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Experiences in military history on Command Technique.

(Rudolf Koch-Erpach)

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Experienced gained from the History of
War on the subject of Command Technique

by

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Experience gained from the History of
War on the subject of Command Technique.

A

Preface.

Instruction in the technique of giving orders must be a part of the thorough training of every officer.

Once the troop commander, after consideration of the situation, has made a decision, that decision must be given effect in an appropriate "order". Efficient fulfillment can, to a large extent, depend upon the proper form of such order.

In the former German Army (particularly in the old Imperial Army and the "Reichswehr"), direct instruction and ~~XXI~~ exercise in Command Technique were carried out. This was especially the case in the Military Schools and the Military Academy.

To draft the wording of the order is usually not the matter of the Commanding Officer but rather of the tactical section of his ^{G-3} staff (Ia) and, especially so in the higher staffs, ~~XXa~~ a matter for the respective Staff Officers.

The old German Army also had great traditions in this respect and well proved training.

B.

War History on the Subject.

In former times, on account of the formations being so small and compact, great leaders were often able to give their orders to their troops personally and to make a direct call to them. Psychologically that was a great advantage. The commands of an Alexander, a Hannibal, Caesar, Frederick the Great etc. were so effective because they incited!

Later, this was usually no longer possible because the scope of, the distance factor in, and the methods of, warfare had so changed that it was no longer often possible for the commander to exert his personal influence. Modern means of communication led to the "personal element" deteriorating ever more and more.

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original German
manuscript

Napoleon was a past-master of the "language of command" which was fully adapted to his troops, who were mostly French-Romance. He knew well how to play on their sense of honour and their temperament. He was a psychologist and in the use of language treated each of his marshals individually according to each one's peculiarities. This accounts for his enormous influence. His order to Massena at Augsburg in 1809 with 60000 men and who was to proceed in forced marches to Landshut on the Isar: "Activit  , vitesse, vitesse je recommande    Vous!" has come down to history.

Massena was an ambitious, brutal dare-devil. The Emperor knew well that he could press the impossible out of him by getting at him through his ambition. "Activit  , vitesse, vitesse," simply must fire on this Marshal even more than he would probably have been able to do any way. But the added "Je recommande    Vous" could not fail to flatter him.

international
Many instances could be cited on the interesting problem of "How shall I give my commands correctly?"

C

1914

For decades we had been trained in rapid, concise assessment of situations, in quick decisions and quick execution, on the principle: "each minute ahead of the enemy is an advantage."

The entire operational and tactical leadership method hinged upon these maxims.

Logically, however, a command technique just as concise goes hand in hand with it. This was practised by all, from the corporal and group leader

or squad leader to the general and army commander.

