

The Connoisseur

November 1971

£1.00

\$3.00 U.S.A.



'Poise Your Musket'

Early Drill Books in the National Army Museum

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THE sixteenth century was a period of great change in the art of war. Firearms of a primitive kind had been in use since the early fourteenth century but it had required two more centuries for these weapons to be developed to a point at which their effectiveness began to threaten the defensive power of armour. Once armour became vulnerable, the reduction in mobility which it enforced on its wearer became a serious disadvantage and its use on the battlefield began to wane. For the soldier who was

required to handle the early firearm, it soon proved too great an encumbrance and he lost the protection upon which he had come to rely.

Instead, through the complication of firing the weapon, came the concept of strictly disciplined drill. The soldier was taught the motions for loading and firing in a series of precise movements which had to be carried out at the order of his officer and in time with his companions. As the gun was not only complicated but inaccurate, the most effective method of use was the volley, with many men firing at the same moment, at short range. In this new form of warfare, victory went to the force which could apply most firepower or the greatest number of volleys at a given point. Once a line of men had fired its volley, it would take a long time to reload and it had to be replaced by another line loaded and ready to shoot; or the line might be required at short notice to fire a volley in a different direction from that originally intended. From these requirements developed complicated field manoeuvres designed to move bodies of men around the battlefield in such a way that they could quickly bring maximum firepower to bear in any direction. The vestiges of this survive in modern ceremonial parades such as Trooping the Colour.

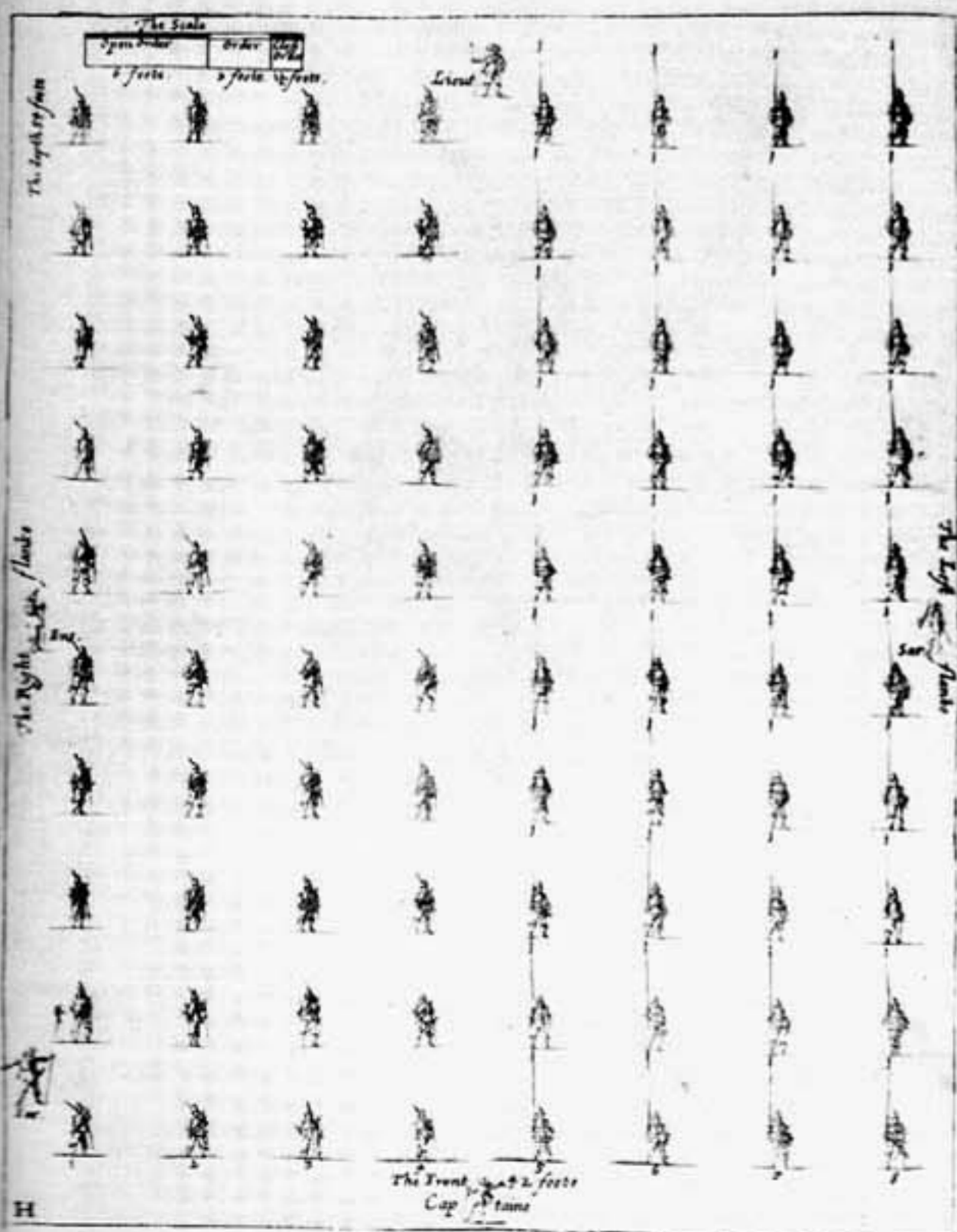
Britain lagged behind in the development of these new weapons and forms of warfare. Elizabeth I avoided large scale involvement in foreign wars and isolationism was carried to an even greater extreme by James I and Charles I. In Europe this was the period of the great religious wars culminating in the 30 Years War when again Britain stood on the sidelines. However, even if Britain as a country was not involved, many of her subjects joined the continental wars as volunteers. They learnt the new arts of war and were ready when required to pass this knowledge on to their fellow-countrymen. Their opportunity came when

