



System of Calls for Medieval Cavalry Drill

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System of Calls for Medieval Cavalry Drill

Throughout the history of mounted warfare commanders in the field needed ways to organize and move large numbers of mounted troops in marches and in battle. Very few specifics exist on how this was done up until the past few hundred years. Mention is made of using vocal commands, bugle/trumpet calls and guidon's and banners. During the American Civil War, bugle calls and commands were used to move mounted troops. Several manuals existed and used or adapted for use by commanders of Civil War troops. One system of tactics was called "Cooke's Cavalry Tactics" and was published in 1862 by Brigadier General Phillip Cooke. Cooke's tactics involved maneuvering men in a single rank as opposed to earlier manuals which specified double rank formations (one rank of men behind the other). Given the limited numbers of Medieval mounted reenactors and given the fact that single ranks of men lend itself much better to medieval style mounted warfare, it was thought that Cooke's would be an excellent manual to start from. This document intends to simplify Cooke's manual, eliminate the unnecessary portions (like saber drill or dismounted drill) and keep the portions applicable to medieval mounted combat. Additionally, some of the instructions are simplified and changed to make it easier for somebody with a non-military background to understand and master the calls. Finally these calls will only make use of verbal calls and will not use bugles or guidon's for movement.

Basic Terminology

To proceed it is best to have a clear and unified understanding of the terminology used. Let's start of with the organization of the mounted unit.

RANK

RANK – Unit of men abreast of each other. Note each RANK constitutes a portion of a COLUMN.

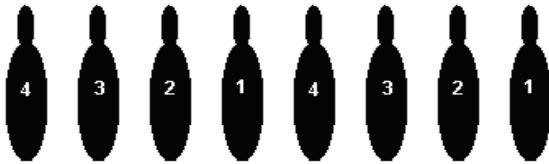


FILE

FILE – A man in RANK, or one or more men behind each other in RANKS.

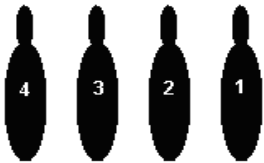
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Each man is a FILE

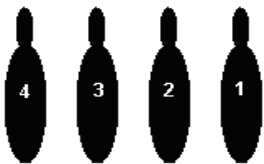


COLUMN

COLUMN – One or more RANKS of men with each RANK behind the other.



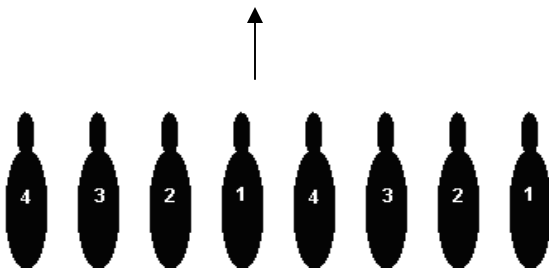
A COLUMN composed of two RANKS, the #1's are a FILE, #2's are a FILE, etc.



FRONT

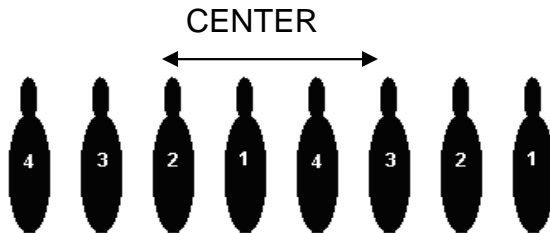
FRONT – The direction perpendicular to the alignment of a body of troops and before it. Either in column or in a line.

