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INITIATIVE AND INDISCIPLINE.

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Initiative and Indiscipline.

To conquer it is not enough to know what one wants, to will offensively, to have kept freedom of action; one must be in condition to act according to one's will and to impose it.

For this the chief has his assembled and organized forces, which he employs advantageously; the workers acting all together in cooperation, a cooperation of arms, and cooperation unqualified; material cooperation and moral cooperation⁽¹⁾. And moral cooperation develops superiority through its material results, since it brings about the assembly and the increase of the individual means of destruction of each arm.

Cooperation, the sum of the measures intended to concentrate all effort towards the realization of the common end, results above all from the action of headquarters, that is to say, from the orders and instructions given by the leader.

The best of cooperation will always be the knowledge of a well-drawn general⁽²⁾ order, explaining to all the situation and the general objective, the mission of each subordinate commander, the forces at his disposal, the role of his neighbors, and the part of the general headquarters without going into methods of execution.

(1)Moral cooperation, sympathy of hearts and communion of intellects, through unity of doctrine, the fruit of education, through common instruction and work. It is this moral cooperation of the leaders of all arms which develops moral superiority by giving confidence and the feeling of solidarity to every one. Thus is justified Colonel Ardant du Picq's definition of tactics: "Art of making men fight with their maximum of energy; a maximum only to be secured through an organization which will overcome fear.

(2)In this line of thought we must accept with caution the too widely spread custom of "special orders to the cavalry". Special instructions for reconnoitering parties, for detachments, to define their mission without weighing

The decree on the S.A.C. says in Article 137: The efforts of the troops will be most in accord and most energetic when the intention of the chief and the objective to be achieved are best known to all (10th paragraph). The chief communicates to the commanders of the principal subdivisions (that is, to his immediate subordinates) his objective, his plan, his entire conception (12th paragraph).

But frequently, the commander, although informed by his cavalry and aeroplanes, by his "reporting officers" and by his subordinates; by his field glasses and those of his neighbors, will find it impossible to intervene in good time should the circumstances require it.

And then comes the question of initiative. Initiative, responsibility, these two words are found on every page of modern military writings.

Initiative is the more necessary in the present conditions of war, as in consequence of the importance of numbers and the progress of armaments, fronts are more extended and forces more dispersed, so tactical bonds are less easy to preserve; if not morally, at least materially.

Initiative will not be assumed without a liking for responsibility, that is to say, without character.

Even in internal administration we strive to develop both these qualities.

The chief is responsible for the orders he gives. But a faulty execution should not destroy this responsibility.

The chief assigns an objective and gives the necessary means of execution, troops, information, etc. - the subordinate executor has freedom in his choice of methods.

What are the authorized definitions of initiative?

(2 cont'd) the general order, good! But to give the main body of cavalry special orders is to incite it to act independently.

In drafting an order, it must first be decided what is to be done with the main body before giving detailed orders to detachments which are to act in support of the main operations; the order to cavalry rightly should follow and not precede the conception of the general order.

Infantry Regulations 1904, Art. 4: "Officers have firmness of character such that they know how to assume responsibility whenever circumstances require; all fear of responsibility is unworthy of that lofty character which should mark the officer."

Art. 6: "The higher command selects the objective and makes it known. The subordinate command enjoys initiative as to the choice of methods, remaining always faithful to the assigned objective which it has been required to reach."

Art. 243: "In battle, the officer must always be guided by the thought of his chief."

Artillery Regulations of 1910, Art. 2, Title 1: "We must develop among the ranks of officers in proportion to their respective spheres the qualities..... initiative and decision, which will permit them in time of war to lead the organization which they command."

Art. 3, Title 4: "The orders of the commander are to insure unity of action, - the direction of all efforts towards the same end being the best guarantee of success; the initiative of subordinate chiefs is obligatory when the circumstances which have caused an order are changed, and the incidents which occurred do not permit waiting for another without some loss. A chief will never hesitate to assume responsibility in meeting by himself any unforeseen and urgent situation, but anyone having a proper idea of duty will never confuse initiative and independence.

In the Cavalry Regulations of 1912, we find no definition of initiative, but the idea is on every page, particularly in the preliminaries and in articles 349, 352, 358, 365, 381, 630, 636.

The "Interior Service of 1910" in the Report: "It is necessary to call upon the initiative of subordinate leaders and upon the taste for responsibility, which is its

principal basis. But initiative and responsibility cannot be exercised profitably, outside the limits of strict discipline, discipline remains, more than ever, the principal strength of armies.

