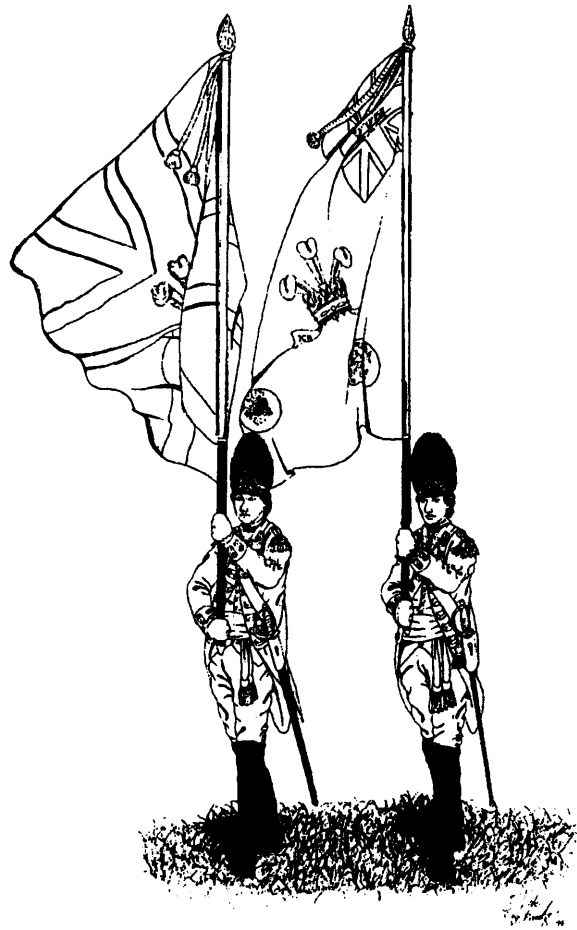


# 6

## *On Formations & Marching Maneuvers*



*Artwork by Eric Schnitzer*



**T**HOUGH it is certain that exercising with exactness, and performing all kinds of Maneuvers with the highest judgement, does not absolutely determine the real merit of a Regiment, and is rather a proof of its Discipline and Obedience, than of spirit or courage; yet 'till a better opportunity offers, to be distinguished, it is the Duty of Officers to endeavor by such methods to procure the good opinion of the public.

*Cuthbertson's System for the Complete Interior Management and Economy of a BATTALION OF INFANTRY, a New Edition, with Corrections; BRISTOL, 1776.*  
Chapter XXVIII, Article I.

## **Topic Index: FORMATIONS and MARCHING MANEUVERS**

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*Drawing by Joe Lee*

## **FORMATIONS AND MARCHING MANEUVERS**

During the period preceding and during the American War of Independence, when the Manual Exercise as Ordered by His Majesty in 1764 was in use, its brevity of comment and lack of concise explanation led to many additional commands and movements, not only to facilitate the movement of the troops, but also often particular to a certain Regiment or encampment of a number of them. There was little standardization in much beyond the sequence of the 35 counts of the Manual Exercise performed at reviews, plus some marching movements. Even for the Annual Inspection and Review, during which the Battalion was to be at its very best to be seen and reviewed by other General Officers, and maybe, even the King himself, beyond the appearance of the troops (governed by the Clothing Warrant of 1768), there was no set pattern for the firings or marching exercises.

*(Ed. Note: When a Regiment had only one battalion, as most did at that time, the word battalion was synonymous with regiment, and so the movements of a regiment are often titled battalion exercises, with the caution command of "BATTALION!" given rather than "REGIMENT!" Those Regiments with two battalions normally exercised each battalion separately in any case, so the command was still BATTALION! To be reviewed was to show off. True, there were methods "generally practis'd by the Regiments at Reviews" and as can be seen, "generally" and "usually" practiced, are not to be interpreted as ordered, which the later regulations stipulated.)*

### **EMPLOYMENT OF CERTAIN COMMANDS OF 1792**

The famous Drill Manuals, which all commenced with the Rules and Regulations for the Formations, Field-Exercise and Movements, of His Majesty's Forces, published for the first time in 1792, and came out in a spate of versions during the 1790's, had many practices written down for the first time, that were (or certainly must have been) in use during earlier years.

