

SI03 **Principles of tactical security** **Time: 2 hours**

Goal: Students will plan security for a march and a defense.

Objectives:

- 1 Given a tactical situation, create a systematic security plan for a defensive position.
- 2 Given a tactical situation, create a systematic security plan for a tactical march.

References:

Mahan, *The Outpost*, Ch. V.
Recon Manual
Study materials

Study Materials

223. To keep an enemy in ignorance of the state of our forces and the character of our position is one of the most indispensable duties in war. It is in this way that we oblige him to take every possible precaution in advancing; forging him to feel his way, step by step, and to avoid risking his own safety in hazarding those bold and rapid movement which, when made against a feeble, or an unprepared enemy, lead to the most brilliant results.

Mahan, *The Outpost*

Perhaps the most evident lapse in reenacted Civil War events is the utter lack of systematic security. The concept of “out-posts and pickets” at typical events, whether scripted battles or so-called tacticals is generally limited to the posting of local sentries – if it is addressed at all. Few skills were of as great a utility to a commander than the ability to plan and place security, whether at rest or in movement.

In fact, a maneuver force then, as now, must rest or move within a sort of bubble of security. The fact that this should be so is generally comprehensible even to amateur hobbyists; the principles that dictate security are not understood at all. We will now begin to correct that deficiency.

Fundamental principles

Deploying a large force to meet a threat requires time. If an enemy threat is detected at some comfortable distance, even a relatively untrained force can manage to prepare; if the detection is late, the enemy may be upon us before we have well prepared to dispute with him the ground we hold. This gives us our first two principles.

1. The outermost security forces must provide early warning of sufficient time to meet any threat. Therefore, the distance from the main force of the security line must be of such a magnitude that it provides the main force time to form and deploy before the enemy arrives. In other words, ask: *how long will it take my force to deploy?* Then: *How long will an attacking enemy take to march that distance?* Then, the security line must be at that distance from the main force that an approaching enemy will not reach me before I am prepared.
2. If the terrain or the proximity of the enemy does not permit this comfortable distance to be maintained (as is frequently the case), then the security force must be strengthened to provide not only early warning of threat, but also *delay*.

The “bubble”

First, we need to establish a vocabulary.

Advanced-post. A **detachment** from a *stationary* larger formation organized, configured, and placed so as to provide security by early warning and/or delay upon the appearance of an enemy. A system of advanced-posts generally consists of multiple layers comprising, from close to distant, **grand-guards**, **pickets**, **out-posts**, and **sentinels**.

[Note that these concepts are quite distinct from the local security provided, generally in safer areas, by guard **sentries**. Such sentries are posted for reasons other than likely enemy action: e.g., fire guard, prevention of theft of government property, desertion, incursion by local civilians, etc. This is about as much as most reenactor units will typically do.]

Advanced-guard. A detachment from a *moving* larger formation organized, configured, and placed so as to provide security by early warning of any enemy formations ahead.

Rear-guard. The opposite of an advanced-guard; security detachment to the rear of a moving formation. When advancing to meet the enemy, the rear-guard is generally smaller than the advanced-guard; when retiring ahead of a pursuing enemy, the reverse is generally true.

Flankers. Detachments from a moving formation deployed to provide early warning against the appearance of an enemy to the flank.

Detachment. The temporary assignment of an organic part of one or more units to undertake a special mission, such as advanced-guard or other security duties. Parts of permanent units may also be detached to provide protection for rail stations, depots, telegraph stations, and other local points on the lines of communication. Detachments of this sort are essential to the army’s security, but drive commanders to drink as they watch their ground strength sucked away by the vampire appetite of higher headquarters.

Now, let’s view some general principles of security detachments.

First, what are we really trying to accomplish? The real answer is a bit more complex than it appears at first examination, but it has the grace to make sense once explained. The reasons lie in the principles of war called **objective** and **economy of force** (see Lesson 1). The essence of the military art, the central issue of grand tactics, is to place *maximum force* at the *critical point*. This is done by maintaining freedom of action until that point at which we can detect the critical point; before that, everything is preparatory displays and cautious sniffing. To define the critical point, we need to understand the battlefield and the dispositions and intentions of the enemy.

It is impossible to overemphasize the importance of avoiding commitment of the main force until the battle’s potentials have been grasped by a *coup d’oeil militaire*. Recall from Lesson 6 the manner in which Napoleon preferred to develop a battle – to detect the enemy, pin his force in broad and indecisive engagement, and then pound him quickly and with overwhelming force at his weak point. To bring this about, we must hold him off and – just as important – avoid committing the bulk of our force until we know what we want to do as a tactical plan. Otherwise, the enemy or the random events of battle shape our courses of action, and we risk pointless defeat.

Instead, we should strive to:

1. Discover the enemy’s strength and dispositions by such detachments as the advanced-guard (detached so that the contributing main force is uncommitted) and identify the key battlefield terrain.
2. Oblige the enemy to deploy, revealing his forces and allowing them to become committed.

The Advanced-Guard

Purpose. Advanced-guards are used to screen the movement of a large force in a “tactical” situation – that is, when there is a probability, however low, of encountering the enemy. The advanced-guards are something like an outpost line on the move, and have the same two missions: (1) to detect the enemy and determine his strength, dispositions, and intentions, and (2) to slow the enemy if necessary and give the main force time to deploy.