And the "Service des Armées en Campagne", 4th paragraph of Art. 137: "When the chief is sure his intentions are understood, he leaves the choice of methods to those responsible; it is his duty not to put bounds to the initiative of his subordinates.

5th paragraph, Art. 138: In case of an unforeseen meeting with the enemy, every detachment commander must nevertheless employ all his initiative to reach the objective assigned to him⁽¹⁾.

The doctrine is clear. "Initiative, says General von der Goltz, is the manifestation of a personal volition supported by judgment acting in accordance with the plans of the superior command."

"Initiative, says General Foch, is an active and intelligent discipline."

Let us conclude:

To fulfill one's mission intelligently, in the way of the known intentions of the commander, making all necessary dispositions and assuming at need the gravest responsibilities with every exertion of soul and body, is not an act of initiative, it is simply disciplined obedience, it is the

(1) German Field Service Regulations of 1908, Art. 4: "Without fearing responsibility, the officer must in every situation, even the most exceptional, develop his utmost effort." Art. 25: "It is important to accustom men to think and act for themselves. Initiative and the feeling of solidarity will require them always to do their duty, even where the eye of the chief is not upon them."

Art. 38: "..... to act resolutely. Every one, the commander-in-chief, as well as the youngest soldier, must feel convinced that any inaction, any negligence on his part is a more serious fault than an error in the choice of means."

result of the idea of duty.

Anything less would be the infamy of inaction.

The initiative of a subordinate in the execution of orders received, or of an unforeseen situation either in quarters or in the field, is fruitful and does not risk falling into anarchy or indiscipline, only when it is exercised in accordance with the intentions of the chief, and if the chief is not in position to give the initial or new orders within the limits of time available.

To put the question of initiative is to put this question: "What is to be done?" If my chief were here to estimate this new situation, would he modify his orders? What would he tell me to do with the means he has placed at my disposal?

The basis of initiative is moral education and also the instruction which the knowledge of their own role and the comprehension of the needs of others grants to executors of the chief's order.

It is, therefore, indispensable from the first to understand the spirit as well as the letter of the text of regulations and of orders and directions proceeding from a chief.

This is the only way to act according to the intentions of the chief, Action in accordance with his intentions is the end of disciplined initiative and of intellectual discipline; it is reached by work in common and by meditation of doctrine.

And when a subordinate has thus employed his initiative, a real chief will applaud him or cover his errors by his own sanction; he will not blame the unfortunate executor; for this would disincline the latter to action, but he commends him and thus encourages him to actions⁽¹⁾.

(1) Von Moltke after Spicheren General Foch, *Conduite de la Guerre*, p.183.

To exercise a profitable initiative, one must understand what is at issue: to understand, one must have good sense and intelligence.

The French army is an admirable field in which to cultivate initiative. The qualities of the French soldier are known throughout the world, temperance, good humor, warlike temperament derived from long inheritance, and further personal energy, vivacity and adaptability of mind, and sound good sense, all qualities of the race.

Let me render tribute to the inherent qualities of our Hussars, recalling like General Castelnau⁽¹⁾ "the reflection of a warrior now dead, who while living, held a high place in the cultivated society of our national ally and friend. Invited to attend our Autumn maneuvers, he alighted one day from the train, which brought him with all the other foreign attachés, upon the theatre of operations. He took long to examine attentively the faces of the company which rendered him honors at the station. And, when the attaché of another great power, neither allied nor friendly, asked him the reason of this unusually prolonged examination, he replied, 'I was seeking in this collection of men for the heads of dullards, of weak minded men, but there are none. All are intelligent in this army.'" And he went on.

Some examples:

Let us take up again the Red army, (See *Révue Militaire Générale*, October 1912, pp.427-28) reassembling on the right bank of the Saône under protection of the advance guard covering the front along Bois de l'Eau - Chargey - 245, and covered towards the northeast by the Nantilly detachment (one battalion, one battery, two squadrons) - Colonel Y - who has in front of him at Bouhans a blue detachment of three arms

(1) Conférence au Centre des hautes études militaires, 1911.

at least as strong as he.

Colonel Y knows from his cavalry, - where main body is north of Poyans - that nothing is in the neighborhood Autry - Fahy - Valley of the Vingeanne, but that the blue detachment at Bouhans is breaking away towards Chargey under cover of its advanced elements, masking it at 247 and 244.

