Charles Le Coq de Kerland father and son: two generations of lawyers, from the amphitheater to the open sky

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DEUX AS DE LA CHASSE

The declaration of war on August 1, 1914 triggered the general mobilization. The number of men between the ages of 20 and 38 called upon to join the army stands at more than 3,800,000. However, the extent of the French contribution to the conflict was not limited to the gluttony of the military institution. Indeed, the entire French society was mobilized into the Sacred Union. For more than four years, entire families, combatants and civilians, saw their activities guided by the hope of victory. This was in

response to the requests of the Government, which directed all sectors of social life towards the conflict and set up war propaganda, but also a call of duty for those who had seen their son, father, husband or brother leave. The Le Coq de Kerland family, representatives of the Bordeaux bourgeoisie, were no exception and bore witness to the diversity of the forms of mobilization all over French society during the war. The father, Charles Marie Stanislas, professor at the Bordeaux Faculty of Law, as well as the youngest son, Marie Charles Maurice Jean, a young law graduate, also offer the example of the journey through war of jurists belonging to two different generations: the first at the rear and the second at the front.

The family known in Bordeaux high society as “Le Coq de Kerland” is actually called Le Coq. In notable families, it was then commonplace to attach a particle name to one’s own, in the manner of the apparent nobility under the Ancien Régime. Used in a constant and continuous manner, the name thus formed ended up becoming the official name of the family on official records, as was the case for the Le Coq de Kerland family. Moreover, the name “Kerland” probably refers to the cradle of the family in Brittany. Indeed, the law professor was not from the capital of Gironde, but he quickly came to rub elbows with worldly circles, as in 1876, he married the daughter of a prominent notable: the head surgeon of the hospital of Bordeaux. In addition, the mother of the bride was the granddaughter of a merchant hailing from Nantes, guillotined in Bordeaux during the Revolution, in 1794.

Charles, meanwhile, was born in 1844 on the Reunion Island, then known as “Bourbon Island”, where his father, originally from Concarneau, provided logistical support for the French fleet as part of his duties as a naval clerk. Like many teachers of his generation, he had embraced the career of a lawyer as a young man. After obtaining his doctorate in law in 1865, he received tenure three years later and began his career at the Douai Faculty of Law before joining that of Poitiers, where he taught civil procedure for three years, which became his specialty. In 1872, Charles Le Coq de Kerland was appointed to Bordeaux, where he reinforced the teaching staff, then composed of eight members, within the newly created law school. He settled there permanently, and his marriage, which resulted in the birth of four boys, was celebrated in 1876. In the fashion of the law professors of that time, Charles Le Coq was above all a teacher, who left almost no scientific production, but who was very appreciated by his students, who enjoyed the clarity of his presentations as well as the numerous examples that made them eager to

discover a field as arid as civil procedure. Add to this an eminently solemn tone, quite fitting to the University, where the classes were still given in robes, which Charles Le Coq de Kerland also gave in the young business school founded in 1873.

A few years before the Great War, Le Coq de Kerland figured prominently in the *Annuaire du tout Sud-Ouest illustré*. It is specified that the professor and his wife hosted events on Tuesdays in their home of the rue d'Aviau, located next to the Bordeaux park in the district of predilection of the Bordeaux master lawyers, and on Thursdays in their château des Chambrettes in Pessac, on the outskirts of the city. Their four sons are mentioned there under the foreign-sounding names of Henry, Robert, Edy and Karl, at a time when the practice of foreign languages, particularly English, was a sign of social distinction. The youngest of the siblings, Marie Charles, who went by "Karl", was born in 1887. He attended two major high schools in the city before obtaining his Baccalauréat: the Lycée public de Bordeaux, now Lycée Montaigne, as well as the private Lycée Sainte-Marie Grand Lebrun. Continuing thereafter his studies, during which he carried out his military service, he obtained a first bachelor's degree from the Bordeaux Faculty of Law in 1911, and a second in science the following year. On the eve of the Great War, he was a chemical engineer. His father, for his part, was about to complete in 1914 what was to be the last year of his career, after forty-six years of teaching. The outbreak of the conflict nevertheless diverted the trajectories of both men. Professor Le Coq, like many colleagues of his generation, thus extended his career in order to perpetuate the functioning of a University both disorganized and solicited by the mobilization, while the young Karl revived the passion of his youth in order to equip the French forces with a new weapon.

Professor Charles Le Coq: a teacher in the service of the University at war

All four Le Coq brothers were mobilized in August 1914. Henri, born in 1877, who had been a volunteer for several years, and Robert, two years his junior, were both called up as administrative officers. This was also the case of Édouard, even if he was exempted from all military service at the age of twenty, in 1904, because of a heart defect. The youngest, Charles, also joined the services of the military administration within the 18th section of administrative clerks and workers. Although it is clear that the Bordeaux family was involved in the national mobilization, the four sons of the professor

nevertheless benefited from a rather enviable situation among the mobilized. This was due to different reasons: age, past experience in military administration, physical weakness or specific skills, especially for the second-born, who quickly became a German translator. The professor was all the more aware of his privilege as some of his colleagues saw their son take the path to the front. This was the case of specialist in administrative law and future dean of the Bordeaux Faculty of Law Léon Duguit, whose son was to die in Verdun.

