



An OPEX RETEX in the 17th century the forgotten expedition of Crete (1660-1661)

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Published on 05/08/2019

Histoire & stratégie

Episode of a coalition war of circumstance, operation painfully planned and recklessly conducted, the expedition of Crete ends in a double failure against the Turks: failure of the siege of Chania, disaster of Candia Nova. In the report that he transmitted to the king on his return in 1660, the chief of staff Millet de Jeure drew a complete RETEX of this disastrous operation, in which one can see that the expedition was a complete failure. covers how the factors of operational superiority were put in default, and which strikes by its intelligence, its topicality and the relevance of its recommendations.

General situation

In 1645, the Turks took control of the Aegean Sea by conquering Crete, which was in the possession of Venice. In 1648, the latter only holds the port of Candia. The Turks sent their reinforcements and logistical supplies through the port of Chania; they controlled the island with 12,000 soldiers, including 1,500 horsemen, collected taxes. They built the camp of Candia Nova facing Candie. Long truces alternate with fighting.

Franco-Ottoman relations deteriorated at the same time: accused of collusion with Venice in 1658, the French ambassador was mistreated by the Grand Vizier. Louis XIV wanted to punish the insult, but without diplomatic rupture. Unwilling to make an additional enemy, the Turks do not want it any more. On the contrary, Venice hopes so in order to obtain the military support of France, an old ally. The king and Mazarin choose a middle way solution: the loan of troops under a foreign flag, akin to mercenarism. Mazarin also pushes Pope Alexander VII to relaunch an anti-Turkish league. . The island is 2,200 km from France, or three to six weeks of sailing.

A proxy war, a two-headed command...

The command of 8,000 soldiers, 4,200 of whom were French, fell to Prince Almeric of Modena. The official conditions of engagement in the name of the pope, the direction of

the army entrusted to an Italian preserve the neutrality of the king in two ways. As lieutenant-general with delegated sovereignty, Almeric had to carry out a limited offensive in Crete or another Aegean island, or even in the Dardanelles, to cut off Turkish maritime traffic to the Levant and force the king to withdraw. The Ottoman Empire must "do whatever and wherever His Holiness wishes", fight his enemies - the Turkish, the Pope assisting Venice, the Ottoman Empire and the Ottoman Empire in the war against Turkey. -, ensure discipline, administrative follow-up (food and balances) . Under Venetian operational command, not control, Almeric retains decision-making autonomy. He does not report to the pope, a mere figurehead, but to the king, via his ambassador in Venice. When his mission is complete, he will repatriate the army. The cause is rather foreign to the interest of France.

Officer, diplomat, secret agent, Guillaume Millet de Jeure...^[5] is Chief of Staff^[6] President of the council of war, general commissioner^[7] (he signs the expenditure orders set by the intendant, head of the provost marshal) . The 4,000 French infantrymen formed 85 companies, and 200 cavalymen formed four others. Supervised by a captain, a lieutenant, an ensign or cornet, and two non-commissioned officers, the company had 45 infantrymen or 48 cavalymen.

Venice provides bread, horses, fodder, France supplies ammunition, 2,000 weapons, 6,000 grenades, 2,000 tools. The Venetian command had to allocate "a clean and comfortable place to establish a hospital", as close as possible to the future camp. Three naval squadrons charged the corps from Toulon to Kythera, via Sardinia, Sicily, Malta and Zakynthos, from where the Venetian navy, assisted by Tuscan and Papal galleys, transported it to Crete.

Unreliable allies, limited means and divergent intentions complicate the plan of operation.

Lieutenant-General in the service of Venice, the Frenchman Jacques de Grémonville thought of facing the Turks at Candia Nova, or forcing them into Chania. . He estimates them at 18,000 to 20,000 men, including 1,800 cavalymen; fearing the arrival of a Turkish fleet with 5,000 to 6,000 soldiers within 30 to 40 days, he calls for 15,000 infantrymen and 1,000 cavalymen.