Colonel Y assembles all his force, main body of cavalry, artillery, infantry, and decides to attack the blue detachment by the flank through 244 to prevent it from going to reenforce the opponents of the advance guard of the army corps - Initiative.

General X commanding the advance guard has his headquarters at 248; he knows that corps headquarters are at the boundary of Arc, and that they there count upon the screen of the advance guard to protect the passage of their troops to Gray. Only the corps commander knows when he will have assembled a sufficient force on the right bank of the Saône to retake the offensive. Now the commander of the advance guard, without reference to the corps commander only 1500 metres away, takes the bait and prematurely abandons his role of screen and orders a forward movement along his whole line towards Oyrrières. - Tactical Indiscipline.

A reconnoitering squadron⁽¹⁾ coming from the south with the mission of exploring towards Champlitte has forced the passage at Gray: - ^{resulting in} discovery of a new situation towards Moutot, Neuville, Montigny-sur-Vingeanne, - halt of the main body of the squadron at the bridge of Gray (^{as} center of information, ^{and for} feeding men and horses); the halt is guarded by the first squad (Lieut. B) at the exit north of Arc, and watch is kept upon the sector between Bois-Fleuriot and the Montureux road. - The Captain stations himself at the Gray bridge.

(1) See map in number of Oct., 1912.

A safety patrol of Lieut B signals a column going from Chargey towards Montureux. Lieut. B goes with all his squad to reconnoiter. Tactical Indiscipline of Lieut B.

Another reconnoitering squadron from the south has the general mission of reconnoitering the region between the Vingeanne and the Valley of the Eculottes inclusive.

The Captain commanding has decided to cross the Saône at Apremont with his main body, - contact of patrols, - then a route towards Autrey.

He has sent his fourth squad (Lieut. C) with the mission of reconnoitering Gray and the Eculottes valley as far as Oyrières (a detachment justified by the features of the terrain). No news as far as Chargey, but when Lieut. C gets there, one of his patrols signals a convoy escorted by some convalescents, which is leaving Rente d'en bas and moving towards Montureux.

Lieut. C decides:

1. His non-commissioned officer and eight troopers will secure the permanence of his mission (observing station north of Chargey patrols in the directions of Chapelotte and of Oyrières).

2. With the main body of his platoon he leaves his sector and goes to attack this convoy (a valuable source of information since the convoy comes from the region to be reconnoitered. On Oct. 17, 1806, Lasalle's cavalry learned from the capture of a convoy that all the Prussian army was retreating towards Magdeburg; this was the first precise news). Initiative of Lieut. C.

The third of July, 1866, Prince Frederick William, contrary to orders he had received, without waiting for the junction of the Prussian forces, and arguing from new information, which, however, he did not refer to Moltke and the King at Gitschin only eight miles away, attacked alone the

whole Austrian Army. - Tactical Indiscipline.

The 16th of August 1870, General Voights-Rhetz (X corps) did not carry out the order given that same morning by Prince Frederick Charles to go with his whole corps towards St. Hilaire - because he was certain that in giving this order his army commander was unaware of the exact situation, and he was too far away from the latter to receive new orders in time. He (X corps commander) goes to the help of the III corps. - Initiative.

Another question of initiative: What should an officer do entrusted with the transmission of a written or oral order, who, on arrival at his destination, recognizes that the situation in view of which this order was conceived and issued has entirely changed?

"Torstenson⁽¹⁾ was a page of Gustavus Adolphus in 1624. "The King, on the point of attacking a body of Lithuanians "in Livonia and having no aide-de-camp about him, sent "Torstenson to carry orders to a general officer in order "to profit by a movement which he saw the enemy making. "Torstenson went and came back. But the enemy had changed "their march. The King was in despair at the order he had "given. Sire, said Torstenson, pardon me, but seeing the "enemy make a contrary movement, I gave a contrary order.

"The King said nothing, but that evening as the page "served him at supper the King made him sit beside him and "gave him an ensign in the guards and some days afterwards "a company.

"Torstenson became one of the great captains of Europe."

We could find in the history of modern campaigns other examples showing what service an officer may render, who wisely and fully grasps the sense of the orders which he carries and possesses to a sufficient degree the military coup d'oeil and instinct for war to explain clearly to the

(1) Voltaire. Siècle de Louis XIV.

commander who is to execute them, the circumstances and intentions under which the order was issued.

