

## Points to Consider in US Drill Movement

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The US and British systems of drill are derived from two distinctly different military traditions. The US drill is copied from French drill regulations, and the British from Frederick's regulations for the Prussian army. In what follows I discuss some salient aspects of US drill for companies involved in battalion evolutions: the role of company guides and the commanding officer in the three close-order formations of column, line, and file marching; the principles of alignment; and the three ways that a company in line or column can change direction.



The roles of NCO and Officer in the US system of maneuver feature different *functions* for each role. In the US system the 1<sup>st</sup> & 2<sup>nd</sup> Sergeants function as company guides, while the officer's function is command. In the US drill system maneuvers these different functions play out as different *positions* in the unit formations.

### Guides

There is no L or R marker in US drill. These functions are done by the **guides**, which when the company is in line, are the 1<sup>st</sup> Sergeant for the right of the company, and 2<sup>nd</sup> Sergeant for the left of the company. The guides serve to align the companies on the battalion line-of-battle, and are the constant reference point for the company. ***Dressing is always towards the guide.*** Similar to the function of the "proper pivot" in British drill.\*

Unlike the markers in British drill, in US drill the guides are posted on the R or L of the company, on the **outside** of the formation (in US drill system the end positions of the ranks are occupied by corporals). The sergeants need to be free to move about: the 1<sup>st</sup> Sergeant steps up to fill ("cover") the Captain's spot when necessary; the 2<sup>nd</sup> Sergeant moves from the file closer rank up to the left of the company front rank when that flank is uncovered by an evolution. So you see that we cannot use corporals in the line as guides; if our corporals are going to act as sergeants when we do US drill, they need to be in the sergeants' correct positions during the evolutions.

(It is possible to have one person act as both L & R guide, if they are prepared to run from one side of the company to the other when their role changes. This is what happens in any case during platoon drill.)

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\* In his first drill manual Winfield Scott actually uses British terminology, calling the side of the guide the "pivot flank" (i.e., the side on which the company would pivot when it wheels into line), and the opposite side the "reverse flank". This usage can be confusing. For example, in Figure 3 below, which illustrates a right wheel with moveable pivot, the guide or "pivot flank" is on the left, but the pivot *man* for the wheel is on the right. Perhaps this is why Scott does not use the term "pivot flank" in subsequent manuals.

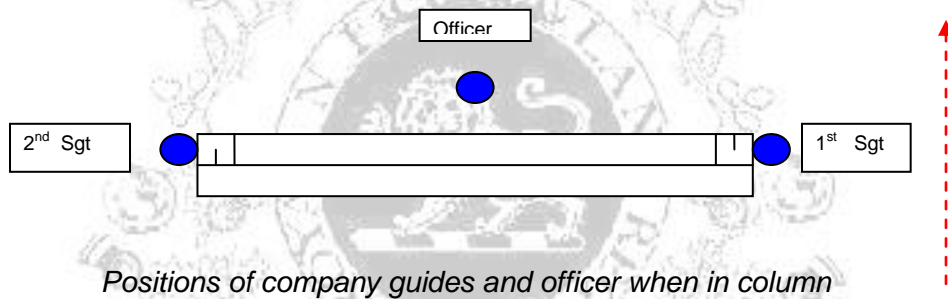
This is not so noticeable when marching as an independent company, but it really shows when operating as part of a battalion—if we align as per British drill, our dressing will be off, and the sergeant & officer will not be in their proper places.

### Officer

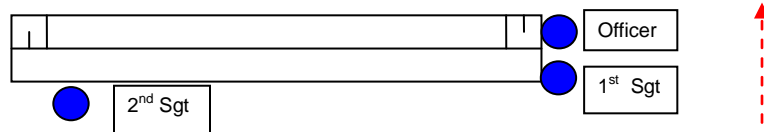
This position is necessary in US drill. The officer in command of a company or platoon is placed differently and has different tasks than the sergeants. So, regardless of the rank worn, the person that performs the officer's role needs to execute the command function and be in their correct position in the formation that is required for the maneuvers. Other men will need to perform the function of guides (that is, the roles of the 1<sup>st</sup> and 2<sup>nd</sup> Sergeants).