Innovative, he advocated the control of the roads by Cretan partisans.^[9] . He advises war in winter: not very cold, less risk of infection than in summer, reduced enemy strength. Millet and Ambassador Embrun^[10] did not share this opinion: the supply difficulties were almost insurmountable in winter. . Almeric and Millet want to attack Chania...^[11] . These hesitations reflect the weakness of Venice: how to pay for both the defense of Candia and the work of the siege of Chania?

The Venice Defense Council increases the doubts of the French ambassador: the senators conceal the campaign plans from him, lie about the state of the opposing forces, their defenses, their environment, about the Cretan partisans who are supposed to be in favor. . Excipating from the Gremonville report, Embrun recalls the dominant position of the Turk. If he advises to show zeal towards the Venetian command, to offer to retake Chania, to accept incursions towards other islands - but without without any French troops there -, refuse to engage in petty warfare, to take over isolated posts and to charge contributions, which would cause a break with the Gate.^[13] .

The body landed at Cerigo (20 July). Millet recalled that the Venetians could not do anything without the French; that a prolongation of the operations would force them to

winter in Crete. The recovery of the island was also the responsibility of the natives who, if well supported, could face the Turks. . Determined to lay siege to Chania Almeric requests:

- naval support to interdict any Turkish external reinforcements;
- 2,000 troops from Candie to prevent the Turks from joining from the inside;
- the guns, ammunition and essential equipment at headquarters .

Venetian captain general Morosini wants to ruin the Turkish forts near La Sude. For Almeric, it would have no strategic effect : only the taking of important places will give pledges, provided he does not relieve the pressure during the off-season, to use reinforcements against Candia Nova. . Morosini bows. For better tactical cooperation, Almeric had Gremonville recognized as Allied Lieutenant-General Gremonville... .

The failure of the siege of Chania

On August 7th, the general staff - Almeric, Millet, Morosini, Gremonville and the Consul Consul's Excellency- count on 9,000 infantrymen and 700 cavalymen, equipped with 6,000 tools to dig a 6-mile circumvallation and block the 2,500 to 3,000 Turks in the garrison: a power ratio of 3 to 4 to 1 insufficient, the ideal ratio being 7 to 8 to 1 in a siege. Another constraint, the reinforcement of 1,700 infantrymen and 300 cavalymen taken from Candie is only available if the fleet goes to get it, lengthening its response time; their dispatch remains uncertain. However, Chania had to be seized before the arrival of the 17,000 Turkish garrisons from Crete and 5,000 to 6,000 others from Greece. . While the French embarked, the Venetian soldiers mutinied and demanded a pay recall: they had to negotiate to get them on board five days later. an illustration of their lack of confidence in the Serenissima.

The corps landed on August 25 in La Sude, southeast of Chania, jostled 500 Turks, seized a fort and invaded the city. The first defections appeared: far from the 10,000 men expected with the reinforcement of Candie, the corps had only 5,800 men, including 350 cavalymen, the rest defecting. Using erroneous maps, the Venetian engineers saw too wide, the infantrymen were not enough to fill the stretched lines. In numbers alone, the Turkish cavalry outnumbered the 250 Franco-Venetian cavalry. More seasoned and better trained than the Venetian mercenaries, the French infantrymen enjoyed good cohesion; their behavior under fire would have worried the Turkish general in charge of breaking the siege. . The corps expelled a thousand Turks from three other forts. It had to remain on the coast because of the food, which the Venetians kept on board the ships, without setting up a store on land¹⁴³. The population's support was not assured: Morosini and the Consulte optimistically estimated the local "resistance fighters" at 10,000, and provided them with weapons; dispersed by the Turks at the first engagement, these "miserable Greeks scattered by the Turks at the first engagement, these "wretched Greeks" number only a few hundred at most, misuse the weapons (which they carry) and fail to provoke a rout; Millet accuses the Venetians of having offloaded the task on them¹²³¹²⁴. Under these conditions, Almeric preferred to abandon the siege before the Turks forced him to do so¹⁴⁵. Unable, after fifteen years of war, to coordinate a serious land operation, the Venetian command launched into costly actions, led by leaders whose social rank took the place of military competence, and where the last speaker was right, without taking into account the logic of the war or even the decisions of the Senate .

