

# Dress Parade

One of the great unifying factors in military history is the tradition of dress parade, a formal ceremony in which the troops are formed, assessed, reports of roll calls received, and important orders read. Dress parade was a fact of everyday military life during the American Civil War, as reported in many first person accounts, and, in reliving the military life of the time, it is important that we do it as accurately as possible.

It is proposed, in this short article, to deliver an overview of the parade, and the basics of each soldier's duties in the parade, in hopes of making our performance of the ceremony a more exact representation.

## An Overview.

It will be our practice has been to hold dress parade at 9:00 AM. The time may be adjusted for other activities.

If we are to follow the form exactly, a drum signal would be given one half hour before troop, in our case, at 8:30, at which point the music would assemble on the parade field, and each company would form on its own parade for roll call and inspection. Usually this task has already been done prior to 8:00 company drill.

10 minutes later, or 8:40, the Adjutant's call would be played. At this point, captains should march their companies to the regimental parade. The music will continue to play throughout the forming of the battalion, stopping when the adjutant indicates to them that the battalion is formed.

Since roll calls have already been made, and company inspections held, it seems more logical for our purposes to have the drum signal at 8:40, 20 minutes before the parade, and the Adjutant's Call at 8:50, 10 minutes before the parade.

## Forming the Battalion.

The color-company forms the basis of the formation, and should fall in first, on the right of the color-guard, which the adjutant has formed and pre-positioned on the line. Other companies, should they arrive early, should wait until the color-

company is on the line.

Companies should fall in on the right and left of the color-company, in order, rather than falling in and leaving gaps. Thus, for example, in a four-company battalion, the 2<sup>nd</sup> (color) company would be first to take position, then the 1<sup>st</sup> company, 3<sup>rd</sup> company, and 4<sup>th</sup> company.

Companies are to fall in on the principle of successive formations, such as Forward into Line, on the Right into Line, etc. Remember that, once the captain is satisfied with the dress, the company is to be put at Support Arms, *NOT* Order Arms. This is true, not only for dress parade, but also for any battalion formation. It is suggested that there is no need to arrive 10 minutes early. The Adjutant takes his post two paces from the right of the battalion, and the Sergeant-Major two paces from the left. The music is in two ranks, to the right of the adjutant. Field and staff officers and non-commissioned staff are in their proper place in line of battle. The Colonel, if he is the ranking officer present, will place himself a suitable distance in the front of the battalion.

## The Parade.

The Adjutant is in total control of the formation. When he is satisfied with the alignment, he will direct that the Captain of the first company put his company at Parade Rest. That captain will take one step forward, and command, Shoulder-ARMS, Order-ARMS, Parade-REST.

When the first company is at Parade Rest, the Captain of the second company will repeat the procedure. Each company should be brought to Parade Rest successively, from right to left.

When the adjutant sees each company at Parade Rest, he will order the music, under the command of the principal musician to "*Beat-OFF*". The music will play a slow march, as they march from right to left in front of the battalion, and then back to return to their position. Note that trooping the color is *NOT* part of the dress parade.

Once the music has returned to its position, the Adjutant will command, "*Attention-BATTALION*", "*Shoulder-ARMS*", "*Prepare to open ranks; To the rear open order-MARCH*". This executed exactly as in School of the Battalion, except that all company officers (including lieutenants not in command) should march four paces forward, captains opposite their position in line, lieutenants opposite their place, in other words in front of their commands, (platoons or sections). Lieutenants will pass through the captain's interval to take position. The Lieutenant Colonel and Major will dismount (if mounted), and march from their positions behind the line to

a place six paces in front of their wings, or two paces in front of the line of company officers. Once the ranks are aligned, and the commissioned officers in their places, the adjutant should command, "FRONT".

The adjutant will then march along the battalion front to the center, face right in marching, and pass the line of company officers eight or ten paces, face about, and command, "*Present-ARMS*". He will then face front, salute the colonel, and report, "Sir, the parade is formed".

The Colonel, still with sword in scabbard, will return the salute with a hand salute. The Adjutant will take post three paces to the left, and one to rear of the Colonel, passing around his right. The Colonel will then draw his sword, command "*Battalion, Shoulder-ARMS*", and drill the battalion in the Manual of Arms, as he sees fit, ending with "*Order-ARMS*".

The Adjutant will then pass around the Colonel's right, taking post midway between the Colonel and the line of company officers. He will then command "*First Sergeants; To the front and center-MARCH*". At the preparatory command, (all that before March) they will Shoulder Arms, march two paces forward, and face inward. At the command "MARCH", they will march to the center and halt. Note that they do not face to the Adjutant until his command.

