



## Military Subjects: Organization, Strategy & Tactics

THE NAPOLEON SERIES

# Paul Thiébault and the Development of the French Staff system from Ancien Régime to the Revolution



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### 1. The beginning: the Ancien Régime

In 1801 Thomas Egerton, the British military publisher, brought out *An Explanation of the Duties of the several États-majors in the French army* which was an exact translation of the original French work of an experienced French staff officer, Paul Thiébault, whose original work, *Manuel des Adjudans généraux et des Adjoints employés dans les État-Major Divisionnaires des Armées*, first appeared in 1800 in Paris.

The origin of *Manuel des Adjudans généraux* could be attributed either to an anecdote or the misfortune of a young staff officer during his meeting with Bonaparte, the then commander in chief of *l'Armée d'Italie*. It was the end of November, in the aftermath of the battle of Arcole, 15-17 November 1796. Captain Thiébault just started his new service as an *adjoint* (assistant; see below) in Masséna's division under his chief of staff, *adjudant général* Jean-Baptiste Solignac (1773-1850). One of the first assignments he received from his superior was to deliver a report to Bonaparte's headquarters. "I just thought," – recalled later Thiébault in his *Mémoires*, – "that the most diligent part of service is a speed of a delivered package, but I was mistaken. Instead of getting my report through the aide-de-camp on daily duty, [the] commander in chief invited me into his room, took papers from my hands and after quickly perusing it began a string of questions surpassing in number and rapidity anything I could have imagined in that way."<sup>[1]</sup> Bonaparte cross-examined him on the number and condition of General Masséna's troops, their logistical situation, location, status of hospitals and on position of the enemy, as well. Thiébault, however, managed to respond only to a small portion of these questions. Bonaparte was far from being satisfied, but Thiébault was satisfied even less. Perhaps, this episode compelled him to think critically of the necessity for systematical preparation and theoretical readiness of staff officers. Hence, his *Manuel des Adjudans généraux* would shortly appear, assembling under one umbrella many thoughts of a young officer, which would be put into fruition in its extended version in 1813, when *général de division* Thiébault will become an experienced combatant and

staff officer.<sup>[2]</sup>

“My first efforts,” – further explained Thiébault, – “were dedicated to organizing the work of the staff, which Solignac did only in bits and pieces. This effort was guided by notes, which I had taken while serving at *l’Armée du Rhin* and which, seven or eight months afterwards helped me in writing my *Manuel des Adjudan[t]s généraux*.”<sup>[3]</sup> But his work, however, was not composed from scratch as France had a long tradition of staff organization.

In the first part of his *Manuel des Adjudans généraux* Thiébault provides the reader with a brief history of the French staff system, from Francis I (1515-47) to Louis XIV (1643-1715).<sup>[4]</sup> He, however, omits the era of Louis XV (1715-74), which brought the first professional title on this subject, *Principes de la Guerre de Montagnes*, composed by Pierre-Joseph de Bourcet (1700-80). Since 1764, while director of fortifications of the *Province de Dauphiné*, de Bourcet took a leading role to better prepare French officers, so humiliated by the disastrous outcome of Seven Year’s War (1756-63).<sup>[5]</sup> In 1766, de Bourcet was put in command of a group of twenty-one officers whose task was to carry out the topographical survey of the French kingdom (this work, however, ceased in 1771 for financial reasons and was abolished in 1776).<sup>[6]</sup>

In his seminal treatise, which he composed around 1775, de Bourcet analyzed operations of an army in mountainous terrain (either defensive or offensive), which included preparation for the campaign, marches, communications and the like. Because such terrain would compel an army to operate in isolated, compartmented areas, he recognized the importance of independent formations acting on their own. What was revolutionary in his *Principes*.., is that de Bourcet proposed the basic concepts for an army organized in a well-articulated divisional-like structure, with its own staff, each headed by a *maréchal général-de-logis* (quartermaster-general).

This office (originally called *maréchal-des-logis d’armée*) first appeared during the era of Louis XIII (1610-43) and had the primary responsibility for the lodging the troops, provision of supplies and organizing marches. Chapter VIII in Book Two of de Bourcet’s work discusses the functions of the *maréchal général-des-logis* who was supposed to assist his superior commander “by maintaining correspondence with War Ministry, ambassadors and different armies’ general officers; provide an accurate report on military substance and munitions, upkeep with reparations of troops, their recruitment and discipline”. This officer should also prepare “orders of general and particular movements of troops, which he supposed to present in writing, [direct] reconnaissance personally or via his assistants (*aides*) and every day bring about the information regarding the enemy and his position; also submit reports on deserters and spies, on which he should inform military department...”<sup>[7]</sup> Further, the *maréchal général-des-logis* was obligated to prepare “orders of battle and marches”, “determine intervals between the billeting” and organize “reconnoitering of villages, towns or hamlets in terms of estimate of the quantities of the forage needed”. To achieve these and other tasks, a company of guides (*compagnie des guides*) was placed under his direct command. This company, to be composed of no less than fifty mounted and twenty guides on foot under command of a captain, was supposed to work with the local

population and be always at-ready.[8]

In de Bourcet's plan, the *maréchal général-des-logis* also supervised the work of officers in charge of geographical matters (*ingénieurs-géographes*), who were supposed to report the "terrain findings to the commander in chief and the Secretary of the War Department"

At least four assistants (*aides*) should be assigned to the bureau of *maréchal général des logis*: one in charge of orders of marches and its instructions; a second to supervised the commencement of marches; while two others were placed in charge of a reconnaissance. [9] De Bourcet concludes this short chapter of his *Principes*., on the merit of such officers who should be selected based on experience and great deal of zeal – they should not afraid of hard work and vigorous and brave under fire.

