

French Army

The **French Army**, officially the **Land Army** (French: *Armée de terre* [aʁme də tɛʁ]) (to distinguish it from the Air Army) is the land-based and largest component of the French Armed Forces. Along with the French Air Force, the French Navy and the National Gendarmerie, it is responsible to the French government. The current Chief of Staff of the French Army (C.E.M.A.T.) is General Jean-Pierre Bosser, a direct subordinate of the Chief of the Defence Staff (C.E.M.A.). All soldiers are considered professionals following the suspension of conscription, voted in parliament in 1997 and made effective in 2001.

As of 2014, the French Army employed 111,628 personnel (including the French Foreign Legion and the Paris Fire Brigade). In addition, the reserve element of the French Army consisted of 15,453 personnel of the Operational Reserve.^[1]

In 1999, the Army issued the *Code of the French Soldier*, which includes the injunctions:

“ (...) Mastering his own strength, he respects his opponent and is careful to spare civilians. He obeys orders while respecting laws, customs of war and international conventions.(...) He is aware of global societies and respects their differences. (...)^[3] ”

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<i>Armée de terre</i>	
	
Active	15th century – present
Country	 France
Type	Army
Size	111,628 military personnel (2014), incl. 8,000+ personnel of the Paris Fire Brigade ^[1]
Part of	French Armed Forces
Nickname(s)	<i>La grande muette</i> <div>"The great mute one"</div>
Motto(s)	<i>Honneur et Patrie</i> <div>"Honour and Fatherland"</div>
Engagements	<div><ul style="list-style-type: none">Hundred Years' War (1337–1453)Colonial Wars (1534–1980)Italian WarsThirty Years' WarWar of the League of AugsburgWar of the Spanish SuccessionWar of the Polish SuccessionWar of the Austrian</div>

History

Early history



The French Royal Army at the battle of Denain (1712)

The first permanent army, paid with regular wages, instead of feudal levies, was established under Charles VII in the 1420–30s. The Kings of France needed reliable troops during and after the Hundred Years' War. These units of troops were raised by issuing *ordonnances* to govern their length of service, composition and payment. These Compagnies d'ordonnance

formed the core of the Gendarme Cavalry into the sixteenth century. Stationed throughout France and summoned into larger armies as needed. There was also provision made for "Francs-archers" units of bowmen and foot soldiers raised from the non-noble classes but these units were disbanded once war ended.

The bulk of the infantry for warfare was still provided by urban or provincial militias, raised from an area or city to fight locally and named for their recruiting grounds. Gradually these units became more permanent, and in 1480s Swiss instructors were recruited and some of the 'Bandes' (Militia) were combined to form temporary 'Legions' of up to 9000 men. These men would be paid and contracted and receive training.

Henry II further regularised the French army by forming standing Infantry regiments to replace the Militia structure. The first of these--the Régiments de Picardie, Piémont, Navarre and Champagne--were called *Les Vieux Corps* (The Old Corps). It was normal policy to disband regiments after a war was over as a cost saving measure with the *Vieux Corps* and the King's own Household Troops the *Maison du Roi* being the only survivors.

Regiments could be raised directly by the King and so called after the region in which they were raised, or by the nobility and so called after the noble or his appointed colonel. When Louis XIII came to the throne he disbanded most of the regiments in existence leaving only the *Vieux* and a handful of others which became known as the *Petite Vieux* and also gained the privilege of not being disbanded after a war.

In 1684 there was a major reorganisation of the French infantry and again in 1701 to fit in with Louis XIV's plans and the War of the Spanish Succession. This reshuffle created many of the modern regiments of the

Succession

- Seven Years' War
- American Revolutionary War
- French Revolutionary Wars
- Napoleonic Wars
- French intervention in Spain
- Greek War of Independence
- Conquest of Algeria
- Crimean War
- Franco-Austrian War
- Franco-Prussian War
- Paris Commune
- World War I
- World War II
 - Allied Forces
 - Vichy French Forces
 - Syria–Lebanon Campaign
- Lebanese Civil War 1975–1990
 - Multinational Force 1982–1984
 - United Nations Interim Force in Lebanon (1978–present)^[2]
 - 1983 Beirut barracks bombing
- Gulf War (1990–1991)



