First Empire

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Columns and Other Things on the Same Lines

(Or move to the left in file, right turn).

John Cook, U.K.

Judging from the recent correspondence on infantry columns it seems, to me, that there is a degree of confusion in the context of what constitutes Napoleonic infantry drill regulations and what constitutes tactics.

To address the question of whether the British used columns or not, however, is comparatively simple. The Rules and Regulations for the Formations, Field-Exercise, and Movements of His Majesty's Forces 1792, hereinafter the Rules and Regulations 1792, certainly recognises a variety of manoeuvre columns. The simple answer, then, is yes they could manoeuvre in column.

If, on the other hand, the question is did the British use columns tactically, then the answer is not so simple. The thrust of the Rules and Regulations 1792 is linear, essentially a reflection of 18th Century Prussian philosophy, and all the columns described are non-tactical formations having a twofold purpose. The first is movement, the second is having done so, to facilitate deployment, which in the vocabulary of the time means into line. In this respect, however, they are absolutely identical to those of all other nations during the period.

THE BASICS.

It does not seem to be appreciated sometimes, that a Napoleonic infantry battalion was a not a single unitary body, which is how it is often alluded to, but one made up of a number of smaller sub-units, each a separate, sometimes entirely independent, tactical entity with its own command and control element.

The first thing to consider is the individual soldier himself. He has to know a number of things starting with his place in the sub-unit. Take a dozen untrained individuals and tell them to fall in three ranks and the result will be chaos as they attempt to sort themselves out. To avoid all this each soldier is given a place in a rank and file of his own sub-unit which is unique to him. Just as importantly, individuals must know how to find their place in the ranks and files and to enable them to do so, one soldier in each sub-unit is designated the right flank marker on whom all the others fall in.

Having got our sub-unit properly organised into ranks and files, it has to be told what it is going to do. Every drill regulation I have ever seen, Napoleonic or modern, regardless of nationality, has a solution which is roughly similar. The words of command are divided into those that tell the soldier what is going to happen and those that tell him to execute the order. These are called the cautionary and executive.

In the context of complicated conversions, however, the passage of commands within a battalion can be quite involved and it is perfectly possible that sub-units will each require entirely different orders, from their own command element, in order to achieve conversion of the entire battalion from one formation to an other. It is simply not sufficient for the colonel to say "form square" because, depending upon the starting formation, say from column for example, at least one sub unit may have to stand fast, others may have to wheel to either left or right flank and another may have to advance in order to close the final side of the square.

The commanding officer having given the order, each company commander, and quite possibly platoon commander, will then give his own sub-unit the orders required to carry out the movements necessary to bring his sub-unit into its correct position in the new battalion formation. Not only may these be different but, in some processional evolutions, it may also be that certain sub-units move later than others.

So, the point is that not only does the giving of orders take time, not much admittedly, but the passage of orders down the chain of command from battalion commander to sub-unit commanders, to the point when they are given and acted upon, and the unit starts to move, can take considerably longer. Add to this, the time taken physically to complete the evolutions and what it all means is that conversions are far from instantaneous.

Whilst I concede that modern British Army ceremonial drill differs in detail from Napoleonic, it stamps the foot, it bends the knee and it swings the arms front to rear at shoulder height, the essence of it is generally similar and for the purposes of illustration, in very simple terms, words of command might go something like this.

"The company will advance" Translation: In a little while we are all going to march off in the direction of our front.

"By the Right" Translation: Take your dressing from the right flank marker.

"Quick" Translation: We will be marching at quick time.

"March" Translation: Do it now! (This is the executive command).

So, the result is that each soldier knows what is happening but drill, even the very basics, takes a degree of training. To achieve the sort of level of competence that one sees at the Trooping of the Colour, which is an education in the context of much of this article, takes considerable practice.

Napoleonic drill was at least as complex, some of the tactical conversions and other elements no longer exist in modern parade square ceremonial, yet battalions were supposed to do it under fire and over virtually any kind of terrain. This means that very many less well trained units, might actually be unable to maintain dressing whilst carrying out the more complicated evolutions under fire.

Be that as it may, let us return for a moment to the commands above because there are two pieces of information absolutely vital to what follows.

The first is the reference to the flank from which the unit is to take its dressing, known as the directing flank, in this case the right, hence "by the right". It might equally be the left

in which case the order would indicate this as in "by the left". Each sub-unit has flank markers, already alluded to, who are usually non-commissioned officers or junior officers, from whom the entire sub-unit takes its dressing and this principle of dressing carries on down to the soldier in the ranks, who takes his dressing from the man, in this case, on his right.

The second is the reference to the marching time, quick time in our example, which will continue to be given periodically as the unit moves, either by voice or drum. Listen to any regimental march, quick or slow, and you will hear the respective cadence, usually in the form of a drum beat. Drummers, then, are not a cosmetic addition but are actually vital to the continued cohesion of a unit whilst moving.

Armed with all this information, and a uniform length of pace, it is a matter of indifference to the trained soldier whether the battalion be in line or column. Without it, however, I can assure you that even in the comparatively friendly environment of the parade square, a unit as small as even a section can start to loose dressing within 20 or 30 yards.

The marker, the time and the pace, are the glue that holds it all together and it was simply not necessary for Napoleonic soldiers to "keep glancing to each side", on the contrary the head was kept still. 20th Century reenactors may well have to glance to left or right to keep dressing where the cadence is not indicated, but one cannot accept this as evidence of anything, except that they are not doing it properly.

In the French service a file was supposed to take up 26 inches; after 1808 a company at full strength was 44 files wide. So, not counting the supernumeraries and the gap between the divisions, a column of double divisions of the kind used towards the latter part of the period, which will be discussed later, could be in excess of 190 feet wide. For the aircraft enthusiasts out there, this is some six feet more than the wing-span of a B52 bomber. Not a lot of people, as they say, know that.

