

THE DEVELOPMENT OF THE ARMY CORPS SYSTEM IN THE UNION ARMY

Allan Satin, Cincinnati Civil War Round Table, asatin@huc.edu

© Allan Satin & Cincinnati Civil War Round Table, 2010, www.cincinnatiwrt.org

At the end of the American Civil War, the Union Army was organized into army corps each with its own unique number which remained with it even if the corps was transferred from one army to another. How did this system develop in the Union Army?

The United States Regular Army had no field commands larger than a regiment when the Civil War broke out in April 1861. Regiments were assigned to geographical departments with no intervening level of command. With the expansion of the armies resulting from the recruitment of the volunteer forces, command levels between the regimental and departmental levels were clearly required. At first, those departments with large enough field forces organized their new regiments into brigades (e.g. May 28 in the Department of Washington). As the forces became larger, divisions were formed (June 11 in the Department of Pennsylvania). The first major campaign was fought with armies organized into divisions (First Bull Run).

Military men in the United States were familiar with the *corps d'armée* system as it had existed in the armies of Napoleon, but conservative commanders such as George B. McClellan and Don Carlos Buell were reluctant to form army corps in the armies under their command. McClellan wanted to postpone the creation of army corps until he had tested his divisional commanders through active operations to see which of them would be capable of commanding at the army corps level.

In the winter of 1861/62, political leaders in Washington, DC became impatient with the inactivity of the Army of the Potomac. President Lincoln decided to push McClellan to be more active by appointing corps commanders who would be more able to pressure McClellan and influence him than the large number of lower level division commanders could. By a presidential order of March 8, 1862, the Army of the Potomac was to be organized into four army corps. Orders of March 13 implemented the presidential order by specifying the assignment of divisions to the new army corps and also created a fifth corps. Shortly thereafter, the Army of the Potomac left for the Peninsula organized into these corps. Transfer of troops to other eastern departments led to the disbandment of the first Fifth Corps and on May 18, 1862, McClellan ordered the formation of two provisional corps for the Army of the Potomac to be known as the 5th and 6th Provisional Corps.

When the Army of Virginia was formed by General John Pope on June 22, 1862, it became the second Union army to be organized into army corps. At this point in the development of the army corps system in the Union Army, the corps were designated in sequences within each separate army. That is, the corps in the Army of the Potomac were designated as the First through Sixth of the Army of the Potomac. The corps in the Army of Virginia were designated as the First through Third of that army. Don Carlos Buell used this same designation system when he organized his Army of the Ohio into three army corps on September 29, 1862.

In a bill passed by Congress on July 17, 1862, the President was given the power to organize army corps at his discretion. This measure, when added to the army's experience with the formation of corps since March 1862, encouraged a systematic organization of the entire Union Army into army corps in the following months.

On July 22, 1862, the units serving in two Eastern departments (Virginia and the Middle Department) were formed into one army corps for each department. With these new formations, a new system of designation for army corps was instituted. The Army of the Potomac included six permanent corps (the two provisional corps were made permanent on this same date). The new corps formed in the Department of Virginia and the Middle Department were numbered in sequence with those of the Army of the Potomac: the corps formed in the Department of Virginia became the VII Corps and that formed in the Middle Department was designated as the VIII Corps. On the same date, troops from North and South Carolina then serving with the Army of the Potomac were combined into a new army corps which was designated as the IX. A decision had been made within the War Department that all army corps to be formed in the future would be

numbered in a single sequence regardless of which Army or Department to which each corps was assigned. X Corps was formed on September 3, 1862 from troops serving in the Department of the South.

The Army of the Potomac was reorganized on September 12, 1862 when it absorbed the troops formerly constituting the Army of Virginia. The three corps formerly in the Army of Virginia became the I, XI, and XII Corps, being integrated into the new designation system (the original First Corps of the Army of the Potomac had gone out of existence in May). By this re-designation, the new system of consecutive numbering was used again and a new feature, the re-cycling of vacated army corps numbers was first employed.

At this point in its development, the system was limited to forces in the Eastern theater of operations. On September 29, 1862, when the western Army of the Ohio was organized into corps, the corps were still numbered within that army only (First through Third). Other Western armies still had no army corps organization at all.

Presidential orders of October 24, 1862 extended the new continuous numbering system to the Western armies. The Army of the Tennessee (still containing no army corps organization) was designated as the XIII Corps and the Army of the Cumberland (the new name of the Army of the Ohio) was designated as the XIV Corps. The Western armies soon recognized the need to divide themselves into several corps each. On November 7, the Army of the Cumberland was divided into Right, Center, and Left Wings, still officially within the XIV Corps. On December 18, 1862 a new Presidential order officially divided the Army of the Tennessee into four army corps, to be designated the XIII, XV (XIV was already in use in the Army of the Cumberland), XVI, and XVII.

