example of this.

Finally, in addition to these three fundamental values that underpin its training system, the Army teaches in its initial training schools as much behavioural skills as military know-how. This is perhaps a lesson that our education system could usefully put back into the curriculum, the know-how of the citizen.

So, what would you say to an education system where the pediment of each of our schools in the Republic would be written: "merit-equity-requirement", I think that would make sense because these are three beautiful values on which a society can build its future.

In all our training schools, pedagogy is taught so that our instructors can dispense their knowledge in the most effective way possible. This pedagogy is based on valuing the successes of individuals, more than their mistakes, the pedagogy of failure is no longer in our ranks. Likewise, the progressive nature of the initial training is an essential element in order to succeed, in 13 weeks, in instilling the basics of the soldier's trade in our young recruits. In our Initial Military Training Centres (IMCs), young recruits undergo a preliminary pedagogical refresher course before they receive their initial training. The progressive nature of the teaching provided allows the training to be followed by the greatest number of people and reduces failures and dropouts as much as possible. The weakest are taken into account in a more individualised way to enable them to achieve the desired objectives. This pedagogy of success also advocates learning by doing, by setting an example, by having people do and redo things, by having them experience situations and experiences. It makes people want to know and learn quite simply.

Finally, in keeping with the merit mentioned above, each training course in a training school gives rise to a final ranking that highlights the most deserving.

Nothing extraordinary, you will tell me, only common sense pedagogical principles, I grant you that.

Finally, our training system puts the soldier back on the school benches each time he reaches an important level in terms of responsibilities or when it is necessary to update his knowledge, due to the technological evolution of equipment for example. This continuous training, which our Belgian friends quite rightly call continuing education, is the price to be paid for maintaining competence, in line with the notion of requirements already mentioned. However, armies must constantly justify the costs of this continuous training to the Ministry's "timekeepers" who reason solely on economic and financial criteria, forgetting that competence also has a price, that of the success of our armies in operations.

In France, however, the public and private sectors have little appetite for continuing training, because of its cost and the absenteeism it generates. Moreover, it is often left to the free will of the person concerned, who chooses the training that interests him or her and is not necessarily the most useful for his or her employer or for his or her professional career. This is a pity because it is the result of a miscalculation in the long term.

The military training system has built its performance on the strength of its values, its rewarding pedagogy and continuous training throughout one's career. It is therefore increasingly being observed by civil society, which is beginning to take an interest in this success.

It is beginning to become a benchmark for civil society

Beyond the specificities linked to the singularity of the arms profession and the operational requirements underlying our training actions, the training of our military personnel is beginning to be a recognized reference in certain circles.

The rapprochement between the École spéciale militaire de Saint-Cyr (ESM) and the civilian grandes écoles, in the form of a partnership, illustrates this trend.

As an engineering school recognised by the State and awarding a master's degree, the ESM de Saint-Cyr has been able to establish a partnership with twenty-three business schools, some twenty engineering schools and ten other French higher education establishments. As a result, some thirty students from the partner schools first follow a little less than three months of theoretical training at the Saint-Cyr Schools before spending three months in immersion in a regiment. They are given part of the teaching given to future officers in the French army, both from a practical and theoretical point of view.

In addition to this partnership, the ESM de Saint-Cyr is also linked to the first two French business schools, HEC and ESSEC, through integration seminars. The latter take very different forms between the two schools. For the former, the seminar takes the form of a week of immersion on the Saint-Cyr campus, followed by theoretical work once the students return to Jouy-en-Josas. Approximately 150 students from the school live this experience. For ESSEC, it is a seminar lasting a few days during which students are made aware of the army's decision-making methods through alternating lectures and role-playing.

Every year, since 2010, five students from the Cergysoise school have been spending a year at COËTQUIDAN as part of a double degree programme that is unique in France. Six months of military training and six months of theoretical training are on the programme of this exchange, which appears to be by far the most successful relationship between a business school and the ESM Saint-Cyr. Five students from the Breton school have the opportunity to spend a year on the ESSEC campus in Singapore.