This conjecture is based on practical thought, as how else would a Serjeant or a Corporal assemble, gain the attention of, or relax men without Arms for the purpose of fatigue details, recruit training in marching maneuvers, or the like? Certainly the simplicity of the following commands are such that little else is necessary for explanation: (underlined parts are for execution).

**FALL - IN!** The NCO will indicate a point of dressing (such as; **ON PRIVATE JONES!** or **ON ME!**) upon which the men will take their places in a rank at their proper intervals, dressing to the right (unless otherwise commanded). If unarmed they assume the **Position of a Soldier Under Arms** except that the left hand is held close to the left side as is the right one. When under Arms, they would assume the position of a soldier at **SHOULDER - your FIRELOCKS**.

**AS YOU - WERE!** This commands the resumption of a former position, countermanding a given command, and is often helpful.

## ***DRESSING THE RANKS***

To **DRESS** is a military expression signifying to arrange troops in a straight line; the point from which the line is to be drawn, being the part they dress by: Thus if they are to be in a line with the right hand file, it is called dressing by the right.

In dressing ranks, the soldiers are to stand upright, and without stooping to look smartly to the right and left, taking care to keep six inches distance between the files. When the Colours are present, **always dress to them!**

In **CLOSE ORDER**, the files are shoulder to shoulder (touching the next man).

In **LOOSE ORDER**, (which can be gauged with the right arms held akimbo so the elbow touches the next man on the right) there are about 6 inches between men. This is the usual interval for drill to prevent the cartridge boxes from clashing during the facings.

In **OPEN ORDER**, the files are a full arms length distance from each other (performed by extending the right arm to full length with the fingers of the right hand fully extended to touch the left shoulder of the next man.)

*(Ed. Note: This is not to be confused with "Open Ranks" which are described later.)*

Whenever they fail of dressing, the officer or NCO should remind them of it, by giving the word **DRESS!**

In this regard, if an Officer is exercising the Company, only he shall give the commands (such as **DRESS!** or **MARCH!**). If the Serjeant is exercising the Company, without Officers, he shall give the commands. The Corporals never give commands when in ranks, and only if they are exercising their section or replacing a Serjeant for exercise. However, it is **ALWAYS** the duty of the NCOs to keep the lines dressed at all times. They should do so **QUIETLY** when on parade.

## ***FROM CLOSE TO OPEN RANKS AND RESUME***

During Company inspections and also for performing the firings and inspection at reviews, to move the ranks from close order to the proper distance, the commands are as follows:

**REAR RANK(S), TAKE YOUR PROPER DISTANCE!** At which command, the rear rank(s) faces to the right-about (180° to the rear). At the command: **MARCH!** the rear rank steps off on the left foot marching 5 paces and halts. If in three ranks (very rare) the middle rank marches 5 paces, the third rank marches 10. When the Serjeant reaches his proper place, 4 paces beyond the rear rank, he halts. Officers, if in ranks are, on command, to march forward 5 paces and halt. If already in front of their companies, they stand fast. The command is given: **TO THE FRONT - FACE!** The front rank stands fast and all others face to the right about - towards the front. The Officers, without specific command, **PLANT - FUSILS** at that time.

To resume a close order, the command is: **REAR RANK(S), CLOSE TO THE FRONT, MARCH!** At which time the rear rank(s) and the Serjeants close up to their close order distance by marching forward the required number of steps. In all this, the front rank stands fast. (If there are only two ranks the rear rank takes 5 paces). Officers stand fast unless otherwise instructed.

*(Ed. Note: Sometimes space constraints require modifications - listen to the commander!)*

## ***MARCHING***

Marching as to its direction, is either straight forward to the front, or obliquely to the right or to the left. As to its measure, it is either in slow, quick or charging time. In slow time the ranks are usually in close or loose order, unless in the performance of the firings and maneuvers; and in quick time they are usually in close order.

When a body of men are marching obliquely to either flank, they must dress by that flank toward which they are inclining; when marching straight forward to the front, they must dress to the colors, if present, otherwise by command.

It is the custom, not only in all regiments in British service, but also in every European army, for the soldiers to step out with the left foot.

In slow marching, which is merely calculated for parade, the feet should not be brought too soon to ground, but time should be allowed to **point the toes**, in which the beauty of slow marching principally consists. It must not, however, be too much protracted, otherwise the equilibrium of the body will be lost. In quick marching the grand intention is to gain ground. The ordinary pace is two feet.