The Adjutant will then command, "*Front-FACE*", "REPORT".

At this, each First Sergeant, beginning on the right, will give the rifle salute, and report the result of the roll call. Remember that, while each of our companies portrays a different regiment historically, in the dress parade, we are supposed to be one battalion. Thus, the report should be on the order of, "Company A, all present or accounted for, Sir". It is not necessary to give actual numbers. Neither is it necessary to report missing soldiers, unless they are missing without permission. All others are "accounted for".

After the reports, the Adjutant will command, "*First sergeants outward-FACE*". "*To your posts-MARCH*". The sergeants will face out and return to their positions in line.

The Adjutant will face to the Colonel, salute, and report the results of the roll to the Colonel, who will then direct that the orders be published. The Adjutant will face about, and command "*Attention to Orders*", at which time he will read such orders as the Colonel may direct. He will then face to the Colonel, salute and report that the order has been carried out.

The Adjutant should announce that the "*Parade is dismissed*". Then the Colonel would take command, close ranks, and wheel the battalion into a column by company, and begin the inspection. According to regulations, the Dress Parade is a

stand-alone formation. When the Adjutant announces that the Parade is dismissed, the company officers would return their swords, face inwards, and march to side of the Adjutant, who will have moved to the center of their line. The field officers would step back to the line of company officers and close on their flanks. Note that they do not face front until the adjutant's command. The Adjutant will command Front-FACE, Forward-MARCH. They will march forward, dressing on the center, with the music playing, to a point six paces from the colonel, when the adjutant will command HALT. The officers will render a hand salute, and remain as the Colonel conveys such orders as appropriate. He shall then indicate that the ceremony is concluded. The officers will again salute, and disperse to their camps. The First Sergeants will then take charge of their companies, and march them back to their company parades.

## **Individual Responsibilities.**

### **Commissioned and non-commissioned Staff.**

These soldiers have perhaps the easiest job in the parade. They take their positions in line of battle and stay there. As arms commands are given, they obey them to the extent that either the sword manual or rifle manual for sergeants permits. Note that sergeants carrying a sword as an arm salute differently than officers, bringing their swords to a *poise*.

The Sergeant-Major does take a different position. Rather than being behind the line on the left flank, he takes position two paces from the left of the front rank of the battalion. Once there, he has no other duties, save obeying arms commands.

Do take note that any of these soldiers might be called upon to perform the Adjutant's part, or take command of the parade in the absence of those officers. Being prepared remains a watchword.

### **Privates, Corporals, and Sergeants, other than First Sergeants.**

One of the great joys of being in the ranks is the need to know almost nothing. All these soldiers need to do is to obey the familiar commands of their officers. Nothing in the parade is any different than company drill.

Still, as interested historians, we all want to understand as much as we can. Note that any soldier may be called upon to act as First Sergeant, or even company commander in the absence of those officers.

## **First Sergeants.**

The First Sergeant, for the most part, acts as though he were in company or battalion drill. When the Adjutant commands "*To the rear open order...*", he steps back four paces as he usually does. When the Captain marches to the front, he replaces him in the front rank. If lieutenants are present, he may need to step to the front, in front of the first file of his company, to allow them to pass to the front of their companies.

The most important function of the First Sergeant is the report of the roll call. On the Adjutant's command of "*First Sergeants to the front and center...*", all First Sergeants will shoulder arms, march two paces forward, (midway between the front rank and the line of company officers) and face inwards. On the command "MARCH", they march to the center, and halt, still facing inwards. On the command "*Front-FACE*", they face the Adjutant. On the command "REPORT", the First Sergeant of the first company gives the rifle salute, and reports the result of the roll. The suggested form is "*Company A, all present or accounted for, Sir*". If there are soldiers absent without permission, report them as such. All others are accounted for.

On the command, "*First Sergeants, Outward Face*", all face out. At "*To your Posts-MARCH*", all return to their posts and order arms.

## **Lieutenants.**

The only real duty of the Lieutenant in the parade is to take post in front of the company. On the command "*To the rear, open order-MARCH*", they should march to the front of their commands, passing by the captain's interval, the First Sergeant stepping to the front to allow them to pass. A First Lieutenant would stand four paces in front of the second platoon. A Second Lieutenant would stand four paces in front of the second section of the first platoon. All will obey the Manual of Arms commands as far as the sword manual permits. Of course, all lieutenants should be familiar with the duties of captains, in the absence of those officers.

