

Difference in the Ranks

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So many times we hear the self-appointed expert (SAE for short) proclaiming how lefthanders are a huge liability in any military formation. The aforementioned expert then opines that they were either forced to be right handed or drowned at birth. As an encore, the SAE then points out that half the people in our formation are too young for the 17th century military.

So what was the practice according to the seventeenth century manuals?

Left handers

Heere • placed the handling of Picke and Mufquet,
with your left hand becaufe there • fundrie of
th• Towne who are left handed and de-
firous to learne to handle both Pickes
and Mufquets therewith.¹

The postures of the pike are then given for the left-handed pikeman.

20 Prefenting your Picke being ‡ouldered to any quarter, ob-
ferue that if hee be a right handed man, that hee right foote
goe alwayes back to one place, and if left handed, h• left foote
alwayes backe to one place, at the exercifing of thefe Poſtures
I ‡a,, ‡ow the reaſons, but now it were too tedious.²

Achesone then gives the postures of the musket for the left-handed.

The words for the handling of the
Mufket for a left handed man.

The mufquet ‡ouldered vpon
the right ‡oulder.³

The postures are given; the priming charge appears to be put in the pan before the charge is rammed home. The pan and match are both used with the left hand, the rest is held in the right.

Acheson finishes the musket drill with:

Note that when you handle your Mufquet with
your right hand that your bandelier be over
the left ‡oulder & vnder the right arme.

Alfo when you handle with the left hand that
your bandeairs be over the right ‡oul-
der and vnder the left arme.⁴

Achesone, A., Gentleman at Arms, *The Military Garden*, Edinburgh, 1629.

Rug-rats

“...For there is no man there that bears a head, but that bears military arms; even boys of fourteen years of age are practiced with men in military discipline, every three weeks.”

Wood, W., *New-England's Prospect, being a true, lively and experimental Description of that part of America commonly called New-England*, London 1639

“...you will have young men to muster the time that they must appear at muster must be so soon as they grow to any mans estate: this will be when they are about the age of 14, 15 or 16 years: Then not only more speedily, but also more perfectly all things are learned, the sooner the better. Fore *Vergetius* sayth truly, that it is better that a young men exercised should allege that his age to fight is not yet come, than he should truly lament that the same were already past. Let young men be exercised betimes, for it is readiness gotten by former practice that maketh a Soldier.”

Cooke, E., *The Character of Warre, or The Image of Martiall Discipline*. London, 1626, Ch III

¹ p31

² p32

³ p32

⁴ p34