Although the army staff organization outlined by de Bourcet did not became official doctrine for the French royal forces, the expeditionary corps under the orders of *Lieutenant-général*, J.-B.-D. de Vimeur, comte de Rochambeau, which landed at Newport, Rhode Island, on 11 July 1780, did have a staff organization.[10] This included:

- *Maréchal-de-camp* F.-J. de Beauvoir, marquis de Chastellux
- *Brigadier des armées du roi* (branch of service) C.-G. duc de Choisy
- *Maréchal général-des-logis* P.-F. de Bévillie and *Lieutenant-colonel* F.-A.-L. Thibault de Menonville (on 12 January 1781, a twenty-seven year old captain, L.-A. Berthier, was assigned to staff as a supernumerary *aide-maréchal général-des-logis*)
- Chief of artillery and equipages Colonel F.-M. comte d'Aboville assisted by captain La Chèze
- Chief of engineers Colonel J.-N. Desandrouins with four attached engineer officers and captain Duchesnoy, an *ingénieur géographe*
- Intendant-general Colonel B.-J. de Tarlé
- Commissary officer C. Blanchard
- Superintendent of hospitals M. de Mars
- Chef physician J.-F. Coste and chef surgeon Robillard
- Chaplain *l'abbe* de Glenson
- Staff also included fifteen senior officers of infantry and cavalry and number of *aides-de-camp*, including members of the most ancient and illustrious French families, such as marquis de Vauban, chevalier de Lameth and others.

Although the Rochambeau's staff did not see much action before the siege of Yorktown it, nonetheless, contributed to the final victory. Thus, by the last week of April 1781, *maréchal général-des-logis* de Bévillie had mapped out a route from Rhode Island to the American headquarters in New Windsor. Further in October, a senior officer on staff duty, *Brigadier* de Choisy was sent to take command of Allied troops (Weedon's Virginia militiamen and Lauzon's Legion) at Gloucester in anticipation of a disagreement between two commanders.[11] And, no doubt, the staff officers of the engineers and artillery directed the trench work at Yorktown until the British finally surrendered.

In the last decades of the Ancien Régime the staff system remained in its previous form until after it was given further push by a War Minister, *maréchal de France* P.-H. marquis de Ségur (1724-1801). In 1783 he formed a staff corps of senior officers, composed of *aides-maréchaux généraux-des-logis* carrying the brevet of a colonel or lieutenant-colonel; each of them was assisted by a captain. At the moment of formation, this staff included 19 colonels, 24 lieutenant-colonels or majors and 25 captains. These officers were supposed to be versed in various military disciplines, such as topography, history, geography; they also should possess the art of commentaries on mémoires, know how to perform a reconnaissance and other subjects related to military matters. The director of this corps, marquis d'Aguesseau, prepared in 1787 a memorandum where he advised the government of placing staff officers (*officers de l'État-major*) on the permanent footing, especially taking under consideration the recent involvement of France in the American War of Independence. It should, continued d'Aguesseau, serve the country both in the peace and wartime, and became a training school for line officers and high nobles desired to pursue a military career.<sup>[12]</sup> The corps included nearly a dozen officers who served with Rochambeau in America, including Colonel de Tarlé and *Lieutenant-colonel* Langlouis du Bouchet.<sup>[13]</sup> It, however, was left for the Révolution to create real change, which saw the beginning of a true system in the staff organization.

## 2. On the administrative and organizational structure of the new French army

The creation of the revolutionary armies, which swept away the old regime doctrine of linear tactics and cordon “war in lace”, truly started when the Assembly of Notables sat in the spring and summer of 1787 to advise Louis XVI on the problematic situation in the French kingdom. Among other matters, Minister of War de Ségur, entrusted the task of investigating possible courses for army reforms to the Jacques-Antoine-Hippolyte, comte de Guibert (1743-90), author of the controversial *Essai Général de Tactique* (1772) and former aide to a previous minister, Claude-Louis, comte de Saint-Germain.<sup>[14]</sup> When de Ségur was replaced, the new minister Loménie count de Brienne, relied on de Guibert and his *Conseil de la Guerre*, was especially created by ordinance, 9 October 1787 for the purpose of enlarging the circle of military expertise in the War Department.<sup>[15]</sup>

The *Conseil* covered a wide spectrum of concerns related to the army's administration, tactics, uniforms and the like, but mainly left it unfinished. However, its major concern was the establishment of a reliable Military Code and culture of command, which found its way in the “Regulation of the Duties of the Hierarchy of All Military Personnel,” approved in 1788.<sup>[16]</sup> Finally, all troops were organized into permanent brigades of infantry, dragoons and light cavalry which, in turn, were formed into twenty-one *division militaires* (including Isle of Corse) commanded by a *lieutenant général* assisted by inspectors for cavalry and infantry. Each general officer commanding the *division* was supposed to “follow government regulations and ordonnances; have constant correspondence with the *Département de la Guerre*; work in relation with royal intendants and municipal officials regarding the troops establishment and movement;

and finally, maintain tranquility and harmony between the troops and local inhabitants.”<sup>[17]</sup> So assembled and organized, these units were stationed primarily on the northern and eastern borders of France, from the Channel to Lake Geneva, garrisoning in or about the major towns and cities.

When the Revolution broke out, military administration fell into the hands of the National Assembly (17th June 1789 – 30th September 1791) and its specifically designated part, the *Comité Militaire*. Composed of professional military men, this section was established in August 1789 and began its work in October of the same year.<sup>[18]</sup> The army organization was hastened to near completion with the numerous decrees on discipline, new system of recruitment and advancement, supplies, payment, preserving the veterans and the like. On 28 February 1790 the *Comité Militaire* adopted the military constitution granting legislative authority certain power including determination of the officer mode of recruitment and advancement.<sup>[19]</sup> For the first time it regulated the army size, composition and precise monetary compensation for all its ranks, from the last *fusilier* to the *général d’armée*, by issuing on 26 August 1790 the “General edict of the quantity of personnel in each grade, composing the army...”<sup>[20]</sup> Note that by doing so the Assembly reserved for itself the right to determine in the near future the questions of the number of the general officers and staff personnel.