French columns formed on only single division frontage were between approximately 83 feet and 96 feet wide, pre and post 1808 reorganisation respectively. The distances between divisions could be from close to full interval, or from 48 to 96 feet in the case of a post 1808 column and so, although the column has considerable depth the individual sub-units are very much in linear order, marching at some distance from each other, with all that this implies for dressing. It was only in a closed column, the colonne en masse, that sub-units were so closed up that soldiers actually trod in the footsteps of the man in front of them.

The infantry battalion, as already pointed out, was not a single unitary body, but one divided into a number of linear sub-units for the purposes of tactical command and control. The soldier always fell in a two or three rank line. The sub units, thus, always formed in line, regardless of the formation adopted by the battalion as a whole and, furthermore, always moved in line. For the purpose of both firing and manoeuvre, these sub units functioned separately albeit as part of the whole but, to reiterate the point, be a battalion formed in column or line, the sub units, and the soldiers in them, were always in line. This is immutable.

I will concede that battlefield factors could certainly affect dressing but the alleged difficulties associated with marching in line, if the evidence of the 18th Century, and indeed 19th Century, is anything to go by, would appear to be exaggerated. Indeed, although a variety of cadences existed in all regulations, I am not aware of any regulations that specify a different pace or cadence when in line, all evolutions and conversions on the battlefield were generally carried out at the quick time, from somewhere between 100 and 120 paces per minute, depending on nationality.

This is actually quite slow in comparison with modern cadences but necessarily so if dressing was to be maintained. There were faster cadences but these were only practical for short distances as they were very tiring to perform, principally because Napoleonic drill was not executed as is modern drill, but with the knee locked, leg straight and arms still. Formations tended to fall into disorder when they were used over long distances.

A line moving at quick time, then, ought to move at exactly the same speed as a column. It may be, however, depending on the importance given it, that a line may halt to adjust dressing more often and it is here that time could be lost.

DRILL AND TACTICS.

Regulations and tactics are frequently spoken of in the same breath as if they were one and the same. They are not.

Drill forms a significant part of all infantry regulations, which, without exception, regardless of nationality, are entirely objective. They are no more than books of rules and in the context of drill, simply statements of uniform methods in which the soldiers are trained, individually and in groups, in order to enable them to convert from one formation to another and to move from one point to another in, as generations of British Army drill sergeants have said, "a smart and soldier-like manner", together with the words of command used and the number and length of paces taken, and so on.

So, the essence of drill regulations is how to do it, rather like the Kamasutra, and, like that document, they give comparatively little information about where and when. There, I hasten to add, any similarity ends but having disposed of the sex element, such as it is, we can now concentrate on the violence.

If drill is the how, the where and when are tactics. Tactics are to do with the way a unit fights, or the way in which it is employed in battle and how its weapons are brought to bear with maximum effect, be it physical or psychological. Tactics, unlike drill which is the immediate concern of the soldier, are

the prerogative of command, at whatever level happens to be appropriate.

Also unlike drill, tactics are subjective, being affected by physical things such as ground, weather, the nature of the enemy threat, the limitations, or strengths, of one's own troops, and those of the enemy's, by more ephemeral things such as the commander's judgment, talent, experience, or lack of any or all of these things, opinion, perceptions and so on, one could make an almost endless list.

To summarise. The way in which a conversion from one formation to another can be carried out is limited to the method found in the relevant drill regulations, there can only be one correct way, one with which the soldier is familiar, from which deviation is impossible. The choice of formation for the relevant tactical problem on the other hand, correct or otherwise, is many and dependent upon circumstances and judgment.

DOCTRINE AND PRACTICE.

If drill and tactics are not the same, it is equally true that there can be differences between tactical doctrine and tactical practice, in so far as formations, for example, can be used in way which was not envisaged for them. Except for the supposed Peninsular evidence, almost certainly flawed, of which more later, there is little to suggest that any regulations intended columns to be used tactically. All columns, be they of route when soldiers might march at ease between and to the battlefield, of manoeuvre or assault, both intended for movement on it, are non-tactical formations and this is why.

If tactics are to do with the way a unit fights, a tactical formation, by definition, is one intended for actual combat with the enemy, one, in simple terms, in which a unit is expected to fight, such as line or square. Doctrine universally points to columns being required to deploy for combat, essentially for musketry. Columns, without exception, are not formations in which soldiers are expected to fight.

Logic, too, dictates that the column was intended to deploy. What on earth would be the point in equipping troops with comparatively expensive muskets, powder and ball, if tactical doctrine called for a formation in which only the first rank was able to us its weapons? Even if the musket was to be relegated to nothing more than a convenient handle for the bayonet, the column would still be unable to use weapons other than those carried by the first rank, the others might have well fallen out for a smoke break, leaving their colleagues to get on with it.

Alright, a degree of exaggeration I admit but if doctrine really called for tactical columns, the pike would seem to have been a more suitably intimidating and effective weapon. This, of course, is equally ludicrous evidenced by the alacrity with which the pike armed elements of the Prussian Landwehr, such as they were, exchanged their anachronistic weapons for muskets as soon as possible.

Doctrine, simply stated, however, is that which is taught, that which is laid down in regulations or rules, in this case, infantry drill regulations. The difficulty here is that they have comparatively little, if anything, to contribute on the subjective matter of tactics other than by implication. Furthermore, tactical doctrine is often influenced by expediency or accumulated practical experience. There can, therefore, be some difference between the theory seemingly reflected in regulations and actual tactical practice.

A classic example is that of the two rank line used by the British, so well known that it hardly bears repetition, we know nevertheless that The Rules and Regulations 1792, whilst recognising two ranks, specifies a three rank line as the principal tactical formation. Were it not for indisputable evidence, one could be forgiven for believing that the former was the exception, rather than the rule. Tactical expediency, necessity even, made British infantry deploy in two ranks. Recent analysis, and a very persuasive argument it is too, indicates that this was less to do with developing fire power and rather more to do with covering frontage with what were often under strength units and, moreover, not enough of them.

