



LISTENING TO THE MARECHAL FOCH

military-Earth thinking notebook

le Chef de bataillon Alain LARDET

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Témoignages

The editor does not have precise information about the author. A member of the Staff of Marshal FOCH, then President of the "Allied Military Committee of Versailles" responsible for ensuring the execution of the military clauses of the peace treaty, Commander Charles BUGNET was chosen as Ordinary Officer in 1921. This function put him in contact with the Marshal until 1929. The essential information is thus provided since this testimony is clearly presented as the "hot" apologetic work of a disciple marked by eight years of intimacy with his master.

The author demonstrates nothing and does not defend a thesis. The book is a walk with the marshal. Foch was fond of this moment during which he delivered the heart of his thoughts. It is therefore a meeting, a tête-à-tête offered to as many people as possible, thanks to an interpreter trained to decipher the slightest reflections of an exceptional personality. For interest is focused on this character, described during his lifetime as belonging to the heritage of humanity and having indeed reached the height of glory. Walking therefore, as the title of the book suggests, the Marshal teaches us by revealing his principles, his doctrine and his method. Indeed, where does this elevation of thought, this correctness of reasoning and this extraordinary energy come from? According to the title of the conclusion, "anyone can do the same". The condition for success would therefore be respect for FOCH's rules, which are good and useful in themselves and even more so in the use that is made of them, because they serve above all to build.

"War has taught me the necessity, in order to succeed, to have a goal, a plan, a method - to have a goal you have to know what you want, to make a plan you have to know what you can do and to carry it out you have to monitor the application of the means". This first council summarizes its teaching while presenting the plan of the work. Indeed, the walk follows the steps that FOCH is so fond of: what is it all about? What is it all about?", "knowing, being able, wanting, acting, results, conclusion" are the chapters that organize the teachings.

It is necessary to namelyThe knowledge is an indispensable basis. Knowledge p conviction, confidence and the ability to make informed decisions. It creates the power to act and develops character. On the contrary, any man who is aware of his ignorance or his need to take advice from others is always indecisive, perplexed and ready to become demoralized. "You have to know in order to have courage, and for that you have to work, and for that it is not enough to learn rules... you have to learn how to think."

It is necessary to power and to do that you have to develop your intelligence, your judgment, your analysis, your synthesis. "The primacy of the soul is the result of its experience. It constitutes the foundation of the other faculties.

It is necessary to wantIf Turenne had prudence and Condé had audacity, Foch had the will. One must decide and want with a sustained, inflexible will to go all the way. "Know what you want and do it," or again, "he who has the most will wins, ..., it is not debatable, otherwise it crumbles". To know how to want is to have character, the main thing in a man of war.

"It's not letting yourself be stopped by any difficulty, and not using your will for nothing, but concentrating on what's essential: breaking the enemy's will."

We must act. and getting results. Action represents for him the necessary outcome of his method, of which the will is the means, and of which knowledge and intelligence are the bases. The marshal creates the impulse: "I always push people with the sword in their loins". "Activity! activity! speed!" Napoleon noted at the bottom of his orders, the marshal added "without delay". Action served him as a unit of measurement for judging men. It should not be confused with agitation, which has no aim, no method and no plan.

"I do not have extraordinary ideas, but those I have, I carry them out. In fact the results obtained by Marshal FOCH are breathtaking. The account of the marshal's life underlines this rectilinear elevation. From his birth in 1851, to the title of Generalissimo in 1918, Marshal FOCH's career is brushed, marked by the war: the defeat of 1870, then the work of preparation through teaching at the War School, giving rise to the famous conferences published under the titles of Principles of War and Warfare, and finally four years of war during which he exercised the highest commands.

Teachings

The Marshal's method described in the previous paragraph is already a teaching for today. The observation and accompaniment of this hero also allows a better understanding of him in a lesson that does not apply to the rules of tactics or strategy. Here the subject is of general interest: the man.

The man as a subject, when he is a model for reflection: "He had a point of support: his faith, a lever: his method, and a strength: his character. His faith received and nurtured, his method the fruit of work and reflection, his character developed by a systematic will."