The corps waits in vain for reinforcements from Germany, Dalmatia, and those from Candie. . On 6 September, 4,000 to 6,000 Turks from Candia Nova attacked the Franco-Venetians near Cicalaria. ...the besieged attempting an exit: caught in the crossfire, the allies lost 300 men. Tried by the Venetian artillery, which killed or wounded 1,000 men,

the Turks paid for their audacity, crossing the enemy lines and entering Chania, strengthening the garrison, now as numerous as the attacker.^[28] The loss of the port would have forced them to set up another bridgehead at Retimo, which was poorly equipped. Their strategic hope ruined, Almeric and Morosini impose to the Consul to raise the siege to leave to face the Turks under Candie.^[29] Leaving La Sude on September 15, the body arrived in Candie the next day.

The Candia Nova Disaster

The general staff decided to attack Candia Nova, 6 km to the south, where only 4,000 Turks would remain.^[30] According to Candie's Greek officers, the cut terrain, enemy entrenchments and batteries made a frontal attack impossible: the site had to be bypassed.^[31] On 17 September, reinforced by 700 to 800 soldiers of the garrison, Almeric came out with 5,500 infantrymen and 350 cavalymen in two lines commanded by Millet and Gremonville¹⁵³. The guides led them towards a valley, while the Turks ran. In columns, the battalions moved upwards so as not to be dominated. Taken to task on a flank, they deployed, drove the enemy away with their fire, then continued their advance. Seeing that the terrain was not at all like what could be seen from Candie or what the besieged were saying, proof that they had never recognised it, Millet changed the angle of attack.

Supported by two battalions, two of his squadrons repelled the Turkish cavalry that came to meet them. The affair was well under way, but impatient Venetian officers jostled their cavalry and deprived the second line of this protection. The Turks are still retreating. The first line, cavalry in the lead, enters Candia Nova: in spite of the prohibition, the Venetians plunder the first houses.^[32] The irruption of a few dozen entrenched Turks suddenly panics them. The first line breaks the order of battle and carries the second line into turmoil. The Turks chase and slaughter 1,200 fugitives. The 4,000 overwhelmed survivors took refuge in Candie. The Turks beheaded 500 prisoners, put the corpses on display to inspire terror in the survivors.^[33]

If the staff investigation^[34] attests that slave mercenaries started the panic, French officers point to the original culprit: jostling the assault order, a Venetian count and his cavalry preceded the Slavers at Candia Nova, encouraging them by contagion;^[35] their escape from the Turks, with a Venetian regiment of infantry, broke the tempo^[36]. The case has no disciplinary action, just recommendations that are not given much weight by the Consultation. We don't know what to do with the demoralized body. On the pretext of the meagre reinforcement of 200 soldiers and 60 horsemen from Venice,^[37] the Consul proposes to attack Candia Nova again: the general staff refuses.^[38] Regular clashes between Turks and fodder animals: on 1 October, leading 350 musketeers and 50 cavalymen on reconnaissance, Millet killed more than 100 Turks and lost only eight men.^[39] On the other hand, dysentery and typhus make the body unfit to fulfil its mission...^[40] There were still 2,100 Frenchmen, 50% of whom were ill, and 2,400 Venetian soldiers¹⁶¹. On medical advice, the Venetians agreed to evacuate him¹⁶². Millet settled him in Paros, an island in the Cyclades, 190 km north of Candie, which was easier to refuel. Sick, Almeric died there on November 8th. Considering his role finished, Millet gave instructions to his deputy and set sail for Venice (December 1660).

The body was not repatriated to France until January 1662. Of the 4,200 men, 1,148, or 27%, remained: 99 officers, 110 non-commissioned officers,^[41] 930 soldiers, 5 surgeons, 1 chaplain, 1 treasurer, 2 volunteers, etc.^[42] The others are dead. The number of desertions is unknown.

