

# **Debunking the Last Great Reenactorism : Left Oblique Aiming Through the Right Interval**

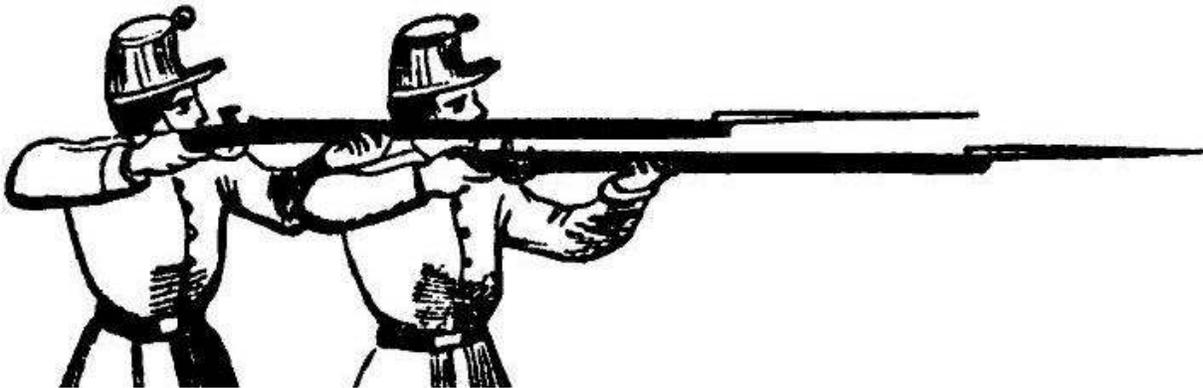
*by*  
**Col. Mark Silas Tackitt**

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A reenactorism is generally thought of as a practice, not found in any period manual, guide or record, which has been performed by reenactors as long as anyone remembers. The usual saying is, "*That's the way we've always done it.*" As a practice handed down by a steady line of well meaning sergeants, it is accepted, entrenched and unquestioned.

Examples of debunked reenactorisms include : weapons sloped to a forty-five degree angle for *Support-Arms* when they should be straight ; weapons straight and right elbow tight to the body for *Right Shoulder Shift* when the weapon is sloped rearward, leaned to the left and the right elbow is well away from the body ; and *Countermarch by File Left or Right* when neither exists in the manuals.

To the list of debunked reenactorisms can now be added left oblique aiming by rear-rank men over the right shoulders of front-rank men. A review of antebellum, wartime and post-bellum sources reveal that left oblique aiming belongs through the interval on the left side of front-rank men, not the right.



## **1. How Reenactors Perform Left Obliques**

As discussed in the below instruction found online, the standard method for left oblique aiming is for the rear-rank men to aim left over the right shoulders of their file-leaders in the front-rank :

*When firing by the oblique, how do I remember which foot to move?*

First, to give you time to think about where you will aim, the commander will always preface the "Aim" command with "*By the Left (Right) Oblique.*" The

front rank has it easy ; at the command "Aim" they merely turn their shoulders in the direction of the oblique, their feet do not move from the "T" position. **It's important for the rear rank men to always remember that their musket has to go over the right shoulder of the man in front of them, just like firing to the front.** The foot opposite the direction of the oblique will move over and forward at the command of "Aim." So at the left oblique, the right foot moves to the right and forward (about 8 inches), and at the right oblique, the left foot moves to the right and forward. (That's not a misprint; the left foot moves forward and to the right about 8 inches!)

Another online example from a well meaning individual contains this simple admonition :

**“Remember that the rear rank man must have his musket over the front rank man’s right shoulder.”**

Right side aiming is the accepted and unquestioned method for left oblique aiming and firing. This method conforms with instruction from The Big Three.

## 2. The Big Three

When Civil War reenactors have questions about drill and tactics, the manuals referenced are those compiled by William Hardee, William Gilham and Silas Casey.



As an instructor of tactics at the United States Military Academy (West Point), William Hardee was the natural choice in 1855 to chair a committee which compiled the new tactics for light infantry. After the tactics were published, he would become the commandant of cadets from 1856-60. Born in Georgia, he resigned his commission when his state seceded from the Union and accepted a new commission in Confederate service. In 1861, he revised the 1855 tactics and published a new manual of arms.

During the war, he commanded an army corps in the Western Theater. When reenactors refer to Hardee’s manual, they usually mean his 1855 tactics. Citations herein are to his 1855 tactics.



William Gilham was an artillery officer in the Mexican War, a professor of tactics at the Virginia Military Institute, a Confederate brigade commander early in the war and compiler of the single best volume of Civil War era drill, tactics and duties. His manual was completed in late 1860 for militia in U.S. service. With the outbreak of the war, a new edition was published with a different

title page indicating it was for Confederate service. The material inside, however, remained unchanged from the U.S. edition.



Silas Casey was a member of the committee which compiled the 1855 tactics. When Hardee joined the Confederacy, Hardee's name was removed from the U.S. Tactics. A slightly revised tactics bearing Casey's name was published in 1862 and became the official U.S. Tactics. Unlike Hardee's Revised Tactics of 1861 which contain improvements for handling the weapons, Casey's manual of arms lacked improvements and is substantively identical to Hardee's 1855 manual.

