

"DRY BOOKS OF TACTICS": U S INFANTRY MANUALS OF THE WAR OF 1812 AND AFTER, PART II

by
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"Dry books of tactics are beneath the notice of a man of genius."
-Francis Grose,
Advice to the officers of the British Army, 1783

1815 but the war ended before their work was complete. There may have been some disquiet about the adoption of a British publication, but Scott had no doubts. In January 1815 he informed Monroe that

It has been intimated that good effect may result from the expression of the Board's opinion on the merits of the system which it has been ordered to adapt to the Establishment of the U.S. infantry — The Board has no hesitation in unanimously declaring that it is the System which they would themselves have adopted, as they believe it is decidedly superior to any other extant.⁹⁴

The 1791 *Reglement* could have no better endorsement. Scott and the board apparently discussed adding man-

oeuvres for light infantry to the *Reglement* but the end of hostilities curtailed their activities which only lasted about two months. Scott felt that the board's work had been "hastily and imperfectly concluded."⁹⁵

The result of the board's labor was the 1815 *Regulations*⁹⁶ (FIG. 4). Almost a carbon copy of Macdonald's translation, it was a bulky volume illustrated with the same plates of French soldiers that had graced the pages of both Smyth and Duane's 1814 manual. In some ways the 1815 *Regulations* were a retrograde step because they did not include some of the later modifications to the 1791 such as the *ligne de science* that were a feature of Duane's *Hand Book*, but the new system was a distinct improvement over the chaos that had preceded it. The 1815 *Regulations* were put into effect by a General Order dated 27 February 1815, and in 1820 were prescribed for the militia.⁹⁷ For the first time since 1812 both parts of the US military establishment used the same infantry system, a system based on the best European practice.

Infantry Manuals, 1816-1862
The 1815 *Regulations*, like the 1791 *Reglement*, did not include any drill for light infantry and riflemen. In 1824 another board was convened at West Point to revise the infantry system consisting of Brigadier Generals Scott and Brady, Colonels Fenwick and Thayer and Major Worth.⁹⁸ The 1824 Board completed their work by January 1825, and their manual was entitled *Infantry Tactics*.⁹⁹ The infantry part of this new manual was almost identical to the 1815 *Regulations* (the same tired 1808 plates were trotted out again) and the only change was the addition of wheeling

In August 1814 Armstrong was replaced as Secretary of War by the intelligent and energetic James Monroe, who wasted little time in settling the question of a drill manual for the army. In November Monroe established a board of officers to decide on a system of infantry discipline. Monroe did some political groundwork first, placing a motion before Congress stating that he intended to convene a board " . . . to digest, and report to this Department, a system of discipline . . . which report, when approved by the President of the United States, should be carried into immediate effect . . ." The motion added that the " . . . sanction of Congress . . . if not absolutely necessary, in consideration of the powers invested in this Department by law would, nonetheless, have a very salutary effect."⁸⁹ Monroe knew how to deal with potential opposition.

To head the tactical board, Monroe chose Brevet Major General Winfield Scott, the trainer of the Niagara Army, victor of Chippewa and probably the most knowledgeable officer in the US on the subject of infantry discipline. Scott, an indefatigable reader, travelled everywhere with a portable bookshelf containing a small library of military reference works. He was an ardent admirer of the French Army and had used the 1791 *Reglement* as the basis for instruction in the Niagara Army. Scott's interest in military literature dated back at least to 1809 when he had unsuccessfully applied to the Secretary of War to be sent to France to observe French methods and collect books on military science.⁹⁰ Even his life-long rival, Brigadier General E.P. Gaines, thought that Winfield Scott was the "best qualified" officer in the army to prepare the new system.⁹¹

The board, consisting of Scott, Brigadier General Joseph Swift, and Colonels J.R. Fenwick, W. Cumming and W. Drayton was convened by a General Order dated 27 December 1814.⁹² The Board was not to compile a new system of discipline but to "so modify 'The Rules and Regulations for the Field Service and Manoeuvres of the French Infantry, as translated by Macdonald' so as to make them correspond with the organization of the Army of the U.S. . . ." Thus, the British Macdonald's fine translation of the 1791 *Reglement* was to become the basis for the new US system of infantry discipline. The board commenced sitting in early

RULES AND REGULATIONS
FOR THE
FIELD EXERCISE AND MANŒUVRES
OF
INFANTRY,

COMPILED AND ADAPTED

TO THE
ORGANIZATION OF THE ARMY OF THE UNITED STATES.