The French **Règlement concernant l'exercise et les manoeuvres de l'infanterie du premier août 1791**, hereinafter the Règlement of 1791, has nothing of substance on skirmishing, yet the French use of infantry in the light role is legendary. Duhesme commented to the effect that skirmishing was the most natural form of fighting and, therefore, needed no regulations on the subject and, furthermore, that French skirmish tactics evolved during the Revolutionary Wars, simply because the larger part of the French infantry was incapable of performing the close order evolutions required by the Règlement of 1791.

This, however, must be something of a generalisation because it is a matter of fact that when not actually fighting, the French infantry spent considerable time and effort training in the close order drill of the Règlement of 1791. Furthermore, a significant proportion of French troops were veterans of the old army, both in the regular battalions and, to a degree, in the volunteer battalions in which many chose to serve because discipline was less rigorous. Consider also that skirmishing, if done properly, is a highly skilled function nothing like the amorphous activity so often alluded to. Indeed it has been said that skirmishing actually requires more training than close order functions. What seems to be perfectly clear, however, is that the Revolutionary period was, for the French, one of 'on the job training' and tactical improvisation.

It would, then, be a very audacious commentator who stated that manoeuvre columns were never used as tactical formations. That notwithstanding, the fact remains that they were intended for movement and not for combat. The morale benefits and relative ease of control of columnar formations on the move seem well established, indeed, I think it was Ney who

said that his untrained French conscripts of 1813 should be taught how to form column and square before anything else, but under the Règlement of 1791 it is clear that columns are formations for movement and, what today we would call, advance to contact. All columns were supposed to deploy for combat. Line, therefore, remained the principal tactical formation of all infantry.

The point here is that one must sometimes look beyond the regulations, some of which have no illustrations, are couched in unfamiliar archaic terms and usually in a foreign language and, thus, are doubly hard to understand, to actual tactical practice in the field in order to find how certain formations were used. This can compound the felony for in the first place diarists tend not to comment much on what, to them, was the obvious and common place, and in the second, when they do give precise details of tactical practice it is often because what they were seeing was unusual and, therefore, worthy of recording but, and here is the danger for individuals interpreting this a couple of 100 years later, it may also be very untypical.

What, however, there could be no deviation from was the foot drill involved in carrying out these conversions and evolutions and, indeed, the repertoire of conversions and evolutions themselves, for the simple reason that the soldier knew no other. Where variety could take place, possibly in a way other than that which was originally intended, was in their tactical application.

THE REGULATIONS AND TACTICAL PRACTICE.

It is frequently implied that the Règlement of 1791 was somehow the military equivalent of thumbs. It was, in fact, entirely conventional in almost every respect and similar to its peers. It was merely a tool the tactical use of which was special. Like all the regulations used during the period, it was a development of 18th Century Prussian regulations and, therefore, essentially linear in concept.

At this point it seems appropriate to consider, however briefly, the regulations in the context of this article, which is essentially the conversion from column to line. As the discussion was motivated in the first place by the question of British columnar tactics, it seems equally appropriate to start with that country. Before doing so though, it might be useful to explain the meaning of certain terms which will be encountered.

In case there is some doubt about what a rank is and what a file is, let me deal with these first. Imagine a unit drawn up facing to the north, ranks go west to east and files go north to south. When drawn up in line, a unit will normally be facing its front with its right markers on the right flank. When arranged thus, it is described as advanced. When the soldiers in it have executed a full pivot through 180° so that the unit is facing its rear, with the right marker standing on the left of the unit in relation to the direction it is facing, it is said to be retired. It is also inverted. All clear so far?

Regardless of whether the unit is advanced or retired, however, the front rank always remains the front rank, even in the case of the latter when it is actually at the rear of the unit. The rear rank then, always remains the rear rank even when at the front as when retired. Sub-units likewise retain their status in the unit hierarchy, thus the right flank sub-unit will stand on the left when the unit is retired. The same applies to flank markers. Units were moved in the retired, and thus inverted, position when tactical circumstances required it but they were usually advanced again as soon as possible, for the simple reason that regulations usually assume that units will be in that position and, clearly, attempts to make further conversions from an inverted formation would result in confusion. Any questions?

A column is described a being formed on the leading sub-unit. This is the head, which may be the right flank sub-unit, in which case it will be described as formed on the right, or right in front. It may equally be the left flank sub-unit or a centre sub-unit, as in the case of the colonne d'attaque which is actually a column of divisions formed on the centre, that is to say the centre division in front. Similarly a column may deploy on the head to one flank or the other, similarly on the rear, or on the centre, in which case deployment is to both flanks at once.

Reference will be made to pivots. These are what we would call turns today, thus a pivot was a turn of 180°, or an about turn, a half pivot was a 90° turn, either a right or left turn, and a quarter pivot of 45° was what is termed today a right or left incline.

Wheeling is well enough understood I think, but could be achieved in two different ways. The first was on a stationary pivot. This entailed those on the outside stepping long whilst the others stepped progressively shorter until the men on the inside, those on which the sub-unit was 'hinged', actually stood still. This was slow, and processional when in column because the sub- units behind the one moving had to stand fast, waiting their turn.

Much faster was the wheel on a moving pivot, the origins of which are open to debate but which came into use progressively from the latter part of the 18th Century. In this manoeuvre the marker on the flank to which the wheel was being made, executed a half or quarter pivot to that flank and marched off halting on the position where the sub-unit was to move to. Whilst he was doing this, the remaining soldiers executed a quarter pivot and marched, individually, in a wheel falling in on the marker. When the last man had fallen in on the marker, the sub-unit marched of as a whole in the new direction. All pretty straight forward stuff really.

Britain.

The British Rules and Regulations for the Formations, Field Exercise, and Movements of His Majesty's Forces 1792 is very well known and remained in use, without substantial change, throughout the Napoleonic Wars and beyond.