These positions are different for each type of formation—**column**, **line**, and **file marching**.

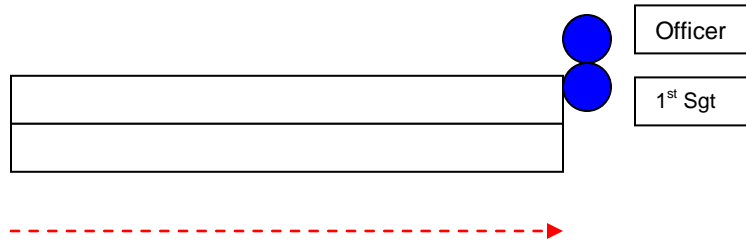
**Column:** When the company is part of a battalion column the officer is 2 paces in front of the centre of the company. The two guides step up to the front rank, 1<sup>st</sup> Sergeant on the right of the company, 2<sup>nd</sup> Sergeant on the left.



**Line:** When the company is formed in the battalion line, the officer is at the right of his company. 1<sup>st</sup> Sergeant is behind the officer, in the rear rank; 2<sup>nd</sup> Sergeant is in the rank of file closers, at the left of the company.



**File marching:** When the company is marching by files, by the right or left flank, the sergeant acting as guide will be leading the front rank, the officer alongside the sergeant. When marching by the right flank the 1<sup>st</sup> sergeant is the guide; when marching by the left flank the 2<sup>nd</sup> sergeant is the guide.



*Positions of company guide and officer when file marching by the right flank*

***In order for our company to execute the maneuvers of the US drill, we will need to have someone designated to perform the separate roles of officer, 1<sup>st</sup> sergeant, and 2<sup>nd</sup> sergeant.***

### **Alignment**

Guides serve to align the companies on the battalion line of battle. Hence the importance of the guides following one another; they mark the position of the battalion line. Alignment is maintained *within* a unit by the men touching shoulders (“dressing”) towards the side of the guide.

For this reason, the guide will always be on the side toward the battalion’s “front”. When **file marching**, the guide is always on the side of the front rank. When in **column** the guide is always on the flank that would be the pivot when the companies wheel from column into line (that is, guide is left when the column is right in front, and guide is right when the column is left in front\*).

### **Changing position when in line**

There are three different ways to do this: wheel from a fixed pivot; wheel from a moveable pivot; and the turn.

- **Wheel from a fixed pivot.** Always done from the halt, to the halt (and performed the same as in British drill, but at common time). Used in battalion evolutions to change from line to column, or from column to line. Dressing is always **towards the pivot**, which is always the guide (“look out, touch in”).
- **Wheel on a moveable pivot.** Used to change direction when in marching in column, when the change occurs on the side **opposite** the guide. (Eg, a right-in

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\* In column by companies the two guides are always on the flanks of the front rank; and one of them is charged with the direction. The **left**, if the right is in front; the **right**, if the left is in front. Smyth, footnote on p. 37.

front column, with guide left, changes direction to the right.) Dressing is **towards the guide** (to maintain integrity of the battalion line, which the guides mark), who is on the outside of the wheel; thus “look out, touch out”.

- **Turn.** Used to change direction when in marching in column, when the change is on the **same** side as the guide. (E.g., a right-in-front column with guide left, changes direction to the left.) The guide makes a 90-degree turn and continues marching in common time; company files come up sequentially (in echelon) at quick time to dress on the guide, and resume marching in common time. Much faster to execute than a wheel. No equivalent in British drill.\* Turns are also used by companies in succession when a battalion column deploys forward into line, or deploys into line on the right.