Starting at the end of the academic year 1913-1914, Charles Le Coq de Kerland found himself confronted with the disorganization of the institution he had joined the day after its foundation, where one can say he became part of the walls. In addition to the mass departure of students called to fight, some of whom did not bother to attend the last exams because of the explosive international situation, the faculties must compensate for the mobilization of some of the professors. This was all the more true in provincial establishments, which very often constituted a starting point for a university career, unlike those in Paris, which represented its culmination and where professors were therefore older. The Bordeaux Faculty of Law was, however, mostly spared, as the average age of the faculty remained high. However, four out of fourteen teachers were mobilized. Charles de Boeck and Jean Lescure put their legal training to good use by working on censorship; Julien Bonnecase, declared unfit for combat, was assigned to the military administration; and Maurice Palmade, appointed in 1914, joined the infantry where his action on the battlefield earned him a military medal, followed by the Légion d'Honneur. To these four mobilized men, one must add Professor Gustave Chéneaux, who, although he was too old to be mobilized, undertook to go into battle with his students and eventually found death there. Professor Bonnecase, performing his service in Bordeaux, certainly managed to continue his classes, but the teaching body was indeed deprived of nearly a third of its members.

Moreover, the political authorities in France made it a point of honor for academic activities to continue despite the fighting. Special importance was indeed given to universities in the mobilization in favor of the Sacred Union. The University thus became a leading actor on this "other front" located at the back, which presented itself as a "cultural front" in the face of "German barbarism", which scholars from across the Rhine refuted by signing the "Call of the 93" in October 1914. In Toulouse, Dean Maurice Hauriou thus asserted that the role of France and its allies was to ensure the

maintenance of “la culture hélenno-latine, […] la seule culture humaine, l’unique, qu’aucun peuple ne peut […] renier sans retomber immédiatement dans la barbarie [the Heleno-Latin culture, […] the one and only human culture that no people can […] deny without immediately falling back into barbarism]”. In addition, law schools quickly rose to the front line as this “cultural frontline” quickly transformed into a “legal front” under the pen of jurists, who sought to participate in any way possible in the mobilization of civilians. The visibility of the teaching staff’s mobilization was not comparable between Paris and provincial cities, where public courses for propaganda purposes were scarcer, but many efforts were made in all university centers. The effervescence was particularly great in Bordeaux, which became, for three months, the political center of the country in September 1914. Indeed, the Government retreated to the capital of Gironde as a result of the German advance towards Paris, and even if the frivolity of the Parisian high society in exile was sometimes described as inappropriate by observers, the city was indeed bathed in patriotic feeling.

The spirit of the time was thus that of “self-sacrifice” for victory within the Bordeaux Faculty of Law, where everyone down to the dean renounced their commodities for a time for the benefit of the main services of the Ministry of Public Instruction. The non-mobilized tenure professors thus assumed, free of pay, the courses of their two colleagues gone to battle, like Georges Ferron, who graciously took over Gustave Chéneaux‘s classes. Léon Duguit even founded a temporary civilian hospital where his colleagues, professors of history of law and Roman law, did not hesitate to lend him a hand as ambulance drivers. Bathed in this singular atmosphere, Charles Le Coq could only resolve to postpone his departure from the establishment where he had spent most of his career. Instead of retiring to his Domaine des Chambrettes in order to devote himself fully to the production of his wines, already known across the Atlantic for having “du corps, une belle couleur, de la finesse, [et] une sève prononcée [body, a beautiful color, finesse, [and] a pronounced sap]”, the old servant of the State therefore chose to continue his teachings on a voluntary basis. This was also the case of his colleague Camille Levillain, also recently retired. This expression of the patriotism only heightened the students’ respect for the two men, but Charles Le Coq de Kerland soon added to this, also being the father of a talent of the new field of aviation.

Karl “Kerland” Le Coq: law graduate and fighter pilot

Karl Le Coq's youth reveals a paradoxical profile, both in accordance with his family environment's way of life, and diverging by the independence of his personal choices. After obtaining his bachelor's degree, the young man followed his father's path and earned one degree in law, and one in science. Although in this, he moved away from the legal, military and commercial careers dear to his parents by becoming a chemist, this was not the greatest divergence of this son of a good family. Indeed, he built up a passion for the new field of aviation.