The British army immediately prior to the turn of the century was, without doubt, one of the most wretched in Europe. It was wanting in almost every respect. The early campaigns, such as that in Low Countries, were lack-lustre in the extreme and the army that emerged from them was held in contempt by both friend and foe alike, at home and abroad

Such was the state of the British army that other than comparatively minor expeditions, with mixed results, it was simply not fit to take the field on mainland Europe with any hope of seriously influencing events until 1809, even Wellington's successful campaign in northern Portugal in 1808 achieved little militarily in the greater scheme of things.

Consider in comparison what had been happening in central Europe, both in terms of numbers involved and effect. In 1809, the same year that a British army was ejected from Spain at Coruna and another forced to withdraw from the Continent

after the ill fated Walcheren expedition, vast French and Austrian armies clashed in the main theatre along the Danube where, although ultimately victorious, Napoleon himself was administered his first significant set-back at Aspern-Esling.

Glover identifies three areas of special neglect. The first was the lack of uniform regulations, the second was false doctrine resulting from experiences in America, and the third was an incompetent and negligent officer corps. That these should have been successfully addressed was due to two men, David Dundas, whose Principles of Military Movements became the Rules and Regulations of 1792, albeit in somewhat abbreviated form, and The Duke of York, the army's great reforming administrator, who ensured that they were adopted by the army as a whole in 1795.

It is well known that Dundas attended Prussian manoeuvres in 1785 and although he claimed that his Principles of Military Movements was based on his own experiences, of which it is true that he had sufficient to qualify him, there are close similarities between many of the evolutions in the Rules and Regulations of 1792 and the Prussian Reglement of 1788.

For tactical purposes a British battalion was organised in ten companies, identical in appearance to the five company Prussian battalion in 1806, with its ten tactical sub-units, which will be examined later. The Rules and Regulations of 1792 specify manoeuvre columns of platoon, subdivisions (company) and grand divisions (double company). These are identical to the Prussian columns of half zug, zug and company under the Reglement of 1788. Conversions were carried out at 108 paces to the minute, which was also the same as the Prussians.

Deployment from close subdivision column was by means of flank march by subdivisions in column of files in a variation of the 18th Century Prussian "en tiroir" innovation. When deploying on the right centre, that subdivision stood fast whilst the soldiers in those to its front and rear executed a half pivot, right and left respectively, marched to the flanks in files halting opposite their places in the line and made a further half pivot left or right towards their fronts. The leading, right flank, subdivision of the column now marked the extreme right flank of the line and now stood fast whilst the others dressed forward into line on it. An illustration is at Figure 1. Deployment on the left or right flank sub-division was accomplished in similar fashion and is described later when examining the Prussian Reglement of 1788.

When a line converted to column it did so into open column of subdivisions at full interval, that is to say the distance between each subdivision was equal to the width of a subdivision, or into close column of subdivisions at half interval where the distance between subdivisions was approximately the width of a platoon.

Conversion from line to open column of subdivisions on the left flank, was achieved by having the left flank subdivision stand fast whilst the remainder were retired by means of a pivot. The subdivisions then executed a 90° left wheel towards the right flank, followed by a half pivot to their right and wheeled in files into place behind the left flank subdivision. An illustration is at Figure 2. Conversion could also be made on the right flank in mirror image of that shown.

Conversion from line into close column of subdivisions on the right flank was achieved by having the right flank subdivision stand fast whilst the remainder made a half pivot to the right, whereupon the subdivisions marched by file diagonally into place in the column. An illustration is at Figure 3. Conversion could be made on the left flank similarly.

Deployment from column of grand divisions into line was perpendicular to the right flank 'en tiroir' as in the Prussian service. The rear, left flank, grand division stood fast whilst those ahead of it executed a half pivot to the right and marched in files to the right flank, halting opposite their places in the line and making half pivot to their left, thus advancing them. The leading, right flank, grand division of the column, now on the right flank of the line remained stationary whilst the others dressed forward into line on it. An illustration is at Figure 4.

Column of grand divisions was formed from close column of subdivisions. The even numbered subdivisions executed a half pivot to the left and marched to the left one interval, made a further half pivot to the right and dressed forward onto the uneven numbered subdivisions. Despite a double company frontage, the column of grand divisions was not the equivalent of the French colonne d'attaque, as it is often represented to be, but the equivalent of the Prussian company column under the Reglement of 1788. An illustration is at Figure 5.

The British used both open and closed squares, the latter essentially a closed column of grand divisions. Squares, however, are beyond the scope of this article.

Other than the light companies of the line battalions, the British army had no light infantry at the outbreak of the Revolutionary Wars. By 1797, however, the 5/60th Regiment had been raised, followed by 6/60th and 7/60th in 1799. In the following year an experimental rifle unit was also raised, becoming the 95th (Rifle) Regiment of Foot in 1802 with, eventually, a strength of three battalions.

By 1803, three light infantry regiments existed. The first was the 90th Regiment, although it played little part in the Napoleonic Wars. This was followed by the 43rd and 52nd Regiments, the 68th Regiment in 1808, the 51st and 85th Regiments in 1809 and 71st Regiment in 1810. Exactly like the Prussian fusiliers, British light infantry battalions were expected to fight in either closed order as conventional infantry, or skirmish order.

These units were trained under the Regulations for the Exercise of Riflemen and Light Infantry and Instruction for their Conduct in the Field of 1798, a translation of a work by the Austrian officer, de Rottenberg and Instruction concerning the Duties of Light Infantry in the Field, by Francis Jarry, published in 1803, both of which amplified the nine pages devoted to subject by Dundas.

Although the Light Division was to become one of the finest fighting Formations of any army during the period, the fact is that the British army was never numerically strong in light infantry and it is fortunate that the Peninsula army had the services of numerous foreign light infantry units, some of which, such as those of the King's German Legion and the Portuguese Caadores were examples of light units at their very best. There is, nevertheless, little doubt, that without the nucleus provided by the British army in general, there would have been no allied army in either the Peninsula or in Belgium.

