



Every military leader has, at one time or another, the lives of his men in his hands 1/2

Reflection circle G2S - n°23

les généraux Hubert BODIN et Bruno DARY

Published on 10/04/2019

Valeurs de l'Armée de Terre

We do not have the right to "play" with these lives through risky decisions. It is therefore essential before taking action to have thought about how far not to go too far. This is what Generals Hubert BODIN and Bruno DARY are inviting us to do when they ask us about the risks of consenting to training and operations respectively.

Article 1 of the General Statute of Military Personnel is particularly clear:

"The Army of the Republic is at the service of the Nation. Its mission is to prepare and ensure by force of arms the defence of the fatherland and the higher interests of the Nation. The military state requires in all circumstances a spirit of sacrifice, which may go as far as the supreme sacrifice, discipline, availability, loyalty and neutrality. »

It is clear that, without needing to talk about risk, this notion is under-understood in each of the sentences:

- The purpose of the military profession is to defend a country and its interests, and to achieve this end, to use weapons to destroy the adversary. Arms control is therefore a necessity. Having the ability to use them "in all circumstances" implies the need to train at all times and in all places. It is therefore essential, not to say vital, that risk taking and risk control permeate military culture, executive education and the training of its soldiers.
- The Statute further states that this state requires "a spirit of sacrifice that may extend to the supreme sacrifice". Indeed, in combat, the adversary will seek to destroy us, which requires, in addition to the risk control acquired in peacetime, anticipation and vigilance at all times to ward off the enemy's blows.

Thus risk is part of the profession of arms! Soldiers do not have a monopoly on it, but it must stick to them. And if one day this is no longer the case, then it would be better to leave this uniform, remembering the song we used to sing during military parachute training: "If you have a taste for risk..."

Le risk in training

The judicialization of our company now forces us, even in operations. Under these conditions, can we still take risks when we are only in training?

Current events remind us of the validity of this question: A helicopter crash during training, a drama in the mountains with officer cadets, in both cases, fatalities to be deplored... There is a saying that goes: "difficult training, easy war". But in our Western world the question is clearly posed: how far can we risk the lives or integrity of the combatants we train? Are we facing an ethical problem?

The fighter's training must continue to be as close as possible to reality, in a framework dominated by technique, where the common rule is then observed, but also in a more specific framework. This requires specific training of trainers, assisted by a reference organisation in the field of ethics.

After having characterized our paradoxical western world in the face of risk, it seems first of all possible to think of banishing risk from training thanks to the means offered by technology, or at least to remain within a well-refined framework. In the end, we have to go beyond this by taking specific risks that require specially trained instructors.

Western civil society presents a paradoxical face in the face of risk.

On the one hand, it is a sanitized, judicialized world, framed by the precautionary principle, which does not promote a culture of risk.

The break with an old way of life, which has slowly improved over the past centuries, has been sudden and brutal. We are now light years away from the rusticity of life at the beginning of the twentieth century, when fear, suffering and even death were lived and natural experiences. The soldier of the Great War, especially if he came from the countryside, was ready to endure the weather, hunger, thirst and wounds! Training under these conditions posed no ethical problems in terms of risk-taking. For a long time it was believed and peddled that the army allowed itself 7% losses in training!

Yet, at the same time, our society is always looking for adrenaline.

Violence, which is inherent to man, remains latent and needs to be expressed. This impulse, which is at the same time an acceptance, or even a search, for risk, will be expressed in several ways.

First of all, we see it in the virtual world. Increasingly realistic video games, which can lead our young people to addiction, take hours to kill and destroy, making their heroes take unlikely risks. As far as movies are concerned, it's a bidding war on violence!

There is also vicarious violence. It is the craze for team sports that draws crowds into stadiums or immobilizes fans even more in front of their screens. We identify with the players, we fight and risk with them. "Panem and circuses"...

But we also see, when this violence is no longer channelled, especially among some young people, a pleasure in being in danger until the maximum risk is sought : off-piste skiing, extreme surfing, hard drugs... This phenomenon, which is probably not new, is completely out of step with society, even reacting against it. These young people seem to

have lost all reference points and are in search of the absolute. This violence within them will lead to pitched battles with the police, intrusion into demonstrations where the game is to break without getting caught... This can go, as we have seen, all the way to the start of the jihad.