The business schools are seeking to develop these partnerships because the military institution has know-how and skills developed over more than two centuries that make it an extremely interesting source of knowledge for future managers. Indeed, who better than an officer on the battlefield is capable of making decisions in complex situations and getting men to follow him? Moreover, the experiences offered by the Saint-Cyr school are unique in the landscape of French business schools, even though they are regularly criticised, often wrongly, for their uniformity and the poverty of their teaching.

Our young students come, of course, to seek leadership training in the terms that are consecrated, but they are also in search of the meaning of their future professional life. By putting a sense of commitment and values at the centre of the educational project, military training perfectly meets the expectations of these young people. As proof of this, I would like to cite this anecdote, cited by the former director of HEC at the Saint-Cyrienne conference in 2018, where he mentioned the case of a young girl who had just entered HEC and, following a 15-day internship at the University of California, Berkeley, and who had just graduated from the University of California, Berkeley. Saint-Cyr, wanted to resign from HEC because she had met Saint-Cyrians who, unlike her, knew why they were there, their commitment gave meaning to their lives.

In another area, the tactical reasoning method has been copied and adapted in certain management schools for use in company case studies. This case method focuses on decision-making situations experienced by a real company. This "situation-dilemma" is studied and discussed in an argumentative way by a group of learners, favouring a logical analysis of the exposed situation. Learners can recommend ways of solving the problems addressed in the case, the Preferred Mode of Action (PM), which bears a striking resemblance to the study of a tactical theme.

It is interesting to note that students working on these cases must answer the same questions as our students at Staff School: what, how, why, when, against whom, with whom? The enemy takes the name of competition, it also has its modes of action and we talk about tactics, corporate strategy, the desired end effect.

Finally, the vocational training implemented within the framework of the Adapted Military Service (SMA) in all our overseas departments, territories and collectivities has become the benchmark in terms of the successful professional integration of young people in difficulty. It served as a model in mainland France for the creation of the Voluntary Military Service (SMV). Today, armed with their know-how in terms of training, the armies have been entrusted with the training of trainers as part of their contribution to the Universal National Service (UNS). These various examples illustrate a recognized know-how in training our youth, even those in difficulty, as long as it is voluntary, which is the case with all the examples cited.

It is, moreover, rather tasty to note in a short history that the emblematic figure of the company adjutant, so often brocaded during conscription as an imbecile, is not only a "man" but also a "woman". cile, is today cited as an outstanding teacher, the only one capable of succeeding in training and educating the "dropouts" from our education system.

But he deserves to be better known and recognized because he can be a model, a bearer of meaning and a model for the future.

In 2015, the MPs' information mission on training in the armed forces advises the armed forces to open up more to the world of higher education. This advice is a little dated and has already been taken into account for several years; example with the partnership between the ESM of Saint-Cyr and the Grandes Ecoles mentioned above. But these recommendations can also be applied in the other direction, because it could also be usefully advised to the world of education to open up more to the working methods of military training.

It is undoubtedly still incongruous to try to explain to certain teachers that the military also knows how to teach, to transmit knowledge, but above all values. For if opinion polls today show that the armed forces have an extremely positive image in our society, the same poll, carried out exclusively among the teaching staff of the National Education system, would undoubtedly have much less flattering results...

In the recent controversy on the evolution of the National School of Administration (ENA), it was surprising to note that the model cited as an example was that of training our military elite at the War School (EdG).

It would be an excellent thing if the senior public service were to be inspired by our system of training and selection of our military elites. For the legitimacy of our senior hierarchy also and above all comes from the fact that it was confronted with the command of men and the realities of our profession in the field in the first part of its career, before moving on to higher responsibilities, in positions of design and reflection.