For direct and oblique firings, instruction from manuals by The Big Three is identical :

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*Oblique firing.*

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[H 266, G 192, C 275] The oblique firings will be executed to the right and left, and by the same commands as the direct fire, with this single difference : the command, *aim*, will always be preceded by the caution, *right oblique* or *left oblique*.

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*Position of the two ranks in the oblique fire to the right.*

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[H 267, G 192, C 276] At the command, *ready*, the two ranks will execute what has been prescribed for the direct fire.

[H 268, G 192, C 276] At the cautionary command, *right oblique*, the two ranks will throw back the right shoulder and look steadily at the object to be hit.

[H 269, G 192, C 276] At the command, *aim*, each front rank man will aim to the right without deranging the feet ; each rear rank man will advance the left foot about eight inches toward the right heel of the man next on the right of his file leader and aim to the right, inclining the upper part of the body forward and bending a little the left knee.

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*Position of the two ranks in the oblique fire to the left.*

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[H 270, G 192, C 279] At the cautionary command, *left oblique*, the two ranks will throw back the left shoulder and look steadily at the object to be hit.

[H 271, G 192, C 280] At the command, *aim*, the front rank will take aim to the left without deranging the feet ; each man in the rear will advance the right foot about eight inches toward the right heel of the man next on the right of his file leader, and aim to the left, inclining the upper part of the body forward and bending a little the right knee.

—See : Schools of the Soldier : Hardee, 266-71 ; Gilham, 192 ; and Casey, 275-80.

Their instruction appears clear : for oblique firings, execute what is prescribed for the direct. Unfortunately, the instruction for the direct fire leaves much to be desired :

[The commands] will be executed as been prescribed in the manual of arms. [The men will] aim according to the rank in which each may find himself placed, the rear rank men inclining forward a little the upper part of the body, in order that their pieces may reach as much beyond the front rank as possible.

—See : Schools of the Soldier : Hardee, 261 ; Gilham, 191 ; and Casey, 270.

The manual of arms prescribed in the above paragraph states :

AIM.

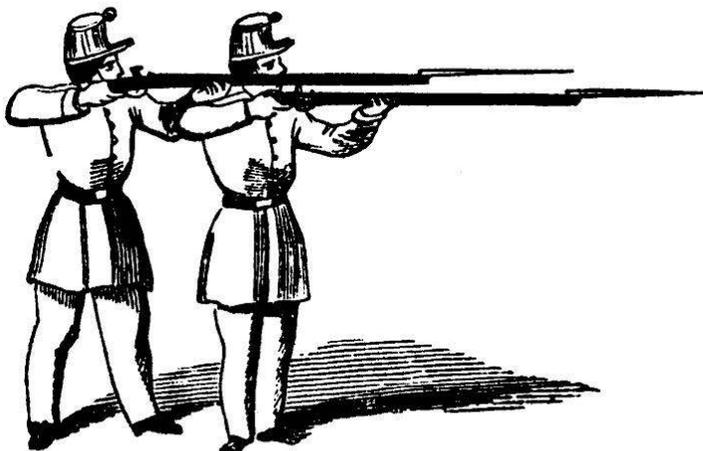
*One time and one motion.*

Raise the piece with both hands, and support the butt against the right shoulder ; the left elbow down, the right as high as the shoulder ; incline the head upon the butt, so that the right eye may perceive quickly the notch of the hausse, the front sight, and the object aimed at ; the left eye closed, the right thumb extended along the stock, the fore-finger on the trigger.

When recruits are formed in two ranks to execute the firings, the front rank men will raise a little less the right elbow, in order to facilitate the aim of the rear rank men.

The rear rank men, in aiming, will each carry the right foot about eight inches to the right, and towards the left heel of the man next on the right, inclining the upper part of the body forward.

—See : SoS : Hardee, 174-76, Gilham, 118, Casey, 181-83.



**AIM. FRONT AND REAR RANK (No. 460).**

Instruction from The Big Three implies that rear rank men fire over the right shoulder for all firings because : (1) the weapon is supported against the right shoulder, (2) the front rank man does not raise his elbow to full height and (3) the rear rank moves toward the right while aiming. Their instruction plus the great illustration published in Gilham

and in the 1861 *U.S. Tactics* (Secretary of War Cameron edition) showing a rear-rank soldier firing over the right shoulder of a front-rank soldier seem to seal the deal.

Based upon the sum of instruction from The Big Three, the reenactor method of aiming over the right shoulder appears correct. However, this reasonable conclusion is correct when only The Big Three are considered. That seemingly correct conclusion changes when the scope of research is broadened to sources before, during and after the Civil War. That's when it becomes apparent that left oblique aimings were actually through the left interval, not the right.

## 2. Historical Background

### A. Winfield Scott's manuals (1821-35)



Major General Winfield Scott is the grandfather of American drill and tactics. From the publication of his first manual in 1821 through new manuals in the next decade and reprints thereof into the Civil War, Scott was the ultimate authority on drill and tactics. When instruction in Civil War era manuals seem ambiguous, his manuals should always be consulted.