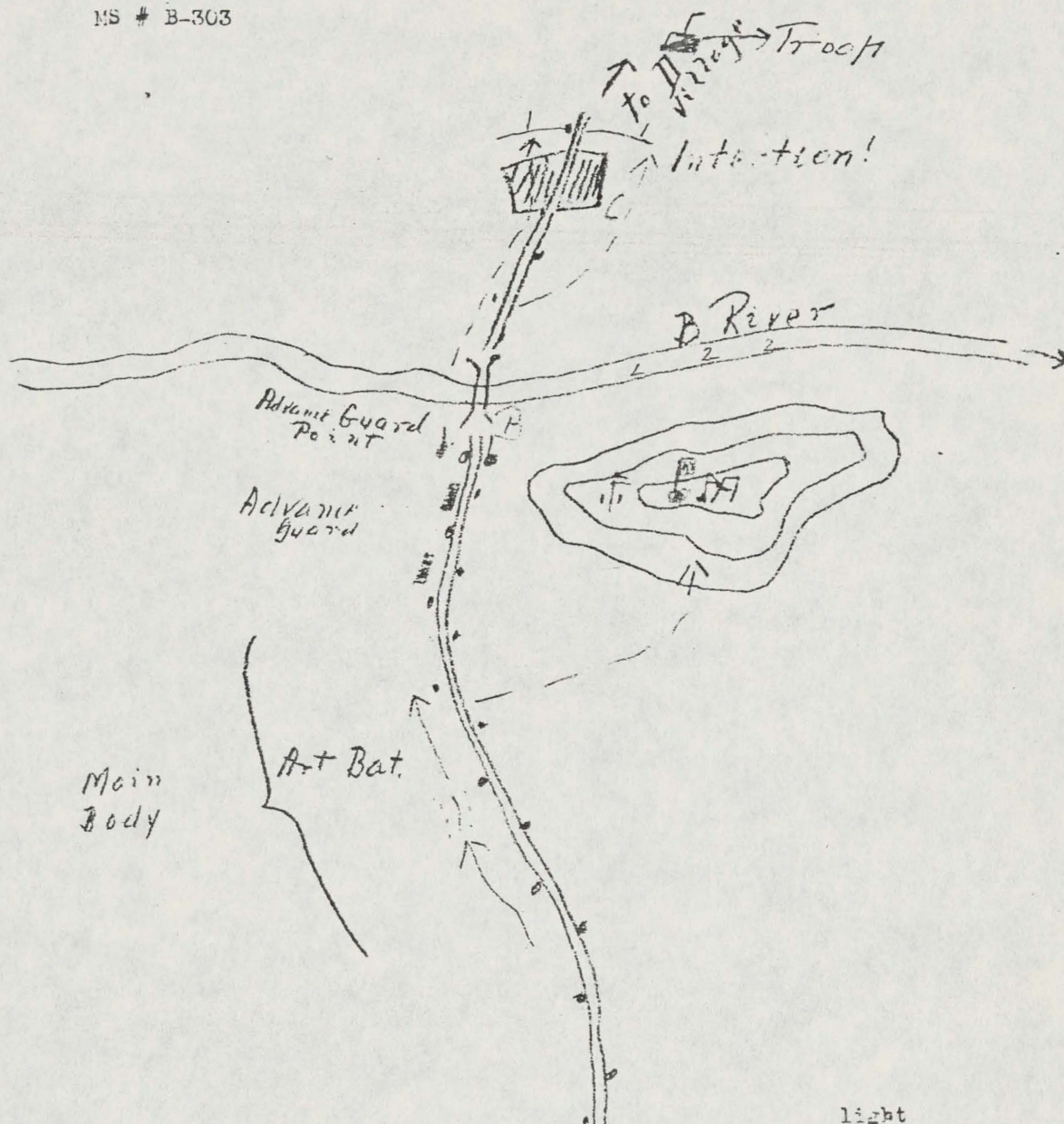
The use of a single unnecessary word was despised and prohibited. Hence, as late as 1914, it was still possible to write out "Army Orders" with the use of only four or five brief ciphers, easily contained on one page. A prerequisite for this is however, a body of professional officers who exactly have ~~been~~ received/the same training during the long years of peace and with the same tactical education, the same way of thinking, identical speech, hence a body of officers to whom all tactical conceptions were fully clear.

A further prerequisite is an officers training institution which allows the subordinate a very great measure of freedom of action and freedom in the manner of executing orders and which primarily calls for independent ~~acting~~, initiative and sense of responsibility.

It was like that in 1914.

Assuming that this subject will prove of interest I am explaining it by a simple schematic example:

continued on page 4.



Situation: "Reinforced Inf. Regt. No. 71 (I.R. 71, 1 Troop, 1 ^{light} field Art. Bat., 1 Eng. Comp.) marching across B River - C - to D Village, where enemy is reported. Regiment has orders to take village." At 9.30 on M Day position is as depicted in sketch.

Ahead is the troop for reconnaissance and security purposes.

Regiment Commander is riding ahead of Advance Guard accompanied by Advance ^{light} guard leader and commander of the light field Art. Bat.

At 9.45 during the march a Cavalry Patrol report arrives: "Enemy Infantry, strength unknown, presumably one battalion, advancing toward C, already passed through D Village at 8.40. Bridge B is under order. Am continuing to watch enemy. East of bridge B River 3 to 4 meters broad, can be forded by infantry."

