Leadership during stress

French military leadership experiences and concepts during stressful events from a Swedish perspective

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Abstract

The author has written a bachelor thesis on the subject of leadership and stress with the aim of finding differences and similarities of stress handling in the French respective Swedish armies.

The methods used when gathering data for the thesis have been interviews with eight officers and cadets from the French Army and Écoles de Saint-Cyr Coëtquidan and a participant observation of a stress-exercise in the terrain of Camp Coëtquidan, where the author accompanied a platoon from the fourth battalion at École Speciale Militaire.

The analysis is split up into four questions, which serve the author the means to reach the aim of the thesis. The questions are:

- What defines leadership in military settings?
- How is leadership affected by stress?
- Is stress useful?
- Are there differences in stress handling? Comparing a Swedish view with a French one.

After each analysis question is finished the author draws concretised conclusions, aiming to draw even closer to the core of the answers.

Lastly the author closes in on the subject of leadership and stress, granting himself the permission to freely discuss the results of the thesis as a whole. A more profound view is given, as to why there is a need for further research into the matter of leadership and stress in the French Army. This is offered along with suggestions that [French Army] experience-based research can contribute to the training of future officers and leaders of soldiers in the French Army.

Keywords
Leadership, stress, decision-making
Acknowledgments

MM.. Didier Danet, Saïd Haddad, Claude Weber
For helping with support and directions in all matters concerning the thesis work, I am enormously grateful. I am also thankful for the genuine interest you have shown in my topic and thesis, this has reinforced my own beliefs in the importance of not only exerting, but also, studying leadership.

Lieutenant-Colonel Robert and Captain Chapon
Thank you for providing me with the opportunity to participate in the stress-exercise and for helping me to get in touch with such great officers and cadets. Without your help this thesis would never have had such quality and substance as it has now.

Captain Colautti and Captain Masquelier
My stay in France and at Saint-Cyr has been a most pleasant one, mainly due to your work and help with all things involving life at the campus and in the school. Without your support I believe I would have been struggling to manage things everyday but now I have been able to fully focus on the academic studies and getting qualitative work done. Thank you.

The interviewed officers and cadets
The most important people for me, without doubt, have surely been the officers and cadets of the French Army who have allowed me to take part of their deepest and honest thoughts on leadership and how to tackle the issue of stress.

Especially the veteran leaders of soldiers, who have given their personal testimony on leadership during the most testing of all conditions; combat. Your personal experiences and thoughts have helped me to reach further in my research than I would have dared imagined when I began my work.

As a future colleague, I thank and salute you all and wish you good luck with future endeavours.
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1. Introduction

“First the fear, fear that arrives in short time. Fear to lose life.
Nobody can have a different testimony.
...[...]..After fear the will to react rises.”

- Officer A on stress during combat\textsuperscript{1}

1.1 Purpose and Background

Leadership is omnipresent for every soldier, non-commissioned officer and officer within every armed force in every country of the world. Leadership is what you find at the core of every working army in the world and thus it is important to understand the fundamental principal of how to make use of leadership at all times as a military leader, be that of an N.C.O.\textsuperscript{2} or an officer.

The responsibility of declaring and making war lies with the political establishment in democratic countries of the western world. However, how the military war pans out is solely a military matter. The military force of a country is nothing but a specifically trained and equipped gathering of people used as tool for political goals.\textsuperscript{3}

So, the military in effect, deals with military means to manage and complete a (or several) political objective(s). This requires a great deal of leadership from the

\textsuperscript{2} C von Clausewitz (Translated by M Howard and P Paret), On War, New York: Oxford University Press Inc., 2007. p. 258
military commanders who are set at the task of executing missions which no ordinary leaders can cope with completing.

The military will engage itself to the full extent and a heavy burden\(^4\) will be placed on the military leaders executing the actions demanded of them to reach each respective tactical and operative goal in the theatre of war.

Reaching these goals and the end-state of a military plan is by no means an easy task and frictions will be rife along the way.

"Friction is the only concept that more or less corresponds to the factors that distinguish real war from war on paper."\(^5\)

It is in a way, by these frictions and how they are handled, which the military profession is defined and separated from all other professions of the modern world. Some military frictions which, when described in a civilian context, could be described as "time-limited stressors [authors translation]\(^6\) when occurring. These frictions occur during combat, training-manoeuvres and in everyday-life as a military commander. The difference between a soldier’s and an officer’s responsibility lies with the part of decision-making.

"Decision-making constitutes an important part of leadership...Typical for decision-making in crisis’s, catastrophes and war is that generally there is no good option when deciding – just more or less bad and more or less risky options. It’s all about making the least bad decision. [authors translation]\(^7\)"

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5 Ibid. p. 66
When making decisions as an officer you not only have to regard the implications of your actions in the short run; e.g. “how many men will I lose if I storm this building” but you also need to be able to sift through vast amounts of information:

“....Other great difficulties, experienced by every general, are to measure truly the thousand-and-one reports that come to him in the midst of conflict; to preserve a clear and well-defined purpose at every instant of time, and to cause all efforts to converge to that end.”

These decisions will most certainly be taxing and therefore stressing for any military commander in general and junior officers in particular. In fact, Forbes listed the military profession as the most stressful job anyone can have as late as this year. This shows to tell just how important it is for officers and leaders to be able to deal with the issue of stress, still in this modern age.

So, in order to maintain an efficient leadership in a military (and thus a stressful) context you need to understand the basics of leadership and the kind of leadership demanded from a leader within the military setting.

Fortunately the research, which has been, and still is being conducted in the field of leadership, is substantial due to the experiences taken into writing by warrior leaders spanning over centuries and millennia.

Many researchers and students of war, when approaching the subject of military leadership, elect to use theories similar to the trait approach to understand the connection between successful and acknowledged military leaders.

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11 G Larsson & K Kallenberg, Direkt Ledarskap, Swedish National Defence College, Stockholm, 2006. p. 31
Therefore, when I try to answer my own research questions I will regard the questions from the *trait approach*\(^\text{13}\) since I believe it to be the best way to understand what foundations make up a stress-resistant and therefore good military leader.

1.2 Aim and Research questions

To get the right perspective of my research questions I will be viewing them from a *trait approach*\(^\text{14}\). The aim of this thesis is to investigate how the Swedish army deals with stress in leadership in comparison to the French army’s way.

I will use the following formulation of questions to answer this aim:

- What defines leadership in military settings?

- How is leadership affected by stress?

- Is stress useful?

- Are there differences in stress handling? Comparing a Swedish view with a French one.

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\(^{13}\) Ibid.

\(^{14}\) Ibid.
1.3 Disposition

The first chapter is the introduction and consists of six sub-headings comprising, in subsequent order, of: purpose and background, aim and research questions, disposition, demarcations, terminology, previous research and theoretical background.

The second chapter describes the methods with the sub-headings of systematising; here the methods of observation and interview are discussed. Last, the validity and reliability of the research material is discussed.

The third chapter, analysis, covers the analysis of the respective research questions followed by short conclusions after each question:

- What defines leadership in military settings?
- How is leadership affected by stress?
- Is stress useful?
- Are there differences in stress handling? Comparing Sweden’s view with a French one.

In chapter four I have my discussion of the thesis and it is here where I will reach any conclusions and results as a result of the analysis. These conclusions will lead to recommendations from my part as to how any future research in the same area of study should be conducted and what questions might be of interest. The sub-headings are: answer of research questions, suggestions for further research, reflection.

Chapter five consists of the thesis summary.

Last, chapter six encompasses the references in with the following sub-headings in subsequent order: books, Internet, articles and studies, interviews, observations
doctrines and regulations and last images. Added post illud appendixes consisting the questions asked during the interviews that were conducted and of a shorter excerpt from the observations made.

1.4 Demarcations

The issue of leadership has been debated, discussed and researched on for as long as documentation has been around. Much of the research in the subject of leadership at the beginning of the 20th century revolved around the “great man theory” in which the studies centered on successful and great leaders and their traits. The idea was basically that these great people had certain properties which they possessed from birth and the studies centered on what traits they were, as to find what linked these great people together.

Thus, to provide my thesis with a theory that has a lot of research material I have chosen the trait approach as the exclusive theoretical framework for my analysis of my research.

To further narrow the thesis and hence deepen into the subject of leadership I will focus on research material (literature-wise) concerning military leadership and leadership during stress.

My demarcation to the stress-related leadership stems from the need to further narrow down my research to situations during leadership and thus make the analysis more qualitative in the chosen area.

Apart from being a modern disease, stress is and has been at the core of leadership issues in military setting since warfare was invented. The mere idea of combatting


\[16\] Ibid.

\[17\] Ibid.
the *four elements of war*\(^{18}\); danger, exertion, uncertainty and chance, would be blocking, if not totally hindering, most average minds cognitive processes when going about normal life and especially during decision-making situations. Therefore, being set in the institution of war studies, I constrict myself in this thesis to the stress-based parts of leadership in the analysis.

