



The part of ideology in the campaigns of the Revolution and the Empire or what drives the soldier to go to battle?

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While in 1789, the notion of a warrior spirit seemed to be absent from the brand new French nation, the latter first engaged in a struggle for survival. The insistence of part of Europe to oppose the development of revolutionary ideas, and then French imperialism, led to almost uninterrupted wars for twenty-three years. The author sets out to explain the nature of the mechanisms that enabled the soldier of the Revolution and then of the Great Army to endure, and even take advantage of, this era of conflict.

" France was made with the sword . »¹ Charles De Gaulle

Throughout the 18th century^e century in France, civil society distrusts the military: often a foreign mercenary to whom not all public places are open? But shortly before the Revolution, the people discovered that their soldiers were mostly French, generally recruited from the humblest part of the population and whose fate remained unenviable. Louis XVI, who was not a man of war, made sure that his army did not cost him too much. The military therefore had a few reasons to be unhappy, in particular restrictive living conditions, Prussian-style discipline and access to the epaulette, which had become more difficult since the Edict of Ségur.²

From 1789 onwards and gradually, the military became actors of the revolutionary gesture. The troop did its duty when it was charged with taming the recurrent popular unrest orchestrated by the bad harvests. But the People made the military "heroes" of the storming of the Bastille, and soon it was a military revolt that prevented the aristocrats from carrying out the counter-revolution. In 1792, the military victory of Valmy (20 September) allowed, two days later, the birth of the First Republic. Finally, after having allowed and then guaranteed the establishment of political institutions, the army went so far as to replace the executive power on 18 Brumaire An VIII (9 November 1799); a situation that would last sixteen years.

France in 1789³ is characterized by a spirit so little warlike that two years earlier she refused to come to the rescue of her ally Holland, invaded by the Prussian army. On the other hand, it is the cradle of the philosophy of the Enlightenment which, through

Rousseau, Voltaire and Montesquieu⁴...advocate "happiness on earth". How can we explain the fact that it has embarked on a military adventure of almost a quarter of a century of almost uninterrupted struggles with all the countries of Europe?

Nothing would have been possible if the actors had not been influenced by a clever alchemy mixing ideological compass, emergence of new values in the exercise of military command and psychological springs.

A "compass of values" that gives legitimacy to action

A French exception

On July 14, 1789, France was set ablaze. From the anarchic revolt (the great peasant revolts of the XVII^e In the 19th century (the "famine war" of 1775), we move on to the Revolution. A new consciousness is created. Precise objectives were formulated in the notebooks of grievances: the end of the feudal regime and the appropriation of the land. The principles of liberty, equality (the idea of social progress) and the sharing of sovereignty were born. Today, it is hard to imagine this French exception and its repercussions. At the time, it was the greatest social revolution in the world. From that day on and in the months that followed, there was only one law, one nation, one family and one title, that of French citizen. Henceforth, the "barrier" that separated individuals (birth) since the High Middle Ages is no longer there. No people had hitherto set an example of such a generous and sublime impulse. Several European nations dreamed of it, France had done so. But if equality of rights was confirmed on the night of August 4, 1789, this great social revolution was only the prelude to the French Revolution.

The armies of the whole of Europe are soon at the gates of France. On July 11, 1792, the Legislative Assembly declared: "[...] numerous troops are advancing towards our borders. All the enemies of freedom are arming themselves against our Constitution ...". The fatherland is in danger! Married men, only sons, old men, seminarians ... are committed to defend the fatherland.

A novelty born of the Revolution: the patriotic spirit...