Thus, on 5 October 1790 (sanctioned on 29 October), to assist army commanders, the National Assembly decreed “Formation of the Staff for the Army” composed of thirty *adjudans généraux*, namely seventeen in the rank of colonel and thirteen in the rank of lieutenant-colonel, chosen by the king.<sup>[21]</sup> Along with 136 aides-de-camp they were assigned to the three major royal armies (*l’armée du Rhin, du Centre, and du Nord*) thirty *lieutenants-généraux* and sixty *maréchaux-de-camps*. Additionally, the decree of 18 November 1790 designated the system of advancement of *adjudans-généraux* (no less than ten years of active service) and their aides-de-camps.

The term *adjutant général* (derived from the Spanish *ayudante*, an officer subordinate; this term first appeared at the end of seventeenth century) means a senior staff officer, “assistant to a general officer.” By decree of 25 March 1776, the position of *adjutant sous-officier* appeared in the French army to distinguish senior NCOs assisting their company grade officers in routine administrative duties, such as disciplinary issues, inspections, instruction of corporals and sergeants, drills, and the like.<sup>[22]</sup> Further, the function of an *adjutant-major* was created; this officer, usually a senior captain, was put in charge of drill regulations, instruction of NCOs and overall disciplinary and administrative service of a bataillon.

Note that the most recent system of advancement was outlined in the ordinance of 17 March 1788 and concerned the hierarchy of all military employments.<sup>[23]</sup> Members of the *Comité Militaire* working on the legislations realized that the lieutenant-colonels of the army, who were mainly provincial nobility might be discontent, because an ordinance of 1788 would have allow these officers to became *maréchaux-de-camp* after twenty years’ service without first advancing to the rank of colonel. Yet the decree of advancement adopted by the Assembly in September and November 1790 applied the principles of seniority and placed them behind

all of the colonels (and later on, all lieutenant-colonels) in competition for the rank of general officer, or offered immediate retirement with promotion to the rank of *maréchal-de-camp* with a pension.<sup>[24]</sup> Thus, office of *adjudans généraux*, as an interim position, could provide a solution to keep the most prominent (or lucky?) officers afloat, while attracting them at the same time with a further opportunity to become a general officer.

Further development of *adjudans généraux* and their respective duties appeared in the “Instruction to the general officers, commanding divisions and their staff” legislated on 1 June 1791.<sup>[25]</sup> The part, which prescribed functions of these officers as staff personnel for each of the three armies, conformed by the decree of National Assembly, stipulated

- Participation in military reconnaissance
- Direction of topographical works for completion charts and tables of all frontiers of the royal domain
- Composition of *mémoires* (that is, military memoranda in relation to the general plan of defensive or offensive operations)
- Submission of reports based reconnaissances or operations from the frontiers
- Detailed and fair attention to different services of arms under order of respective general officers
- Inspection of established posts and troops’ lodgment
- Conducting troop movements in their respected divisions and leading the [marching] columns

To assist *adjudans généraux* in these and other tasks, division commanders had a right to appoint their assistants from the different services of arms, know as *adjoints* (Fr., past participle of *adjoindre*), that is officers, who are temporary attached during the course of the military campaign. According to same “Instruction...” the number of *adjoints* should not exceed three per division; these officers should return to their respective units at the end of each campaign.

On the divisional level, additional functions of *adjudans généraux* involved:

- Reports addressed to the commissary at war (including information on provisions and substance, formation and dispersion of magazines, organization of convoys, copies of general orders)
- Preparation of reports to division commander (including copies of orders from War ministry, notes on military reconnaissances and topographical works, maps and plans of theater of operations)
- Organization of a bureau (including daily book of orders, transcription of documents and active correspondance on internal matters of the division). Such bureau should include a clerk (*écrivain*) or draftsman (*dessinateur*) and sous-officers of each service of arms.

The “Instruction...” also regulated *adjudans généraux* state of residence (according to the orders of War ministry), commandment of detached troops, *tour de service* and the uniform.

Along with the administrative measurements designed to straighten discipline, morale, system of advancement and, above all, the fighting capabilities of the military forces, one of the greatest achievements of the National Assembly and its *Comité Militaire* towards the military codification was the installment of the new “Regulation of the Formation, Appointments and Pay System” adopted on earlier 1 January 1791.<sup>[26]</sup> This decree eliminated many useless positions awarded in the past chiefly as favors, as well as supernumerary ranks of *officiers de replacements* in infantry and cavalry (*major-en-second*, *capitaine-en-second*, and the like). From now on, each branch of the army received a clear organizational chart with precise functions and duties of its personnel and system of hierarchy. The basic drill manual was the famous “Regulation Concerning Exercises and Maneuvers for Infantry” of 1 August 1791 (published in 1792), which was supplemented with analogous documents for other major branches of arms.<sup>[27]</sup>

Although the role of the *Comité Militaire* was to bring before the Assembly the military questions that needed resolution, it, nonetheless, prepared all steps to transform the army from the personal tool of a monarch into a national institution composed, like the nation, of citizens with the assurance of freedom and *carrière ouverte aux talents*.