The FRONT



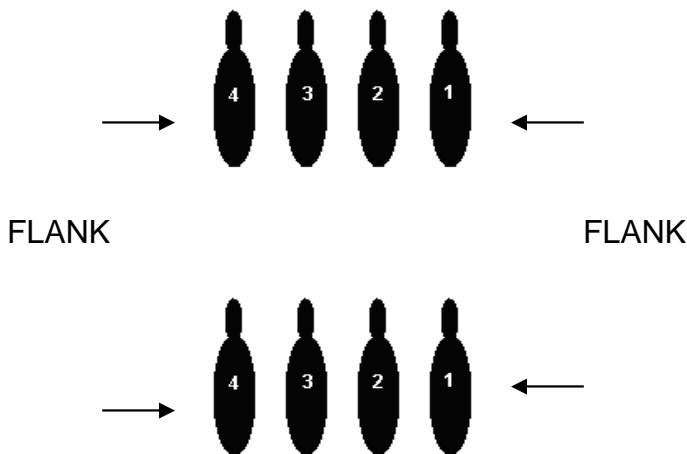
CENTER

CENTER – The middle of a body of troops (this is kind of arbitrary)



FLANK

FLANK – The right or left side of a body of troops



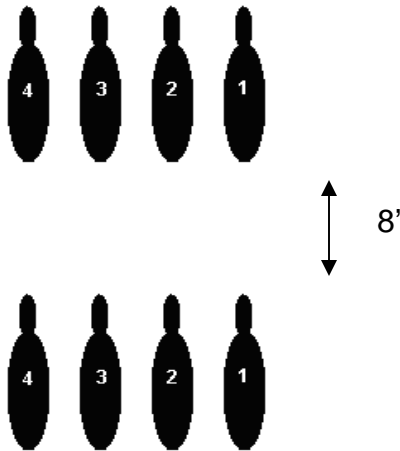
INTERVAL

INTERVAL – The distance between RANKS or between FILES. The INTERVAL between FILES in closed order is 4" from toe to toe of the rider. The INTERVAL between RANKS is the width of COLUMN. Each horse is considered two feet in width so the INTERVAL between RANKS of a COLUMN of four horses would be eight feet.

INTERVAL here it is between FILES (4" toe to toe of rider)



INTERVAL here is between RANKS and would be eight feet for this COLUMN.



Getting Started

Commands Structure

There is more terminology, but these are the basic definitions. The next thing is the calls. All calls in Cooke's are given with a preparatory command and then an execution command. Some of the preparatory commands are given and the execution is the word "MARCH." For example "Right Turn" ... "MARCH" at the execution command the column would execute a right turn. Other commands do not include "MARCH" as the command is both the preparatory and execution (for example "Right dress." To avoid confusion, most commands will be considered preparatory and "MARCH" will be used as the execution.

FORM RANK

To get started we need our mounted troops to get into a RANK. To do this the commander would call "FORM RANK ... MARCH." At this command the lead or commander would take a position and all the other mounted troops would take positions to the left of the commander forming a RANK and all facing the same FRONT.



DRESS RIGHT

Your RANK will not look this straight and pretty. At this point without a call the commander should step up one space. Every trooper should at that point move right and step up even with the commander. To verbally give this command, the commander would step up and command “DRESS RIGHT ... MARCH.” Ideally the RANK would be straight and even and only 4” of space would exist between each trooper’s toes.

COUNT FOURS

The next command given by the commander would be “IN RANK(S) COUNT FOURS.” At this command in each RANK starting with the rightmost rider going to the left in the RANK each rider after the previous rider will count fours. So in our above diagram the commander would say “1”, the rider to his left would then say “2”, the rider to his left “3”, the rider to his left “4”, the rider to his left would start over and say “1” and so on.

What we have done is organized the RANK into sets of four. We are now organized and ready to ride and maneuver.

Moving our Mounted Unit

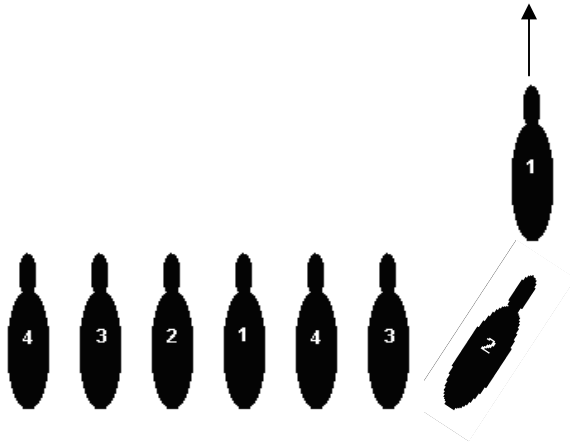
BY and FORM

To move our men we need to form a COLUMN. A COLUMN can be any number of horses in a RANK. To change the width or number of FILES in our COLUMN we can either reduce its size or increase its size. To increase the width of the column we use the term “FORM”, to decrease the width we use the term “BY.”

