

What the individual soldier and the company should know:

- The proper positions in ranks
- How to do the correct facings
- What is the Direct Step
- What is Double Step
- Complete Manual of Arms
- Stack arms
- How to load and fire from front or rear ranks
- Direct March and Oblique March
- March by the Flank
- Wheeling left and right and changes of direction
- Skirmish Drill
 - Deployment
 - Advance
 - Firings
 - Rally
- Bugle calls as posted on Birney's web site

The Formation of the Battalion

The Union Army during the Civil War arranged their companies into a battalion line based on the seniority of the company Captains. This was implemented as follows, from right to left;

Most Senior Captain's company is first on the right
Second Senior Captain's company is the furthest left

In a ten company Battalion the order by this method would be right to left:

First senior captain
Sixth Senior
Fourth Senior
Ninth Senior
Third Senior
Eighth Senior
Fifth Senior
Tenth Senior
Seventh Senior
Second Senior

While this may have been a good method at the time and a way to determine next in command it is not practical for today's reenactor. Reenactors have many different levels of experience and to base the company order in the Battalion on the Captain's seniority is not realistic.

Therefore the Battalion Colonel will appoint the first company (first on the right) and all of the remaining companies order. At events that do not have the complete Battalion in attendance the Battalion Adjutant will designate the second through last companies in the order he feels best for the Battalion on each reenacting site and battle.

The Battalion belongs to the Battalion Adjutant as it is formed and until he has reported to the Battalion Colonel that the Battalion has been formed. The Battalion Adjutant also determines the location for the forming of the Battalion and the length of the Battalion line by posting the Battalion Guideons.

Company Captains are responsible to know the correct drill for dress parade as posted in Birney's web site.

During the formation of the Battalion ALL weapons will be 'cleared' at the orders of the Battalion Adjutant. Malfunctioning weapons will be attended to by each company's First Sgt. and company Captain. Final ruling on the use of any weapon rests with the Battalion Safety Officer (who is appointed by the Battalion Colonel).

While Battalion Wings during the Civil War were based on two or more Battalion Divisions this practice is not generally possible in reenacting. The Battalion Divisions are eliminated for most reenactments. Therefore use of Battalion Wings is based on the number of companies in the Battalion at each event. However each Battalion Wing must have a minimum of two companies and will be lead by a Wing Commander. Wing Commanders are appointed by the Battalion Colonel and serve at his convenience.

Formation of the Battalion into columns of companies

This maneuver can be the simplest of all the Battalion maneuvers. The maneuver is most often done from a Battalion Line of Battle formation, however it can be done on the march if deemed necessary.

The forming a Column of Companies can be executed either to the right or to the left (wheeling left will put the Battalion in inverse order of companies and is rarely used) and is determined by the Battalion Colonel as follows:

Colonel says “**By Company, Right (or Left) Wheel...**”

Company Capt say “**1st (2nd, 3rd, etc) company, right (or Left) Wheel**”

Colonel says “**March**”

When each Company is at right angle to it's beginning formation the company Captain orders:
“**x company Halt**”

The Company Captain then orders, “**Left Dress! Front**”

All companies must have a enough distance to the company in front of it to be able to wheel either right or left. (proper distance).

That is all there is to this maneuver.

Marching the Battalion in column of Companies

Now that we have the Battalion in Column of Companies we need to move forward. For our purpose we will always assume that the Column of Companies is not inverted.

To get the Battalion moving is just the simple order by the Colonel:
“**Battalion, forward.....**”

Company Captains “**X company forward**”

Colonel “**March**” (remember that the only person to say march is the colonel)
that's it, the Battalion is now in motion.

But let's say that we need to go in the opposite direction. Battalions **DO NOT** counter march so now what?

For the Colonel it is really simple, “**Head of the column to the Right (or left)**”

The Colonel makes a sharp turn to the Right (or left) (he is 15 steps ahead of his First Company).

The First Company Captain says, “**First company right wheel**”

He waits to say “**March.**” until the lead rank of his company is half way to the spot the Colonel made his turn.

