

THE  
EXERCISE  
FOR THE  
MILITIA

Of the Province of the  
*Massachusetts-Bay*

By Order of his EXCELLENCY.

*BOSTON*

Printed and Sold by John Draper, Printer to his  
Excellency the Captain General, etc 1758

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**The Exercise for the Militia...disclaimer.**

Greetings!

In your hands you are holding a reproduction of “The Exercise for the Militia of the Province of Massachusetts-Bay by the Order of His Excellency, 1758”. I had received a copy, of a copy, of a copy, of a copy etc...of the original 1758 document. Obviously, it was hard to read and this is my attempt to make it readable. I have tried my best to copy word for word the entire text given to me but because of the poor quality of the original I suspect I have missed a few words here and there; for this I apologize. I have left the original punctuation in place as well as capitalization. Needless to say this period grammar makes it hard on our modern senses and plays havoc with a modern computer’s spell checking capabilities but I strongly wanted to leave this document as original as possible. The one exception being I did type the letter “s” where it needed to be – in place of the period “f”.

At any rate, I hope you enjoy this document as I feel it is quite an interesting read!

Sincerely,

Mark A. Rohman  
President, Fletcher’s Scouting Company

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*The* EXERCISE  
FOR  
The MILITIA of the Province of the  
*MASSACHUSETTS – BAY,*  
By Order of His EXCELLENCY

XX

As it is the essential Property of a free Government to depend on no other Soldery but it's own Citizens for it's Defence; so in all such free Governments every Freeman and every Freeholder should be a Soldier. A Freeman that is no soldier does as much as in him lyes, that he should be no longer Free: For if the same Spirit was to become general, there would be no Soldery within the Government; and it must either cease to be defended and secure it's Freedom, or seek it's Defence in Foreign Assistance, and so be no longer Independent. Every Man therefore that wishes his own Freedom, and thinks it is his Duty to defend that of his Country, should as he prides himself in being a Free Citizen, think it his truest Honour to be a Soldier Citizen. In such Government, composed of such Men, Slaves only and Aliens are forbid the Use of Arms; while it is the Right, Priviledge and Pre-eminence of a Free Citizen to bear Arms in the Bands of his country.

Tis' base and slavish not to be allowed to bear Arms in his Own and Country's Defence: Tis' Perfidy and Treachery in a Free Citizen not to be willing so to bear Arms. But to affect to bear Arms, and not to know or learn the Use of them – is worse than Slavishnes and Treachery; it is cruelly; with Aggravation, to mock his Country in it's Distress.

Let therefore every Man that appealing to his own Heart, feels the least Spark of Virtue of Freedom there, being that it is an Honour which he owes himself, and a Duty which he owes his Country, to bear Arms; to know the Use of them, and to be willing, with his life, to bear them and use them for his Country. If he once is conscious that he ought to learn this Duty, he will soon follow it, For there is neither Difficulty nor Mystery in it. There are many Things which a Soldier, whose whole time is devoted to that Service alone, may learn and acquire the Practice of, that a Militia cannot spare the Time to learn. There are also many Things which are necessary for a Soldier who is inlisted and in pay for that Service only, to learn, practice and do, which are not at all necessary for a Militia.

The Regular Soldiery is composed of Men who for the most Part never bore Arms and are totally unskilled in the Use of them: 'Tis therefore in the first Place absolutely necessary that they, as Individuals, should be taught to handle the Firelock; and as all have this to learn, 'tis right that all should learn one Method – As this Method is not Natural but Artificial, it becomes necessary that they should be so constantly continued in the Exercise of it, that the Method may become Habitual and almost Natural; for Use is second Nature.