The Gardes françaises at the battle of Fontenoy (1745)

French Army and standardised their equipment and tactics. The army of the Sun King tended to wear grey-white coats with coloured linings. There were exceptions and the foreign troops, recruited from outside France, wore red (Swiss, Irish...) or blue (Germans, Scots...) while the French Guards wore blue. In

addition to these regiments of the line the *Maison du Roi* provided several elite units, the Swiss Guards, French Guards and the Regiments of Musketeers being the most famous. The white/grey coated French Infantry of the line *Les Blancs* with their Charleville muskets were a feared foe on the battlefields of the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries, fighting in the Nine Years' War, the Wars of Spanish and Austrian Succession, the Seven Years' War and the American Revolution.

The revolution split the army with the main mass losing most of its officers to aristocratic flight or guillotine and becoming demoralised and ineffective. The French Guard joined the revolt and the Swiss Guards were massacred during the storming of the Tuileries palace. The remnants of the royal army were then joined to the revolutionary militias known as sans-culottes, and the "National Guard" a more middle class militia and police force, to form the French Revolutionary Army.

From 1792, the French Revolutionary Army fought against various combinations of European powers, initially reliant on large numbers and basic tactics, it was defeated bloodily but survived and drove its opponents first from French soil and then overran several countries creating client states.

Under Napoleon I, the French Army conquered most of Europe during the Napoleonic Wars. Professionalising again from the Revolutionary forces and using columns of attack with heavy artillery support and swarms of pursuit cavalry the French army under Napoleon and his marshals was able to outmanoeuvre and destroy the allied armies repeatedly until 1812. Napoleon introduced the concept of all arms Corps, each one a traditional army 'in miniature', permitting the field force to be split across several lines of march and rejoin or to operate independently. The Grande Armée operated by seeking a decisive battle with each enemy army and then destroying them in detail before rapidly occupying territory and forcing a peace.

In 1812 Napoleon marched on Moscow seeking to remove Russian influence from eastern Europe and secure the frontiers of his empire and client states. The campaign initially went well but the vast distances of the Russian Steppe and the cold winter forced his army into a shambling retreat preyed on by Russian raids and pursuit. The Grand Army of the 1812 Campaign could not be replaced and with the "ulcer" of the ongoing peninsular war against Britain and Portugal in Spain the French army was badly short of trained troops and French manpower was almost exhausted.

- Kosovo War (1998–1999)
 - Global War on Terrorism (2001–present)
 - War in Afghanistan (1978–present)
 - Operation Enduring Freedom
 - War in Afghanistan (2001–present)
 - Northern Mali Conflict
 - Second Ivorian Civil War
 - Central African Republic conflict
- (List of wars involving France)

Website	www.defense.gouv.fr/terre (http://www.defense.gouv.fr/terre)
Commanders	
Current commander	General Jean-Pierre Bosser



The French Revolutionary Army at the battle of Jemappes (1792)



After defeating Prussian forces at Jena, the Grande Armée entered Berlin on 27 October 1806

After Napoleon's abdication and return, halted by an Anglo-Dutch and Prussian alliance at Waterloo, the French army was placed back under the restored Bourbon Monarchy. The structure remained largely unchanged and many officers of the Empire retained their positions.

The long 19th century and the second empire

The Bourbon restoration was a time of political instability with the country constantly on the verge of political violence.

The army was committed to a defense of the Spanish monarchy in 1824, achieving its aims in six months, but did not fully withdraw until 1828, in contrast to the earlier Napoleonic invasion this expedition was rapid and

successful.

Taking advantage of the weakness of the bey of Algiers France invaded in 1830 and again rapidly overcame initial resistance, the French government formally annexed Algeria but it took nearly 45 years to fully pacify the country. This period of French history saw the creation of the *Armée d'Afrique*, which included the French Foreign Legion. The Army was now uniformed in dark blue coats and red trousers, which it would retain until the First World War.

The news of the fall of Algiers had barely reached Paris in 1830 when the Bourbon Monarchy was overthrown and replaced by the constitutional Orleans Monarchy, the mobs proved too much for the troops of the *Maison du Roi* and the main body of the French Army, sympathetic to the crowds, did not become heavily involved.

