

## Appendix: Which drill manual did the US Army use during the War of 1812?

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The United States was notoriously ill-prepared for the War of 1812.\* Its inadequate military preparation included lack of uniformity about something as basic as the manual used for army training in tactics and manoeuvres. During the War of 1812 US Army units utilized a confusing number of different drill manuals; only in 1815 was a uniform drill manual, and practice, adopted. Here is a brief survey of some of the various manuals used during this period.

### Steuben

Baron von Steuben was one of a number of unemployed European military officers that managed to secure a position with the Continental Army during the American War of Independence. As Washington's inspector general, he established a system of drill based on simplified European practices (primarily the 1764 British manual). It was concise and basic, suitable for a small, new army. Originally issued as general orders, Steuben's program for drill and military administration was adopted as the official Army manual in 1779; the "Blue Book" remained in effect through 1812 (1820 for militia), going through numerous printings.

### Smyth

By the beginning of the 19<sup>th</sup> century successive Secretaries of War, aware of the need to update the Army's tactics and impressed by contemporary French military practice, commissioned adaptations of the comprehensive 1791 French drill manual. Under War Secretary William Eustis the manual prepared by the Army's Inspector General, Alexander Smyth, was officially adopted in 1812. The April edition was quickly followed by a second edition in June. In the first part of his manual Smyth retains aspects of the manual of arms found in Steuben, while adopting an abridgment of the French system of unit movement. The second portion of his manual basically reproduces Steuben's non-drill regulations for military administration (e.g., rules for camp lay-out, posting of sentries, duties of rank).

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\* The British were equally unprepared at the beginnings of the AWI and the war with revolutionary France, requiring major military reform for the latter. See Richard Glover, *Peninsular Preparation*.

## Duane

Unfortunately, Smyth's inept performance on the Niagara in 1812 so damaged his reputation that his drill manual was also viewed with disfavour before it could be widely adopted. In 1813 new Secretary of War John Armstrong replaced it with another adaptation of French drill written by the newly-appointed adjutant William Duane. Duane was an influential and partisan publisher, an author of several works on tactics, but was also a political appointee who lacked military experience. His drill manual features a complicated company-level redesign of the French system of movement, and was apparently widely detested by officers, many of whom flatly refused to use it.

## British

Like the French, the British army establishment also updated its drill practices at the end of the 18<sup>th</sup> century. Sir David Dundas, impressed with Frederick's Prussian system, and after viewing large-scale demonstrations of Prussian manoeuvres, produced in 1788 a British adaptation of the Prussian tactical system, *Principles of Military Movements*; in 1792 it became the official manual. Dundas' strong emphasis on close-order line manoeuvres reversed the trend towards light infantry tactics prevalent in the AWI and championed by generals such as Howe and Cornwallis. The 1792 *Rules and Regulations* remained the official infantry drill manual for the British army until 1824.

In the U.S., the British approach to war, based on American colonial heritage and linked to the Anglophile Federalist party, competed with the French approach favored by Francophile Republicans. During the War of 1812 some US units, frustrated at the confusion caused by the repeated change of manuals in the midst of the war, and despite American reluctance to militarily embrace anything British, decided to use the 1792 British manual. Some manuals written for militia by Epaphras Hoyt (1798), Robert Smirke (1810) and Isaac Maltby (1811), were based on Dundas' system; Smirke's was dedicated to the governor of NY, and Maltby's was adopted for use by the Massachusetts militia. Winfield Scott reports that at least one regular Army regiment (the 21<sup>st</sup>) was using the British drill when it arrived at the Left Division camp near Buffalo, NY, in 1814.

## Scott

Winfield Scott drilled the two regular brigades of the Left Division during the 1813-14 winter in camp near Buffalo, NY. In his memoirs he notes that regiments came to the camp following a variety of the systems of drill described above. Scott went back to the source; he had copies of the French 1791 manual in the original and in English translation, and used this manual to drill the division for the upcoming 1814 Niagara campaign. (The Right Division under George Izard reverted to Steuben's manual in

1814.) Subsequently (under yet another new Secretary of War, James Monroe), Scott chaired a board tasked with adopting a translation of the French manual for US infantry. This manual was adopted December 1814, and printed in 1815. French influence on US military thought was further cemented when a translation of the French 1792 regulations for military administration was adopted in 1821. The US Army continued to use translations of French drill manuals until the adoption of Emery Upton's system in 1866; institutionalized in the West Point curriculum, French military thought dominated army tactics up to WWII.