Size. How large should the advanced-guard be? Mahan wrestles with this question and, being no fool, does not give a definitive answer. In fact, it “depends on the situation,” though he admonishes us that the total should not exceed one third of the total force in any circumstance. In determining the proportion of your force that will be detailed for advanced-guard, consider the following:

- What is the threat? How much do I know about the enemy? Is he likely to attempt to block my advance with significant forces, engage in decisive combat, or just harass me and slow my advance? Am I likely to encounter enemy cavalry or infantry or both?
- What is the nature of the terrain along the route of march? Is there cover and concealment; are there hills and defiles in which an enemy might hide and spring an ambush?
- How large is my force? If I detach, say, a third of my force to form an advanced-guard, will I have enough remaining to support the advanced-guard and deal with the threat?

Here are some rules of thumb:

If your force is small (one battalion or less), detach no more than a third, and that much only if the enemy’s size, location, and intentions are a mystery.

If your force is large (a brigade or more), detail no less than a company – more if the enemy’s location and strength are unknown.

If the terrain offers good cover and concealment for an enemy, and especially if there is a risk of ambush, use a large advanced-guard. If the terrain allows you to view the country for a good distance, a smaller advanced-guard may be adequate because of the longer lead-time to deploy against an enemy force.

Formations

With respect to the disposition of the advanced-guard, we can be more specific. In general, the advanced-guard will have three parts. The main guard (say, a company) is placed about 100 yards in front of the main force on the march. The distance of “100 yards” is subject to the nature of the terrain and how far you can see. The company sends one of two platoons forward about another 50 yards. The lead platoon sends a small element – what we now call the “point” – another short distance ahead, in this case, as far as possible without being generally lost to the sight of the platoon behind. (You may note the resemblance to grand-guards, pickets, and advanced-posts; again, advanced-guards are just advanced-posts on the move.) Hence, the advanced-guard has an advanced-guard, and the advanced-guard advanced-guard has an advanced-guard!

Why all this complication? For the same reason as the layers of outpost elements in a static situation. The lead element detects the enemy and gives warning, and then falls back on its platoon (-) while the company (-) is deploying to engage and delay the enemy. The lead platoon, now (we hope) rallied, falls back under pressure to rejoin the rest of the company comprising the advanced-guard. Meanwhile, the commander of the advanced-guard (in this case, the company commander) has sent a courier back to the commander of the main force, which will be deploying for a fight in the brief space of time provided by the gallant advanced-guard.

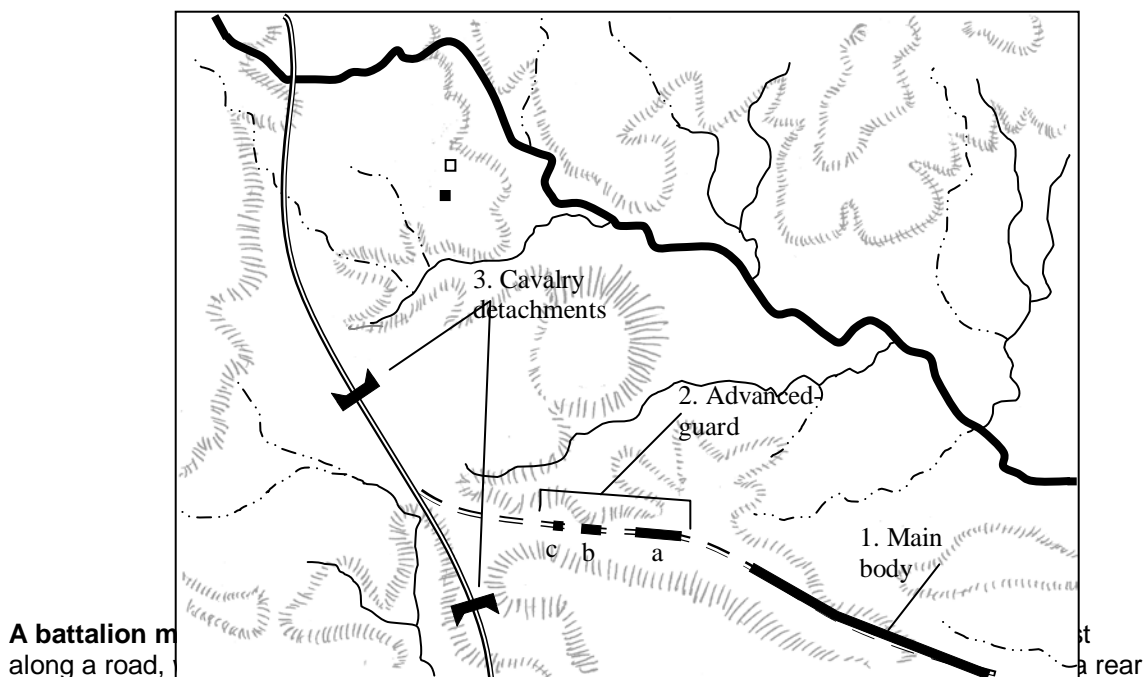
Or so it is supposed to work. If the advanced-guard is careless and allows the enemy to overrun them too quickly, the main force may be in danger. Remember: a battalion or brigade using an advanced-guard is marching by the flank. If attacked by an enemy force – even one smaller than the main force – at a

location such as a defile where it is difficult or impossible to deploy into line, an enfilade situation quickly develops in which a smaller force can deliver more fire on the larger one than the larger one can return.