When First company is at right angle to it's previous line of march the First company captain says, “**Forward march. Guide Right!**” This means that the company will align on the pivot man of the Wheel. If the maneuver had been to the left the guide command would be, “**Forward march. Guide Left!**” (The guide is always in the direction of the wheel)

Each following company does exactly the same maneuver as First company at the same spot that First company did it's wheeling maneuver.

To complete the maneuver and be headed in the opposite direction to the original line of march simply to do the same steps again.
Not so hard is it!!

There are two things that company Captains have to pay attention to:

- After each wheeling maneuver be sure that the proper distance between companies is maintained. Remember that in Column of Companies the proper distance is the distance the company needs to complete a wheeling maneuver. Yeah sure. Here is a rule of thumb that will work to keep the proper distance. Each company should be trailing the company ahead of it by 3 paces (steps). That is the Captain's paces. First Sgt. should be paying attention to this as well as he can remind the Captain as needed.
- Second thing to watch is that the maneuvers must be done exactly as the First company did theirs. You can see that if the Second company is off a little bit then by the time the Tenth company does the maneuver it is way off the mark. So if the proper distance is maintained then there will be room to maneuver for each company as it comes to the mark.

Maneuver from Column of Companies to Line of Battle

There are 19 different maneuvers to get into a line of battle, and most of them require a good deal of maneuvering ground. However, in Civil War reenacting we simply do not have enough area to do these moves. Further, the actual armies of the Civil War did most of their maneuvers while quite far apart so it did not matter that some maneuvers could take a long time to complete. Again in reenacting we are much closer to the opposing side and do not have the time to engage in complex maneuvers.

Here are some things to keep in mind as you read through these maneuvers, a Column of Companies, composed of 10 companies will be every bit of 125 feet long. Also a line of battle of 10 (20 man) companies will be at just about 300 feet wide. So while First company has little marching to do, the last man in the Tenth company is going to cover A LOT of ground. As reenacting Officers it is our responsibility to minimize the impact of maneuver on the troops while maximizing safety and enjoyment.

If you as the company Captain wait to start giving the maneuver order for your company at the point you want them to move your company will be well past the point of maneuver at the command "March". Just about all commands have two parts, the preparatory (what we are about to do) and execution (March). So give the preparatory command well before the point of maneuver and the execution command at the point of maneuver.

So here we are at the place of battle, but the Battalion is in Column of Companies, not the way to fight a Civil War battle. Therefore the Battalion needs to shift from Column of Companies into a line of battle.

The maneuver is dependent on where the Colonel wants the battle line to be formed, to the front of the line of march or to the left or right. Each of these directions require a different maneuver.

One thing that does not change is that as each company comes on line the company will commence fire by company unless or until the Colonel or Wing commander orders otherwise. There is a simple reason for this – if the Battalion were to wait until all companies were on line to begin firing, the battle line would be shot to pieces as it was forming. Each company gives covering fire to the maneuver as it comes on line.

First let's deal with forming a battle line to the right:

The Colonel says, "**By companies, into line, right wheel....**"

Company Captains say, "**X company, right wheel.**"

Colonel says, "**March**".

When the companies are at right angle to their previous facing the company Captain says, "**X company Halt. Right dress!**"

What should happen next without the colonel saying a word?

Right, each company commences firing by company. If the Colonel did not want this to happen he will make his desires known in a loud voice.

Boy that was tough, right?

Can you guess how the Battalion forms a line of battle to the left from a column of companies?

Right, same as the above but left wheel.

Couldn't be easier.

The question arises when the Colonel wants the battle line to be beyond the First company.

This is a bit trickier but not too bad:

Colonel says, "**On the right into line, guide right!**"

First company Captain says, "**First company, right wheel March!**"

First company completes the wheel and marches forward ten paces.

First company Captain says, "**First company, Halt. Right dress**".

The remaining companies march straight forward in the same line of travel as they were prior to the Colonel's command.

As the second company comes to the last man of First company he goes through the same set of maneuvers and commands as did First company's.

Each following company does the same maneuver as they reach the last man of the company that was in front of them. This is done until all companies are on line

If the Colonel wants the Battalion's line of battle to be facing to the left and still anchored on First company, his command is: "**On the left into line, guide left!**". All company Captains will order left wheel at the appropriate point.