With transferring of its power to the Legislative Assembly (1 October 1791 – 20 September 1792), all military matters were entrusted to the War Ministry. Under Joseph Severes, serving in this capacity until October 1792, were produced the basic official guidelines for administration and the organization of military forces, such as “Provisional Instruction for the Army Encampment” of 1 March 1792 and the “Provisional Regulations for Infantry Service on Campaign” on 5 April 1792.<sup>[28]</sup> Title IX of this document outlined, in general terms, most important duties of staff officers:

- Necessity for the chief of staff to outline the order of battle for the army and subsequent placement of all general officers
- Each brigade should have a senior officer, who will replace the general officer in the course of the latter’s absence
- All orders shall be in writing and bear signature of a sender and a recipient
- Each morning the chief of staff shall receive reports on all actions accrued during the last twenty-four hours.

(This Title also specified the system of the orderly officers, delivery of messages, system of substitution, etc.)

According to the 13 October 1792 order, chiefs of staffs, *adjudans généraux* and *adjoints* were obligated with necessity to send a copy of daily reports to the War ministry, which should include order of battle, changes in position or information on detached units. It further created function of a staff officer, *adjutant général* or *adjoint*, performing exclusively administrative paper work (*chargé du detail*).<sup>[29]</sup>

Articles related to discipline, system of military hierarchy, wearing uniform and punishments were outlined in the “Regulations Concerning the Interior Service, Police and Discipline” for both infantry and cavalry, on 24 June 1792.<sup>[30]</sup> The main idea here was the concept of justice being advanced for the nation should be applied to the army, asserting that general

principles ensuring due process involving the rights to counsel and appeal.

Such was the condition of the French armed forces when young Thiébault joined the ranks of the revolutionary army. Military matters were under the umbrella of the reorganized War Ministry and remained the concern of this department. All following governments – Convention, Directory, and finally, Bonaparte's Consulate, used the provisions so fundamentally outlined earlier by the military specialists of the *Conseil de la Guerre* and *Comité Militaire*, which gave France victory over the forces of European monarchies.

According to the set of decrees legislated in 1793-94, the French army underwent a complete transformation. The government had embarked on the process of fusing old royal army units with new revolutionary volunteer units to create a new entity – infantry demi-brigades (it also reorganized all cavalry and artillery regiments, and bringing them up to strength).<sup>[31]</sup> Although this process, known as the *amalgame* (and its subsequent final product, *enbrigadement*) was not completed until summer of 1795, it gave the young French Republic certain military and political strengths composed of the professionalism of old military men and the zeal of revolutionary bravery.

Regarding the staff appointments note, that the reform of 1793-94 abolished the ranks of colonel and lieutenant-colonel as implying aristocratic privilege, but left unchanged the offices of *adjudant général* and *adjoints*. However, as the *lieutenants-généraux* and *maréchaux-de-camps* had now taken names more appropriate to their functions, that is *général de division* and *général de brigade*, respectively, so the utilization of staff officers was rearranged. The main decree of 21 February 1793, which reorganized the army created a new rank of *chef de brigade* (former rank of a colonel) and *chef de bataillon* or *chef de escadron* (lieutenant-colonel).<sup>[32]</sup> If previously, at the moment of its creation, the military rank of *adjudant général* was an interim position (according to the decree of 5 October 1790: see above), now it became more of an administrative office, whose bearer could hold a rank of *chef de bataillon/escadron*. From now on it implied to the functional duties while established the new system of military hierarchy, as well. So, the new title could, sometimes, read like *adjudant général chef de bataillon* meaning that a person is a senior staff officer holding a rank of *chef de bataillon*. The same went for *adjoints* who were usually drawn from the company grade officers' ranks. Thus, effective 29 November 1795, Captain Thiébault was appointed *adjoint à l'adjudant général* Solignac who's military, hierarchal rank was *chef de brigade* (not to be confused with the *général de brigade*, the first general officer's rank).<sup>[33]</sup>

Further, in early March 1793, Edmond Dubois-Crancé (himself a former member of the *Comité Militaire*) in his report to Convention advised on "surveillance" and "administration in the armies, as well as their independence."<sup>[34]</sup> It also stipulated that from now on the *adjudant général* take over duties of *maréchal général-des-logis*; for that, he should be assisted by two *adjoints* as his aides along with the *commissaires des guerres*. This new entity was supposed to participate in "execution of military operations, maintain the discipline and surveillance in the case of necessity." They were expected to keep up with the "work of a bureau, do

a reconnaissance, set a trace for camps and overview marches.” To uphold the hierarchal system, a new “Decree related to organization of the field army”, legislated on 10 brumaire Year 4 (31 November 1795) was adopted, by which *généraux de brigade* were supposed to be at least eight years senior to *adjudans généraux*. The same law now commissioned *adjudans généraux* exclusively from the infantry branch of service with the grade no less than *chef de bataillon* and/or *chef de brigade*.<sup>[35]</sup> Perhaps, the new government – the Directory – considered cavalry, artillery or engineers more “conservative” element of the army being able quickly form corporations based on their unilateral technical knowledge.

### 3. Thiébault’s apprenticeship: Berthier’s work on staff organization.

In January 1796 the Executive Directory ordered the second army reorganization, which resulted a consolidation by downsizing and re-grouping of many existing “brigaded” or semi-autonomous units along with dissolution of surplus cadres of the officer corps.<sup>[36]</sup> At that time, the War Ministry outlined the following personnel necessity for the staff of *l’Armée d’Italie* under soon-to-be commander in chief, General Bonaparte:

Army chief of staff  
 15 commissaires des guerres  
 9 *généraux de division*  
 18 *généraux de brigade*  
 16 *adjudans généraux*  
 32 *adjoints*  
 5 wagon-masters  
 1 company guides – 50 men  
 1 detachment of gendarmerie – 100 men  
 3 brigades of engineer officers – 21 men