Movement

An advanced-guard cannot be content simply to stroll along a road. The commander of the advanced-guard must be alert in “reading” the terrain, locating in advance likely hiding places and positions from which an enemy force can achieve surprise. It may be necessary to detach small patrols (2-4 men) to check out critical points that could command the route of march. When crossing an obstacle (see below), one platoon may halt and cover the advance of the other, then leapfrog forward.

There will always be a tension between the desire of the overall commander to move forward rapidly and the due caution of the officer commanding the advanced-guard. Generals do not like to see troops sitting beside the road again and again while the advanced-guard checks out every little bush and gully. To keep moving forward at a steady rate, the advanced-guard may be forced to expend a lot of energy. For this reason, it is often helpful to relieve the advanced-guard company¹ with a fresh company from time to time.



A battalion marches along a road, with a rear platoon (a), a forward platoon (b), and a small detachment from the forward platoon (c). The mission of the advanced-guard is so vital that a senior staff officer of the battalion is usually placed with the lead elements, along with one or two couriers for communication with the battalion commander. In addition, the key terrain ahead and to the flanks is covered by small detachments of cavalry (3).

The Rear-Guard

Purpose. Rear-guards are not simply advanced-guards in reverse. Advanced-guards have as a primary mission finding the enemy. Since rear-guards are generally used to cover a withdrawal under pressure, that problem has taken care of itself! The rear-guard is detailed to delay the enemy’s pursuit.

¹ The advanced-guard need not be a company, of course. In some situations, a brigade or division may put a whole battalion forward; a brigade may screen the advance of a corps. The question is always: “How much time will it take me to deploy to fight? How large an advanced-guard will be necessary to buy me that time?”

Why? Because a pursuing enemy generally moves at the same speed as the withdrawing² force. To open the space and allow you time to get to a safe position, the gap has to be widened. The rear-guard does this by forcing the pursuer to deploy and fight annoying skirmishes again and again while the prey marches off.

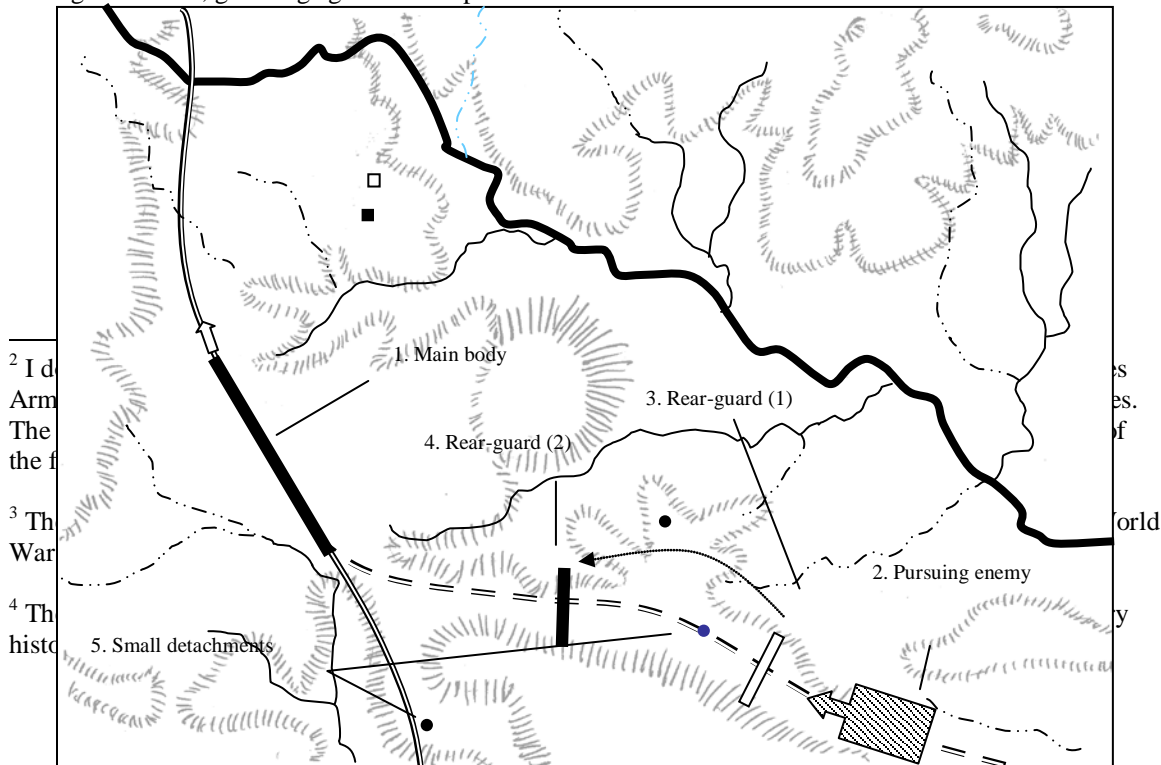
Consider this as well: warning intervals are different for bodies of troops moving in the same direction and those moving towards each other. If two forces are approaching (a “meeting engagement”), reaction must be quicker, so the three layers of the advanced-guard are necessary to give the main force time to deploy. The job of the rear-guard is easier in the sense that the “closing speed” of two forces approaching each other with a rate of march of 2 miles per hour³ (about a common step rate) is 4 mph. If pursuer and pursued are both moving at 2 mph, the rate of closure is zero! This means the urgency of early warning is less for the rear-guard. However, the rear-guard in a fighting withdrawal is vulnerable to some unpleasant outcomes, and may in emergencies find itself “expendable,” as we shall discuss.

