

# ***U.S. Infantry Drill*** FOR **NEWFIERS**

**T**HE FOLLOWING IS INTENDED to interpret the French-based system of drill used by the U.S. infantry during the War of 1812, for those reenactors more familiar with the Prussian-based system of drill used by the British Army.

Part I lists differences between the two systems at the company level. Part II discusses some main points of difference at the level of battalion drill. Part III is an abstract of common orders for the US system at the company and battalion levels.

## **Part I: Differences from British drill at the company level**

### **Manual of Arms**

**No pauses** between motions. Time for each motion is same as one step of common time.

- **Support Arms.** Right hand remains grasping the small of the stock. Left hand grasps right arm. Optional to drop the R hand when marching.
- **Shoulder Arms from Order/Trail.** Shift musket upwards in R hand before bringing across to the left shoulder.
- **Order Arms.** Right hand grasps the musket instead of lying flat on the sling.
- **Charge Bayonet.** Tip of bayonet at eye level.
- **Shoulder Arms from Advance Arms.** Come to the Poise before returning the musket to the left shoulder.

- **Fix/unfix bayonet.** No instructions provided for this in Smyth. Steuben, Duane, Scott generally agree:
  - *From order arms:* half-face to the right.
  - *From shoulder arms:* lower musket on left side; return to shoulder.

The bayonet is grasped with the **right** hand to fix/unfix from either position.

- **Inspection of arms.** To be done daily by the company officer; no specific procedure given in Smyth. Scott: as per fix bayonet from the order, also spring rammer.

## Loading and Firing

The US loading procedure uses the same motions as the British procedure, but organizes them differently, so that there are 9 commands to the British 8.

- **Open pan.** Half-face to the right to prime.
- **Shut pan.** Half-face to the left; cast about with musket vertical against forearm (2<sup>nd</sup> motion of secure arms).
- **Return rammer.** Ends with the 1<sup>st</sup> motion of Shoulder Arms.
- **Make Ready/Take Aim.** Feet do not move at Ready; rear rank steps to the right at Aim.

## Pile Arms

Done at open order, front rank faced to the rear, in groups of 2 files. Arms are piled with fixed bayonets, and the piles are made by locking the bayonet shanks.

## Facings

- **Right/left face.** Done as one motion, no placing of right foot before the move.
- **Right about face.** Right foot placed behind left at “Right about”

## Marching

Any change of motion commences on the executive command MARCH.

Touch shoulders towards the guide.

US drill does not use the backwards wheel.

The pace does not change when wheeling.

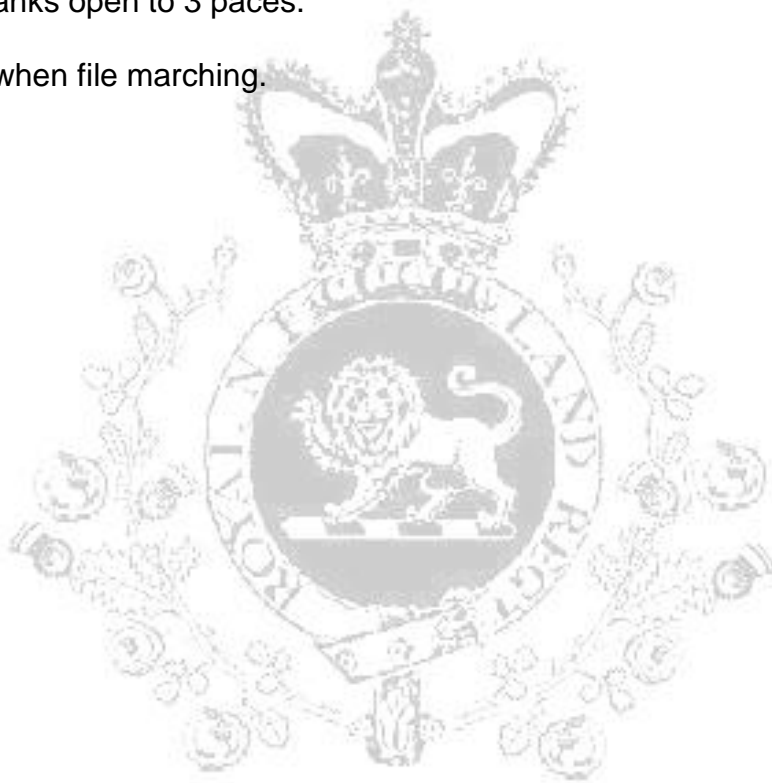
Wheels on the march are done in continuous motion, no halts before or after (similar to “R/L shoulders forward” in British drill).