The custom of creating specialist light and rifle battalions followed that established in Prussia and Austria. It was in contrast to that of the French whose philosophy was the

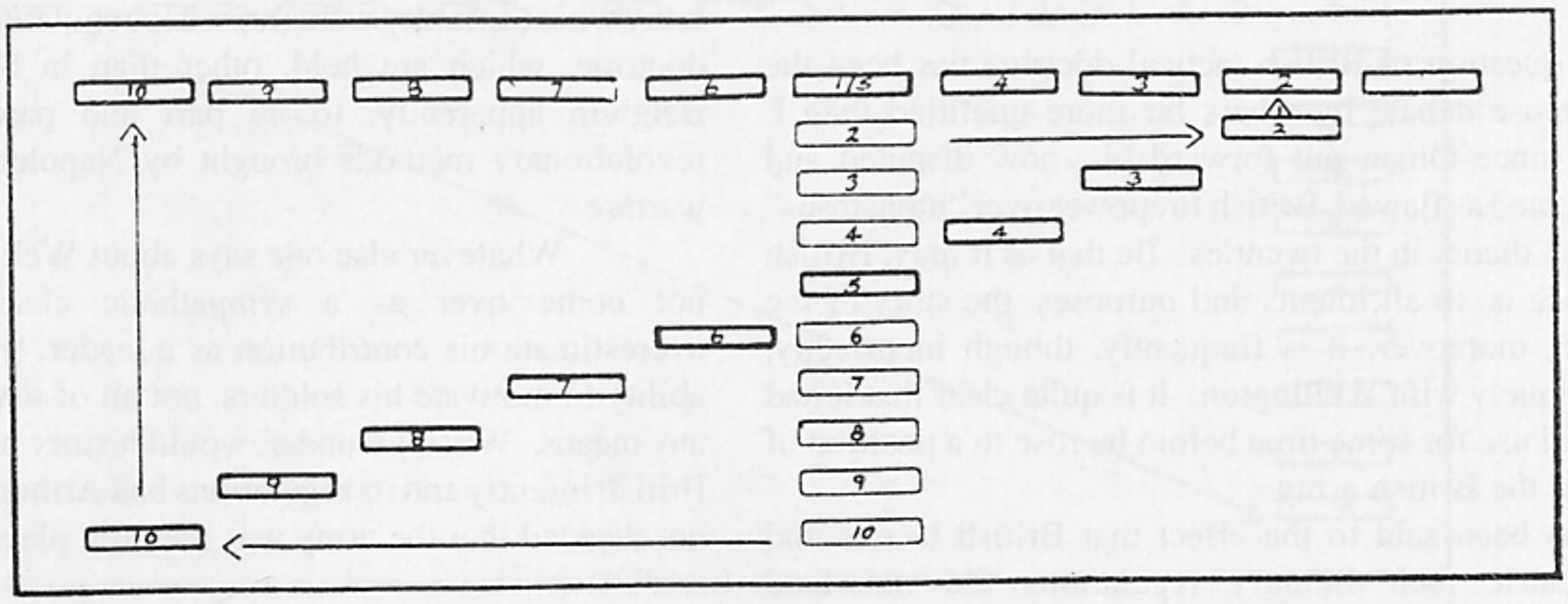

Figure 1. **Britain: A close column sub-divisions on the right deploys on the right centre.**