AGREEABLY TO
A RESOLVE OF CONGRESS,

DATED DECEMBER, 1814.

PUBLISHED BY ORDER OF THE WAR DEPARTMENT.

NEW-YORK :

PRINTED BY T. & W. MERCEIN, 93 GOLD-STREET.

1815.

FIG 4

Title Page of the 1815 Regulations, the result of the work of a Board of Officers headed by Bvt. Major General Winfield Scott.

ADJUTANT AND INSPECTOR GENERAL'S OFFICE, FEB. 28, 1815.

GENERAL ORDER.

THE "*Rules and Regulations for the Field Exercise and Manœuvres of Infantry*," compiled and adapted to the organization of the U. States Infantry, by a BOARD OF WAR, of which Major Gen. Scott was President, will be observed as the system of Infantry discipline for the ARMY of the UNITED STATES.

By order of the Secretary of War.
D. PARKER, *Adj't. and Insp. General.*

Both the 1815 *Regulations* and the 1825 *Infantry Tactics* were basically the 1791 *Réglement* with few changes. When the French finally revised the *Réglement*, the resulting *Ordonnance* of 1831 retained the 3-rank formation of the 1791 but provided for the employment of a 2-rank formation in exceptional circumstances. The number of evolutions in the *Réglement* were reduced and simplified and a special section on light infantry movements was added but, in fact, the 1831 *Ordonnance* merely amended the 1791 *Réglement*.¹⁰⁵

By this time Winfield Scott, having chaired several boards on the subject of infantry discipline, regarded himself as an expert and "unencumbered with a board" translated "the new French *Tactics* on the old basis."¹⁰⁶ Scott's translation of the 1831 *Ordonnance* was published in 1834 as *Infantry Tactics*.¹⁰⁷ This was a direct copy of the original and an arrant piece of plagiarism. Nonetheless, Scott's reputation being what it was, his 1834 work was ordered as the new system of discipline for the U.S. Army in 1835 (FIG. 6). The

when changing direction in close column, a very minor modification.¹⁰⁰ The main difference in the 1825 *Tactics* from the 1815 *Regulations* was the addition of a system of exercises and manoeuvres for light infantry and riflemen. The 1825 *Tactics* became official on 5 January 1825 and is often known as the "System of 1825"¹⁰¹ (FIG. 5).

In order to provide the militia with a compact version of the 1825 *Tactics*, Secretary of War Calhoun ordered Scott to prepare an abstract for their use.¹⁰² Scott annotated and abridged a printed copy of the *Tactics* and submitted it to the Secretary in February 1825, but, in 1826, the printing of this militia manual was delayed when a joint board of regular and militia officers, headed by Scott, was convened to consider militia and regular army.¹⁰³ One of the results of the labors of this 1826 Board was the *Abstract of Infantry Tactics*. . . or Scott's abridgement of *Infantry Tactics*, which was first published in 1829 and went through many subsequent editions.¹⁰⁴