Therefore, when Thiébault arrived at his new assignment to the Theater of Operations in the fall of 1796, the staff systems had functioned well for nearly six years. Of course, it was frequently interrupted by some political waves in the army and the turmoil in the French government, as well, but administratively speaking, the armies’ staffs functioned to the best of their abilities, which brought France her first victories of 1794 and allowed her to export war beyond her frontiers. On the educational level of its personnel it should be noted that in the fall of 1797, *adjutant général* J.-F.-X. Mangin of *l’Armée de Rhin-et-Moselle* found some time to present the Executive Directory with project of a first... *le scaphandre de guerre* (a “diving suit”), which he created in the course of his experiments.<sup>[37]</sup>

The theoretical staff work underwent further development based on the *Document sur le Service de l’État-Major Général à l’Armée des Alpes* (1796) composed by Berthier, who would soon assume the chief of staff position in Bonaparte’s *l’Armée d’Italie*.<sup>[38]</sup> Needless to note that Bonaparte himself always considered the professional work of staff officers an utmost importance, which could be seen from one of his daily orders during the early days of Italian campaign:

Upon receipt of the present order, *adjudans généraux* will forward to the chief of staff name, rank and the record of service (*l’ancienneté de service*) of each of their *adjoints* with additional notes concerning their educational level.

The *adjudans généraux* are warned that the precise orders of the commander in chief is to examine their respective *adjoints* fairly and to replace those who are not able to assist in work with which *adjudans généraux* are charged.<sup>[39]</sup>

No doubt, Berthier brought up his *Document sur le Service de l'État-Major* as an approach of a professional long working in various staff organizations. He based his treatise in part on the work done along the line by of *Conseil de la Guerre* of 1788, *Comité Militaire* of 1790-92 and recent decrees issued by the War ministry.<sup>[40]</sup>

In preamble of his work, Berthier outlined three fundamental principles for organization and functioning of *l'État-major général* (headquarters of the commander-in-chief):

- Subordination to the chief of staff, initiative and responsibilities
- Rapidity in performing of the assignments
- *Adjudans généraux* should be specialists in their specific service but possess general knowledge of overall staff work.

Further, the organization of staff proper was set forth in considerable details, broken down in ten parts where each service assumed their own specific functions:

***Attribution of different parts of service performed by four adjudans-généraux under the chef of l'État-major général.***

First bureau (*adjudant général* Chorier):

Staff archives; collection of issued legislations; daily orders; organization, inspection, control and movement of troops, military counsels, prisoners, deserters, troops rosters and reports (*états de situation*)

Second bureau (*adjudant général* Rivaux):

Keeping the historical journal of the army (*journal historique de l'armée*, that is, a daily log of all events), armament of the troops, organization of fortified towns (*des places fortes*), artillery, engineers, encampment, substances, hospitals, military police (*gendarmerie*), establishment of commandants in towns (*commandement des places*)

Third bureau (*adjudant général* vacant):

Military reconnaissance, plans, *mémoires* for various matters); control of marching of the troops; communications. It also included post services and correspondence; organization and employment of guides.

Fourth bureau (*adjudant général* vacant):

Establishment of headquarter (for the *l'État-major général* and commander in chef) and its internal order (*police*);

cantonments and placing troops in casernes (*casernement*).

Other offices of *l'État-major général* were responsible for the sending of orders, correspondence with the War ministry, general disposition of the troops, tenure of registers (surveillance of compliance with military laws and regulations), administrative paper work (*chargé du détail*), communication with *adjudans généraux* assigned to various divisions and the like. Berthier also planned to include in the staff personnel a brigade of geographical engineers (*ingénieurs-géographes*), which *l'Armée des Alpes* composed six officers of this branch of service.

This project was only partly fulfilled in *l'Armée d'Italie* but its provisions, nonetheless, are of a paramount importance. Not only would they serve for all subsequent organization of the *Le Grand-Quarter-Général Impérial* of Napoléon's Grande Armée in the future, but they also supplied a great deal of information to Thiébault when he began writing. Perhaps, in the way of a manuscript, Berthier's *Document sur le Service de l'État-Major Général* and other related instructions were circulated among division commanders and their respective staffs. After his unsuccessful meeting with Bonaparte, Captain Thiébault was definitely looking for some sources and soon outlined his future treatise, which was published in 1800.

#### 4. The French army under the early Consulate, 1799-1800

To fully comprehend the specifics of the *Manuel des Adjudans généraux*, it is necessary to summarize the statute and organization of French army, which is generally unfamiliar to a modern reader. As noted above, Thiébault's work embraces an earlier period of his own services, that is, from 1792 to 1798. But the army, in which he served during the time his work saw the light of print, was once again a subject of major reorganization under then the War Minister (future *maréchal* and after 1818, the king of Sweden), Jean Bernadotte. He held this high post from 3 July to 14 September 1799 and it is plausible that Thiébault, influenced by new changes, finished his final draft at that time.<sup>[41]</sup>

In the "Law Relative to All Military Personnel", issued 23 fructidor Year 7 (9 September 1799) the government, while declaring an "act of urgency", adopted a new organizational system for the army.<sup>[42]</sup> The times for the French Republic were difficult: victorious Bonaparte was in Egypt (although he, in fact, was secretly en route to France, which he would reach on 9 October); the armies of the Second Coalition under Russian Field Marshal Alexander Suvorov had the initiative over the French generals in Italy; finally, the Directory itself was in deep crisis. By adapting this law, the government hoped to consolidate the strength of its army before the possible foreign invasion and establish its own position. The major provisions (excluding "Army of the Orient" fighting in Egypt) were stipulated, as follows:

Title IV. *L'État-major general des armées*, which included six major metropolitan field armies: *l'armée d'Italie, Sambre et Meuse, Rhin et Moselle, Nord, Alpes* and Interior (Paris garrison):

80 *Généraux de division*  
 140 *Généraux de brigade*  
 110 *Adjudans-généraux*

520 aides-de-camps and *adjoints*, including six *chefs de brigade*, thirty *chefs de bataillon*, 382 captains and 102 lieutenants; Total: 850 men

