



Back to Contents Joint Battle Group For a further step towards efficiency

military-Earth thinking notebook

le Chef de bataillon Frédéric CHAMAUD

Published on 23/05/2018

Engagement opérationnel

Recent operations show that the Inter-Arms Battle Groups (IABGs)[1] are now truly effective. In the difficult budgetary context, the author proposes a number of ideas for maintaining and even improving the power of the IATFs. While operations are increasingly imposing inter-service structures down to the lowest level, the accumulation of resources and therefore of subordinates weighs on the tactical commander. The question of the leader's place in combat and the optimum scope of command remains topical. The author proposes that the chain of command of the ATIGs should be made denser by the adoption of battalion structures.

1] The structure of the AITG respects at least the quaternary structure. The hard core is made up of at least 2 units from the original regiment and gives it its specificity (landed, embarked, air combat). 1 or 2 units from the other components of the operational function "contact", allow for complementary effects. Engineer and artillery elements are also integrated.

Over the past 20 years, the French Army has undergone major changes: suspended conscription, professionalization, a very significant reduction in the number of personnel, the provision of highly sophisticated equipment whose effects are multiplied, and the digitization of the battle space. At the same time, there has been a gradual hardening of operations, but also a shift in manoeuvres towards confined spaces. Hardiness, resilience and the ability to last in hostile environments remain constants.

According to Colonel Goya, a definition of military power could take into account three factors. "**Command (C)** is more important than **number (N)** , which in turn is more important than quality (**Q**), **with** each time a more than proportional increase in effectiveness" [1].

With the professionalization, the Army has seen a very important reduction in the number

of men from 250,000 to 88,000 in 2013. This reduction was only partially compensated for by quality. The Feline system is operating alongside the AMX 10 RC, which is out of breath. In addition, export difficulties mean that small production runs are required, which does not result in defect-free production and leads to lower availability.

The current organisation of the Army enables it to respond effectively to small-scale operations. However, the more numerous (or resilient) and well-organised our adversaries are, the more difficult it will be to compensate for numbers by quality.

As modernity tends to increase the effects of weapons in the field, the complexity of coordinating all these means is increasing. Tactical command structures suffer from just enough dimensioning.

An organisation of units to offer more command opportunities and thus gain experience

- Operations that require joint operations down to the combat platoon level

The battlefield's getting bigger and bigger. When Napoleon commanded his armies, he looked across almost the entire battlefield. He gave his orders by means of letters and sometimes intervened directly to place this or that artillery battery. A century later, in 1914, as they mounted an assault in close ranks, the French line infantry learned, at the cost of heavy losses, that modernity (machine guns, rapid fire cannons) required them to attack on larger fronts. When the GTIA 21st^{RIMA} intervened in Mali in 2013, it intervened "over an area almost as large as France with a SGTIA [2] at each end: Diabaly was 250 km from Bamako and Sévaré 600 km away" [3].

3] Paradoxically, the maneuver no longer takes place in large areas because the population has become more than ever the stake in modern wars [4]. Our opponents know their weaknesses and generally refuse to fight in an open environment. They seek confined spaces whose equalizing power of technology allows them to fight in better conditions. The locality of Adizai in Afghanistan, during the mandate of the GTIA RAPTOR in 2011, presented all the characteristics of this environment: compartmentalization and isolation of the combat sections and groups, difficulty for the leader to see his terrain and his men. In the same area of action of the AITG, two parallel valleys, for example, could present several micro-theatres.

To compensate for this isolation of companies and sections, the infantry and cavalry gradually acquired reinforcements allowing them to increase their power and autonomy. The battlegroups of the Second World War were broken down to the platoon level.

The DIA (joint detachment) enabled the section or platoon leader to deal with a multitude of situations.

With a small number of personnel in the field, modern technology makes it possible to multiply the effect of weapons. An air guidance team (JTAC) of three combatants can guide aircraft coming from France to strike an enemy position in the heart of Africa. The "ROVER" system gives the tactical commander, via a drone, a live view of a field compartment before he engages it, and enables him to guide himself day and night

through a maze of similar alleyways by spotting possible obstacles to the movement of vehicles.

Thus modernity, but also the adaptability of our adversaries, impose little by little a systematization of the inter-services structures up to the level of the section.

An infantry or cavalry-dominated GTIA therefore now has unprecedented potential power.

However, isn't the accumulation of resources and therefore of subordinates becoming a brake on manoeuvre?

- Putting the leader to the test of modernity

The FELIN system and, more broadly, the digitisation of the battle space are gradually reaching operational maturity. But the way of fighting has not yet been revolutionized, and the new style of command based on the "electronic ubiquity of the leader" [5] is long overdue. When the generalization of signals in German tank units is achieved in the late 1930s, the way of fighting changes, the units are then more dispersed but, above all, the coordination of maneuvers gains in flexibility and speed.

It is at the level of the SGTIA chiefs, the unit commanders, that the expectation of a new way of commanding is the most striking.