48

The principles of the Art military.

Note also, that after you have wheeled to which hand you list, and as often as you will, you give in a single company this word of command, *Half file as you were*, that is, as they stood in their order both in ranke and file before; but in greater bodies where the doubling is omitted, you first open your ranks, by giving this terme of direction, *Ranks backward to your open order*, and then likewise your files by commanding, *Files open* (both waies) to your open order of fixe foote, as this figure both in ranke, and file represents.

In opening of Ranks and files, you must make all the files, or ranks; saving the outer most on that hand from whence you meane to open (which must stand) to move altogether till the second Rank, or File from that which standeth have gotten its distance, and consequently all the rest.



1. A company of infantry drawn up in ranks of musketeers and pikemen. From Henry Hexham, *The Principles of the Art Militarie*.

2. Captain William Barrieff. The frontispiece to his book, *Military Discipline or the Young Artillery-Man*.



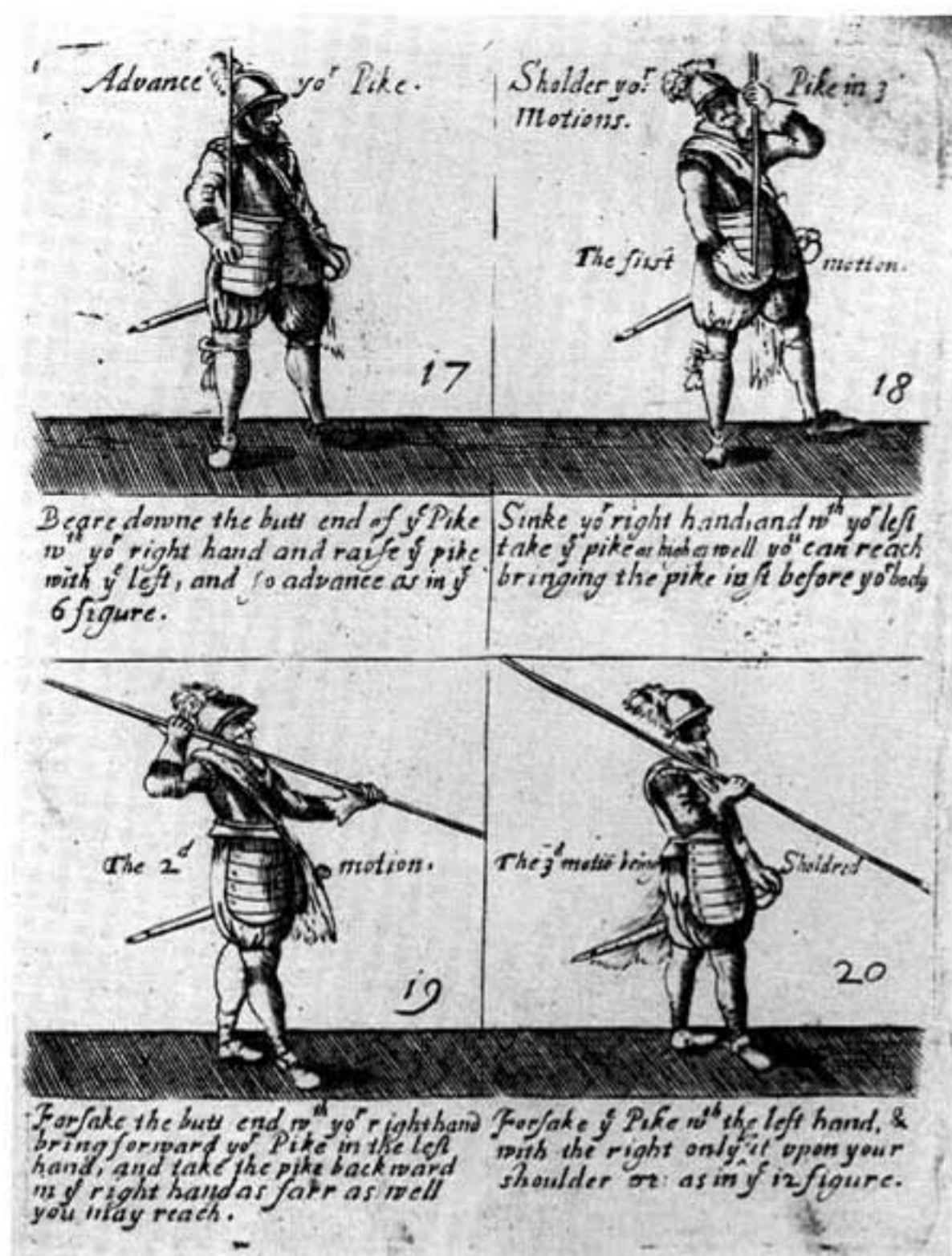
King Charles I and his Parliament came to the brink of civil war. From the local militia or trained bands came a demand for up-to-date military training and this was partially satisfied by a spate of books illustrating the latest forms of arms drill and manoeuvres as practised on the Continent.

After the restoration of the monarchy, the country opposed a professional standing army and preferred a local militia formed from those with property to protect. The militia remained avid for modern military knowledge and from the Civil War to the 1750s there was a steady stream of books on drill and