Title V. *L'État-major des places*, which employed fortified town commanders, their *adjudans* and clerical personnel:

Temporary commandants:

9 of the first class<sup>[43]</sup>  
 21 of the second class  
 50 of the third class  
 80 of the fourth class

Adjudans de place: 90 captains, 90 lieutenants

1000 *portieres et consignes* (porters and prison guards, usually drawn from invalids)  
 160 *escrivains de place* (clerical personnel) also divided into four classes.  
Total: 1500 men

Title VI. *Les commissaires des guerres* attached to the armies:

40 *Commissaires ordonnateurs*  
 180 *Commissaires* of the first class  
 180 *Commissaires* of the first class  
Total: 400 men (plus additional 400 if necessary)

Title VII. *L'infanterie de bataille* (line infantry), which composed of 100 demi-brigades, four bataillons each (instead of three, as outlined by the law of *amalgame* on 21 February 1793)

Each line demi-brigade included its own "staff" (*petit état-major*):

1 *Chef de brigade* (demi-brigade chef commanding officer)  
 4 *Chefs de bataillon* (battalion commanders)  
 1 *Quartier-maître* (quartermaster, lodging)  
 1 *Vague-mestre* (wagon-master)  
 3 Adjudans-majors  
 3 Adjudans sous-officiers  
 3 *Officiers de santé* (medical officers)  
 1 Tambour-major and 8 musicians (demi-brigade's orchestra)  
 1 *Caporal-tambour* (corporal leading all tambours of the battalion)  
 4 *Maîtres ouvriers* (masters: tailor, maker of cords, of gaiters and armorer)

Each of the three line battalions composed of seven companies: one grenadier and six fusiliers (battalion depot composed of six fusilier companies). Each line company composed of:

1 captain (first, second or third class)  
 1 lieutenant (first or second class)  
 1 sous-lieutenant  
 1 sergent-major  
 4 sergeants  
 1 fourier (NCO responsible for company's lodging  
 and also in the guard of the colors)  
 8 corporals  
 2 tambours  
 64 grenadiers (in grenadier company)  
 104 fusiliers (in fusilier company)

Summary: three line battalions each had 1 grenadier company (83 men) + 6 fusilier companies

(738 men) = 821 men x 3 = 2,463  
 men  
 one depot battalion had 6 fusilier  
 companies (738 men)

Total per demi-brigade: 3,201 men in  
 four battalions + *petit état-major* =  
 3,231 men

Title IX. The line infantry, according to the law, supposed to have 323,100 men, NCOs and officers (Note that these were, of course, proposed “paper” strengths for the armies of the Republic, which chronically had its non-complete personnel).

Title X. *Les demi-brigades d'infanterie légère* (light infantry, or *légère*) composed of twenty-six demi-brigades organized along the lines of the *l'infanterie de bataille*; they supposed to have 84,000 men (*chasseurs* and *carabiniers*), NCOs and officers.

Note: the reform was carried out only partially. Towards the end of 1800 the French infantry (excluding foreign, auxiliary and colonial troops) composed of 110 lines and 30 *légère* demi-brigades, as follows:

4 demi-brigades of line infantry (four battalions each)  
 103 demi-brigades of line infantry (three battalions each)  
 3 demi-brigades of line infantry (two battalions each)  
 2 demi-brigades of *légère* (four battalions each)  
 27 demi-brigades of *légère* (three battalions each)  
 1 demi-brigade of *légère* (two battalions each)[\[44\]](#)

According to the same law (titles XI-XV), cavalry of the armies of the Republic composed of:

2 Carabinier regiments (704 men each regiment)  
 25 Regiments of *la cavalerie de bataille* (531 men each)[\[45\]](#)  
 15 Dragoon regiments (942 men each)  
 22 *Chasseurs à cheval* regiments (942 men each)  
 12 Hussar regiments (942 men each)

This branch of service was to have 1,408 carabiniers, 13,275 *cavalerie*, 14,130 dragoons, 20,724 *chasseurs à cheval*, 11,304 hussars, respectively. Total number for the mounted troops should be 60,841 men. Regiments of carabiniers (elite units) and *cavalerie de bataille* were usually assembled as independent cavalry formations (not subject of this study). Each infantry division, however, was attached with one-two regiments of light cavalry: *chasseurs à cheval* or hussars. They were organized along the line of dragoon regiments, four squadrons each (two companies per squadron). As in infantry, dragoons and light cavalry regiments included its own “staff” (*petit état-major*):

*Chef de brigade* (commander of the cavalry regiment)  
 2 *Chefs d'escadron* (each of these senior officers commanded two squadrons)  
 1 *Quartier-maître*  
 1 *Chirurgien-major* (senior surgeon)  
 1 *Artiste-vétérinaire* (veterinarian)  
 1 *Maître-sellier* (master-saddler)  
 1 *Armurier-éperonnier* (master-armorers/spurmaker)  
 1 *Tailleur* (master-tailor)  
 1 *Bottier* (master-cobbler)  
 2 Adjudants-majors  
 2 Adjudans sous-officers

Each squadron composed of two companies; each company included:

1 Captain, where the senior captain (first class) commanded the right-flanked company of a squadron and the captain of the second class – the next company  
 1 Lieutenant (of either first or second class)  
 2 Sous-lieutenants  
 1 *Maréchaux-des-logis chef*  
 4 *Maréchaux-des-logis*  
 1 *Brigadier-fourrier*  
 8 *Brigadiers*  
 2 Trumpeters  
 96 dragoons, hussars or *chasseurs à cheval*

Summary: each company numbered 116 men x 2 = 232 men per squadron

Total per regiment: 928 men in four squadrons + *petit état-major* = 942 men

Title XVI. *L'État-major de l'artillerie* composed of:

8 *Généraux de division*  
 12 *Généraux de brigade*  
 29 *Chefs de brigade*  
 33 *Chefs de bataillon*  
 144 Captains

Total: 226 men

Titles XVI-XXI. Each of eight foot artillery regiments (*artillerie à pied*)

included 1,888 officers, NCOs and men per regiment; total 15,104 men; each of eight horse artillery regiments (*artillerie à cheval*) included 466 officers, NCOs and men per regiment; total 3,728 men. This gave the French artillery corps, including twelve train companies (1,044 men), two battalions of pontooneers (1,198 men) and thirty-two brigades of artisans (1,920 men) a total of 23,220 men.

