Ex? No, thanks: military rank and qualification last forever. The law establishes it.

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When a military member is no longer in active service, newspapers and television often tend to present them as **“ex-general”**, **“ex-colonel”**, or **“ex-marshal”**. An apparently harmless formula, but one that reveals a lack of knowledge of Italian regulations and, above all, a profound conceptual error.

A military member, in fact, **never ceases to be one**: the rank and qualification are **acquired forever**, just as with a degree or an honor.

The law is clear: no “ex-military”. A General remains a General, a Corporal remains a Corporal

Law no. 113 of April 10, 1954, with subsequent amendments and integrations, today largely incorporated into the **Legislative Decree of March 15, 2010, no. 66 (Military Ordinance**

Code) and the related **D.P.R. 90/2010**, regulates the **legal status of Italian military personnel**. According to this regulation, a military member can be in different conditions:

- **Permanent service (for all):** the military member is in active duty and fully performs their duties.
- **Auxiliary (only officers and some non-commissioned officers):** the military member is on leave but remains at the disposal of the State and can be recalled for up to 5 years.
- **Reserve (only officers and non-commissioned officers):** the military member is placed on leave with the possibility of recall within certain age limits established by law.
- **Unlimited leave (troops):** indicates cessation from service, with retention on the recall list until reaching the age limit.
- **Absolute leave (for all):** the military member definitively ceases active service and is no longer recallable, while retaining acquired rank and qualification.
- **Early leave (for all):** cessation from service for particular reasons (e.g., health or discipline), while retaining acquired rank and qualification.

In none of these cases, however, does the law contemplate the use of the term **“ex”**. The **rank and qualification**, once conferred — for officers with a **decree of the President of the Republic** and for non-commissioned officers and troops with **ministerial provisions** — have **lifetime** value.

There are therefore no **“ex-officers”**, nor **“ex-marshals”**, **“ex-sergeants”**, or **“ex-soldiers”** : every military member remains such forever, regardless of the position they are in.

A **General** can be in service or on leave, but will never be an **“ex-General”**. The same applies to every other rank: a **Carabinieri Marshal** may be a former station commander, but never an **“ex-Marshal”**; a **Soldier**, representing the first step in the Army hierarchy, **remains such forever**.

It is correct to say **“former Commander”** of a unit or **“former Director”** of an office, because it refers to a function, not a rank. But defining the qualification itself as “ex” is incorrect, both **linguistically** and **legally**.

Articles regulating the matter

Art. 874 – Categories of legal status

The **Legislative Decree of March 15, 2010, no. 66** is clear: there is no legal status of ex-military, but of "military on leave".

"*Based on the position of **legal status**, military members are distinguished into:*

a) military in permanent service;

b) military in temporary service;

c) military on leave."

Art. 879 – Position of status on leave

The military member on leave is suspended from exercising the functions of the rank, meaning they **do not exercise command powers nor are subject to the obligation of hierarchical obedience**, but **do not lose the rank**, except in cases expressly provided by law.

"*The military member on leave can be:*

a) temporarily recalled or retained in service;

b) suspended from the functions of the rank."

Art. 861 – Causes of loss of rank

"*The rank is lost **exclusively** in the following cases:*

a) voluntary resignation (of the rank, not of the service, Art. 862);

b) resignation by authority;

c) removal from the rolls;

d) removal following a disciplinary proceeding;

e) criminal conviction."

Art. 880 - Categories of personnel on leave

Even in the case of absolute leave, meaning no longer bound to active service obligations, **the military member DOES NOT LOSE THE RANK**. In particular, Paragraph 6 explicitly states:

"*Military members on absolute leave are no longer bound to active service obligations in peacetime, wartime, or severe international crisis; **the military member on absolute leave retains the rank** and the honor of the uniform, which can be worn according to the provisions of each Armed Force or the Guardia di Finanza Corps, and is subject to legal provisions*

reflecting the rank and discipline."

Alpini, Bersaglieri, Paratroopers: identity for life

Some military corps represent much more than a period of service: they are an **identity that accompanies forever** those who have experienced them. The **Alpini**, the **Bersaglieri**, and the **Paratroopers** embody this indissoluble bond with a tradition, a symbol, and a lifestyle that are not lost with leave. Talking about **“ex-Alpino”**, **“ex-Bersagliere”**, or **“ex-Paratrooper”** is not only improper but also offensive to those who have proudly worn the **hat with the feather**, the **plume**, or the **maroon beret**.

The only correct definition is **“Alpino on leave”**, **“Bersagliere on leave”**, or **“Paratrooper on leave”**, because one can leave the uniform, but not the belonging to a corps that becomes an integral part of one's identity for life.

When rank can be lost

According to the **Military Ordinance Code (D.Lgs. 66/2010)**, the rank can be lost either for **criminal causes** or for **state disciplinary measures**.

The loss of rank can occur:

As a result of a criminal conviction

In some cases, the sentence may provide for **degradation** or **removal from rank**, especially when the crime is such as to render the military member unworthy of belonging to the Armed Forces. These are accessory penalties provided by military criminal law.

By state disciplinary measure

The rank can also be lost **without a criminal conviction**, through a **state disciplinary proceeding**, in cases of particular gravity that harm the prestige, decorum, or honor of the Military Institution.

By automatic effect of certain convictions

In some cases provided by law, the loss of rank occurs **by right**, without the need for further disciplinary judgment.

Other causes provided by the Code (non-criminal)

In general, the Code lists more causes of loss of rank (not limited to criminal sentencing): for example, **resignations, removal from rolls, removal following proceedings**, etc. (art. **861** c.o.m.).

It is important to emphasize that these are exceptional episodes. In the vast majority of cases, military members who end their service remain lifelong bearers of their rank, whether they are on leave, in reserve, or in auxiliary.

Rank and qualification: a recognition forever

The conferral of rank is not an ordinary administrative act: for **officers** it occurs through a **decree of the President of the Republic**, while for **non-commissioned officers and troops** through ministerial provisions. In any case, it is a recognition of a **permanent** nature, which for legal and moral importance can be compared to a **degree**, a **diploma**, or an **honorary decoration**: titles that never lose validity.

Just as one never becomes **“ex-graduates”** or **“ex-decorated”**, one never becomes **“ex-officers”** or **“ex-soldiers”**. The military rank has an **indelible** character: it can be suspended in the exercise of functions, but it is never erased, except in the rare cases of a criminal conviction with a sentence that entails degradation.

Respect and precision

Defining a military member as **“ex”** means **trivializing** their history, service, and commitment. It is a mistake that the media should avoid, replacing it with correct terms such as **“on leave”**, **“in auxiliary”**, or **“former commander”**.

Because **there are no exes**: the qualification and rank are **acquired forever**.