Since my thesis work is being conducted at the Écoles de Saint-Cyr Coëtquidan in France I decided early on that I was going to make use of the competence and experience of the French military in general and the officers and cadets of the school in particular. Hence, I will focus on differences in Swedish and French views of stress handling during [stressful] combat situations for the junior officer in the field. This also coincides with current research being conducted at CREC\(^{19}\) into the subject of leadership; consequently it’s my hope that this concentration into stress will be of use for further research here at St-Cyr in the future.

Since my focus will be on the junior officer during decision-making moments and the experienced stress, I will need to disregard from eventual PTSD\(^{20}\) that occurs after the stress related incident as a result of overwhelming accumulated stress. Even though this [study of PTSD] is a field that is of utmost importance for professional armies it would entail a totally different take on the subject of stress and would take away the main focus of the thesis on decision-making moments.

When observing for the thesis I will limit the research to one *section*\(^{21}\) in order to wrap my head around the cohesion in the smaller military unit. Thus, making the observations more qualitative since the foundations of military leadership is based on interaction between the leader and the ones being led.

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\(^{19}\) *le Centre de Recherche des Ecoles de Coëtquidan*

\(^{20}\) Post-traumatic stress disorder

\(^{21}\) French unit designation for approximately 30 men; a Swedish platoon-sized unit
1.5 Terminology

Since this thesis falls within the category of social science and borders to anthropology in certain senses the terminology used will be fairly spared of military language. In some cases of the interviews that I have conducted some military language has been spoken but I have chosen to interpret the meaning of the discussions and use a civilian spoken language.

In order to avoid impairing the text in the thesis for academic staff reviewing the work in a later stage I chose this way.

Five reoccurring references throughout the thesis are to the cadets of Saint-Cyr, studying to become 1st Lieutenants at the school.

These cadets belong to either EMIA (École Militaire Interarm) and ESM (École Speciale Militaire) which are separated. The cadets at EMIA are former non-commissioned officers, generally with a few years of active duty and experience, studying for a short while at the school.

While the ESM cadets are admitted directly from various military prep schools or business schools and study totally four years, these cadets are generally younger and less experienced.

Some direct quotes from the interviews will reflect the state of the interviews and thus the interaction between the author and the interviewee, shedding light on what is important in the discussions.

1.6 Previous research

In my search of previous research I am limited by my own lack of knowledge in the French language. Therefore primarily Swedish and English research results in the field have been sought out for my thesis.
In Sweden, researchers have made studies and one author in particular is reoccurring when I look for leadership under stress-related situations in general and leadership in a military context in particular. The author Gerry Larsson, with his book *Ledarskap under stress* [*Leadership during stress* – authors translation] 22 has many examples of how Swedish officers in an international context has faced difficult decision-making and also what is to be done but also other types of jobs which demands a lot from the leader in stressful situations.

The book heavily relies on the current Swedish theory for leadership, *utvecklande ledarskap* [*developmental leadership – authors translation*] 23 in the Swedish armed forces.

Another book, which contains research material of interest, is the book *Direkt Ledarskap* [*Direct Leadership – authors translation*] 24 where more focus is placed on the military aspects of stress and leadership. This book is co-authored by previously mentioned author Gerry Larsson but is quite different from the afore mentioned book on leadership. *Direkt Ledarskap* deep-dives into the different purely military situations and show examples of what constitutes stress, how it affects leaders and what possible courses of action there are to counter stress. The Swedish armed forces’ model for developmental leadership is also closely described throughout the book, serving as a firm substance for the analysis in my thesis.

The bachelor thesis by Cadet Lisa Thornblad, *Ledarskap under stress - En teoriprövande fallstudie på BA01* 25 is a good example of research done with a case study of a Swedish military unit during their mission in the Balkans, using Swedish leadership theories as the theoretical framework.

Among the conclusions, which cadet Thornblad reaches in her thesis, some are of importance for my research:

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“The chosen [leadership] theory works in practice and is exceedingly relevant for military leadership in international operations [authors translation]”\textsuperscript{26}

In effect this fortifies the claims of the theories of a functioning and effectful leadership.

Thornblad continues her conclusions on leadership and stress:

“It is important to comprehend what underlying factors can effect the leadership during critical stress and thus the subject [of leadership during stress] has to be studied from different perspectives and be seen as a part of a larger coherence [authors translation]”\textsuperscript{27}

In some ways, perhaps the Thesis by cadet Thornblad will make my thesis cumulative in the area of leadership and stress, providing some research material not only of value to Swedish military leadership study but also to our French counterparts.

Cadet Michael Sördal’s bachelor thesis from 2010, \textit{Påverkas officerarnas beslutsfattning om de utsätts för stress?}\textsuperscript{28} has a striking similarity in purpose and research questions albeit it does not aim at finding differences in French and Swedish views on leadership and stress. Therefore the cadet Sördal’s thesis might serve as base for accumulated knowledge on how Swedish officers’ decision-making is affected by stress.

Sördal’s thesis approaches the leader’s interaction with his colleagues and by doing so Sördal’s thesis contributes with a more sociological approach to the subject of leadership. Excerpt from Sördal’s thesis abstract:

“One conclusion of the study is that it is very distinctive how much each officer will be affected during stress but that stress in one way or the other will affect the officer’s

\textsuperscript{26} Ibid. p. 1
\textsuperscript{27} Cadet Lisa Thornblad, \textit{Ledarskap under stress - En teoriprövande fallstudie på BAO1(Bachelor Thesis), Swedish National Defence College, Stockholm, 2013. p. 1
decision-making. Another conclusion is that good relations in a group of soldiers will be helping in a stressful situation. [authors translation]²⁹

By adding the aspect of interaction and relations to further enhance the issue of traits demanded from the leader, I believe Sòrdal’s thesis will augment my research material when studying the components of leadership during stress and group dynamics.

1.7 Theoretical background

The trait theory³⁰ as a theoretical framework or background is well suited for analysing the material gathered through the methods used in this thesis. Basically Northouse provides for substantial amounts of knowledge and research on the trait approach to leadership.

Traits of leaders have always dominated the discussions when closing on the subject of leadership, however it isn’t until recently that researchers shifted focus from the theory that traits dominantly defined leaders, rather than the traits to be regarded with factors as situations the leader was in and the interaction between leaders and non-leaders.³¹

Having been focused on solely the traits of the leader and thus only the leader, the theory of traits is incomplete in the matter of it not including enough factors to clearly envisage the perfect leader, only the nearest-to-perfect.

The reason for using this approach is solely because of the possibility of application to figures traits. When talking of decision-making and stress, in a hierarchal organisation such as the army, there has to be some kind of theory that can be applied to the leadership process and the trait theory as such offers researchers (and me of course) a stepping stone from where they can continue their research.

²⁹ Ibid. p. 1
³¹ Ibid. p. 36-37
As a result of constant trait research Northouse has produced results on what makes up the personality, through the *Five-Factor Personality Model and Leadership*[^32], this claims that many researchers, within trait approach studies, have found solid evidence for correspondence between leadership personalities and five distinct factors[^33] will be central for this thesis;

- [Low] neuroticism[^34]
- Extraversion[^35]
- Openness[^36]
- Agreeableness[^37]
- Conscientiousness[^38]

As mentioned these five factors have found to exist in at least seventy-eight trait based leadership researches[^39] when researching relations between traits and leadership.

As a result of decades of studies, Northouse has landed at five major leadership traits, which are found in most approaches to trait theory:

Intelligence[^40] –

As far as research goes, the intelligence or intellectual trait is described as a positive thing for leadership skills. To have verbal skills, perceptual aptitude and to be able to

[^33]: Ibid. p. 36
[^34]: Ibid. p. 22 [Neuroticism – The tendency to be depressed, anxious, insecure, vulnerable and hostile]
[^35]: Ibid. [Extraversion – The tendency to be sociable and assertive and to have positive energy]
[^36]: Ibid. [Openness – The tendency to be informed, creative, insightful, and curious]
[^37]: Ibid. [Agreeableness – The tendency to be accepting, conforming, trusting and nurturing]
[^38]: Ibid. [Conscientiousness – The tendency to be thorough, organized, controlled, dependable and decisive]
[^40]: Ibid. 20
reason yourself through problems are accounted for within Northouse definition of intelligence.

Self-confidence\(^{41}\) –
Certainty of ones own knowledge and having the gusto to convince others of the correctness is also a trait, which greatly helps one to become a good leader.
“\textit{It includes a sense of self-esteem and self-assurance on the belief that one can make a difference.}”\(^{42}\)

Determination\(^{43}\) -
Another distinguishing trait is the ability to display initiative and determination throughout work and “\textit{to get the job done..}”\(^{44}\), being proactive and maintaining perseverance even when in face of difficulties.
By establishing the dominance and pushing through to set goals a leader differs from follower.