X Leutnant 3/Husaren 14. from Height 211~~XXXXXXX~~ four kilometers
⁰⁵
 north C. 8.V. 9.05

This report contains everything the Regiment Commander needs.

Compasses, Distance calculation, time compared, concise assessment of situation
 quick
 and ~~XXXX~~ decision: "Reinforced Inf. Regt. 71 will first take C."

Execution - "Command Technique"

1./ Map in hand, the Regiment Commander gallops ^{ahead} accompanied by Advance Guard
 Leader and ^{light} Commander of /field Art. Bat. to Heights A, in order to survey the
 terrain personally, and to direct action from there. Regiment continues on
 march.

2./ Brief orders to Advance Guard Leader and Commander of ^{light} /field Art. Bat.

a./ Enemy, about 1 Battalion, advancing from D Village to C, could now be
 II about 8 kilometers from C;

b./ Regiment will first gain northern edge of C; further orders there.

c./ Light Field Art. Bat. advance to this height (a), to cover advance to C.

d./ Advance Guard take northern edge of C and keep B River Crossings open.

e./ River reconnaissance eastwards of bridge by Adjutant II Bat.

f./ I shall remain at A for a while and then ride to Advance Guard at C."

All this takes about 10 ten minutes! Every commander repeats his orders, the
 adjutants gallop to marching column and instruct the officers, the adjutant
 of the L.F. Art. Bat. detaches the Battalion on right from marching column, de-
 ploying them on the gallop to Height A, where, in the meanwhile, Commander of
 Art. Battalion has had time to reconnoitre the B. position and to survey the
 terrain.

The Battery Leaders, together with Battery Troops gallop ahead to A, where
 Battalion Commander assigns them their positions. By the time the batteries
 arrive at southern slope of A, everything is ready.- thirty minutes later,
 all are ready to open fire.

Advance Guard Leader gallops from A to B Bridge where he awaits his Advance

then proceeding ahead to northern rim of C. Whilst on the march to there he gives company leaders brief orders which these pass on, whilst marching, to the platoon leaders.

Not one minute halt is called for, everything remains in ^{smooth} motion.

Such missions were exercised with watch in hand.

The most important is the mission - what is to be done. How is decided by the respective subordinate leaders.

Nothing is ordered whilst halting, everything is done whilst advancing.

All leaders are far ahead of the troops, following alone, and ~~XXIX~~who are fetched forward by an adjutant, by a rider, often even by means of signals.

Within the marching column certain members have instructions, during the march to do nothing but watch their respective leaders who have galloped ahead, observing them with fieldglasses to see what they do and whether they give any prearranged signs.

That from top to bottom was the whole secret of the lightning-like leadership method in 1914, from the Army down to the Company.

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Re: Orders a./ to f./

Re: a./ To say more about enemy and lengthy discussions about what he could perhaps do, need not be said here. Nothing more is known.

Re: b./ This is the most important for the following hours, all else can follow later according to developments in the situation.

(It is unnecessary to say: "march over bridge B". That is taken for granted).

Re: c./ Commander of Art. Bat. need not know more at this juncture.

Re: d./ -----" and hold B River crossing open" is a quite concise, clear tactical conception, which even every NCO knows. Any explanations would be superfluous.

Re: e./ This is making provision for the eventuality of ^{rear} ~~late~~ units of the regiment having to wade through the river eastwards of bridge, if enemy

should open fire on the bridge beforehand.

Re: f./ For a short while the Commander can, from A, observe enemy terrain and the movements of his regiment through his field-glasses - everything can function without his presence! - . Then he must again proceed ahead to the bridge in order to reach C soon - again at same time as the advance guard.

1916 - 1918.

After
~~XXXXXXXXXXXX~~ the first great fluid battles of 1914 it became obvious that in many a tactical situation it was necessary that orders contain more detail. In 1915 commands were still brief but no longer like they had been during peace or in 1914.