Title XXV. *L'État-major de l'arme du génie* (corps of engineers) composed of:

3 *Généraux de division*  
 4 *Généraux de brigade*  
 30 *Chefs de brigade*  
 60 *Chefs de bataillon*  
 260 Captains of the first or second class  
 80 Lieutenants of the first or second class  
 200 *Adjoints* of the first or second class

Total: 637 men

Title XXXIX. *Les compagnies des guides à cheval* (personal bodyguards and scouts):

1 Captain (commanding officer)  
 1 Lieutenant  
 1 Sous-lieutenant  
 1 *Maréchal-des-logis chef*  
 4 *Maréchal-des-logis*  
 1 *Brigadier-fourrier*  
 8 *Brigadiers*  
 2 Trumpeters  
 81 Guides  
 100 men per company (5 companies attached to the each of the five armies and its commanders at the main headquarters).  
Total 500 men.

Title XL. *Les officiers de santé*, which at this time were civil medical servants, not military personnel. Interior service (*service de l'Intérieur*) included:

7 *Inspecteurs-généraux*  
 8 Superior officers  
 120 Surgeons and pharmacists of the first class  
 130 Surgeons and pharmacists of the second class  
 370 Surgeons and pharmacists of the third class

Personnel attached to the armies (*service des armées*):

15 Chiefs  
 90 Medics  
 180 Surgeons and pharmacists of the first class  
 200 Surgeons and pharmacists of the first class  
 700 Surgeons and pharmacists of the first class

Including school professors and their assistants the total

number was 1,907 men.

The total land military force of the French Republic, including various auxiliary units, schools, coast-guards, veterans and the like (not listed here) consisted of 566,420 men.

### Notes:

[1] *Mémoires du général Bon Thiébault*, publiés sous les auspices de sa fille Mlle Claire Thiébault, d'après le manuscrit original par Fernand Calmettes, in 5 vols. (Paris: Plon-Nourrit, 1894-95); vol. II, 26; Jack Sigler, *General Paul Thiébault, his life and his legacy* (PhD diss., Florida State University, 2006), 30.

[2] In 1813, Thiébault published an extended version, some 580-plus pages long work known as *Manuel général du service des État-Major Généraux et Divisionnaires dans les Armées*. It was translated into major European languages and even used in 1817 by Simon Bolivar in his leadership for South American independence. Sigler, *General Paul Thiébault*, 301.

[3] *Mémoires du général Bon Thiébault*, vol. II, 27-28.

[4] Thiébault, *Manuel des Adjudans généraux*, 4-9. In the 1813 extended version, he provides more detailed history of the French staff under the Ancient regime monarchy.

[5] See discussion in Hittle, *The Military staff*, 90-92, where the author primarily relies on work by Spenser Wilkinson, *The French Army before Napoleon* (Oxford, 1915).

[6] Unfortunately, de Bourcet's *Principes de la Guerre de Montagnes* (Paris, 1888) was not printed until this time and previously existed only as a manuscript at the *Dépôt de la Guerre*. All citations in this section are from this source; page numbers for citations are noted in parenthesis in the text.

[7] De Bourcet's *Principes de la Guerre de Montagnes*, 56.

[8] *Ibid.*, 57.

[9] *Ibid.*, 58-59.

[10] Composed after Samuel F. Scott, *From Yorktown to Valmy* (University Press of Colorado, 1998); Gilbert Bodinier, *Les officiers de l'armée royale combattants de la guerre d'Indépendance des États-Unis* (Paris, 1983), 100-102.

[11] Scott, *From Yorktown to Valmy*, 51, 69.

[12] De Philip, Lt.-colonel, *Étude sur le Service d'État-major pendant les Guerres du Premier Empire* (Paris: R. Chapelot, 1900), 6-8.

[13] Bodinier, *Les officiers de l'armée royale..*, 103.

[14] Jean Colin, *L'Infanterie au XVIIIe siècle – La Tactique* (Paris, 1907), 114-30.