Integrity\(^{45}\) –
People will follow leaders who maintain a higher set of moral and ethical values since followers in general demand their leaders to be archetypes of good people; to have values which are worth fighting for and to believe in. Leaders with integrity get loyalty because they are trusted to act as they say and by doing so inspire confidence in their followers.

Sociability\(^{46}\) –
Being sociable is an important trait in today’s views of effective leadership. Leaders who are sociable generally display a friendly, outgoing leadership towards the

\(^{41}\) Ibid.
\(^{43}\) Ibid.
\(^{44}\) Ibid.
\(^{45}\) Ibid. 21
\(^{46}\) Ibid.
followers. Having the diplomatic feel along with being courteous and tactful is regarded as typical for a leader of people. This makes for a popular leader who will gain respect by forming cohesive relations with his or her followers at the same time as he or she shows concern for other’s wellbeing.
2. Method

2.1 Systematisation

I make use of different methods when gathering information for the thesis to ensure that the data is as solid as possible. First of I gather and go through the current literature and research in the subject of leadership and stress, then I decide which of these sources are relevant for my research.

I thereafter participate in a stress test conducted by the leadership section of École Spéciale Militaire de Saint–Cyr with the cadets to see how the issue of leadership and stress is handled both by students and teachers.

Since the French Army has practically no research on the subject of leadership and stress in English I will conduct three interviews with experienced French officers at Saint – Cyr. This will be supplemented with five interviews with cadets who answer questions related to their views of leadership and stress.

2.1.1 The method of participating observation

Since the interaction between leaders and followers in the military context is closest to the field of sociology and anthropology I will make use of participating observation\(^{47}\). The following description suits best:

“With participating observation we mean the method where the observer participates in the studied persons daily life, either openly in the role as a researcher or covertly disguised in another role, observing what’s happening, and listening to what’s being said and asking questions during a certain period. – Becker and Geer 1975. p. 28[authors translation]”\(^{48}\)


\(^{48}\) Ibid.
I will be participating at one stress-exercise and since I make use of my Swedish BD\(^{49}\) during the event it will be overtly as a researcher of sorts. Because the French army is used to having other nations along on their operations abroad and in training I believe my openly Swedish participation will not affect the events or decision-making among the cadets.

It is crucial to keep the original setting of the exercise (and thus getting as true results from observation) for getting the correct information needed in my research and thesis.

According to Denscombe there are two main reasons for making the observation as a participant along with other members of the study. It is chiefly an issue that the people being [systematically] observed may disguise or involuntarily mask certain truths when being scrutinized. The second reason consists of the fact that the observer sees everything – the real happening along with all faults and fails.\(^{50}\)

### 2.1.2 The method of interview

As a part of getting solid facts of how leadership is regarded in the modern French army the author makes use of interviews with French officers and cadets.

Since the thesis orbits around interaction-based events that affect leadership there is a strong need to understand the interviewee's opinions, feelings and feelings.\(^{51}\)

Therefore a personal interview is most suited method for gathering relevant facts concerning experience in the matter of leadership. These proficiencies as a leader are harder to communicate than other methods.

As Denscombe describes the suitability of interviews peaks when the data interview is based on the following:

\(^{49}\) Battledress  
“Opinions, perceptions, feelings and experiences. The nature of these things is as such as they are better researched in-depth and in-detail than accounted for in a few words. [authors own translation]”\(^{52}\)

The method of interviewing offers the author to ask about sensitive issues:

“…By using a careful and considerate approach the participants are encouraged to discuss personal and sensitive issues in an open and honest way. [authors translation]”\(^{53}\)

This thesis has its basis and purpose aimed at answering questions in military issues therefore information that can be regarded as **privileged**\(^{54}\) information and experiences are sought after.

“…The depth of information interviews offer gives the best value for money if the informants are prepared and capable to give information which others lack – information they have because of their particular position. [authors translation]”\(^{55}\)

The interviews will be **semi-structured**\(^{56}\) in the sense that they have set questions and a clear purpose, which aim at providing research material for the analysis. If the interview is deemed to work better if the questions are provided in a different order, it’s not a problem since the semi-structured interview offers that possibility. The questions that are asked also aims at letting the interviewee to cultivate his ideas, providing for open answers and honest opinions.


\(^{53}\) Ibid.

\(^{54}\) Ibid.

\(^{55}\) Ibid. p. 233

\(^{56}\) Ibid. p. 234
To provide further expert knowledge in the area of leadership and stress I will make use of email correspondence-based interviews\(^{57}\), a method which I deem to be of substance since I have met the interviewees in person to verify their military status and experience. They also come recommended from the institute at which I am studying.

2.2 Validity and reliability of research material

The literature used is frequently occurring in leadership studies both abroad and in the Swedish armed forces. Since it has been acknowledged in numerous theses and dissertations at the Swedish National Defence College in Stockholm, the validity and reliability is ensured yearly.

The interviews, which the author has conducted, are based on the need to extract information regarding leadership and stress training at the Ecoles Militaire de Saint-Cyr. This in order to understand how the cadets are prepared to meet stressful situations in their respective commanding positions upon commissioning.

The interviews are also used to understand what and how the cadets themselves perceive military leadership as a concept and layered on top of that the difficulties of stress during leadership. This is important for several reasons but chiefly because it might serve as a controller as to whether the training the cadets have received has actually been taken to heart.

The selection of officers and cadets was made according to the demarcations and this was in order to get as relevant information as possible for my thesis.

The questions asked are in general the same (see appendix 1 for interview questions) although the author has in some cases chosen to elaborate on certain questions when the informant is willing to share his or her experience or thoughts on a certain matter. Especially when interviewing the officers and EMIA cadets the discussions have sometimes been allowed to drift a bit from the original questions in order to allow for the informants to reason freely. The author has limited but special education in conducting discussions with willing informants and therefore the possibility of asking relevant questions are further ensured. Interviewing as a method grants access to privileged information and thus sensitive questions are asked in the process of acquiring said information. Being a method that forces the author to interact with the informants directly, the author is offered the chance to see physical reactions in both body language and speak.

Since the questions regarding leadership and stress in all cases concern personal experiences either through training or combat the author needs to respect the

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informants and engage himself on a personal level in order to insure the informants that the answers given are awarded the proper attention.

This interaction between the author and his informant offers the possibility of ruling out some answers which aren’t relevant but also to focus on certain answers and to make the informants elaborate when necessary.

The validity of the interview is guaranteed by the possibility of verifying the data directly during the interview.  

Further, the author has the possibility of correcting and verifying the data whenever needed due to the fact that most informants are based out of the same geographic place, in this case Écoles Saint-Cyr Coëtquidan. In other cases than the personal verification, the author makes use of internet-based interview questions. This interview method offers higher validity due to the fact that the answers are directly put in writing thus eliminating risks of misinterpretation in an interview due to poor audio recordings.

Notwithstanding there are several disadvantages when conducting interviews as a method to get information with high reliability;

“The interviewer and the context effect means that is hard to get consistency and objectivity. The collected data is in some sense unique because of the specific context and the specific individuals participating. This has a negative effect on reliability”[authors translation]

Overall the methods which the author makes use of provides both solid and interesting facts that would otherwise have been hard to acquire due to language problems and lack of French qualitative literature in English.

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60 Ibid.
61 Ibid. p. 268-269
3. Analysis

3.1 What defines leadership in military settings?

When interviewing the officers and cadets it is common for them to answer that military leadership clearly is set apart from the civilian form, in the sense that they work towards completing a common goal or mission;

“For me leadership is the ability of appointed officer or NCO in situation of leadership to...[...].. commit the troops in the mission and to make all soldiers working together to manage and to win the war/mission and to be able to do it whatever the situation”\(^{62}\)

Setting up the differences between military and other leadership matters is an issue most people can imagine without greater difficulty due to the above-mentioned matters of both ethical and moral dilemmas. Making decisions and seeing them through is inevitably a military matter and according to EMIA Cadet A it is not a trait that comes naturally;

“[..][..]in leadership you have to apply ....command and to give orders. It takes a lot of time to learn that, [and] that’s not something you have when you are born.”\(^{63}\)

The argument that military leadership is a trait developed by interaction with others and experience is something, which quite differs from the observational view of the French leadership in the field.\(^{64}\) I will return to that later in the thesis.

\(^{62}\) Officer A, Ecoles de Saint-Cyr Coëtquidan. Interview 2014-04-02.