The forces in two more Departments (North Carolina on December 24, 1862 and Department of the Gulf on January 5, 1863) were given army corps organizations as the XVIII and XIX Corps respectively.

The three corps in the Army of the Cumberland were brought into the sequence on January 9, 1863 when an order mandated the re-designation of the Right, Center, and Left Wings of that army. The Center kept the number XIV, while the Right and Left Wings became the XX and XXI Corps respectively, skipping the intervening numbers already assigned to corps in other departments.

Later in 1863 the XXII and XXIII Corps were formed from troops in the Department of Washington and in Kentucky respectively (February 2 and April 27, 1863).

1863 and 1864 saw not only the continuation of the feature of consecutive numbering across armies and departments but also two other features of the designation system. Following the defeat of the Army of the Cumberland at Chickamauga in September, that army was reorganized. The shattered remnants of the XX and XXI Corps were combined into one. The designation of the new corps was IV, a number which had been vacant since the disbandment of the original IV Corps in August 1863. Similarly when the XI and XII Corps were combined, they were given the number XX which had been vacated by the consolidation of the XX and XXI Corps into the new IV. The number VII (vacated in August 1863) was recycled with the organization of troops in the Department of Arkansas as the VII Corps in January 1864. The IX Corps exemplified another feature of the system: portability of designations. The IX had originally served in Virginia but as the war progressed it served in Kentucky and Tennessee and then returned to the East, all without losing its original number. Similarly, when the XI and XII Corps were brought west for the Chattanooga campaign in the fall of 1863, they kept the numbers they had received as part of the Army of the Potomac.

The XXIV and XXV Corps were formed on December 3, 1864 by the reorganization of the X and XVIII Corps troops serving at that time in Virginia. On February 18 and March 27, 1865, the numbers XIII and X, which had been vacated earlier, were brought back for use by two corps formed by the consolidation of other units.

From its pre-war and early war lack of any army corps organization through the formation of the first army corps numbered within each army, the Union Army had developed a system of corps designations which

included a single consecutive number sequence, the reuse of numbers vacated by consolidation or discontinuation of corps and the retention of numbers by corps regardless of their assignment to particular armies or theaters of operation. The corps number had become a focus of identity for the units which made up each corps and continued to be part of the war time memories of veterans for decades after their disbandment in 1865.

ARMY CORPS FORMED IN THE UNION ARMY

Sources: WE: Welcher, Frank J. *The Union Army 1861-1865*. Eastern Theater (1989)

WW: Welcher, Frank J. *The Union Army 1861-1865*. Western Theater (1993)

- First Corps, Army of the Potomac [WE 300-301]
1862/03/08 created by Presidential order
1862/03/13 organized
1862/04/04 discontinued when transferred to Dept of the Rappahanock

- Second Corps, Army of the Potomac [WE 313]
1862/03/08 created by Presidential order
1862/03/13 organized
1862/09/12 continued as II Corps (Army of the Potomac)

- Third Corps, Army of the Potomac [WE 343-5]
1862/03/08 created by Presidential order
1862/03/13 organized
1862/09/12 continued as III Corps (Army of the Potomac)

- Fourth Corps, Army of the Potomac [WE 359-362]
1862/03/08 created by Presidential order
1862/03/13 organized
1862/08/00 became IV Corps (Department of Virginia)

- Fifth Corps, Army of the Potomac [WE 363-4]
1862/03/13 created from Banks' command, Department of the Shenandoah and Shields' division
1862/04/04 merged into Department of the Shenandoah

- Fifth Provisional Corps, Army of the Potomac [WE 364]
1862/05/18 created from Porter's division, Sykes' brigade, and Warren's brigade
1862/07/22 became V Corps (Army of the Potomac)

- Sixth Provisional Corps, Army of the Potomac [WE 394]
1862/05/18 created from Franklin's division, Dept. of the Rappahanock and Smith's division
1862/07/22 became VI Corps (Army of the Potomac)

- First Corps, Army of Virginia [WE 311-12]
1862/06/22 created from Fremont's Mountain Dept.
1862/09/12 became XI Corps (Army of the Potomac)

- Second Corps, Army of Virginia [WE 342-3]
1862/06/26 created from Banks' Dept. of the Shenandoah
1862/09/12 became XII Corps (Army of the Potomac)

- Third Corps, Army of Virginia [WE 357-9]
1862/06/26 created from Dept. of the Rappahanock
1862/09/12 became I Corps (Army of the Potomac)

- First Corps, Army of the Ohio [WW 236-7]
1862/09/29 created

1862/11/05 became Right Wing, XIV Corps (Army of the Cumberland)
1863/01/09 became XX Corps (Army of the Cumberland)

- Second Corps, Army of the Ohio [WW 238-9]

1862/09/29 created

1862/11/05 became Left Wing, XIV Corps (Army of the Cumberland)

1863/01/09 became XXI Corps (Army of the Cumberland)

- Third Corps, Army of the Ohio [WW 239-40]