#### (I). Scott's *Militia Tactics* (1821)

Scott addressed left oblique firing in his *Militia Tactics* (1821) using language familiar to what is presented above. The big difference is that he states explicitly the side of the body where the weapon should be aimed :

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#### FIRING TO THE LEFT WHEN IN TWO RANKS

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86. At the word, *Ready*, both ranks perform as in the direct fire. At the word, *Aim*, the front rank direct their pieces to the left, the same as before to the right [the piece brought down on an angle of forty-five degrees], without moving the feet. The rear rank advance the left foot about six inches, and **aim through the opening to the left of their file leaders**. After firing, come to the usual position of priming.

—See : *Scott's Militia Tactics : Comprising the Duty of Infantry, Light-infantry, and Riflemen; in Six Parts* (Hartford, 1821), SoS 85-86.

#### (ii). *U.S. Infantry Tactics* (1825)

In the *Infantry Tactics* (1825), a committee of officers, of which Scott was the

president of the committee, carried forward the same technique for the left oblique :

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Position of the Ranks in the Oblique Firings to the Left.

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301. At the word, *Ready*, both ranks will execute what has been prescribed for the direct fire.

302. At the word, *Aim*, the front rank man will direct his firelock to the left, inclining the left knee, without moving the feet .

303. The rear rank man shall advance the left foot about six inches, and towards the right heel of the front rank man on the left of his file ; and shall also advance the upper part of the body, bending the left knee, and **aiming through the interval to the left of the front rank man of his file.**"

—See : Scott, Vol. I, *Infantry Tactics ; or, Rules for the Exercises and Manoeuvres of the Infantry of the U.S. Army* (Washington, 1825), SoS 301-03.

(iii). *Scott's Abstract of Infantry Tactics* (1830)

In Scott's *Abstract* (1830), he used the same text from the 1825 manual :

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Position of the Ranks in the Oblique Firings to the Left.

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301. At the word, *Ready*, both ranks will execute what has been prescribed for the direct fire.

302. At the word, *Aim*, the front rank man will direct his firelock to the left, inclining the left knee, without moving the feet .

303. The rear rank man shall advance the left foot about six inches, and towards the right heel of the front rank man on the left of his file ; and shall also advance the upper part of the body, bending the left knee, and **aiming through the interval to the left of the front rank man of his file.**"

—See : Scott, *Abstract of Infantry Tactics for Use of the Militia of the United States* (Boston, 1830), SoS 301-03.

(iv). *Scott's Infantry Tactics* (1835)

The above text from Scott's manuals of 1821, 1825 and 1830 concerned firing in two ranks. Each of these manuals also provided additional instruction for firing in three ranks. The three rank system was revised in the 1835 manual. When firing in unison per the 1835 tactics, the front rank knelt, then the middle and rear ranks performed like the front and rear ranks performed in the prior manuals. For three ranks firing to the left oblique, he specified :

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Position of the Three Ranks in the Oblique Fire to the Left.

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283. At the command, *ready*, the three ranks will execute what has been prescribed for the fire direct.

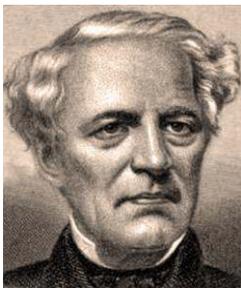
284. At the cautionary command, *left oblique*, the three ranks will throw back the left shoulder and look steadily at the object on which they ought to fire ; in this position the men of the centre and rear ranks will be ready to take aim in the interval to the left of the men in front, and in an oblique direction.

285. At the command, *aim*, the front rank [kneeling] will take aim to the left without inclining the knee or stirring the feet. The centre rank men will take aim through the intervals to the left of their file leaders without stirring the feet. The rear rank men will advance the left foot about six inches towards the right heel of the centre rank men of their files ; they will advance also the upper part of the body in bending a little the left knee, and **take aim through the intervals to the left of their file leaders.**

—See : Scott, *Infantry —Tactics ; or Rules for the Exercise and Manoeuvres of the United States' Infantry* (New York, 1835), SoS 283-85.

Instruction from the 1835 manual was widely circulated and copied into other manuals. It was republished in 1840, 1843, 1846, 1849, 1852 as well as being republished several times after the publication of Hardee's 1855 manual.

B. Samuel Cooper's Concise System (1836)



Cooper's *Concise System* provided instruction for aiming in two ranks. This manual was prepared and arranged by Cooper, who was the adjutant general of the army. The cover page of the manual states it was compiled under the supervision of Major General Alexander Macomb, commander of the army. During the war, he was the Adjutant General and Inspector General of the Confederate Army. Due to date of promotion to full general by President Davis, he outranked Robert E. Lee.

For the left oblique, Cooper wrote :

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Position of the Ranks in the Oblique Firings to the Left.

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At the word, **READY**, both ranks execute what is prescribed for the fire direct.

At the words, **LEFT OBLIQUE**, both ranks throw back the left shoulder,

and look at the object at which they are to fire the rear-rank holding itself ready to take aim to the left of the men of the same file in front, and in an oblique direction.