On December 2, 1870, about half-past eight in the morning, the Saxons coming from Noisy in spite of their sudden and vigorous attack had not yet succeeded in taking possession of Bry which was defended by General Daudet. But news brought to General Ducrot at the same instant informed him that the Wurtembergers had seized the greater part of the village of Champigny on the flank of the four divisions of Berthaut and Courty which were lodged on the plateau of Villiers, and that the Saxons were gaining ground to the northward between the Marne and the village of Bry.

The General-in-chief thought proper to order General Exea to abandon the village of Bry and to withdraw Daudet's brigade to the right bank of the Marne.

A young captain of the general staff was sent to Bry to reiterate the order to retreat. Arriving at Bry, he ~~saw~~^{saw} that the attack of the Saxons had been sharply checked both towards the north and the northeast and that the premature evacuation of this point of support would be disastrous for the left of the second corps still at Villiers.

The captain took the initiative; instead of repeating the order for a retreat, which General Daudet had not yet begun, he encouraged the latter in his resistance and galloped to the general-in-chief to inform him of the existing situation. The captain was commended and nominated for the Legion of Honor.

Some ten years later, this same officer discussing the question before the officers detailed to the War School⁽¹⁾ said: If one were to listen only to the voice of Egoism, one would think above all of covering oneself from responsibility and of returning to ask for new orders. This line

(1) Conference on field service on the Staff, War School, 1st Division, 1881.

of conduct can be recommended only if one is very near his general, or if the commander receiving the order after having assumed responsibility for the measures required by the conditions, asks you to return for new orders.

"If on the contrary the general who originated the order is far away and a decision is urgently necessary, I think, the officer would be right in making known to the leader who is to execute the task, 1. the order of which he is the bearer, 2. the intention with which the order was given and the time and circumstances to which it related. This done, the officer should add these simple words: At present the circumstances in view of which the order was given appear to me to have changed in--'such a sense'. If you think proper to tell me the decision you arrive at, I shall have the honor to report it to my general."

The commander of the troops, responsible for the execution is alone in a situation to appreciate justly in what direction the orders given by a distant chief may and should be modified. The officer will have fulfilled his task if he succeeds in making exactly known the situation in view of which the original order was given. He must never take upon himself to modify, upon his own account, the orders which he bears, except in the case where, in prevision of certain events, he shall have been duly directed by his general so to do.

With filial respect let us accept this instruction.

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The initiative most delicate to undertake is perhaps that of abandoning an assigned mission to march towards the guns. This is the more difficult, because even when it should not be so, one is incited to take the easier alternative, that of marching towards the guns, and rejoining one's comrades, by the recollection of passages from the regulations.

"In the lack of orders in time, every subordinate leader must act on his own initiative and march towards the guns." (Cavalry 638) "One should always march towards the guns or the musketry fire if one has not received precise orders to act otherwise, or if one is not already engaged with the enemy." (4th paragraph, Art. 138 of S.A.C.)

Marching to the guns is not an absolute principle. There are frequent cases when one must not march towards the guns even "when one has not received precise orders to do otherwise."

Examples:

Situation of the Red advance guard⁽¹⁾.

The first battalion has Chargey as its objective. The second battalion has Boulaye wood as its objective. In rear towards Arc are the reserves. Heavy musketry fire towards Chargey, but nothing at 248. Should the second battalion forsake its objective to march towards Chargey? Should the reserves break up of their own accord? Then? Is General X, commanding the advance guard, thus to be stripped of his command? No. The second battalion will continue on towards Boulaye wood, sending one of its companies towards the height, north of 248, to the east of Chargey; and the occupation of Boulaye wood will help to overcome the Blue defense of Chargey.

If everybody were to oblique towards the first gun shot, all control of battle would be impossible and too great an opportunity for an enveloping movement would be afforded to the enemy.

An army corps⁽²⁾ stationed in the neighborhood of Grande Resie - Crésancy and to the south is covered by two advance guards at Gray and at Apremont. At Apremont they hear the

(1) See p.427, number for Oct., 1912.

(2) Map of neighborhood of Gray, number of Oct., 1912.

gun fire at Gray. Should the detachment at Apremont abandon that locality to go to Gray?

But, if an enemy should then come by Poyans, the way of Apremont would then be open when the corps commander thinks it closed.

Should the garrison of Crésancy, followed no doubt by that of Champtonnay, put itself in march for Gray?

Then, if the army corps commander must go the next day to Gy, screening himself towards the north, he will be able to go with his headquarters alone, while his troops are engaged along the Saône.