*(Ed. Note: Slow time or march step (also called ordinary step) is to be 60 steps per minute. Quick time or step (the normal march step for the flank companies) is 120 steps per minute. Double quick time or charging time is 140 steps per minute and is performed at the command **MARCH! MARCH!** (Further Note: In battle, other speeds will be needed so take your cue from your commander. At all speeds, dress must be maintained.)*

The word **MARCH**, given singly, at all times denotes that ordinary time is to be taken: when the quick march is meant, **QUICK**, with a pause, will precede the word **MARCH**: - The word **MARCH** marks the beginning of movements, from the halt.

In marching straight forward, the men are to regulate their steps by their right-hand man (or toward the Colours, if present), neither advancing before, nor falling behind him; they must just feel the elbows of one another. But in marching on a large front, they always regulate their march by the center, for there are placed the Colours. In stepping to music, the left foot should fall on the down-beat of the music.

*(Ed. Note: When the command "CHARGE" is given, we do **NOT** go to a break-neck run! We quick march. Keeping dress is essential both for looks and so an officer may get in front to tell you when to STOP! Dress is a safety issue in this situation.)*

## ***THE MANNER OF STEPPING***

In marching by the slow measure, the firelock is carried upright, and the right arm hangs motionless down the side (do **NOT** swing arms while marching!). The feet must be taken gradually off the ground, the knees stiff, the toes pointed forward, and the equilibrium of the body exactly preserved. A momentary pause (which is made just at the instant the leg is extended, and the balance of the body ready to be shifted) greatly facilitates doing it gracefully.

In performing the slow-step, the feet when advancing should be carried over a little to the opposite side, and both let down on the same line, otherwise the body will reel disagreeably. For instance, if you walk on a crack of a floor, at every step you should cover the crack with your heel. The length of the step should, on a plain march, be about 30 inches.



This is usually called the **SLOW-STEP**, being performed only to slow-timed music, one step to a second of time...the **QUICK-STEP**, which is taken in half the time, or two of them in a second. (This allows a unit to cover twice the ground in the same amount of time.)

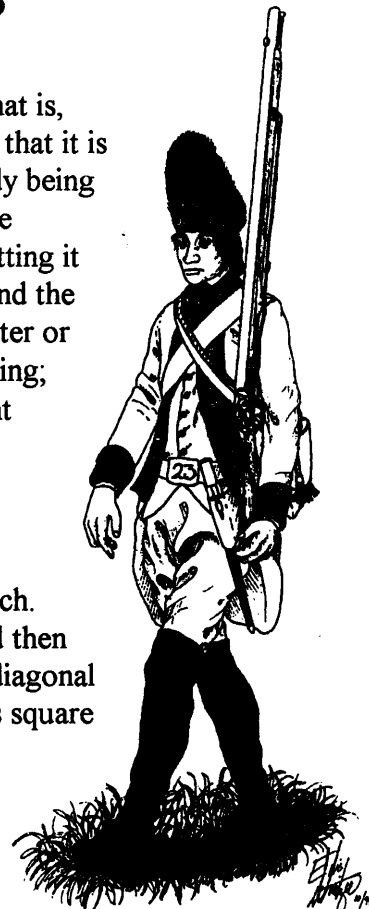
The RWFA has adopted a **Parade Step** which is used for reviews. It is performed by stepping straight forward with the leg fully extended to the front; foot **parallel** to the ground and raised about 12-16 inches. It has been described as a "**semi-goose step**." The main object is to have the leg straight and to try to have all feet level when full into the step. The command to begin is: **PARADE - STEP!** which is given while the unit is marching. To return to a common step the command is simply: **MARCH!**

(Ed. Note: According to J. A. Houlding, *Fit for Service*, page 259: "Marching style - that is, the manner in which the legs were lifted and put down - only assumed a regular fashion in the (British) army at mid-century, after 1748, with the adoption of the 'Prussian Step': taken from the stiff-kneed marching style introduced in Prussia during the reforms of Frederick William I's reign.")