Moving Forward

BY FILES

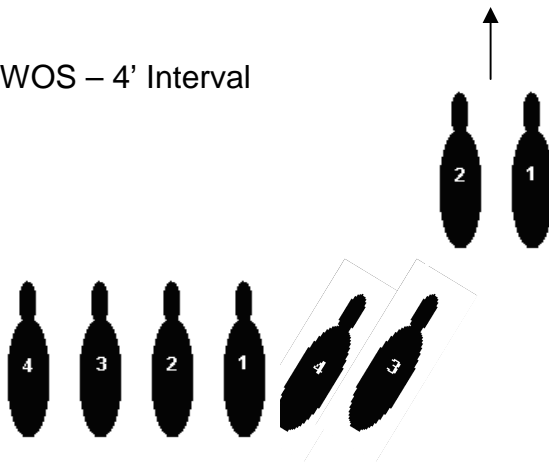
We are now going to place our RANK (we are really in a COLUMN as well ... it is just a single RANK COLUMN) into a 1 FILE wide COLUMN by giving the command “BY FILES FORWARD ... MARCH.” At this command we are reducing our single RANK COLUMN into a multi RANK COLUMN composed of one horse per RANK. The movement starts at the far right FLANK of the COLUMN/RANK. The far right FLANK #1 man will move his horse forward. As the tail of the horse crosses the plane of the nose of the #2 mans horse, the #2 man will oblique his horse 45 degrees to the right and move forward and get behind the #1 man. Since the width of our column is one horse, the #2 man will keep a distance of 2’ between the nose of his horse and the tail of the horse ahead of him. This will repeat for each man down the line.



BY TWOS/BY FOURS

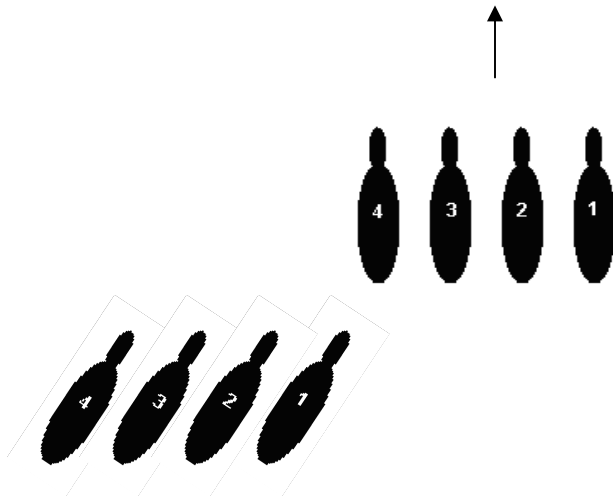
The commander could have also kept a larger number of FILES in RANKS of his column by calling “BY TWOS FORWARD ... MARCH” or “BY FOURS FORWARD ... MARCH.” The same concept as above, but would be done by sets of twos or fours.

BY TWOS – 4' Interval



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By FOURS – 8' Interval



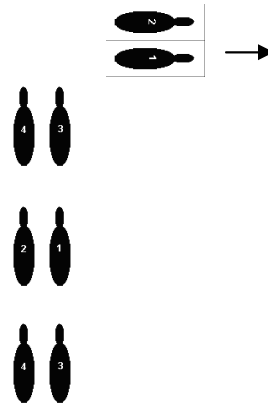
TURNING

Let's assume that our "FORWARD MARCH" command was called "BY TWOS" and we are in a COLUMN of TWOS. Now that we are in our COLUMN and moving forward, we can start turning the COLUMN.



