



La Pointe de l'Éguillette

General Tactical Review - Fire

Colonel François-Régis LEGRIER, COM TN/ Chef de la division adaptation préparation à l'engagement

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Tactique générale

In the summer of 1793, back in France after an unfortunate expedition to Sardinia¹, Bonaparte found himself near Carteaux, which was besieging Toulon then occupied by^{the} English. The two men already knew each other because Bonaparte had helped Carteaux take Avignon from the counter-revolutionaries some time before. Carteaux did not particularly appreciate the man he ironically called the "captain canon" but nevertheless invited him to witness the fire of the English fleet which was to be carried out by the artillery under the command of Dammartin. Let Marmont tell the rest: "Bonaparte, as a man of the trade, knew what to expect on arrival and announced that the cannonballs would not go into the sea (...) four cannon shots were enough to make it clear how much the fire had been caused by the cannon. The preparations made were ridiculous; Ollioules was given a low ear and it was believed with good reason that it was best to hold Captain Bonaparte and report to him.² »

Having been appointed commander, Bonaparte took charge of operations and identified Pointe de l'Éguillette, defended by the English redoubt in Cairo, as the key point of ground from which he could beat the Little roadstead of Toulon with his fire and thus prevent access to the English navy supporting the insurgents. After several unsuccessful attempts, the Cairo redoubt was taken from the English and the Pointe de l'Éguillette occupied by artillery on 17 December 1793. The English squadron immediately weighed anchor and the Republican forces were able to seize Toulon. This tactical success was also a political victory that earned Bonaparte the appointment of Brigadier General.

What does this historical anecdote tell us? It is that before being a series of brilliant concepts, the ABC of tactics consists first of all in using one's means, including one's firepower, correctly in order to be within firing range and to obtain the best return.

Let us take another example. In his book *Sous le Feu*³ Michel Goya recounts the spring of 1918, French soldiers seized German 13 mm anti-tank guns capable of piercing the armour then in stock at 300 metres and realised that this "miracle weapon" had finally destroyed only two light tanks. When asked about the use of this weapon, German prisoners gave the following explanation: the weapon was too heavy and delicate to use, implying too great an exposure to danger; the shots were therefore fired in a hurry with almost no yield.

This example reminds us that if range, power and precision are essential factors, we must not forget the simplicity of use, hardness and production capacity.⁴

Tactics and Use of Fires :

in constant search for the best performance

Thus, the yield of a weapon is linked not only to its intrinsic performance but also to its environment and the technical-tactical choices made. In today's operations, where air support is used extensively, the Cassear gun, which is technically very high-performance, can see its performance weakened by 3D coordination constraints, resulting in firing delays that are incompatible with tactical manoeuvres. This is why, during the Battle of Hajin in October-December 2019, Task Force Wagram redeployed less than three kilometres from the border with the United States. This is why, during the battle of Hajin in October-December 2019, Task Force Wagram redeployed less than three kilometres from the Iraqi-Syrian border in order to be able to beat the entire action zone with fire on the one hand and to reduce the firing delays linked to 3D coordination on the other.⁵

The first obsession of a tactical leader should therefore be to obtain the best return on the firepower entrusted to him, starting with the most consequent and to always remain manoeuvrable, i.e. to maintain a certain reversibility in his modes of action. There is undoubtedly here a way of reflection to be able, in certain circumstances, to approach in a different way our conception of manoeuvre by articulating it around what constitutes the firepower of a large unit: LRU, 155 Caesar guns and 120 mortar, Hellfire missiles from the Tiger, 120 guns from the Leclerc tank, missiles from the Infantry. The maneuver is no longer elaborated in GTIA spindle but in successive fire bases that the large unit must conquer to take the advantage over the enemy. This is the essence of SCORPION combat: producing effects and not a maneuver supported by effects.

Can you imagine in naval combat⁶ build a maneuver around avisos by leaving frigates or battleships with superior firepower "in support"? This is often what we do, however, by studying the fire support maneuver only after we have developed our mode of action.