But he has put his guarding detachments at Gray and Apremont, to ensure his freedom of action towards Gy; not to draw his army corps to the Saône.

Even when inspired by the most brilliant courage and the most praiseworthy desire to engage the enemy, such an understanding is inadmissible. It would be the ruin of every combination, of every economy of force, of every command.

If one has a mission, a task, to perform, it must be held fast. If the enemy allows you freedom of action, go to your neighbor's help with such force as you have available⁽¹⁾, leaving behind what is necessary to secure the permanence of your mission, for the commander who has given you an order will count on your fulfilling it.

On the 16th of June, 1816, did the fault of Ney lie in not having marched to the guns at Ligny, or was it in not having utilized all the forces at his disposal to defeat the English

(1) "All that you have at the battle to be stronger than the enemy at the selected point." (Napoleon).

"A detachment is justifiable only if it withholds from the decisive battle field a force superior to its own." (General Lacroix, observation on the maneuver of the 7th Corps in 1907).

on the 15th at Quatre-Bras, and thus prevent them either from rejoining the Prussians engaged with Napoleon at Ligny or from escaping towards Brussels for a new rendezvous, which was Waterloo? His fault was that, by hasty orders contrary to the Emperor's intentions, he caused the corps of d'Erlo^w to wander uselessly between the two battle fields of Quatre-Bras and Ligny. The 17th of June, the fault of Grouchy was not so much that he marched towards the guns at Mont-Saint-Jean as that he allowed the Prussians, beaten at Ligny, to escape from his control and to regain their freedom of action by way of Wavre and to rejoin Wellington.

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During the last days of the battle of Liao-Yang, General Orloff (54th Division), during the night of Aug. 31-Sept. 1, at the railway station of Yentai, received the order to move to the Yentai mines, there to unite with Samsonow's cossacks to form the extreme left of the Russian army.

Should he march to the guns of the XVIIth corps (Bilderring) and reinforce it to meet the desperate attacks of Kuroki's main body (Okasaki's brigade and Inouye's division) at hill 131 and at Manju-Yania, distant ten kilometers south of the mines?

If he had acted thus, he would have left the road to Yentai open to Shimamura's brigade of Kuroki's army and to Umezawa's detachment hastening from Penchibo. In spite of the want of energy which was imputed to him and the mediocre quality of his troops, Orloff, nevertheless, checked the two Japanese brigades on the first and second, and threatened the right flank of Kuroki's attack. Otherwise, the Russian left would have been enveloped, the railroad to Mukden would have been cut and the retreat of the Russian army immediately compromised.

On the morning of the first, before the arrival of Orloff

at Yentai, the officers of Kuroki's staff, in the presence of Sir Ian Hamilton (Souvenir's 2d Vol. pp.85-104), recalled gaily that it was the anniversary of Sedan, but the evening of the second, they were irritated to see in the distance, towards the north, the smoke of the trains and the dust of troops and of convoys moving towards Mukden.

What is bad, it is Bernadotte idle and useless at Dornburg, 15 kilometers from Iena and Anerstadt, forsaking his comrade Davoust; - it is the 5th Corps (du Faily) at Bitsche, during the battle of Worth on August 6, 1870. And during this time, the same day on the Sarre, when the French corps, without any mission to perform, remained deaf to the guns of General Frossard defending the positions of Spickeren, the most forward portions of the 3d Prussian corps (Alvensleben) and the 16th division (Goeben) of the 8th corps, having no special orders, of their own initiative hastened to Sarrebruck to sustain the 14th division of the 7th corps of Stinemetz' army.

What is good, it is Desaix on June 14, 1800. Detached towards Novi with his division to hold Mélas in case he should escape from Alexandria, towards Genoa, he saw there was nothing that way. His mission fell through, and he hastened to the guns at Marengo.

But the immortal example of the march towards the guns and of initiative was given by General Constantine Alvensleben,⁽¹⁾ commanding the 3d Prussian Corps on August 16, 1870, the victor of Gravelotte. When the general staff and the 2d army commander had sounded the mort at the Meuse before having roused [from its cover] the quarry, which was still in full possession of its powers and morale on the left bank of the Moselle at Rezonville-Metz.

(1) The statue of Alvensleben should be in front of the Siegensdenkmal of Germany. An unpretentious portrait of him by von Werner hangs very high in a room of the National Gallery at Berlin.

To act in disorder is as bad as to wait for orders.

To act with initiative is to understand, to know, and being far from the chief, to act in harmony with him.