In 1909, as part of his sporting activities at the Racing Club de France, Karl met Geo Chavez, an aviation pioneer who, faced with his enthusiasm, offered him to fly aboard his aircraft a few days later. It did not take more for the descendant of sailors to turn into a true aerophiliac. Based in Bordeaux, he frequently visited the Mérignac aerodrome to follow Marcel Issartier's classes on monoplane aircrafts, first the Blériot XI model, named after the pilot who had crossed the English Channel in 1909, then the Deperdussin. All this despite the paternal prohibition to practice this dangerous activity, and despite the death of the "Vulture", Chavez's nickname in reference to the mountain raptor, fatally injured in a violent landing after having made the first crossing of the Alps. But when Charles Le Coq learned that his son had defied his ban, he was forced to abandon the idea of getting his pilot's license and was forced to devote himself solely to his studies.

When the war broke out, Karl Le Coq's aeronautical dream seemed to be over. Like his brothers, he was called up as an administrative officer, as he had been during part of his military service. However, he did not seem to be satisfied with the administrative routine and tried to escape it for the first time by taking an opportunity as a trainee interpreter in German, a language of which he had solid knowledge. But the ambitious corporal remained uncomfortable in these tasks that he considered subordinate. For this reason, he quickly applied for a promotion to the rank of 2nd class stewardship *attaché*, which was granted to him in light of his superiors' excellent assessments.

The conflict led to the development of military aviation. In spite of the debates this development provoked within the army, the plane was initially used for reconnaissance missions within the French army. But the development of a fighter aircraft by the Germans, who managed to synchronize the machine gun with the propeller of the aircraft, prompted the French to do the same. In the siege warfare that nailed troops to the ground, the first pilots became true knights of the sky in the eyes of other conscripts.

They even dethroned the cavalry in its prestige and their exploits were relayed to the rear, in a new press specialized in aeronautical adventure.

Enough to revive the Karl's abandoned dream, but also win the adhesion of his parents, who bowed to the nobility of the task. He applied for integration into the military aviation and joined the flight school in February 1916. After obtaining his patent, he was assigned as a pilot within the N68 squadron based in Lorraine in September after having followed a "fast aircraft" specialization, which would make him a fighter pilot as the first bombers appeared. The young aviator shot down an Aviatik C over Gremecey Forest in Moselle in November 1916. After this first accredited victory, 3 others, not accredited this time, followed before his transfer to the N90 squadron. French aviation was indeed subjected to extremely strict rules when it came to official recognition, requiring in particular to find the target on the ground, which became impossible when the aircraft crashes behind the enemy lines.

Within this new unit, represented by a rooster (a "*coq*" in French), Karl Le Coq de Kerland met a band of particularly daring airmen who did not hesitate to attack Drachen, captive German zeppelins located behind enemy lines. Among them was Marc Ambrogi, who even achieved a "double" in 1918, that is to say the shooting of two zeppelins a few minutes apart, sharing with Kerland his third official victory in January 1918. Building on his successes and with a year of seniority despite a period of hospitalization, the latter took command of the SPA82 squadron in June. His leadership qualities were so great that his men adopted a red and white pennant adorned with a rooster's head as their insignia, in direct reference to his surname. In this new position, the aviator won five more victories, two of them on the same day, July 11.

The squadron led by Le Coq de Kerland was eventually merged with the GC23 at the end of the war, but he ended the war with a total of 14 victories, 7 of which officially credited to him. His record was certainly not commensurate with that of a Georges Guynemer, who totaled 53 accredited victories and some 30 probable ones, but this still allowed him to reach the status of aviation ace, which required 5 accredited victories. Mentioned several times by the military authorities, he was also decorated with the five bronze palms of the Croix de Guerre, the Belgian Croix de Guerre, and also made a Knight of the Légion d'Honneur in October 1918.

A few days before the armistice, Karl Le Coq de Kerland enlisted in the active army. He did not resign until 1923, but asked for unpaid leave after his wedding in 1920 to devote himself to managing his father-in-law's factories. His father had finally retired for good in early 1918. He settled at his Domaine des Chambrettes, where he managed the production of his wine for a few years before returning to Paris, where his sons had settled. He died there at the beginning of 1922. Karl Le Coq de Kerland soon combined his legal degree and his experience in the Air Force. Practicing as a lawyer with the Paris Court of Appeal starting in 1921, he specialized in the defense of airmen in the liability lawsuits brought against them, notably aces André Martenot de Cordoux, Dieudonné Costes or Paul Louis Weiller. Recalled into the army when the Second World War broke out, he joined the general staff of the air command of the Levant, and was one of the few officers to encourage his men to retreat to England during the debacle. Unable to leave France himself, he carried out resistance activities until the end of hostilities in Paris, where German authorities tried to arrest him in 1942, then in Grenoble where he was appointed leader of the Air Resistance for the South-East. After returning to civilian life after the war, he entered the Superior Council of the Judiciary and was even a member of the Constitutional Council from 1959 to 1967. He eventually died in his hometown on November 7, 1978, at age 90.

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