It is thus a question in an operation of determining our "Pointe de l'Égaillette", i.e. the best space-time framework allowing us to use our firepower in the best possible way and to impose our will on the adversary. This process, which was tested by the 92nd IR EMT during a SCORPION exercise in March 2019, deserves to be studied in greater depth and its translation studied in MEDOT.

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Remote firing and contact operation

That said, it should be borne in mind that while getting the best return from firepower is essential, it is not the ultimate horizon for tactical thinking.

Indeed, since antiquity, the purpose of combat has not changed: it is to impose one's will on the enemy by force. This is true at the political, strategic and tactical levels. While fire is essential, it is not enough. As long as we have not "planted the flag" in the opposing camp, we can knock them out under a deluge of fire, but victory is not guaranteed. Indeed, the ability to shoot from a distance, which reserves the death zone for the opponent, is necessary but not sufficient, as Michel Goya reminds us in his book already quoted: "It would indeed be very difficult, from the first Gulf War to the recent war in Libya, to find a single example of the success of long-range action alone. Air or air-mobile raids are often very effective, but they are not enough to win a political decision. Experience shows again and again that it is necessary for victory to be signified by a soldier planting a flag somewhere.⁷ »

Israel's war in southern Lebanon in 2006 was a rich experience in this respect. At the time, the CDEF carried out an in-depth analysis of it.⁸ which highlights the setbacks of long-distance combat and some elements of which are taken up by Mr Goya: "During the month of July 2006, the Israelis launched more than 5 000 shells and 250 missiles, guided bombs and cluster bombs every day over the 45 x 25 km rectangle in southern Lebanon. Hezbollah never folded and a ground force had to be engaged, which was discovered to be incapable of conducting large-scale operations.⁹ »

A good understanding of fire effects

So it's important to remember that the use of fire is a double-edged sword. It undeniably has destructive effects on the enemy's potential, as well as significant psychological effects (astonishment, loss of spatial and temporal reference points, feelings of powerlessness and terror, etc.).¹⁰) that you have to know how to exploit. On the other hand, however, used massively and indiscriminately, particularly in urban areas, the use of fires can have counter-productive effects by transforming a given area into an impregnable bastion.¹¹ This can be done by causing disproportionate collateral damage that discredits the action, by destroying the area to be cleared, or by strengthening the opponent's resolve.

It may even lack its purely kinetic effect, and there is a finding in the CDEF document that can be found in the fight against Daesh in the Hajin pocket, namely the relative ineffectiveness of air strikes such as counter-battery fire in the face of rustic but highly mobile enemy artillery. There is here a major line of thought to make our counter-battery

truly effective through the implementation of short loops (intelligence acquisition or fire detection, response, evaluation).

This conflict shows one thing: it is not enough to identify and destroy a certain number of targets to make the adversary bend, especially when you are fighting on his ground and he has the support of the population; you must be capable of. You must be able to go into contact in the image of a bird of prey that is melting on its prey, that is to say to exploit very quickly on the ground the disorganization of the opposing device normally created by our fire before it recovers. This implies knowing how to determine precisely the right moment to launch the attack and the right distance: too short, the energy of the attack does not have time to be deployed, too long, it weakens before having reached its objective.

Taking the environment into account in tactical thinking and the use of fire

But before going to contact, the tactical commander must take into account these two dimensional factors: the population and the media. Poorly designed long-distance warfare is not only a failure in that, far from breaking the resistance of the adversary, it strengthens him, but also because, through the inevitable decollateral damage that it provokes and that the adversary knows how to exploit with reactivity, it calls into question the legitimacy of the action in the eyes of international public opinion.

To quote the CDEF on the 2006 war: "Not only did the Lebanese army not move to try to disarm Hezbollah, but the strikes on Lebanon gave international public opinion the feeling of a flagrant disproportion between the casus belli and the response.