In 1848 a wave of revolutions swept Europe and brought an end to the Bourbon monarchy. The army was large uninvolved in the street fighting in Paris which overthrew the King but later in the year troops were used in the suppression of the more radical elements of the new Republic which led to the election of Napoleon's nephew as president.

The Pope had been forced out of Rome as part of the Revolutions of 1848, and Louis Napoleon sent a 14,000 man expeditionary force of troops to the Papal State under General Nicolas Charles Victor Oudinot to restore him. In late April 1849, it was defeated and pushed back from Rome by Giuseppe Garibaldi's volunteer corps, but then recovered and recaptured Rome.

The French army was among the first in the world to be issued with Minié rifles, just in time for the Crimean War against Russia, allied with Britain. This invention gave line infantry a weapon with a much longer range and greater accuracy and would lead to new flexible tactics. The French army was more experienced at mass manoeuvre and war fighting than the British and the reputation of the French army was greatly enhanced.

A series of colonial expeditions followed and in 1856 France joined the Second Opium War on the British side against China; obtaining concessions. French troops were deployed into Italy against the Austrians, the first use of railways for mass movement.

The French army was now considered to be an example to others and military missions to Japan and the emulation of French Zouaves in other militaries added to this prestige. However an expedition to Mexico failed to create a stable puppet régime.

In 1870 France was humiliated by defeat in the Franco-Prussian war. The army had far superior infantry weapons in the form of the Chassepot and an early type of machine-gun but its tactics were inferior and by allowing the invading German force the initiative the army was rapidly bottled up into its fortress towns and defeated. The loss of prestige within the army led to a great emphasis on aggression and close quarter tactics.

Early 20th century

In August 1914, the French Armed Forces numbered 1,300,000 soldiers. During the Great War the French Armed Forces reached a size of 8,300,000 soldiers, of which about 300,000 came from the colonies. During the war around 1,397,000 French soldiers were killed in action, mostly on the Western Front. It was the most deadly conflict in French history. The main generals were: Joseph Joffre, Ferdinand Foch, Charles Mangin, Philippe Pétain, Robert Nivelle, Franchet d'Esperey and Maurice Sarrail (See French Army in World War I).



French Poilus posing with their war torn flag in 1917, during World War I (1914–18)



Free French Foreign Legionnaires at the Battle of Bir Hakeim (1942)

At the beginning of the war, the French Army was wearing the uniform of the Franco-Prussian War of 1870, but the uniform was unsuited to the trenches, and so in 1915 the French Army replaced the uniform, with the Adrian helmet replacing the képi. A uniform with a capote, of bleu-horizon colour adopted to the trenches, was adopted, and the uniform for colonial soldiers coloured khaki.

At the beginning of World War II the French Army deployed 2,240,000 combatants grouped into 94 divisions (of which 20 were active and 74 were reservists) from the Swiss border to the North Sea. These numbers did not include the Army of the Alps facing Italy and 600,000 men dispersed through the French colonial empire are not included in this figure. After defeat in 1940, the Vichy French regime was allowed to retain 100–120,000 personnel

in unoccupied France, and larger forces in the French Empire: more than 220,000 in Africa (including 140,000 in French North Africa),^[4] and forces in Mandate Syria and French Indochina.^[5]

After 1945, despite enormous efforts in the First Indochina War of 1945–54 and the Algerian War of 1954–62, both lands eventually left French control. French units stayed in Germany after 1945, forming the French Forces in Germany. 5th Armored Division stayed on in Germany after 1945, while 1st and 3rd Armoured Divisions were established in Germany in 1951. However NATO-assigned formations were withdrawn to fight in Algeria; 5th Armoured Division was withdrawn in 1956. From 1948 to 1966, many French Army units fell under the integrated NATO Military Command Structure.^[6] Commander-in-Chief Allied Forces Central Europe was a French Army officer, and many key NATO staff positions were filled by Frenchmen. While an upper limit of 14 French divisions committed to NATO had been set by the Treaty of Paris, the total did not exceed six divisions during the Indochina War, and during the Algerian War the total fell as low as two divisions.