## THE OBLIQUE STEP

The oblique step is performed in the same time and manner (that is, either by the slow or quick step) as that straight forward; only that it is made by carrying the feet obliquely to the right or left, the body being kept square to the proper front. If you are to **INCLINE** to the **RIGHT**, when you step with your left foot, carry it across, setting it down before the right foot, the left toe pointing to the front, and the left heel directly before the right toe, at a distance from it greater or less, in proportion to the length of the steps you take in marching; but careful not to set the left foot down to the right of the right foot, because it will twist you around and prevent your **KEEPING YOUR BODY SQUARE TO THE FRONT**. When you step with the right foot, you advance it toward the front, and set it down to the right of the left foot, with the toe pointed directly at the object or place to which you are to march. When you step again with the left foot, as before directed, and then with the right; and so alternately; move toward the front in a diagonal line, inclining to the right, and keeping the body and shoulders square to your proper front.

The commands are: **INCLINE RIGHT!** (Incline - Left is performed in the same manner but in the other direction), and to march again to the front: **FRONT!** or **MARCH!**



*Drawing by Eric Schnitzer*

## ***WHEELING***

Wheeling ranks to change the direction of the front of a unit was the most generally accepted method employed by the armies of the 18<sup>th</sup> century. As with marching, a number of authorities will be quoted so some duplication or reiteration may occur, but are in no way contradictory and only serve to further explain the method.

A rank that wheels, is to be considered as an inflexible straight line. It should move like a swinging door. At the word of command **MARCH!**, the whole rank is to step off at the same time with the left foot; and every man is to make an equal number of paces, only his paces must be longer or shorter in proportion to his distance from the pivot. In wheeling to the right, therefore, each man's paces must be longer than those of his right-hand man; in wheeling to the left they must be longer than those of his left-hand man. The whole rank is to be governed by the end that has the farthest to go! **In wheeling, therefore, to the right, every man in the front rank should look to the left, and regulate his steps by those of his left hand man**, in order not to advance before him, or fall back behind him, but bring the rank about even with dress maintained. **Likewise, in wheeling to the left, every man in the front rank is to look to the right, and regulate his steps by those of his right-hand man.**

Take special note that in all wheeling to the right, the front rank men must cast their eyes to the left, except the left-hand man; and in all wheelings to the left they cast their eyes to the right except the right-hand man, *taking care to feel the hand they wheel to, without crowding upon it.*

Second and third ranks should incline so that each man remains directly behind the man to his front. Each man, unlike those in the front rank, should be looking straight to the front at the man ahead of him and maintaining his proper distance. He should look slightly to the right (or left) to maintain dress, but concentrate his attention to the front.

Commands are:

<b>TO THE RIGHT WHEEL!</b>	<b><u>MARCH!</u> <u>HALT!</u> <u>DRESS!</u></b>
<b>TO THE LEFT WHEEL!</b>	<b><u>MARCH!</u> <u>HALT!</u> <u>DRESS!</u></b>
<b>TO THE RIGHT ABOUT WHEEL!</b>	<b><u>MARCH!</u> <u>HALT!</u> <u>DRESS!</u></b>
<b>TO THE LEFT ABOUT WHEEL!</b>	<b><u>MARCH!</u> <u>HALT!</u> <u>DRESS!</u></b>

A wheeling motion or command will carry the line in a different direction, by command, while an about wheel will be 180 degrees. Wheeling may be done by ranks or files, and to maintain their respective position in line, the wheeling of each rank or file successively shall be done on the same ground at the same point.

When marching in a column of companies it is essential that the leading company shorten its pace upon completion of its wheel and continue a shorter pace as succeeding ranks approach the point of the wheel. Otherwise, they become strung out and the rear companies in the column must race to catch up.

*(Ed. Note: In many situations both on parade and in battle, a unit will need to wheel a variety of ways - and not always a precise 90° and may need to continue without stopping to dress. To execute a wheel that is less or more than 90° the WHEEL command will be given as previously described but the command MARCH! will be given to resume marching forward. The command: FRONT! may also be used. Also, the above commands assume that the troops are beginning from the HALT. If the troops are already in motion, the commands are the same except the command of execution is WHEEL! rather than MARCH! Since the troops are already marching, this removes a redundancy.)*

## **TURNING**

**Turning** is simply a facing movement executed by **each individual simultaneously while on the march**. It takes the place of wheeling or halting and facing to turn a line or column 90°. This is similar to the modern day **TO THE RIGHT (LEFT) Flank - MARCH**. The Commands are: **TO THE RIGHT (LEFT) - TURN!** The result is the same as commanding **HALT; RIGHT (LEFT) FACE; TO THE FRONT - MARCH!**; only **without** stopping. It is executed as follows: At the command **TO THE RIGHT - TURN!**, given as the right foot strikes the ground, advance and plant the left foot; then turn to the right in marching and step off in the new direction with the right foot. Turning to the left is given on the strike of left foot; the right is advanced and planted; turn to the left and step off with the left foot. Step off with the foot on the side as the direction turned.