\(^{63}\) EMIA Cadet A, École militaire interarmes, Saint-Cyr Coëtquidan. Interview 2014-04-02

\(^{64}\) Participant Observation by Fredrik Cavalli-Björkman during stress exercise with cadets in 4\(^{th}\) Battalion Écoles St-Cyr Coëtquidan at Camp Coëtquidan 2014-03-29 – 2014-03-30
The relationship between responsibility for the troops being commanded and the leader is something which the cadets in training are instilled with early in their training;

“Leadership in the military is different from the civilian leadership because the leader is responsible for the life of his men, that’s the difference between a war chief.....[...]...and a leader of civilians.”

Further notions of this responsibility and the interaction between humans, the leader and the followers, entail the abundant and constants of risk when actions are being taken in a military setting;

“There is a different aspect than leadership in general. Fulfilling a mission could mean risking the life of a person”

So, the definition of leadership in a military context can be seen as one where interaction and cohesion is centered. The leader has a role that is immensely more demanding when leading the workforce and managing tasks assigned to the leader’s unit. A leader of people in the military and in the field needs to be a leader of action in order to succeed in operations but also one who is consequent in his behaviour, setting the hallmark for a military leader;

“Command as you are, not modify your personality...[...]..You have to be firm, consistent, do not play a role or to be another person.”

Reasoning on and of leadership is certainly something that the French officers do and their thoughts on military leadership are quite broad in the aspect that it covers a wide range of offshoots from the trait of sociability.

65 ESM Cadet A, École Spéciale Militaire de Saint-Cyr, Saint-Cyr Coëtquidan. Interview 2014-04-10
66 EMIA Cadet B, École militaire interarmes, Saint-Cyr Coëtquidan. Interview 2014-04-02
67 EMIA Cadet A, École militaire interarmes, Saint-Cyr Coëtquidan. Interview 2014-04-02
Having an open mind and to be adaptable is something that reoccurs during the interviews but also the need to be “firm, [and] consistent...[...] don’t make any difference between your guys, no discrimination”\textsuperscript{68}, which is to say that a military leader needs to have integrity.

Officer A further details on how he teaches the cadets the theories of effective military leadership at Saint-Cyr and what points he stresses.

“\textit{There is three points that [you need to] become a good military leader. First of all the appointment, the rank. It’s the legal part of this notion, otherwise we become military society...[...]}”\textsuperscript{69}

Understanding that the military is a set part of society and acts therein is thus crucial to ensure the legitimacy, both in lawful terms but also in the moral aspect as well when exercising leadership over others in military settings.

He continues:

“\textit{After[legality] I think that the skills, tactical skills, technical skills build the good military leadership.}”\textsuperscript{70}

Being in the military venue, a healthy dose of know-how is of course needed to operate as a soldier but the specific knowledge, expert and general, is key to becoming a good officer. If an officer is supposed to have such comprehension and to acquire this military expertise in tactics he or she requires solid cleverness as a trait from the very start of the cadet education to become an officer.

Officer A further implies that leadership is to be strengthened through:

\textsuperscript{68} EMIA Cadet A, École militaire interarmes, Saint-Cyr Coëtquidan. Interview 2014-04-02
\textsuperscript{69} Officer A, Ecoles de Saint-Cyr Coëtquidan. Interview 2014-04-02.
\textsuperscript{70} Ibid.
“...the human behaviour, with different skills which are part of the character, of the nature of the person and some[of] that we can work on, to develop is the human capability to manage and to lead. [...] So that, at the end we have something like that [Officer A draws a leadership model]”

“This drawing, you have to see it in three dimensions so that if you shut down one, [...] the leadership will be less efficient or it will fall. On another hand, if one of them is shorter of course the whole leadership will not fall down but it will be less efficient.”

Drawing from the thoughts on leadership, which Officer A discusses, it’s fairly established that the interaction between the leader and his followers is central in maintaining an effective leadership according to this model.

The idea that interaction breeds confidence is successfully passed on to younger generations of officers as the interviews with the cadets show. The cadets also emphasize the responsibility and special relation to life and death, which the officer in command holds in regard to his subordinates and which has to be reciprocated in order for the officer to have an effective leadership;

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71 Officer A, Ecoles de Saint-Cyr Coëtquidan. Interview 2014-04-02.
72 Ibid
“...[military]leadership[is similar] but with a deeper notion of trust between the leader and the soldiers under his command: in the battlefield you must be able to entrust your life to your subordinates.”\textsuperscript{73}

Forming a bond to the soldiers and subordinates you have is a point, which reoccurs when interviewing the younger cadets.

“It is a task for the good chief to be aware of his men...[and] to care for you subordinates and your whole platoon”\textsuperscript{74}

Since leadership is mostly a matter of interaction between humans it can be speculated with some assurance that the thoughts on a good relation with the subordinates is something which is encouraged in order to gain the aforesaid trust.

Officer D continues the reasoning on a refined military leadership, based on core values, which the leader shows through action:

“The military leadership is more subtle than in the civil system. In this way, I think the military leadership have to embody some values to keep the dedication of the soldiers even in difficult situation during which the situation is particularly risky.”\textsuperscript{75}

Officer D describes what constitutes correct values as a military leader:

“For me, these values are confidence, courage, justice, decisiveness, maturity, honesty, humility, listening of the soldiers and the chiefs and empathy.”\textsuperscript{76}

\textsuperscript{73} ESM Cadet C, École Spéciale Militaire de Saint-Cyr, Saint-Cyr Coëtquidan. Interview 2014-04-09
\textsuperscript{74} ESM Cadet B, École Spéciale Militaire de Saint-Cyr, Saint-Cyr Coëtquidan. Interview 2014-04-10
\textsuperscript{75} Officer D; Ecoles de Saint-Cyr Coëtquidan. Interview 2014-04-28
\textsuperscript{76} Officer D; Ecoles de Saint-Cyr Coëtquidan. Interview 2014-04-28
It could be reasoned that the officer intends to maintain a kind of higher, more strict moral code or standards and through these standards the leadership of the officer will benefit. Being an exemplary leader for ones’ soldiers in this case by being empathetic and positively responsive towards the leaders subordinates is beneficial to the leadership as a whole.

When asked for a definition of the concept of leadership Officer C answered:

“Leadership is defined by someone’s ability to gather his partners around a vision, a project, in order to reach an aim.”\(^{77}\)

So, leadership could be argued as a skill or ability, which an individual has and uses to manage tasks by organizing others effectively and leading these people towards the goal, whatever the task.

Officer C continues:

“In the army, the definition [of leadership] is not that different. Even though the notion of sacrifice needs to be taken into account while engaging in combat. The leader’s ability to make his subordinates follow him freely, until death.”\(^{78}\)

The notion of subservience through free choice, which Officer C recounts as the main difference between leadership in general, and leadership in a military context could show that the experience, which Officer C has of leadership, has landed in something interestingly different. Namely the making the subordinates freely follow the leader or at least under the perception that the submission is free when asked to preform a task of the leader.

\(^{77}\) Officer C; Ecoles de Saint-Cyr Coëtquidan. Interview 2014-04-27
\(^{78}\) Ibid.
3.1.1 Conclusions

As a concept the interviewees all point to the dealing of death in leadership matters as the apex of difference between leadership in a civilian context and that of leadership within a military one.

Dedication to the task, being able to rally people around one objective and to gain the unquestionable support from soldiers when preforming a potentially deadly task are also examples of what military leadership constitutes for the selected interviewees in this study. This ability to gather men around a certain task and to make them work together could be placed within the trait sociability\(^79\) since it requires the leader to able to weld a certain group together for the task at hand.

Furthermore the relation between a successful leader and his or her soldiers is characterised by a fruitful and trusting relation where the leader is non-discriminate exemplary leader, thereby gaining the confidence of said soldiers in difficult and stressful tasks such as combat. Having achieved this confidence shows a leader with integrity\(^80\) and this is a trait that will inspire true loyalty among the followers laying the foundations for an effective leadership.

3.2 How is leadership affected by stress?

The matter of military leadership inadvertently leads to discussions on combat and stress. The tactical skills (among others) as a part of an officer’s traits to conduct effective leadership\(^81\) was mentioned in the previous question but there is a need to further deep-dive into one of the factors in the theme of leadership during the combat, namely stress.


\(^{80}\) Ibid. p. 21

\(^{81}\) Officer A, Ecoles de Saint-Cyr Coëtquidan. Interview 2014-04-02.
When asked how the stress affects the leadership EMIA Cadet B answered the following:

"Your abilities and your aggressiveness increases under fire. In just a few seconds you switch from normal mode to [combat] mode."

This answer is not out of the ordinary during the interviews. Most of the officers seem to have the same experience from combat that the initial feeling and subsequent reaction during combat is aggressiveness and action taking.

To further press the matter of a steadfast leadership with the concept of the platoon leader as the centre of action taken is taught to the cadets;

"The leader is a person [to] where all the eyes go when nobody know[s] what to do."