Below are some illustrations & accompanying commentary from Winfield Scott's 1814 drill manual. The illustrations are the same as those in Smyth but clearer, while Scott's explanation provides additional detail. I scanned the four Figures from Plate VIII and placed them following the relevant explanations from the manual.

Plate VIII illustrates a column of platoons, but it clearly shows wheels with fixed & moveable pivots, and turns.

Plate XII shows a battalion column, right in front (hence guide left) with companies executing turns when changing direction to the left, and wheeling with a moveable pivot when changing direction to the right.

Toronto  
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## Sources

[Scott, Winfield] *Rules and Regulations for the Field Exercise and Manoeuvres of Infantry*. New York: W. Mercein, 1815.

Smyth, Alexander. *Regulations for the Field Exercise, Manoeuvres, and Conduct of the Infantry of the United States*. Philadelphia, PA: Anthony Findlay, 1812.

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\* This can be quite confusing, as a “turn” in British drill is an *individual* change of direction on the march, which causes the unit to change formation; while in US drill a turn changes the *unit* direction, but does not change the formation.

## PLATE VIII.

Figure 1,

Represents a company wheeling forward from line into open column of platoons.

*Note.* It appears that upon the word, *march*, the right hand man (c) of the front rank of each platoon has faced to the right. The officer of each platoon has placed himself, as represented by the letter (d,) in a line with the front rank of the platoon as it will stand after effecting the wheel of ninety degrees. This officer posts himself at the distance of some paces from what will be the pivot, after accomplishing the wheel, and faces to the rear.

When the man who conducts the wheeling wing has, in wheeling, arrived within two paces of the point perpendicular to the position in line, the figure shows the platoon halted in this position by the officer commanding it.

At the word, *halt*, the covering-sergeant, and the file-closer from the left of the rank of file-closers represented by the letter (c,) have placed themselves in the direction ascertained by the platoon officer, who has, immediately afterwards, commanded, *Left—DRESS; FRONT*; and, then, moved to the front of the centre of his platoon, his position being marked (f.)

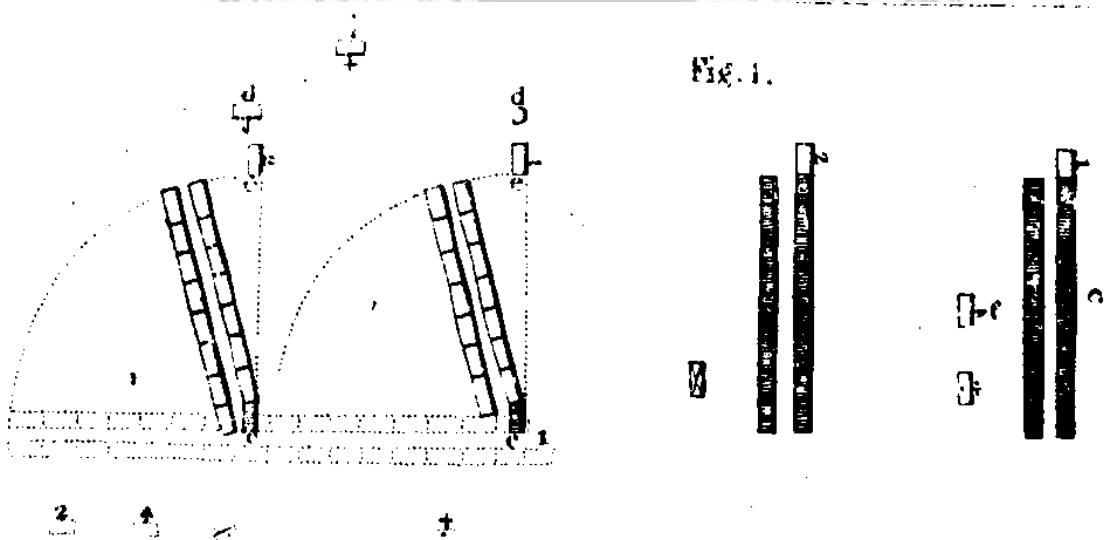


Fig. 1. Right wheel with fixed pivot (line into column)

Figure 2,

Represents a company marching in column of platoons, and wheeling on the march, into a new alignment, or direction. The wheeling is on the pivot flank.