## **SENDING FOR THE COLOURS**

- I. The Battalion is assembled on parade by platoons - at Close Order - at a predetermined position by the RSM and NCOs. Bayonets unfixed, muskets shouldered, the platoons evenly distributed to either side of center where music is massed. The Officers facing the Battalion, in their respective positions, five paces in front.
- II. At the Commander's command the Officers will post to their positions in the line (facing the rear).
- III. At the Commander's command **FRONT!**, the Officers will right about face.
- IV. The Commander will order **TROOP** and the music will play the appropriate phrase.

V. The Commander will then command: "**PREPARE TO TROOP THE COLOURS - MARCH!**"

VI. The 2nd Lieutenants (Colour Lieutenants) followed by two Grenadier Drummers or their assigned replacements will wheel out of line to the right and march (at the single beat) to the right end of the Grenadier Company, where they will without command, left wheel so as to be in front of the right four Grenadiers or the Company and halt. The Captain of Grenadiers will then incline behind the drums.

VII. The Captain of Grenadiers will then order: "**ESCORT TO THE COLOURS** (the four end Grenadiers behind him), **ADVANCE YOUR - ARMS**".

VIII. The Captain of Grenadiers then orders: "**ESCORT TO THE COLOURS** (Colour Lieutenants, two drummers, himself & the four Grenadiers), **BY THE RIGHT WHEEL - MARCH**". In column they then march out of line and to the Colours which are being held on the right side of the parade ground.

IX. The Commander then orders the Battalion to the position of "**EASE ARMS.**" At this time the Music will move back 6 paces behind the rear ranks and face front again.

X. The Colour Party halts in front of the Colours (held by new recruits, Pensioners, or other designated personnel). The Grenadier Captain then gives the orders: **ESCORT TO THE COLOURS, SHOULDER YOUR - FIRELOCKS, FIX - BAYONETS** (the Lieutenants withdraw their swords), **SHOULDER YOUR - FIRELOCKS**".

XI. The Grenadier Captain orders: "**COLOUR LIEUTENANTS, TAKE UP YOUR - COLOURS**". The Colour Lieutenants then salute the Colours with their swords, replace them in their scabbards, step forward and take the Colours. When ready, they wheel about and face the Escort. The Colour Lieutenants wheel rather than face in order to keep the King's Colour always on the **RIGHT**. The Captain of Grenadiers orders: "**PRESENT-ARMS.**" The Drummers beat "*Point of War.*" The Grenadier Captain orders: "**SHOULDER YOUR FIRELOCKS**" followed by **ADVANCE your - FIRELOCKS**. The Colour Lieutenants then wheel about to form the head of the column again.

XII. The Captain of Grenadiers orders the Colour Party to: "**WHEEL TO THE RIGHT - MARCH**" and marches the length of the Battalion front (between the front rank & the Commander). (*Ed. note: The tune "Grenadier's March" should be played.*)

XIII. The Commander brings the Battalion to the Shoulder, gives the order to **FIX - BAYONETS**, and as the Colour Party approaches, orders: **PRESENT YOUR - ARMS**.

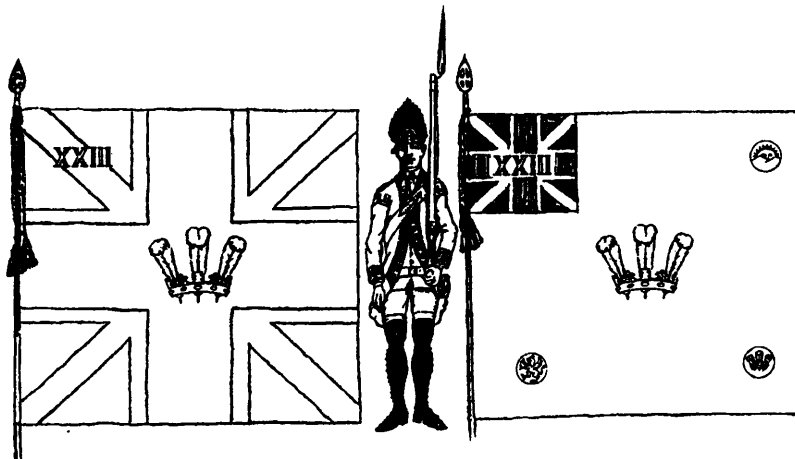
XIV. As the Colour Party reaches the end of the Battalion, the Commander will order the Battalion to "**LEFT - FACE**" (this is a formal facing) and the Captain of Grenadiers will order the Colour Party to: "**LEFT - WHEEL**".