It is estimated that, for the war as a whole, 1,183 Lebanese civilians were killed and 4,000 injured, and 18,000 homes were destroyed or damaged in Beirut alone. The country's infrastructure was devastated and the economy was paralysed by the blockade. According to the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP), the total cost of the damage amounts to \$15 billion, in a country whose debt is already \$30 billion, or 200 per cent of GDP.¹² »

Fighting in the midst of the people is the hallmark of most modern conflicts, and our adversaries know perfectly well how to exploit this situation by using the people as a human shield. In this context, every major firefight must be weighed against the tactical gains and the political and media risks involved. The choice will be all the easier as communication will not only be planned but also reactive so as not to give the enemy time to publish its victory communiqués and denounce or fabricate the "horrors" of the other side. The tactical manoeuvre must therefore be accompanied by a manoeuvre of influence so as not to lose in hearts and minds what we gain on the ground.

Rommel asserted that in infantry combat "the one who fires first and has the most

firepower wins. This is probably also true on the media battlefield. Here too, one must be able to concentrate one's efforts and exploit a situation quickly.

* * *

For an articulated manoeuvring design around the fire effort phase

Continuing our tactical thinking outlined above, it is then possible to draw up a manoeuvre concept whose initial phase, focused on intelligence acquisition, consists in identify fire efforts that are not designed in support and distributed by manoeuvre time but determined by the effect of destroying or neutralizing an essential capability of the enemy device. These fire efforts must be screened for expected kinetic effects, as well as psychological and potentially media effects, so as not to misinterpret the effects. By inference, the manoeuvre develops by itself, as it were, through the temporary or permanent seizure of fire bases.¹³ and the identification of actions prior to my fire efforts (sensor maneuver, deception maneuver, EM jamming, etc).

This maneuver must remain flexible and adaptable thanks to a solid depth acquisition capability combining EM detection means, 3D means and human observation.¹⁴. This redundancy is essential for at least three reasons:

- guarantee the accuracy of the lights,
- to mitigate the hazards (bad weather conditions, jamming, neutralizations etc.) and not to be blind at the decisive moment,
- seizing opportunities.

Such a high level of interaction between acquisition, intelligence and fire militates in favour of a closer integration of the RENS and FIRE cells of a large unit OC, as the speed with which one is able to exploit an opportunity is essential in combat. More generally, entrusting the large unit fire cell with the phase of conducting fire efforts before switching back to a more conventional operation in the exploitation phase is a solution that deserves to be further explored.

Finally, tactical thinking must continue with the integration of influence operations in order to optimise the effects both sought and achieved or, conversely, to limit undesirable effects. It ends with the search for the best performance, i.e. the definition of the mode of action that will enable me to obtain maximum effects with minimum effort and thus preserve my potential for future action.

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In conclusion: remote warfare - remote effect

If war is primarily a matter of will, we must attack the enemy first in his brain before we attack him in his physical strength. As François Jullien points out in his remarkable *Traité de l'efficacité*, devoted to the study of Chinese thinkers, the good strategist works upstream; he creates the conditions of success and knows that he has already won when he fights: The ideal in war," says the Chinese classic, "is to attack the opponent in his strategy, then in his alliances, then in his troops, and finally in his places. To start a siege war directly is the worst, both because of the resulting bogging down of forces and because one is most exposed to it; this immobile face-to-face represents the zero degree of strategy.¹⁵ »

Thus, before waging war at a distance once confrontation is inevitable, we must first seek the effect at a distance, that is, the effect obtained by acting upstream of a situation and not in reaction.

This approach must lead us to enhance our understanding of the adversary and his way of thinking so that he acts in the desired direction but also detect his flaws (in his alliances, his organization, his morale etc.) and exploit them instead of confronting him head-on. It is then possible to evaluate, with all the uncertainties inherent in war, the possible effects of the use of fire.