Size. Here again the question of the size (and proportion of the main force) depends on the situation; Mahan suggests that it may be no more than a token. How badly battered is the withdrawing force? What are the proportions of combat power for the pursued and the pursuer? What are the stakes? (These are questions that Napoleon and his increasingly disgruntled Marshal Ney had to contend with at the crossing of the Berezina in 1812. Ney bought time for what was left of the *Grande Armée* to slip away from the Russian pursuers, but the result was the sacrifice of his force.)

Basically, the question is: How large a force is necessary to delay the pursuit? If your rear-guard is too small, it may be devoured without causing the enemy much inconvenience. If too large, it may simply precipitate another battle like the one you just lost. If you can't spare much, look for a good place to defend to the last, like the 300 Spartans at Thermopylae.⁴

Formation. Here I can only give a recommendation, derived liberally from Mahan. A main body prepared to form into a dense skirmish line or line of battle at defensible positions, supported by a smaller detachment as skirmishers to provide early warning, may be sufficient.

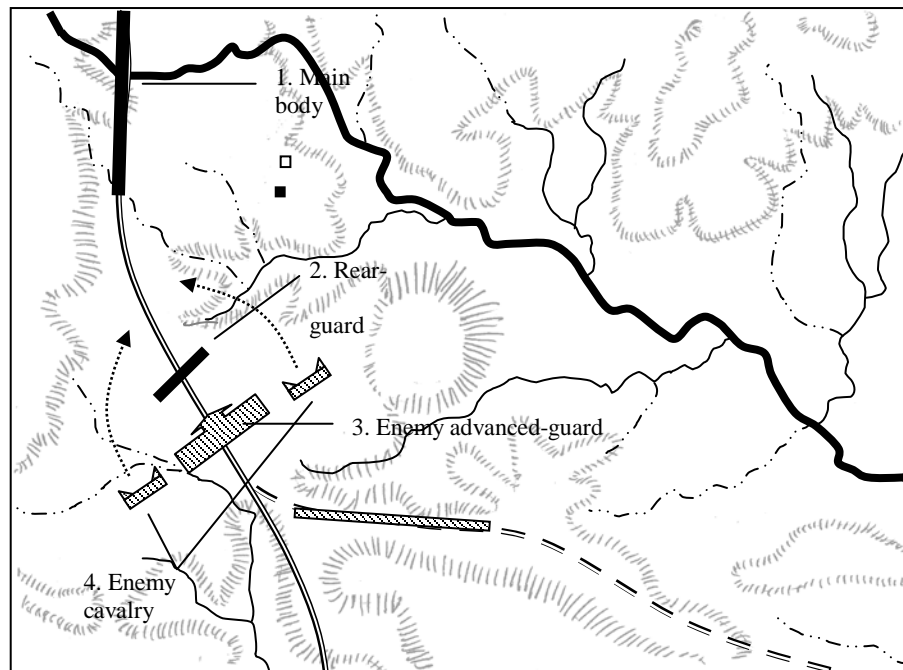
NOTE: The nightmare of retreating forces in general and rear-guards in particular is cavalry. Cavalry, at least in good cavalry country (see discussion below), moves faster than an infantry force can generally retreat, and this principle makes exploitation and pursuit a major mission for the mounted arm. Without flank security, a rear-guard may be entertained in front and flanked on both sides by cavalry, cut off and cut to pieces. Mounted armies like the Mongols *loved* to do this, such an adventure being in the nature of a cheap thrill. In such a case, most of the withdrawing force's cavalry should probably be detailed to rear and flank guard duties, guarding against the depredations of the Cossacks.



Rear-guard. The main body (1) is withdrawing to the north under pressure of a pursuing enemy force (2). The rear-guard withdraws by stages from one position to the next, delaying enemy pursuit (3,4). To guard against surprises, the rear-guard also deploys small patrolling detachments (5) to watch for possible enemy moves wround the flanks of the rear-guard.

Movement. Rather than moving steadily behind the main body like an advanced-guard in reverse, the rear-guard should try when possible to take a defensive position whenever the terrain favors it, causing the enemy to deploy each time and slow down the pursuit. The commander of the rear-guard should always be careful to avoid a decisive engagement when possible, as the pursuing force will obviously outnumber the rear-guard, and once heavily engaged the rear-guard can be pinned down and by-passed by the main enemy force.

Under some circumstances, the rear-guard may be required to take a stand and sell itself dearly to let the main force escape. At a river crossing, for example, utter disaster would likely befall the retreating force if the pursuers were to catch up at such a vulnerable moment. *Élan* was invented for such moments, and there will be plenty of medals to hand out.



How to lose a rear-guard. Pursuing enemy infantry or cavalry engages the rear-guard and pins it in place. Cavalry swings around both flanks (“pincer movement”).

The Flankers

Purpose. In a tactical march, there is also danger from the flanks; but that danger is somewhat different from an ambush or meeting engagement from dead ahead, and this affects how we secure the flanks.

First, a column marching by the flank must execute some complicated and time-consuming maneuvers to get deployed against an enemy storming in from the front. As noted above, an enemy already deployed can easily “cross your T,” as the Navy puts it; attacking from enfilade. But if an enemy attacks from the flank, the column theoretically comes to a “front” and faces the enemy without the danger of being enfiladed while executing a movement from the flank to line of battle.