Before the French Revolution, there was no such thing as a homeland. The prevailing concept was the state, embodied in the person of the king; let us remember the famous formula: "the state is me! ». Identity and national unity are built around the sovereign. With the death of Louis XVI, this way of celebrating national unity disappeared and with it the risk of an explosion in the cohesion of the people of France. A singular entity then emerges: the homeland and its cult. It is indeed a kind of "religious idea" that invades the hearts of men. It is this image of the homeland that brings together a heritage of both material and immaterial goods, which stands before the battalions to support the courage of the soldiers and preserve the failures. The Revolution thus makes it possible to create a new link between the soldiers, which, by its strength and character, has the power to

produce heroic men. Without doubt, discipline is an indispensable driving force in an army. But for an army to be able to sustain with constancy long and difficult wars, endure extraordinary deprivation, and brave the number of its enemies, the spirit of sacrifice requires a higher moral basis than discipline. To lay down his life, the soldier must have a high sense of the motive for risking it. Who would want to die needlessly? It is patriotic sentiment that conveys the reasons for a sacrifice that can be supreme: antagonism of nationalities, a glorious reputation to uphold, revenge to take, hatred of the aristocracy, anticlericalism, or the perpetuation of gains (social, political). Being born is not enough, "one owes" to parents, to one's own, to the country something sacred that puts one's own life at stake; it is the cement of memory. These are the powerful auxiliaries of the warrior spirit that introduce the notions of "duty" and "debt". It is these manifestos that strengthen the sense of resistance in the Republican armies. In the eyes of these men, who are steeped in "generosity", the defence of the fatherland is the most important thing for them.⁵ deserves all the sacrifices and it becomes beautiful to die for her.

With Bonaparte, the emergence of new notions: honour and glory

As soon as Bonaparte came to power, it is observed that he emphasizes new values that he associates with the fatherland. Thus in 1802, he created the Legion of Honour, whose motto was "honour and homeland". Similarly, in 1804, Napoleon gave military status to the brand new polytechnic school, intended to provide the country with new elites. He assigned it a strong motto: "for the fatherland, science and glory". These two new values were intended to underpin a notion of a homeland that was destined to fade in the wake of increasingly distant conquests. It is indeed difficult for Napoleon to explain to his soldiers, most of whom were proletarians, that taking them to the depths of Poland, Spain, or Russia consisted in defending the "sanctuary" and its values. However, the men of the Grande Armée never ceased to be the ideological heirs of a Revolution waging war against the old monarchical Europe. Indeed, it remains a plebeian army fighting against aristocratic governments, in the name of freedom and brotherhood. But as a shield of the Revolution, the French army becomes a real ideological vector that will, little by little, contribute to catalysing patriotic feelings in Europe. "Our glorious homeland is now the pilot of the ship of mankind."⁶ points out historian Michelet. Throughout his reign, Napoleon thus remained the main propagator of the principles of the Revolution. Rarely has an entire army felt so motivated and galvanised to bear arms in enemy territory, because it is systematic that its leader gives legitimacy to any new undertaking.

The charisma of the chef

The myth of the savior

The young Republic was soon reduced to internal rivalries. As time goes by, people become alarmed at the excesses of the Revolution (Crimes of Terror; the speakers come down from the rostrum to the scaffold!). The benefits of freedom are soon considered to be dearly paid for. While at the borders ragged armies face the coalition forces of Europe

in the name of the fatherland, in the Vendée lords and peasants stand up to these armies in the name of the king! It is chaos and anarchy. When Bonaparte left Alexandria on 23rd August 1799 and landed on the coast of Provence, the situation had been going on for seven years. The return of this general, made famous by his victories in Italy and Egypt (he was the only general who had not been defeated until then) provoked general joy in the armies.⁷ as Bigarré, for example, who was serving in the army of Helvetia at the time, points out: "[...] everyone regarded this event as the precursor of many others which would restore the glory and affairs of the Republic, and everyone saw in Bonaparte the man who was to save France by completing the Revolution .⁸ The latter seems to be strongly supported. According to Captain Laugier, who is far from being a fervent Bonapartist: " We wanted one of our generals to fight with his sword in his hand the way to the government of one: which none dared to attempt . It was often said: "If we had Bonaparte in our midst, he would put a good order in France " and the soldier added: " These desires were repeated in the working class of the people ".⁹This indicates a certain consensus in French society, at least at the beginning of the adventure.

