



The consequences of training deficiencies on the use of the military tool

2/2 - BRENNUS 4.0

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Insufficient to contribute to the development of an optimal combat instrument, the training of the French armies did not make it possible either to take proper advantage of what already existed. This had serious consequences during the inter-war period, and the eight months of the "phoney war" did not bring about the recovery that could have been hoped for.

Between the wars

In the inter-war period, the limited number of major manoeuvres and exercises that took place and the little room left to the initiative of the "CIA", the "CIAs" and the "CIAs" was a major obstacle to the success of the "CIAs" in the inter-war period. players' initiative, deprived the staffs and chiefs of the training necessary to make optimal use of the tool at their disposal. The latter suffered from a lack of training at all levels.

With the one-year service in 1928, which was reduced to ten months in 1932, the situation had indeed become very critical in terms of training. In March 1936, at the time of the remilitarization of the left bank of the Rhine by Hitler's Germany, the two-year service had just been re-established (1935), but the decrease in the number of training days was not sufficient to meet the demand. training had led to the closure of many facilities and camps, as well as the abolition of the Infantry and Tank School. This greatly hampered efforts to resume training.

This explains the inability of the French army to react in March 1936, when the German army still represented only a minimal force and the opportunity to put a serious stop to the Third Reich presented itself.

The national defence efforts made by the Popular Front government from the end of 1936 onwards only partially improved the situation and did not make it possible to react further to Hitler's subsequent coups de forces. The priority given to the construction of certain equipment (tanks, in particular) was in fact to the detriment of the support equipment of

the DCR and theThe priority given to the construction of certain equipment (tanks in particular) was in fact to the detriment of the support equipment for the DCR and the training equipment (firing ranges, manoeuvring areas) and explains the rarity of major manoeuvres at the end of the 1930s: there were none in 1936; those of autumn 1937, with a DLM, a motorized DI, and a DCR, did not take place [8]; postponed to 1938, the DCR experiment was cancelled.

This defect of training was all the more critical since at the same time, the German army - its most modern components in particular - was trainingwas born in an intensive way in its camps and within the framework of the interventions decided by Hitler (action of the Condor legion in Spain, annexation of Austria, dismemberment of Czechoslovakia).

The lack of training of the French army, faced with a German army that was known to be reactive, explains the missed opportunity of an offensive ofThe lack of training of the French army, facing a German army that was known to be reactive, explains the missed opportunity of a large-scale offensive on the left bank of the Rhine, at the beginning of the War, when the main part of the Wehrmacht was occupied in Poland and the Siegfried line, which suffered from serious insufficiencies, was weakly held [9] .

g) The "phoney war", however, provided an opportunity to remedy the shortcomings of the military tool.

The "phoney war" and the Battle of France

However, the eight months of the "phony war" were hardly used to improve training.

Thus, in the 2nd Army, which occupied the sector of the passive front at Sedan, it was decided that the units [10] would devote only one third of their time to training, the other two thirds being devoted to earthworks. In fact, training was finally reduced to half a day per week. As for the infantry divisions that were behind the Maginot Line and the active front, which extended it as far as Luxembourg, their training was often limited to the unproductive periods of "hardening" that the small units carried out within the framework of the rotations that had been established.

As a result, overall exercises and maneuvers were rare during this period, especially since large units were not set up until late, in the case of DCRs but also in that of DLMS. The training also suffered from the schematic and processional character already mentioned.

The shortcomings of the interwar period were therefore hardly compensated in the French army against a German army that had chosen to focus on exercises and maneuvers in camps for most of its units. It should be noted that decision making in chaotic circumstances was systematically encouraged, without this excluding the training of staffs in rigorous planning work.

As a result of this situation, French chiefs and staffs lacked agility in the face of a reactive enemy.

General Blanchard (1st Army) thus gave up asking that the progression in Belgium be limited to the Scheldt after the die.the beginning of the operation Dyle-Breda and the discovery of the Belgian unpreparedness [11], for fear of provoking the disorganization of his army.

It is also thus that serious difficulties arose in the handling of the large units, DCR in particular, these had just been set up with means leaving them only a very reduced autonomy and they had not carried out any general maneuver [12]. Consequently, the capacities of subordinate units could not be correctly used when they were well trained, as was the case of the heavy tank battalions of the 3rd DCR, which did not receive any training. As a result, the capabilities of subordinate units could not be properly utilized when they were well trained, as was the case with the heavy tank battalions of the 3rd DCR, which were not ordered to disengage in the afternoon of May 14, 1940, when they were ready to attack and Guderian's armoured corps presented them with its weakly defended left flank.

The capabilities of some tank units were also under-utilized due to the lack of training of infantry units in joint combat: On the morning of 14 May, south of Sedan, when it was important to act as quickly as possible, the tanks of the companies of the 7th Light Tank Battalion (BCL), which were acting in concert with the battalions of the 213th RI, had to interrupt their advance several times to pick up the infantrymen who were not following.

The priority given to earthmoving work to the detriment of weapons training and the identification of enemy equipment, as well as the development of the troops' endurance had dramatic consequences: units exhausted by marches of a few dozen kilometers, panic caused by Stuka and Panzer attacks, which the The effect was to create a chaotic situation that could not be re-established, following the failure of the counter-attacks mentioned above [13].

Conclusion

In 1940, the high command believed that the French army was well enough trained to stop the Germans and to be able to reinforce and train itself. to be able to reinforce and train under the shelter of strong defences, in order to ensure superiority over the enemy with the help of its allies, as its predecessor had done in 1917-1918.

This overestimation of the French army's capabilities in 1940 was largely the result of training carried out with incomplete and outdated means, which prevented the high command from fully grasping the new realities of war and, in particular, the possibilities offered by the combustion engine and transmissions.

Such overestimation prevented him from fully grasping the consequences of the lack of training of the troops of which he was aware. He convinced himself that he would overcome this disadvantage by conducting the battle methodically.

This way of proceeding could be applied with chances of success within the framework of a defensive system based on a system of solid organizations, permanent or campaign, and reserves placed in the rear. It was no longer realistic as soon as the French army entered Belgium and the Netherlands before going on the defensive and the reserves used for this task were eliminated.

The High Command believed that the method adopted in 1917-1918 could be reproduced and improved, but, neglecting the training which then occupied the first place, it put itself in a position which its predecessor of 1917-1918 had carefully avoided taking [14].

8] The necessary complementary materials did not come out.

9] An offensive was indeed started on September 7, in the Saar; Executed by 11 divisions, it was limited to a progression of 8 km on a front of 32 km, which stopped without the Siegfried line having been started. From September 21, the retreat towards the Maginot Line began.

10] They were category B reservists and had a particularly low level of training.

11] It turned out that the defensive apparatus that should have been in place in the Gembloux Gap was almost non-existent.

12] Neither did the tank half-brigades of which they were composed.

13] It was indeed the training which was in question because on the Aisne and the Somme (early June 1940) and at Bir Hakeim (May-June 1942), the units effectively resisted the Panzer and Stukas while they had a similar armament .

14] A solid defensive device, staggered in depth and thus making it possible to release important reserves of intervention (40 divisions out of a total of a hundred) - while supporting instruction and training, had been set up to face the great German offensive planned for spring 1918. This system played a decisive role in the defensive and offensive phases of the operations that took place from March to November.

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