

# **THE WAR OF POSITIONS**

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The war of positions by Paul Azan

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**PAUL AZAN**

**THE WAR OF  
POSITIONS**



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# THE WAR OF POSITIONS

BY

LT. COLONEL PAUL AZAN, LITT.D.  
OF THE FRENCH ARMY

WITH A PREFACE BY

BRIGADIER GENERAL JOSEPH E. KUHN, U.S.A.

*TRANSLATED AT HARVARD UNIVERSITY*



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## PREFACE

**I**T is unfortunate that authors of books are so rarely known to their readers. This is especially true of books dealing with professional matters. In such cases one would like to be assured that the author really knows his subject, and is not merely a tyro feeding his readers with self-derived knowledge.

In Lieutenant Colonel Paul Azan we have a fine type of the French officer, a representative of that noble, glorious, and chivalrous Army which has for three years challenged the admiration of the world, friend and foe alike. He has learned his subject, not only theoretically, but also practically, through long service in the trenches and at the expense of honorable wounds. It is to be regretted that all who read his book cannot know the author personally.

A War of Positions, such as is being waged to-day, has never been known before — at least not on anything approaching the present scale. It has been made possible by the mutual action and reaction of firearms and of field works, aided on both sides by the recent progress of all sorts of technical inventions.

In the exposition of his subject Lieutenant Colonel Azan has presented the fundamental principles of the war of positions in an exceptionally clear and able

## PREFACE

manner. While written primarily for the soldier, the book is full of interest for the layman, and will enlighten the latter as to why it is so difficult to attain a military decision between antagonists fairly equal as to numbers, resourcefulness, and industrial development.

JOSEPH E. KUHN,  
*Brigadier General, General Staff,  
President Army War College.*

ARMY WAR COLLEGE,  
*July 24, 1917.*



## INTRODUCTION

**T**HE present war, with its multitude of new forms, has come as a surprise to that school of writers who believed that they could find the secret of victory in certain immutable precepts.

They might have avoided this misconception by a study of history. There they would have learned that although the same great principles of strategy brought victory to Hannibal, to Caesar, and to Napoleon, yet tactics have undergone countless fluctuations in the course of centuries, on account of the development of armament.

The curve of tactics is ever varying, yet always continuous. Among those forces whose resultant determines its direction, two in particular have greatly increased in recent years, the destructive power of cannon, the resisting capacity of field works. A careful evaluation of the importance of these forces in the recent wars of the Transvaal, of Manchuria, and of the Balkans has made it possible to sketch this curve day by day, to note its sinuosities, and to follow its development in a new direction.

Yet all this time certain arm-chair theorists, closing their eyes to actual facts, have still remained in the domain of speculation. As a basis for their doctrines, they have taken the victories of Napoleon, or the battles

## INTRODUCTION

of 1870. In their wake a number of men of intelligence have been drawn by their imagination or by their enthusiasm into the realm of hypothesis and fancy, to the entire neglect of those qualities of reflection and judgment, which constitute the true value of a leader.

In the present war a similar state of affairs has been seen. How many military critics have proclaimed the impossibility of laying down general rules, on the ground that the conditions of battle were constantly changing! From time to time they have announced the passing of a new milestone in the evolution of tactics; it was merely the milestone which their intelligence had passed on its road towards reality.

Since October 1914 the tactical curve has undergone but slight modifications. The two opposing forces of artillery and field works have, perhaps, gained still further in importance, each one developing in order to overthrow the other. But the essential principles of strategy and of tactics which govern the course of the present war have really changed but little since that date, nor can they ever vary but by slow degrees.

This work, in which an attempt is made to state these principles, is written for those who have not, as yet, taken part in this war, in order to spare them a difficult and dangerous apprenticeship. Perchance it will also give food for study and reflection to those of my young comrades who are seeking day by day, at the price of untold efforts, suffering, and bloodshed, to hasten the hour of victory.

# CONTENTS

	PAGE
PREFACE . . . . .	iii
INTRODUCTION . . . . .	v

## PART I

### THE PRESENT WAR

#### CHAPTER I

##### CHARACTER AND FORMS OF WARFARE

General Characteristics . . . . .	5
Different Forms of Warfare . . . . .	7

#### CHAPTER II

##### COMBAT ON A FRONT

Fronts in General . . . . .	12
Normal and Intensive Attrition . . . . .	13
Principles of the Offensive on a Front . . . . .	15
Rôle of the High Command in an Offensive . . . . .	18
The Defensive . . . . .	21

#### CHAPTER III

##### RÔLES AND FUNCTIONS OF THE DIFFERENT ARMS OF THE SERVICE

Infantry . . . . .	23
Artillery . . . . .	26
Engineers . . . . .	27
Cavalry . . . . .	29
Aviation . . . . .	31