At the word, AIM, the front-rank takes aim to the left without moving the feet. The rear-rank men advance the left foot six inches towards the right heel of the front-rank men of their files ; they also advance the upper part of the body, in bending a little, the left knee, and **take aim through the intervals to the left of their file-leaders.**

—See : Cooper, *A Concise System of Instructions and Regulations for the Militia and Volunteers of the United States* by Samuel Cooper, Alexander Macomb (1836 ; reprint, Baltimore, 1861), School of the Squad, p. 21-22.

### 3. Manuals of the 1840's and 1850's

#### A. John T. Cairns' *The Recruit* (1847)

The first of the manuals to be addressed is Cairns' *Recruit*. A former captain in the Seventh Regiment of New York State Militia, John Cairns was described as “one of the most distinguished militia officers the city has ever produced.” A noted instructor and disciplinarian, his manual of tactics was extremely popular. As a colonel, Cairns raised a regiment of New Yorkers for the Mexican War, but his Fifth Regiment was not selected for service in Mexico. Cairns' manual followed the two rank principles contained in Scott's manual :

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#### Position of the Ranks in the Oblique Fire to the Left

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At the command, *ready*, both ranks will execute what has been prescribed for the fire direct.

At the cautionary command, *left oblique*, both ranks throw back the left shoulder, and look steadily at the object on which they ought to fire ; in this position the rear rank will be ready to take aim in the interval to the left of the men of the same file in front and in an oblique direction.

At the command, *aim*, the front rank takes aim to the left without moving the feet. The rear rank men advance the left foot about six inches towards the right heel of the front rank men of [38] their files ; they will advance also the upper part of the body in bending a little the left knee, and **take aim through the intervals to the left of their file leaders.**

—See : John T. Cairns, *The Recruit: a Compilation of Exercises and Movements of Infantry, Light-infantry and Riflemen, According to the Latest Improvements* (New York, 1847, 1853, 1855), pp. 37-38.

B. George B. Roe's *The Neophyte* (1854)

Next is a manual from 1854 by another captain in the New York State Militia. He followed the left side rule :

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Position of the ranks in the oblique fire to the left.

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At the command, "*ready*," both ranks will execute what has been prescribed for the fire direct.

At the cautionary command, "*left oblique*," both ranks throw back the left shoulder, and look steadily at the object on which they ought to fire ; in this position the rear rank will be ready to take aim in the interval to the left of the men of the same file in front, and in an oblique direction.

At the command, "*aim*," the front rank takes aim to the left without moving the feet. The rear rank men advance the left foot about six inches towards the right heel of the front rank men of their files they will advance also the upper part of the body in bending a little the left knee, and **take aim through the intervals to the left of their file leaders.**

—See : George B. Roe, *The Neophyte: An Elementary Treatise of Rifle Movements and Manual of the Percussion Rifle* by Capt. George B. Roe, Commanding Co. A, 15th Reg't, Hamilton Rifles, NYSM, Flushing, L.I., April (1854), p. 55.

C. William C. Kibbe's, *The Volunteer* (1855)

This militia manual from William Kibbe, Adjutant General of California, follows the left side instruction.

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POSITION OF THE RANKS IN THE OBLIQUE FIRE TO THE LEFT

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At the command, *ready*, both ranks will execute what has been prescribed for the fire direct.

At the cautionary command, *left oblique*, both ranks will throw back the left shoulder, and look steadily at the object on which they ought to fire ; in this position the men of the rear rank will be ready to take aim in the interval to the left of the men in front and in an oblique direction.

At the command, *aim*, the front rank will take aim to the left without inclining the knee or stirring the feet. The rear rank men will advance the left foot about six inches towards the right heel of the front rank men of their files ; they will advance also the upper part of the body by bending a little the left knee, and **take aim through the intervals to the left of their file leaders.**

—See : William C. Kibbe, *The Volunteer* (Sacramento, 1855), p. 26.

D. Ebenezer W. Stone's *Compend* (1857)

The Massachusetts militia received an updated tactics manual from its adjutant general. Instead of using Hardee's system for light infantry, Stone used Scott's three rank system :

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POSITION OF THE THREE RANKS IN THE OBLIQUE FIRE TO THE LEFT

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283. At the command, *ready*, the three ranks will execute what has been prescribed for the fire direct.

284. At the cautionary command, *left oblique*, the three ranks will throw back the left shoulder and look steadily at the object on which they ought to fire ; in this position the men of the centre and rear ranks will be ready to take aim in the interval to the left of the men in front, and in an oblique direction.

285. At the command, *aim*, the front rank [kneeling] will take aim to the left without inclining the knee or stirring the feet. The centre rank men will take aim through the intervals to the left of their file-leaders without stirring the feet. The rear rank men will advance the left foot about six inches towards the right heel of the centre rank men of their files ; they will advance also the upper part of the body in bending a little the left knee, and **take aim through the intervals to the left of their file-leaders.**

—See : Stone, *Compend of Instructions in Military Tactics, and the Manual of Percussion Arms, with Extracts from the U.S. Army Regulations ; Compiled and Published for the Use of the Militia* (Boston, 1857) by Ebenezer W. Stone, Adjutant General of Massachusetts, SoS 283-85.

E. Hardee, Rifle and Light Infantry Tactics (1855)

With the foundation laid by Scott in the 1820 and 1830's, all subsequent manuals which specified an interval all specified that the weapon is aimed through the left interval. The author did not encounter any manuals which specified aiming through the right interval or over the right shoulder for left oblique firings. All were on the left side. The explicit specification ceased with Hardee's 1855 manual.

