VIII Corps (Grande Armée)

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The **VIII Corps** of the *Grande Armée* was the name of a French military unit that existed during the Napoleonic Wars. Emperor Napoleon formed it in 1805 by borrowing divisions from other corps and assigned it to Marshal Édouard Adolphe Casimir Joseph Mortier. Marshal André Masséna's Army of Italy was also reorganized as the VIII Corps at the end of the 1805 campaign. The corps was reformed for the 1806 campaign under Mortier and spent the rest of the year mopping up Prussian garrisons in western Germany.

After Jean-Andoche Junot's Army of Portugal was repatriated after the Convention of Cintra in 1808, it was reconstituted as the VIII Corps. However, Junot's command was broken up before the end of the year. In 1809, the soldiers from the Kingdom of Württemberg were formed into a new VIII Corps under the leadership of Dominique Vandamme. After seeing a few battles, they were used to protect Napoleon's rear areas. By January 1810 a new VIII Corps was created in Spain and placed under Junot. This unit participated in Masséna's invasion of Portugal before being discontinued in 1811.

A new VIII Corps was formed from Westphalians for the 1812 French invasion of Russia and placed under Junot's command. The corps was effectively destroyed during the retreat. The following year, the corps was rebuilt with Polish units and assigned to Józef Poniatowski. The VIII Corps fought in the fall 1813 campaign and ceased to exist after the Battle of Leipzig.

VIII Corps (Grande Armée)	
Active	1805–1813
Country	First French Empire
Branch	Army
Type	Army Corps
Size	One to three infantry divisions, cavalry, artillery
Engagements	Napoleonic Wars
Commanders	
Notable commanders	Édouard Mortier André Masséna Jean-Andoche Junot Dominique Vandamme Józef Poniatowski

1812–1813

Jean Henri Dombrowski

The corps was reconstituted for the French invasion of Russia and leadership was given to Vandamme. Together with the V Corps (Poles), VII Corps (Saxons), and IV Cavalry Corps, it was assigned to the 2nd Support Army under King Jerome Bonaparte. All the corps troops belonged to Jerome's Kingdom of Westphalia. General of Division Jean Victor Tharreau commanded the 1st Division and General of Division von Ochs led the 2nd Division. On 24 June 1812, the corps consisted of 15,885 infantry in 18 battalions, 2,050 cavalry in 12 squadrons, and 34 artillery pieces. Later, command of the corps passed to Junot.[37] Jerome's inexperience as a general was mitigated by the appointment of General of Division Jean Gabriel Marchand as his chief of staff.[38] Nevertheless, after being harshly criticized in a letter by his imperial brother, Jerome resigned his command on 14 July and went home.[39]

At the Battle of Valutino on 18 August 1812, the VIII Corps was ordered to cross the Dnieper River and block the retreat of the Russian army toward Moscow. After taking a long time to cross the river, Junot failed to advance any farther, allowing the Russians to escape.[40] At the Battle of Borodino on 7 September, the corps started out in reserve along with the Imperial Guard and the reserve cavalry.[41] By 8:30 AM, Junot's men were sent into action. At 10:00 AM they joined the I Corps and III Corps in a massed attack on the *flèches* which was successful.[42] Tharreau was among Borodino's many fatalities.[43] That autumn, the Imperial armies withdrew from Moscow. By the time they reached Smolensk, the combined V and VIII Corps counted no more than 1,500 men.[44]

In the following year, Prince Józef Poniatowski was appointed to command the VIII Corps, which was rebuilt as an all-Polish unit. At the Battle of Leipzig on 16–19 October 1813 the corps consisted of the 26th Infantry Division under General of Division Kamieniecki, the 27th Infantry Division led by General of Division Jean Henri Dombrowski (Jan Henryk Dąbrowski), the 27th Light Cavalry Brigade of Brigadier General Jan Nepomucen Umiński, and the 44 guns of the corps artillery under Colonel Redel.[45] Marshal Joachim Murat assumed command of a wing that included the II, V, and VIII Corps plus cavalry. His orders were to delay the advance of the Army of Bohemia from the south.[46] On 16 October, the 26th Division fought near the villages of Markkleeberg and Dölitz in the southern part of the battlefield.[47] Meanwhile, Dombrowski's division became involved in the fighting to the north.[48] During the rear guard fighting on the 19th, a panicky sapper prematurely blew up the bridge over the Weisse Elster River, trapping the VII, VIII, and XI Corps in Leipzig. The wounded Poniatowski drowned trying to escape and the encircled troops surrendered.[49]

Borodino: September 1812

General of Division Jean-Andoche Junot (8,900, 30 guns)

- **23rd Infantry Division:** General of Division Jean Victor Tharreau †
  - 1st Brigade: General of Brigade Damas †
    - 3rd Westphalian Light Infantry Battalion
    - 2nd Westphalian Line Infantry Regiment (two battalions, two guns)
    - 6th Westphalian Line Infantry Regiment (two battalions, two guns)
  - 2nd Brigade: General of Brigade von Borstell
    - 2nd Westphalian Light Infantry Battalion
    - 3rd Westphalian Line Infantry Regiment (two battalions, two guns)
    - 7th Westphalian Line Infantry Regiment (three battalions, two guns)
  - Divisional Artillery:
    - 1st Westphalian Foot Artillery Company (eight guns)
- **24th Infantry Division:** General of Division von Ochs
  - 1st Brigade: General of Brigade Legras
    - Westphalian Guard Grenadier Infantry Battalion
    - Westphalian Guard Chasseur Infantry Battalion
    - Westphalian Guard Chasseur-Carabinier Infantry Battalion
    - 1st Westphalian Light Infantry Battalion
  - Divisional Artillery:
    - 2nd Westphalian Foot Artillery Company (eight guns)
    - 1st Westphalian Guard Horse Artillery Company (four guns)