

Press Release

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Ecole de l'Air names Class of 2017 after General Robert Aubinière, first Director General of CNES

Friday 6 July at Air Base 701 in Salon-de-Provence, the Ecole de l'Air, France's air officer training school, held its traditional class naming ceremony. The Class of 2017 was named after General Robert Aubinière, who after a career in the French air force that saw him posted to the Ecole de l'Air on two occasions, including several months as its commanding officer, was instrumental in getting France's space programme off the ground.

Choosing to join the French air force in 1935 after his graduation from the Ecole Polytechnique engineering school, General Robert Aubinière began his career in Algeria flying transport aircraft. In 1943, he joined the French Resistance in London. He was arrested and deported to Germany, where he remained a prisoner of war from April 1944 until the Liberation. Resuming his career with the French air force after the war, he later became the commanding officer of the Ecole de l'Air and Air Base 701 in Salon-de-Provence on 10 January 1960. In February 1962, General Robert Aubinière was appointed Director General of the newly formed Centre National d'Etudes Spatiales (CNES), in application of the Statute of 19 December 1961. He occupied this post until 1971 and was also from 1968 to 1970 Chair of the Council of ELDO, the European Launcher Development Organization.

The Ecole de l'Air is part of the ISAE global aerospace training and research institute. It has ties to CNES through a memorandum supporting space training for its trainee officers. The class naming ceremony is a solemn moment at which the French air force's future officers swear to serve with honour, following the example of the person after which their class is named. The Class of 2017 comprises 126 trainee officers.

On this occasion, Jacques-Emile Blamont, Emeritus Professor at Pierre et Marie Curie University, member of the French Science Academy, a pioneer of France's space policy and advisor to all CNES Presidents since 1961, commented: "A brave Resistance fighter and an officer with a great career record, General Robert Aubinière made a huge contribution to the French and European space community. In particular, he was behind the creation of the Toulouse Space Centre, the choice of Kourou as launch base and the exemplary construction of the Guiana Space Centre. His career will serve as an inspiration for the Ecole de l'Air's young trainee officers."

CNES President Jean-Yves Le Gall, present at the naming ceremony, added: "The honour bestowed tonight on General Robert Aubinière, who led our agency 50 years ago, is an extraordinary tribute to his efforts laying the foundation for the success of France and Europe's space programme. On behalf of all of CNES's employees, I would like to thank the French air force for this distinction that honours all of us: everyone at our agency knows how much they owe to General Robert Aubinière."

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