It is not so with the Men who compose the Militia of these Countries. Every Man here knows and is peculiarly expert in the Use of the Firelock: 'Tis almost as constantly in his Hand as any Implements of Husbandry or of his Trade. As an Individual therefore, he knows already better than six days, or six Times six Days in a Year, would teach him in the Use of his Arms. If it be expected that he learn the one uniform Exercise prescribed, while he has a peculiar Method of his own in handling his Arms; a few Days training in a Year may, during the Time he is training, make him perform it in an awkward constrained Manner; but it will no more habituate him to, or teach him to use his right Hand six Times a Year, will make him right-handed. It is therefore to be confided first, what is absolutely necessary to be done; and next, what Militia can be brought to do. For a little and well is better than a great deal that is stark naught.

All the Exercise of Arms therefore that I shall require of the Militia is That Use of them which in Time of Action will indispensably and necessarily be required; And as it is absolutely necessary that every Man should be able to load duely and fire steadily, so he who can load the quickest and fire with the best Aim will, as an Individual, do most Execution.

And if in Action, every Man (??) to fight as a single Person, I should wish every Man to load and (??) his own Way, in that which he has been used to; and think him the best Soldier who could throw the most Balls into a Mark in the Shortest Time.

But as in Service the whole is to act as a one united Body, and against a Body of Men – something more and something different is required, tho' in my Opinion very little more with very little Difference will serve the Purpose.

And first, Whatever method a man has of loading and firing by himself, when he acts in a Body of Men, it must be such as not to interfere with his Neighbour, nor to interrupt his acting, or obstruct his Arms. For so the Service of Both would be lost; and as far as the Obstruction or Embrangement of Arms reach'd, so far would the Service of all be lost. Every motion therefore that he makes with his Firelock, must be absolute Necessity be right up and down directly before him, or in a direct Line from Front to Rear in the Space betwixt him and his right hand Man, as I will presently more particularly describe. The same is also absolutely necessary to be observed in every Motion he makes with his bayonet, either while he is fixing it, or when it is fixed.

But further, When a Number of Men are acting together in a Body in close Order as they should, if one falls back to load while another advances himself to fire, the Consequences of such interfering Motions will be, as it has always been found to be, that they will wound and destroy more of one another than of the Enemy: It is therefore absolutely necessary that they learn to load and fire a near together at the same Time as can possibly be: For the Reason just mentioned, it is absolutely necessary for their own safety; but it is not less absolutely necessary to do

effectual Service against a Body of Men. - The killing one or two at a Time in such a Body, will not dishearten, weaken or break them, so that they may be forced: But the Fire well aimed of a number together, if it take Place, will fall to heavy and destroy at once to many, as will entirely dishearten, weaken and break any Body of Men in the World.

