

**THE A.B.C. OF SKIRMISHING: THE
LIGHT INFANTRY MOVEMENTS
OF COMPANY, IN ACCORDANCE
WITH THE FIELD EXERCISE AND
EVOLUTIONS OF INFANTRY, 1859**

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WILLIAM D. MALTON

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OF
SKIRMISHING:
BEING THE
LIGHT INFANTRY MOVEMENTS OF A COMPANY.

IN ACCORDANCE WITH
THE FIELD EXERCISE AND EVOLUTIONS OF INFANTRY, 1859.

BY
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(Author of "Company and Battalion Drill Illustrated," &c.)

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1860.

231. C. 35



PREFACE TO THE FIRST EDITION.

THIS little work is published under the idea that a short Manual of reference on Elementary Light Drill may, at the present time, be found useful.

The language of the *Field Exercise*, than which nothing could be more clear or concise, has been closely adhered to throughout.

May, 1859.

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EXTRACT FROM THE CIRCULAR MEMORANDUM

DATED "HORSE GUARDS, 1ST MAY, 1860."

• • • • •

"The improved range and accuracy of fire of the arms now in general use render it doubly important that every soldier should, when skirmishing, be prepared to take such advantage of ground and cover as will enable him, with the least exposure of his own person, to inflict the greatest amount of injury on his opponents.

• • • • •

"The attention of the skirmishers should be especially called to the following points:—

"Skirmishers, when under fire, must take advantage of all cover. The men of a file should always work together; both men should never be unloaded at the same time; they should always, when practicable, load under cover, before moving to the front when advancing, and after falling back when retiring.

"Young soldiers (particularly when first opening fire) are apt to waste their ammunition; its value, therefore, cannot be too carefully impressed on their minds, and they should be made to understand that the principal advantage of their rifle—viz., accuracy of fire, is lost if, in moving from spot to spot, they do not consider well the distance they are from the object they are about to fire at, and are not careful to adjust the back-sight accordingly.

"The files must be careful not to get in front of each other. When small objects, such as trees or rocks, afford cover for a few files only, the men must not crowd behind them in numbers, as they will be safer in the open. Here they should load and fire lying, and move rapidly when the advance or retreat renders a change of position necessary, throwing themselves at once on the ground.

"Bugle sounds should be avoided as much as possible; the men should be practised at 'passing the word,' and made to understand signals.

"The men should be taught that good cover may be obtained from the slightest rise or fall of ground,—more especially when engaged at long ranges—a slight furrow, a few stones or small bushes, will often afford cover in the absence of trees, rocks, walls, banks, &c.

"Skirmishers should be taught to judge rapidly for themselves of the nature of the ground on which they are acting, and of the best mode of occupying it. In defending a line of heights, the edge of a wood, or any ditches, walls, &c., they should follow the windings of the cover, instead of remaining in line, taking care to leave no considerable gaps, and not to collect in groups.

"A line of skirmishers may be exercised with advantage in passing obstacles, such as ponds, farm buildings, &c., the men opposite these obstacles doubling in rear of the files on the right and left; but running out to their proper places as soon as the obstacles are passed.

"Before quitting one position each file should decide on the next they intend to occupy, which they should make for in double time; when at close quarters one man of a file should cover the advance or retreat of his comrade while running from point to point, the men protecting each other in turn while exposed.

"The fire of skirmishers may often be better employed against the enemy's files on their right and left than against those in their immediate front, who are more likely to be completely covered.

"It is impossible for the officers to place each file of their companies; the men must be made to understand that they are responsible for the cover each file may select.

"They should keep in sight the files on their right and left, and, when the ground permits, should resume the general line of dressing, and their proper distance, making use of their own intelligence, without waiting for special directions.

"The dressing of a line of skirmishers is a matter of no importance, as long as the connexion between files is kept up. In advancing or retiring, those files having cover should remain in their position until those on their right and left have passed them by 15 or 20 paces. In advancing, files should run on to cover, when the general line is within 50 paces of it, holding it as above. The fire of one protected skirmisher is of more value than that of five when exposed.

* * * * *

"By Command,

"J. YORKE SCARLETT,

"Adjutant-General."

GENERAL PRINCIPLES

or

SKIRMISHING.

SKIRMISHERS, SUPPORTS, AND RESERVES.

(1) *Skirmishers.*

THE movements of the Skirmishers must depend, in a great measure, on the position and movements of the Enemy: they should always, however, protect and over-lap the flanks of the main body they are intended to cover.

Skirmishers (whether halted or in motion) when under fire, should take advantage of all cover: taking care, when advancing or retiring, not to get in front of each other, or to retain their places of cover so long as to interfere with their own or their comrades' fire.

All lines of Skirmishers move by their *centre*: except when inclining to a flank (*see* p. 20), in which case they move by the flank to which they are inclining.

The distance between Skirmishers and Supports, on a plain, should be about 200 yards (= 240 paces) †.

Whenever Skirmishers are directed to HALT (whether by word of command or by bugle sound), they will halt and *kneel*, facing to their proper front.

N.B.—Men in extended order will invariably face (or turn) to the *right-about*; whether advancing, retiring, firing, or not firing.

† A pace is five-sixths of a yard. To reduce yards to paces, therefore, multiply the number of yards by 6 and divide by 5: to reduce paces to yards, multiply the number of paces by 5 and divide by 6.