



**MINISTÈRE  
DES ARMÉES  
ET DES ANCIENS  
COMBATTANTS**

*Liberté  
Égalité  
Fraternité*

**New Year's Address to the  
Military Community  
Val de Grâce  
Monday 26 January 2026  
Alice RUFO,  
Minister Delegate to the Minister  
for the Armed Forces and Veterans**

*Check against delivery*

Dear Members of Parliament,  
Dear Elected Representatives,  
Dear National Delegate of the Order of Liberation,  
Dear Secretary-General for the Administration,  
Dear Chief of the General Staff,  
Dear Chief of the Naval Staff,  
Dear Chief of the Air and Space Staff,  
Dear Military Governor of Paris,  
Dear Director of the French Military Medical Service,  
Dear Directors of the Central Administration,  
Dear General Officers,  
Dear Representatives of the cultural and museum community,  
Dear Representatives of the remembrance and military community,  
Dear Officers, NCOs, and Soldiers,  
Dear Arlette Testyler, thank you for your presence, which honours us and obliges us,  
Ladies and Gentlemen, in your ranks, grades, and qualities,

I am very glad to be here with you today, in the Val-de-Grâce, under these vaults, where the echo

of our history and those who made it resound.

In this abbey, which was turned into a military hospital 230 years ago, and now houses the **Museum of the French Military Medical Service** and the **Military Medical Academy**, a **structure of excellence**, which has federated, since 2024, medical monitoring, training, research and innovation.

This place thus embodies what makes the strength of this ministry and of our country: the intertwining of the **traditions of our history**, our **current commitment**, and our **reflection on the future**.

This is an opportunity to highlight an essential component of our Armed Forces, because we can never say it enough: the **French Military Medical Service is a major strategic asset**.

Its exemplary involvement in **guiding and assisting the injured victims of the Crans-Montana** tragedy reminded everyone of this.

In recent days, the news has shown what **'innovating to protect'** means: France now has an **antidote to ricin**, at the crossroads of biosecurity, sovereignty, private research and public action. I would like to pay tribute to those in the French Military Medical Service and in our ecosystem who have made this possible.

This place is also symbolic, because, as you saw in the museum that houses it, it contains everything that gives sense to the **mission our ministry has pursued since the First World War**: casts of **'broken faces'**, **reconstructive surgery**, but also, even then, the **invisible wounds** of 'shell shock' — and the difficult work of repair.

If you stroll around here, you will also be able to see a hospital waggon and its stretchers, all testimonies of the Great War: due a tragic concordance of times, these are **the same types of waggons that, today, evacuate the wounded from the front line in Ukraine**.

I have just returned from a visit to Ukraine, where I signed a **memorandum of understanding with Ukraine's Minister for Veterans** to support the wounded, share our experiences, but also to **implement a remembrance policy in a democratic state**.

I am counting on you to help us with this. And I know how committed you all have been, from the outset of the war, to showing solidarity with the Ukrainian people: I would like to take this

opportunity to thank you.

This visit further reinforced my conviction that **the remembrance, reparation and recognition policies pursued by the Ministry for the Armed Forces are not a mere 'side issue' in our diplomatic agenda and the life of the country.**

They are not simply a heritage of the past.

They convey a **message that is more relevant than ever, a message of values, solidarity and cohesion, a message of freedom.**

It is thus for me a huge mission and honour to have this responsibility for the veteran and military community, which is part of a **longstanding republican tradition that has begun with Maginot and Clemenceau: recognising and supporting our soldiers of yesterday and today.**

This is what I wanted to demonstrate during my first trip, when I visited Percy Hospital with the Minister for the Armed Forces and Veterans, then went to the Arc de Triomphe to rekindle the flame of the Unknown Soldier, symbol of the soldier of the Ideal glorified by Clemenceau.

It is through these actions that we ultimately pay the best tribute to the veteran and military community: by getting involved into its daily life, and remembering its past.

Because, **this is by remembering the sacrifices that we know why we work today.**

I come from diplomacy. I would like to thank personally, since it is a moment of greetings, our military commanders, who have welcomed me in this ministry, and who have considered that although a diplomat, I was nevertheless worthy to serve in the Ministry for the Armed Forces. They were able to teach me values I will never forget: those of **loyalty, the relationship to truth, the relationship to results.**

These values supported me in these first hundred days of my taking office, and will, hopefully, continue to support me at a time when – and I promise you, I will fight till the end –, **we need a budget for the Armed Forces.**

With this budget, we will be able to pursue, in 2026, our missions, whose first one is our necessary mobilisation for the veteran and military community.

## *Mobilisation for the Veteran and Military Community*

I have now met the main associations of the veteran and military community, which I thank for the quality of our exchanges.

You show how deeply **voluntary** you are.

You are keen — and you are right — **to be better associated with the life of our forces, the work towards our youth**, and, of course, **the setup of the new national service**.