Compare the full phrase from paragraph 285 in the School of the Soldier of Scott's 1835 tactics :

*... and take aim through the intervals to the left of their file-leaders.*

to the same paragraph of the Schools of the Soldier found in paragraphs 271 of Hardee, 192 of Gilham and 280 of Casey :

*... and aim to the left....*

The below phrase shows what was removed from the full phrase and from where :

*... and take aim through the intervals to the left of their file-leaders.*

Generally, the manual compilers who followed Hardee followed his lead and parroted the text in his 1855 manual. Compilers include : Gilham (1859) SoS 192 ; Lee (1860), para. 184 ; Baxter (1861), page 56 ; Ellsworth (1861), para. 121 ; Richardson (1861), SoS 266 ; Casey (1862), SoS 280 ; Lewis (1863), SoS 269 ; Morris (1865), page 84 ; and Patten (1865), page 46.

For more than thirty years, the only method specified for aiming was through the left interval. Being obvious to all, Hardee and subsequent compilers may have believed it unnecessary to repeat the full phrase as the partial phrase, “*aim to the left,*” seemed sufficient. Had Hardee intended an entirely new method and wanted others to comply, he would have stated specific instruction such as :

*... and take aim to the left through the right intervals of their file-leaders.*

But he didn't.

Regardless, the publishing of Stone's Massachusetts militia manual in 1857 shows that the principle of firing through the left interval did not vanish with the publication of Hardee's manual. Also of note is the continued reprinting of Scott's 1835 tactics in 1855, 1857, 1858 and 1861 plus the reprinting of Cooper's 1836 tactics in 1861.

#### **4. The War Years**

Four sources during the war show that aiming through the left interval remained the proper method of aiming.

##### **A. Beadles' Dime Squad Drill-Book (1861)**

The forerunner of the modern “For Dummies” books was Beadle's Dime Books. Seems like there's a Beadle's Dime Book for everything from parlor games, dress making, letter writing, chess, cricket, base-ball, farming, swimming, cooking, songs, etiquette, patriotic speeches to jokes and humor. It should come as no surprise there's a book of drill, too.

A Beadle's Dime Book isn't a scholarly source, such as quoting from Scott or Hardee. However, this book helps show the common understanding of how recruits were expected to perform the manual of arms. This handy source for everything one needs to know in life—for a dime—instructed new recruits to aim on the left :

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Left Oblique Fire.

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At the command, READY, assume position as for the fire direct. At the words, LEFT OBLIQUE, throw back your left shoulder, and eye the object at which you are to fire. At the command, AIM, take aim to the left, without movement of your feet, if you are in the front rank, but if you are in the rear rank, advance your left foot about six inches toward the right heel of the front man of your file, at the same time protruding your breast, and bending your left knee a little, **while taking aim to the left of your file leader.**

—See : *Beadles' Dime Squad Drill-Book : Or, School of the Soldier. A Simple Guide to Infantry Recruit Drill and Rifle Exercise. For the Use of the Minute Man, the Recruit, the Home Guard, and Citizen Soldiers Generally* by an Officer of the "National Guard" (New York and London, 1861), p. 24.

B. Robert Chandler's "Infantry Tactics (1861)

Fast forward to the fourth year of the war. The army was scheduled to lose many troops because they neared the end of their three year, terms of enlistment. To induce reenlistment for another three years, the army offered a thirty day, veteran furlough. Many reenlisted and were ordered home on furlough. Those who did not reenlist remained behind.

In January, 1864, Col. William Robinson of the 7<sup>th</sup> Wisconsin commanded what was left of the famed Iron Brigade. The three Wisconsin regiments of the brigade approached the end of their enlistments and were eligible for veteran furlough. Many reenlisted and were sent home. Col. Robinson went with them. Temporary command fell upon Col. Henry Morrow of the 24<sup>th</sup> Michigan. His troops had less time in the field and were not eligible for veteran furlough.

As brigade commander, Morrow noticed something wrong about the drill performed by some of the troops in his temporary command. They weren't using Casey's tactics. Morrow disapproved. So upset was he, that he caused a general order to be issued within the brigade demanding uniformity :

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Head Quarters  
1<sup>st</sup> Brigade 1<sup>st</sup> Div 1<sup>st</sup> A.C  
January 28<sup>th</sup> 1864

General Orders  
No. 8

There is a want of uniformity in the practice of the several Regiments of this Brig. in the manner of executing the following movements : coming to a “Parade Rest” ; fixing and unfixing bayonets. Some of the troops execute these movements according to Scott, while others execute them according to Casey. The latter having been recognized by the War Department as authority of course it is not optional with officers which system is to be adopted. The only correct system, because [it is] the only recognized one, is Casey.

Page 226, 1<sup>st</sup> Vol Casey will be found the instructions for Parade Rest.

Page 50, 1<sup>st</sup> Vol Casey will be found the instructions for fixing bayonets and on page 53, the instructions for unfixing bayonets.

Hereinafter on Grand Guard Mounting and on Inspections the troops will be required to execute the above movements according to the instructions prescribed in Casey.