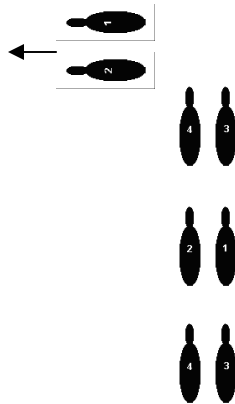
RIGHT TURN

Right Turn – To turn right the commander will execute the “RIGHT TURN ... MARCH” command. At MARCH the first set will turn 90 degrees to the right. The second set will go to the point that the first set turned and also make a 90 degree right turn, as will the third set, etc. This is important as the column will start to snake if it does not turn at the place the first set turned.



LEFT TURN

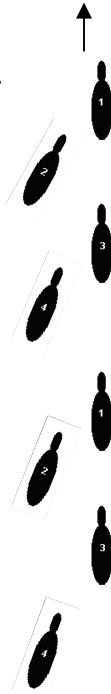
Left Turn – To turn left the commander will execute the “LEFT TURN ... MARCH” command. At MARCH the first set will turn 90 degrees to the left. The second set will go to the point that the first set turned and also make a 90 degree left turn, as will the third set, etc.



BY FILES

Reducing column size – Lets say our column of two's needs to move across a narrow feature. The commander would call "BY FILES ... MARCH." At MARCH, the far right number 1, i.e. commander would maintain his pace, but the remainder of the column would slow down. The number 1 and 3 men would remain in line, but the 2 and 4 men would angle or OBLIQUE 45 degrees to the right and the number 2 man would get behind the number 1 man and the number 4 man would get behind the number 3 man. We have now reduced the width of our column to a single file. The column should automatically adjust its interval. Of course this command could be given as "BY TWOS" or "BY FOURS" depending on the number of FILES in each RANK and what the commander wants to do.

2's and 4's OBLIQUE to the RIGHT



Moving by files 2' intervals



FORM TWOS

Increasing COLUMN width. We have gotten past our obstacle and now the commander wants to get the column back into a shorter, wider formation. The commander would call "FORM TWO'S AT A TROT ... MARCH." At this command, the 1's and 3's would maintain the current walking pace, but the 2's and 4's would trot back up to their respective positions to the left of the 1's and 3's. They would do this by LEFT OBLIQUEING 45 degrees and trot until they are into position besides their set partner. Once in position, the ranks should adjust to their proper 4' interval.



FORM FOURS

Now that we are in our COLUMN of twos, the commander could form us in fours by giving the command "FORM FOURS AT A TROT ... MARCH." At MARCH, the 1's and 2's will remain at a walk, but the 3's and 4's will OBLIQUE 45 degree's to the left and trot to a position to the left of their respective 1's and 2's set. Once in position, the column should adjust its RANK INTERVAL to 8'.

3's and 4's OBLIQUE to the left



COLUMN of fours



OBLIQUES

We've discussed OBLIQUE's previously. In our previous discussion they were related to positioning troops within the column. There is also the concept of OBLIQUEING the entire column. If we want to shift our column to the right or left, but not at 90's (like a turn) we can do this by using the oblique command. At the command the #1 trooper, i.e. commander should pick a point off in the distance to which they wish to position the COLUMNS FRONT to. He should make sure the column is staying on course to that point and sets the direction for the column. The command is given "RIGHT (or LEFT) OBLIQUE ... MARCH." At MARCH each set should oblique so that the nose of their horse is in plane to the shoulder of the horse to the right or left depending on the call. At the command "FRONT," the column should return to normal marching order by adjusting their horses 45 degrees opposite of the original command and dressing and adjusting intervals appropriately.

Column at the Right OBLIQUE



GAIT TRANSITIONS

At any points in our movements, the commander can call for gait changes. No matter the gait, the trooper is expected to maintain both the FILE INTERVALS and RANK INTERVALS.