## **Captains.**

**Captains should see that their companies are formed and aligned at the first drum call before the parade. They should march their companies to the parade ground only on the sound of the Troop, which is the second music heard after the initial drum call. Do not bring your company early, as they will then have to wait for the color-company to form on line.**

**The captain of the color company, however, will form his company and march to the parade ground as soon as possible, preparing for the Adjutant to place it next to the color-guard.**

**Remember that the formation of the battalion is according to the principles of successive formations. DO NOT BRING YOUR COMPANY TO ORDER ARMS. Bring them to the Support Arms instead. Remember that this is true in all formations of the battalion, not just for Dress Parade.**

**When the Adjutant directs the Captain of the first company to bring them to Parade Rest, he will step one pace forward and command “*Shoulder-ARMS*”, “*Order-ARMS*”, “*Parade-REST*”. He will then step back into line and take the position of parade rest. The Captain of the second company will then repeat the procedure, and so on successively down the line.**

**At the Adjutant’s command, “*To the rear open order-MARCH*”, all captains will march four paces forward and halt. From that point, simply obey Manual of Arms commands as allowed by the sword manual.**

**When the adjutant commands Parade is dismissed, await further orders. If we are going to do something different, you will be forewarned.**

## **Field Officers and Chiefs of Cavalry and Artillery.**

**The Lieutenant Colonel and Majors, after seeing that the companies are forming on their parades, will take their positions twelve paces behind their respective wings in line of battle. This distance will probably need to be adjusted to a small battalion front. On the command, “*To the rear open order-MARCH*”, they will march to the front, passing through the two pace interval between the Adjutant or Sergeant Major and the battalion. Their position is six paces in front of their respective wings. As a matter of practicality, it is well to step off when the preparatory command is given. Thus you should be at the battalion line in time to remind the company officers to march four paces forward.**

## **Colonel.**

The Colonel directs the Adjutant as to the exact location of the line. He then takes position a suitable distance from the front of the battalion, depending on the length of the front. His sword should be in the scabbard until the Adjutant takes post behind him, and he instructs the battalion in the Manual of Arms. He should be familiar with the Adjutant's job, as he is in an excellent position to remind him of the order of the parade. He is responsible for informing the adjutant of the orders to be read.

## **Adjutant.**

The Adjutant is the main player in this particular drama. He prepares the line for the parade, and forms it before turning it over to the Colonel. Even then, most of the actions of the parade are initiated by him. Rather than repeat, it is suggested that all who wish to learn the Adjutant's part study the overview. Most of that refers to the Adjutant. If you know the Adjutant's part, you know the parade!!

## **Dress**

The term "dress parade" refers back to the English tradition of "dress" and "undress" uniform. In that tradition, the ceremony did require the full dress uniform. In unusual circumstances, such as inclement weather, an "undress parade" might be called, which would require only the undress uniform, and a shortened ceremony.

Summarily, the best uniform available would have been worn. Early in the war, frock coats, sashes and white gloves would have been common, though not universal. Sergeants would have worn swords rather than rifles.

During the progression to mid and late war, many of these items would have been discarded, or have worn out and perhaps not been replaced. Still, even in the late war, there would be some dandies who would dress to the fullest.

Soldiers on active campaign would have been unlikely to bring such items. If on an active campaign, one would wear the only uniform available, the one on the soldier's back.

Blousing of trousers was not a common period practice. No images, either photographic, painted, sketched, have surfaced that show bloused trousers, although they may exist. Regardless, it is suggested that troops not be bloused for dress parade, unless in a known, heavily tick infested area.

**Buttoning of uniforms is another point. CS Regulations, in Para. 1477, do state that the jacket should be “buttoned or hooked at the collar”. I would suggest though, 15. An officer, non-commissioned officer or soldier shall indicate respect for women when passing by them in public by touching the brim of the cap in the manner of a salute, or removing the hat. That for dress parade, the jacket be buttoned completely. The ceremony lasts only 10 minutes or so. In extreme heat, this could be adjusted, as the British did with the "undress parade".**

## **Conclusion.**

**Dress parade is an important military ceremony, with a rich history. It is important that it is represented as accurately as possible. All should read the overview, and copy the instructions for their particular part. Learn the part next above your station, since you can never tell who will be “on furlough”, and prepare accordingly.**

## **WORKS CITED**

**A listing of the works consulted in making this study, and a short commentary on their use.**

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Material Adapted from;  
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