The soldier that we train is a young man of today, who comes from this consumer society, but who has perhaps tasted violence and who, through training, will discover another form of it, one that he has mastered.

Military training can and must be carried out with minimum risks, that is to say with minimal risks that are accepted by society and governed by the law, and therefore without posing any ethical problems.

Simulation is increasingly being used in training.

Simulation is becoming so realistic that one might now think that one can do without reality, thus avoiding physical accidents in training. In the specific areas of each army, we learn to fly a boat, a plane, to react to a riot. We know how to put the individual in extremely difficult conditions, such as in a submarine that has become uncontrollable! We are in the field close to the video games mentioned above, a little or even a lot of adrenaline, but no real risk.

Despite everything, this does not eliminate training in the field where the risks are well framed by safety regulations, just like in civilian life. Reality remains indispensable. Once the roughing out in simulation has been done, you have to command the manoeuvre of a real ship from the sea, pilot a real tank, set up an ambush, and react to demonstrators.

The realism of combat is particularly strong among fighter pilots, who only need, during their exercises, to shoot the real thing in front of their opponent. The Army practices the exercises in training camps, again as close to reality as possible, with all the equipment deployed on the ground and the fire simulated by the laser. The same applies to live firing exercises, which recreate the atmosphere of combat with the sounds of the battlefield and the effects of the weapons, where the only constraint remains the safety limits.

The most dangerous exercises are probably those carried out as part of rescue training. We have experienced the pits from which you had to go out through the manhole of the tank in immersion. Airplane and helicopter pilots continue to perform similar exercises by getting out of their submerged cabins and then actually being dropped into the sea before being hoisted up.

If we look at all these actions, including the most impressive ones, in terms of risk, we see that we are exactly in the case of practices carried out in the civil sector in dangerous occupations: construction, mining, factory workers on their machines, firefighters. The risks are known, listed and the safety measures adapted. The officer at the firing range or the team leader in a quarry applies, each in his or her own field, the safety measures planned for this type of activity.

Thus, in the application of our military techniques, there is no risk taking that is very different from that of other professionals who are exposed to danger. Faced with the sacrosanct principle of precaution, in the event of an accident, the civil jurisdiction will be competent. We therefore have no need to fear limitations in our training practices. We are within normal labour legislation and no ethical problems arise here.

Have we therefore completely entered the common lot or are we forced to leave it because of our specificity?

This specificity leads to the need for special training, outside the usual civil standards, where the instructor managers need technical, ethical and even operational training in the face of the risks to be taken, because it is not acceptable to lose men in training.

Within this framework, it seems good to maintain some exceptional structures, with exemplary champions, who will provide us with examples capable of motivating risk-taking.

The emblematic figure of Éric TABARLY has shown us that the military knows how to be among the best in terms of courage and innovation. The example is still provided to us by the Groupe militaire de haute montagne (GMHM) and its various exploits. It should be noted that during the group's attempt to conquer Everest, the leader had taken at the last moment the most difficult decision of his life: to give up the summit so as not to risk human losses. We are always in control of the risk as well as being as close as possible to danger. It is essential to continue to keep "military" champions in exceptional structures. The ability to "discern" can be taught!

Above all, we must continue to conduct progressive and demanding training combining rusticity and advanced technology with risk-taking close to the risk in operation.

In terms of danger, not only have the risks not diminished, but they are now more diverse and even confusing. We are dealing with adversaries whose laws of war, if they have any, are not exactly ours. We are engaged in asymmetrical battles in which cunning, trickery and intertwining with civilians are the order of the day. The theatre of operations is often arid terrain where extreme weather conditions require rigorous training and a rusticity far removed from modern standards.

As a result, accepting, even demanding, that our combatants in training experience hunger, thirst, darkness, lack of sleep, cold, humidity and extreme fatigue seems indispensable. We are far from the Western criteria advocating the control of hydration, the balance of the diet, even going so far as to allow chemicals to dominate stress, to recover quickly, to stay awake. We must continue our training courses in hostile environments - jungle, mountain, desert - our commando training courses, our survival exercises, all these exercises where body and mind are subjected to harsh tests and where danger seems very close.

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Release date 20/03/2019

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