By Comd of Henry A Morrow  
Col Comdg Brigade  
J.D. Wood  
A.A.G.

—See : *Iron Brigade Correspondence File*, 1200 series, State Historical Society of Wisconsin ; “Manual of Arms for Infantry : A Re-examination—Part VI” by Dom Dal Bello and Geoff Walden, *Camp Chase Gazette*, (March, 1997), p. 38.

The nonuniform soldiers of the brigade belonged to the Second, Sixth and Seventh Wisconsin regiments who did not reenlist and remained behind. These Wisconsin soldiers used Chandler’s 1861 *Infantry Tactics for Wisconsin Volunteers*, not Scott’s manual. Chandler incorporated drill from Scott and Hardee. This explains why Morrow mistook drill from Chandler for Scott. Of course, Chandler prescribed that left obliques were on the left side:

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Position of the two ranks in the oblique fire to the left.

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At the command, *ready*, the ranks will execute what has been prescribed for

the fire direct.

At the cautionary command, *left oblique*, the ranks will throw back the left shoulder, and look steadily at the object on which they ought to fire ; in this position the men of the rear rank will be ready to take aim in the interval to the left of the men in front, and in an oblique direction.

At the command, *aim*, the front rank will take aim to the left without inclining the knee or stirring the feet. The rear rank men will advance the upper part of the body in bending a little the left knee, and **take aim through the intervals to the left of their file-leaders**, without stirring the feet.

—See : Robert Chandler, "*Infantry Tactics, Compiled from Scott and Hardee for the Use of Wisconsin Volunteers*," (Milwaukee, 1861), pp. 34-35.

### C. William B Pace's *Tactics* (1865)

An obscure manual was compiled for local use in late 1864. This manual is Pace's manual for militia in Utah Territory aka the Nauvoo Legion. Instruction for obliques specified that aiming was on the left. An interesting detail is that he used the foot movement prescribed by The Big Three :

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#### Position of the two ranks in the oblique fire to the left.

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133. At the command, *ready*, both ranks will execute what has been prescribed for the direct fire.

136. At the caution, *left oblique*, both ranks will throw back the left shoulder and look steadily to the left.

137. At the command, *aim*, the front rank men will aim to the left without derailing the feet, each rear rank man will advance the right foot about eight inches towards the left heel of the man next on the right of his file leader, and **aim through the interval to the left of his file leader**.

—See : William B. Pace, *Rifle and Light Infantry Tactics* (Salt Lake City, 1865), School of the Platoon, 133, 136-37.

Of all the examples found for this article, Pace's is the only one which expressly specified right foot and left interval. Hardee specified right foot, but not which interval. That Pace included right foot shows he consulted the latest tactics. Except for Chandler, all manuals which specified left interval also specified left foot. Pace followed the lead of Hardee and subsequent compilers by instructing that the right foot moved for left obliques and that the left foot moved for right obliques.

By itself, Pace's tactics would seem to be an aberration. However, when viewed in

the context of all the other manuals, his seems to be the truest interpretation of Hardee by requiring right foot and left interval.

D. *United States Service Magazine (1865)*

During the war officers and enlisted men had opportunities to ask drill questions in some “Dear Abby” type columns. One was the *United States Army Navy Journal* with its “Answers to Correspondents” column. Another was the *United States Service Magazine* with its “Military Notes and Queries” column.

For example, an answer to a query in the Army Navy Journal went like this :

"When a company marches at support arms," it has been the custom for the guides to remain at a *carry* ; but, inasmuch as they require relief, as well as the men, we can see no good reason why this should be.

—See : Vol. I, *United States Army Navy Journal* (1864), p. 408.

Another is from the U.S. Service Magazine :

Questions. - Are troops drawn up for inspection supposed to have their *bayonets unfixed* and at the command, "Inspection - Arms!" to *fix bayonets* and spring rammers ? and when the inspecting officer has passed to the third man from the one inspected, is that man supposed to *unfix bayonet* and return rammer ?

—A. B. C., *Camp Burnside, Ky.*

Answers. - Troops are usually drawn up with *fixed* bayonets. If they happen to be unfixed, they should be fixed at the command, "Inspection - Arms!" but not unfixed again when the inspector has passed and the rammer returned.

—See : Vol. II, *United States Service Magazine*, (1864), p. 439.

Being a solid source for answers to drill questions, someone posted the below question about where to aim for left oblique :

S.L.H., Vicksburg.—"Through what interval does the rear-rank man aim in firing to the left oblique?" Answer.—**Over the left shoulder of the man in front of him.**

—See : Vol. III, *United States Service Magazine*, p. 285 (New York, 1865)

The answer to this query in the U.S. Service Magazine is a persuasive statement that there is something wrong with reenactors aiming through the right intervals or over

the right shoulders of their file leaders. When viewed alongside five decades of usage, this simple answer is the single most conclusive statement that the proper location is through the left interval, not the right.

## 5. What Would Upton Do?



Like the prewar manuals of Scott, the postwar manuals from Emory Upton sometimes shed light on practices during the war. For example, his manual details how adjutants address troops for parade and where sergeants, commanding companies, stand during parade. He also provides instruction about how soldiers reverse arms and rest-on arms. None of these things are discussed by the Big Three. The oblique fire is another thing discussed.