Thus it can be certain that the huge amount of responsibility of action is placed upon the platoon leader when action is demanded. The leader needs to know what to do and to act accordingly.

Being the centre point for handling, the leader not only needs the ability to act but hopefully also to act correctly and to drive his will towards the right goal with a mind set on managing the task at hand appropriately.

Since the leader sets precedence for his followers the orders he or she issues must be the right one, else things might go horribly wrong;

"[on what leadership is demanded during stress]...a leadership which is strong and clear, which makes no room for doubts or misinterpretation."

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82 EMIA Cadet B, École militaire interarmes, Saint-Cyr Coëtquidan. Interview 2014-04-02
83 ESM Cadet A, École Spéciale Militaire de Saint-Cyr, Saint-Cyr Coëtquidan. Interview 2014-04-10
84 ESM Cadet C, École Spéciale Militaire de Saint-Cyr, Saint-Cyr Coëtquidan. Interview 2014-04-09
So what the cadets, who were interviewed, in training perceive of leadership is the leader as solid, competent leader who can absorb stress and continue to make the correct decisions.

The cadets in training fail to mention the very initial feeling of stress which combat-experienced officers do, explicitly the fear.

"First the fear, fear that arrives in short time. Fear to lose life. Nobody can have a different testimony. [...] After fear the will to react rises."

This testimony of initial fear which pushes the leader to make decisions ensuring the survival of his troops of the success of his mission is a sound reminder that experience complements the knowledge on the leaders reaction to stressful situations. Thus, the cadets in training will benefit from practicing situations that have reactions such as fear and initial inability to react correctly.

Feeling fear and getting over the psychological, initial shock that combat stress gives you as a military commander is also an important part of training and the pedagogic process during cadet training.

The cadets will during these exercises face moments when they have to command and make decisions, which serve to test them [the cadets] as leaders. Officer A elaborated on this in his interview when we discussed the stress exercises the cadets are put through at Saint-Cyr;

“So if the leader gives order and reacts the troops will react and so the stress will go [away] and they [the troops] will follow naturally and so he[the leader] will be reinforced by his reaction because he will be the appointed leader and the natural leader.”

85 Officer A; Ecoles de Saint-Cyr Coëtquidan. Interview 2014-04-02.
86 Ibid.
So Officer A asserts that the process of alleviating stress is to manage the stressful tasks as a leader. One could also draw the conclusion that the whole stress exercise, even though it is centered on leadership, is a process of the cohesion between the leader and the group, which he or she is leading.

The training of stressful leadership is something that is taught on different levels and the exercise that was observed by the author was the first and therefore most basic of these stress exercises conducted at Saint-Cyr.⁸⁷

The cadets which were interviewed for this thesis had varied experiences on leadership during stress and these experiences are relevant in the fact that they give the cadets the experience they need to form their on relation to stress and decision-making.

Exemplary leadership, where the leaders action will set the precedent for what the subordinates perform a task is something which the cadets themselves stress as important when talking of leadership during difficult situations;

“If the chief is afraid of course the other guys are afraid”⁸⁸

So it is not only in a positive manner that the leaders actions and feeling during great stress influences his or her subordinates. The exact opposite reaction from the troops is a big risk and the cadets are taught that the leader must know this when commanding in order to avoid pulling the troops in to the void of uncertainty and failure during a mission.

Although the experience of leading (and being led) through stressful environments and tasks can be simulated at training exercises⁹⁹ the need for the armed forces to

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⁸⁷ Participant Observation by Fredrik Cavalli-Björkman during stress exercise with cadets in 4th Battalion Écoles St-Cyr Coëtquidan at Camp Coëtquidan 2014-03-29 – 2014-03-30
⁸⁸ ESM Cadet B, École Spéciale Militaire de Saint-Cyr, Saint-Cyr Coëtquidan. Interview 2014-04-10
⁹⁹ Participant Observation by Fredrik Cavalli-Björkman during stress exercise with cadets in 4th Battalion Écoles St-Cyr Coëtquidan at Camp Coëtquidan 2014-03-29 – 2014-03-30
produce experienced junior officers still exists. Even though the informants had different experiences, the ones who had been in combat could confirm what their younger colleagues thought on leadership during stress. When asked what was most important during combat;

“*Keep calm and not [to] seem frightened and to give orders clearly and to continue the mission*”\(^{90}\)

The assuring, calm answer, could insinuate that perceived fear is best kept to oneself as a leader in order to better lead. Also, the notion to carry on giving orders and to continue making decisions is central for an effective leadership during the most testing of moments during leading as an officer, namely combat.

The most experienced of the interviewees confirms the importance of continuing to make decisions and to act as a leader during stressful events such as combat:

“*As the situation gets harder, the leader has to act with humanity, calm and serenity. However clear decisions are necessary. Subordinates should not feel that there is any possibility to negotiate with the commanders while facing a stressful situation.*”\(^{91}\)

The need of clarity, control and authority of leadership comes to full crystallization in the event of stress when eyeing the relation between the leader and his subordinates. The coherence between perceived and actual leadership comes to full test when in stressful situations as combat and therefore there is no leeway for the subordinates’ own interpretation of leadership.

Even though direct leadership is dominant during stress there exists a need to diffuse the stress among the followers, which Officer C discusses:

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\(^{90}\) EMIA Cadet A, École militaire interarmes, Saint-Cyr Coëtquidan. Interview 2014-04-02

\(^{91}\) Officer C; Ecoles de Saint-Cyr Coëtquidan. Interview 2014-04-27
“Nonetheless, making them feel involved in the situation is a good way to avoid them focusing on the stressful event. If stress takes over, subordinates should be taken into care by someone designated.”

Giving the subordinates the feeling of participation of the decisions-making or whatever process is at hand, sharing information on what is going, might then serve as a tension relief during stressful events. Being given a task might help to reboot or start the cognitive process with the subordinates when they experience stress.

Officer D, who even though lacks combat experience, maturely discusses the implication of stress and how this might be combated in order to maintain the officers leadership:

“Firstly, I think in a critical situation a leader will want to succeed his mission and he won’t think feelings through. I believe to no let yourself get overwhelmed by the emotion; you have to cling to your mission at all costs to not fail. The emotion will come soon enough but just after. It is for that it exists on preformatted orders to act rapidly.”

Officer D’s thoughts could be interpreted as having the priority of staying true to the mission and not letting the stress drive the leader towards emotions, which can be impeding in making decisions and managing the tasks at hand.

3.2.1 Conclusions

While most of the senior informants have the opinion that stress forces the leader to act and in most cases regard it as a triggering factor rather than hindering it is surprising since rather few of them see it as a negative happening.

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92 Officer C; Écoles de Saint-Cyr Coëtquidan. Interview 2014-04-27
93 Officer D; Écoles de Saint-Cyr Coëtquidan. Interview 2014-04-28
Maintaining the serenity\textsuperscript{94} or calm as one could call it is what the author has experienced as the core of managing stressing leadership moments when interviewing the informants. Said calm would, according to the informants, act as a defusing factor for the soldiers, lending them the assurance a leader has to offer in dire situations.

The action of decision-making is also important during stressful events and to involve the subordinates, making them feel part the decision process will help to further defuse the stress.

3.3 Is stress useful?

Some of the more experienced informants who were interviewed for this thesis did at some point reach the conclusion that stress is not always of evil but can actually help the leader to act and react to immediate danger and sudden frictions;

“\textit{The positive stress is something very useful during the mission and it helps the commander...[...]. Positive stress - helps to focus on the task.}\textit{[it]}\textit{Can make you more brave and help you to focus on the task}”\textsuperscript{95}

Seeing and making use of the stress as a positive factor in combat may therefore be something to emphasize as the informants do when referring to it [positive stress] as “\textit{it helps you to command, coordinate and organize things}”\textsuperscript{96} in combat situations and during great stress.

The feelings of stress, forcing the leader to act instantaneously, could be compared to a start gun going off before a race and starting the reactions necessary to preform your duties as a warrior;

\textsuperscript{95} EMIA Cadet A, École militaire interarmes, Saint-Cyr Coëtquidan. Interview 2014-04-02
\textsuperscript{96} Ibid
“You don’t have [many] feelings during combat, only a chemical response. Your ability is increasing due to the adrenaline, you can analyse a lot of things during the same time.”\textsuperscript{97}

The thought and perception, that action is being taken fast and that a lot of things appear to be happening, could be attributed to the chemical reactions of adrenaline. As a soldier the actions taken usually fall back on being prepared as much as possible for the unexpected.

Preparations prior to a mission serves multiple purposes other than being prepared for the physical combat in itself as preparations are as a part of the cognitive preparation before battle. Here, again experience is the superior ally when combatting the initial stress in combat situations.

“*The ANA guys have been to war for 30 years and therefore they are not affected by it in the same way*”\textsuperscript{98}

Using experience as an argument for combat durability could be possible when trying to find and explanation as to why none of the cadets believed stress to be a positive or useful reaction in combat.