The Army created two parachute divisions in 1956, the 10th Parachute Division under the command of General Jacques Massu and the 25th Parachute Division under the command of General Sauvagnac.^[7] After the Algiers putsch, the two divisions, with the 11th Infantry Division, were merged into a new light intervention division, the 11th Light Intervention Division, on 1 May 1961.^[8]

Decolonisation

At the end of World War II France was immediately confronted with the beginnings of the decolonisation movement. The French army was the leading force in opposition to decolonization, which is interpreted as a humiliation.^[9] In Algeria the Army repressed the first demonstrations in May 1945 with heavy fire; 45,000 Algerians were killed.^[10] Maintaining control of Algeria, where 1 million Frenchmen had settled alongside 9 million natives was a high priority for the Army. When it decided that politicians were about to sell them out and give independence to Algeria, it engineered a military coup that toppled the civilian government and put General de Gaulle back in power in the May 1958 crisis. De Gaulle, however, recognized that Algeria was a dead weight and had to be cut free. The Army then planned a military coup against de Gaulle himself in 1961, but it failed. After 400,000 deaths, Algeria finally became independent.

Hundreds of thousands of Moslems who were loyal to Paris (also known as Harkis), went into exile in France, where they and their children and grandchildren remain in poorly assimilated "banlieue" suburbs.^[11]

The Army repressed the Malagasy Uprising in Madagascar in 1947. French officials estimated the number of Malagasy killed from a low of 11,000 to a French Army estimate of 89,000.^[12]

Cold War era

During the Cold War, the French Army, though not part of NATO's military command structure, planned for the defence of Western Europe.^[13] In 1977 the French Army switched from multi-brigade divisions to smaller divisions of about four to five battalions/regiments each. From the early 1970s, 2nd Army Corps was stationed in South Germany, and effectively formed a reserve for NATO's Central Army Group. In the 1980s, 3rd Army Corps headquarters was moved to Lille and planning started for its use in support of NATO's Northern Army Group. The Rapid Action Force of five light divisions was also intended as a NATO reinforcement force. In addition, the 152nd Infantry Division was maintained to guard the intercontinental ballistic missile bases on the Plateau d'Albion.

In the 1970s–1980s, two light armoured divisions were planned to be formed from school staffs (the 12th and 14th). The 12th Light Armoured Division (12 DLB) was to have its headquarters to be formed on the basis of the staff of the Armoured and Cavalry Branch Training School (French acronym EAABC) at Saumur.^[14]

In the late 1970s an attempt was made to form 14 reserve light infantry divisions, but this plan, which included the recreation of the 109th Infantry Division, was too ambitious. The planned divisions included the 102nd, 104e, 107e, 108e, 109e, 110e, 111e, 112e, 114e, 115th, and 127th Infantry Divisions. From June 1984, the French Army reserve consisted of 22 military divisions, administering all reserve units in a certain area, seven *brigades de zone de defence*, 22 regiments interarmées divisionnaires, and the 152nd Infantry Division, defending the ICBM launch sites.^[15] The plan was put into action from 1985, and *brigades de zone*, such as the 107th Brigade de Zone, were created. But with the putting-in-place of the "Réserves 2000" plan, the brigades de zone were finally disbanded by mid-1993.^[16]

Post Cold War era

1st Army Corps was disbanded on 1 July 1990.

In February 1996 the President of the Republic decided on a transition to a professional service force, and as part of the resulting changes, ten regiments were dissolved in 1997.^[17] The specialized support brigades were transferred on 1 July 1997 to Lunéville for the signals, Haguenau (the artillery brigade) and Strasbourg (engineers). The 2nd Armoured Division left Versailles on 1 September 1997 and was installed at Châlons-en-Champagne in place of the disbanding 10th Armoured Division. On 5 March 1998, in view of the ongoing structural adoptions of the French Army, the Minister of Defence decided to disband III Corps, and the dissolution became effective 1 July 1998. The headquarters transitioned to become Headquarters Commandement de la force d'action terrestre (CFAT) (the Land Forces Action Command).



Soldiers of the 4th zouaves regiment during the Algerian War



Alignment of AMX-30 tanks during the Cold War. 1,258 were in service in 1989.



