



The French Army Corps Perspective Test 1/4

General Tactics Review - The Battle - the French Army Corps

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Since its creation in 1804 by Napoleon to perfect the divisional system which was the keystone of the organization of the Grande Armée, the Corps has always been the major level of conception and battle management, the "Corps d'Armée". The Corps has always been the major level of battle design and conduct, with the Army at the hinge of the tactical to the higher levels, operational and strategic, and the division generally relegated to the level of execution of the maneuver designed by the Corps.

It will be seen that, as with any scheme, this statement needs to be qualified, but whether it is a question of "prolonging" the commitment of the divisions (period from its creation to 1914), of "multiplying"..., it is a question of "extending" the commitment of the divisions (period from its creation to 1914), of "multiplying".... the manoeuvre of the Army (from 1914 to 1945) or to "test" the cold planning of its engagement with the divisions (period of the Cold War), the use of the corps is very much part of this logic.

The second obvious observation is that the Corps has always been a "complete" echelon of maneuver, in the sense that it has always included within it and implemented all the operational functions, the use of which has always been prepared by specialized cells of its staff.

Finally, the third constant, albeit eclipsed and totally obsolete nowadays, for a long time the territorial organisation based on military regions was associated and even twinned with the military regions.e with the stationing of the army corps, within the framework of what was called by General Lagarde, the "merged command", and codified by the highest level there is, the law, the 1882 law, in this case. In Algeria, between 1956 and 1962,

it is also around the corps echelon that the "grid" was organized, the corps being then elevated at the civil-military level, since it corresponded to the portion of territory and the attributions of an IGAME prefect (Inspector General on Extraordinary Mission).

Two paradoxes can be drawn from the above: As a complete element of tactical maneuvering, since its inception, the corps engagement has never, since its inception, been a complete element of tactical maneuvering. It has been the subject of a specific manual of use (it has always been absent from the ATT 900 series of the last quarter of the 20th century). Until the Second World War and the appearance of the Cours Supérieur Interarmées in 1947 (which served as the second year of higher military education), until the dissolution of the École Supérieure de Guerre in 1992.¹In the first year of the War School, the schooling of the War School was at divisional level, and in the second year at corps level (in fact, to deal with the level of the Army that Foch instituted in 1909, for a restricted pleiad of identified trainees, a third year which was to deal with this level and which, very quickly detached itself from the War School to become the CHEM). It is for this reason that the corps holds a large place in the pre-war general tactics manuals, notably that of General Altmayer, published in 1937. After the war, the role of the corps was sketched out, but never detailed in the various General Instructions. The role of the army corps was outlined after the war, but never detailed in the various General Instructions for the Use of Land Forces (GILF) issued by the JSAT, which were always very general in terms of the implementation of assets.

Secondly, although a central element of the manoeuvre since its creation, the holders of its command were divisionaries until 1920, since there have only ever been two ranks of general officers, those of brigadier general and divisional general. It was in 1920 that the law introduced the notion of "rank and appellation" of Lieutenant Generals and Generals of the Army, but without making specific ranks out of them.

As a final example, it appears that the "hours of glory" of the army corps, the two world wars and the planning of their engagement in Central Europe as part of the 1st Army, correspond to the times when, in terms of organisation, the brigade level had disappeared from the French army's order of battle. It will be necessary to analyse this phenomenon rigorously, before drawing conclusions that may be a little hasty for today.

1 In fact, between 1947 and 1992, the "Second Year" was divided into five months of C.S.I. and four months of studies on the organic functioning of the Army.

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