From 1916 on the fronts become rigid - trench warfare is the ruling factor in the second phase of the war. Technique, Artillery, Automatic Weapons, Plan of Fire, Development of Positions etc., call for ever more detailed and longer commands. All movement has ceased and the staffs are in permanent positions. All this leads to, or tempts superior commands to issue, page-long orders which not alone assign a mission but rather also give instructions as to how they shall be carried out. The "war of paper" commences, numerous time-limits, reports, communiques and maps of all kinds are demanded, and orders become ever more specified.

But another reason for this becomes evident:

After 1914/15 very many of the professional officers were dead, wounded, or ill, as experience shows that losses in the first battles of a war are high on account of nervousness and lack of combat experience.

Many reserve officers take over battalions and regiments and also are drafted into the staffs.

Naturally they often lack the established tactical conceptions, practise and the professional training.

For them therefore, the order already had to contain certain directives of

explanations as to how execution should be carried out.

All this led to orders being long, but also to the initiative of subordinate officers becoming ever increasingly restricted.

" Reichswehr "

The long-service, professional army attempted to exercise the old command technique of 1914 again in greater measure and to rid itself of the long order in the form it had taken on in 1916 - 1918.

On the whole this was successful. But nevertheless the war had shown that in many a situation more detailed orders are necessary.

Thus an intermediate form of order was developed between that of 1914 and that of 1916 to 1918. Everything depended upon the individual circumstances in the respective situation.

But the speed of execution once more reached a high state of perfection in the army.

1933 - 1939.

The extreme increase and dilution of the body of officers after rearmament led to a lowering of the professional niveau among the masses. Schooling and course became shorter and time was lacking for the proper planned training so that command technique as such never again attained the old high standard, and was also no longer so uniform.

1939 - 1942

Orders tend to become long, above all at the outset of engagements. Supreme Command included many details in commands which, formerly, were left entirely to subordinate officers. Initiative became restricted and many remarkable and expressions forms/find their way into the language of command which did not stem from the old school.

1943 - 1945

All fronts have gone over to defense. Defense orders are always much longer than attack orders. In trench warfare orders are more detailed than in war of movement.

Officers on the whole are even less well trained than in 1916 - 18. Reserve officers are briefly trained and come from all classes.

Adolf Hitler held no high opinion of the "General Staff", which was too "intelligent" for him and too little capable of enthusiasm, so that he did not trust it too much. (Prior to 1943 officers of the General Staff were only allowed to be awarded the "Ritterkreuz" in especial, exceptional cases.) He therefore ordered that ~~in future~~ during the war, future General Staff officers should, first of all, only attend Military Academy for 6 months and later on only for three months (instead of three years!)

But, all that is not decisive!

German commands not only became ever longer, but also in their form of expression in ever increasing measure took on the form of "appeals" "incitements".

Resounding words were chosen, usually in the superlative form.

For instance: "without delay", "speediest", "immediately" "with all emphasis", "with all means available", "under all circumstances", "every inch of ground must be defended", "to dig claws into the ground", "attack with vigour", "tenaciously defend", etc.

The simple form of expression, practical and without the use of bombastic words, had been lost.

Pressure exerted by higher quarters in the event of the slightest tactical failure and threatening with "Court-martial", "punishment", "holding responsible" gradually led to all orders received from higher quarters being passed on in exactly identical wording to subordinate officers, in order to play safe. Every one was afraid to pass on received orders in his own simple language, for fear that, in the event of failure in any action, the question would be asked: "Why was the order not carried out precisely. The order was quite explicit." The position became ever more acute!

Identical types of orders were found in 1941 amongst the Russians, in the East. In one order which was captured the wording ran: "Why did you not carry out

the attack on ... in the way it was ordered? I am anxious about your health!

Such dictatorial leadership by compulsion easily creates a mechanical form of command, just that being copied exactly that higher quarters has ordered. Such methods ruin the free initiative and all sense of responsibility and bring about that nobody will move or risk a single step that is not ordered. Further, every minutest detail, even such as were self-evident, was ordered. The war of paper was assuming the most grotesque features. Many instances could be cited in which Supreme Quarters despatched high court officials to the staffs in order there, as absolute amateurs, to examine the operational and tactical records in order to find out whether the orders given by Supreme Command had been passed on to subordinate officers in their identical wording. Naturally this happened most frequently after failures, so that everyone was constantly afraid(im Druck) - on a hot spot -

D

Experience gained.