military discipline aimed primarily at the militia. There was a further surge in this interest when Napoleon threatened to invade Britain and a large proportion of the male population joined the Fencibles, the Yeomanry or the Volunteers to defend their country against invasion.

These drill books, many of which are of great rarity and bibliophilic interest, are valuable source material for both the military historian and the student of military uniform. Some were illustrated by artists of talent such as Jacques Callot, Bernard Lens and Thomas Rowlandson and their plates are fine

engravings in their own right. Two notes of caution should be sounded. Until Henry Dundas's *XVIII Manoeuvres* was accepted by the War Office in 1793, no drill book could claim to represent an officially approved drill. Examples of drill books produced at about the same time as one another show different drills. Secondly the illustrations often pre-date publication by many years and while the uniform is usually represented accurately it may be of an earlier date.

The earliest book of infantry drill in the library of the National Army Museum is 'The Principles of the Art Militarie practised in the Warres of the United Netherlands. Composed by Henry Hexham, Quarter-Master to the Regiment of the Honourable Colonell Goring; London, printed by Robert Young 1639'. The wars referred to are the Dutch fight for independence against Spain and the methods propounded are those of Maurice of Nassau, the great sixteenth-century Dutch general. The book contains illustrations of drill which are poor copies of the famous Dutch drill book of Jacob de Gheyn, 'The Exercise of Arms' (The Hague, 1607). Of more interest and rarity are the plates showing company drill (No. 1).