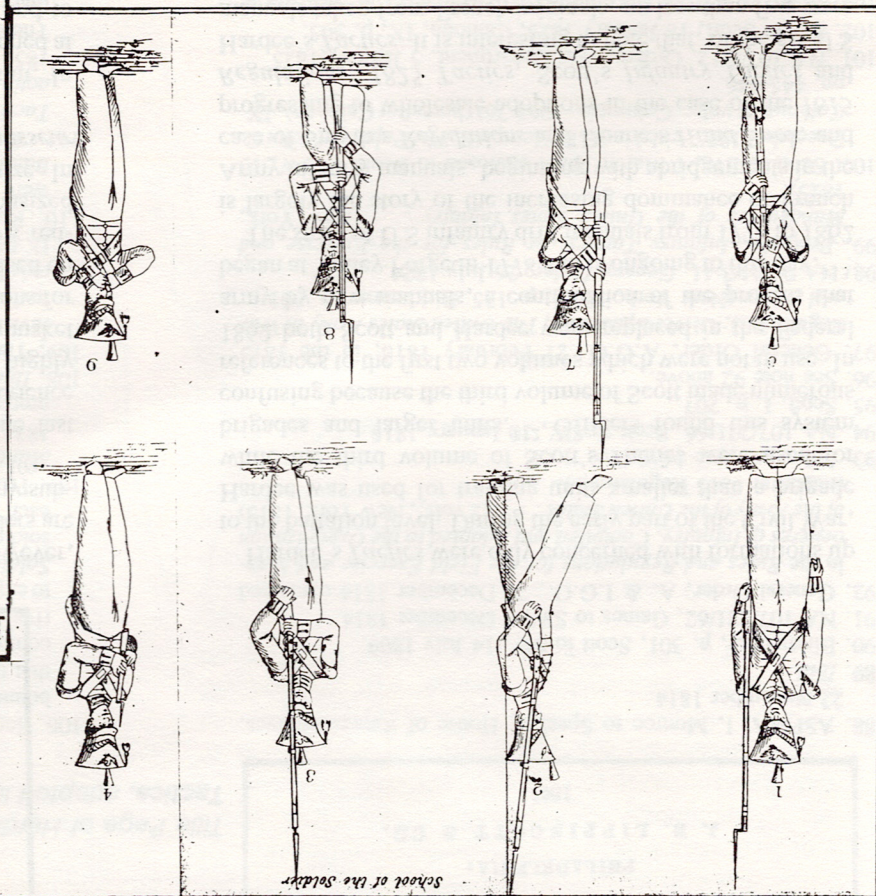
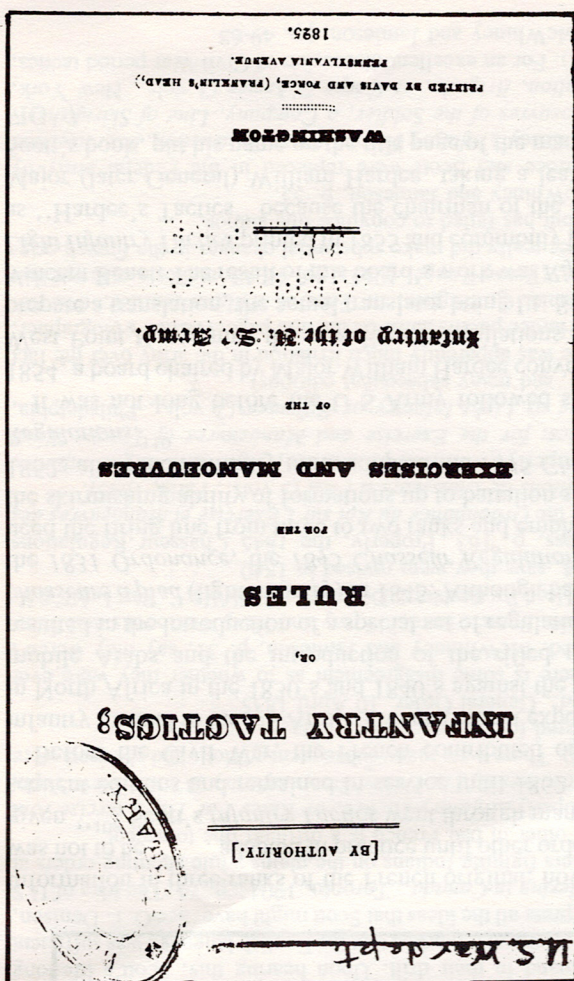


FIG 5
Title Page of the 1825 *Tactics* and plate showing
the Manual Exercise.