“*[..]..they seem confident most of the time but sometimes they can lose control and be incapable to execute orders.*”\textsuperscript{99}

- on how a cadet perceived his subordinates during a stress exercise

This testimony to negative reactions from stress during stress exercises in the terrain is hardly news for experienced militaries but for the younger cadets which usually face an indoor academic education. This meeting with stress may be overcoming

\textsuperscript{97} EMIA Cadet B, École militaire interarmes, Saint-Cyr Coëtquidan. Interview 2014-04-02
\textsuperscript{98} Ibid.
\textsuperscript{99} ESM Cadet C, École Spéciale Militaire de Saint-Cyr, Saint-Cyr Coëtquidan. Interview 2014-04-09
with feelings unbeknownst to them prior to the exercise, serving as a perfect opportunity to get first-hand experience of leadership during stress and friction.

Personal proficiency in leadership is something which is promoted at Saint-Cyr and the cadets get the opportunity to tune their leadership with their fellow cadets in the terrain in order to harden their resolve and to evolve their leadership skills. More than once the experience is useful;

“I remember that when the lieutenant said to me “GIVE ORDERS NOW” I stopped running and looked at him to say “I CAN’T GIVE ORDERS, THERE IS TOO MUCH NOISE”....so I was quite nervous and angry. When I’m stressed I can be much more angry but also people can get blocked.”

Even though he was under great stress the cadet managed to continue making decisions that could be seen as a positive thing although the stress inflicted on his physical reaction as a response when a layer stress was added with the friction of the training officer wanting an answer.

Re-emphasising on the importance of interaction between the leader and the soldiers, one cadet found strength in his leadership and solace in the positive energy displayed by his soldiers when commanding in the terrain on exercises;

“I was not stressed because I could see that they were happy.”

The positive air the troops showed could be assumed to have been the result of a group of soldiers in harmony, set for the task at hand making leading a profoundly easier task for the inexperienced cadet assigned as a temporary platoon leader.

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100 ESM Cadet A, École Spéciale Militaire de Saint-Cyr, Saint-Cyr Coëtquidan. Interview 2014-04-10
101 Ibid.
102 ESM Cadet B, École Spéciale Militaire de Saint-Cyr, Saint-Cyr Coëtquidan. Interview 2014-04-10
When asked for personal experiences on the effects of stress on leadership, during combat, Officer C answered:

“I don’t think that my way of leading has been affected by these feelings. I would say it reinforced my leadership.”\textsuperscript{104}

This statement shows to tell that a reaffirmed leader and experienced warfighter might be able to benefit from the resulting stress when there is need of crucial decision-making.

As Officer C reasons forward on the matter it is clear that action might be delayed a fraction of a moment after the initial shock of combat has sunk in;

“Nonetheless there is a gap between the beginning of the event and the reaction due to fear. The goal is to make this gap as short as possible to keep the control of my soldiers.”\textsuperscript{105}

Officer C leads back the discussion towards the most important part of stress handling, namely the need to maintain control of his subordinates and to continue the process of decision-making. A thought might be that insight has made Officer C realize that the main instrument for managing the tasks at hand is to keep issuing orders and to keep up the feeling among the men that the situation is manageable by the leader.

3.3.1 Conclusions

\textsuperscript{103} ESM Cadet B, École Spéciale Militaire de Saint-Cyr, Saint-Cyr Coëtquidan. Interview 2014-04-10
\textsuperscript{104} Officer C; Ecoles de Saint-Cyr Coëtquidan. Interview 2014-04-27
\textsuperscript{105} Ibid.
The analysis shows that most informants agree that stress can be useful in the aspect that it forces the leader to act. Regardless of it being a chemical response or a response, the leader is forced to think faster and act quicker when deciding how to act in stressful leadership situations.

It is even possible that the leader himself might stand to gain something from reaffirming his leadership through successful handling of situations of stress in a leadership context.

It is interesting since self-confidence\textsuperscript{106}, one of the five key traits according to the trait approach\textsuperscript{107}, makes up for a good leader who can effectively assert influence over others and thus succeed in his own ambitions with his followers easier than a person or leader without the said self-confidence.

3.4 Are there differences in stress handling? Comparing a Swedish view with a French one.

The issue of being in command of your own reactions as a leader could be regarded as a most central concern when picking out officer candidates, suitable for leading scores of soldiers in hostile environments with difficult assignments at hand. Officer A gave expression of the most generic answer when asked how best to avoid unnecessary negative stress;

“The preparation is a protection against this stress.”\textsuperscript{108}

The officer gives an example where the briefing that he gave, prior to a mission, was perceived as so exact and thorough that the soldiers felt that the operation at hand could be hard but the chief knew everything and therefore they were not worried.\textsuperscript{109}


\textsuperscript{107} Ibid. p. 15-38

\textsuperscript{108} Officer A, Ecoles de Saint-Cyr Coëtquidan. Interview 2014-04-02
The academic studies for the Swedish officer cadets are theoretically prepared with literature on the subject of stress and it stipulates a number of things on what conditions must exist in order to maintain an effective, good leadership during stressful situations;

“Along with the personal conditions [stipulated for good leadership] also comes being qualified and trained [for the task].”[authors translation]¹¹⁰

Having the correct training for the task at hand and being the most qualified leader in the field is therefore a circumstance that can’t be avoided according to Swedish leadership and stress literature. One could reason that the motif for these preparations are somewhat designed to defuse the stress and uncertainty of applying oneself with a daunting new, dangerous task at work everyday, which is the everyday life of a junior officer in field working in the armed forces.

The cadets at Ecoles Saint-Cyr are put through various stress exercises¹¹¹, including being taken prisoner during their training and the exercise has three general goals.

The first is to understand the difference between regular, civilian stress and that of the military stress, which is the personal experience.¹¹² The second is to understand the collective experience where the cadets have to interact and solve different tasks together under great stress, deprived of geographic and time knowledge.¹¹³

¹⁰⁹ Officer A, Ecoles de Saint-Cyr Coëtquidan. Interview 2014-04-02
¹¹⁰ G Larsson, Ledarskap under stress, Malmö: The Author and Liber AB, 2010. p. 82-83
¹¹¹ Participant Observation by Fredrik Cavalli-Björkman during stress exercise with cadets in 4th Battalion Ecoles St-Cyr Coëtquidan at Camp Coëtquidan 2014-03-29 – 2014-03-30
¹¹² Officer A, Ecoles de Saint-Cyr Coëtquidan. Interview 2014-04-02
¹¹³ Ibid.
“[..]..And the last goal of this exercise is to give the briefing after where we can[..]..talk about the stress in general and for some cadets, the behaviour that they should have in that situation of [the] prisoners and the different feedback that we have about the different situation of prisoners, civil or military and for a population like St-Cyr[ cadets] the debriefing is more centered on the stress in combat and we have one hour where we talk about the different feelings and different reactions and the ways to be able to prepared if we can. And some key points to detect a stressed person.”114

The third and last goal, which aims at cementing the stress experience for the cadets, enable the possibility further acquire deeper knowledge from the stress exercise and how the stress affects their own actions. The exercise observed115 by the author, although at a simple level116, works as a catalyst for the cadet’s understanding of the basics of human behaviour during great stress in a military setting. This gives the cadets a stepping-stone from which to further hone their military leadership during stressful conditions.

As the experiences gained from the various exercises held during the cadet years’ functions as a core from which the future officer will sprout and cultivate an experience-based, stress resilient leadership that can be effective in combat and stressful environments.

Therefore, the field exercises have to have substance in themselves when being conducted, seeing as it is the training, which is the only experience the young officers will have until they face the real combat situations.

Officer C elaborates on the matter of preparing correctly;

114 Officer A, Ecoles de Saint-Cyr Coëtquidan. Interview 2014-04-02
115 Participant Observation by Fredrik Cavalli-Björkman during stress exercise with cadets in 4th Battalion Écoles St-Cyr Coëtquidan at Camp Coëtquidan 2014-03-29 – 2014-03-30
116 Officer A, Ecoles de Saint-Cyr Coëtquidan. Interview 2014-04-02
“I think that a good, regular and realistic training as a leader enables oneself to reduce considerably the time of this gap [between the beginning of the event and the reaction due to fear]. Fight as you train – train as you fight”\textsuperscript{117}

This insight into the subject of leadership during duress and stress can seemingly only be obtained through experience and it is confirmed by the younger but still experienced EMIA Cadet B;

“If you are acting the same way on training as under fire it helps for your guys to trust in you to do your job correct. They need to trust in what you are doing.”\textsuperscript{118}

A conclusion of the French experiences could be that becoming a steadfast point in the ensuing, orderly chaos that follows in combat could place the demand of calmness and consistency in the leaders actions in order to maintain control of the stressful situation and oneself as a leader of soldiers.