1862/09/29 created

1862/11/05 became Center Wing, XIV Corps (Army of the Cumberland)

1863/01/09 became XIV Corps (Army of the Cumberland)

- First Corps, Army of the Mississippi [WW 236]

1863/01/04 created

1863/01/12 merged into XIII Corps (Army of the Tennessee)

- Second Corps, Army of the Mississippi [WW 237-8]

1863/01/04 created

1863/01/12 merged into XV Corps (Army of the Tennessee)

- Reserve Corps, Army of the Cumberland [WW 369-71]

1863/06/08 created

1863/10/09 discontinued

- Reserve Corps, Military Division of West Mississippi [WW 371-3]

1864/11/25 created from XIX Corps

1865/02/18 merged into XIII Corps (new)

- I Corps [WE 301-11]

1862/09/12 created from Third Corps, Army of Virginia

1864/03/23 discontinued

- II Corps [WE 313-42]

1862/09/12 continued from Second Corps, Army of the Potomac

1865/06/28 discontinued

- III Corps [WE 343-57]

1862/09/12 continued from Third Corps, Army of the Potomac

1864/03/23 discontinued

- IV Corps (old) [WE 362-3]

1862/08/00 created from half of Fourth Corps, Army of the Potomac

1863/08/01 discontinued

- IV Corps (new) [WW 240-6]

1863/09/28 formed from consolidation of XX and XXI Corps

1865/08/01 discontinued

- V Corps [WE 364-94]

1862/07/22 created from Fifth Provisional Corps, Army of the Potomac

1865/06/28 discontinued

- VI Corps [WE 395-420]

1862/07/22 created from Sixth Provisional Corps, Army of the Potomac

1865/06/28 discontinued

- VII Corps (old) [WE 420]
1862/07/22 created from troops in the Department of Virginia
1863/08/01 discontinued

- VII Corps (new) [WW 7]
1864/01/06 created from troops in the Department of Arkansas
1865/08/01 discontinued

- VIII Corps [WE 420]
1862/07/22 created from troops in the Middle Department
1865/08/01 discontinued

- IX Corps [WE 420-42, WW 246]
1862/07/22 created from troops from NC and SC serving in Virginia
1865/07/27 discontinued

- X Corps (old) [WE 442-55]
1862/09/03 created from troops in the Department of the South
1864/12/03 discontinued

- X Corps (new) [WE 455-7]
1865/03/27 created from troops in NC not part of XXIII Corps or Sherman's army
1865/08/01 discontinued

- XI Corps [WE 457-64, WW 246-9]
1862/09/12 created from First Corps, Army of Virginia
1864/04/04 merged into XX Corps (new)

- XII Corps [WE 464-72, WW 249-51]
1862/09/12 created from Second Corps, Army of Virginia
1864/04/04 merged into XX Corps (new)

- XIII Corps (old) [WW251-67]
1862/10/24 created to include all troops in the Department of the Tennessee
1862/12/18 broken up into four corps
1864/06/11 discontinued

- XIII Corps (new) [WW268, 5-6]
1865/02/18 created from Reserve Corps, Military Division of West Mississippi
1865/7/20 discontinued

- XIV Corps [WW 268-81]
1862/10/24 created to include all troops in the Department of the Cumberland
1862/11/07 broken up into Right, Center, and Left Wings
1863/01/09 wings redesignated as XX, XIV, XXI Corps
1865/08/01 discontinued

- XV Corps [WW281-91]
1862/12/18 created
1865/08/01 discontinued

- XVI Corps [WW291-303, 5-6]
1862/12/18 created
1865/07/20 discontinued

- XVII Corps [WW 303-13]
1862/12/18 created
1865/08/01 discontinued

- XVIII Corps [WE 472-87]
1862/12/24 created from troops in the Department of North Carolina
1864/12/03 discontinued

- XIX Corps [WW 313-22, WE 487-95]
1863/01/05 created from troops in the Department of the Gulf
1864/11/07 discontinued

- XX Corps (old) [WW 322-5]
1863/01/09 created from Right Wing, XIV Corps
1863/09/28 merged into IV Corps (new)

- XX Corps (new) [WW 325-30]
1864/04/04 created from merger of XI and XII Corps
1865/07/28 discontinued

- XXI Corps [WW 330-3]
1863/01/09 created from Left Wing, XIV Corps
1863/09/28 merged into IV Corps (new)

- XXII Corps [WE 495]
1863/02/02 created from troops in the Department of Washington
1865/? discontinued

- XXIII Corps [WW 333-48, WE 495-8]
1863/04/27 created from troops serving in Kentucky
1865/08/01 discontinued

- XXIV Corps [WE 498-504]
1864/12/03 created from white troops of the X and XVIII Corps
1865/08/01 discontinued

- XXV Corps [WE 504-8]
1864/12/03 created from black troops of the X and XVIII Corps
1865/08/01 discontinued