All that I have said hitherto relates only to a Body of Men, fix'd in that Spot where they come to Action: But that a Number of Men should move together in a Body, that they may be able to march with different Fronts as the Road or Pass will permit; that they should be able to take Possession of their Ground in different Forms, as the Nature of the Ground requires; that they should be able to change and vary their Form even in Time of Action, as the Strength, Position or Motions of the Enemy may make necessary – and finally, in case of their being broke, that from small and lesser Parties they may be able to collect and form again: That they may be able to perform these Things, which are absolutely necessary, and not more than are necessary, you should divide your Regiment into Parts by Divisions, and the Companies into lesser Subdivisions; draw up these lesser Divisions on different Grounds, and teach them to form themselves from such into Companies; and further teach these Companies, thus collected, to form themselves into Regiments, taking their proper Posts: To do this, it is first absolutely necessary, that you teach the Men to perform their Facings – and to open or close their Order. - 'Tis also absolutely necessary, that the Regiment and Companies be taught to Wheel and March by these several Divisions. As these Evolutions are contrived to form a Number of Men, (which, without such Order, would be a mere Mobs (??) or Rabble-Rout) to form them, I say, into one Body, that shall act as it were with one Soul, as they are contrived that such Body should take different Forms and Positions, and more different Ways, without Confusion or ceasing to be such a one form'd body. And of whose more intricate Evolutions, such as doubling the Files, either by half Files, or half Ranks in Divisions; such as I fear wou'd never be learnt with Exactness, nor executed with an habitual Readiness, wou'd, in my Opinion, waste much of the Men's Time in learning; and when wanted to be done in Action, being done imperfectly, would rather throw the Body into Confusion, and tend to break it, than to preserve it's Order and Unity; but besides the Danger of Confusion and utter Breaking, in attempting to perform what will be never executed in Service, 'Tis clear from Mr. Bland, That the End to be derived from this doubling of Files by division, namely, for the readier passing of Defiles, Bridges or Passes; may be gain'd by a much easier and plainer Motion, “When a Battalion says Mr. Bland, is strained for want of Room that they can't march, the whole in Front, an entire Platoon, should be ordered to fall back and march in the Rear, till the Interval will allow of it's moving up.” In the same manner, when a Battalion is marching in Divisions, and comes to some Defile, Bridge or Pass, where the whole cannot march in Front, the right or left half Division should be ordered to fall back and march in the Rear of the other half, till the Ground will allow of it's moving up. Many Things, says Mr. Bland, that might be greatly useful, and of the utmost Service, were they so perfectly learnt as to be executed with an habitual Readiness, should never be practiced where there is a want of constant Training and military Discipline, the Officers cannot be supposed to have a thorough ready Knowledge of the Service; and where we know the private Men, as in the Case of Militia, cannot be brought to be very exact: In such Cafe, it would be infinitely dangerous to attempt it.

Upon this Idea of the very great Danger there is in dividing a Battalion into such Divisions as a Militia would neither understand, like, not learn, such as would therefore rather

tend to weaken, confuse and break that Battalion, than order, form and strengthen it: Upon this Idea it is, that I shall by no means recommend to the Militia that Method of Forming a regiment by Grand-divisions, Sub-divisions and Platoons, which is used amongst the regular Soldiers. A militia Soldier is never so hearty and confident in his Service and Action, as when Side by Side to his Neighbour, his Friend, his Relations, and united with them; never so well satisfied in his Duty of Obedience, as when under the Command of his own Officer, who he knows is his Neighbour, his friend, perhaps his Relation, and acting under the same Circumstances, the same Principles and Interest as himself. Those Divisions therefore of a Battalion which may possibly divide and disunite a Man from the Company of his Friends, and by the usual Method practiced in the regular Service of Posting the Officers, may make such fall under the Command of some Officer in a Regiment that he is a Stranger to, and who is unknown to him, and with whom he is under no natural Connections: The forming a Battalion I say, be those Divisions, and that Method of Posting the Officers, does by no means suit the Spirit of a Militia. - Besides no Man without, constant and continued Training (which cannot be the Case of Militia) will ever learn to know the several Divisions and Platoons to which he belongs: the Battalion therefore by that means would be in Confusion; and if ever broke, either by the Interruption of broken Ground, or thick Woods, or the Force of the Enemy, would never be able again to Rally and Form.

The regiment is naturally divided into *Companies* which, generally speaking, are so nearly equal, that they may very well serve in the stead of what is called Grand-divisions. Instead of Sub-divisions I would divide the Companies into two parts; the Captain to command the right Division, the Ensign the left, and the Lieutenant in the Rear: This I call dividing the Battalion into *Commands*, as all the Divisions are commanded by Officers. As it will be necessary still further to divide the Battalion – I would divide these Commands into two Parts; the right *Party* to be commanded by the Commission Officer, the left by a Serjeant. As those small Bodies of Men which are commanded by Non-commission Officers are called Parties; I call this, Dividing the Battalion into Parties – So that instead of the artificial Division of the Battalion into Grand-divisions, Sub-divisions and Platoons, which must constantly vary according to the Number of the Battalion, and which consequently a Militia Soldier, and perhaps the Officers, would never learn to know, I divide the Battalion into *Companies*, *Commands* and *Parties* – that is, the Captain's Command of his Company, the Subalterns' Command, and will know; it's impossible they should be ignorant which Company they belong to; they could never be ignorant under which of the Subaltern's Command they fell; and it would be as easy as knowing their Right Hand from their Left to know which Division of this Command, namely, whether the Subalterns, or the Serjeants they belong'd to, and for the same Reason I would never have the Drummers other wise posted than at their respective Companies: So that whether the Battalion was ordered to Wheel, to March, to Fire or do any other Service, by these Divisions every officer knowing his own Command, or Party, and every Man knowing to what Division he belonged, it would be done with Ease and without Confusion.

