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military-Earth thinking notebook

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Histoire & stratégie

An example for generations of officers, General Leclerc can also claim to serve as a reference for managerial action. By applying a grid of managerial reading to the action of this emblematic figure, the author invites us to reconsider the existing or supposed, even honored, relationships between the fields of command and management.

Confrontation between management concepts and the exercise of command in the armed forces is becoming increasingly frequent. This often leads to an opposition between military personnel who believe that management is nothing more than the implementation of processes that deny the human aspect of organisations, and managers for whom command is part of a coercive mode of operation that destroys initiative.

However, as early as 1917, the Commander-in-Chief of the French Armed Forces did not hesitate to present himself as "a captain of industry" and, in 1921, the Maréchal Lyautey had a brochure, inspired by the work of Henri Fayol, entitled "Modern methods of administration and organisation of work" distributed to officers serving in Morocco. Thus, management, which is understood as the art of transforming the work of others into performance, does not always seem to have been doomed to grimaces by military leaders.

Among these leaders, one of the most prestigious is undoubtedly General Leclerc. His ability to get the best out of his men, disregarding differences, is often highlighted as one of the main characteristics of the "Leclerc spirit", which will animate the units under his command from Koufra to Hanoi via Strasbourg and Berchtesgaden. Highlighted by the Second World War, this ability was built up throughout his assignments: in Morocco as head of the Goum, in Saint-Cyr as an instructor, then at the War School. The future General Leclerc demonstrated his leadership qualities each time, but also showed his willingness to improve the structure (organization) entrusted to him in order to increase performance. In many respects, the future general behaves like a manager, in the modern sense of the term, which is not common for a cavalry officer of the interwar period.

Thus, "turning the work of others into performance" and "getting the best out of his men" do not seem to be such distant goals. Applying a managerial reading grid to the action of General Leclerc then seems less iconoclastic and allows to put it into perspective with more modern concepts and may be more meaningful for current generations.

Three months for Koufra

"When he first arrived in Chad on December 2, 1940, Austerlitz's birthday, Colonel Leclerc knew only as much about the country and the men as can be learned from maps and reports. On December 3, however, he already spoke of attacking Koufra" [1].

The appointment of Leclerc as commander of the military territory of Chad was perceived by the principal interested party as a sanction. For their part, the soldiers present on the spot awaited him with apprehension. They were essentially soldiers belonging to the colonial troops, judged indolent by Leclerc, who was perceived as a caricature of the cavalry officer, strangely young for his rank, with a reputation for austerity.

The assumption of office begins badly. Leclerc's personality contrasts with the state of the troops under his command. Some officers predict a resounding failure for the new colonel. Thus one of them wrote: "Leclerc may lack a little tact in command" [2] while Captain Massu declared: "The gap between our two arms is deep, I wonder how the osmosis will work... Will he want to turn us into horsemen (...), will we manage to turn him into a colonial?». However, Leclerc will impose himself thanks to his charisma and his ability to take the measure of his position, but also because he indicates to his subordinates a goal to reach: to take Koufra.

3] If, "in a few days, the presence of Colonel Leclerc metamorphosed the territory of Chad", this was due to his ability to evaluate the context and to play on resentments (having witnessed powerless at the Battle of France) as well as on the hopes of his new subordinates so that they would become "impatient to fight" and declare that "this heroic enterprise exalts their imagination". Koufra seems impossible to conquer, but Leclerc will strive to make his troops efficient and to give operational impetus. To achieve this, he will plan, organize, direct and control: he will implement a management process in line with that developed by the industrialist Henri Fayol.

- Planning: Leclerc takes the time to study his Italian opponent and the terrain. Then, with his staff, he sets intermediate objectives and establishes coordination measures.
- Organize: To achieve his objective, he compares the meagre means at his disposal with the importance of the objective to be conquered and deduces an organization. This takes the form of a highly mobile column where speed of execution is preferred to firepower. He makes the best use of the British unit [4] present in the area of operations and does not hesitate to draw inspiration from his adversaries. Thus, its organization is close to that of the Saharianna, an ad-hoc Italian unit used by the Italians to control their territory. The manager of the years 2010 will retain this fundamental principle at Leclerc: it is not the end that is subordinated to the means, but the reverse.
- Lead: Leclerc is always present on the main action and imposes its leadership by demonstrating its military qualities (legitimacy) and its psychological sense of command. While an Italian unit counter-attacks, his subordinates describe him as

"present everywhere where and when the need arises, galvanizing by his calm and dynamism his handful of soldiers" [5].