A "return of experience" in the 17th century

Millet is writing a report to be used in the reconquest. Attached to military necessities, he sets aside political questions... does not pronounce on the strategic usefulness of the seizure of territorial pledges in the Aegean Sea, a decision which is up to Venice; it does, however, warn the Swedish government against the apparent ease, the sterile dispersion and the real lack of interest of this action for the continuation of the operations. His aim was to re-conquer Crete by taking Chania, vital from his point of view, in order to cut the Turkish umbilical cord. If this proves impossible, it is necessary to go down elsewhere, for example to Candie, to wage a war of attrition, to fight the Turk as little as possible, but to drive him to hunger, to misery, to take advantage of the country's amenities, to rely on the population. Millet re-evaluates the Turkish potential at 12,000 pedestrians and 800 cavalrymen, at Chania, Retimo and Candia Nova, noting that the enemy received two relief supplies until November to make up for his losses.

He then details the ideal siege of Chania, with 12,000 infantrymen, including 2,000 on the ships that were to intercept the Turkish fleet, and 1,000 horsemen. The siege line would be 18 miles (over 30 km) long and would include villages that could provide logistical support, if the Turks did not destroy them. Only the access roads to the city would have to be guarded. Following the principle of concentration of effort, Millet estimates that any attack on a specific point would require at least 1,500 men. He wanted 24 heavy cannons, a train of 100 to 120 horses with the carters: 20 horses could pull one cannon a day, instead of entrusting this task to the *chiourme*, already monopolised by the transport of food and ammunition. It required 15,000 earthmoving tools, baskets, gabions and bags. Lead, gunpowder, cannons and fuses were in sufficient quantity in Candie and La Sude. The siege was to begin on the first day with the firing of at least 6 cannons and 1 to 2 mortars, in order to counter the enemy artillery and throw "force bombs into the town". Estimated at 40,000 ECU, the work involved trenches, housing, batteries and a hospital.

To improve the chain of command, Millet called for a "land chief for the whole", experienced and professional, independent, the sole interlocutor of the captain general and the sole master of execution, siege or battle. The nationality of the troops did not matter as long as they were of quality with experienced cadres with authority. The cavalry lacks technical personnel and small ironing equipment, a concern that is easy to solve. In addition to the indispensable help of foreign powers, Venice needs time to gather troops, equipment and impedimenta, in order to ensure the autonomy of the corps in Chania - or on the island, if one prefers a war in the open country. Millet recommended setting up two stores in Candie, one for all the equipment, the other for wheat and flour, a real logistical base that would save many round trips between Crete and Venice: because at first sceptical about Gremonville's non-conformist idea of war in autumn, he recommended bringing the body to Crete at the beginning of October, implying a possible wintering. The war would be less harassing against a diminished army, which the Turks could no longer rescue as easily as in the summer because of the state of the sea, and the delay in recruiting new soldiers. Another idea taken in Gremonville, the employment of Cretan peasants: Millet, however, confines them to logistical tasks.

In the event of a "small war", it could not be fought with less than 7,000 to 8,000 infantrymen and 800 cavalrymen. Between 100 and 120 horses were also needed to pull 8 field pieces equipped with front trains, and 12 to 16 ammunition carts. Millet advised the soldiers to be loaded with flour, which was easier to transport than biscuit, and that the army should be joined by masons to build ovens and bakers to knead the bread. The desired control of the sea would make it possible to raise contributions in the surrounding islands, to prevent the arrival of Turkish reinforcements and to supply the logistics base in Candie. Millet added practical advice on how to take Chania or Candia Nova, and concluded on the need for Venice to carry out this programme in an integral way, on pain of never recovering Crete. He insists on the imperative agreement of the captain general

of the sea, the *provéditeurs* des places and the general of the army, because a disagreement would ruin the company.

Millet sent this report to the Venice Senate and to Le Tellier, thus to the king, who received it on his return. Hearing on 26 March on the situation in Crete by a council bringing together Louis XIV, the ministers concerned (War and Foreign Affairs) and the main military leaders, he urged caution. The King suspended the sending of troops and promised financial aid to finance the war against the Turks, and doesn't decide anything. ⁽⁴³⁾ He has not had an ambassador in Venice since August 1660, a consul deals with current affairs, a peculiar situation, so much has the expensive and unfailing alliance been proclaimed; but the absence of a high-ranking diplomat means the end of commitments. The reawakening of Turkish-imperial hostilities in Hungary explains it: the Turks cannot support the war in several theatres. The open conflict with Vienna implies a tacit truce with Venice, the temporary removal of the threat. The situation lasted until 1665, after which the Turks completed their definitive stranglehold on Crete, through the final and very hard siege of Candia from 1667-1669.