Man also when he is the object of command. The marshal devoted all his studies to this question: "Command is the main thing, our misfortune is that we lack leaders because of general laziness. This represents another teaching of the work, which by its height is addressed to all those who will want to direct, command, guide or lead men even elsewhere than in battle. Here again, the advice is simple, tailored to action. "Monsieur de la Palisse is my best friend! You must not be too refined in action, you must simply do

what you can, to apply what you know. We must learn to think, that is to say without relying on our gifts but on facts, persevere in work and effort, reduce to the simple, clarify, prune. "Learning to think means learning to fix one's attention, to concentrate, to discover the essence of a question, and to do this, to clear up: what is it all about?" This school of command and therefore of thought is a patient rumination within the reach of an average intelligence according to the marshal, so that the moral resources, including the will, are not lacking. For moral greatness plays a part in war, but it was thought impossible to study it. "Defeat seemed to be an exclusive product of material greatness, whereas it is, on the contrary, a purely moral result, caused by the death of the enemy. The defeat seemed to be an exclusive product of material magnitudes, whereas it is a purely moral result, caused by discouragement and terror, brought to the defeated as a result of the combined and simultaneous use by the victor of moral and material forces. He therefore endeavours to solve the problem of leadership training. The subjects taught must be applied to particular cases "fact over idea, action over speech, execution over theory". What is needed in the midst of special cases is to recognize the situation as it presents itself, shrouded in the fog of the unknown, to make a healthy appreciation of what one sees, to guess what one does not see, to make a quick decision, and then to act vigorously, without prevarication.

This requirement applies to all matters: "strategy: a matter of common sense and character".

For the rest, the book is interspersed with reflections on the more developed topics in its tactical lectures. A few examples; History: "there is no book more fruitful in meditation to maintain in peacetime the brain of an army"; Regulations: "the generals had prepared in maneuvers a conventional war,...the war they had to fight was no longer in the rules...poor rules...it is not enough to learn the rules, you must

learning to think"; the detail: "insignificant in design can defeat the purpose, can play a major role in execution." Information in wartime: "But it is useless, they are almost all false; one only knows afterwards which ones were true. I have never mentioned them. What is needed is not to wait for intelligence, it is to know what you want"; Even multinational command is discussed: "Here's a summary of my thinking, it's consistent with yours in principle: study it, then come back to me and we'll see together". Finally, to conclude the illustrations, but without being exhaustive, Foch's will constantly comes back to us and becomes a tactical principle. He did not like the sceptics, the indifferent, the floating, the hesitant, the dilettante or the complicated, all those in a word whose character diminishes the forces instead of increasing them. "Victory belongs to those who deserve it by the greatest amount of will power.

Editor's Commentary

"If the forms evolve, the guiding principles remain". It is with this key to reading that this book can contribute to the training of leaders.

The FOCH method is its main asset: "reading, noting, rereading, comparing, starting over, developing the qualities of analysis and synthesis of judgement, then building on it". The fruits of this method are universal, as Napoleon remarked: "It is not a genius who suddenly reveals to me in secret what I have to do or say, it is reflection and meditation".

The Marshal's aphorisms are the main reading interests. Fruits of a life of meditation and especially action, they embody indigestible ideas without this practical step.

Finally, the French spirit loves and claims the providential leader. Our history is built on its men and women who, alone in the turmoil, affirm that "the great events of history are not accidents" The figure of the marshal is part of this line of great captains, imitable and kind. All of them, like Foch, insist on the primacy of moral forces to prepare for action: "In our time we believe we can do without ideals, reject what she calls abstractions, live on realism, rationalism, positivism, reducing everything to questions of knowledge or the use of expedencies.

To avoid fault and error, the cult of two abstractions of the moral domain: duty and discipline, a cult that requires knowledge and reasoning to produce results.

This book has no other ambition than to facilitate the work of the bees of Montaigne who "plunder this, hence the flowers, but make honey, which is all theirs, theirs". He fully succeeds in this.

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