- Control: In military language, one would rather use the word "drive". Leclerc followed the execution of his plan and systematically took the necessary measures to deal with an unforeseen event. Demanding precise reports from his subordinates, he always remains capable of assessing the situation and redistributing resources in order to be strong where the enemy is weak. This ability to conceive and then lead while federating the energies of his subordinates enabled Leclerc to win the first battle of the Free French. He knew how to impose himself with tact by multiplying the trips and meetings on the ground and, above all, he respected to the letter these principles of managerial common sense: quickly display his first successes **[6] and know how to exploit them in terms of communication ...** (Koufra oath).

Leclerc, agent of change: the L force becomes ^{2nd} DB

During the operations in Tunisia in 1943, it was not one, but two French armies fighting alongside the Allies: the African army, claiming to be under General Giraud, took part in operations under American command, while General Leclerc's L-force was integrated into Montgomery's VIIIth British army. Faithful to General de Gaulle, Leclerc refused contact with those he still called the "Vichyssois". The changing political situation will however lead de Gaulle to make General Leclerc one of the main levers of **change, which is** the creation of an amalgamated and renovated French army.

Leclerc was therefore to take charge of the modification of processes and behaviour that would make it possible to transform "seasoned troops, experienced in Saharan combat, but few in number, with heterogeneous equipment, and with the ability to fight in the Sahara".roclite and breathless equipment" into "a large unit, composed of many regiments, equipped with armoured equipment requiring a multitude of specialists and technicians" [7]. To create the 2nd ^{AD}, he has five months during which he will thus have to: change the structure, change the technology, change the people.

The change of **structure** is embodied by the forced adoption of the American divisional system which imposes to organize the division into battle groups [8]. [8] It is therefore important to review coordination processes since battlegroups combine melee weapons and support weapons, but also to redefine authority relationships since the three battlegroup leaders now have greater autonomy. Leclerc is increasing the number of exercises and emphasising the training of managers to accompany this change and ensure its effectiveness in the very short term, as it is also necessary to take account of the urgent need to adapt to the new equipment.

As is often the case during times of conflict, **technology has evolved** rapidly. The rustic but obsolete L-Force equipment is gradually being replaced by new equipment, the impact of which on the organization is highlighted not only by the change in structure but also by the need for staff training and the reorganization of the logistics function. To this end, Leclerc creates a divisional training centre located close to the collection point in Casablanca. Leclerc then took great care in the conditioning of the equipment and the training of the personnel, which was sanctioned by a meticulous American inspection that was successfully passed.

The most difficult change was undoubtedly that of the **personnel**. On the one hand, the statutes of the American army prevented the retention of native Africans in large units

designed to take part in Operation Overlord, forcing Leclerc to part with men who have been following him for two years, and on the other hand it is necessary to get them admitted:

- to the FFL[g] units that they will be amalgamated with those they still commonly call "Vichyst".
- to the North African units that they will be placed under the orders of one of the first "dissidents".

Leclerc himself had often shown intransigence, preferring to march with the British rather than the French during the capture of Tunis, but he would show realism and implement a strategy to combat resistance to change. This strategy is based on five tactics:

- Education and communication The Koufra oath allows us to bring people together by indicating the common goal and the logic of change, sometimes playing on the emotional register. "The 2nd Armoured ^{Division} is the first large unit in which Frenchmen who, for three years, had been separated by circumstance, were brought together. I ask you to reflect on the importance of this reunion. Our country can no longer afford the luxury of internal divisions. Unity is more necessary than ever to restore France's national greatness," Leclerc told his officers, asking them to spread this message, which he himself never ceased to carry during his many visits to the units that made up the division.
- Participation, embodied in the integration of "vichyst" officers into the command group, which Leclerc involved in the decision-making process. This tactic also enabled him to attract to him skills that he had not previously had.
- Negotiation This was the equivalent of a bargain: expectations were met (the assurance of participating in the landing) in exchange for a commitment of loyalty to General de Gaulle.
- coercion Leclerc also employed the same approach, as illustrated by the episode that led to the break with Colonel Malagutti, who was opposed to the principle of battle groups. This strong doctrinal opposition, heightened by conflicts of personal ethics, led Leclerc to ask de Gaulle to recall Colonel Malagutti on the eve of the Normandy landings.