*Note.* The plate shows that the guide (g,) at the instant of his having arrived at the wheeling point (h,) has turned to his left, and continued the march at the same uniform rate; the wheeling point has a marker (h) placed at it; each man, in his file, brings forward the right shoulder a little, arriving, in quick time, successively on the line of dressing, as represented by the files on the right (i;) the files on the left (k) are represented after having successively wheeled, and formed up, continuing the march.

The instructor (l,) is posted near the wheeling point, superintending the movement.

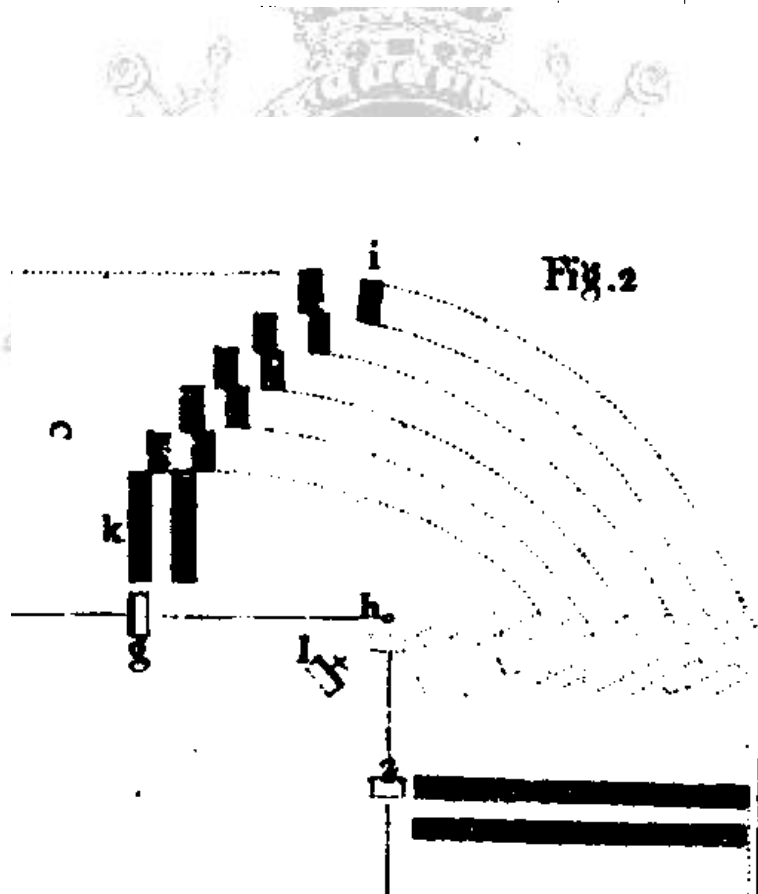


Fig. 2. Left turn

Figure 3,

Represents a company marching in column of platoons, and wheeling on a moveable pivot, on the reverse flank.

*Note.* At the word, *march*, given at the instant when the guide (d,) on the pivot flank, has arrived at the marker (m,) previously placed, the platoon executes the wheel to the right on a moveable pivot, taking the touch of the elbow from the left, the pivot flank; and not from the right, the reverse flank. The pivot man on the right continues taking steps, in wheeling, of seven inches, in order to clear the ground for the succeeding platoon. The letter (f) represents this pivot-man on the right. The guide on the left, the pivot flank of the column, takes the usual step of twenty-eight inches. From the nature of the movement, the platoon curves a little at the centre, towards the rear, as the figure shows.

The guide (e) of the second platoon follows, exactly, in the track of the preceding guide. Each guide, in his turn, takes care, in describing his arc of a circle, not to open out from, or close in, to the point round which the pivot-man wheels.

