



Evolution and Revolutions in Tactics

Free Reflection

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Tactique générale

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The tactician is not in charge of crisis resolution and does not care about the global approach. His art, "simple and all-embracing," is summed up as implementing the means of the moment in combat. It is a matter of geometry, topography, ranges, cadences, speeds; of devices, formations, manoeuvres, fronts and intervals...

It is more immediately than strategy subject to the obvious durability of geographical factors, the volatility of technical improvements and the constancy of individual and collective human psychology (not to mention animal psychology, which for 2000 years imposed strict limits on the evolution of the cavalry's modes of action).

Observed over time, the history of tactics is one of evolution and revolution. (1) There was a lot of hesitation and trial and error, dazzling innovations followed by punishment-like returns. What one campaign revealed as a new principle was disproved in subsequent battles: many brilliant innovators were in reality nothing more than reckless people blessed by Fortune.

The cavalry had completely renounced the "hedge" charge at the end of the 16th century, abandoning armour and edged weapons to adopt the hat, pistol and caracole. From the middle of the 17th century, however, armour, swords and sabres had reappeared, and in the middle of the 18th century Frédéric forbade Frédéric forbade his cavalymen to use firearms, and the charge once again became the almost unique way of using them, against both cavalry and infantry, at least until 1815.

After the first battles of 1861 the American cavalry had almost given up fighting on horseback, fighting on foot by fire like dragoons. Two years later, and despite the obvious increase in the range and rate of fire of small arms, mixed tactics had emerged, combining the fire of dismounted skirmishers manoeuvring on foot by the flanks of the opposing cavalry and that of light pieces in sashes, with sabre charges, a tactic that was superbly ignored by the French and German cavalry in 1870.

After the early days of August 14, spent seeking cavalry combat with spear and sword, the European cavalry did not shine. entered the world war only with horsemanship comparable to that of "Jeb" Stuart and John Hunt Morgan, in which they acted primarily in combat on foot and by the fire of their batteries. (2). It is customary among many "historians" to ridicule the military for their inability to understand seemingly obvious developments.

The truth is that the effects of these developments were much less obvious to those who had to face them: in the moving art of tactics, the absence of hindsight is obviously the law of the practitioner.

Among the myriad factors affecting the evolution of the art of warfare today, two probably deserve the tactician's close attention: the upcoming capacity for "collaborative protection" and "collaborative combat"; developments in "information technology" and "information security"; and the development of "information and communications technology".valorisation" or "network-centric combat". Both converge towards a common effect: the acceleration of the manoeuvre through the transformation of hitherto thoughtful acts into collective "reflex acts".

It is likely that these capabilities will have even greater effects on the capabilities of mobile weapons, armoured cavalry and helicopters, than on those of the infantry and engineers, in particular (3).

The mobility differential between the weapons could thus once again become a tactical factor comparable to what it was, for example, in 1940, when very partially armoured and motorised armies were fighting each other. In comparison, the "new" capacity to apply precise, "kill" fire at a very long range and beyond masks (4)...will ultimately do little more than turn the units or weapons that apply them into "melee" units... (5) Like tank units, "special artillery" became "armoured cavalry". Similarly, advances in vehicle mobility and capability will remain insignificant relative to the effects of geography.

Even during periods of rapid change, especially technical changes, the effects on combat appear only very slowly and gradually. New weapons are not manufactured and distributed all at once, and not all parties to a possible conflict are equipped with them at the same time. The development of new combat procedures is sometimes rapid. But their generalization through instruction and training often takes many years at the level of a national army.

And since no theory has ever stood the test of practice, it has often taken several wars or campaigns to develop and confirm procedures adapted to the new conditions. The immediate advantage at the beginning of a conflict is for those who are fortunate enough to have the processes best suited to the conditions of the moment; and if the conflict lasts, to the one who will be able to adapt his armaments and processes most quickly and efficiently to the real conditions that experience will have enabled him to apprehend.

In this, history often proves those who were right too soon to be wrong: The unexpected success achieved in Poland and France in 1939 and 1940 certainly did not help the Germans adapt to the completely different conditions of 1941 to 1944, when the generation of the German army was in power. The unexpected success achieved in Poland and France in 1939 and 1940 certainly did not help the Germans to adapt to the completely different conditions from 1941 to 1944, when the introduction of motorization and anti-tank weapons recreated the general conditions of 1917 and the Allies, especially the Americans, implemented the doctrine they had learned on the French front in 1918.

Pensées mili-terre

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The practical impossibility of knowing when and against whom we will start the next conflict and, even more so, in what relative state we will be with regard to equipment and procedures, makes it necessary to adopt a cautious method or a "strategic stand-by arrangement", based on the most demanding assumptions.

And beware of a major temptation, the symptoms of which are sometimes observed in many current writings: to push to enter into conflict here and now, to give ourselves an identified adversary whose vulnerabilities and capacities are known and to whom our means and procedures are obviously, and as by chance, adapted. DAESCH is a dangerously convenient enemy! Asymmetric, hybrid warfare and stabilisation is not the Alpha, let alone the Omega of warfare.

(1) Literally, meaning a return to the initial situation at the end of a cycle .

(2) For the French : the raid of the 5th DC to the left bank of the Ourcq (during which it canons many convoys) and that of the 10th DC to Sissonne (during which a party of the 20th dragoons calls in vain a battery to cannon the cavalry corps von der Marwitz rallied under the walls of Laon, September 14, before this mecorps von der Marwitz itself cannonizes the 10th DC in retreat at the Juvincourt bridge); raid of the Eastern cavalry brigade towards Uskub through the Goleschnitza in September-October 18 (during which the 1st Spahis seizes on foot and in the fog of the heights of Vodno).

(3) The slowness of foot maneuvers and foot changes will remain the dominant factor for the infantry, the time needed for its work will be the same for the engineers, as technology brings little change to these factors.

(4) Whether it is "fire beyond direct sight" (TAVD) or the ability of artillery to apply precision fire, the ability to which is nothing new, since direct, strafing fire has been the normal mode of action of artillery for at least two centuries.

(5) Whoever can apply such fire may also receive it from an opponent with the equivalent capability, which is elementary.

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