However, a surprise attack from the flank can succeed if the attacker is in a superior position. This kind of ambush is difficult to pull off unless the terrain – cover and concealment, observation and fields of fire – favors it.

A good example is Jackson’s attack at Brawner’s Farm that kicked off Second Bull Run and earned the Iron Brigade its name. Surprise was achieved. If not for the steadfastness of those men from Wisconsin, Michigan, and Illinois, the outcome of the campaign might have been even worse than it turned out to be – if that is possible.

Size. Flanker strength will generally be much lower than the advanced-guard. The reason for this is fairly simple. Because it is easier for a column marching by the flank to deploy against a threat from the right or left than from the front (it requires only “front” or, at worst, front and face by the rear rank), delay is less necessary than simple early warning. Flankers are more like skirmishers moving sideways than like a movable out-post line.

Consequently, the detachments should be large enough to cover the length of the column at skirmish interval × two flanks.

Formation. C. W. Reed’s drawing of flankers in Billings’s *Hard Tack and Coffee* is probably fanciful. The line of flankers is much too close to the column to provide any useful early warning – they are more like parade marshals than flank security! The distance to the main column should be dictated by the threat and the terrain – how far to the flanks must the flankers be to see threats? If there are open fields all around, the usefulness of infantry flankers is limited – they would have to be placed so far out to add any margin of early warning that communication would be a major obstacle. (In such cases, flank security is better provided by cavalry – see below.)

The most useful formation is probably as “skirmishers marching by the flank.”

Movement. The biggest single problem for flankers is maintaining connection and pace with the main body. The main column will frequently move down a road or trail. This means the flankers will usually have to hack through woods, climb over or wade through obstacles, and generally have a hard time keeping up. As with the advanced-guards, this argues for replacing flankers on a regular basis to avoid fatigue. It also requires the commander and staff to maintain contact with advanced-guards and flankers at all times so the whole affair doesn’t get impossibly strung out and separated.

If parallel roads are available, or the country is open with little concealment, cavalry can be used in the flanker role. Sometimes (as in the initial movement to contact at the Wilderness) cavalry and infantry are used at the same time, with mounted troops on the outside and infantry flankers closer in. In the Wilderness case, this otherwise sound approach didn’t work because the nature of the country prevented the cavalry and the main force from communicating readily, since horses could not penetrate the dense growth any faster than dismounted soldiers.

The Advanced-Posts

Unlike other elements of grand-tactics, Mahan is very specific about advanced-posts, their functions, and their dispositions. (Note that Mahan on one occasion seems to refer to advanced-posts and advanced-guards as one and the same thing, suggesting that a moving force may have advanced-posts:

232. *Advanced-Posts.* The duties of the advanced-posts are the same whether the troops are stationary, or in movement; they are, 1. To keep a good look-out for the enemy, and when in his immediate presence, to take all means to be accurately informed of his strength, position, and movements; 2. Should the enemy advance, to hold him in check long enough to give the main body ample time to be prepared for his attack.

He appears to mean that a force is “stationary” if it is in the defense or halted for a long period of time between movements, while a corps or other formation on the strategic advance or withdrawal may half for a time and put out advanced-posts, but still be technically “moving.”)

It’s useful to remember that commanders didn’t always do these things, and so frequently came to grief. Grant failed to do properly it at Shiloh, and so effectively had a division overrun. Devens didn’t do it at Chancellorsville; same result. Hill failed to do it at a critical time in the Wilderness, and would have lost the war had Longstreet not arrived at just the right moment. And these were prudent commanders; Hill in particular (after three years of practice) should have known better. These exceptions demonstrate the necessity for doing it properly.

Bear in mind, the idea of outposts is to alert the commander of enemy approach and buy time to get the main body deployed in line of battle before the Mongols have piled your heads in great mounds and sat down to eat the meal you were cooking. This means there are really three elements: the *out-posts*, which provide warning; the *pickets*, which delay the enemy until the main force can pull on its brogans and get into formation, and the *grand-guards*, which must meet the enemy.

It’s conceptually simple: The sentinels at the far extreme need to be exposed, or they can’t watch for the enemy. In addition, they can’t stay awake 24 hours a day. This means they must have a secure location out of sight of the enemy to and from which they can rotate so the sentinels are always fresh, and at which they can cook rations and catch some sleep. This is the *out-post* – the position from which sentinels are rotated and supported. If the sentinels are pressed by the enemy, the advanced-post also provides a rally point where the sentinels can form to begin retiring towards the line of the *pickets*. (The concept of a *rally point* is very important and not explicitly described by Mahan; we will discuss this idea in more detail later.) The pickets provide a reserve to support the collapsing line of outposts, and are usually placed at critical points on the major avenues of approach to the main body to allow for a brief delay and to lower the risk of having to abandon the out-posts and sentinels to capture. If the enemy is likely to use these avenues of approach (comprising defiles, gaps, roads, fords, bridges), so must the outposts, if only because they are unlikely to be able to run any faster than the attackers. As soon as the last retrievable outpost people are past, the pickets can fire a couple of volleys, then fall back on the *grand-guards*. (Note: There is confusion between Mahan and Butterfield about the order of grand-guards and Pickets; I have arbitrarily sided with Butterfield.)