The Sources of Leadership

Contemporary management writers define a leader as a person with formal managerial authority and the ability to influence others and mobilize a community. Haunted by both efficiency and concern for his men, General Leclerc, who established himself as a great leader between 1940 and 1947, is indeed the one who, better than others, knows not only where he wants to go but also where he must go. He is also the one who knows how to communicate his confidence to his men and, above all, he manages to obtain the active, intelligent and ardent support of all for the achievement of the company's objectives.

To situate Leclerc in the typology of leaders, it seems appropriate to use the work of R.R Blake and J.A. Mouton on the different types of leadership according to "interest in production" and "interest in people". Blake and Mouton start from these two dimensions to construct a grid on which they position five management styles

Through the examples already studied, we have seen the emergence of a Leclerc planning, directing and controlling the execution of his orders in order to achieve his objective. It is the sometimes autocratic Leclerc who decides to take over Koufra.

However, we also observed an officer who was able to generate support by creating a climate of trust and promoting initiative. This does not mean that Leclerc is a social leader, as his benevolence is permanently limited by his willingness to achieve his objectives and satisfy the general interest without any possible compromise with the satisfaction of individual interests. For Leclerc, each of the men in the division is there to "serve" and not to "serve himself". Thanks to the trust and respect he inspires, he succeeds in convincing men with very different backgrounds to fight together. The example of the former Spanish republicans (the famous Nueve company, which was one of the first units to enter Paris), fighting in a division commanded by a Catholic general, with rather conservative positions, and for a country that was not their own, is quite revealing. Thus, Leclerc is definitely an integrating leader.

General Leclerc is also distinguished by his ability to conceive a vision (the liberation of France by a reorganized Free French Army), to embody it through his behaviour and to transmit it. When he materializes this vision by pronouncing the oath of Koufra, he captures the energy and emotion of his men through powerful imagery. He then uses this oath as a "red thread" until its fulfillment. He thus perfectly illustrates the work of Bennis and Nanus[10] on the best leaders, in particular what they call self-deployment, i.e. the leader's management of himself, and the "Wallenda" effect [11]. 11] The importance of this self-management, he is very quickly aware of it since he adopts as his personal motto "Command oneself", conscious of the risks that his sometimes too authoritarian character can cause him to run, but also because he wants to capitalize on his strengths and knows how to exploit them to train his men ("We already had self-confidence before leaving, but now we knew that with such a leader there was no mission we could not fulfil"). Finally, he is not a man to look for excuses and knows how to use the occasional failure to build the victory of the next day. Optimistic even in difficult situations, Leclerc is a man who believes in luck and knows how to bring it about...

An example for generations of officers, Leclerc can rightly serve as a reference for managerial action.

Moreover, this perspective of an emblematic officer with the concepts of management invites us to redefine the relationship between command and management. At a time when economic logic, which is increasingly prevalent in armies, makes it necessary to replace the notion of effectiveness with that of efficiency, and when orders are more and more objective under the effect of standardisation and new technologies, it appears that command is more and more **management**. However, there will always be exceptional situations where the manager will fade behind the warlord.

[1] « General Leclerc as seen by his fellow soldiers » Alsatia edition, Paris 1949, p 91.

2] Quoted by Jean-Christophe Notin in "12". Leclerc", Perrin edition, 2005.

3] This is a small-scale operation (400 men, 112 of whom are European, 162 vehicles), but it is very difficult because of the depth of the objective in Italian territory (450 km) and the short time the climate allows for assembly.

4] Major Clayton's Long Range Desert Group, which will be used by Leclerc to illuminate his progression.

[5] « General Leclerc as seen by his fellow soldiers », Op cit, p.109.

6] Before it was theorized by Michael Watkins, Leclerc understood and implemented the 90-day rule.

[7] « General Leclerc as seen by his fellow soldiers", Op cit, p.173

8] The famous GTV, GTL and GTD identified by the initial of their respective leaders in 1943: V for Warabiot, L for Langlade, D for Dio.

g] Free French Forces.

10] Op. cit.

11] Wallenda effect: ability to pursue positive objectives, to pour all one's energy into the task at hand, without looking back or exhuming excuses for past events.

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