



## GIVE HIS INTENTION: THE BEST WAY FOR THE LEADER TO REDUCE UNCERTAINTY BY ENCOURAGING INITIATIVE FROM SUBORDINATE LEVELS

Command in Operations Exercise for Tactical Leaders

RFT 3.2 Tome 2 (FT-05)

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**Today, the information systems available to Western armies are reducing what is known as the "fog of war". However, the acquisition and processing of information never completely removes the degree of uncertainty in which the leader finds himself. One deviation to be avoided would be to continually delay decision making while waiting for more and more complete information. To avoid this deviation, as well as to reduce the degree of uncertainty, the leader's decision making must always be one step ahead and, as the As Liddell Hart said in his colourful language, "look over the hill," in short, the leader must anticipate.**

However, in order to reduce this degree of uncertainty, two approaches are possible. The first, top-down, info-centred approach is to provide the highest levels of command with considerable means of collecting and processing information. This has the perverse effect of making the lower levels of command less well informed than the higher ones, without removing the uncertainty for the levels of execution. The second focuses on the action and effects to be achieved in the field. In this option, chiefs and their staffs are prepared and trained to deal with uncertainty as an inherent factor in the conduct of the war. This approach therefore favours the delegation of implementation to those levels capable of acquiring, processing and exploiting information in an appropriate and effective manner ("actionable information").

Marshal Foch, emphasizing the line to his habit, in order to make himself understood, explains that he has always decided in the midst of uncertainty of the intentions of the enemy and that, if he had had to wait until he had all the information in hand, he would never have decided anything:

"Intelligence? But, it is useless, they are almost all false; you only know afterwards which ones were true. I never mentioned them. We see what we want to do, we see if we can do it with what we have, and then we do it. Intelligence on the enemy? You never know anything... On the night of the Marne, when I was told that the Germans were no longer there, I didn't understand! History? In hindsight, we only report information that we know

to be accurate; but when we had to use it, we didn't know it! ...You see, what is needed is not to wait for the intelligence, it is to know what we want. You do what you want when you know what you want. »

Reported by Maj. Bugnet listening to Marshal Foch (Paris 1929.Grasset. Page 121)

Intention drives the idea of manoeuvring, the keystone of any kind of operation at any level.

- l'indispensable idée de manœuvre du chef

It is based on the notion of major effect, implemented in France, even if the allied armies end up adopting it more or less (commander's intent). The idea of manoeuvre sets the common objective in the form of an effect to be achieved within a defined space-time framework, the phasing of the action in question. The idea of manoeuvre sets the common objective in the form of an effect to be achieved within a defined space-time framework, the phasing of the action in question and the role assigned to each individual, while at the same time imposing as limits on the initiative of subordinates the indispensable coordination measures required of them.

In criticising the annual manoeuvres of the AFN army in 1947, of which he was the Inspector, Leclerc insisted on the "goal", i.e. the intention of the chief, the basis of his idea of manoeuvre:

"Whenever the final goal is not clearly set, the mission fails. To tell a detachment or group leader: make an effort on such and such an axis in order to remove such and such a movement of terrain, then resume progress in such and such a direction, is an order that is given incorrectly. Leaders, at all levels, must know the Goal: the one for which one is running by all means, by all routes passing where they can, and for that, they must know the Intention of their superior and the Final Goal he proposes to reach. Therefore, simplicity in the statement of your missions, your Intention is the Goal, the Goal, the Goal.  
»

General LECLERC quoted by General COMPAGNON, (What I believe, Page 138)

- La necessary (controlled) assumption of responsibility for subordinates

Within the framework of this idea of maneuver, which not only indicates the goal sought by the leader, but also the phasing to achieve it within a fixed space-time framework, the subordinate can then take into account the relative share of action that he is entitled to in order to achieve his mission. It is in this way that the subordinate is able to determine whether or not he is in charge of the effort, which gives him from the outset an indication of the margin of initiative that will be his and the reinforcements he is likely to request. Accepting this notion of initiative constitutes for the leader a certain amount of risk-taking, which is why it is necessary to make sure that the subordinates understand the spirit of the mission (Anglo-Saxon "backbrief" practice). This control by the upper echelon is part of the normal play of subordinate relationships and is not a sign of distrust.

Thus, in the following intention of Colonel Erulin, commander of the 2nd REP. in Kolwezi,

his captains could fully grasp their colonel's purpose and their place and role in the operation :

"Jumping as close as possible to European quarters to take advantage of the surprise to seize the first objectives.

To do this:

1. 1. To land the first wave (reduced CP, 3 companies) on the ZS A, to win the first objectives as quickly as possible without being delayed by the cleaning of residential areas.
  2. 2. Depending on the evolution of the situation, land the second wave:
    - either entirely on the ZS A, in case of difficulties to enter the old city,
    - or part on ZS A part on ZS B, in case of control of the situation in the old city.
  3. 3. As soon as the situation in the European districts is under control :
    - begin the clean-up of the native cities,
    - seek liaison with Zairian units and the airfield."
- The importance of instilling a spirit of initiative at the highest levels of the organisation. subordinates

Having been imbued with their leader's idea of manoeuvre, subordinate levels must be able to decide how to carry out their mission at their level. Furthermore, they must seize any opportunity to achieve the desired objective in the spirit of their leader's intention.