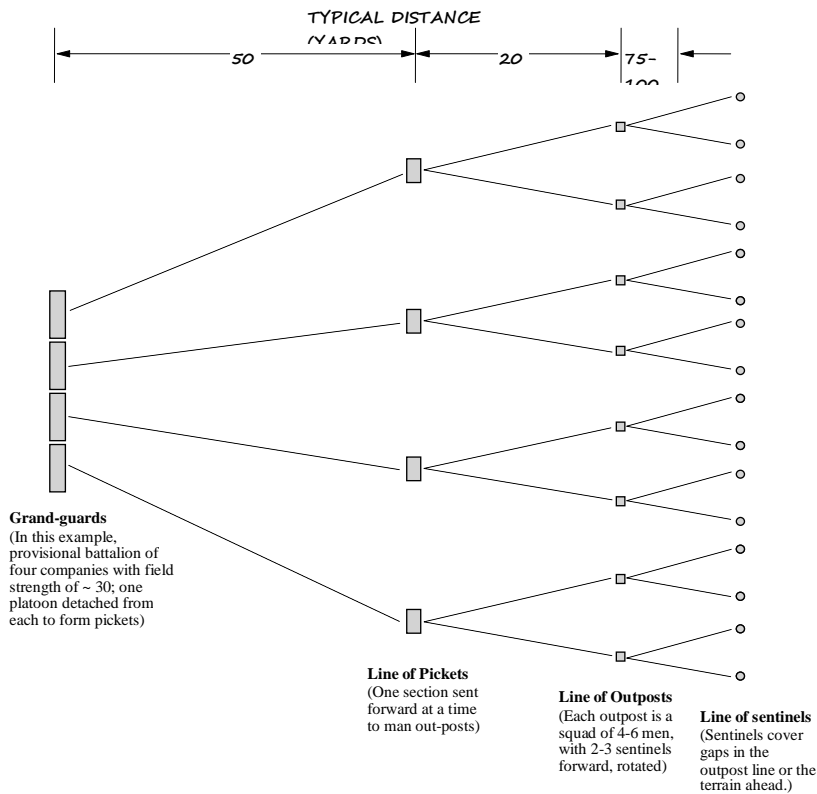
I have some reason to suspect that this elaborate system was much simplified during the war; in particular, the distinction between pickets and the outposts may have blurred somewhat – certainly the terms came to be interchangeable. If nothing else, the concept of outposts with some kind of reserve on which to rally under pressure would have been used. We will proceed from this basic idea.

Formations (minus) and the dynamics of the advanced-posts. Now, here is an important point: the concept of *formations (minus)*.⁵ We begin, let’s say, with the regiment encamped in the field within striking distance of the enemy. Let’s say the commander has decided to detach two companies (probably more if the enemy is close and belligerent) to form security. His encamped regiment now has only eight companies, and is technically what we would call a regiment (or battalion) *minus*. The detached companies form the pickets, the last delaying line. But each of these is a *company (-)*, because about a third to a half

⁵ Terms like “company minus” are contemporary, not period; I use them here for clarity. The “minus” indicates a formation from which a part of the strength has been **detached**.

has been detached to form the combat outpost line⁶ (grand-guards, pickets, out-posts, sentinels). Each level is actually a (-) because it has a proportion it must send forward.

This process is like opening and closing a sliding-tube telescope. The security force extends outward from the main body about two miles (I suspect somebody picked this because at infantry march rate – then about 1.5 miles per hour sustained rate, about 2 mph attacking -- that gives the main body enough time to wake up and get deployed), the telescope “clicking” at each point and the detachments moving forward to the next “click.” The systematic collapse under enemy pressure is the reverse:



Advanced-positions, grand-guards, and pickets. (Adapted from Butterfield.)

- (a) Enemy is observed by sentinels; enemy presses forward, sentinels withdraw to rally on advanced-positions.
- (b) Out-posts (now probably sections, reconstituted) retire to line of pickets. These outposts will now probably be reconstituted platoons. This is one example of the tactical use of a separate platoon; the other is found in the division of platoons in skirmish order.
- (c) Pickets retire only rapidly enough to keep enemy in sight, after having informed the grand-guards by courier or other signal. Pickets should not actively delay the enemy; at most (if the enemy does not have good position to observe and judge the force to his front), the enemy’s lead elements may deploy to engage. This buys time and allows the effect of surprise to be reduced.
- (d) Pickets will rejoin their parent companies as part of the grand-guards position. *The purpose of the grand-guards is to slow the enemy by obliging him to shift from approach formation (probably*

⁶ The term *combat outpost line* is more contemporary; it has the same general meaning as advanced-positions.

*marching by the flank if terrain allows) to line of battle.*⁷ An approaching force will generally try to move as far forward as possible by the flank because of easier speed and coordination. The pickets will be too weak to hold the main force long, but can score some hits and cause delay and confusion in some cases – particularly in terrain favoring the defender – just by exploiting the confusion attending a shift from approach to attack formation. Once an enemy has moved into line of battle, he isn't likely to change that formation as long as he is under fire, a fact the pickets should take care to exploit.

Gordon Rhea's excellent book on the Wilderness contains some good descriptions of forces moving forward and engaging enemy pickets; "driving their pickets in" was frequently the first shooting phase of a battle. In the case of the Wilderness, advanced-guards and out-posts, etc., were absolutely essential because the terrain did not permit good observation and fields of fire. (I like the Wilderness because of its resemblance to the reality of Viet Nam – two vast armies stumbling around more or less clueless in a vast bramble bush.) Much of the Union heartache on the first day of the battle stemmed from Meade's hasty deployment and assault without proper flankers and advanced-guards (about which Warren complained bitterly); Reb woes on the second day resulted from Hill's unaccountable failure to place outposts to cover his corps, still disorganized from the previous day's battle. And Hancock, uncharacteristically, failed to use flankers to cover his assault on Hill. It was as if nobody had read Mahan!