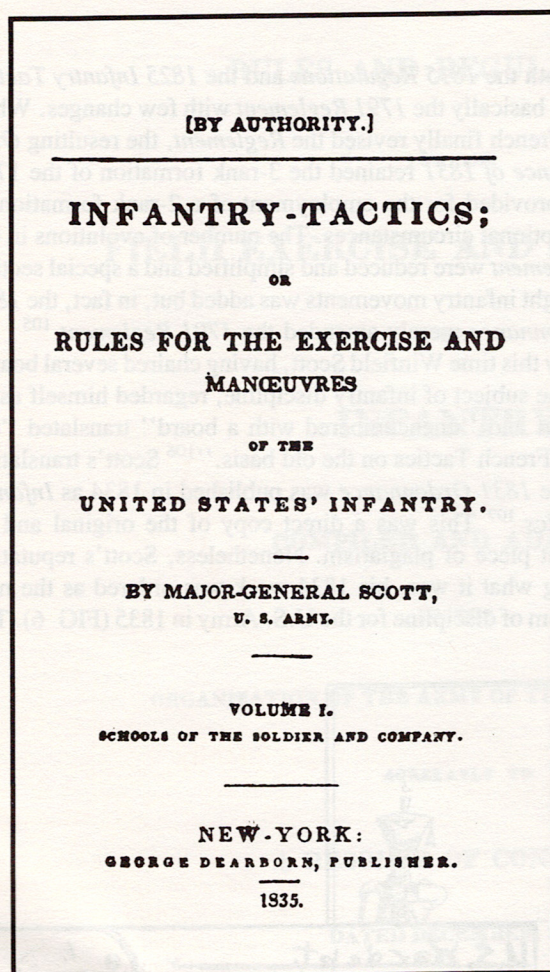


FIG 6
Title Page of Scott's *Infantry Tactics* adopted in 1835. It went through many editions and remained in service until replaced by Silas Casey's *Infantry Tactics* in 1862.

information in three ranks of the French original, however, was not to be "... adapted in practice until other orders are given."¹⁰⁸ Scott's *Infantry Tactics* went through many subsequent editions and remained in service until 1862.¹⁰⁹

Before the Civil War, the French contributed one last infantry manual to the US Army. French combat experience in North Africa in the 1830's and 1840's against the highly mobile Arabs and the introduction of the rifled musket resulted in the introduction of a special set of regulations for *chasseurs a pied* (light infantry) in 1845. Although based on the 1831 *Ordonance*, the 1845 *Chasseur Regulations* reduced the firing line from three to two ranks and emphasized the skirmishing ability of formations up to battalion size. In 1852, all French infantry units adopted the 1845 *Chasseur Regulations*.¹¹⁰

It was not long before the U S Army followed suit. In 1854, a board chaired by Major William Hardee convened at West Point to examine the new French regulations and to prepare a translation, the actual translator being Lt. Stephen Vincent Benet. The result of this board's work was *Rifle and Light Infantry Tactics* printed in 1855 and commonly known as "Hardee's Tactics" because the chairman of the board, Major (later General) William Hardee, taking a leaf from Scott's book, put his name on the title page of the manual¹¹¹ FIG 7.

Hardee's *Tactics* were only concerned with formations up to the battalion level. During the early part of the Civil War, Hardee was used for training units smaller than a brigade while the third volume of Scott's *Tactics* were used for brigades and larger units.¹¹² Officers found this system confusing because the third volume of Scott made numerous references to the first two volumes which were not in use. In 1862 both Scott and Hardee were replaced in the Federal army by new manuals, a continuation of the process that began at Valley Forge in 1778 and is ongoing to this day.¹¹³

The story of U S infantry drill manuals from 1778 to 1862 is largely the story of the increasing dominance of French Army infantry manuals, beginning with abridgements in the case of Smyth's *Regulations* and Duane's *Hand Book*, and progressing to wholesale adoptions in the case of the 1815 *Regulations*, 1825 *Tactics*, Scott's *Infantry Tactics* and Hardee's *Tactics*. It is interesting to note that, of the six U S manuals taken from French originals, no less than five were based almost directly on the 1791 *Reglement*, a tribute to the enduring quality of that system of discipline.

A history of infantry drill books, however, is not a history of infantry tactics. As was stated at the beginning, manuals are only a training aid; they are an indication of intent, not a statement of event. In combat, the "book" is usually the first thing that gets discarded.

RIFLE
AND
LIGHT INFANTRY TACTICS;
FOR
THE EXERCISE AND MANOEUVRES
OF
TROOPS WHEN ACTING AS LIGHT INFANTRY
OR RIFLEMEN.
PREPARED UNDER THE DIRECTION OF THE
WAR DEPARTMENT,
BY
BREVET-LIEUT.-COL. W. J. HARDEE,
U.S. ARMY.
VOL. I.
SCHOOLS OF THE SOLDIER AND COMPANY;
INSTRUCTION FOR SKIRMISHERS.
PHILADELPHIA:
J. B. LIPPINCOTT & CO.
1861.

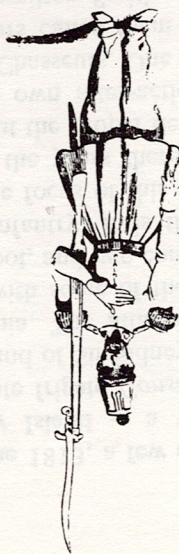


FIG 7
Title Page of Hardee's Rifle and Light Infantry
Tactics, adopted in 1855.

