



## City, military, former military and citizen

G2S File No. 25

Le GCA (2S) Jean-Claude THOMANN

Published on 18/04/2020

Valeurs de l'Armée de Terre

**It is also desirable to look at the place of the same soldier in the city, metropolis, town or village, where his relationship to his fellow citizens is less the subject of general analysis than in the case of the military. The relationship between the soldier and his fellow citizens is not so much a general and rather theoretical analysis of the "Armed Forces-Nation dialogue" as of a cohabitation marked by the proximity and the very concrete character of his position in the environment in which he lives.**

However, while few active military personnel can get involved in local, electoral or associative responsibilities, the same cannot be said of the large cohort of "retired" military personnel, who should not limit themselves to running associations in the combat world. Indeed, their availability, their freedom of commitment and their sense of community allow them to participate actively, and often welcome, in the life of the city. In fact, there are many and varied examples of these local commitments on the part of former military personnel who wish to continue to serve their country, as they have done in their careers.

But there is one particular type of commitment whose importance in a society of disinformation should not be overlooked: it is a matter of explaining "to civilians" defence, armies and their problems by playing on local networks and the proximity offered by the living environment of the city.

In this respect, the experience conducted in recent years in Lille is an example that may be of interest because of its fairly innovative nature and which opens up new perspectives in terms of collaboration between former soldiers, serving soldiers, municipal authorities and fellow citizens.

It is the initiative taken jointly in 2008 by the mayor of Lille and her first deputy on the one hand and the author of this article on the other hand, who, after putting down the bag, had settled in the Lille conurbation. For the municipal authorities, the aim of the initiative was to demonstrate, through its concrete commitment, the interest of the city and its citizens in a military community in Lille. For the municipal authorities, the aim was to demonstrate, through its concrete commitment, the interest of the city and its citizens in a very important military community, with several major commands installed in the metropolis (CFAT4, CRR Frs, <sup>OGZD6</sup>, Cdt région Gendarmerie) and to create an original link between the city and its military. Thus was born the idea of a municipal mission dedicated to information on defence issues with a focus on the student population, which is very numerous in the metropolitan area. The idea was to organise symposia on these themes with, given Lille's position, a strong focus on the "European defence" aspects of the events to be held.

The Lille Eurometropole Defence and Security Mission (MLEDS) was therefore set up in 2009 with the stated ambition of contributing to the European influence of the city of Lille and, more broadly, of the Northern Region in the field of European and international defence and security.

The project was based on four main lines of effort:

- Improving the synergy between the political, academic and military communities in order to enhance the European assets of the Lille metropolis.
- To create a network under the aegis of the mission and with the approval of the university authorities, bringing together students from the four universities and the local grandes écoles to raise awareness of defence and security issues.
- Provide concrete support from the municipality for events held by schools, research centres and specialised institutions dealing with these issues.
- Finally, in a more general way, and as part of a citizen's approach, provide those interested or likely to be interested with quality and up-to-date information on all defence and security issues, both national and European.

Since its creation, the LEDS Mission has been supported by a large number of personalities from all walks of life, political, economic, academic, social and cultural, and of course by the local commands, on the assumption of absolute political neutrality. At the same time, a scientific council was formed by personalities who were asked to reflect on the actions to be taken and help to find high-level speakers and significant patronage or sponsorship. Finally, although the mission was well directed by a general officer in the second section, acting voluntarily and independently, it was domiciled in the Hôtel de Ville and organized around a senior municipal official, a former member of the regional IHEDN and very familiar with defence and security issues, assisted by young doctoral students and students. The Director of City Services was, for his part, the authority in charge of providing the funding and logistics necessary to run the mission.

In 2019, the MLEDS celebrated its first decade of activities, consisting mainly of conferences, defence cafés for students (and interested senior citizens) and seminars or

colloquia. Well-known experts and personalities have taken turns at the lectern or on the podium, ensuring the mission's reputation for high quality and interest in its events. As early as 2010, the mission received, jointly with the CRR-Fr, the Armed Forces-Youth Prize for its citizen action and its approach in favour of students. Indeed, the CRRFr was immediately associated with the mission's activities by hosting, in the prestigious setting of the Queen of the Citadelles, which houses its staff, a major annual symposium, "Les Ateliers de la Citadelle". This event brings together military personnel, students, researchers and citizens from several countries for a day dedicated to European defence issues and led by very high level personalities. Over the years, these workshops have garnered the support of organisations such as NATO and the EU, media such as France Culture or the monthly magazine DSI, and many regional economic and cultural players, all interested in the innovative nature of this initiative.

All in all, this truly "municipal" and civilian approach, which was intended to ensure that it did not encroach on the remit and actions of the OGZD/DMD while fully associating it, helped to strengthen the links between the city and the military community and to raise awareness of the major commands established in the metropolis. It has thus enabled, among others, the CFT and the CRR-Fr, to mobilise students for the animation of the "white cells" of the major exercises, or to create links with teachers and students of the School of Journalism, Sciences-Po Lille and other Grandes Ecoles. In addition, each year, a class of senior high school students from the Lycée FAIDHERBE participates in the Ateliers de la Citadelle, after an ad-hoc preparation, with an impact that is certainly not quantifiable, but which is clearly significant on the high school population. On the other hand, it is unfortunately necessary to point out the very great, even insurmountable difficulty of mobilising and securing the loyalty of people working in the economic sector for the cycle of conferences, as their timetable does not allow them to receive this information which, in terms of citizenship, would be very necessary for them.

Finally, it should be borne in mind that this experience has obviously benefited from a combination of circumstances that make it a unique case of the combined will and resources of a large city, the presence and support of a high-level military community, the goodwill of the local authorities, the presence of the local authorities and the support of the public authorities. Finally, the acceptance by high-ranking civil and military personalities, both French and European, to participate by their presence and their interventions in a civic exercise of education and information on defence issues.

Admittedly, all local conditions differ, depending on the importance of the city, the presence of the armies or the existence of a more or less developed university fabric, but the principle of the approach followed can be duplicated with adaptations and modulations in most of the large and medium-sized cities, as soon as there is a willingness to act in the field of defence education and information at the local level. An initiative inspired by the MLEDS (conferences, defence cafés) is moreover successfully led by a general officer in the second section in Vannes, which associates local authorities and university.

There is thus a whole field of activities to make our fellow citizens aware of defence issues, which requires the involvement of the municipal authorities, to whom it must be shown that, as far as they are concerned, defence is not just a question of the local authorities, but also of the local authorities themselves. It must be shown that, as far as they are concerned, defence is not limited to the world of veterans' associations alone,

but that they can have a major role to play in this field by promoting and supporting initiatives that provide better information and thus raise citizens' awareness. The priority is to convince our fellow citizens that defence is not a black box, but the business of all those who intend to exercise their duty as citizens with discernment, subject to the provision of essential information. And it is also a priority for former senior officers of our armed forces to devote some of their available time, where they have established themselves, to this information approach, as a relay for all the institutional actions carried out elsewhere.

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4| Land Action Force Command, now Land Forces Command (LFC).

5| Rapid Reaction Corps France

6| General Officer of the Defence Zone to which we have added our "and Security" jwrs.

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<b>Title :</b>	Le GCA (2S) Jean-Claude THOMANN
<b>Author (s) :</b>	Le GCA (2S) Jean-Claude THOMANN
<b>Release date</b>	10/04/2020

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