The chiefs of platoons, during the wheel, are to turn round to them, in order to conduct the wheel.

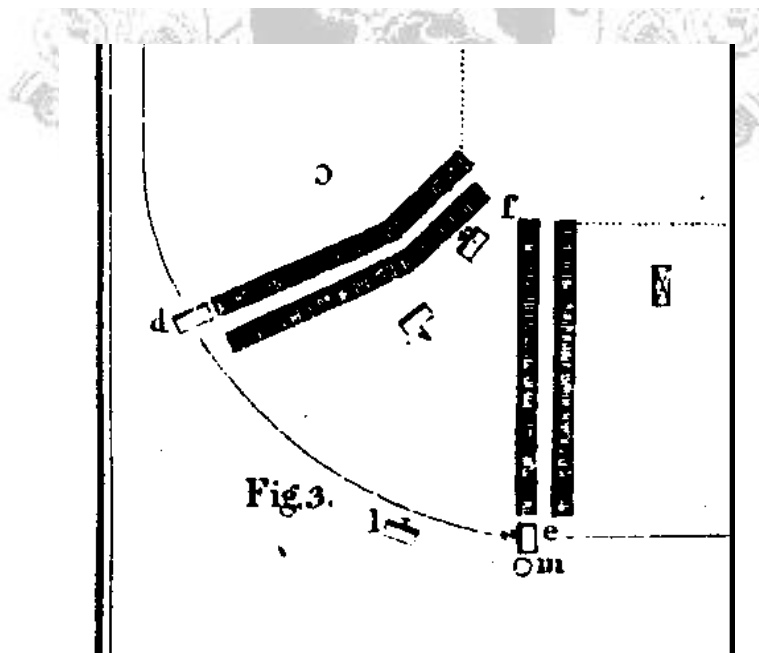


Fig. 3. Right wheel with moving pivot  
Column is right in front; guide is left.

Figure 4,  
Represents a company in column of platoons, wheeling forward, to the left, into line.

The instructor (a) has moved forward in front of the pivots, placing himself in a line with the guides on the pivot flank, facing towards, and at the specified distance from them.

At the word, *march*, the man (b,) on the left of the front rank of each platoon faces to the left; the guides (e,) stand fast; and when the platoon-right-flank of each platoon has, in wheeling, arrived within two paces of the line of guides, the platoon-officer commands, *platoon, halt*.

At the word, *dress*, given by the captain, the two platoons dress forward to the line, by completing the wheel.

The officer of the second platoon, after giving the word, *halt*, retires to the rank of file-closers.

The captain directs the dressing of both platoons.