Really not all that complicated, but a little practice will make the maneuver easy to do in short order.

Now comes the tougher part. The Colonel wants a battle line to be formed to the front. But does he want it to be to the right or left of the First company? In reality doing these maneuvers to the right or to the left are simply mirror images. We will just discuss doing the maneuver in one direction.

Without question the easiest maneuver is to utilize the ability of the companies to march by the flank.

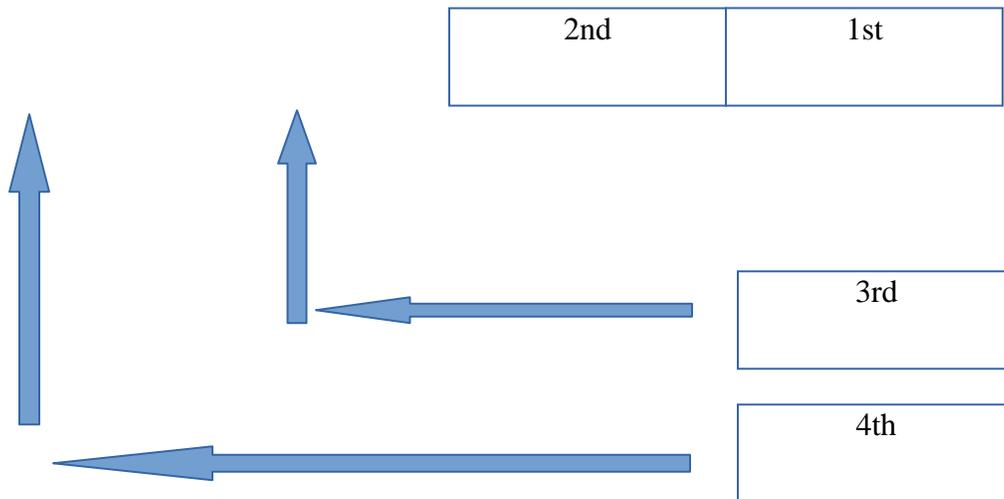
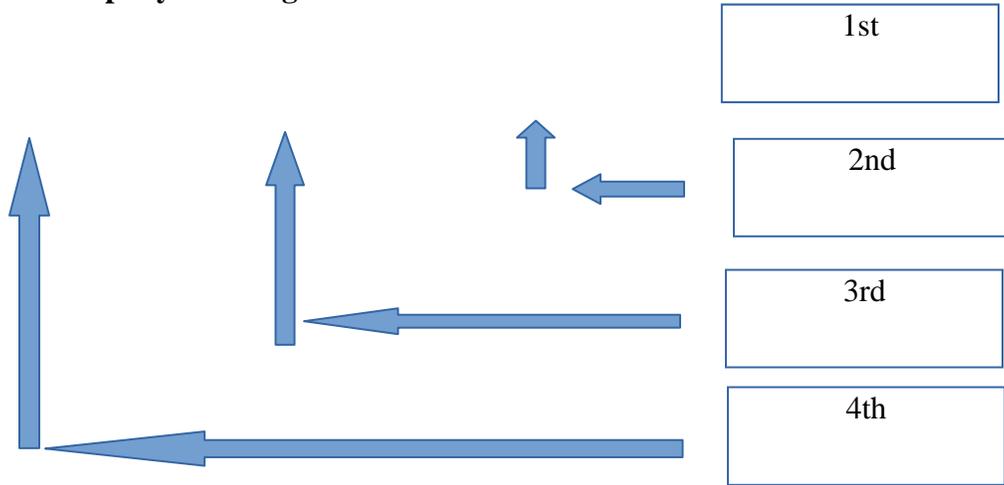
Colonel says, "**On the left into line!**"

First company Captain says, "**First company stand fast.**"

All other company Captains say, "**X company by the left flank, march!**"

Immediately as each company passes the last file of the last company currently on the line of battle, the company Captain says, "**X company by the right flank, march!**"

The company continues to march forward until it is on the battle line then the company Captain says, "**X company halt. Right dress!**"



The only real problem for reenactors with this maneuver is that it takes just under an acre (approximately 35,500 square feet) to accomplish. Most times that much area is just not available for maneuver.