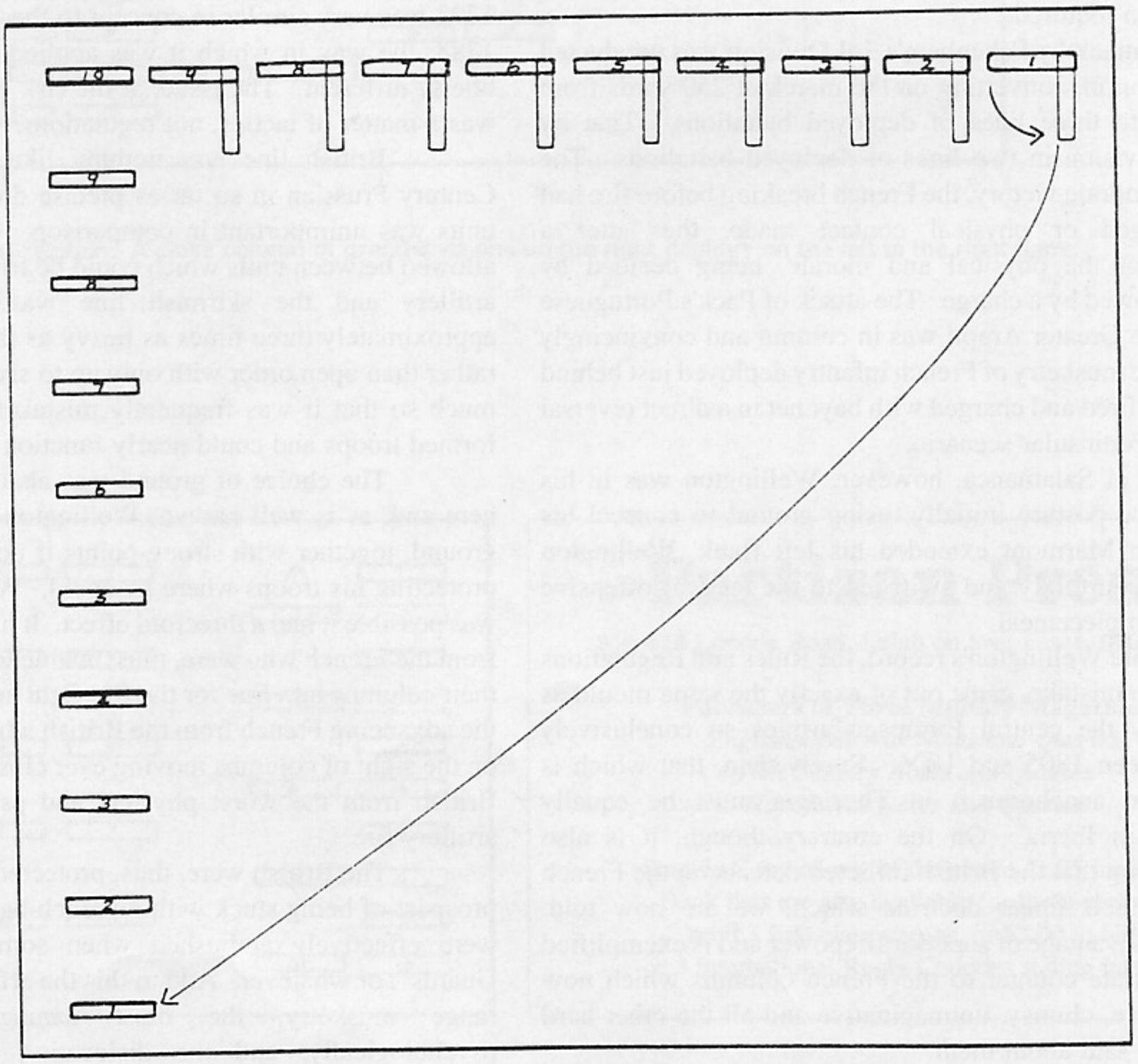

Figure 2. **Britain: A line forms a column of sub-divisions open to full interval on the left.**

universal infantryman. I don't think that Tim Franklin's view that "only the British seem to have recognised the importance of skirmishers in the French system" really stands up to much examination.

The question of British tactical doctrine has been the subject of intense debate by others far more qualified than I, more or less since Oman put forward his, now disputed and generally accepted as flawed, British firepower over "monstrous" French column theory in the twenties. Be that as it may, British tactical practice is, to all intents and purposes, the story of the two rank line, moreover, it is frequently, though incorrectly, associated uniquely with Wellington. It is quite clear that it had been in general use for some time before he rose to a position of prominence in the British army.

It has been said to the effect that British tactics and doctrine, because their infantry regulations did not lend themselves to any other, were almost always defensive. It is a matter of fact that most of Wellington's battles were fought on the tactical defensive, but it is also true that, as Wellington pointed out, were the Peninsula army to be destroyed there was little hope, if any, of it being replaced. He was, in other words, not in a position to take great risks with it.

On the other hand, although the victory at Salamanca was in part due to the celebrated cavalry action in which Le Marchant was killed, and the French loss of both their commander and second in command at approximately the same time, which caused a critical breakdown in command, it is also evidence that British infantry was perfectly capable of the tactical offensive when required.

The attack by Pakenham's 3rd Division was conducted initially in column, converting on the march at 250 yards from the French into three lines of deployed battalions. That by Leith's 5th Division in two lines of deployed battalions. The former was a morale victory, the French breaking before fire had been exchanged or physical contact made, the latter a combination of the physical and morale, being decided by musketry followed by a charge. The attack of Pack's Portuguese Brigade on the Greater Arapil was in column and convincingly repulsed by the musketry of French infantry deployed just behind the crest, who fired and charged with bayonet in a direct reversal of the usual Peninsular scenario.

Even at Salamanca, however, Wellington was in his usual defensive posture initially, using ground to conceal his forces. When Marmont extended his left flank, Wellington grasped the opportunity and switched to the tactical offensive destroying him piecemeal.

Despite Wellington's record, the Rules and Regulations 1792, make no mistake, came out of exactly the same mould as those used by the central European armies so conclusively defeated between 1805 and 1806. Surely then, that which is held to be an anachronism in Thuringia must be equally anachronistic in Iberia. On the contrary though, it is also received wisdom that the British inflicted defeats on the French by virtue of their linear doctrine which, we are now told, bestowed the advantage of superior firepower and is exemplified as the appropriate counter to the French columns which now become massive, clumsy, unimaginative and all the other hard things that are said about them.

So, we now have a British army, whose infantry are trained in regulations similar, identical in parts, to those used by the Prussians at Jena, I will concede that the former's do have illustrations but apart from that and the language there is not much to choose between them, consistently defeating a French army whose infantry were trained in regulations and used tactical doctrine, which are held, other than in Spain, Portugal and Belgium apparently, to be part and parcel of the alleged revolutionary methods brought by Napoleon to 19th Century warfare.

Whatever else one says about Wellington, and he does not come over as a sympathetic character, one cannot overestimate his contribution as a leader, by which I mean his ability to motivate his soldiers, not all of whom were British by any means. What, I wonder, would history have to say about the British infantry and its regulations had Arthur Wellesley's mother not decided that the army was the only place for her "awkward son".

In Wellington, perhaps more importantly, the army also had one clearly identifiable, determined and ruthless chief who was sufficiently geographically distant from London that he could do, more or less, as he wanted without fear of immediate political interference, and certainly without question or debate from his subordinates. Contrast this with the 'command by committee' method that blighted the other allied armies, particularly in the early campaigns and, indeed, the sometimes behaviour of the Peninsular marshals. I digress.

I return to my opening preamble in which I said that regulations and tactics are not the same thing. Although the infantry drill contained in the British Rules and Regulations of 1792 was very similar in concept to the Prussian Reglement of 1788, the way in which it was applied on the battlefield was utterly different. The issue, at the risk of becoming repetitive, was a matter of tactics, not regulations.

British line was nothing like so rigid as the 18th Century Prussian in so far as precise dressing of and between units was unimportant in comparison. Quite large gaps were allowed between units which could be filled with light troops or artillery and the skirmish line was usually very dense, approximately three times as heavy as the French, in extended rather than open order with only up to six feet between pairs, so much so that it was frequently mistaken for the main line of formed troops and could nearly function as such.

The choice of ground was also a vital ingredient and here and, as is well known, Wellington invariably chose high ground, together with strong points if possible, concealing and protecting his troops where he could. Where this concealment was possible it had a threefold effect. It hid the British main line from the French who were, thus, unable to judge when to deploy their columns into line for the fire fight and assault, it concealed the advancing French from the British who were unable to dwell on the sight of columns moving ever closer, and it protected the British from the worst physical and psychological effects of artillery fire.

