



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

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Valeurs de l'Armée de Terre

**French armies, especially the Army, are probably among the best armies in the world in terms of rusticity. They must remain so, but this requires a heavy responsibility on the part of the command.**

**This requires selection and training of managers.**

Our managers are currently very well prepared for the different types of conduct to be followed in operations, but we must insist just as much on their training as instructors.

They must first be chosen with great care and it is desirable, if not essential, that they already have experience of operations, that they are familiar with teaching methods and human knowledge, and that they are aware of physical and psychological limits. They must be trained with a high safety standard, accustomed to being able to stop just in time and to being able to get their subordinates to stop them, by whom, sometimes through overzealousness, "slip-ups" can occur. It will always be necessary to be alert to the possible reactions of trainees in a state of stress, or even revolt. Care should be taken to ensure that trainers are kept up to date with the latest research and resources in sensitive areas, both medical and psychological, and that they work in conjunction with their colleagues in the health service. They will be kept informed of developments in the jurisdiction by also working alongside lawyers. In any event, they must be prepared, without fear, to be called before a court in the event of a "blunder".

Who are these instructors? They are first and foremost, but not only, the managers of the training schools. There are all the instructors of the specialized centers, commandoes, parachutists, alpinists, combat swimmers, pilots, combat sport instructors and more generally the contact managers of our units where training is done continuously before or between each operation. Under these conditions, the training and monitoring of all our instructors is an increasingly heavy task and makes it eminently desirable to set up a

permanent body that can ensure the consistency of training doctrine.

In fact, more broadly speaking, we need a joint body to serve as a benchmark for ethics. Such a body would be the reference point for training and education, but also for combat behaviour, reception and mastery of new technologies, and the guarantor of our values in terms of knowledge and respect for the human being that is every fighter, including our adversary.

Without going into detail because the subject deserves a complete study, we can put forward a few suggestions. This body will have to be composed of a limited number of people in order to be effective, while being able to call on outside experts as necessary. It will bring together representatives of the command, the armed forces health service, psychologists, lawyers, weapons engineers and also representatives of religious denominations (Vicariate to the Armed Forces, etc.). The latter have their place when one knows the role of the "padre" or chaplain closest to the men in the field.

In short, if there is more and more of a gap between life in Western society and combat training, it must be possible to continue it by taking risks which the accentuated judicialization must not diminish. Under these conditions, one cannot but notice the difficulty for instructors to accomplish their missions. They will have to be increasingly better trained and supported, and the creation of a body for ethical and legal reflection with a more global mission would be beneficial, if not indispensable. Let us never forget that, in our country, the soldier is first and foremost a man and must remain a man.

## **Le risk in operation**

In operations, both the leader and his soldiers face two types of risk: accidental risk and operational risk.

Accidental risk is much the same as that encountered in training, or in peacetime. In this regard, it is often said that "in training, safety takes precedence over manoeuvre," which could imply that this would not be the case during OPEXs! But in operations as well, safety takes precedence over everything else, as it would be unfortunate to think that safety and efficiency are contradictory, which would mean sparing the blood of one's own soldiers in the face of the enemy, but neglecting potential accidents. However, that was not always the case and, even if in this area we must be modest, we can only pay tribute to the younger generation, which today, in operations, is showing great vigilance in external theatres of operation.

Several examples may shed some light on this sensitive subject:

- The first was told to me by my father-in-law, who, having just landed in Indochina as a young lieutenant, saw his captain and his radio drowned for having deThe Indochina campaign was off to a bad start for this unit...
- The second example was given to us by our instructors in Saint-Cyr, who told us over and over again that the French army in Algeria had had more losses due to accidents of all kinds (vehicle, fire, health, etc.) than the French army in France.) than by enemy fire.
- And the last example is that of the first ten months of Operation Licorne, during which the battle groups were wounded on several occasions due to clashes, but they were able

to be rescued. This advanced medical structure has made it possible - and still makes it possible - to save many lives. On the other hand, from memory, three deaths have been deplored, one by a traffic accident, the second by an unfortunate handling of a firearm, and the last in an accident of everyday life.