Gait commands are normally done in progression. From walk to trot to canter and visa versa.

WALK/TROT/CANTER

The commands are given as such:

“TROT (WALK, CANTER) ... MARCH”

HALT

To stop the column the commander simply gives the order:

“HALT ... MARCH”

FORWARD

To get it moving forward again, the commander would use the command:

“FORWARD AT A WALK ... MARCH”

Advanced Concepts

There are some additional concepts that are generally applicable to how a unit responds to hostile situations that occur around it.

FRONT INTO LINE

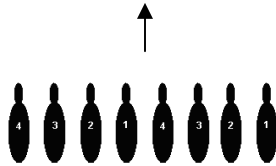
The first is getting your column into a line of battle to face a threat to its FRONT. Some changes are being made and some additions, but the concept is generally the same. To do this, the commander would say “FRONT INTO LINE MARCH.” At MARCH each RANK in the column would OBLIQUE 45 degrees to the left and move into a single rank; assuming their places in line. The command is executed at whatever gait the column is currently moving. The ranks behind the first rank just need to move a bit quicker at their perspective gait. The commander could also execute the command at a “FRONT INTO LINE AT A (TROT/CANTER) ... MARCH.” The front RANK would maintain its current speed, but the rear RANKS would increase to the gait specified in the command.

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FRONT INTO LINE



Unit in single RANK

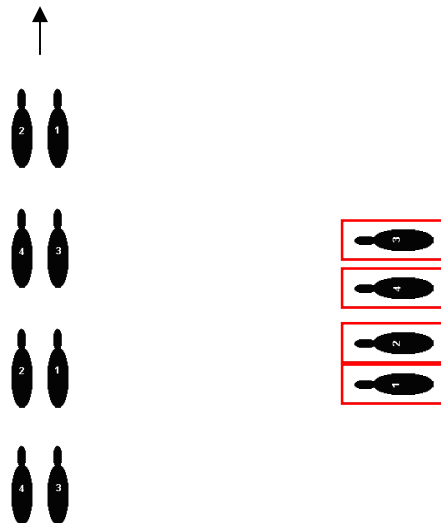


FILES/TWOS/FOURS LEFT/RIGHT

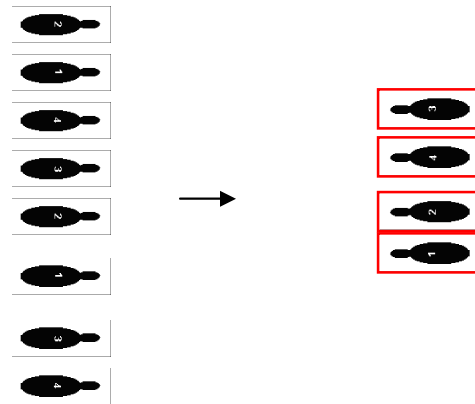
The previous command is fine for threats to our FRONT, but what about threats to our FLANKS. The next concept can be a bit confusing, but it will allow us to engage threats to our FLANKS easily. It also illustrates the importance of our RANK intervals. This call can be made using FILES, TWOS or FOURS and can be made RIGHT or LEFT. The call would be:

“(FILES/TWOS/FOURS) (LEFT/RIGHT) ... MARCH.” At MARCH each called set will turn 90 degrees in that direction. For example, we are in a column of twos. Our commander notices a threat to our right flank. The commander would call “TWOS RIGHT ... MARCH.” Each set of TWO’s in our column would turn right 90 degrees. We have just gone from a column, to a line of battle.

Threat to our right flank



Now facing threat



If we were in a column only a FILE wide, the commander would call “FILES RIGHT ... MARCH.” If we were in a column of fours, the commander would call “FOURS RIGHT ... MARCH.”

We can also use the same commands to move from a line of battle into a column again by calling the same command. FILES/TWOS or FOURS RIGHT/LEFT.