As a general note, modern units will string a line of LP/OPs (listening posts/observation posts) forward. In addition, a division will frequently deploy its organic armored cavalry squadron (which includes an air cav troop) forward in a screen; a corps is generally blessed with a cav regiment for this noble purpose.

Here are the basic guidelines for establishing and maintaining the advanced-posts:

Upon arrival:

1. **Make a visual reconnaissance** of the area; familiarize yourself and key assistants with the nature of the terrain, including:

Cover and concealment. Where can advanced-posts be placed so as to be hidden from the enemy, while still close enough to sentinel posts?

Observation and fields of fire. How far can sentinels see from their posts? How much warning will they have when the enemy comes in view?

Likely enemy avenues of approach. If the enemy comes, along what route will he likely advance? It is extremely critical that these avenues of approach be under observation (and that the grand-guards and pickets be positioned to delay). Likely avenues include roads and trails, draws and defiles, fields and fence lines. Think like the enemy: how would *you* approach?

Tip: never use a likely avenue of approach (a road, a defile with cover, etc.) as a boundary between units. If, for example, two companies' outpost lines meet at a road, who is responsible for the road? Better to place key terrain entirely within one unit's front.

Lines of withdrawal. If the enemy approaches, your job is to see him and report. Advanced-posts have got to be able to bug out under pressure, fall back on the grand-guards, and eventually merge with the pickets to form the delaying force. This means thinking in 3-D, seeing the terrain as a complex of military problems and opportunities.

⁷ Remember Buford at Gettysburg. His advanced-posts (which are called *vedettes* in the mounted service) picked up Heth's advance, fired a couple of volleys, and galloped off. The line of dismounted regiments (really an outpost line for the Army of the Potomac) forced Heth's lead brigade to deploy, then his whole division, buying time at each "click of the telescope." This is the way the outposts are supposed to work.

2. **Locate out-post positions** (usually squads of 4-5). These should be covered and concealed, as on the reverse slope of a ridgeline, so movements and cook fires will not be visible to the enemy. Remember: each out-post of squad size will provide *two or three sentinels*. (A larger advanced-post – section or platoon – can provide more.) **Note:** each out-post should know where adjacent advanced-posts are, in case they must provide mutual support, and to avoid getting into fire fights with each other and with the patrols that will prowl the gaps between sentinels. In addition, advanced-posts should include not only a cozy campfire and some shebangs. Under pressure, they must deploy to fighting positions in case they have to provide covering fire for the withdrawal of sentinels.

A good thing to remember about the high ground is that it has three features that are key to positioning troops: The *topographic crest*, or highest point, where positions should not be sited because they are silhouettes and easy to see; the *military crest*, just below the topographic crest, where soldiers have good observation and fields of fire without being spotted easily; and the *reverse slope*, which is out of sight of the enemy to the front. A position just behind the military crest is useful because it can be used to provide cover for all but the shooting end of the soldier (we call this *defilade*). The Irish Brigade used this tactic at the Sunken Road at Antietam. It is also useful for positioning artillery. Learn to use the ground!

After placing advanced-posts:

3. **Post sentinels.** Officer should post sentinels *personally*, and be accompanied on this task by all officers and NCOs who will be charged with relieving and inspecting sentinels, so they will know where to go without wandering aimless through the woods all night. Whenever possible, sentinels should be posted in daylight; if this is not possible, posts should be adjusted as soon as possible after first light.

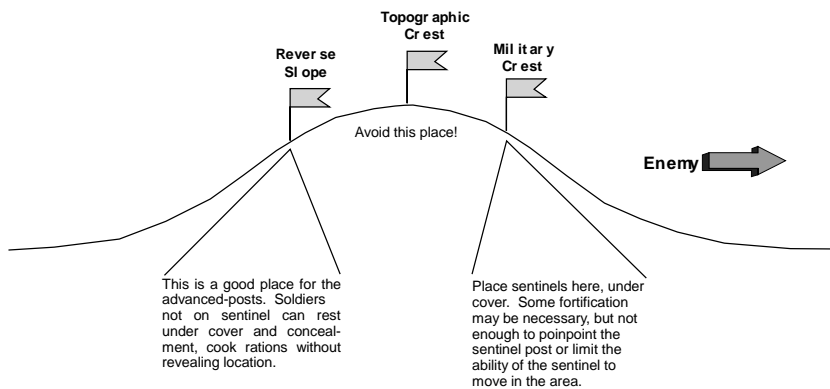


Figure 4: Ground features.

4. The posting officer should make certain that there are no gaps in the views of sentinels. All areas in the sector allotted to the unit must be under observation. In addition, sentinels should have cover and concealment at hand. It's important to note that sentinels during daylight man *observation posts*; after dark – when their visual observation is limited by ambient light – they become *listening posts*. That is, the primary sensory modality changes, and several things happen that affect the sentinels. Most important, the range of coverage of sentinel posts is greatly reduced after dark – we can see and hear clearly for a great distance, but the sense of hearing gives us much less precise information about the direction, distance, and source of an event. It may be necessary to tighten up the interval between sentinels after dark, which means more sentinels.

