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Russo-Japanese War

**NOTE: FRENCH STRATEGIC LESSONS, RUSSO-JAPANESE WAR, 1904-05**

The effect of this war upon European military thought has been inadequately studied, according to Theodore Ropp, War in the Modern World (Durham, NC: Duke UP, 1959; U39R6), p. 203. See also Edward M. Earle's Markers of Modern Strategy (Princeton UP, 1948; U39E2), and Richard D. Challener's French Theory of the Nation in Arms, 1866- 1939 (NY: Columbia U, 1955; UA700C5).

It seems the doctrine of maneuver, corrupted into a narrowly conceived doctrine of the offensive by Col de Grandmaison and the "Young Turks," had its intellectual roots in the writings of Ardant du Picq and Ferdinand Foch. Histories of the result, i.e., Plan XVII, can be seen, for example, in the memoirs and biographies of Foch and Joseph Joffre, as well as this book:

Gascouin, General F. Le Triomphe de l'idee, 1914. Paris: Berger-Levrault, 1931. 259 p. D521G32.

One may question if the lesson of the Russo-Japanese War was merely primacy of the defensive. Subtleties creep in. For example, note the comment in a recent book by Denis and Peggy Warner, The Tide at Sunrise (NY: Charterhouse, 1974; DS51713W32), pp. 541-42.

An army forced to take the defensive must defend itself by incessant counterattacks, General de Negrier, former inspector-general of the French army and a member of the Supreme Council of War, solemnly concluded in his Lessons of the Russo-Japanese War. Acting on his advice, Allied and German commanders on the Western Front sent millions of men to death on futile, ill-conceived attacks.

Hoffman Nickerson in The Armed Horde, 1793-1939 (NY: Putnam's, 1942; U103N53) makes some astute observations on the apparent contradiction, i.e., that the "chief military lesson of the [Russo-Japanese] war was to emphasize once more that fronts are unbreakable," yet, between 1905 and 1914, the cult of the offensive gained strength in France. Nickerson observes that, partially because of a vague realization that entrenched fronts were highly defensible, some advocates of offensive strategy quaintly envisioned attacks upon the flanks with cavalry. To Foch, the offensive failed in Manchuria because of poor communications, long supply lines, and bad roads, not because of the inherent strengths of machine gun pits and barbed wire (pp. 219, 221, 223).

One French military thinker found justification in the battles of the Russo-Japanese War for France's offensive plans:

Conin, J. The Transformations of War. Trans by L.H.R. Pope-Hennesay. London: Rees, 1912. pp. 150 & 158. U102C751.

Studies of French strategy by Conin's contemporaries include these:

Boucher, Arthur. L'Allemagne en Peril. Paris: Berger-Levrault, 1914. 196 p. UA700B76.

\_\_\_\_\_. La France victorieuse dans la guerre de demain. Paris: Berger-Levrault, 1911. 93 p. UA700B7.

\_\_\_\_\_. L'Offensive contre l'Allemagne. Paris: Berger-Levrault, 1912. 70 p. UA700B75.

Grouard, A. La Guerre eventuelle: France et Allemagne. Paris: Chapelot, 1913. 253 p. UA700G88.

Concerning the possible lack of influence of the war on French strategy, see Colonel Cordonnier in the translated Japanese in Manchuria (DS517C6), Vol. 2, p. 342, who warns the reader that his account is no definitive history because his information has been filtered through several languages. And Janin in Aperçus sur la Tactique... (DS517J53) lists fifteen sources, only one of which may be a report by a French observer. Similarly, a glance through pertinent articles in French periodicals suggests that the authors depended heavily upon British, German and Russian reports. Thus, is it not possible that French military thought was little affected by the reality of the war because French observers' reports were not read back home? Is there any indication their dispatches were published?