His paragraphs for the direct and oblique firings in his 1868 manual are generally identical to Hardee, Gilham and Casey. The big difference is that Upton specifies the side where the weapon is aimed :

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### *Oblique Firings*

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287. The oblique firings will be executed to the right and left by the same commands as the direct fire, with the difference : the command, aim, will be preceded by the command, *right* or *left oblique*.

288. The command, *ready*, will be executed as in the direct fire. At the command, *right oblique*, both ranks will cast their eyes to the right and look steadily at the object to be hit. At the command, *aim*, the front-rank men will aim to the right without deranging the feet ; each rear rank man will advance the left foot about eight inches toward the right foot of the man next on the right of his file-leader, and aim to the right, inclining the upper part of the body forward, and bending a little the left knee.

289. Should the command be, *left oblique*, both ranks will cast their eyes to the left ; the rear-rank men will, at the same time, raise their pieces to a vertical position. At the command, *aim*, the front rank will aim to the left, without deranging the feet ; each rear-rank man will advance the left foot about eight inches toward the right foot of the man next on the left of his file-leader, at the same time bringing down his piece, and **aiming to the left of his file-leader**, the upper part of the body inclining forward, the left knee slightly bent.

—See : Emory Upton, *a New System of Infantry Tactics Double and Single Rank. Adapted to American Topography and Improved Fire-arms* (1868), SoS 287-89.

Upton's revised manual in 1875 and an update to his tactics in 1882 reaffirm the

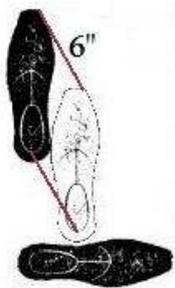
left interval for aiming :

“...each rear-rank man [ ] brings down his piece to the left of his front-rank man.”

—See : Emory Upton, *Infantry Tactics, Double and Single Rank* (New York, 1875), SoS 107 ; and Hugh T. Reed, *Upton's Infantry Tactics, Abridged and Revised* (Baltimore, 1882), SoS 136.

## 6. Foot Movements Then, and What Should Reenactors Do Now?

### A. The Oblique Hokey Pokey

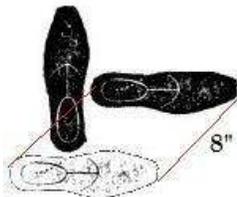


Left oblique per Scott

A comparison of the different manuals would be incomplete without examining foot location for left oblique aiming. It varied over time, but oddly enough, the method went full circle when Scott started with the left foot forward, Hardee changed it to the right forward, but was returned by Upton to left foot forward.

Compare Scott (1835) :

285. At the command, *aim*, [ ] The rear rank men will advance **the left foot about six inches towards the right heel of the centre rank men of their files** ; they will advance also the upper part of the body in bending a little the left knee, and take aim through the intervals to the left of their file leaders.



Left Oblique per Hardee, Gilham, Casey and Pace

to Hardee (1855) :

271. At the command, *aim*, [ ] each man in the rear will **advance the right foot about eight inches toward the right heel of the man next on the right of his file leader**, and aim to the left, inclining the upper part of the body forward and bending a little the right knee.



Rear-rank feet per Chandler. Feet remain in the position of prime without moving.

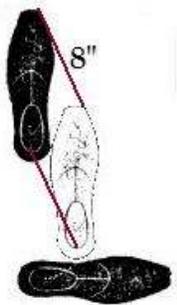
to Chandler (1861) :

At the command, *aim*, the front rank will take aim to the left without inclining the knee or stirring the feet. The rear rank men will advance the upper part of the body in bending a little the left knee, and take aim through the intervals to the left of their file-leaders, **without stirring the feet**.

to Pace (1865) :

137. At the command, *aim*, the front rank men will aim to the left without derailing the feet, each rear rank man will **advance the right foot about eight inches towards the left heel of the man next on the right of his file leader**, and aim through the interval to the left of his file leader.

and to Upton (1868) :



Upton :  
Left Oblique  

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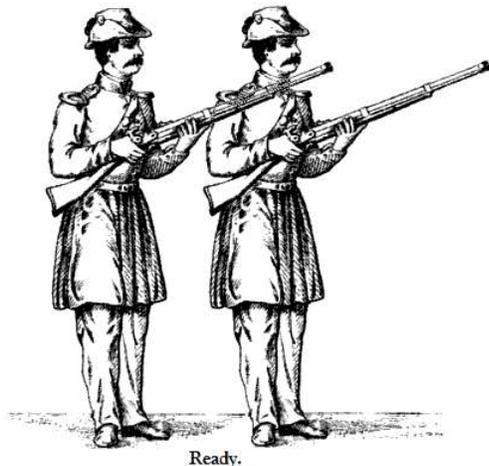
Hardee, Casey  
& Gilham :  
Right Oblique

289. At the command, *aim*, [ ] each rear-rank man will **advance the left foot about eight inches toward the right foot of the man next on the left of his file-leader**, [ ] and aiming to the left of his file-leader, the upper part of the body inclining forward, the left knee slightly bent.