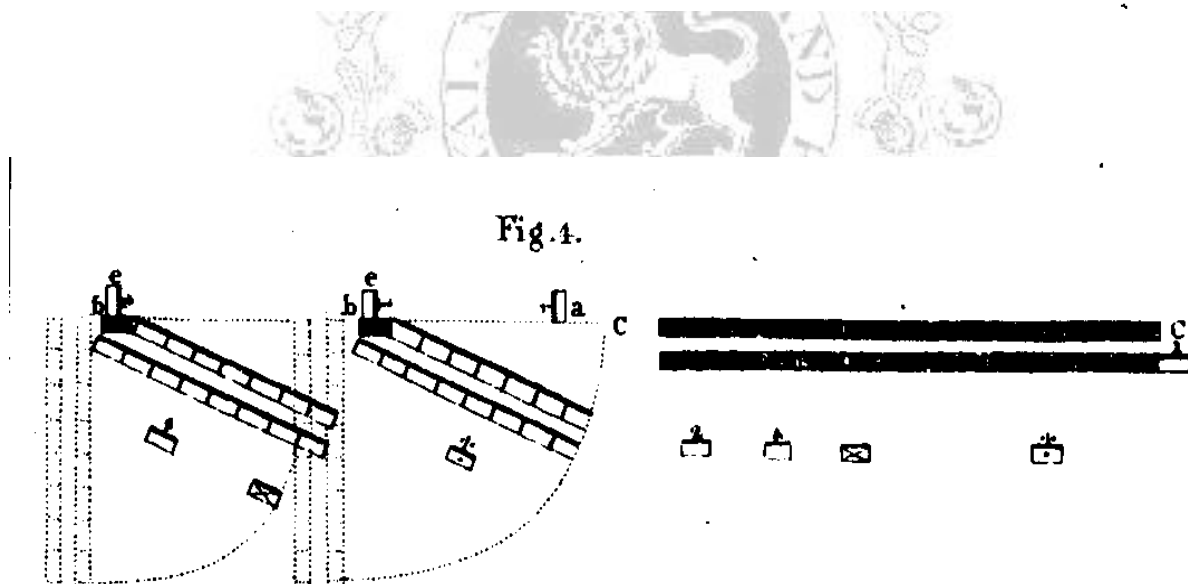


Fig. 4. Right wheel with fixed pivot (column into line)



## Wheels and turns in a battalion column (Plate XII)

Fig. 1. Battalion column, right in front (guide left), changes direction to the left on the march. Companies **left turn**.

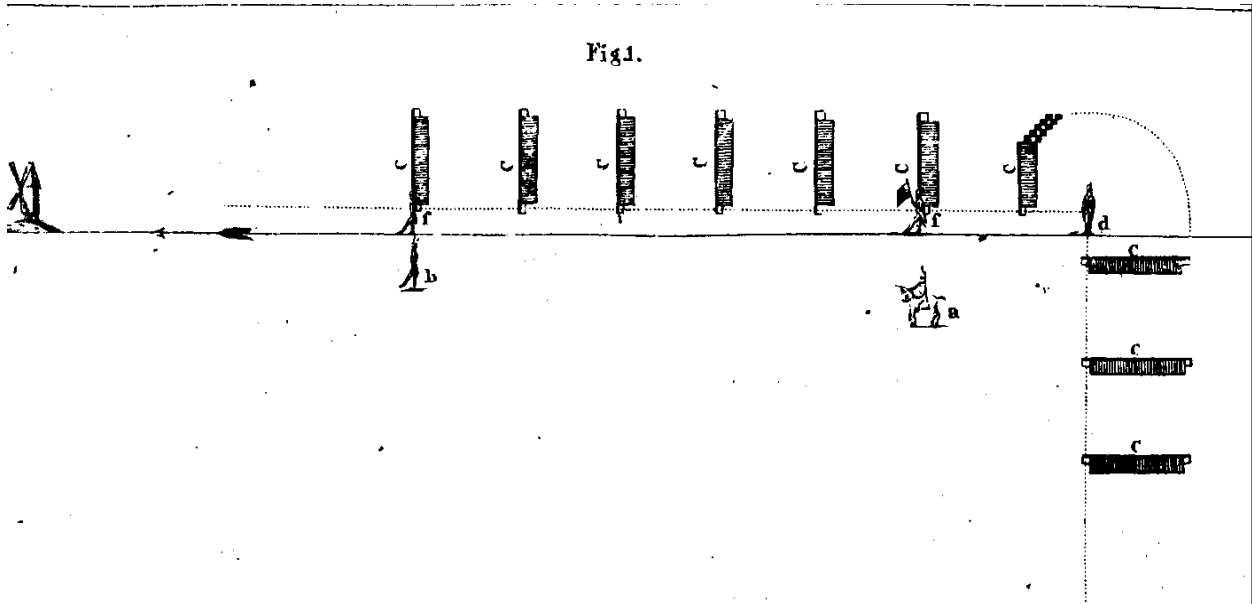


Fig. 2. Battalion column, right in front, changes direction to the right on the march. Companies **right wheel** on moveable pivot.