But with a minor modification we can accomplish the maneuver in far less area and just as efficiently.

The maneuver starts off the same:

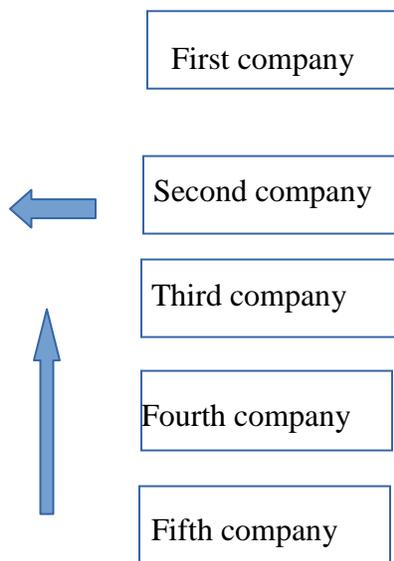
Colonel says, “**On the left into line!**”

First company Captain says, “**First company stand fast.**”

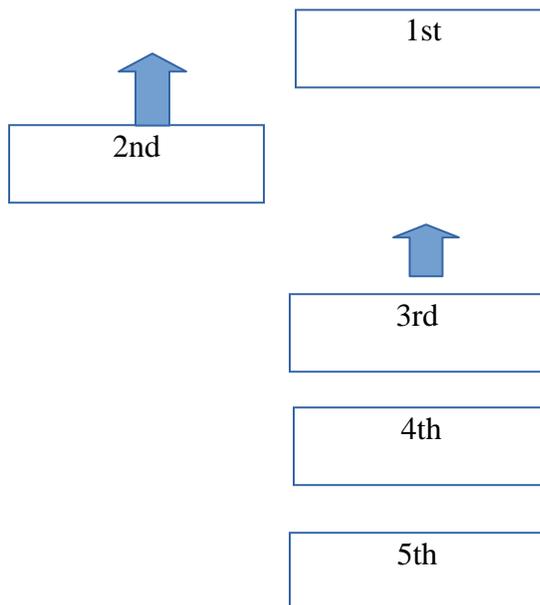
Here comes the modification.

Second company and only second company Captain says, “**Second company by the left flank, March!**”

All other company Captains say, “**X company forward March!**”



Immediately as second company passes the last file of the First company currently on the line of battle, the company Captain says, “**Second company by the right flank, march!**” All of the other companies continue to march forward.

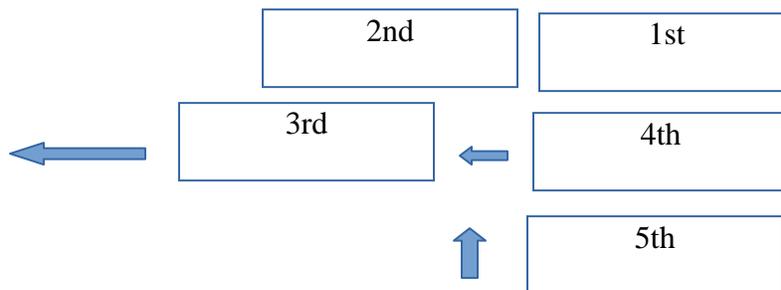
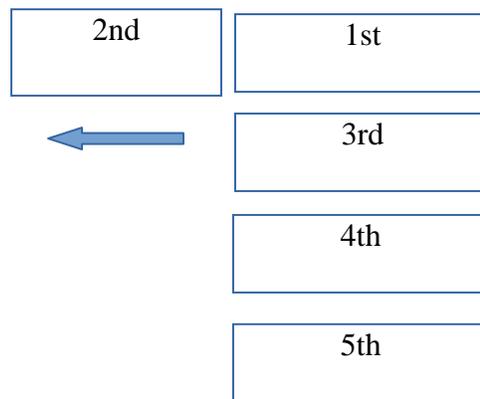


Then **“Second company halt! Right dress!”** Second company and First company are now on line of battle.