In order to acquire an effective, durable military leadership, according to Gerry Larsson’s book Ledarskap under stress, which was mentioned before is course literature at the Military Academy Karlberg, the nucleus of the leader’s personality need to consist of certain characteristics;

“Fundamental conditions for good leadership during great stress are good physical capabilities as well as trusting values and personality. Several studies have shown that leaders who thrive during harsh stress have good self-knowledge and self-confidence. They see not only difficulties, but possibilities and dare to act on their on convictions. They have a capability to keep their calm and to absorb legitimate critique. The opposite, that is low physical capability, an unsavoury personality and lack of moral courage are of course unfavourable conditions.”[authors translation]\textsuperscript{119}

\textsuperscript{117} Officer C; Écoles de Saint-Cyr Coëtquidan. Interview 2014-04-27

\textsuperscript{118} EMIA Cadet B, École militaire interarmes, Saint-Cyr Coëtquidan. Interview 2014-04-02

\textsuperscript{119} G Larsson, Ledarskap under stress, Malmö: The Author and Liber AB, 2010. p. 82
Larsson, in his book, clearly states that several studies in the field of leadership and stress have shown that some people with certain traits are more prone to being able to handle the aforesaid situations. Not saying that a person without said traits could manage tasks during the same conditions, one could assume through the attained studies that leaders with these traits are more suited for the military task of leading war fighters successfully.

Several of the interviewees have given testimony to the need of serenity\textsuperscript{120} and creating a feeling where the leader absorbs the stress of the subordinates and this corresponds in general to the FT-05\textsuperscript{121} instruction on commanding and how commanding should be made as effective as possible.

The FT-05 points to several key factors in maintaining a steady judgment in field, when commanding:

“[..]..He must remain clear-headed, not become overworked, screen how much information he receives, delegate effectively, keep physically fit and keep his spirits high.”\textsuperscript{122}

These instructions on leadership correlates in some ways to the Swedish literature Ledarskap under stress but tends to become a bit more general in its recommendations:

“He must not fall into the trap of being too consumed by his work and maintaining a distance from the events in hand. There is a second expression of discernment: a true commander does not always comply in principle with the views of others. He preserves and smoothly displays his assessment capabilities, even when initially opposed to the common or majority opinion because he has his own objective evidence. His discerning nature in this case is consistent with his ability to convince.

\textsuperscript{120} Officer A and C; Écoles de Saint-Cyr Coëtquidan. Interview
\textsuperscript{122} Ibid. p. 49
Of course, this state of mind should be confused neither with stubbornness nor with intellectual isolation.”

It is in some cases unclear exactly how the junior officer should act on the FT-05:s instructions since it is very generic and adapted for the entire military hierarchy, tactical to strategic level.

Maintaining calmness through combat- and stressful situations is something the experienced EMIA cadets emphasize and also something which can be retrieved in writing, in the FT-05, albeit as “serenity”:

“IV. 7 Serenity

In addition to these qualities, the commander must strive to reassure his entourage and subordinates in tense situations. They can then give their best without feeling pressure brought about by the operational situation or from higher echelons. By ‘absorbing’ as much anguish as he releases serenity, he contributes to reducing overall stress and re-establishes as much as possible a quiet, dispassionate and soothing atmosphere. He not only protects himself and retains his capacity for discernment mentioned above, but also makes himself credible to those around him and lends strength to his decisions.”

The manual instructs the leader to act as a kind of airbag for tough situations, absorbing negative feelings around him and exuding a calmness he not only diffuses stressful feelings among the followers but gains vigour in resolving tasks and taking decisions.

The manual doesn’t allow for deeper insight as to the constraints the leader might experience from always taking the hit of negative energy in stressful events; it could

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124 Ibid. p. 50
possibly lead to accumulation of said stress within the leader if he doesn’t possess a way of dealing with the ‘anguish’ at some point.

“To this end, as character is determined and not predestined, it is important that future commanders’ moral and intellectual education should emphasize these qualities from initial training and throughout their military education.”\textsuperscript{125}

The manual ends it’s instruction on the leadership of the tactical commander with pressing the issue that the leader’s characteristics is shaped through the experiences and career and not a thing which is unalterable therefore opening up for possibilities of the idea of acquiring an effective leadership as a tactical leader.

Larsson lastly describes a stress-resilient leader as a leader who leads by example;

“They live as they teach and they are clear in their values.”[author’s translation]\textsuperscript{126}

\textbf{3.4.1 Conclusions}

The interviews have shown that French military experience, which one could speculate is somewhat superior to Swedish [experience] in recent history, indicates that training and preparing in the correct fashion for stressful situations and practicing decision-making with the future leaders is something which the officers consider the best way to gain an effective leadership during stress and to see if there is someone that can’t handle the pressure.

The cadets are given the opportunity, at different times during the officer training, to lead various units in the terrain so it is fair to say they practice leading through


\textsuperscript{126}G Larsson, Ledarskap under stress, Malmö: The Author and Liber AB, 2010. p. 82
testing situations with soldiers, thus allowing for the cadets to train as they would fight in real combat, under real stress.

The Swedish Armed Forces with researchers, Gerry Larsson being one of the most recognised among them, has conducted several studies into leadership during stress in order to establish what the stress factors are constituted of and how a leader should act in order to continue leading as effectively as possible.

The results of Larssons and the other authors’ endeavours into the leadership studies are, at current, *Ledarskap under stress* and *Direkt ledarskap* through which the reader, often-military personnel since it’s course literature at the Military Academy Karlberg, can derive information and therefore knowledge from numerous studies on how leadership is best conducted during stressful events.

Part 3 of *Direkt Ledarskap* deals with practicing in order to become durable in stressful situations:

“Stress-exercises have both positive and negative sides. Among the positive is knowing what to do even when confronted with fear. You act without thinking too much and you gain a platform of experience which makes you more confident”[authors translation]

*Direkt ledarskap* continues to file research and examples on what can be done to alleviate stress for the leader as well as the soldiers, granting the possibility for a leader in training to seize leadership knowledge before putting the leadership skills on trail in the field.

In this matter the author of the thesis has found coherence with the French views from the interviews and Swedish leadership theory, that training and practicing

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128 Ibid. p. 233
leadership during stress is the best way to provide the leader with an effective and durable leadership during stress.

As Nilsson argues in her dissertation the military leadership issues are quite special in certain matters when it comes to decision-making;

“A majority of ethical dilemmas within a military context are reported to stem from the paradox inherent in military ethics: sometimes having to resort to violent means for the utmost purpose of maintaining peaceful conditions...[..].”\(^{129}\)

Drawing from this set characteristic could imply that the officers interviewed displays determination\(^{130}\) in their taken actions. Exhibiting this trait during tough decisions and extreme stress could clear sign that the leader in question focuses on the right matter at hand; solving the task no matter what.

4. Discussion and Result

The concept of leadership is something which is a matter of great importance within the French armed forces, to the officers that work there and the cadets undergoing education to become future officers.

Though several times, when asked to openly reflect on what kind of leadership they themselves have when leading, the interviewees are perplexed. This has given me the impression that they seldom reflect on their own leadership qualities for some reason. Either, because it might be obvious at such a prestigious school as Saint-Cyr that all officers and cadets are leaders or because personal leadership qualities is something which one has as a trait or not, not something which can be obtained.

My interviews with the more experienced officers and cadets have shown me that they value experience even more than education when it comes to the matter of leadership and it is the experience which has been the central reservoir of knowledge in leadership and stress-handling for these experienced military leaders.

A reflection I’ve drawn is that the older and more experienced officers tend to lean back on the solid arguments and instructions found in the FT-05(The Tactical Commander’s Guide to Command and Control in Operations, French Doctrine)131 when closer describing WHAT is to be done during stressful events and combat situations. Even so, when asked HOW the leader should act the argument is heavily based on personal experiences rather than the formalized instructions from FT-05. This kind of switching between theory and experience suggests that there is a great deal of experience gained first-hand from these officers at a tactical level in combat situations which hasn’t trickled down to formalized doctrines where they are needed the most, for future generations of leaders.

The lack of formalized documentation in English on how to correctly lead and manage stress and difficult leadership situations gives the impression that there is a gap between leadership theory in educational and doctrinal material and experience-based leadership gained from leaders in tactical settings.

This gap strikes me as odd, since the leadership experiences all of the experienced officers have drawn and discussed with me during the interviews show as a whole that they believe in a kind of transformational leadership (quite similar to the Swedish Armed Forces leadership model) where the leader adapts to the environment and has a exemplary leadership towards his followers.

