

Swiss Military Cadets and Sports (1758-1907)

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The first corps of cadets were created in Switzerland in the XVIIIth century after the cadet-schools of Louis XIV of France, Friedrich II of Prussia and the schools for noblemen of Germany and Austria. The Swiss corps were not boarding-schools, and offered military training to 10- 18 year old boys only some hours per week. Such corps were established for patrician sons, but in other cities all boys were raised for para-military exercises in which J.J. Rousseau himself was involved in Geneva.

In the Swiss Cantons (states) military service has been always compulsory, and the cadets were like juniors of the cantonial armies. They had splendid uniforms and often infantry, brass band, drummers and even artillery. Their maneuvers, parades and camps attracted parents, teachers and a large public. The cadets were usually incorporated in high schools and offered something like a physical training. About 150 corps were created from 1758 to 1907, often as reaction to dangers around Switzerland, e.g. from 1830 to 1874 (revolutions of 1830 and 1848; wars in Central Europe 1860-1871).

Schools introduced physical education little by little, firstly in private institutes (Pestalozzi in Yverdon, 1805-1825), then in several public schools and after 1850 in some Cantons. In the 1860's some European states (Prussia, France, etc.) improved their army by introducing gymnastics for soldiers and boys schools. In Switzerland the army became federal in 1874, imposed compulsory gymnastics for 10-15 year old boys and facultative military exercises with shooting for young men (16-20). The military law of 1907 introduced gymnastics, which became later physical education, for 7- 17 year old boys, and facultative training for 16-20 year old men in three branches: gymnastics or shooting or military courses. These courses were like "popular cadets" and had in 1907, 8.861 in 13 Cantons. A compulsory sport tests for all 19 year old recruits obliged schools and the three branches to promote games, sports and out-door activities.

Although traditional cadets, patronized by secondary schools, adapted their programme and introduced outdoor sports, their corps were dissolved little by little. In 1907 there were 6.931 boys in 55 corps (Switzerland had 3.5 million inhabitants). However the evolution of cadets from 1758 to 1907, from the sons of aristocrats to the republicans and the junior armies of the Cantons, is in accordance with the evolution of national defense, from the Cantonal contingents to the Swiss federal army. It shows a change in people's mentality and the rise of games, sports and outdoor activities.