XV. As the Colour Party approaches the end (rear) of the Battalion front, the Commander will give the order to: "**LEFT - FACE**" (the Music, however, faces right) and the Captain of Grenadiers will give the orders to the Colour Party to: "**LEFT - WHEEL**".

XVI. The Colour Party then marches down the line (between the rear - now "front" - rank and music.

XVII. At the center of the line, without commands, the Colour Lieutenants and the two Grenadier Drummers will wheel to the left into their proper positions in the line, while the Escort to the Colours (the Captain and four Grenadiers) continues on to the end of the line.

XVIII. As the Escort to the Colours approaches the end of the line, the Commander orders the Battalion to "**RIGHT ABOUT - FACE**" and "**SHOULDER YOUR - FIRELOCKS**", while the Captain of Grenadiers gives the order to "**LEFT - WHEEL**" (wheeling the Escort into their proper positions as he then inclines to his position on the right) and halts them even with the line. (DONE)



## ***LODGING THE COLOURS***

I. The Commander orders the battalion to **FIX your - BAYONETS!** followed by: **PREPARE to LODGE THE COLOURS - MARCH!**

II. The two Colour Lieutenants, followed by two Drummers, without further orders will wheel to the right out of line and march to the right, wheeling to the left and halting directly in front of the Grenadier Company (all to the single beat of the drum).

III. The Captain of Grenadiers then inclines in behind the Drummers.

IV. The Commander then orders: **PRESENT your - ARMS!**

V. The Captain of Grenadiers commands:

**ESCORT TO THE COLOURS - ADVANCE your - ARMS!**

**ESCORT TO THE COLOURS - BY THE LEFT WHEEL - MARCH!**

VI. In column the Colour Party (consisting of the Colour Lieutenants, Drummers, Grenadier Captain, and designated Grenadiers) march past the battalion with all Musick playing "*British Grenadiers*". Each Officer, in turn, salutes the Colours as they pass (the Colour party **does not** return the salutes.)

VII. Once the party is off the "parade ground", the Commander orders the remainder of the battalion to: **SHOULDER your - FIRELOCKS! UNFIX your - BAYONETS!**

VIII. The Colour Party, under command of the Captain of Grenadiers, marches to the place where the Colours are to be lodged and halts.

IX. The Captain of Grenadiers gives the following orders: **ESCORT - HALT!**

**ESCORT TO THE COLOURS - PRESENT your - ARMS!**

**ESCORT TO THE COLOURS - SHOULDER your - ARMS!**

**COLOUR LIEUTENANTS - LODGE the - COLOURS!**

The Colour Lieutenants then lodge them in the appropriate place, step one pace backwards, salute the Colours (even if cased) and return to the Colour Party in their original positions.

X. The Captain of Grenadiers then orders:

**ESCORT TO THE COLOURS - UNFIX your - BAYONETS!**

**ESCORT TO THE COLOURS - ADVANCE your - ARMS!**

XI. Unless given orders to the contrary, the Colour Party marches back to the rear of the Battalion (at the single beat of the drum) where each person silently wheels back to his post.

XII. The Captain of Grenadiers then orders the Grenadiers of the Colour Party to whatever position the Commander requires.

(DONE)

These ceremonies may be modified as circumstances require.

## ***ON PASSING DEFILES, MARCH BY FILES***

There are numerous occasions, especially during non-scripted tactical actions, where it becomes necessary to move rapidly from a company front to a narrower front to pass an obstruction on a narrow front. This can be a bridge, fence, or some other limiting terrain. This sometimes must be accomplished under fire. One solution is to disperse the company, instructing them first to fall in again on the other side of the obstacle. This "Abe Lincoln method" usually is not practical and certainly is not very professional. A more serious alternative is to **form a column of twos by marching by files**. The following instructions describe advancing and retreating by files only from the right because it is better to know a few things well than a lot of things poorly and in ninety percent of these situations our unit is small enough to be able to march by the right files without causing problems. We may wish to practice these maneuvers by the left and can do this by simply substituting "left" for "right" in the following instructions. We should not choose to advance by files from the center. (A unit in two ranks advancing by files from the right forms a column of twos, when advancing by files from the center it forms a column of fours and will only serve to confuse the men.) For a description of advancing, retreating, and other maneuvers from the center, see the Light Infantry Drill, Tab #10.