US drill uses the TURN to change direction on the side of the guide (files come up sequentially to align on new direction); pace increases to quick time.

Changes of direction and formation (British drill uses the term “turn” for this) are indicated by stating the new direction, eg “by the flank” or “to the front.”

At Route Step ranks open to 3 paces.

Do not form 4s when file marching.



## Part II: Points to Consider in US battalion drill

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 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.

### 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 function as the "proper pivot" in British drill. 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 the "reverse flank".\*

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.)

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.

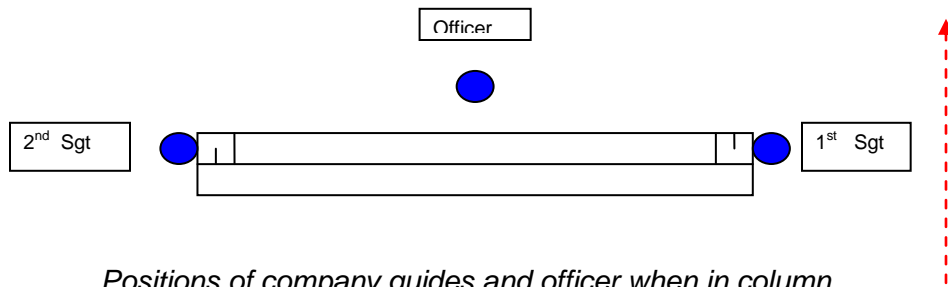
### Officer

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, if you're in the officer's position, you need to have someone else be in the sergeant's positions in the maneuvers. These positions are different for each type of formation—**column, line, and file marching.**

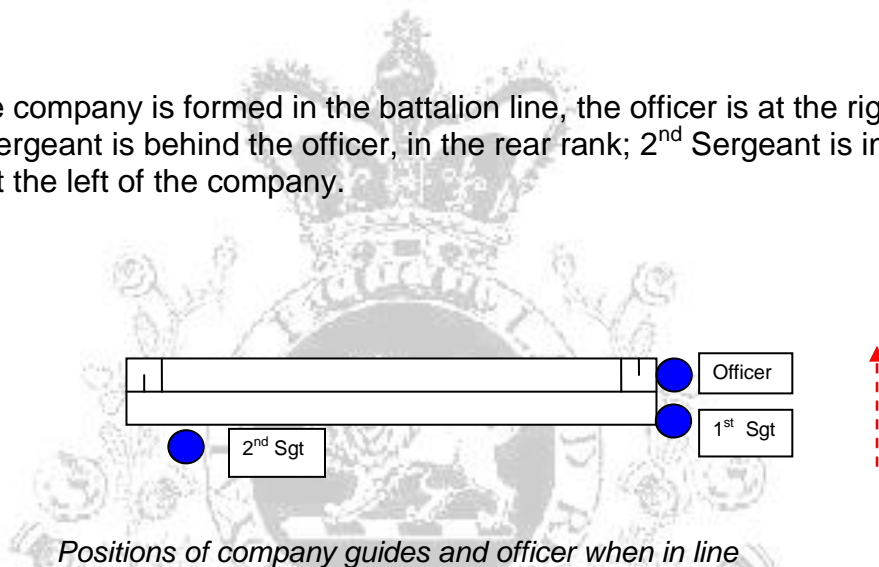
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\* This usage can produce confusion. For example, in Figure 3 below, which illustrates a right wheel with moveable pivot, the guide or "pivot flank" is on the left, but the pivot *man* for the wheel is on the right. Perhaps this is why Scott does not use the term "pivot flank" in subsequent manuals.

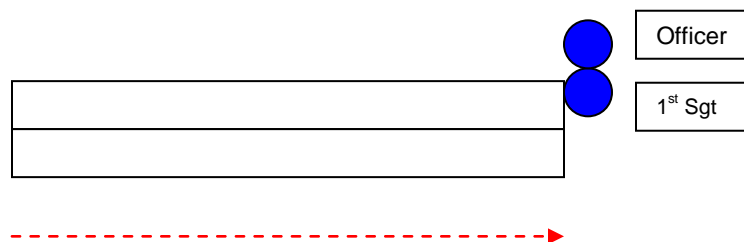
**Column:** When the company is part of a battalion column the officer is 2 paces in front of the centre of the company. The two guides step up to the front rank, 1<sup>st</sup> Sergeant on the right of the company, 2<sup>nd</sup> Sergeant on the left.