The simple capture of L'Éguillette was enough to obtain the withdrawal of the English fleet without the need to engage in a decisive battle. Conversely, massive bombing of an enemy who had prepared morally and materially for it could produce uncertain and, in any case, costly results.

It should also encourage us to rediscover the advantages of cunning and stratagems in combat, both to save effort and to create conditions favourable to engagement rather than to focus on the increasingly complex coordination of redundant means, the logistical support and implementation of which take up our energies and our intelligence. It is a question of creating surprise and/or undermining the enemy's morale as a prelude to defeat.

The wars of antiquity give us beautiful examples of this. One thinks of course of the famous Trojan horse that allowed the Greeks to seize by trickery the city under siege for ten years, but we could also cite the example of the capture of Babylon by Cyrus in 539 BC.C. By diverting and drying up the course of the Euphrates, the Persians managed to enter by surprise into this city, which was reputedly impregnable, and thus saved themselves a great deal of effort.

The same applies to the use of fire: to gain a discreet firing position that allows them to

deliver surprise fire on strategic elements (e.g. anti-aircraft defense position), is to put themselves in the right conditions to obtain victory. Using the enemy's morale and thus weakening his will to fight by denying him the bombardment he is expecting - and for which he has been prepared by an influencing maneuver - is another possible form of this effect which was conceived upstream of the confrontation.

1 Removed from the staff for abusive absence and then reinstated with the rank of artillery captain thanks to the interpersonal skills of a Corsican deputy, he is appointed commander of the artillery of a force of the Corsican national guard whose mission was to attack the Magdalen Islands in support of a French expedition in Sardinia. The expedition turns into a disaster following the mutiny of sailors and soldiers.

2 Quoted in Histoire de l'artillerie française, Charles-Lavauzelle, 1984, p. 146.

3 Michel Goya, Sous le feu, la mort comme hypothèse de travail, Tallandier, 2014, chapter 13, Des armes et des hommes.

4 Certain weapons such as the 12.7 or the "kalashnikov" have thus reached a point of equilibrium that has made them almost impossible to circumvent on the battlefield for more than half a century.

5 Decreasing the range makes it possible to maintain the trajectory of shells in the airspace of the tactical leader (battle spaceowner) by avoiding time-consuming deconfliction procedures.

6 In the past, the art of naval combat consisted of crossing the T, i.e. deploying in a line perpendicular to the enemy fleet's axis of advance in order to concentrate its firepower.

7 Michel Goya, Sous le feu, la mort comme hypothèse de travail, op. cit. , p. 200.

8 Cahier du RETEX, La guerre de juillet, analyse à chaud de la guerre israélo-Hezbollah juillet-août 2006, CDEF, October 2006.

9 Michel Goya, Sous le feu, la mort comme hypothèse de travail, op. cit. , p. 201.

10 Reread the testimony of British General Gardiner on this subject: "Although the artillery deafens you, terrifies you, traumatises you and is certainly the loudest noise I have ever heard, I will always remain truly surprised by the few casualties caused by these same shots in the Falklands and Oman. How were we able to survive all this? Actually, it's an assault on your mind more than anything else." Quoted by Michel Goya, Sous le feu, chapter 13, p. 195.

11 Example of the monastery of Monte Cassino in 1944 entirely destroyed by the Allies and then reoccupied by the Germans.

12 RETEX notebook, La guerre de juillet, analyse à chaud de la guerre israélo-Hezbollah juillet-août 2006, CDEF, October 2006, p. 29, note 12.

13 Or 3D space in the case of air vectors.

14 The experience of the Levant (Battle of Hajin) shows that in the event of bad weather conditions rendering the use of air means inoperative, the coupling of EM detection means and human acquisition team remains efficient.

15 François Jullien, Traité de l'efficacité , Grasset, 1996, p. 68.

Title : Colonel François-Régis LEGRIER, COM TN/ Chef de la division adaptation préparation à l'engagement

Author (s) : Colonel François-Régis LEGRIER, COM TN/ Chef de la division

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