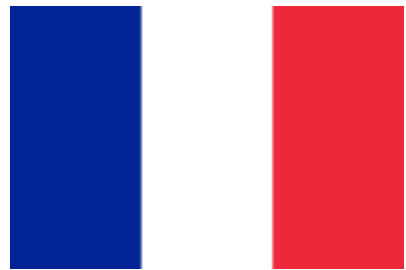
An ERC 90 Sagaie of the 1st Parachute Hussar Regiment in Côte d'Ivoire in 2003

War on Terror

Structure and organisation

Arms of the French Army

French Army



Awards

The *Légion étrangère* (French Foreign Legion) was established in 1831 for foreign nationals willing to serve in the French Armed Forces. The Legion is commanded by French officers. It is an elite military unit numbering around 7,000 troops. The Legion has gained worldwide recognition for its service, most recently in *Operation Enduring Freedom* in Afghanistan since 2001. It is not strictly an *Arme* but a *commandement particulier*, whose regiments belong to several arms, notably the infantry and the engineering arm.

The *Troupes de marine* are the former Colonial Troops of the French army. They are the first choice units for overseas deployment and recruit on this basis. They are composed of Marine Infantry (*Infanterie de Marine*) (which includes parachute regiments such as *1er RPIMa* and a tank unit, the *RICM*) and the Marine Artillery (*Artillerie de Marine*).

The *Aviation légère de l'Armée de terre* (ALAT, which translates as *Army Light Aviation*), was established on 22 November 1954 for observation, reconnaissance, assault and supply duties. It operates numerous helicopters in support of the French Army, its primary attack helicopter is the *Eurocopter Tiger*, of which 80 were ordered. It is an *Arme* with a *commandement particulier*.

Administrative services

On the administrative side, there are now no more than one **Direction** and two services.

The *Army Human Resources Directorate* (DRHAT) manages human resources (military and civilian) of the Army and training.

The two Services are the service of ground equipment, and the integrated structure of operational maintenance of terrestrial materials (SIMMT, former DCMAT). This joint oriented service is responsible for project management support for all land equipment of the French army. The holding-operational equipment the Army is headed by the *Service de maintenance industrielle terrestre* (SMITer).

Historically there were other services of the Army who were all grouped together with their counterparts in other components to form joint agencies serving the entire French Armed Forces.

After the health service and the service of species replaced respectively by the *French Defence Health service* and *Military Fuel Service*, other services have disappeared in recent years:

- In 2005, the Army historical service (SHAT) became the "Land" department of the *Defence Historical Service* (Service historique de la défense);
- In September 2005, the Central Engineering Directorate (Direction centrale du génie, DCG) was merged with its counterparts in the air force and the navy to form the *Central Directorate of Defense Infrastructure* (Direction centrale du service d'infrastructure de la défense);
- On 1 January 2006, the Central Directorate of Telecommunications and Informatics (DCTEI) was incorporated into the Central Directorate of the *Joint Directorate of Infrastructure Networks and Information Systems* (DIRISI);

The Army Commissariat was dissolved on 31 December 2009 and integrated into the joint-service *Service du commissariat des armées*.

There is the *Diocese of the French Armed Forces* which provides pastoral care to Catholic members of the Army. It is headed by *Luc Ravel* and is headquartered in *Les Invalides*.

Military regions

For many years up to 19 military regions were active (see *fr:Région militaire*). The *10th Military Region (France)* supervised *French Algeria* during the *Algerian War*.^[24] However, by the 1980s the number had been reduced to six: the *1st Military Region (France)* with its headquarters in Paris, the *2nd Military Region (France)* at Lille, the *3rd Military Region (France)* at Rennes, the *4th Military Region (France)* at Bordeaux, the 5th and 6th at Lyons and Metz respectively.^[25] Each supervised up to five *division militaire territoriale* – military administrative sub-divisions, in 1984 sometimes supervising up to three reserve regiments each. Today, under the latest thorough reform of the French

security and defence sector, there are seven fr:Zone de défense et de sécurité each with a territorial ground army region: Paris (or Île-de-France, HQ in Paris), Nord (HQ in Lille), Ouest (HQ in Rennes), Sud-Ouest (HQ in Bordeaux), Sud (HQ in Marseille), Sud-Est (HQ in Lyon), Est (HQ in Strasbourg).^[26]

Personnel

Soldiers

There are two types of enlistment for French army soldiers:

- *Volontaire de l'armée de terre (VDAT)* (Volunteer of the Army), one year-contract, renewable.
- *Engagé volontaire de l'armée de terre (EVAT)* (Armed Forces Volunteer), three- or five years contract, renewable.