In 1958, engaged in the battle of the dam, Colonel Buchoud, commander of the 9th RCP, explained his style of command :

"No limitation: an arrow.

No field objectives: an enemy to destroy. The action commands and not the staffs. Intelligence will be the reason for discipline, sometimes even to the detriment of the hierarchy, to achieve the goals defined by the command that will best help, organise the action initiated and feed it rather than hinder it. War is made up of opportunities that must be foreseen as much as possible and prevented, but above all that must not be lost. The one in the best position, the one who has the action in hand, will command; the others will come to his rescue and according to what he has planned; the next day the wounds of self-esteem will be healed around a pot to celebrate each other's success.

Hierarchy is no longer about ordering planned decisions and taking responsibility, but about encouraging initiative and giving it the power to act. The hierarchy is no longer there to order planned decisions and take responsibility, but to stimulate initiatives and give them the scale of effort they deserve in the shortest possible time in order to give them efficiency in a flexibility of manoeuvre never conceived until now. A new tactic, probably the one of tomorrow. »

THE AIM Military history of the Algerian War. (Paris 1982. Albin Michel page 203)

- Make an effort on the quality and simplicity of orders, which must be issued on time.

If in command by objectives, the leader makes fewer decisions, he must concentrate on the most important ones. These will be translated into plans or orders, which must include, in addition to the leader's intent:

- the friendly situation, especially the neighbors; the enemy situation for all we know of it;
- the subordinates' missions written in the form of effects to be achieved, within a fixed time and space frame;
- the means allocated to them to carry out their mission...

(example: fire reinforcement) ;

- coordination measures, which are essential to give subordinates the framework for their action, i.e. their scope of initiative.

In form, the simplicity of the expression of orders and their conciseness must always be sought. This **simplicity will be** all the easier to achieve the clearer the leader's idea of manoeuvre is.

This effort at simplicity should always be sought, even when the procedure in force imposes order frameworks tending towards comprehensiveness as in NATO.

In the spring of 1958, in Algeria, during what has been called the "battle of the dam", the means of the East Constantine Zone were deployed in the following sequence:

" 1) In front of the barrage, four regiments were placed: the 3rd REI; the 1st Half-Brigade de Chasseurs, the 153rd RIM and the 26th RIM, in charge of covering the barrage and of a first interception.

2) On the barrage, six armoured regiments are in charge of the "harrow": the 31st and 18th Dragoons, the 1st Moroccan Spahis, the 1st and 2nd REC, the 1st Hussars.

3) Behind the barrage, the sectors held by the 3rd RTS, the 151st RIM, the 60th RI, the 152nd RIM and the 6th Moroccan Spahis occupied the entire depth of the ground and constituted, by their device, a veritable spider's web in the threads of which the rebel bands had to get caught.

4) Superimposed on this device, in free pursuit, five parachute regiments are placed on the main axes of infiltration of the adversary. These are from north to south of the 1st REP, 9th RCP, 14th RCP,

CPP 8 and CPP 3. The action of these five intervention regiments is coordinated by Colonel Craplet, deputy to General Vanuxem.

In addition, three helicopter detachments are available in Guelma, Tébessa and Bir el Ater, with air support (T6, Corsairs and even B 26) being provided from the bases of Bône and Tébessa. »

**Le Colonel Buchoud, Chief of Staff of the 9e RCP cite the message that he himself sent on 23 April 1958 to General Vanuxem following information gathered in the field which invalidated those previously obtained,**

"PRIMO: Requests you to place a squadron of the 18th Dragons as soon as possible, in loop on the Souk Ahrras - Gambetta axis and have them search for information by Calleja post.

SECUNDO: I immediately launch my squadron and a company of the 152nd RIM currently at my command in looping between Souk Ahrras and Dréa.

TERTIO: Have my regiment together between Zaroura and Dréa by 6:30 a.m. to sweep either to the west or to the east.

QUARTO: This action will be completed towards the south by my group of the 152nd RIM.

QUINTO: These actions will be usefully extended to the north and south. North could be entrusted to 60th RIM and activated by you. South to an element of the 152nd RIM also activated by you.

SEXTO: Gave orders to all 152nd RIM elements. Requests you to warn 60th IR, 18th Dragons, 4/8th RA.

Cancel previously scheduled operation. STOP and END."

Formal "requests you" aside, we're dealing with a complete order here. In fact, Colonel Buchoud cancels the initial and ongoing maneuver, goes on his own initiative to execute another maneuver before reporting back and suggests - rather cavalierly - the following

- to his general to integrate himself into the system that he, as head of the corps, is setting up. In fact, with Vanuxem, this kind of behavior went very well, as long as the orders were clear and the intention consistent with the situation.

As soon as the chief expresses himself in the form of a perfectly clear and chiselled intention, he reduces the amount of uncertainty, or even misunderstanding, in the decisions of his subordinates. Moreover, he is assured that the latter will conceive their own maneuver in absolute respect of the spirit of his own. This is how the successive intentions of the different levels of command are interwoven into each other like Russian dolls in a perfectly coherent manner, a guarantee of simplicity and conciseness in the expression of orders.

Stabilisation operations, the most likely engagements in the short and medium term, favour the indirect approach and resort to the application of a global manoeuvre. Command by objective allows the absolute primacy of the spirit over the letter. In this way, it cultivates the initiative of subordinates and seems particularly suited to stabilization without obscuring its use in the intervention phase.

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