



Rugby and the Army: shared values

2/2 - BRENNUS 4.0

le chef de bataillon Pierre-Charles de l'École de Guerre Terre

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The demands of combat for the soldier, or for the rugby player, require more than ever (albeit to different degrees) to rely on values such as: combativeness, a sense of sacrifice, fraternity.

Fighting spirit

The latter is found in the characteristics of a strong fighting troop as it is the prerogative of many rugby teams. It is mentioned in the directive on behaviour in the Army as a factor that reinforces the moral strength of the soldier in the exercise of his mission. It is associated with "team spirit" [8].

8] Thus, in rugby, this fighting spirit is expressed in various ways by the great nations of the sport. We will speak of the Irish "fighting spirit", Scottish courage, the "furia francese", an expression directly derived from military history and invented by the Italians, to describe French ardour in combat during the Battle of Formua in 1495.

And what about the Haka of the All Blacks, a true Maori warrior song assimilating rugby to a fight, where we find the need to overcome fear and to stand together?

"We are not afraid of you and you will bow down before the brave warriors that we are! ... Face up, face in a row! ">[9].

It is not far from the warrior songs and rites, to which armies have always lent themselves throughout the ages, to maintain combativeness and esprit de corps in their ranks.

The coach of the Nîmes team, Tim Daniel, praises the fighting spirit of head sergeant

Tavite Veredemu, a player in the French rugby team at seven and non-commissioned officer in the 2nd foreign infantry regiment, underlining the continuity of his legionnaire status right up to the rugby pitch: "In life, he is a legionnaire. On the field too. When they tell him to go to battle, he goes. He is capable of putting his head where others do not set foot" [10].

The sense of sacrifice

Just as the soldier knows that his life is on the line, the rugby player knows before every game that he is going to face a physical confrontation and that he will have to endure shocks. He also knows that his failure in one line of defence can penalize his entire team. Henry Chavancy, the general's son, talks about "the responsibilities that come from a defensive front line, where every teammate has an important role to play" [11].

11] Thus, rugby, as if by a sad irony of history, was the French team sport that was hardest hit by the First World War. It lost 121 players. The glorious Stade toulousain alone lost 81 of its players. The Allies lost 102 international players. Since 2013, French players have been wearing the Bleu et de France on their polo shirts in honour of the 1914-1918 combatants.

Two figures perfectly embody generosity on the field and in combat:

- George André known as Géo André:

An outstanding athlete, he is a great international rugby player. Wounded and taken prisoner at the beginning of the First World War, he escaped after his fifth attempt in 1917 and served in the air force until the end of the war. His athletic skills and the fighting spirit he displayed in the sport led him to enlist

in Africa's corps francs during the Second World War, when he was 54 years old. He died in action in Tunisia in 1943.

- Dave Gallaher, captain of the All-Blacks:

A formidable player known for his talent and charisma, he volunteered for the war at the age of 41. He died at the Battle of Passchendaele on October 4, 1917. The Dave Gallaher Trophy has been awarded since 2000, the winner of the first test match of the year between France and New Zealand.

Brotherhood

More than ever, cohesion is necessary in combat as it is on a rugby pitch. The fraternity of arms that binds the combatants is considered in the Army as "one of the essential conditions of collective action" [12]. 12] It is in no way different from the brotherhood that binds the players of a rugby team together. In an interview given on the rugby site, military rugby international Antoine Robichon, speaks of rugby as "the sport that best fits the military spirit with values of solidarity, cohesion without forgetting the strategic side"[13].

13] Daniel Herrero, former international and coach of the Racing club of Toulon, sums up perfectly the meeting of these three values in a documentary on the ancestral Franco-English rivalry in rugby. It is the confrontation of danger on the pitch, from which one is not sure to emerge unscathed, that confers, according to him, a quasi-military nature to rugby, thus inciting the player to sacrifice himself for the comrades who support him:

"The best way to create a bond is to generate danger. That's military! To generate danger, we invented a game where there is danger. When you enter a rugby field, you never know how you get out. But as there is danger, solidarity will become obligatory. We're going to come up with rules that will encourage solidarity. The rule is: to go forward where there is danger, you look at the danger. ...] You'll have to make your move backwards, because all your colleagues are behind you. Solidarity is an absolute law"[14].

14] Aware of the strong ties that unite it to rugby, the Army is constantly bringing rugby to life in its ranks, like the Pacific XV, created eleven years ago. Heir to the traditions of the Pacific Battalion engaged in the Free French Forces during the Second World War, he is a true ambassador of military and rugby values.

Conclusion

Thus, it is because rugby is the epitome of team combat sport, that its comparison with the military world makes sense.

It is indeed the complexity of this warlike game from its origins, based on shock, speed and the ability to seize the opportunity, that brings it closer to inter-services combat. In addition to this, there are the values, without which the confrontation it requires in the field would not be possible, values that the Army is constantly cultivating to unite the men and women who make it up.

A school of combativeness and collective discipline, this sport is more than ever promoted within armies as a true haven of the warrior spirit, the very spirit that made the soldier and rugby player Manguez, mortally hit by a machine gun bullet during the First World War, say: "Go and say that I haven't yet backed down from the fray" [15].

8] Army Staff, Directive on Behaviour in the Army, 2001, p.17.

9] Source: <https://paroles2chansons.lemonde.fr/paroles-ora-mate/paroles-kamate.html>

10] Source: https://www.rugbyrama.fr/rugby/rugby-a-7/2017-2018/rugby-a-7-tavite-veredamu-le-legionnaire_sto6861583/story.shtml

11] Yves BILLON, op.cit .

12] Etat-major de l'Armée de Terre, Livre bleu sur l' exercice du commandement, 2015.

13] Source: <http://www.lerugbynistere.fr/chroniques/vis-ma-vie-de-rugbyman-international-dans-l-armee-avec-antoine-robichon-.php>

14| Maxime BOLLON, Ces chers ennemis, documentary, 2007.

15| Michel MERCKEL, op. cit. , p. 203.

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