**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.



***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. So 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 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". Similar to "shoulders forward" in British drill. The marching pace does not increase for wheels.
- **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 then resume marching in common time. No equivalent in British drill. (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 maintains the formation.) Turns are also used when a column deploys forward into line, or deploys on the right into line.



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  
August 2011; revised April 2012

### **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.



## PLATE VIII.

Figure 1,

Represents a company wheeling forward from line into 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.)

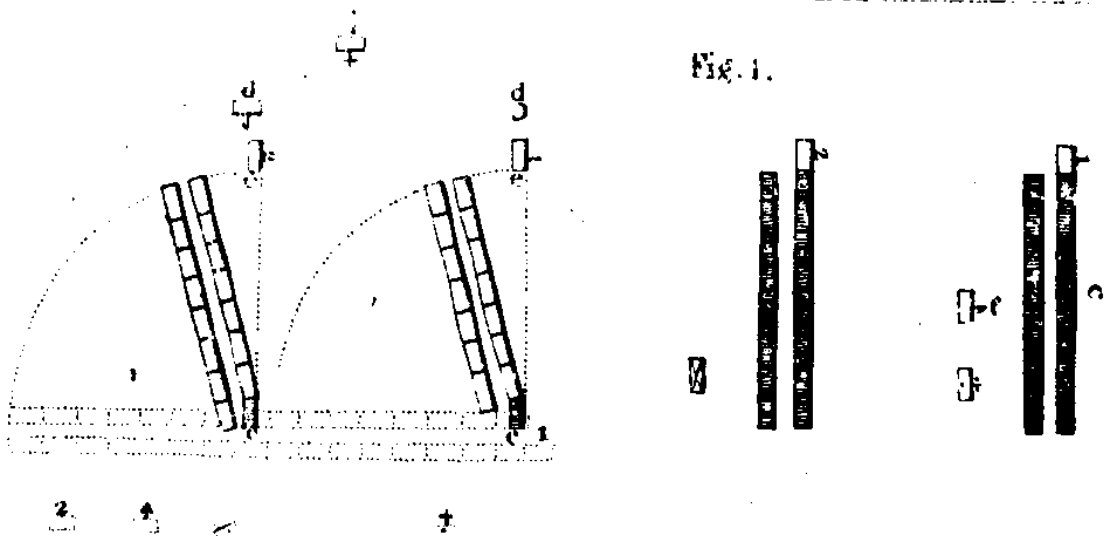


Fig. 1. Right wheel with fixed pivot (line into column)



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.

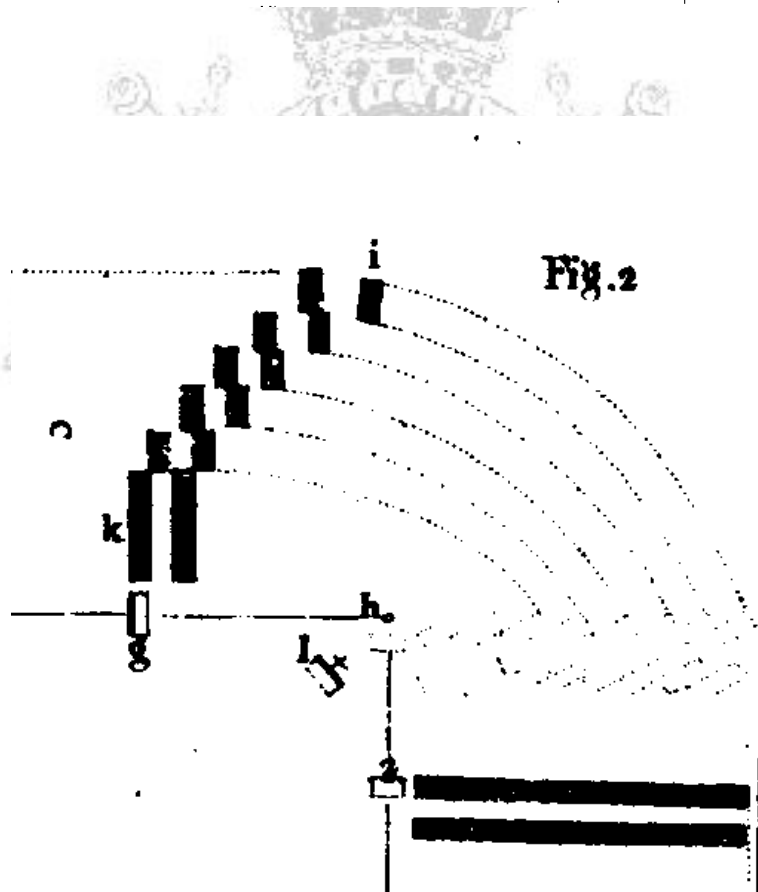


Fig. 2. Left turn

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.