For several years now, the Army juries for the entrance examination to the École de Guerre have systematically included civilian personalities, mainly from the academic world (General Inspectors of National Education, for example). They sit alongside our general officers to select the future senior military officers of the French Army.

When will we see a general officer sitting on the ENA jury to take part in the selection of future senior French administration officers?

It will no doubt still take time to change mentalities, because the institution that is struggling to open up to the outside world or to reform itself is not necessarily the one we imagine...

However, the way has been paved, since ENA is hosting for the first time in the 2018-2019 class, five Gendarmerie officers and two Army officers "on an experimental basis", to follow the curriculum of this school, instead of the War School.

This rapprochement between the civilian and military worlds is essential in all areas, and training should be no exception. The Prime Minister's speech at IHEDN last October was along these lines: "I enjoyed my service so much that I have, in a way, been re-elected! Let's just say that I took part in a programme that aimed to train pairs of young senior civil servants and young officers. The purpose of the program was to get us to work together, to take us to theatres of operations overseas.... My conviction is that everyone can put in place this kind of useful and important mechanism. As you know, the President of the Republic has asked Frédéric Thiriez to reflect on the future of training for the senior civil service. I would like this reflection to include training in defence issues. Including from a practical point of view; why not by spending time in a regiment, on board a ship or on an air base. And IHEDN would seem to me to be the right place to do this [...]. Society therefore needs to reappropriate military issues because, unfortunately, the times and geography dictate it. ».

He encourages these two worlds to work together in order to get to know each other better, by sharing our experiences, without prejudice.

At a time when the French working world is struggling to promote "lifelong training" in concrete terms, the armed forces are succeeding in supporting their personnel, all categories combined, throughout their legible and varied career paths. The Armed Forces, attached to the youth of their human resources, are constantly pushing for professional advancement, with the concern for competence linked to the frequent changes of position that such a policy induces. This is a fundamental difference from the business world, where career development is often driven by the individual. However, continuing education concerns an experienced population, for whom the questioning of an application to an examination or competition, or even a return to student status, is not necessarily self-evident.

The continuing education system of the armed forces can also serve as a reference, and it is also supplemented by the possibility of attending civilian schools, particularly for officers. They are a source of inspiration for military thinking. In fact, these courses are a privileged means of enriching the methodological and knowledge base of the armed forces in order to maintain the performance of the procedures and actions carried out. Why should it be any different for a civilian civil servant who does part of his or her schooling or training in the armed forces?

Today, it is interesting to note that the rank of general has once again become a quality label, as some corps claim, such as our civilian firemen who have been granted the right to carry pyres, a bit ridiculous I grant you, instead of stars...

It even becomes sometimes a refuge value when it is necessary to manage a difficult problem, by putting oneself at the service of others. This is perhaps the hidden meaning of the appointment of a former army chief of staff to follow the reconstruction of Notre-Dame de PARIS and the enthusiasm of several second-section generals for the conquest of a municipal investiture.

Above all, however, it demonstrates the excellence of the training of senior military officers, capable of putting themselves at the service of others, based on values that give confidence.

The armies have a model training system that conditions their operational success, but which is also a motor for social elevation and a factor of influence in a society that is struggling to develop an efficient educational system. Our society would benefit from drawing more inspiration from what is practised in our armies because the military has a system of values that can be transposed to civil society, provided there is the will to impose them.

This also requires a return to authority, in a French society that sorely needs it in these difficult times. "The military is a practitioner of authority. Authority is not specifically military, it is the fundamental link in any human society," wrote General DE VILLIERS.

Today it is becoming urgent to follow the advice of the practitioner...

18] PISA 2018 is an OECD study on the assessment of the co-skills of 15-year-olds in 79 participating countries and economies. It is a benchmark survey of 600,000 students (including 6,308 in France), which allows each country to assess its education system and compare itself with others in order to deepen good practices and see where the problem lies. It is in line with the average for OECD countries.

19]École Nationale des Sous-officiers d'Active

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