While Second company was doing the above all of the other companies were moving forward. As Third company comes to the proper distance from First company, Third company Captain says, **“Third company by the left flank, March”**.

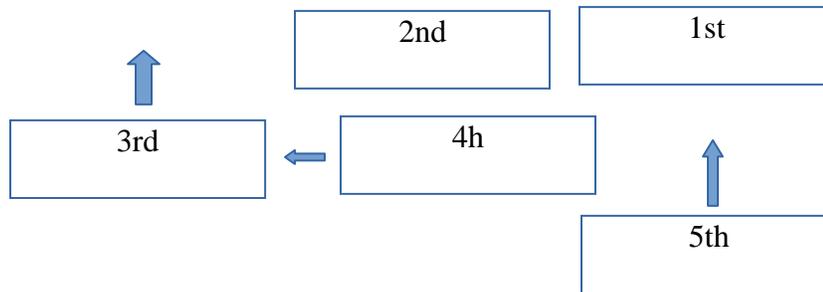
Again all following companies continue to march forward.

Third company marches behind Second company and then does a right flank on to the line of battle.



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Each following company repeats the same maneuver until the entire Battalion is on line, faced to the front and to the left of First company.

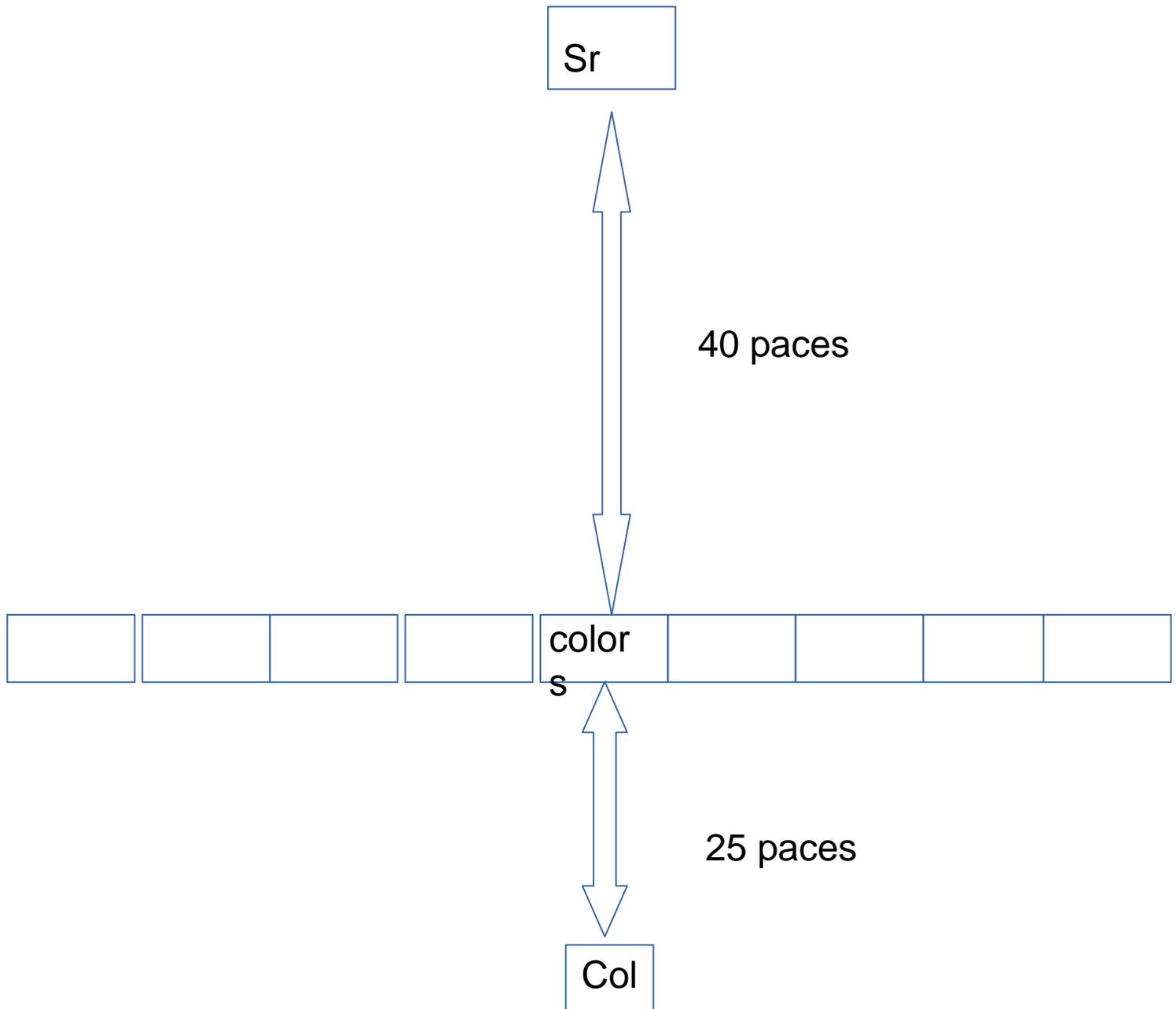


The Battalion has formed the same line of battle as the maneuver that needed 35,500 square feet while using less than 10% of the maneuver area. Guess which one we'll be using!

Marching and Maneuvering in a Line of Battle

Before advancing the Battle Line a number of things have to happen:

- The Battalion has to be aligned properly.
- The Colonel advises the Senior Wing Commander (Major) the direction of travel for the Battalion.
- The Senior WC posts to 40 paces directly in front of the colors
- The Colonel posts to 25 paces behind the Battalion
- The Colonel will make sure that he and the Senior WC are in a straight line.



So what was the point of all this pre-movement set-up? It is really for practical reasons – if the Battalion is out of line, even a small amount, when it moves it will go more and more out of line.

So what? Well, when the Battalion halts it is generally because it is about to engage the enemy. If they have to do a re-alignment they will get shot to pieces or at the least they would lose the advantage to the enemy.

While all of this was very important during the Civil War it was intended for Battalions of appropriately 1000 men. That equals a Battalion front of 1500 feet. To put that into modern terms the Battalion front, in line of battle, was 30 buses long. You can see how small variations in the maneuver would caused large problems.

For reenactors the most important thing to remember when a Battalion line of battle is in motion is to **GUIDE ON THE CENTER** (or if you prefer on the Colors). Once again we do not have the time or area to do the detailed maneuvers.

The Colonel says, “**Battalion forward, Guide on the Center.March!**”.