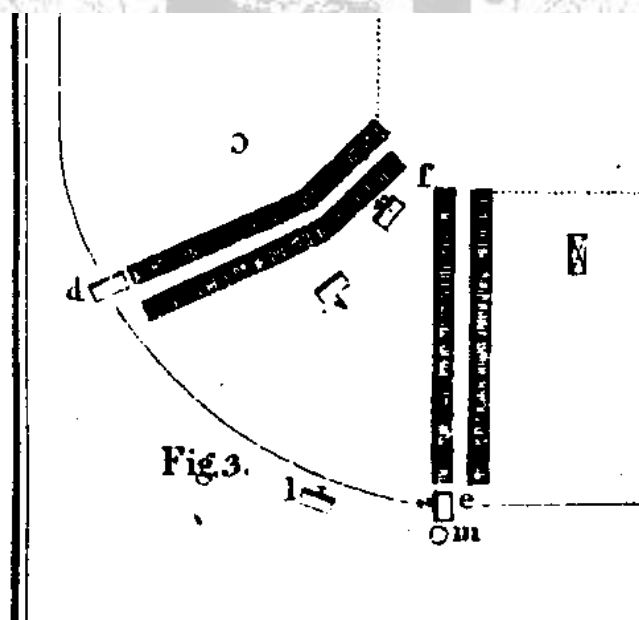


Fig. 3. Right wheel with moving pivot  
Column is right in front; guide is left.

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.

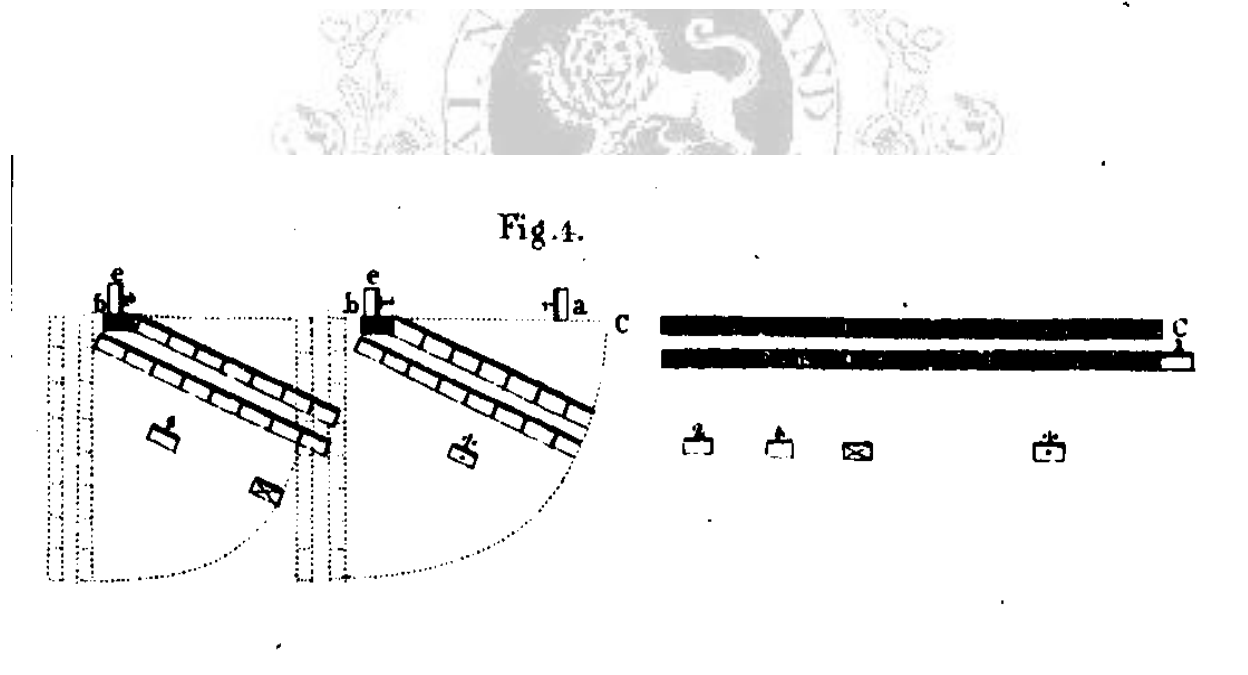


Fig. 4. Right wheel with fixed pivot (column into line)