The British were, thus, protected from the intimidating prospect of being stuck with a French bayonet, whilst the latter were effectively ambushed when someone said "stand up Guards", or whatever. Add to this the effect of a volley of close range musketry, the most damaging physically and psychologically, and the dislocation of expectations was complete. The final, and possibly most important, ingredient was a local British counter attack which decided the issue. It

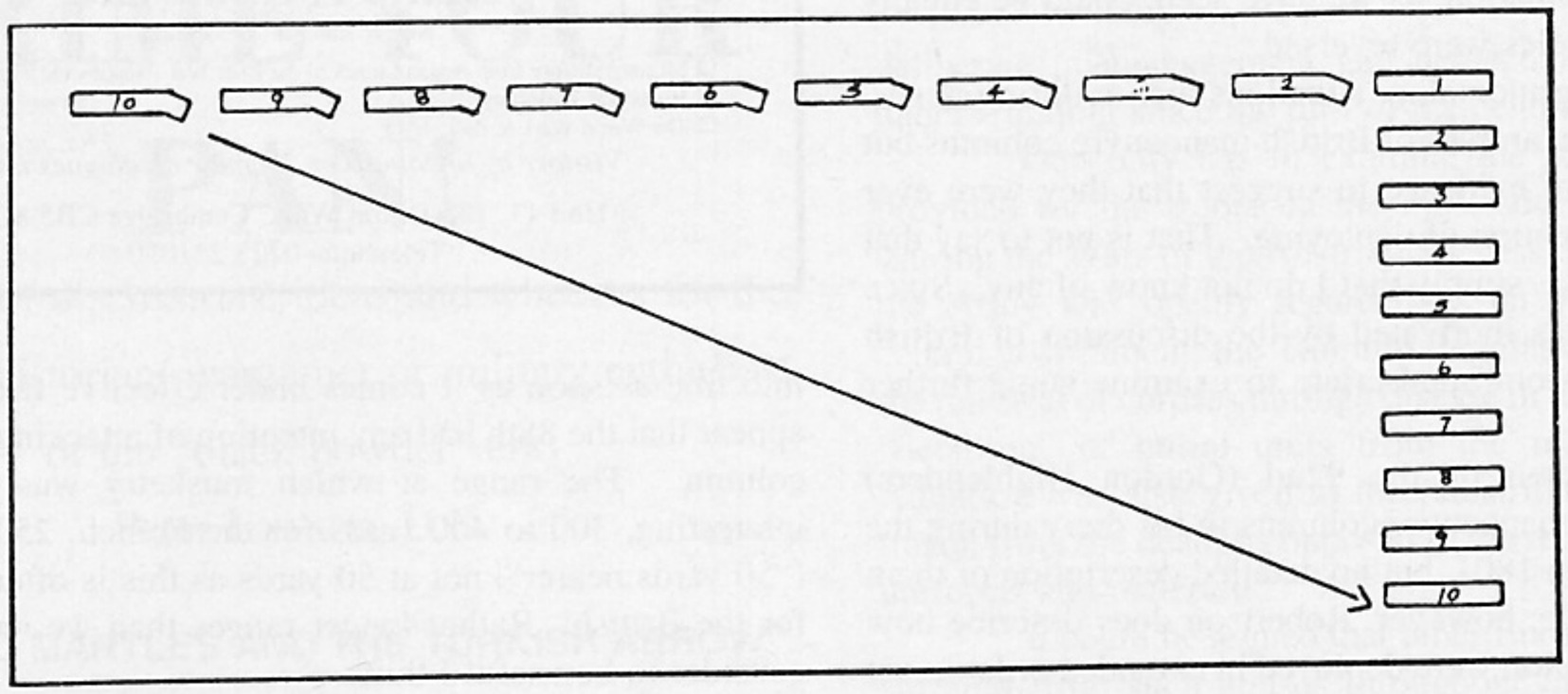

Figure 3. Britain: A line forms a close column of sub-divisions on the right.

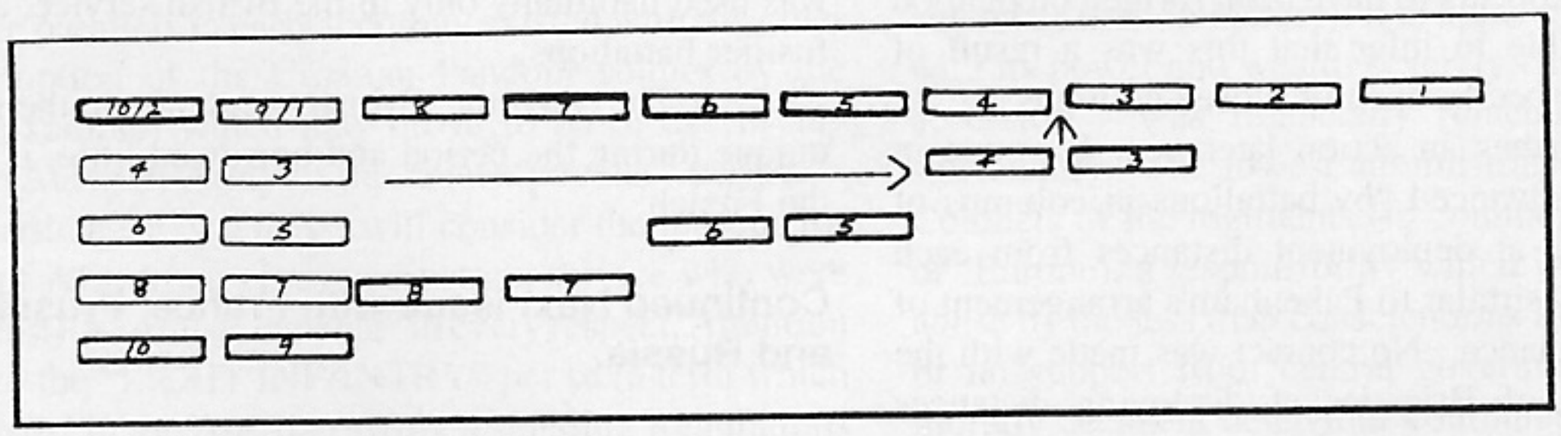

Figure 4. Britain: A close column of grand divisions on the right deploys on the left to the right flank.