Upon these Principles above laid down, it appears to Me, That the following System of Discipline is all that is necessary for the Militia. But if there be any Colonel, or Commander of any Independent Company that thinks his Regiment or Company can learn more, if they learn it well, so much the better: But what follows, being absolutely that which each Man as a Soldier should learn, and all as a Military Body be able to perform;

IT IS MY ORDER, that every Colonel or Commander of a Company in the Foot do use and train their Men in the following Exercise: And that the Pains and Penalties by the several Militia Laws of this Province for Disobedience, or Neglect to learn, &c, be levied for their Disobedience or Neglect to learn, practice and perform this, and no other.

## ARTICLE I.

### Of Forming the Battalion.

THE Companies must take their Post from Right to Left according to their Seniority, except the Grenadier Company which is always upon the Right, each Company to be drawn up in three Ranks; for as the Forming it into six Ranks by front and Rear Half-Files is only for the sake of performing that Part of the Manual-Exercise which is not here required of Militia; the forming them into six Ranks is needless. The Opening of Files is also needless; for that Part of the Exercise only which is performed in close Order is here required.

As I have above shown the Reason why I do by no Means approve of the Officers in a Battalion of Militia being pulled, according to the Method that is called, Taking their Post in Battalion:

II IS HERE DIRECTED, That the Colonel take his Post in the Front at the Center: The Lieutenant-Colonel in the Rear at the Center: The Major upon the Right in the Rear: The Adjutant upon the Left in the Rear, moving as Occasion in Service shall require: And that every Captain or Captain-Lieutenant take his Post at the Head of his Command, upon the Right of the Company; and the Ensign upon the Left; the Lieutenant in the Rear; One Serjeant and One Corporal in the same rank with the Privates; but upon the Right-Flank of the Front and Rear Ranks: One Serjeant and One Corporal, with the Lieutenant in the Rear; the Drummer of each Company in the Rear of their respective Companies at the Center. Each Captain is then to subdivide each of these Commands into Two equal Parts; and when the Regiment is ordered to March, Wheel or Fire by *Parties*, the Left Part of each Command is to be given to a Serjeant.

And this general Rule is to be observed, That in Marching every commissioned or non-commissioned Officer, who commands any of the above Divisions, is to march at the Head of his Division; but in Wheeling or in Firing, to fall in with the ranks upon the Right Flank of his command.

I post the Lieutenant-Colonel, Major and Adjutant as above, because they must be so posted in Action: and I do propose that the Battalion should perform no Exercise but what is necessary in Action.

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## The *EXERCISE*.

THE Ranks are to be two Feet asunder, from Heel to Heel: The Files take up about twenty-one inches when their Elbows touch, each Man keeping his Arms close to his Sides: Each Man stands with his Heels four Inches asunder, his Toes turn'd out: The Firelocks (in this Exercise) are carried with the Left Hand under the Butt, the Left Arm a little bent; but at all other Times are to be carried as usual.