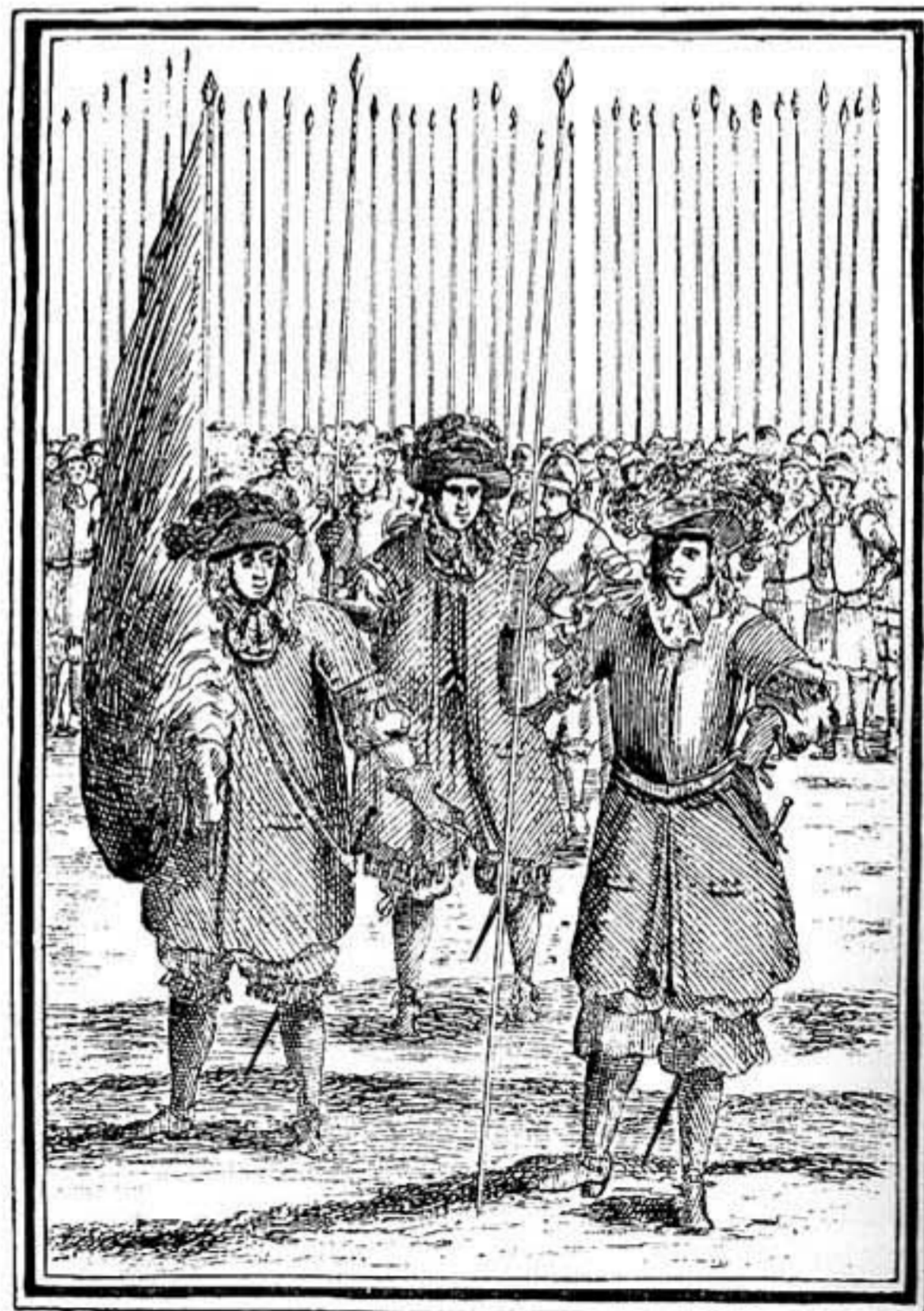


3. The Pike Exercise. From *The English Military Discipline*, n.d. (c. 1680).

The methods of Maurice of Nassau were already being replaced by those of Gustavus Adolphus of Sweden, the greatest general of the 30 Years War. One of the first publications to bring 'the way to draw up the Swedish Brigade' to the notice of the trained bands of England was *Military Discipline: or the Young Artillery-man* by Captaine William Barrieff; London, printed by John Dawson, 1643' (No.2). Artillery is used here in the early sense referring to firearms in general.

Although cavalry retained their armour longer than infantry they adopted 'hand-gonnes' with enthusiasm and for a time their main tactic was to trot to within 20 yards of an enemy, discharge their pistols and trot off to reload. These drills are shown in the museum's oldest drill book: *Militarie Instructions for the Cavallrie According to the Moderne Warrs* (by John Crusoe); Printed by the Printers to the University of Cambridge, 1632'.