I have listened to you and understood the attention we must pay to the **fourth generation of veterans**, and I see the reservoir of goodwill that exists throughout our country to make this projection into the future a success, without forgetting anything about our past, without leaving out any of the faces of the military community and those who support them every day, in Paris and in the field.

We have already done a great deal of work within the framework of the **G12** — a new acronym for me, after the G7 and G20 — which is not exclusive to other organisations of the military community, but which allows for operational engagement and follow-up on what is said. Together, we have revitalised this group.

The Minister for the Armed Forces has participated, and I believe this was a very important signal, to one of those meetings, and we will hold another one on the topics we have identified by February.

This is for the method. I just wanted to tell you I will stick to it.

The second element, this is the necessary evolution of our tribute, recognition and reparation policy.

### *Evolution of our tribute, recognition and reparation policy*

#### **Pay tribute, first:**

we must continue to honour the memory of all those who died for France, the Nation and the republic, by transmitting this memory to the young generations.

I won't hide my emotion **every time I see a flag bearer pass on his flag to a younger person**: It's **one of the most beautiful things I have ever seen**, and this is obviously something we must continue to do, **by reminding people of the value of commitment wherever it is needed; whenever it is needed.**

This morning, I was with the military governor of Paris at the **monument paying tribute to those who died in overseas operations**, to commemorate the sacrifice of the **90 French soldiers who died in Afghanistan alongside our allies.**

We see the sad reality and the necessity of such tributes.

To return to recent events, I am thinking of the **disgraceful attacks targeting the Harkis**, and I want to tell them that **we will fulfil the promises made by the President of the Republic regarding reparations**, and that the Republic will keep the promise that, unfortunately, it failed to keep in the past.

Giving all our gratitude to those, who deserve it, this is also **enhancing all forms of commitment.**

I would like to salute in this regard the **first promotion the National Defence Medal with the 'combatant' clasp**, an advance that we owe to the conviction of one of my predecessors, Jean-Louis Thiériot, whom I thank from the bottom of my heart: it is a **tangible recognition of the commitment to national cohesion and the bond between the Armed Forces and the Nation.**

I am delighted to see this new form of recognition come to life.

At the end of this New Year's address, we will award the first batch of these medals, thus honouring those in associations and in our institutions, who devote their energy and work to remembrance and solidarity.

### **Repairing, too:**

we must continue — and even accelerate — the **implementation of the Plan for the Wounded**. You have all heard that, in his New Year's address, the President of the Republic set us a deadline of **13 July**.

We have already begun working on accelerating what has already begun to be implemented, but which must be brought to completion: on **employability**, on the **treatment of psychological**

**injuries, on the simplification of procedures.**

I would like to commend all the SGA teams, who have made great progress.

I have visited many **Athos homes** recently, and I believe that we need to consolidate this general system, which was born out of an idea from the Army, and that we must make **sustainable**.

One of my first trips, in fact, was to an Athos house in Bordeaux.

There, I spoke to one of the wounded, and he said something to me that I will never forget: 'We are not primarily war wounded, we are wounded warriors.'

I believe that this **preserved link with the Armed Forces**, as embodied by the Athos Houses, is absolutely **essential in the policy of reparation**.

There is also the issue of the **Military Invalid Pension point value**, in a difficult budgetary context. Nevertheless, I have made commitments.

We will therefore begin **work on the biannual report** in a few days' time, and I hope that this will be the first step in a process that will lead us to a **reevaluation of the point value**.

In this policy of reparation, I do not want to forget the **Institution nationale des Invalides**, which I visit regularly and whose **new strategic review** we have just approved.

I am counting on all departments of the Ministry for the Armed Forces to support the ongoing smooth running of this magnificent institution in the work that lies ahead.

I am talking about the Institution nationale des Invalides, the first national solidarity institution in our country, whose origins date back to Louis XIV.

I do not forget that the Invalides also houses, of course, the Museum of the Armed Forces.

*Creating Bridges between the Military Community and the Nation*

This brings me to another priority for our action in 2026: the **cultural action**, in the broadest sense, of the Ministry for the Armed Forces, at a very particular moment, where we need to **create**

**more and more bridges between the military community and the Nation**, in a **general** worldwide **cultural battle**.

Because, when we talk about **globalised hybrid war**, we must also take into account the **narratives** and the way history is told.

In this perspective, our museums and the museums of the Armed Forces are absolutely essential. One of the first actions I had to carry out was to **protect** them.

We all had in mind what had happened at the Louvre.

I would like to thank the management teams of the major museums, which enabled us to take stock of the situation and launch the necessary measures.

I would also like to commend their professionalism, efficiency and responsiveness, and I would like to tell you that my team and I will, of course, continue to monitor the implementation of the measures we agreed upon on this occasion.

**Opening our museums, archives, memorial sites** to all audiences, all forms of **art**, the **cultural and creative industries**, and, of course, the youth.

Art has always accompanied the military experience, and I think that it is essential to maintain this link.

