

THE MILITIA - BAYONET POLICY - JULY 2014

Introduction

The Prussian infantry of the late Napoleonic period had bayonets fixed all the time. They did not carry bayonet scabbards. This was a distinctive feature of the Prussian army.

In order to accurately portray Prussian infantry of the period, we will adopt this historical practice. The policy below has been written to ensure that this can be done in a manner that minimises risk to other participants and the public.

When portraying units other than Napoleonic Prussians, bayonets are to be carried in scabbards. If they are fixed the following principles will still apply.

The over-riding rule in all cases is that we do not engage anyone with our bayonets lowered. When facing infantry the key feature of the policy is a 10 metre zone immediately to the front of the unit. If any participant or unit is within this zone, moves into this zone, or is brought into this zone by the movement of our unit, then bayonets are brought to a safe position.

The policy is in four parts: the safe handling of the bayonet in a proactive context; the safe handling of the bayonet in a reactive context; general rules; and diagrams of the postures described.

Part 1 - Safe Handling of the Bayonet in a Proactive Context

An assault on a formed and stationary enemy unit is an example of a Proactive Context, i.e., one that the unit commander is in control of. It includes all of the bayonet specific orders that we will use and is described below.

i - Load Muskets - Geladen - "guh-lard-enn"

The men will load in the usual way and go to the shoulder when loaded.

ii - Trail Arms - Gewehr Rechts - "guv-air rex"

The men will seize the musket around the rear ramrod pipe with their right hand; they will bring the musket across to their right hip; the musket will be held with the right hand at the right hip, at a steep angle, to the front, such that the tip of the bayonet is just above head height. (See Diagram A)

iii - Quick March - Geschwindschritt, Marsch - "gush-vint-shh-ritt, marsh"

The men will advance at the quick march (108 ppm) or jog (120 ppm), maintaining formation.

iv - Fire

The unit will halt and deliver a volley from safe firing distance or greater.

v - Lower Bayonets - Fallt das Gewehr - "felt dass guv-air"

The men will take the pistol grip of the musket in the right hand and grasp the stock at the rear ramrod pipe with the left; the musket will be lowered to a horizontal position at hip level with the bayonet pointing directly forwards. (See Diagram B)

vi - March - Ordinaireschritt, Vorwärts, Marsch - "ord-in-air-shh-ritt, four-vurts, marsh"

The men will advance on the enemy in ordinary time (72 ppm) maintaining formation.

vii - Bayonets to Safe Position - Gewehr Hoch - "guv-air hock"

The unit commander will give this order before the unit crosses an imaginary line 10 metres in front of the enemy unit. Whilst continuing to advance, the men will smartly bring the musket to a high port position. The musket will be held at a steep angle, with the lock held high up the chest, such that the bayonet is high up above the head. (See Diagram C)

viii - If the opposing units then close ...

The men will stay at the "Gewehr Hoch" position and maintain formation. They will stand their ground as far as possible, but will not engage in hand-to-hand, nor move their muskets from the "Gewehr Hoch" position.

NOTE 1 - in the event that a formerly stationary enemy unit advances into (or towards) the 10 metre zone, the unit commander must immediately give the order Gewehr Hoch.

NOTE 2 - the orders above may be used individually or in sequence depending on the manoeuvre required, but in all cases bayonets must not be at Gewehr Rechts or Fallt das Gewehr if there is any participant in the 10 metre zone.

Part 2 - Safe Handling of the Bayonet in Reactive Context

Reactive Contexts are those situations where the unit has to react to the actions of other participants, usually the enemy. For example: receiving an infantry attack; receiving a cavalry attack.

Receiving an Infantry Attack

Napoleonic re-enactment rarely comes to uncontrolled hand-to-hand, or a confused melee situation. Under normal circumstances, engagement is between formed and commanded units, consequently the distances and speeds involved are such that there is sufficient time for a unit commander to prepare to receive an infantry attack safely.

Infantry attacks will likely be in the form of a controlled advance by the enemy, like that described in Part 1, although they may occasionally take the form of an un-controlled advance, such as an enemy unit/detachment/soldier rushing to engage.

In all cases, the principles described in Part 1 apply: if any enemy advances within 10 metres and we are at *Gewehr Rechts* (ii) or *Fallt das Gewehr* (v) then the unit commander must immediately order *Gewehr Hoch* (vii).

Due to the nature of reactive contexts, it is possible that the unit commander may be unaware of an incoming risk. To ensure as much warning as possible, section commanders may also give the order *Gewehr Hoch* to the whole unit.

It is also possible that the section commanders may also be unaware of an incoming risk. To further ensure as much warning as possible, the men may make their nearest commander aware of a risk they identify.