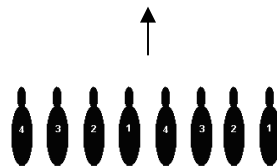
FILES RIGHT/LEFT

To quickly move us out of a threat to our FRONT, the commander may call “FILES RIGHT(LEFT) ... MARCH.” This would allow us to move away from the danger. Each FILE in the line would turn right 90 degrees and march to the right.



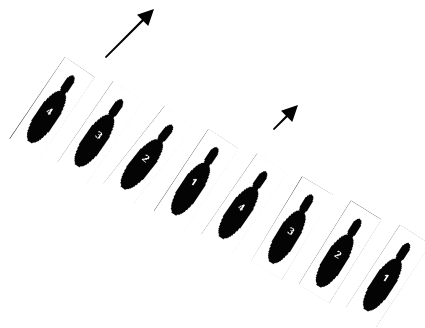
WHEELS

Wheels are methods of turning our front to face a threat in another direction. Wheels are done from a fixed point (RIGHT FLANK or LEFT FLANK)



RIGHT WHEEL

To orient the front in a different direction (lets assume to the right), the commander would call "RIGHT WHEEL ... MARCH." At the command MARCH the rider to the far right of the RANK would fix his position. The rider at the far left of the flank would begin to march in an arc around the fixed rider to the right. The rider to the right would adjust his position periodically to face the direction of the far left rider. The riders in between would move themselves at an appropriate pace to maintain a straight line. The wheel should be done calmly, slowly and carefully. If not done that way, the line will break up or bunch up. The wheel continues until the commander calls "FRONT." At FRONT, the riders will cease the wheel motion.



LEFT WHEEL

The LEFT WHEEL is the same concept except the LEFT most rider becomes the fixed point. Once you get into larger formations, you realize that a RIGHT or LEFT turns are much like a RIGHT or LEFT WHEEL. Of course the turn is 90 degrees and a WHEEL can be less or greater than that, but when you are making a right or left turn in a company size rank, it is done like a wheel.

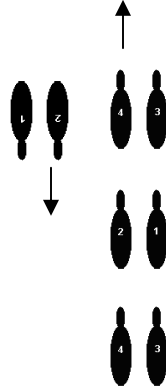
RIGHT/LEFT ABOUT

Right/Left About. At the command "RIGHT ABOUT ... MARCH," each trooper will turn his horse 180 degrees to the right so they face and march in the direction opposite they were before. Left about is the opposite.

COLUMN RIGHT/LEFT ABOUT

Column Right/Left About. At the command "COLUMN LEFT/RIGHT ABOUT ... MARCH," the head rank of the column will turn 180 degrees to the LEFT/RIGHT of the column. The subsequent RANKS will go up to the place the first RANK turned and also make 180 degree turn to come in behind the previous rank. This way the entire column makes a U turn, but maintains positioning.

Column performing
a COLUMN LEFT ABOUT



MOUNTING/DISMOUNTING

Mounting or Dismounting. In most Civil War formations, troopers almost always initially fall into formation dismounted. This is for inspections (tack and weapon). The troopers fall in, in very close formation. The troopers left elbow will be inches from the muzzle of the left horse. Mounting or dismounting in a rank like this is unfeasible. To properly mount in a rank like this the commander would call "PREPARE TO MOUNT ..." at this command each 1 and 3 man will advance a horse length with their horse. They will place their left foot in the stirrup and grab the mane right above the pommel of the saddle and left hand at the cantle. The commander will then command in a separate command "MOUNT." At that point each trooper swings into the saddle. The 2's and 4's get up into line into their respective positions among the 1's and 3's. Without being told the line should do a RIGHT DRESS. Dismounting from a RANK/FRONT or LINE is much the same. The commander will call "PREPARE TO DISMOUNT ..." at this command the 1's and 3's will move forward a horse length and move to a position where their left hand has grabbed mane above the pommel and the right leg has risen to the cantle of the saddle. The commander will then command "DISMOUNT" at which point the trooper will swing down from the saddle and remove their left foot from the stirrup. They will then move into position at the left side of the horse, holding the bridle at the horse's muzzle. 2's and 4's will do the same and move up into line with the 1's and 3's.