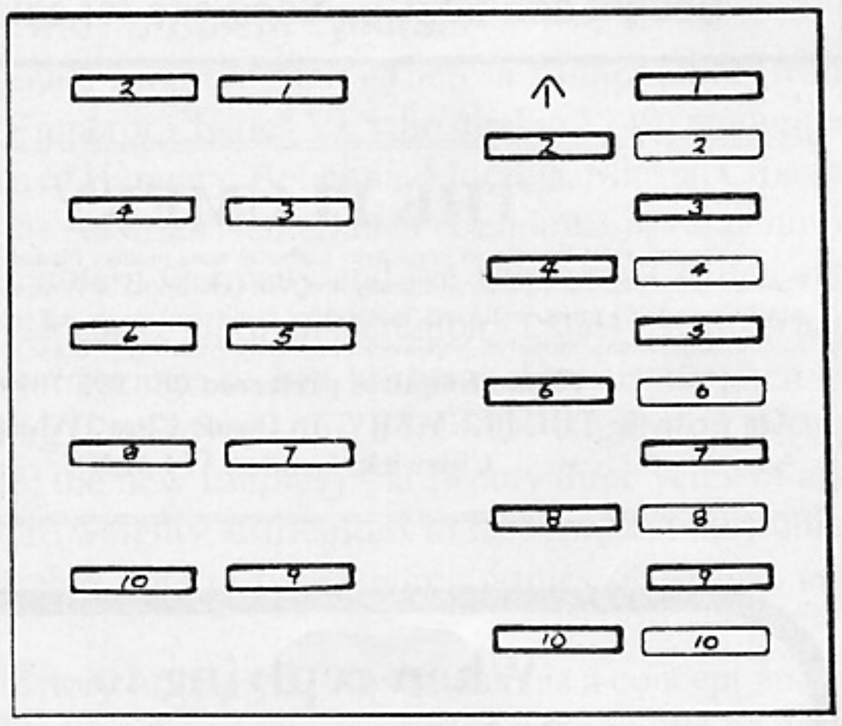

Figure 5. Britain: A close column of sub-divisions on the right forms a column of grand divisions open to half interval on the right.

was a morale victory as much as anything else brought about by surprise. This combination, as we have seen, could be equally effective when the roles were reversed.

Discounting anomalous situations such as during sieges, there are numerous examples of British manoeuvre columns but I have not a shred of evidence to suggest that they were ever used without the intention of deploying. That is not to say that none exists, of course, simply that I do not know of any. Since this entire article was motivated by the discussion of British columns, it would seem appropriate to examine some further examples.

Sgt Robertson of the 92nd (Gordon Highlanders) Regiment mentions manoeuvre columns in his diary during the Egyptian campaign in 1801, but no detailed description of them is given. As an aside, however, Robertson does describe how his and another battalion were deployed in extended order to act as light troops, there being none available, and how that extended line was able to develop sufficient musketry to beat off cavalry. Not only does this illustrate the density of a British skirmish line, but it should give pause for thought to those who claim that only light companies of British line battalions could deploy in that role.

A column of files would have been two wide, the sub-unit simply having made a left or right turn and marched off. The subsequent column appears to have been formed on platoon frontage and it is possible to infer that this was a result of ground. Batty does not specify open or closed columns.

Batty also describes an action later near Bayonne in which the 1st Division advanced "by battalions in columns of companies, the Brigades at deployment distances from each other". This sounds very similar to Pakenham's arrangement of the 3rd Division at Salamanca. No contact was made with the enemy but the spacing of Brigades at deploying distances indicates that the possibility was thought to exist. It is obvious from Batty's description that the intention was to deploy had contact been made.

Batty frequently alludes to columns but the type is not always described. He describes the crossing of the Nivelle thus, however, "allied columns descending from the fortified position in files to the banks of the river, and then forming columns in the most perfect order ... the ford was wide enough to cross by platoons".

The well known description by Costello supports the tactical use of lines, rather than column, for the assault in the British service.

A battalion at Vitoria, which he identifies as the 88th Regiment, although this is not relevant to the discussion, advanced under artillery fire to attack a French regiment deployed in line on the "verge" of a hill. The 88th was formed "in close column of companies" initially, and then "deployed into line, advancing all the time towards their opponents". The French line then fired a volley at them when they were "within 300 to 400 yards" sufficient to cause casualties because the 88th "closed their files on the gap it had made", and commenced to advance at "double time until within 50 yards nearer to the enemy", when they fired a volley in return before the French had time to fire a second volley, cheered and charged with the bayonet, the enemy breaking before impact.

The close column of companies is clear enough and, exactly as manoeuvre columns were supposed to do, it deploys into line as soon as it comes under effective fire. It does not appear that the 88th had any intention of attacking the French in column. The range at which musketry was exchanged is interesting, 300 to 400 yards for the French, 250 to 350 yards ("50 yards nearer", not at 50 yards as this is often interpreted) for the British. Rather longer ranges than we would normally consider to be useful I think.

British infantry regulations were unremarkable and anachronistic compared with those of their later peers. Doctrine, as it evolved in The Peninsula, undoubtedly emphasised the tactical defensive, if only for reasons of economy but which, again, is in stark contrast the that of the French and Napoleonic practise generally. British tactics differed in the density of the skirmish line and the two rank deployment of the formed line, which of all the major powers, although well known generally, was used habitually only in the British service, and by Prussian fusilier battalions.

The way the British went about their business was unique during the period and borrowed little, if anything, from the French.

Continued Next issue with France, Prussia, Austria and Russia.