**COMPANY, TO THE FRONT, QUICK MARCH**-- The company is in two ranks, in company front, marching forward when it approaches a narrow opening, which could be some trees, a bridge, fence or even two other units already in place.

### **HALT-**

**COMPANY BY THE RIGHT, ADVANCE BY FILES, MARCH**-- When the preparative **BY THE RIGHT, ADVANCE BY FILES** is given, all the men do a right face except the two files on the extreme right of the line This means that the four men on the right are facing to the front and the rest of the company is facing to the right. When this happens (which should be instantaneous), the command of execution, **MARCH**, is given The four men on the right march straight to the front and the rest of the company marches to the right and wheels in behind them The company will now be marching to the front in a Column of twos.

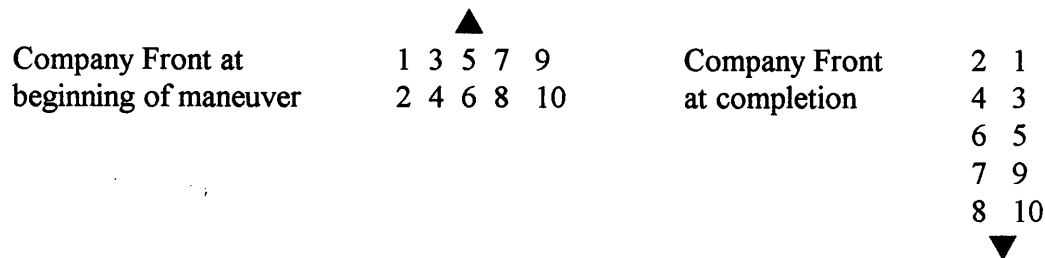
	▲		▲
Company Front at	1 3 5 7 9	Company Front	7 9
beginning of maneuver	2 4 6 8 10	at completion	8 10
			5 6
			3 4
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### **HALT-**

**FORM THE COMPANY, MARCH**-- When the preparative **FORM THE COMPANY** is given, the four leading men stand fast while the rest of the company faces to the left. At the command **MARCH**, those men faced to the left wheel to the right and form the company front.

The above system, described by Steven Eames in his interpretation of the *Manual Exercise of 1764* is the best way to learn advancing by files, however, in the original *Manual* this maneuver is performed as one fluid motion without halting. Experience has shown this is the best practical method of employing this command. When advancing across the field of battle, considerable time is saved by not having to halt to pass through a narrow opening. As the company is marching forward, and the command **COMPANY, BY THE RIGHT, ADVANCE BY FILES, MARCH** is given, the two files on the right continue marching to the front while the rest of the company **turns** to the right and **wheels** in behind the lead files. When the obstruction is passed (or whatever), and the command **FORM THE COMPANY, MARCH** is given, the four lead men halt and the rest of the company turns left and immediately wheels to the right to form the company front, at which time they halt and dress before continuing.

**COMPANY, BY THE RIGHT, RETREAT BY FILES, MARCH**-- When the preparative **BY THE RIGHT, RETREAT BY FILES** is given, the two right hand files do an about face and the rest of the company faces to the right. When the command **MARCH** is given, the right hand files march to the rear while the rest of the company wheels to the right, in succession, behind them.



**HALT-**

**FORM THE COMPANY, MARCH**-- When the preparative is given, the four men in the front stay as they are, the rest of the company faces to the right. On the command **MARCH**, they do a left wheel to form two ranks faced to the rear. **TO THE RIGHT-ABOUT, FACE**-- The company is now faced to its proper front.

Retreating by files can also be accomplished as one fluid motion, but the right hand files will have to turn about on the march, something that is even more complicated than the simple turn. As the circumstances which would cause an advancing company front to suddenly retreat by files is rare, we will halt before retreating by files (in most instances the companies will be at the halt anyway when given the order to retire).