## 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**.

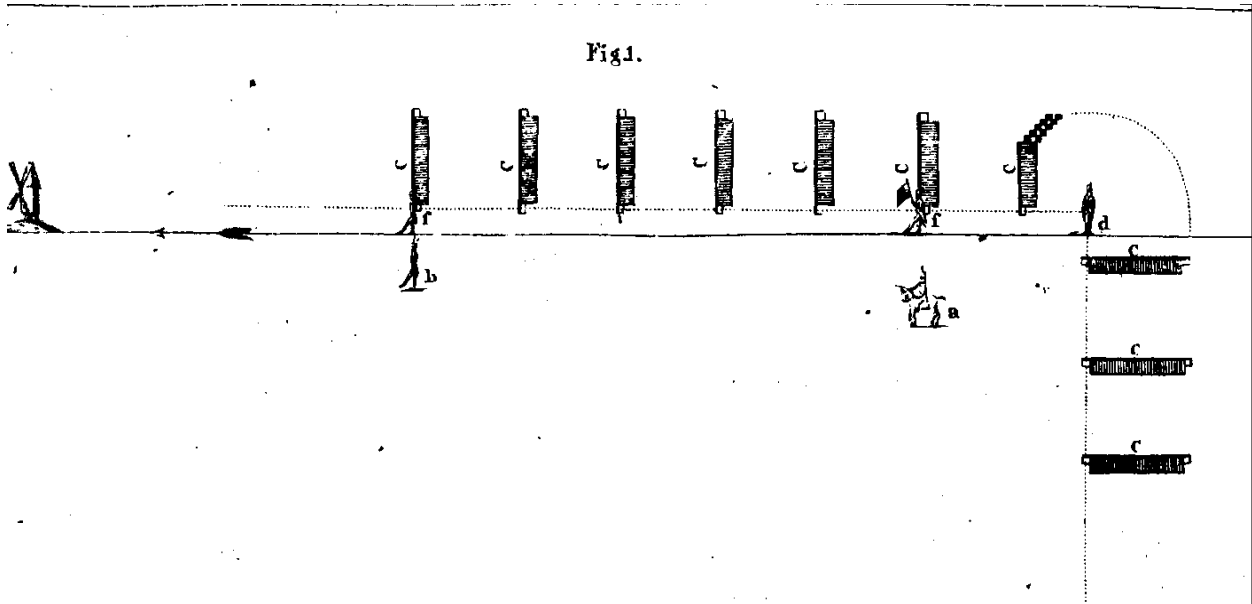
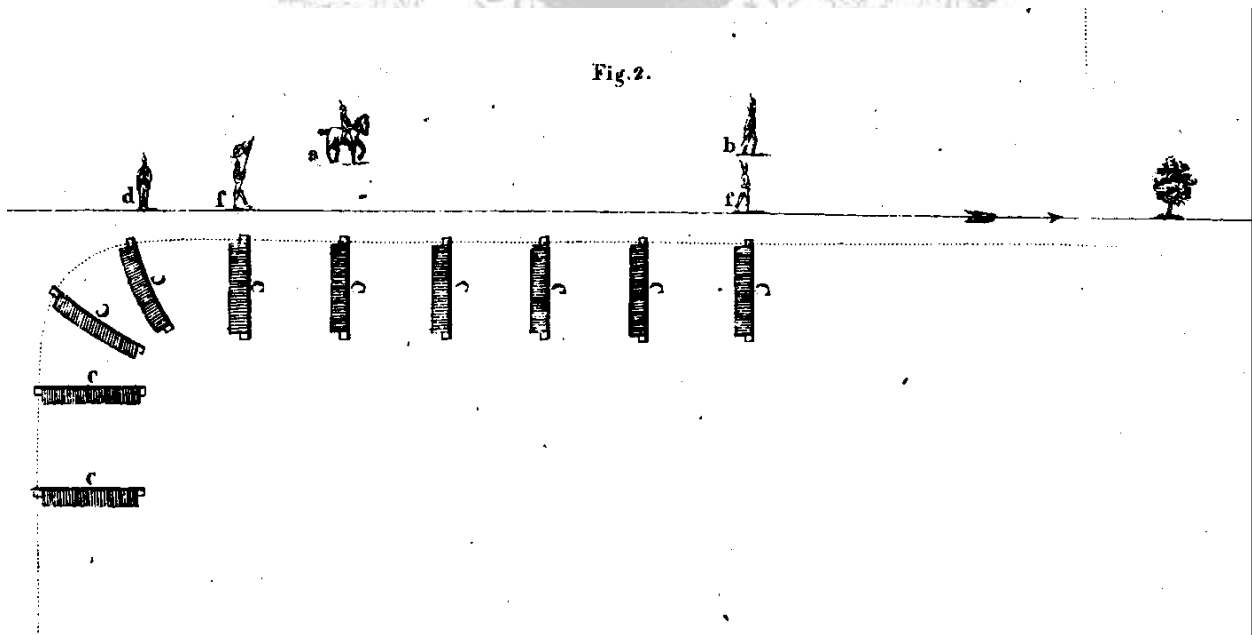