- 1./ In the initial stages of training young officers it is advisable to give examples of commands for the main tactical orders. This same applies to reserve officers, as directives and "vademecum".
Then, however, one should rid oneself of such schematic aids to thought, because otherwise schematic thinking will be brought about which can become dangerous and does not accord with actual war facts.
- 2./ It is very good practise in map exercises etc to have the orders written down under time pressure, i.e. to have them timed.
- 3./ A further good exercise is to dictate the orders by the map. This all induces to logical, concentrated thinking, whilst being a good exercise at the same time in simple form of speech for giving orders.
- 4./ Superlatives and strong language have no place in commands! They gradually numb the senses, lose all effect and incite to criticism.

- 5./ Short sentences, main sentences, make orders clearer. In the case of Allies speaking some other language, this also simplifies translation.
- 6./ The length of orders varies greatly and depends upon various circumstances.

Seen tactically the longest orders are those for

- a./ Systematic attack against an enemy position;
- b./ Organization for systematic defense;
- c./ Assembling from billets for an advance.

Orders are shorter for

- a./ Attack whilst in motion;
- b./ Wheeling to a new direction.

Orders which become necessary during the course of an engagement are shorter.

- 7./ The conclusive form of command is generally necessary for
- a./ Preparations for systematic attack;
 - b./ Moving into assembly area;
 - c./ The setting in motion of all battle action.

Short, individual orders are most practicable in the case of all fluid action whilst in motion.

- 8./ The psychology of command is more complicated today than formerly.

It is usually difficult to suit the order individually to the various characteristics of the subordinate officers. This can only be done by giving the orders orally and if the superior officer frequently sounds his subordinates. Then he can treat them rightly, according to their individual peculiarities.

of personal treatment

Otherwise such methods/are precluded by modern forms of warfare, modern means of communication (radio, teletype, etc.) Commands are mechanically duplicated and ~~sent~~ transmitted to all subordinate quarters.

- 9./ "Appeals", "Rousing Calls" etc. take no effect nowadays! By the time such "high-sounding" words reach the front line troops, they have lost their

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appeal going to life at the actual front being entirely different to life behind the lines, in the higher staffs. Very often the front lines, upon which everything hinges, never even hear about such appeals. Often criticism at the front is sarcastic because of the vast difference between the desire and the stark reality.

The dead, written, word can never have the same effect as that which is spoken personally.

10./ One must be careful not to command too much and too often. Often this is brought about solely by nervousness or lack of confidence in subordinate officers.

The less orders given the better.

11./ An order received should never be transmitted mechanically in the same wording. This is a sign of lack of own thought and of fear of superior quarters. Such method is certainly easier and "secures" one against reproaches, but it is unsoldierly and runs counter to all rules of good commanding.

12./ An excellent form of exercise in concentration is to have beginners and trainees in tactical instruction answer all questions right away in the wording of the respective command cipher they will give.

For instance: "What decision will you make?"

Answer: " 3. Panzer Division will attack enemy reported at A and for this purpose will first gain the line B - C with the advance units of both marching columns."

That is a clear answer containing everything. The examinee cannot extract himself by twisting and turning about, is compelled to concentrate and at the same time learns the command language.

13./ Modern motorized units particularly expect short commands, similar to the cavalry of 1914 or earlier. The speedy motor must not be allowed to run itself hot whilst idling for hours on end just simply because the long-

windedform in which commands are given take hours for transmission.

First the troops must be set on the march to their initial objectives and all the rest, including details can then follow.

That, in 1914/15 and 1939/41 was our great advantage over the much slower, systematic form of commanding by our former enemies of those days.

In 1928/29, during training-travel, I experienced how long it took at that time for the Russian officers who had been detached for training, to formulate in hours of labor an exact, page-long order. In the meanwhile their troops waited for their maps whereas we were already on the move for hours and consequently at an absolute advantage in respect of initiative right from the very outset.

Signed: Blumentritt.

Gen. Inf. 27 I 1947