A unit commander must command among his men where the main action takes place, and many have been wounded in combat in Afghanistan or Mali. Subordinates need these leaders at their side to coordinate their actions, to quickly understand the situation and also to motivate and reassure them.

Nevertheless, the unit commander is torn by the temptation to stay close to his digitized command systems and reinforcements. This allows him to maintain a certain overview and analysis of the situation, to make effective use of his support or tactical reserve, but above all to stay in touch with the higher echelon. Coordination in contact with the enemy is then left to the deputy officer or section chiefs. The unit commander is no longer at the heart of the action.

Another reason encourages the unit commander to take a step back from the action: the difficulty to synthesize the mass of information coming from his subordinates.

With eight or even ten different sources of information, the volume of reports becomes enormous. Added to this is the psychological pressure of combat and the consequences of orders given. This makes it difficult to effectively analyze a situation as a whole.

This increasing difficulty in finding the right place for the unit commander has been identified. An additional deputy officer (taken from the substance of the ERTF) is sometimes appointed. This measure provides short-term solutions, but lacks scope because it is dependent on the availability of officers at the right level and because it does not provide the volume of personnel required to generate an additional ASWITG CP.

Another solution is the secondment of tactical CPs to support unit commanders. This choice was made in Mali by the GTIA of the 21st RIMA. A tactical CP was deployed with each SGTIA "in order to allow the captain to concentrate on the field aspect of the tactics

to leave the situation assessment to the tactical CP" [6]. However, the 21^{RIMa} corps commander explained that his CP's manpower had been reduced by the same amount. The AITF CP was in difficulty if the action was to last; here again, the command structure did not seem to be fully satisfactory.

- Increasing power by discerning the optimum scope of command

As a first step, unit commanders should be allowed to concentrate on visual manoeuvring. One solution would be to allow the ERTF to arm more tactical CPs. This would be accomplished by having an experienced officer, a former unit commander, who would be responsible for coordinating visual support and liaison with other units, command one echelon between ITARMS and the ERTF. He would be able, through his overall vision, to manage the real-time feedback and, if necessary, help a subordinate in difficulty in the event of a hard blow.

To go further, in order to give these structures an esprit de corps, it would be conceivable to equip each regiment with several battalions. Each battalion would be formed from a regiment that would be divided. These battalions, with a strength of no more than 200 to 300 men, would be supported by a pooled echelon at the higher level. Each battalion would not necessarily have identical structures. One battalion could be fully equipped and capable of short-notice projection; the other, on a lighter structure, could respond to an alert on longer notice. A third could include operational assistance detachments, reserve units, and pool men unavailable for long periods of time.

This would also allow for greater flexibility. Today, when an infantry regiment arms an ERTG, it mortgages its entire staff and two or three of its combat companies. Its unprojected fraction, the "rear base", includes one or two companies that carry out day-to-day business while they continue their training. With a battalion structure, it would be possible to deploy two battalions simultaneously or successively in a battalion relief logic, each with its own chain of command.

Thus creating new command opportunities, the attractiveness of the profession and the motivation of the men would certainly be maintained. The increased operational experience would make it possible to have even more experienced AITG leaders.

In the current context, which resembles a strategic pause for the Army, this battle structure would also help to prepare for the future. It takes six months to train a young volunteer. If necessary, a battalion could split up and form additional companies with strong operational experience. It would be possible to extinguish the first outbreaks of fire with a glass of water, while training the bulk of the troops for the rest. In this way, the question of critical mass, beyond which the factors of quality and command no longer count, would find a concrete solution and make it possible to respond to large-scale events that put our society at risk.

In a world where armament has never been so present or so sophisticated, operations are tending to become tougher. The enemy is adapting quickly and choosing the confined environment in which to fight. Tactical autonomy down to the lowest echelons, as well as high technology, make it possible to respond effectively to these new challenges. For the tactical leader, this means a multiplication of subordinates. In order to optimise the use of weapons, a denser command structure is required. **The creation of battalions with their own chain of command would meet this expectation.** The gains would be to allow unit commanders to focus on visual manoeuvre, to gain flexibility in projection and to regain

the motivation associated with the prospect of command opportunities in combat. Above all, it would prepare for the future with units capable of splitting up if the need arose.

[1] Colonel Michel Goya, "Res Militaris"Économica, 2011, p 30.

[2] Joint Battle Group Sub-Group

[3] Colonel Geze, 21st^{RIMa} Corps Commander, in Foot Soldier #30, Spring-Summer 2013

4] General Desportes, "The probable war"», 2008

[5] General Michel Yakovleff, "Theoretical Tactics"Économica, 2006, p 247.

[6] Colonel Geze, 21st^{RIMa} Corps Commander, in Foot Soldier #30, Spring-Summer 2013

Coming from the non-commissioned officers corps, officer of the navy troops, Battalion Chief CHAMAUD served in combat unit before joining the Urban Zone Action Training Center. He is currently a trainee at the War School.

Title :	le Chef de bataillon Frédéric CHAMAUD
Author (s) :	le Chef de bataillon Frédéric CHAMAUD
Release date	17/05/2018