Fig. 2. Battalion column, right in front, changes direction to the right on the march. Companies **right wheel** on moveable pivot.



## Part III: US Drill Abstract\*

### COMPANY

#### Marching by the flank (file marching)

- **Flank:** by the R flank; to the R, FACE; MARCH
- **Form line forward PLT/CO on march:** Form PLTs/CO, MARCH; guide L
- **Form line by file, to R/L:** By files, to the R/L; form in line

### Platoons

- **Form line when file marching:** Form platoon(s)
- **Line→column:** Form column of PLTs by wheeling to the R. By PLTs, R wheel
- **Column→line:**
  - **Left:** to the L in line, wheel, March
  - **Right:** on the R form the line; guide to the R, turn to the R, March
  - **Forward:** form company

### BATTALION

#### Line → Column

- **Front:** Form column of companies by wheeling to the R; by companies, R wheel; march
- **Front, to march L:** Break into column by the R, to march to the L [or front]. By companies R wheel [1<sup>st</sup> CO marches 2x distance to the front]
- **Rear:** Form column of Companies by filing to the rear. Btn, by the R flank; to the R, face. By companies, file to the R; march
- **Close column by division:** Close column by division, on X division, R in front. Btn, by the r & L flank; to the R & L face, march.

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\* Commands are for formations that are right in front.

## Column → Line

- **Left:** To the L in line, wheel; March
- **Inversion:** by inversion, to the R in line, guide to the R, R wheel, March
- **Right:** On the R form the line. Bttn guide to the R [companies R turn sequentially]; March
- **Front:** Form the line to the front. Bttn, Guide to the R. By COs, half wheel to the L, March. 1<sup>st</sup> CO form on markers. (each CO “to the R turn, March” sequentially)
- **Rear:** Form the line faced to the rear, Bttn by the R flank, to the R, Face. March [COs countermarch by file L 2x to form sequentially to the right of the column, faced to the rear]]

**Countermarch:** Countermarch. Bttn by the R flank; to the R Face. [each company]: By file to the L, countermarch; march.

## Passage of Lines

- **Retreating line:** Bttn, by the L flank; by CO, by file to the R, March. Halt. Front. L in line, wheel; March
- **2<sup>nd</sup> line:**
  - Double platoons. 2<sup>nd</sup> PLTS by the R flank, to the R Face; March. Halt; Front; L dress
  - Form the Line. 2<sup>nd</sup> PLTs, By the L flank, to the L face; March. Halt; Front; R Dress

**Change Front:** Change front forward on the R flank; by CO half wheel to the R [same process as forming line forward, except the 1<sup>st</sup> CO takes new direction from markers]

## Column of Attack [double column, formed on the two centre companies]

- **Line → column:** Form column of attack; by CO, on the centre in column. Bttn, R&L Face; March
- **Column → line:** Display the column. Bttn, R&L Face; March

## Role of company guides in BTTN manoeuvres

- **Column:** L guides of each CO cover guide of 1<sup>st</sup> CO
- **To align halted column:** [Adj and guide of 1<sup>st</sup> CO mark line]; Guides on the Line
- **Sequential manoeuvres:** After CO halts, L guides in front of company, faced to the R, cover 1<sup>st</sup> CO guide; Guides, Posts

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