**Turning to young people.**

I remember my **first visit to the Mont Valérien**, Mr National Delegate of the Order of Liberation, of the force of what I have seen there, and of all that we have to **tell the young generations** about it.

So that they remember the commitment of those who fell for us, and the reasons why they were able to **act as one Nation, create our unity, stand up for our values and uphold them in the best and most beautiful way possible**.

A word about the **Bleuet de France (Cornflower of France)**, which many of you are wearing today, and that's very good!

It celebrated this year its 100th anniversary, with an **exceptional mobilisation** for this simple, little, but so meaningful flower.

I congratulate all those, who have worn it before me, beginning, of course, with my predecessors, to achieve the level of collection reached in 2025.

I am being told that it must be a benchmark: not at all. We must exceed it, and we must go even further next year!

Speaking of centenaries, the **Navy** is even older: it will celebrate its **400th anniversary** this year. I really wanted to tell you, Admiral, Chief of the Naval Staff, that we are very proud to celebrate this anniversary with you – that's the Toulonnaise speaking – which is not only an history exercise, but also the **demonstration of our naval capacities** and our **ability to fight at sea**.

Before concluding, I would like to reiterate that the action we carry out for the veteran and military community is not disconnected from what we do in the world and the role our country is playing.

**Cooperation is developing increasingly between the veteran and military community of different countries**, in Europe, but also elsewhere.

I think of **Lebanon** by looking at you, where I hope we will be going together.

I was thinking about **Ukraine**, of course, in the defence of Europe, which we must strengthen.

I believe we must remember that **historical revisionism always precedes war**.

And that's what happened in Russia, since it was right after the **dissolution of the Memorial association**, which documented the crimes of Stalinism, that the Kremlin regime launched its war.

And this is no coincidence because, **when you want to rewrite history, you fundamentally want to rewrite borders**.

So it is essential to **build bridges between what countries on the European continent are experiencing today in the form of war, and what we have experienced, and our shared history**,

**that which unites free Europeans, who want to defend their sovereignty and international law.**

Finally, another historical reference that I believe is relevant today: I would like to quote what **General de Lattre de Tassigny** said in 1951 about the **Franco-American friendship**.

He said he was very proud to have had more than **100,000 soldiers from the United States** under his command in the **1<sup>st</sup> Army**.

He said France was very **proud to have been able to contribute to the birth of such a nation, such a great nation**.

He said that **the bond forged by history between the two nations, beyond successive governments, is unwavering**.

When I travelled to Washington, I went to the **Arlington cemetery** to honour the memory of **American freedom fighters**.

As we have celebrated the **80th anniversary of the landings and Victory**, I would like to pay tribute to the remarkable work of the **Liberation Mission**: the medal we are about to award is a mark of our deep gratitude for its outstanding work.

Today, my thoughts are with **Charles Norman Shay**, a **Native American nurse who landed on the beaches of Normandy**, who had chosen our country to live in, and whose funeral was held last month at the Bayeux Cathedral.

In this year, when we will also celebrate the **250th anniversary of the United States Declaration of Independence** on 4 July 1776, what General de Lattre said resonates more strongly than ever. He called for the courage to **remain free in the face of 'deceitful powers'**. He reminded us of what we must all remember: **freedom and truth must always be conquered and always defended**.

He concluded his text with a vibrant call:

**'Culture today sounds like a call to arms, because it gives people reasons to live, to live freely, and therefore reasons — and the duty — to fight against servitude.'**

Here is the lesson from the Franco-American friendship: **knowledge of history, of our culture, the**

transmission of our memory, the link between generations, the ties between the Armed Forces and the Nation, and everything that brings us together today, everything that symbolises the place where we are, at the Val-de-Grâce, must give us the keys to understanding the contemporary world.

And you are the actors, and I dare say, **the ambassadors, the ambassadors of this patriotism**, which is a great word:

**a word that belongs neither to the left nor to the right,  
a word that belongs to everyone,  
a word that unites everyone,  
which excludes nothing, and which excludes nobody.**

A word, as the philosopher **Simone Weil** said in 1942, that conveys a feeling of '**poignant tenderness for something beautiful, precious, fragile and perishable**'.

Your fight shows that we must always defend it, that we must always defend what our soldiers died for, and that patriotism, in this year when we are going to honour **Marc Bloch** at the Pantheon, is a **vital necessity**.

Because the **spirit of defeat is a deadly poison** and our country is one of **invincible hope**: because there is always a moment when it rearms itself, and it will always be **the country that has decided to be strong in order to protect what is right; to defend the international order based on law, based on peace**.

**With a hope that runs through testimonies, memories, the commitment of our soldiers, the hope that helps our wounded recover, the hope that prompts young women and young men to risk their lives even today, because they believe that we share France, and that it deserves to be defended, that it is — as the poem said 'always more beautiful than tears'**.

In the name of this hope, which we will continue to carry together in 2026, I would like to wish you all a wonderful year — hopefully by your side.

That, at any rate, is my wish.

**Long live our freedom, long live the Republic, and long live France!**

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