Non-commissioned officers

NCOs serve on permanent contracts, or exceptionally on renewable five years-contracts. NCO candidates are either EVAT or direct entry civilians. High school diploma giving access to university is a requirement. *École Nationale des Sous-Officiers d'Active (ENSOA)*, Basic NCO school of 8 months, followed by combat school of 4 to 36 weeks depending on occupational specialty. A small number of NCO candidates are trained at the *Ecole Militaire de Haute Montagne (EMHM)* (High Mountain Military School). NCOs with the Advanced Army Technician Certificate (BSTAT) can serve as platoon leaders.

Officers

Career officers

Career officers serve on permanent contracts.

- Direct entry cadets with two years of Classe préparatoire aux grandes écoles or a bachelor's degree spend three years at École Spéciale Militaire de Saint-Cyr (ESM), and graduates as First Lieutenant.
- Direct entry cadets with a master's degree spend one year at ESM, and graduates as First Lieutenant.
- Non-commissioned officer with three years in the army, spend two years at École militaire interarmes, and graduates as First Lieutenant. 50% of the commissioned officers in the French Army are former NCOs.

Contract officers

Contract officers serves on renewable contracts for a maximum of 20 years service. A bachelor's degree is required. There are two different programs, combat officers and specialist officers. Officers in both programs graduates as Second Lieutenants and may reach Lieutenant Colonels rank. Combat officers spend six months at ESM, followed by one year at a combat school. Specialist officers spend three months at ESM, followed by a year of on the job-training within an area of specialization determined by the type of degree held.

Equipment

Personnel strength of the French Army 2015	
Category	Strength
Commissioned officers	13,800
Non-commissioned officers	37,600
EVAT	57,300
VDAT	671
Civilian employees	8,100
Source: ^[27]	



The HK416F is the new service rifle of the French military.



Leclerc main battle tank



GCT 155mm self-propelled artillery



Eurocopter Tiger attack helicopter

Uniform

In the 1970s, France adopted a light beige dress uniform which is worn with coloured kepis, sashes, fringed epaulettes, fourragères and other traditional items on appropriate occasions. The most commonly worn parade dress however consists of camouflage uniforms worn with the dress items noted above. The camouflage pattern, officially called Centre Europe (CE), draws heavily on the coloration incorporated into the US M81 woodland design, but with a thicker and heavier striping. A desert version called the Daguet has been worn since the First Gulf War which consist of large irregular areas of chestnut brown and light grey on a sand khaki base.

The legionnaires of the French Foreign Legion wear white kepis, blue sashes and green and red epaulettes as dress uniform, while the Troupes de marine wear blue and red kepis and yellow epaulettes. The pioneers of the French Foreign Legion wear the basic legionnaire uniform but with leather aprons and gloves. The Chasseurs Alpains wear a large beret, known as the "tarte" (the *pie*) with dark blue or white mountain outfits. The Spahis retain the long white cloak or "burnous" of the regiment's origin as North African cavalry.

Gendarmes of the Republican Guard retain their late 19th century dress uniforms, as do the military cadets of Saint-Cyr and the École Polytechnique.^[28] A dark blue/black evening dress is authorized for officers^[29] and individual branches or regiments may parade bands or "fanfares" in historic dress dating as far back as the Napoleonic period.

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External links

- (in French) [Official website \(http://www.defense.gouv.fr/sites/terre/\)](http://www.defense.gouv.fr/sites/terre/)
 - [French Military Reform: Lessons for America's Army? \(http://www.carlisle.army.mil/usawc/Parameters/00summer/bloch.htm\)](http://www.carlisle.army.mil/usawc/Parameters/00summer/bloch.htm), George A. Bloch (includes explanations of the structure of command)
 - [The French Army: Royal, Revolutionary and Imperial \(http://napoleonistyka.atspace.com/FRENCH_ARMY.htm\)](http://napoleonistyka.atspace.com/FRENCH_ARMY.htm)
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