Superiority of reasoning

If soldiers recognize bravery in many generals of the Republic, they soon discerned in Bonaparte, the military genius. His mind, tending towards manoeuvre and surprise, saw on the map what he wanted to do. He "sticks" to the terrain and knows how to take risks. As soon as his opponent reveals his intentions, he has the eye, the self-control, the lightning reflexes that allow him to exploit his mistakes. He attacks day and night. In his proclamation of Austerlitz, the sovereign of the French did not hesitate to reveal to his soldiers the trap he was setting for his enemies: " The positions we occupy are formidable and, while they march to turn my right, they will present me with the flank . In another proclamation that precedes the surrender of Ulm (1805), he proclaims: " Soldiers, tomorrow will be a hundred times more famous than that of Marengo (1800); I have placed the enemy in the same position ". He showed himself to be "sure of his blow". The declaration aims to strengthen the determination of the grumpy by demonstrating the superiority of the French army's plan. By doing so, Bonaparte won the "battle of morale". In front of the young republican phalanxes stood the armies of the Ancien Régime engulfed in an outdated and dusty doctrine largely inspired by Frederick II and his " General Principles of War ". These include the prohibition of marches and attacks at night, the prohibition of setting up camp near a forest, the prohibition of any movement of soldiers to carry out requisitions, and the avoidance, as far as possible, of forced marches that dislocate units. In these armies, the captains are fifty years old, what about the generals! Colli was 61 years old, Suvorov 69, Melas 70, Beaulieu 74... In 1799, Bonaparte was 30, Murat 32, Lannes 30... There is no doubt in the mind of a soldier that with such leaders, one can only be victorious and success follows success.

The man of communication

Napoleon is first of all a figure that everyone can recognize from afar. In the middle of the marshals and aides-de-camp in colourful clothes, he wears the sober dress of the colonel of the chasseurs à cheval de la Garde, wearing his black beaver-skin bicorne and on the

battlefields he is dressed in his famous grey frock coat. He excels in terms of communication. His proclamations¹⁰...a little like the Roman emperors, are still prodigiously strong. Overall, this allows him to exalt honor: " You equal today by your services the conquering army of Holland and the Rhine ," to praise the glory: " You have in fifteen days won six victories, taken 21 flags, 50 guns, several strongholds ... you burn to carry away the glory of the French people! ... you are eager to carry away the glory of the French people!" to lavish love on the fatherland: " The grateful fatherland owes you some of its prosperity ... the fatherland has the right to expect great things from you. Will you justify this expectation? "...] one condition you must swear to fulfill is to respect the peoples you deliver ... we are only angry with the tyrants who enslave us " and to demand fidelity to his person: "to your love for the fatherland and for me ...". Moreover, Napoleon never ceased to maintain a psychological closeness with his men through his constant presence in the midst of the troops. The sovereign showed his interest in them by means of inspection reviews. An Emperor's review could last up to seven hours! He walked along the front of the troop, pinned up decorations, had the ranks opened, questioned the soldier, recognised a face, asked the grumpy man about his campaigns, asked his opinion on the soup, tasted his war bread, listened to his complaints, had haversacks opened, checked their contents, examined their effects (spare shoes), lingered at a game, checked the state of the cartridges, watched for the presence of flint stones, etc. He was also present at the front of the troop, and was present at all times at the front. In the field, he maintained the same proximity to his men. In Spain and Russia, he shared the same misery as his men and on the evening of the victory of Montmirail (1814), his tent was set up on the battlefield in the middle of his Guard.

While Napoleon can be reproached for not having been able to give his marshals the benefit of his combat experience, as a connoisseur of human psychology and the mentality of the soldier, he encouraged his general officers and superiors to apply his motivational methods to get the most out of their fighters. This is in the interest of the leaders. In his memoirs, General Marbot recounts that an inspection of the Emperor remains a particularly formidable exercise... for the colonel! In his memoirs, General Marbot recounts that an inspection of the Emperor remains a particularly formidable exercise ... for the colonel! "In addition to the questions of use on the numerical strength in men and horses, the weaponry, he addressed, blow by blow, a host of unforeseen questions that we were not prepared to answer . For example: how many men have you had in such a department for two years, what is the average age of your soldiers, your officers, your horses ..." and the general added: "He who hesitated was badly noted in the mind of the Emperor .