## Conclusion

It is not clear that Smyth's manual, much less Duane's, saw much practical use. Further research into sources such as QM records of manuals purchased and distributed to units, and first person accounts of actual drill practices may illuminate this in the future. Given the confusion attending the rapid succession of drill manuals early in the war (official manuals were Steuben in 1811, Smyth in 1812, Duane in 1813),\* I suspect that many units would have not have acquired copies or adjusted to the new manuals, and likely continued to use Steuben. For example, quartermaster records for the US Marines show purchases of only Steuben's manual during the war, and the Right Division under Izard used Steuben in 1814. However, Scott's 1814 version of the French 1791 manual is a likely guide to the drill of the brigades of the Left Division in the 1814 Niagara campaign.

## Light Infantry

British light infantry drill and doctrine had been developing since at least the Seven Years' War as a result of experiences in Europe and North America, to the point where the British armies involved in the American War of Independence predominantly utilized light infantry tactics in the field. David Dundas strongly reacted to this development, and for a period the ascendancy of his linear Prussian model repressed light infantry training. This trend abruptly reversed once the British encountered French light troops in the Revolutionary wars; by the time they were involved in the Peninsula the British expeditionary force had two entire divisions of light infantry units, as well as four specially trained battalions armed with rifles. Wellington's light troops consistently

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\* "On Dundas, I do know that the commanding officer of the 21st Infantry trained his regiment using it in 1813. By the spring of that year I identified no less than five drill books in use in the regular US Army, none of which were really compatible. Another officer, bewildered by the whole thing, simply composed his own manual." Don Graves 23 April 2009 post to Napoleon Series forum ([http://www.napoleon-series.org/cgi-bin/forum/archive2009\\_config.pl?md=read;id=103266](http://www.napoleon-series.org/cgi-bin/forum/archive2009_config.pl?md=read;id=103266)). Cf. Graves, "Dry Books of Tactics", "Dry Books of Tactics Reread".

outnumbered and dominated those of the French, and their ability to effectively screen the main body was a key component of Wellington's successful tactical approach.

Prior to this period the British practice was to raise light units when needed (utilizing foreign or colonial units), then disband them at conflict's end, resulting in a lack of institutionalized light infantry doctrine, manuals, or specialized training. Permanent light infantry companies were added to regular battalions in 1771-2; Townsend issued rudimentary tactics for light companies on the Irish establishment in 1772, and William Howe developed a programme of light infantry training at the battalion level in 1774, but although light infantry practices permeated the British Army in the American War, no manual was developed to codify this practice. The subsequent postwar ascendancy of Dundas' Prussian approach stifled development in this area until the Army's dismal performance on the continent in the 1790s provoked major military reforms that included a reconsideration of the role of light infantry.

British light infantry manuals started with an official translation in 1798 of a manual by a European mercenary officer in British service, Francis, Baron de Rothenburg, (Austrian, he'd served with the French 1787-91, then the Poles before joining the British), followed by a number of private publications for the expanded volunteer and militia units (e.g., Cooper, 1808). Light infantry doctrine was provided by an official translation of French émigré Francois Jarry's 1801 treatise on the duties of light troops in the field (he had served in the Prussian army, including Frederick's staff). Tactics continued to develop as a result of further training and field experience, and were compiled by Neil Campbell in 1808 (revised 1813). Campbell's manual was used for training the British and British-led Portuguese light infantry in the Peninsula. In 1824 it was incorporated into the official manual of general infantry drill.

It seems that the Americans, at least those associated with General Scott, were acutely aware of British developments in this area. Scott was a serious student of military science, and famously kept a library of reference works with him in the field. Light infantry tactics were apparently discussed during compilation of the 1815 manual, but were not included in order to expedite publication. However, in 1819 Charles Gardner (who had served as Adjutant-General for the Left Division) published a compendium of infantry tactics which featured Scott's 1815 manual for line infantry, and Campbell's 1813 manual for light infantry (touted as "the best system extant for light infantry and riflemen"). Gardner's verbatim copy of Campbell was subsequently included in the 1820 edition of Scott's tactical manual.\* This strongly suggests that US forces by the 1814 Niagara campaign (if not earlier) may have been aware of Campbell's manual, and likely utilized it for their light infantry drill.

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\*Thus Campbell's work is incorporated into the official U.S. tactics manual four years before it appears in the British manual.

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