In addition, each man is ultimately responsible for his own bayonet and, if not comfortable with a situation in his immediate area, must assume the *Gewehr Hoch* posture, or, if this is not possible, take other evasive action. For example: from *Gewehr Rechts* it is easy to go to *Gewehr Ab* (order arms); from *Fallt das Gewehr* it is easy to lower the bayonet point to the ground; in addition the man can issue a verbal warning to oncoming troops.

If the opposing units close, the men will stay at the "*Gewehr Hoch*" position and maintain formation. They will stand their ground as far as possible, but will not engage in hand-to-hand, nor move their muskets from the "*Gewehr Hoch*" position.

Receiving a Cavalry Attack

The Prussian practice is to form a standing solid square, or clump, with muskets held high and vertically, with bayonets pointing straight up (the *Fertig* position in essence).

We will adopt the same practice, but will hold the musket at an angle just beyond vertical, so that the point of the bayonet is directly over the musketeer's own head and the musket thereby leans slightly backwards, away from the attack. (See Diagram D)

We will not lower bayonets, or kneel to receive cavalry.

We will not engage in hand-to-hand and will remain physically passive during a cavalry attack.

Other Reactive Contexts

The same principles will apply in any other situation where the unit has to react to the actions of other participants (e.g., a friendly unit crossing our front).

Part 3 - General Rules

Safety is everyone's job.

No member is obliged to have their bayonet fixed at all times and any member who so wishes is free to carry their bayonet unfixed. Unfixed bayonet must be carried in a period correct scabbard and sling. Unfixed bayonets must not be carried in haversacks or packs.

We do not engage anyone with our bayonets lowered.

We do not permit uncontrolled bayonet charges, either by individuals or as a unit.

We only lower bayonets when in a formed and commanded body.

We do not lower bayonets if other participants are within 10 metres of our front, or appear to be moving into that area.

Bayonets are to be blunted and of a pattern appropriate to the musket.

Bayonets are to be maintained in good condition.

Bayonets may only be fixed by members who have passed the bayonet part of the musket competency test.

Like the decision to fire a musket, the ultimate responsibility for bayonet safety remains with the individual. In almost all cases the unit commander or NCOs will be aware of the situation and will give the appropriate order - however, individual members must remain aware of their immediate situation and be prepared to take any necessary steps to ensure the safety of themselves and others.

Unit commanders are not to take any risks and must in all cases sacrifice derring-do, drama, territory and aggression to the interests of safety.

When portraying units other than Napoleonic Prussians, bayonets are to be carried in scabbards.

