

The Cornet / Le Cor

The cornet was introduced for both light and line infantry voltigeur companies.

There is an assumption that they were used in the same way in both. The former adopting slightly earlier their use.

First we will discuss the merits of the instrument, and then the uniform of the Cornet.

The Instrument

It was felt that for passing commands, the use of the drum when skirmishing was cumbersome, and during the period 1804-1805 the line infantry started replacing the drummers with Cornets, this came with the Arretes of year XII and XIII.

Unlike earlier Trompes de Chasse, the cornet or cor as it is written in many tomes, has no musical merits, it was a small horn that could be held in one hand, and gave off tuneless commands to those in earshot. It is a common mistake to think that trumpets carry further in sound than drums, the sound of a drum carries much further.

The instrument itself was slung over the left shoulder sitting on right hip. The Cornet carried a short musket, unlike a drummer, the instrument sat on cartridge box. The cornet carried the sabre briquet and bayonet like other voltigeurs. Add to this of course his cow-skin backpack.

The tubing was 221cm long with a bell at one end, a green cord wrapped around the center with tassles. The tubing did three loops, the largest of which measured 18cm, the lead pipe measuring 9cm. The cor is played in F or e flat, later bugles 1822 switched to B flat.

Central Europe prior and since the Napoleonic period still uses a similar sized cor for hunting. The traditional French Trompe or Cor Naturel is a much larger instrument requiring regularly two hands one in the bell of the instrument to hold it.

The memorialist Marbot makes specific mention of the reasons for removing the tambour from the light infantry, roughly translated he says despite the advantages of the drum over the cor, it is true that it is difficult to carry a drum through woods and over rocks., the light infantry following the example of other nations were the first to abandon its use.

Elting in his book, Swords around the Throne mentions that cornets were issued before a complete set of calls were issued. By 1806 there were commands: a ministerial circular was issued sent to colonels of line infantry regiments, dated 5th March, that detailed five calls.

Basically a lot of triplets going on in a limited range of notes to be expected with the instrument, but nevertheless cannot be confused as to their meaning.

No. 1 Marche / Charge/ Forward



No. 2 Le commandement a droite



No.3 Le commandement a gauche



No.4 En arriere



No.5 Le ralliement



Basically translated means: march on, fan right, fan left, withdraw, regroup.

It has been recorded by a number of critics of the cor that it was less effective than the drum, and indeed affected the health of its users.

There is much discussion about what happened at the battle of Caldiero.

One witness General Molitor, says his cornetists were puffed out sounding the March (charge) climbing up the escarpments as they did so. He was obliged to bring up some drums to take over.

Still, at the second battle to take place at Caldiero, Elting writes that an Austrian regiment heard the cornets through the smoke, assumed it was cavalry coming towards them and formed square, whereupon the 14eme legere overran them in a quick charge.

It is clear by 1815 the Cor was largely ceremonial in use, several Corps replacing their Cornets with a drummer. Note voltigeur units did not have fifers unlike their grenadier rivals that regularly substituted a drummer for a fifer.

There were two cornets assigned per company, some regiments going down to one, replacing them with a drummer.

Uniform of the Cornet.

There follows a series of images here of cornets in light and line infantry. Note the variety and degree of non-conformity. Note some had 7 chevrons on the sleeves similar of white, yellow, or blue, red white lace.

1812+

Later ' imperial' lace took the place of these brighter laces, on the green habit bardin cut with its 9 buttons down the front. Note collar of habit chamois turning darker yellow. Cuffs red and yellow. Turnbacks white.

For voltigeur companies in 100days there is evidence of blue and white habit with white lace chevrons and on facings, light yellow with white piping, with the only the grenadiers in some regiments having the green habit with imperial lace.

Shakos were had bands of yellow, white or orange. Epaulettes and plumets the same as voltigeurs. White or green shako cords, persisting despite regulations to the contrary.



1^{er} Line Infantry
Illustration H Knotel.
1893-1963



3^{eme} Line Infantry
Illustration H Knotel.
1893-1963



Imperial Lacey pattern- light infantry 1815
voltigeur



Cornet- light infantry



15eme light infantry
Illustration H Knotel.
1893-1963