During the Civil Wars in England the lessons learnt were written down and illustrated for 'the souldiery of the nation' in two important books: *The Compleat Body of the Art Military Exactly compiled and gradually composed for the Foot in the best refined manner according to the practice of the Modern Times*. Second Edition, by Richard Elton, Lieutenant-Collonel; London, printed by R. & W. Leybourn, 1659'. This was written specifically for the Militia of London and deals largely with field manoeuvres rather than arms drill. The most popular illustrated book on arms drill, judging by the number of editions seems to have been *The English Military Discipline Exactly described by prints from copper cuts sold by John Overton at the White*



4. A Captain, an Ensign, a Lieutenant and a company of pikemen. From Capt. J. S., *Military Discipline or the Art of War*, 1689.

5. 'Present - Fire'. A private of the 1st Foot Guards 1745. From the *Gentleman Volunteers Pocket Companion*.



Horse without Newgate'. The museum copy is undated, but was probably published between 1675 and 1680. The dress shown is that of some thirty years earlier (No. 3).

The Monmouth rebellion of 1685 and the Revolution of 1688 brought the threat of civil war once more. The standing army was increased far beyond the Royal Guards and Garrisons hitherto permitted by Parliament. It is probably for officers of the new regular regiments that many drill books were published around this period. None of the museum's several examples contains the usual dedication to the Gentlemen of the Militia. One example with an interesting frontispiece (No. 4) is 'Military Discipline or the Art of War showing directions for the Postures in exercising of the Pike and Musket. Improved and Designed by Capt. J. S.; Published and Sold by Robert Morden 1689'. The uniform shown is of an earlier date, probably about 1660-65.

The late seventeenth century saw growing sophistication in the science of war, not only in weapons and drill but also in fortification, which became an increasingly exact science pioneered by the French engineer Vauban. New forms of defence required new methods of attack and it is at this point that the grenadier appeared. He carried several grenades which were hollow containers of gunpowder exploded by a wick. The wick was lit and the grenades thrown in a carefully laid down drill sequence. This was obviously a hazardous business as implied in a popular drill book of the time which was published in several editions: 'Treatise of Military Discipline in which is laid down and explained the Duty of the Officer and Soldier, by Humphrey Bland; London, printed for Sam Buckley, 1727'. Bland advises that 'when the Granadiers stand in a body with men of the Battalion they must then perform the same motions that they do

XXII. *Charge your Bayonet.* Pl^{24.}



6. 'Charge Your Bayonet'. From *A Plan of Discipline composed for the use of the Militia of the County of Norfolk*, 1759.

Colour plate. 'Blow Your Match'. A grenadier of the 1st Foot Guards 1735. From Bernard Lens, *The Granadiers Exercise of the Granade*.

because they do not then meddle with their Granades'.

The only drill book in the museum specifically devoted to the grenadier is also one of the finest: 'The Granadiers Exercise of the Granade in His Majesty's first Regiment of Foot-Guards. Drawn from life and etched by Bernard Lens. Oct. ye 30th 1735'. It consists of a frontispiece and 17 coloured plates (see colour plate).

Periodic attempts between 1689 and 1745 to restore to the throne James II and his heirs posed a continuing threat of invasion. This not only provided an excuse to keep the standing army but also meant that interest in the militia was maintained. A fine book on musket drill similar in style to 'The Granadiers Exercise' of Bernard Lens is 'The Gentlemen Volunteers Pocket Companion describing the various motions of the Foot Guards in the Manual Exercise. Inscribed to the Brave and Worthy Gentlemen associators of Great Britain and to the Militia of the Citys of London and Westminster; Published Decem 26 1745'. This has 48 plates in eight pull-out folding sections of 6 plates each (No. 5).

One of the most famous drill books published with the militia in mind is 'A Plan of Discipline composed for the Use of the Militia of the County of Norfolk (by William Windham); London, printed by J. Shuckburgh, 1759'. It has 52 engraved plates of musket and sword drill which show well how the uniform had become simpler and more practical than that illustrated in the two previous examples (No. 6). This book is of particular importance in that it was taken up by the Colonial Militia in North America and later became one of the standard textbooks of the American Continental Army during the War of Independence.

A lull in the publication of drill books followed until the outbreak of the French Revolutionary and Napoleonic Wars. Considerable expansion in the army and the formation of the Yeomanry and Volunteers produced another wave of interest in matters military and a number of other drill books were published during this period. All described here can be consulted in the library of the National Army Museum.