This comparison shows that, like reenactors, the compilers couldn't agree on the best method of performing left obliques, either. In Scott, the left foot goes six inches forward ; in Hardee, the right foot goes eight inches diagonally to the right ; in Chandler, neither foot moves ; in Pace, the right foot goes eight inches diagonal to the right (like Hardee) ; and in Upton, the left foot goes forward eight inches.

## B. What Should Reenactors Do?

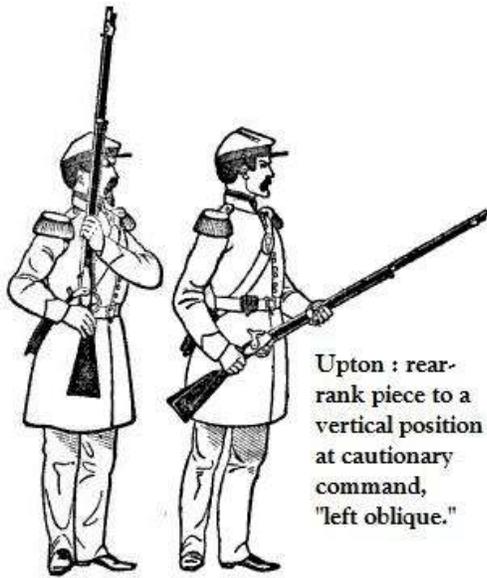
To conform to period practice, reenactors should perform the following movements beginning with both ranks in the position of *ready* (as shown, left) :



(1) At the cautionary command, *left oblique*, two things occur :

(A) **Both ranks “throw back the left shoulder and look steadily at the object to be hit.”** [H 270, G 192, C 279]

—*Comment* : This opens the left interval.



- (B) **“The rear-rank men will, at the same time, raise their pieces to a vertical position.”** [Upton, 289]

—*Comment* : Raising the weapon decreases the odds that the rear-rank men will club the front-rank men while throwing back their left shoulders.

Note : Commanders should wait for both movements of the cautionary command to be completed before ordering the command of execution, *aim*.

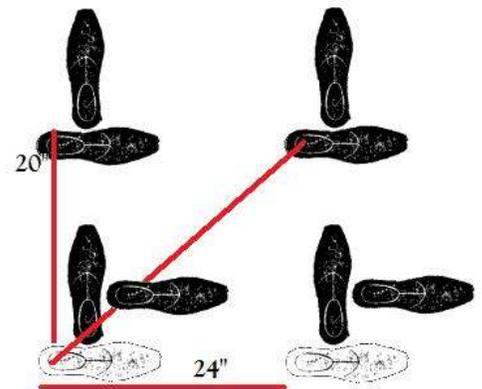
- (2) At the command, *aim*, several things occur :

- (A) **“... the front-rank will take aim to the left without deranging the feet ; and ...”** [H 271, G 192, C 280]

- (B) **“... each man in the rear will advance the right foot about eight inches toward the right heel of the man next on the right of his file leader... [H 271, G 192, C 280]**

- (C) **“... and aim to the left [H 271, G 192, C 280] of his file leader [Scott, 86, 303, 285 ; Cooper, p. 22 ; Cairns, p. 38 ; Roe, p. 55 ; Kibbe, p. 26 ; Stone, 285 ; Beadle, p. 24 ; Chandler, p. 35 ; Pace, 137 ; U.S. Service Magazine., III:285 ; Upton, 289, 107 ; and Reed, 136].**

—*Comment* : The length of the diagonal line from the right heel of the rear-rank man to the front-rank man on his right is approximately 32" based upon  $A^2 + B^2 = C^2$ . With the manual prescribing an eight inch movement, it's only one quarter of the total distance from the positions of these heels where they started at the *ready* position. The right foot is perpendicular to the left foot, and the right heel is place near the in-step of the left foot.



Foot positions for left oblique per Hardee, Gilham and Casey

- (D) **“...inclining the upper body forward...”** [H 271, G 192, C 280]

- (E) **“... bending a little the right knee.”** [H 271, G 192, C 280]

—*Comment* : This is for balance.

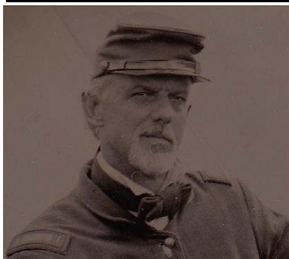
## 7. Summary

The modern practice of aiming through the right interval or over the right shoulder to the left does not conform to period practice. No authorities were found which specified aiming through the right interval or over the right shoulder for left oblique. All instructed aiming through the left interval or said nothing at all.

The Big Three's partial instruction to "*aim to the left*" is consistent with all other authorities which provided the full instruction. Had The Big Three intended the radical change of aiming through the right interval or right shoulder, the significant change would have been noted with specificity. Instead, they removed phrases which seemed redundant. This removal created an ambiguity which was resolved with the query in the U.S. Service Magazine and with Upton returning the removed phrases in his post war manuals.

When all authorities say to aim through the left interval and when no period authorities say otherwise, reenactors should conform to period practice by aiming through the left interval. This method is easier and safer than making a large, off-balance step to the right to fire the left. Use the body and foot movements demonstrated herein when firing to the left.

Accordingly, aiming through the right interval to the left is hereinafter a debunked reenactorism.



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