CLOSED/OPEN/SKIRMISH ORDER

Closed vs. Open order. While the troopers mainly rode during movement in closed order 4" between knee's or in our case toes, the also rode in open interval. While marching in a rank, the commander can call "OPEN FILES FROM THE RIGHT ... MARCH." At that command each trooper to the left of the commander will oblique 45 degrees, while maintaining forward movement for one pace and then front the horse. The interval between the files should be sufficient

enough to allow a horse to pass through. The command can also be done FROM THE LEFT or FROM THE CENTER, at which point the troopers would oblique opposite the call for one pace. For the center, the troopers to the right and left of the center man would oblique away from him for one pace. Conversely, the commander can call "CLOSE FILES TO THE RIGHT ... MARCH." At MARCH the troopers close intervals towards the right of the line. There is also the concept of skirmish intervals in which a similar command to the open or close order intervals is given. Skirmish intervals allow a commander to quickly fill an open space like a field (although troopers are expected to remain in visual contact with the trooper to the right or left of them). The commands would be "SKIRMISH INTERVALS FROM THE (RIGHT/LEFT/CENTER) ...MARCH." The CLOSE FILES command would bring these elements back together.

RALLY

Rally. The Rally command allows the commander to rally his troops if they are broken up from a charge, movement, battle or even to organize them back from a skirmish line. Usually when the commander called "RALLY" the troopers would extricate themselves from their current engagements (turning shield side to the enemy) and resume their places in RANK to the commander facing the FRONT the commander is facing. It is good to pick a rally point or a point that troopers can typically expect to see the commander. Like to the right/rear of the enemy or right front of the enemy. One can see where guidons would come in handy here.

CHARGE

Charge. This command will usually be given when the rank or line is in a canter, but it could be given at any gait. At the command "CHARGE ... MARCH," the line should move quickly into a fast gallop. It is important that the line be maintained and straight. Alternatively, the commander could give the command "CHARGE AS FORAGERS ... MARCH." At MARCH the charge is also commenced, but it is done in an open interval.

Tactics/Implementation and Training

CHAIN OF COMMAND

Chain of command. There should be some chain of command in any mounted unit. If a commander is lost to battle, the second commander should take command. If casualties are taken, positions in line should be maintained until the commander orders the line to recount by FOURS. This may mean gaps or empty places in your column, but it will prevent your column from degenerating into a mess.

FILES/TWOS/FOURS RIGHT/LEFT

Doing a (FILES/TWOS or FOURS) (RIGHT/LEFT) will alter the ordering of your sets. The commander will have to keep this in mind to reorder the sets by reversing the commands.

TRAINING

The most experienced riders and horses in drill should be placed at each extreme of the line. Inexperienced horses and riders should be placed in between. If possible, reserve the #1 and #3 positions for those experienced – thus an inexperienced rider will always have an experienced rider next to him. 2's and 4's are good places for new people (especially the 2 position). The most difficult concept for the rider to get over is realizing that their horse is able to work with other horses. Horses that have a tendency to kick or bite should be discouraged of that trait by the rider. Most horses can overcome this instinct giving training and consistent discipline by the rider. Notice your horse is tensing up and ears laid back, give the horse a kick to have it focus back on you the rider and not the horses around it. Teach the horse that when on the clock, that behavior is unacceptable.

COMMANDS

Keep commands simple to maintain the strength and integrity of your line. The commander ALWAYS has to think at least 2 or 3 steps ahead. Come up with a script and implement the script for training. To practice your drill, the commander should figure out a pattern and using the calls complete that pattern. They can think out imaginary threats and figure out how to orient their FRONT to respond to that threat.

DISENGAGING

When in a line engaging the enemy, the command “RIGHT ABOUT ... MARCH,” will disengage the troopers from the enemy, but still present their shield side towards the enemy as they are turning.