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Words of Command to be given by each Officer who Commands a Division when in Service	Words of Command to be given when instructing the men in the Exercise.	EXPLANATIONS
	Take Care	A perfect Silence, the Utmost Attention and Steadiness, are absolutely necessary to be observed both by Officers and Men at all Times when under Arms: but more especially when they are formed for going through the Firings not the least Motion is to be made but what is directed in Consequence of the several Words of Command. This Therefore cannot be too strongly enforc'd on young Soldiers particularly.
—             	Rest upon your Arms	1. Your Firelock being upon your left Shoulder, held with the left Hand in the usual Manner, - lower the left Hand, thus lowering down the Firelock, as low as your Arm will permit: then with your right Hand seixe it by the Barrel close by your left Shoulder, and with your right hand bring the Firelock directly before you, setting the Butt-end upon the Ground with the Muzzle right up, and both Hands seizing the Firelock about the Sight.
Fix your < Bayonets       	Fix your Bayonet	2. With your Right- Hand draw your Bayonet bringing it directly before you, then turning the Point right up, and bring the Handle close to the Muzzle of your Firelock: Fix it firm upon the Sight.




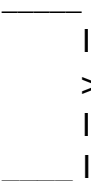






Words of Command to be given by each Officer who Commands a Division when in Service	Words of Command to be given when instructing the men in the Exercise.	EXPLANATIONS
<div> <div> <div>I</div> <div>I</div> <div>I</div> <div>I</div> <div>I</div> <div>I</div> </div> <div>_____</div> </div>	<div>Present</div>	<p>The front Rank steps back with the right Foot, three feet in a direct Line to the Rear, kneels on the right Knee, the perpendicular Line of the Body falling about 12 Inches behind the left heel, the Body by that means being properly poised, the Butt-end of the Firelock at the same Time being placed upon the Ground in a Line with the left Heel, the center Rank steps back with the right Foot, one Foot in a direct Line to the Rear, by that means bringing their right Foot just behind the right Foot of the front Rank, the Firelock kept in the same Position as at first.</p> <p>The rear Rank steps with the right Foot to the Right, till his Toe touches the hinder Part of the left Heel of his right hand Man, at the same Time bending his right Knee a little so that his Body may be opposite to the Interval of his File-leader, and the File upon his Right.</p> <p>The Firelock in the same Attitude as that of the center Rank.</p> <p>Bring down the Muzzle of your Piece with both Hands, throwing forward your left Hand as far as the Swell of the Stock under the Barrel, placing the Butt-end in the Hollow betwixt your right Breast and Shoulder, pressing it close to you at the same Time taking your right Thumb for the Cock (but keeping your Fore-finger on the Tricker) both Arms close to your Body: the center Rank levels a little to the Right of the front Rank, the rear Rank levels through the Interval of his File-leader and right hand File, the whole taking good Aim, by leaning their Heads to the Tight and looking along the Barrels.</p>
<div> <div>_____</div> <div>I</div> <div>I</div> <div>I</div> <div>I</div> <div>I</div> <div>I</div> <div>I</div> </div>	<div>Fire</div>	<p>Draw the Tricker briskly with your Fore-finger, and immediately upon Firing, the front Rank rises, all the three Ranks bringing their right Heels four Inches distance behind their left Heels, at the same Time bring back the Firelock almost level as before directed, the right Thumb upon the Cock, the right Elbow raised, the Ranks then facing full to the Right.</p>

Words of Command to be given by each Officer who Commands a Division when in Service	Words of Command to be given when instructing the men in the Exercise.	EXPLANATIONS
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Words of Command to be given by each Officer who Commands a Division when in Service	Words of Command to be given when instructing the men in the Exercise.	EXPLANATIONS
<div style="text-align: center;">  </div> Return your < Bayonets	Unfix your Bayonet. Return your Bayonet Shoulder.	3d, Face to your proper front. And, 4 <sup>th</sup> , Bring up your left Hand under your Right as when rested upon your Arms.  <div style="text-align: center;">  </div> As Before.

*N.B.* In practicing the Exercise, the Men Should be taught to do all the Motions with great Briskness, and as it were with a Spring, which not only helps to mark the Time, and distinguish the Motions, but gives Spirit to the Men themselves.