The FT-05 however is somewhat confusing in the sense that it only offers general recommendations or instructions which emphasizes on the leader having set characteristics that are key to managing the tasks as a tactical leader and discipline being at the core of commanding, rather than a functioning leadership. Also, I find it very hard to understand why historical leaders (even though successful in combat or not) are brought forward as examples throughout the doctrine. It gives me the impression that some claims on how commanding and leadership should be made lacks correct and valid research and therefore historical figures are brought forward as arguments, where a set trait or action was taken which likens that of the doctrinal assertion to successful leadership.

Returning to the matter of effective leadership during stress, I believe that the experienced officers and EMIA cadets I have interviewed carry with them invaluable stress-resilient leadership knowledge which has been obtained not through studies into theories but rather experiences. Their conclusions on how to manage and lead during stressful events are rather similar even though their backgrounds are different.

One could ascertain that these veteran leaders of soldiers, with their collective experience and knowledge in handling the matter of leadership during stress could provide facts and information that would make for ample instructions to younger, future leaders in-training at various military schools. This way, young leaders in
leadership situations, when faced with tough decisions and during stress will have been offered the possibility early on in their careers of theorising on the matter of stress and decision-making, hopefully making them more resilient towards stress and thus more effective leaders in an armed forces perspective.

4.1 Recommendations for further research

As a result from the conclusions drawn after the analysis the author deems it prudent for future researchers to deeper explore if there is a generic, unofficial leadership model the French officer corps as a whole makes use of and if it can be formalised. The need for documentation and further research into what constitutes the reasoning behind the leadership decision-making is evident and would be beneficial to the leadership skill process for the future military leaders.

Recognising that the French Army with it’s combat-hardened and experienced officer corps has an immense knowledge and collective know-how in matters of leadership during stress, future researchers venturing into stress-handling studies should have plentiful of accurate and reliable sources.

The need to have documented and researched material in the area of leadership during stress stems from the need to effectively train and educate future generations of officers and leaders of soldiers.

If the accumulated leadership knowledge of veteran officers leaders could be handed down to future officers, as early as during the cadet years, the army potentially stands to regain the first years of active service where the junior officer might otherwise have to learn effective and correct leadership by experiencing difficult and stressful events first-hand when on real assignments.

The author is a strong believer of the need for the military leader to constantly adapt and reshape his or her leadership in the face of an ever-changing environment where the combatant with the most effective fighting force will succeed.
Leadership is paramount in fighting effectively and therefore the author believes it to be the officer’s sole mission; to be an effective leader, in order to ensure success in battle.

4.2 Reflection

This thesis has offered me the opportunity of a lifetime, since very few Swedish cadets go abroad to write their final thesis before receiving the commission into the armed forces.

Having the chance to use the method of interview and participating observation to this apparent success (in the aspect of obtaining useful facts for my thesis) has led me to comprehend the amount of work and time put into greater researches and dissertations.

I also believe these two methods are the most accurate and provide for valid material if the author maintains a critical view of what he is experiencing and the information he is obtaining.

Granted, my own background (with basic education in interviewing willing informants) as a cadet and military man has given me the chance to understand certain undertones in the various interviews and therefore to ask the correct questions and to understand the reactions from the informants during the interviews.

The thesis, taking place in France, has also served as a great opportunity to get interesting and current facts on leadership in the field from war fighters and leaders of soldiers in wars across the globe. This is possible since France has numerous overseas military postings, among them conflict zones throughout Africa and in Afghanistan.

Working in a language which isn’t my native one has also been a fun and sometimes challenging task offering me the chance to become more proficient in English and
therefore bettering the odds at being able to work efficiently in an international context.

Due to the ever-changing arena of conflict, interoperability between nations, especially between Sweden and NATO countries is crucial since one conflict in the world can quickly become a global issue.

Sweden always has, and will continue to contribute to peace-keeping missions in the world and it is certainly uncertain at the moment in what direction Sweden’s relationship to NATO is going to evolve. However, understanding the differences in military leadership between Sweden and France (and other NATO countries) is something that will help me lead more effectively and ensure mission success in possible joint, future ventures.
5. Summary

The process of the thesis work has been spread out over three months with the description of method, interviews with transcription and analysis taking most of the time.

Using the method of interview has provided the author with actual and reliable data, completely critical for the analysis and the subsequent conclusions.

This thesis has reached several conclusions, among them two which are supreme in comparison to others:

- The need for documentation and further research into what constitutes the French officer corps’ generic leadership values and model due to the fact that this would be beneficial to the leadership skill cultivation for future military leaders.

- The need to have documented and researched material in the area of leadership during stress in order to effectively train and educate future generations of officers and leaders of soldiers.

Acting and implementing these two recommended programmes could serve as a way to further professionalise an already effective corps of war fighter leaders that constitutes the French Army officer corps.
6. References

6.1 Books


6.2 Internet


6.3 Articles and Studies


6.4 Interviews

Officer A; Écoles de Saint-Cyr Coëtquidan. Interview 2014-04-02.

Officer C; Écoles de Saint-Cyr Coëtquidan. Interview 2014-04-27

Officer D; Écoles de Saint-Cyr Coëtquidan. Interview 2014-04-28

EMIA Cadet A; Écoles de Saint-Cyr Coëtquidan. Interview 2014-04-02

EMIA Cadet B; Écoles de Saint-Cyr Coëtquidan. Interview 2014-04-02

ESM Cadet A; Écoles de Saint-Cyr Coëtquidan. Interview 2014-04-10

ESM Cadet B; Écoles de Saint-Cyr Coëtquidan. Interview 2014-04-10

ESM Cadet C; Écoles de Saint-Cyr Coëtquidan. Interview 2014-04-09
6.5 Observations

Participant Observation by Fredrik Cavalli-Björkman during stress exercise with cadets in 4th Battalion Écoles St-Cyr Coëtquidan at Camp Coëtquidan 2014-03-29 – 2014-03-30

6.6 Doctrines and regulations


6.7 Images

Image 1. Leadership points according to Officer A from interview 2014-04-02
Image 2. Officers and cadets interviewed for the thesis
7. Appendixes

7.1 Appendix 1 – Copy of Interview questions

Before the interview questions are answered I need you to answer these questions BRIEFLY:

Your age?

Your time in the army?

What branch (infantry, cavalry etc) are You in (or have belonged to)?

Your time as an instructor/teacher (at St-Cyr or other school)?

Your time as a commander (squad/platoon/section/company)?

Do You have combat experience?

This information I need in order to get a good picture of You as an officer and what experiences has shaped Your leadership and ideas of leadership.

Interview questions

- What is leadership to You?

- What is military leadership for You?

- Who is a good military leader?

- What signs do You see when conducting stress-exercises?
- What kind of leadership is good during stress?

- What are the aims of stressing the cadets during exercises?

- What is the outcome of the stress exercise?

- What is important in leadership for You?

- How would you describe Yourself as a leader?

- Your feelings experienced during stress(combat)?

- How did the feelings affect Your leadership?

- How did You cope with those feelings during the stress-related event?

- What reactions did your subordinates show during stress?

- How should a good leader act during stress according to You?


7.2 Appendix 2 – Excerpt from observational protocol

Two days of field-exercise preceded the capture of the 21 cadets of the 4<sup>th</sup> battalion.

We met up with the officers in charge of conducting the stress-exercise, from the leadership section at Saint-Cyr.

The cadets were, after crossing underneath a bridge, captured, hooded and handcuffed. The cadets were then placed in the back of white, large, car. After a while they were driven to what was revealed as a mock-up village where they were dropped in four groups.

Inside the buildings, which they were placed, they were forced to kneel, still hooded and cuffed, for an unknown time. Eventually a [jailor] man unlocked the handcuffs and locked the door to the building.

The cadets were then given written instructions and a subterranean map revealing tunnels going under the entire village. 
Here the first leadership moment starts when the cadet who receives the information must take his team out of danger and escape.

In the tunnels they also found food, water and weapons which they made use of during the escape.

In the tunnels the groups converged and three group leaders were led by what seemed to be a (self-appointed?) section leader among the cadets. After a while they succeeded in scouring the tunnels and found an exit and started a surprisingly well-organised exit.
During the exit I noticed one of the cadets who had an (faked) injury in his leg and couldn’t move through the tunnels. The other cadets opted to leave him in order to make a hasty getaway since he was screaming and couldn’t help himself through the tunnel system.

When the entire section (apart from the injured cadet left behind in the tunnels) had found their way out of the tunnel system, they made their way on foot, in darkness, to a rendezvous-point closer to the school campus, roughly two-three kilometres from the mock-up village.

At the rendezvous the exercise ended and captain “Philippe”, the officer in charge of the exercise, had an hour long briefing where the cadets recounted for the events from the capture until the rendezvous.

Captain Philippe explained that this briefing is as important a part of the exercise as the actual being captured and escaping event while all the frictions. This because the cadets got to contemplate their decisions during stress; why they made them and what could have been done differently.