1) Embrun (French ambassador to Venice) in Mazarin, December 27, 1659, AMAE, CP, Venice 79, f° 484.

Land Forces Doctrine Review

2) Embrun to Mazarin, February 28, 1660, AMAE, CP, Venice 80, f° 52.

3) Instructions to my lord, Prince Almerik of Modena, on his way to command the said corps of troops which was to be embarked at Toulon, March 29, 1660, SHD, A1164, f° 89-98.

4) Commission to Mgr le prince Almerik de Modène to command the corps of troops which was to be embarked at Toulon, 28 March 1660, SHD, A1164, f° 85-89.

5) Pinard, *Chronologie historique militaire*, t. 6, p. 354. Raymond Darricau, "Guillaume Millet de Jeure, confidant of Mazarin", *Bulletin philologique et historique du CTHS*, 1957-1958, p. 351-387. Marie Chouleur, *Guillaume Millet de Jeure, témoin de la vie politique du Grand Siècle*, Paris, thesis of the École nationale des Chartes, 2011.

6) Raymond Darricau, "Mazarin and the Ottoman Empire. L'expédition de Candie (1660)", *op. cit.* p. 349.

7) Brevet de Président au Conseil de guerre en l'armée qui doit estre embarquée à Toulon pour le sieur Jeure Millet, 3 April 1660, SHD, A1164, f° 108-109, and Commission de la charge de commissaire général de l'armée que doit commander M. for Sr Millet, April 4, 1660, *ibidem*, f° 109-112.

8) Excerpt from the letter from M. le Chevalier de Gremonville écrite à Monsr l'Ambassadeur, 3 May 1660, AMAE, CP, Venice 80, f° 100-102.

9) Embrun to Mazarin, April 10, 1660, AMAE, CP, Venice 80, f° 80.

10) Millet at Mazarin, July 17, 1660, AMAE, CP, Venice 80, f° 136.

11) Millet de Jeure, *Relation of all that happened in the Kingdom of Candia during the campaign of 1660*, BNF, ms fr. 11322, f° 1. A copy also exists under the title *Fidel relation de ce qui s'est fait et passé dans le royaume de Candie pendant la campagne de l'année 1660 par l'armée de la Sérénissime République de Venise joint avec les troupes auxiliaires, comme une remarque des erreurs comises en ladite campagne, et les causes d'icelles*, AMAE, CP, Turquie 6, f° 40-55.

12) Embrun to Mazarin, May 29, 1660, AMAE, CP, Venice 80, f° 110-111.

13) Embrun à Mazarin, May 29, 1660, AMAE, CP, Venice 80, f° 112.