88. ASPMA, I, Monroe to Speaker, House of Representatives, 22 November 1814.
89. *Ibid.*
90. Birkheimer, p. 301, Scott to SW, 14 July 1809.
91. NA 107/221/62, Gaines to SW, 8 December 1814.
92. General Order, A. & I.G.O., 27 December 1814 contained in the Rules and Regulations for the Field Exercise and Manoeuvres of Infantry, Compiled and Adapted to the Organization of the Army of the United States . . . (2 vols., New York, 1815) (hereafter 1815 Regulations).
93. *Ibid.*, see note 14 above.
94. NA 107/221/66, Scott to SW, 10 January 1815.
95. Scott, I, p. 207.
96. See note 92 above.
97. General Order, A.G.O. 27 February 1816, in the 1815 Regulations: Oliver Spaulding, *The United States Army in War and Peace* (New York, 1937), p. 135; Birkheimer, p. 301.
98. NA 94/44/3:41, General Order, 26 July 1824.
99. Properly, *Infantry Tactics: or Rules for the Exercise and Manoeuvres of the United States Infantry* . . . (New York, 1825).
100. Scott to SW, 1 March 1825, enclosed in Board to SW, 15 December 1825, cited in W.E. Hemphill, *The Papers of John C. Calhoun* (9 vols., Columbia, 1963-76) (hereafter Calhoun), IX, pp. 445-446.
101. NA 107/6/12, Orders, War Department, 5 January 1825.
102. SW to Scott, 18 January 1825, Calhoun, IX, p. 505.
103. Board to SW, 5 December 1826, contained in *Abstract of Infantry Tactics: Including Exercises and Manoeuvres of Light Infantry and Riflemen: for the Use of The Militia Of The United States*, (Boston, 1829 and many subsequent editions).
104. On 2 March 1829, an Act was passed directing the Secretary of War to cause the *Abstract of Infantry Tactics* . . . to be printed in an edition of 60,000 at government expense and distributed to the various states and territories for their militia. See ASPMA, IV, pp. 86-87, 267; V, pp. 344-345.
105. Ross, pp. 160-161. Properly, the new French regulations were the *Ordonnance sur l'exercice et les manoeuvres de l'infanterie du 4 mars, 1831* (Paris, 1831-32).
106. Scott, I, p. 258. Scott's admiration for things French was boundless. At one point in the 1840's, he apparently decided that the U S Army should retain the original French words of command in their drill. Upon hearing this, Scott's life-long rival, Gaines, remarked that the English language was sufficient to express all the ideas that Scott might have. See G. T. Denison, *Soldiering in Canada*, Toronto, 1904, p. 74. The idea of U S soldiers fighting Indians on the plains while shouting orders at each other in bad French is a difficult one to accept.
107. Properly, *Infantry-Tactics: or Rules For The Exercise And Manoeuvres Of The United States Infantry* (3 vols., New York, 1834). There were many subsequent editions and abstracts were prepared for the use of the militia.
108. *Ibid.*, General Order, 10 April 1835.
109. There is some disagreement as to whether they were ever revised. McWhiney and Jamieson, p. 31, say they weren't revised. Francis Lord, "Army and Navy Textbooks and Manuals Used By the North During the Civil War", Part I, MC&H, IX:64, says they were revised in 1840.
110. Ross, p. 163. Properly, the 1845 Chasseur Regulations were the *Ordonnance du Roi sur l'Exercice et Manoeuvres des Bataillons de Chasseurs a Pied* (3 vols., Paris, 1845).
111. Properly, William J. Hardee, *Rifle and Light Infantry Tactics: for the Exercise and Manoeuvres of Troops When acting as Light Infantry or Riflemen* (2 vols., Philadelphia, 1855, and many subsequent editions).
112. McWhiney and Jamieson, p. 53.
113. Hardee and Scott were replaced in the Federal army by Silas Casey's *Infantry Tactics, for the Instruction, Exercise, and Manoeuvres of the Soldier, a Company, Line of Skirmishers, Battalion, Brigade, or Corps D'Armee* (3 vols., New York, 1862). For an excellent discussion of Civil War period tactics, see McWhiney and Jamieson, pp. 49-68.