- [15] SHD/DAT, Série X2 45, “Règlement fait par le roi portant établissement d’un Conseil d’Administration de Département de la guerre, sous le titre de Conseil de la guerre.” Marcel Marion, *Dictionnaire des institutions de la France aux XVIIe et XVIIIe siècles* (Paris, 1969), 137.
- [16] *Règlement sur la hiérarchie de tous les employés militaires, ainsi quie sur les promotions et nominations auxdits emplois* (17 March 1788) in Albert Duruy. *L’Armée Royale en 1789*. (Paris, 1888), 87.
- [17] As quoted in Albert Duruy, *L’Armée Royale en 1789* (Paris, 1888), 62-63.
- [18] *Archives Parlementaires de 1767-1860*, ed. Jerome Madival and E. Laurent (Paris, 1868-1913, 1985), 1st série, vol. 8, 433 (proposal); vol. 9, 233-234, 336, 437-38 (members selection).
- [19] “Rapport sur la constitution militaire”, *Archives Parlementaires*, vol. XI, 521-26.
- [20] “Edit général du nombre d’individus de chaque grade qui doivent composer l’armée” (1790), *Journal Militaire*, 1792 (sup. 4), 299-306.
- [21] “Décret concernant la formation de l’état-major de l’armée.” *Journal Militaire*, 1790 (vol. 1), 280-81. In various late works it could be read as *adjudants généraux* or *adjudans-généraux*; here the original transcription is preserved.
- [22] “Tableau des grades et emplois militaires...” H. Berriat, *Législation Militaire* (Alexandrie, 1812), vol. I, xxvi.
- [23] Duruy, *L’Armée Royale en 1789*, 85.
- [24] More on this in Samuel Covington, *The Comité Militaire and the legislative reform of the French army, 1789-91* (PhD diss., University of Arkansas, 1976), 180-81.
- [25] “Instruction aux officiers généraux commandants dans les divisions, et aux *adjudans-généraux*...” *Journal Militaire*, 1791 (vol. 3), 386-89. All citations in this section are from this source.
- [26] “Règlement sur la formation, les appointemens et la solde...” (for infantry, cavalry, dragoons, engineers, etc.). *Journal Militaire*, 1791 (vol. 2), 59-270.
- [27] “Règlement concernant l’exercice et les manoeuvres de l’infanterie” (1791); “Règlement concernant l’ordre de service du corps de l’artillerie” (April, 1792). The regulation for cavalry known as “Instruction provisoire concernant l’exercice et les manoeuvres des troupes à cheval” (May 1788, changed in 1789) went on without much alteration until 1804. *Journal Militaire*, 1791 (sup. 3).
- [28] “Règlement provisoire sur le service de l’infanterie en campagne,” *Journal Militaire*, 1791 (sup. 2), 27-293; “Instruction provisoire sur le campement de l’infanterie,” *Journal Militaire*, 1792 (vol. 4), 224-42.
- [29] Ordre à observer pour faire connoître au ministre de la guerre al

situation des armées de la république,” *Journal Militaire*, 1792 (vol.5), 542-43.

[30] “Règlement concernant le service intérieur la police et la discipline...” (1792); earlier, on 1 April 1792, the “Règlement concernant l’ordre de service du corps de l’artillerie” was published. *Journal Militaire*, 1791 (sup. 3).

[31] “Décret relatif à l’organisation de l’armée... - Du 21 février 1793,” *Journal Militaire*, 1793 (vol. 6), 137-46; “Décret relatif à l’organisation de l’infanterie légère. – Du 9 pluviôse, an 2 (28 January 1794),” *Journal Militaire*, 1794 (vol. 8), 384-85. Studies on this subject are too numerous to be listed here. See, e.g., Jean-Paul Bertaud, *The Army of the French Revolution, from Citizen-Soldiers to Instrument of Power*, transl. by R. R. Palmer (Princeton University Press, 1988); Paddy Griffith, *The Art of War of Revolutionary France, 1789-1802* (London: Greenhill Books, 1998); Rafe Blaufarb, *The French Army 1750-1820: careers, talent, merit* (Manchester University Press, 2002), where the author for the first time discusses political aspects of the *amalgame*.

[32] “Décret relatif à l’organisation de l’armée... – Du 21 février 1793,” *Journal Militaire*, 1793 (vol. 6), 139-43.

[33] Six, *Dictionnaire biographique des généraux*, vol. 2, 462, 494; Sigler, *General Paul Thiébault*, passim. Note that the rank “brigadier” applied only to the junior cavalry NCOs.

[34] “Extract du report de Dubois-Crancé, sur l’organisation de l’armée.” *Journal Militaire*, 1793 (vol. 6), 169-170. All citations in this section are from this source.

[35] “Arrêté relatif à l’organisation de l’armée de terre. – Du 10 brumaire an 4,” *Journal Militaire*, 1793 (sup. 6), 224-25.

[36] “Arrêté du directoire exécutif, concernant l’organisation générale de l’armée. – Du 18 nivôse an 4,” *Journal Militaire*, 1796 (vol. 13), 949-67.

[37] “Le scaphandre de guerre,” *Carnet de la Sabretache*, No. 88 (1900), 240-47.

[38] De Philip, *Étude sur le service d’État-major*, 23.

[39] Order du jour, 9 germinal an IV (24 March 1796), *Correspondance de Napoléon Ier*, vol., No. 104, vol. 1, 127, as cited in Sigler, *General Paul Thiébault*, 31.

[40] Unless otherwise indicated, the following is a combination form De Philip, *Étude sur le service d’État-major*, 26-27, and Marcel Reinhard, *Avec Bonaparte en Italie* (Paris: Hachette, 1946), 63-75. Detailed analyses see in Griffith, *The Art of War*, 167-70.

[41] On 16 September Bernadotte was replaced with Dubois-Crancé but after the *coup d’état* 18-19 brumaire Year 8 (9-10 November 1799) the latter lost his place and was substituted by A. Berthier. The new Constitutional Act of 12 December 1799 established position of Bonaparte

as First Consul of the French Republic.

[42] “Loi relative au personnel de la guerre. – Du 23 fructidor, an 7”, *Journal Militaire*, vol. 19 (1799), 741-765. Unless otherwise indicated, all figures in this section are from this legislation.

[43] The class subdivision varied according to the pay scale – higher on the first, lower on the third class, which promoted a professional competition amongst its personnel.

[44] As appeared in Lt.-colonel Victor Belhomme, *Historie de l’Infanterie en France*, in 5 vols (Paris, 1893-1902), vol. 4, 200.

[45] In 1803, these regiments were renamed as cuirassiers and getting appropriate equipment (cuirass and helmet). Until that time, the branch of arms known commonly as “cavalry” was generally referred to as *troupes à cheval* with specifics being made to whether *cavalerie*, *carabiniers*, *dragoons*, *hussars* or *chasseurs à cheval*.

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