XX

# Evolutions for the Militia

## The Facings

Face to the Right. 3 Motions	Bring the Firelock to a Recover, as in Explanation, Tell 1,2 and face on the left Heel to the Right a quarter of a Circle, keeping the Firelock Recover'd. Then tell 1, 2 and come nimbly to your Rest, stepping back a little with the right Foot as in Explanation. In the performing of the second Motion, which is the facing, the soldiers must take Care not to move their left heels from the Ground, but only to turn on them, that they may keep their Ranks and Files Strait; as also to place their right Feet in a Line with their left, keeping their Firelocks in the true Position of a recover, till they perform the third Motion which is the Rest.
Face to the Right. 3 Motions	Each of these Words of Command must be performed at three Motions, as is above directed in Explanation, which compleats the Circle in four Times.

Face to the Right-about 3 Motions	This is perform'd at three Motions as in the foregoing Explanation, only they face half the Circle to the Right.
To the Left-about as you were. 3 Motions	This is done on the left heel, as in the above Explanation, only they face half the Circle to the left, which brings them to their proper front.
Face to the Left. 3 Motions	These Facings must be perform'd in the same manner as those to the Right on the left Heel, with this difference only, that they face to the left.
To the Left-about. 3 Motions	This is half the Circle to the Left.
To the Right-about as you were 3 Motions	Your are to face half the Circle to the Right, which brings you to your proper Front – and compleats the Facings.

## Marching.

THE general Rule is to teach them stepping off with the Right Leg, to step so nearly equal that the Ranks may not be broke, but be kept as near as may be in a right Line. They must first learn to do this by Companies; they will then soon learn to do it in the whole Battalion.

As the Paths and Ways by which a Regiment or Company may be obliged to march in the Woods, will not admit if the Battalion's marching even by the smallest Sub-division, it is directed, that you teach them to march whole Companies, and even the whole Battalion by Files, in the following Manner, *viz.*

To face the whole regiment to the Right or Left, as the defile or narrow Pass shall happen to be on the Right or Left; and march by Files, with the officers so upon the Flanks, as to be at their proper Posts when the Regiment faces to the Front.

## Wheeling.

THEY should be taught to wheel by Companies, Commands and Parties, according to the above Division of a Battalion. In performing of Which, the Following general Rules are to invariably observed:

“All Wheeling is perform'd in close order by the Center and Rear-Ranks closing up to the Front Rank, so as to be withing a Pace of one another:

The Circle is divided into four Parts.

Wheeling to the Right or Left, is only one Quarter of the Circle: Wheeling to the Right or Left-about is one half of the Circle. When the Divisions or Parties wheel to the Right the Men are to close to the Right, so as to touch each man his Right-hand Man, but without pressing him, and to look to the Left without turning the Head, in order to bring the Rank about even.

When the Divisions or parties wheel to the Left, the Men are to close to the Left and look to the Right, as above directed, by Sub-divisions with their Ranks open; the each Rank wheels distinctly by itself, when it comes to the Ground on which the Rank before it wheel'd; but not before.

It will likewise serve for a Rule for the Front Rank, in all Wheelings, whether that of the whole Battalion or Grand or Sub-divisions: But the Rear-ranks, when they are closed forward, being to wheel directly in the Rear of, and at the same Time with, the Front-Rank, must incline a little to the Left, when they wheel to the Right, in order to keep directly in a Line with their File-Leaders.

In Wheeling, the Men are to take particular Care, neither to open nor close their Ranks; and to carry their Firelocks high and firm on their Shoulders.

In Wheeling, the Motion of each is quicker or slowed; according to the Distance he is from the Right or Left: Thus, When you wheel to the Right, each Man moves quicker than his right Man; and in wheeling to the Left, each Man moves quicker than his Left-hand Man; the Circle that every Man wheels being larger, according to the Distance he is from the Hand he wheels to; as may be seen be describing several Circle within one another at three Foot distance from each; which is the Space every man is supposed to take up.

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