The favourable psychological environment

Esprit de corps

In this army in permanent warfare, it was not long before the organisation of a shrinking society was established. The latter had its hierarchy, its codes, its vocabulary. To be a warrior is to enter into mechanisms of cohesion that make it possible to overcome the harshness of the life of a soldier. The Napoleonic conscript first of all regrets his village and his family. But as he "moves on," his sadness dissipates. The sergeants are happy with their war adventures... Finally, the young conscript leaves one family to find another,

thanks to the mutual aid and cohesion that reigns in his regiment. Little by little, the regiment becomes a new essential reference point, to the point of constituting a substitute emotional unit in which the bonds of camaraderie are essential. The regiment becomes a "military family"¹¹ ». It is this factor of cohesion that gives meaning to victory. You fight to avenge your comrade, but also to safeguard the integrity of the group. In Napoleonic armies, the style of command is fraternal and based on emulation. Up to the rank of captain, it was not uncommon for soldiers to be on first-name terms with their officers. Indeed, under the Empire, it is estimated that seventy-seven French officers left the ranks, and the soldiers persisted in considering them as their own. In fact, since 1790, corporal punishment has been forbidden.¹² The French army is a big brotherhood in which the echelons rub shoulders and share the same values.¹³ Nothing like this among the coalised, or a clear separation of officers from the troop. According to Wellington's experts, Wellington professed an undisguised contempt for his soldiers.

Recognition of services rendered

To the collective motivations that develop the warrior spirit, we should add the many individual testimonials of gratitude offered to the soldier. The Revolution now opens up careers to the intelligentsia and rewards devotion through the achievement of rank. At the same time, as soon as the reins of power were in hand, Bonaparte reinstated the decorations that the Revolution had abolished, through the distribution of weapons of honour (sword, rifle, baton, boarding axe, etc.). But in times of peace, these weapons of honour are hardly ever seen. By instituting the Legion of Honour (the Cross of the Brave), which makes no distinction between officers and soldiers (nor between civilians and soldiers), one can therefore permanently identify those heroes who strike down the stranger. Advancement based solely on merit was introduced and from then on, according to the consecrated expression: " every soldier has his marshal's baton in his musette ". The "deed of arms" also made it possible to join the elite regimental company and wear its distinctive insignia. After a few years, the grunt can also hope to join the Imperial Guard, a supreme and coveted honour.

If the Royalty grants wounded veterans the Invalides, the Convention, despite humanitarian laws, half forgets them, while the Directory forgets them lamentably. The soldiers, especially amputees, deprived of all resources, begged in Paris and dragged their crutches in the provinces. On the contrary, Napoleon had a great deal of concern for his old soldiers. He wanted to show the families that one had just returned from the army and that one had come back with everything. Branches were set up to welcome them. As for the invalids, he opened up to them the administration, in particular forestry, post offices, tobacconists and contributions. It was Bonaparte who, in September 1802, laid down the principle that the wives and children of soldiers who had died in the field of honour were entitled to a pension.

Mutual trust

Finally, Napoleon established a whole "climate" of trust around the soldier, the most symbolic of which was the regimental emblem. From a square of cloth intended to rally

