

A Sandhurst, le 12 avril 2024

ORDRE DU JOUR N° 49

Commandant, Directing Staff, Distinguished Guests, Ladies and Gentlemen, it is a great honour and privilege to be here with you today and to represent His Majesty the King for the 203rd Sovereign's parade.

It is unusual for a General Officer of the French Republic to represent a king but this distinct honour has been conferred on me. The one hundred and twentieth anniversary of the Entente cordiale justified stretching the rule. I thank you for it.

Around me, the military leaders, the veterans, the many parents and relatives as well as the foreign delegations attest to this being a truly momentous occasion.

The cadets commissioning today who stand in front of me have completed their initial training : they have learned to command and obey. They have met comrades and formed friendships, and are now hardly recognisable to their parents. They are ready to embark on an adventure which may be the adventure of a lifetime.

Officer cadets, I look at you and I see selfless young men and women, who have chosen to serve their country, and, if necessary, to the risk of their lives for their country. I look at you and I see soldiers ready to be engaged in the toughest combats. I look at you and I see men and women who bear a striking resemblance to the officers I have the privilege to command. I am therefore going to talk to you the way I talk to my own cadets on the day they leave the Saint-Cyr Military Academy to join their branch schools, on the day of their great achievement : the Triomphe.

Becoming officers brings with it considerable obligations. You are soldiers. You are leaders. You are the ones to whom a mission is entrusted, knowing that it will be fulfilled whatever the price. For your superiors, you are the ones who will understand the intents and the stakes; the ones who will not hesitate. For your soldiers, you will be the ones who will energise and drive them on to turmoil. For your fellow citizens, you represent the very best of the youth of the United Kingdom or of your native country's youth : the ones who think as men or women of action and act as men or women of thought.

You are embracing the military career as war is gathering back at the doors of our continent. Contrary to the pacifist trends, war, in its most conventional and raw sense, is back. Contrary to the idea that war can be conducted as a stand-off activity, modern engagements are won on the ground; this is where the will of the adversary is bent. Contrary to the isolationist trends, the western and European countries are linked together through agreements, alliances and countless other bounds committing them to each other. No Nation can expect to evade its responsibilities.

You are soon going to join the units of the British Army, or of your native country. You will have responsibilities. Your soldiers will expect strong will, smartness and efficiency from you.

While commanding, you will have the will : the will to initiate activity; the will to persist when confronted with adversity; the will results in a final push to gain the upper hand. The will to win. This is a will that will be tested in the cold, in the mud, in the depths of physical and moral hardship. It confronts the soldiers to fear, death and to their own determination.

While commanding, you will need to apply your intelligence : the intelligence that makes the difference and serves the higher good; the intelligence that seizes the initiative and finds a way; the intelligence that makes sense for your subordinates; the intelligence that elevates them so that they come into their own in the responsibilities you will give them.

While commanding, you will be efficient. In your garrison like in combat, leaders cannot hide behind circumstances to justify failure. They bear the responsibility for it. You will not be obliged to use specific means but you will be obliged to achieve results. You will have to summon the will and the motivation to fulfil the mission whatever the price.

When I look at you, no traditional ironic statement on the competition between our two countries comes to my mind; no clever line with a possible hint of a British humour whose codes remain unfamiliar to me.

The overwhelming emotion that seizes me is deeply rooted in our past. It is shared by those who know the history of our two peoples. It is a history punctuated by battles and wars, reconciliations, alliances, common fights and shared victories. Having been face to face for long and often shoulder to shoulder, our Nations and our armed forces understand each other and know how fortunate they are to be ready to face together the challenges of tomorrow. It is reassuring to be able to rely on loyal, decided and competent allies. You are undoubtedly one of them !

Cadets of the Royal Military Academy Sandhurst, you deserve today to be distinguished in front of your commanders and relatives, and to have from midnight responsibilities consistent with being officers.

Cadets of the Royal Military Academy Sandhurst, nobody can say what tomorrow will look like. Nobody knows what they will be confronted with when they join the Army. Some are thrown into the furnace of battle just after completing their initial training; some patiently defend their country while maintaining and passing on their know-how. In the demanding life ahead of you, you may be assailed by doubts and tempted to choose the easy option. So you must always remember the motto of your academy, "serve to lead".

Général d'armée Pierre Schill