Wing commanders echo the Colonel's command. “**Right (or left) Wing forward guide on the Center!**”

Company Captains **DO NOT** echo these commands. (it takes to long and becomes very confusing).

Obviously the most important element of the Battalion is the center company or Color Company. If they get out of order or make a mistake the entire Battalion will be in big trouble.

While it is possible to have the Battalion line of battle move by the Oblique, it is not often done. Generally maneuver by the Oblique is followed by the command “Battalion forward March”, making it a two element maneuver. Obviously the more movements done while the Battalion line of battle is in motion the greater the probability that the Battalion will become more and more out of alignment.

It is essential that the Oblique maneuver be done by all companies uniformly. Again GUIDE ON THE CENTER is paramount. The Battalion must move on a common front but at a 45 degree angle. (see the picture on the next page)

Well if this Oblique maneuver is so prone to problems of alignment isn't there a better way to move the battle line to the left or right.

The answer is sure there is.

The Colonel could order the Battalion to do a left or right flank and then another opposite flank movement to get the battle line to move forward without a halt.

However everything comes with a cost and here the cost is one of time. The Oblique movement takes less time to do while the flank movements are less prone to getting the Battalion truly out of alignment. Another issue also comes into play, particularly during the Civil War, namely this, "...Battle lines never show anything but their face to the enemy." The use of the flank movements would put one side of the Battle line to the enemy.

Perhaps the most important reason to use the Oblique maneuver is simply that at any time during the maneuver it is possible to have the Battalion bring fire on the enemy with little to no delay. The flanking maneuver would require that during the left or right movement the Battle line would have to be halted and faced to the enemy before they could fire. Back to everything has a cost.

The bottom line is that the Colonel has to make a choice between maneuvers based on the situation and his experience. After all he is the one in command.