And today, a trained eye can see that all soldiers with assault rifle has an "OCD" (clogging tell-tale) on their weapon.), which makes it possible to see and control, without having to handle the breech, that a weapon is neither loaded nor armed... Hence a drastic reduction in firearm accidents...

Operational risk is inherent in combat and is reflected in the ability to know how to deal with a threat, i.e. a "risk linked to a will" : Each adversary pursues the same goal, namely to gain the upper hand over his enemy, which translates into the pursuit of his destruction.

And contrary to the game of chess where one sees the opponent's device, for lack of reading his thoughts and knowing his intention, in operations, the art of war consists in surprising the other, by his manoeuvre and by his fire.

The immediate consequence is that combat is not an exact science since your enemy, himself, will always seek to surprise you. It therefore becomes essential first to be informed, and well-informed, about the adversary, so as to know. But you must also have weapons that can shoot at long distance, to be able to stay out of his shots.

One of the main difficulties in asymmetrical conflicts today is that the notion of life and death is also totally asymmetrical: for the Western world, and this is our pride, human life is priceless. Pushing the paradox a little further, one might even wonder whether there are still values, material goods, or even human communities, that are worth sacrificing human lives for the sake of death and dying, or whether there are still values, material goods, or even human communities, that are worth sacrificing human lives for the sake of death and dying. Thus, the sacrifice of some 1,400,000 French Poilus killed during the First World War has today become incomprehensible to us as contemporary man.

On the other hand, in theatres of operation, we are faced with an adversary for whom, most of the time, human life represents little or nothing at all! We knew this after certain African experiences, where entire villages were massacred and NGO members killed; but Daesh accentuated the importance of the human life of the enemy. But Daesh has widened this gulf, with his procession of massacres in Syria or Iraq, during his attacks in the Western world, or during assassinations, orchestrated and mediatized.

Thus, what we were learning in Saint-Cyr, in the tactical rudiments :

"see, without being seen" and above all "kill, without being killed" has gradually become a strong operational constraint, even a new, as yet unrecognized principle of warfare

This new situation has led to the development of modern techniques, the search for new technologies and the implementation of adapted tactics, with a view to limiting this human risk:

- The systematic recourse to the third dimension with helicopter operations carried out only at night thanks to night vision systems and without footprint on the ground, of which Operation HARMATTAN in Libya will remain an example;

- The use of long-range missiles, either from the sea or from a fighter aircraft, allowing stand off firing, as during Operation HAMILTON in May 2018 to neutralise chemical sites in Syria;
- The systematic use of UAVs over time, to discreetly detect the presence of the adversary, as is currently the case at Barkhane, leading to air strikes; and tomorrow, with armed drones, it will be possible, after human control, to react very soon after detection;
- The transfer of the confrontation to other areas, equally important, with the taking into account of new dimensions of the battlefield, such as space, cyberspace or the field of perceptions;
- The use of weapons with ever greater range and accuracy, such as the LRU and the CAESAR, currently used by the WAGRAM Task Force in Iraq in support of Iraqi forces fighting against Daesh;
- Or the "de-linking " of small detachments, so as not to differentiate them from their human environment and avoid making them vulnerable to the triggering of an IED or the explosion of a drone.

But while success is always on the side of the highest demands, it is also on the side of taking a certain amount of risk, or rather taking a certain amount of risk. So it is up to every leader, engaged in a theatre, to find his tactical path between the routine that sleeps and the presumption that blinds, between the success that reassures and the victory that makes one believe in one's own invulnerability! But risk always retains its attractive, almost bewitching power. It is both happy and dangerous: happy, because the day when we will no longer be able to find men, young, dynamic and with a taste for risk, we will have to worry about the future of our army; but dangerous, because as Joseph KESSEL made his hero say in his novel *The Crew* : "And you felt you could do anything because death was your closest companion! »

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