the troops and to indicate the place of the chief, he created a fresco depicting the glory of the regiments and a symbol of power. While commanding the Italian army, Bonaparte had his half-brigades given the following orders⁴ On July 14, 1797, new flags with simple sentences he could pronounce were introduced to emphasize the value of the bodies. Thus, for the 18th half-brigade: " Brave 18th, I know you; the enemy does not stand before you ," for another: " The 25th was covered in glory ," or " I was quiet, the brave 32nd was there.⁵ ». On the reverse of the emblem, he had the battles in which the regiment distinguished itself written in gold letters. Having become emperor, he made the regimental emblem an object of worship. It is now unique within a corps (1808) and its shaft is surmounted by a gilded bronze eagle, symbol of power. Thus, each regiment is the depository of power, and therefore of the person of the Emperor. Moreover, on the obverse of the emblem is inscribed: " The Emperor Napoleon in the 10th reg iment". The emblem is now a sacred object. Glory and power are now irremediably linked. General Lejeune acknowledges: " Our little Corporal," the soldiers said, "ordered this, so I must succeed. Such was the feeling of confidence engraved in the hearts of all the men and they repeated the word impossible, which he had crossed out of his vocabulary.⁶ ».

At the end of the Empire after the catastrophe in Russia, Napoleon overplayed his charisma by systematically reviewing the regiments of new formation, whose recruits (the Marie-Louise) were not yet twenty years old. Born when Bonaparte achieved his first successes, they were cradled throughout their childhood by army bulletins and tales of victories, each one more brilliant than the last. It was not long before they fell under the spell of this "shadow", a true living God to whom they devoted a cult that did not falter in 1815, during the Hundred Days. Thus, the Duke de Broglie, who was attending a parade in Paris, could not help but quell a shiver: " As they marched before the Emperor, their gaze [at the soldiers] shone with a burning, dark fire. We thought we could see moreturi te salutante wandering on their lips⁷ ».

Napoleon then seems to "absorb" everything.

1 Gaulte (Charles, de): La France et son armée, Paris, Plon, 1938.

2 Ségur (Philippe-Henri, Marquis de) Secretary of State for War of Louis XVI. His edict of 22 May 1781 dealt a severe blow to the commoners serving in the royal armies. Four quarters of nobility are now required to win the epaulette.

3 France has not known any conflict since the Treaties of Paris and Versailles of 1783.

4 Rousseau popularized social equality, Voltaire freedom of thought and Montesquieu political freedom.

5 As can be seen here, "patriotism" goes far beyond the protection of territory. It is also the defence of values linked to the history of the country and which have forged its identity, such as the attachment to democracy and the defence of individual freedoms.

6 Michelet (Jules): The People, 1846.

7 The latter goes beyond the confines of the army. One need only look at Boulart's memoirs: Mémoires militaires du général baron Boulart sur les guerres de la République et de l'Empire, Paris, Emile Collin, n. d. which describes how Bonaparte was greeted by the people of Avignon: " The crowd was immense ... enthusiasm was at its height, the air resounded with cheers and the lively cry of Bonaparte ... from that time on, he was seen as called upon to save France from the crisis that had been thrown upon it by the pitiful government of the Directory and the setbacks of our armies .

8 Bigarré (Auguste): Mémoires du général Bigarré, aide de camp du roi Joseph, 1775-1813, Paris, Giovanangeli, 2002.

9 Laugier (Jérôme-Roland): Les cahiers du capitaine Laugier, Aix, Remondet-Aubin, 1893.

10 On this subject, it would be useful to consult " Napoleon Bonaparte's proclamations and harangues, with a summary of the events (sic) that gave rise to each of them ", collected by Th. D., Paris, 1835.

11 Challand de La Guillauche (colonel): Memoirs of Captain Bertrand. Grande Armée, 1805- 1815, Paris, librairie des deux Empires, 1999.

12 These remained in use until 1881 in the British army. Moreover, obedience under threat is de rigueur in European armies. An arsenal of sanctions exists at the disposal of officers, which should make it possible to impose on their soldiers a fear greater than that of enemy fire.

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14 Ancestors of regiments.

15 Andolenko (Serge): Recueil d'histoire de l'infanterie française, Paris, Eurimprim, 1969.

16 " Mémoires du général Lejeune (1792-1813) ", Paris, éditions du Grenadier, 2011.

17 Quoted by Thierry Lentz in " Waterloo 1815 ", A.C.L., de Broglie, " Souvenirs (1785-1870) ".

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