Part 4 – Diagrams

Diagram A – Gewehr Rechts



Diagram B – Falldas Gewehr

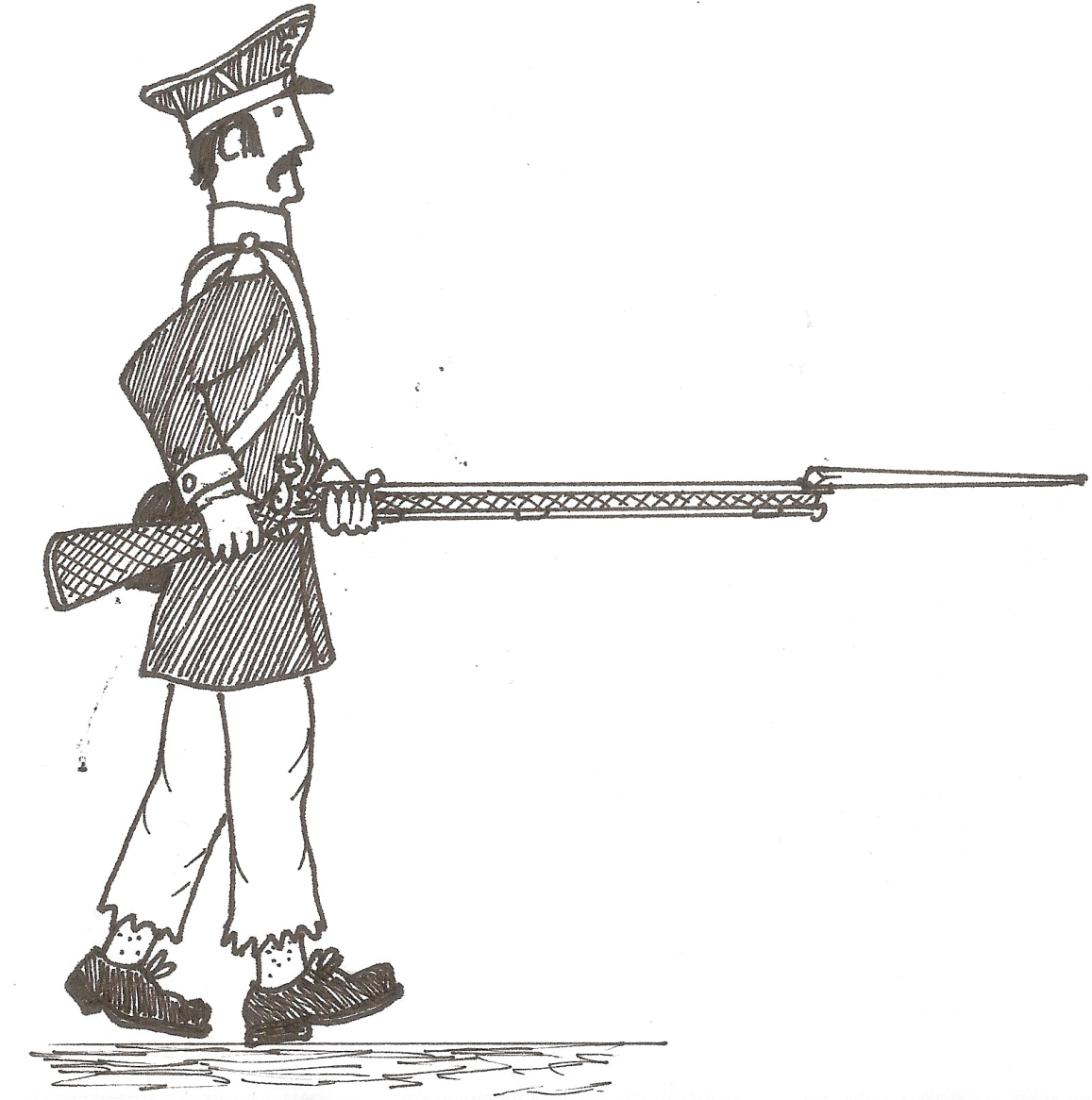


Diagram C – Gewehr Hoch

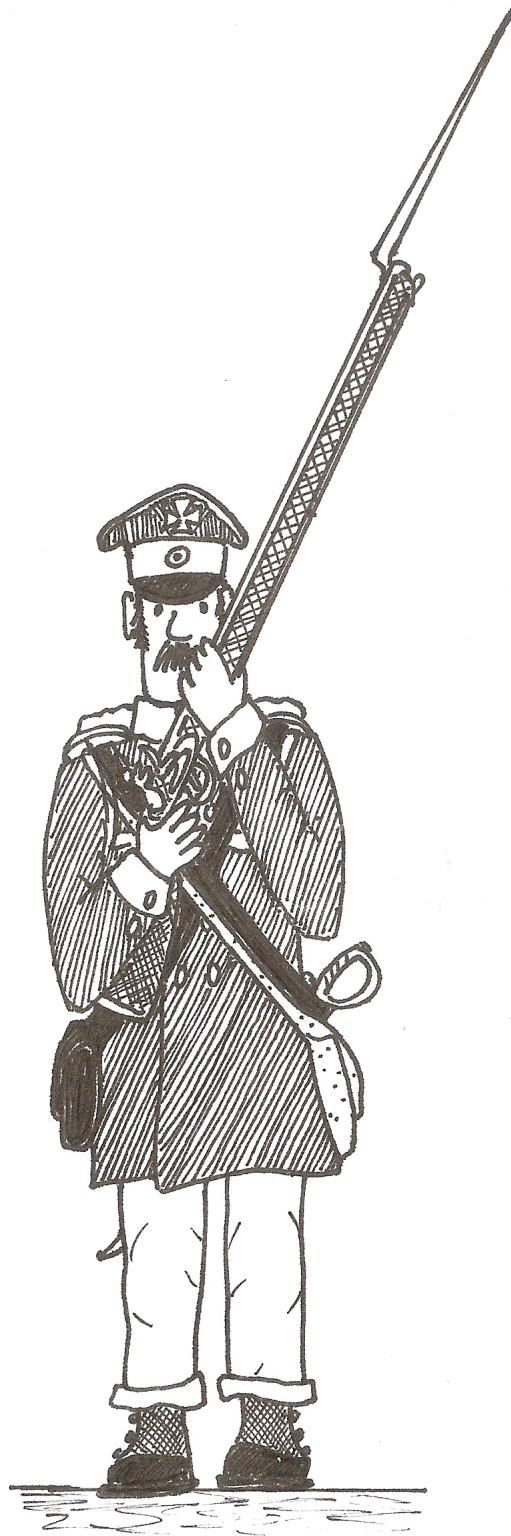


Diagram D – Receive a Cavalry Attack