- 14] Millet at Mazarin, July 28, 1660, *ibidem*, f° 146-147. This was Gremonville's idea.
- 15] Embrun at Brienne, July 10, 1660, AMAE, CP, Venice 80, f° 143-144. Almeric to Millet, July 24, 1660, AMAE, CP, Venice 80, f° 209-210 .
- 16] Copy of a memorandum sent by His Highness to Mr. Captain General on the 9th of August 1660, of the figure of M. Millet, AMAE, CP, Venice 80, f° 154 .
- 17] Copy of a memorandum sent by His Highness to Mr. Captain General on the 9th of August 1660, of the digit of M. Millet, AMAE, CP, Venice 80, f° 154 Millet, AMAE, CP, Venice 80, f° 154-155 .
- 18] Millet to Mazarin, 16 August 1660, AMAE, CP, Venice 80, f° 171 .
- 19] Millet at Mazarin, August 16, 1660, AMAE, CP, Venice 80, f. 168-169 . Another source estimates them at 10,000 in Crete, Military Expedition of the French troops sent to the Isle of Candia by the very Christian King Louis XIV, in the service of the Serenissima Republic of Venice in the year 1660, [1663], BNF, ms fr . 20784, f° 651 .
- 20] Millet to Mazarin, August 22, 1660, AMAE, CP, Venice 80, fn. 178-179, and 6th letter [Almeric] to Morosini, August 21, 1660, AMAE, CP, Venice 80, fn. 214.
- 21] Millet, Relation [...], BNF, ms fr . 11322, f° 3-4 .
- 22] Letter [Almeric] Morosini, August 29, 1660, AMAE, CP, Venice 80, f° 217-218 .
- 23] Millet, Relation [...], BNF, ms en . 11322, f° 3, and Memorandum given to the Captain General and to the Consul, drawn up by M. Millet, President of the Council of War, 4 October 1660, *ibidem*, f° 16.
- 24] Letter [Almeric] to Morosini, 25 August 1660, AMAE, CP, Venice 80, f° 216 . Millet, Relation de tout ce qui s'est passé dans le Royaume de Candie en la campagne de l'année 1660, BNF, ms fr . 11322, f° 1 .
- 25] Millet, Relation [...], BNF, ms fr . 11322, f° 4 .
- 26] Bembo, provéditeur de Candie, on the contrary, asks for the help of the body to fill the gaps due to the disease Millet, Relation [...], BNF, ms fr . 11322, f° 4-5 .
- 27] Military expedition of the French troops sent to the Isle of Candie by the very Christian King Louis XIV, in the service of the Serenissima Republic of Venice in 1660, BNF, ms fr . 20784, f° 654 . Hammer-Purgstall, History of the Ottoman Empire, op. cit., t . 11, p . 102-103 .
- 28] Military expedition of the French troops [...], BNF, ms fr . 20784, f° 656 .
- 29] Millet, Relation [...], BNF, ms fr . 11322, f° 5-6, Expédition militaire des troupes françaises [...], BNF, ms fr . 20784, f° 656 .
- 30] Expédition militaire des troupes françaises [...], BNF, ms fr . 20784, f° 655-656 .
- 31] Millet, Relation [...], BNF, ms fr . 11322, f° 6 . 153 ^{Millet}, Relation [...], BNF, ms fr . 11322, f° 6 .
- 32] Millet, Relation [...], BNF, ms en . 11322, f° 6-9 . Military expedition of the French troops [...], BNF, ms fr . 20784, f° 656 .
- 33] Military expedition of the French troops [...], BNF, ms fr . 20784, f° 657 .
- 34] Millet, Relation [...], BNF, ms en . 11322, f° 9 .
- 35] Almeric's account of the failure of September 17, 1660, AMAE, CP, Turkey 6, f° 56-65 .
- 36] Millet, Relation [...], BNF, ms en . 11322, f° 10 .
- 37] Millet, Relation [...], BNF, ms en . 11322, f° 11 .

38] Memorandum given to the Captain General and to the Consul, drawn up by M. Millet, Relation [...], BNF, ms fr . 11322, f° 11. Millet, President of the Council of War, 4 October 1660, AMAE, CP, Venise 80, f° 219-220 (also entitled Memorandum given to the Captain General and the Ex[cellentissime] Consulte en conseil de guerre on 4 October 1660, BNF, ms fr . 11322, f° 14) .

39] th letter [Almeric] to Morosini, October 3, 1660, AMAE, CP, Venise 80, f° 219 . ¹⁶² Millet, Relation [...], BNF, ms fr . 11322, f° 12-13 .

40] Extract from the dream made by us, steward of justice, polish and finance near the troops of His Majesty in Candie when they embarked on the King's ships, commanded by Mr. Gabaret and Mr. Fricambault on the island of Nexie, January 23, 1662, BNF, Mélanges Colbert 107, f° 186-189 .

41] Memory of things that seem more essential and absolutely necessary for the recovery of the Kingdom of Candia, drawn up by Sr. de Jeure-Millet, Commissioner General of the auxiliary army of Levant joined to that of the Serenissima Republic of Venice, and president of the council of war in the said army, s .Ln.d, BNF, ms fr . 11322, f° 19-30 (copy) . All that follows is taken from it .

42] Raymond Darricau, "Mazarin and the Ottoman Empire . L'expédition de Candie (1660)", Revue d'histoire diplomatique, Paris, 1960/4, p. 353 .

43] Gremonville to Lionne, September 24, 1661, AMAE, CP, Venise 82, f° 94 .

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Release date 29/07/2019

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