Sentinels should carry their full field load — knapsack, blanket, etc. In the case of an enemy advance that requires the sentinels and advanced-posts to fall back rapidly,

sentinels will not have time to retrieve their gear, and should hence carry the full load on post. This is a matter for the commander's judgment. NCOs at the advanced-posts (usually the corporal) should inspect sentinels to assure that they are properly equipped and that their equipment is secured to prevent unnecessary noise (e.g., dangling tin dippers).

Sentinels, when first posted, should be instructed not to lie or sit at their posts (this invites sleep), and reminded of the procedure for challenging, particularly after dark. (When I was young, there were 11 general guard orders that had to be memorized, from "I will take charge of this post and all government property in view" to "I will quit my post only when properly relieved," and including the ever-useful "I will be especially watchful at night, and during the time for challenging will challenge all persons on or near my post and allow no one to pass without proper authority." I expect the CW soldier had some sort of SOP at hand, but I haven't been able to discover it.) Tours should not exceed two hours in any case.

Sentinels should be briefed on what to do if anything unusual happens; their job is to report activity, not shoot at it unless it is the only way to alert the advanced-post.

An important point to remember: *A soldier on duty knows no one.* Even his closest pard needs the challenge and password.

5. **Inspect sentinels.** The officer commanding should personally inspect sentinels at least twice during the hours of darkness. He should be accompanied by a noncommissioned officer (no one should go stumbling around in the woods alone at night – you tend to lose lieutenants that way). This is one reason the officer should post the sentinels himself and be accompanied by NCOs when he does it – it makes it possible to run an inspection, not a reconnaissance patrol! The officer should verify that each sentinel is awake and alert and follows proper challenging procedure. (**Note:** If a challenge and password are used, sentinels should understand *how* they are used – up close, in a low voice, not yelled for everybody for miles around to hear. All challenges and conversation should be in as low a tone as possible, and *not* a whisper – on a quiet night, a whisper can carry a surprisingly long distance.) The inspection should not be conducted at the time sentinels are relieved – soldiers are generally most alert when they have first been posted and when they are about to be relieved.
6. **Relieve sentinels.** The responsibility for proper relief of sentinels rests with the officer commanding the advanced-posts; the authority may be and in the interests of efficiency generally should be delegated to the senior NCO. Responsibility cannot be delegated, however, and the officer should assure by spot inspections that the job is done properly.

The officer commanding the advanced-posts and the NCOs supervising reliefs must understand that a soldier awakened from sleep at a campfire will suffer from two impairments. If he was in a deep sleep, he will suffer the grogginess of *sleep inertia* for about 20 minutes, during which he will typically be slow to respond, clumsy, and generally distracted. In addition, a soldier pulled from the vicinity of a campfire into profound darkness will have poor night vision. Adaptation will require about 20 minutes. Hence, it is usually better to awaken the relief at least 20 minutes prior to posting time. Take the relief *beyond the light of the fire* and let them shake off sleep inertia and adapt to night conditions.

At relief time, the NCO should inspect the sentinels before posting (as in 3, above). The NCO should accompany the guard detail, verifying proper relief. He should also assure that there is food available for the returning sentinels, who will usually want to eat a bite before rolling into their blankets. Coffee should be available for those – like the officers and senior NCOs – who will be up most of the night

doing inspections. The sentinels need their sleep, and should be given coffee only *before* they are posted, not after when it will interfere with sleep. (Note: the caffeine in coffee takes about 20 minutes to start working.)

Conduct *defensive patrols*. Mahan stresses that gaps between sentinels should be covered by *defensive patrols* (offensive patrols are deliberate reconnaissances, discussed in the next chapter) to assure that enemy probes are not slipped between sentinel posts. In our case, the sentinels will be fairly close together; unless there is some terrain feature that prevents mutual observation and support, the inspections of sentinels can serve the purpose of the roving patrols.

Whether and where to run the patrols depends on the environment -- ground, weather, and visibility. This is a matter that requires considerable judgment and experience. The trick is to identify "dead spaces" in the out-post line -- placed that cannot be adequately covered by the stationary sentinels. A wooded defile, for example, can provide a handy avenue of approach for enemy patrols or probes but be a poor place to put a sentinel because he cannot see very far in any direction (and because a sentinel so isolated is likely to feel stressed). The patrol can cover that gap. Bear in mind that *patrols of the defensive kind -- covering gaps -- are generally conducted at night* (see section on patrols in general), and their frequency and importance under night conditions depends on the nature of the ground, the level of luminance (bright moonlight, heavy overcast, etc.) and ambient noise (listening posts can't hear enemy probes very well in the rain, since the background noise masks the sound of feet stepping on leaves and twigs, as well as whispering).

The commander should bear in mind that he must balance aggressive patrolling and number of sentinels against the unit's sustainable assets. People have to sleep. If you are going to be manning an out-post line for a week (unlikely in the hobby!), night time entertainments must be balanced against the capacity of the unit for sustained operations. I emphasize the difference between what the modern Army calls *sustained* and *continuous* operations. In continuous operations, everybody keeps awake and operating; in sustained operations, the *unit*, not every individual, stays in operation. This is particularly important for reenactors because weekend hobbyists are not conditioned to the wear and tear of continuous/sustained operations. In addition, the campaign-style drills will include daylight operations as well as night, and it is unwise to wear people out with a weekend of drill, and then expect them to drive a long way home