

Preliminaries

Distances provided in these Web pages need not be executed with razor-sharp precision. Any spacing should instead be a close approximation of distance, as much as reasonably possible, especially on uneven ground. Only a very peculiar officer or sergeant would stretch a measuring tape between two soldiers and remark: "Hey, dudes, you're, like, 94 centimeters apart and you gotta be 92." Thought to spacing should rather be (to use an Americanism): "Don't sweat the small stuff, jes' keep it in the ballpark."

These Web pages on distancing follow William Barriffe's "Militarie Discipline: or the Young Artilleryman...", chapter 6 (1661 ed.)

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Order - in the Ranks

Order in the ranks is the appropriate spacing in ranks for soldiers when assembling or receiving instruction from their superiors. It also is best for maneuvering and may be used in the march. Soldiers are sufficiently separated to go through the motions with their weapons without undue risk to one another.

The space for Order in the ranks is easy to determine. Should two soldiers in a rank rest their hands on their hips to have their elbows crooked (akimbo), the elbows of the two should almost touch. Granted it's easier to poise the left arm rather than the right, which must hold the weapon, but even with only one arm akimbo, simply visualize double the distance from the elbow to the person at the left.

Distance measured elbow to elbow with arms akimbo
Slightly less than one meter, or around three feet, body center to body center



Colonel Barriffe provides commands for going to Order in the ranks and which depend on the initial status of the ranks:

- "Files open to your right (or left) to your Order!" (if the initial status was Close Order)
- "Files close to your right (or left) to your Order!" (if the initial status was Open Order or wider)
- "Files open (or close) to your right AND left to your Order!" (instead of files shifting to one side or the other, soldiers orient to the rank's midline)

(Remember, a rank is 90 degrees to a file and consists of one soldier from each of several files.)

Order - in the Files

Order in the files, as with in the ranks, is the appropriate spacing for soldiers when assembling or receiving instruction from their superiors. It can also work for maneuvering on the field but is tight. It is not suitable, however, for marching and may be used in this situation only for out-of-the-ordinary circumstances. For cleaner maneuvering and especially for marching, use Open Order in the files.

Drill instructors of olde found that the most convenient way to measure the distance was for a soldier in the file to stand *almost* to the tip of the sword of his file mate in front.

Distance should be near the sword tip of the soldier in front
Slightly less than one meter, or around three feet, body center to body center



Another way to determine the distance, especially good if the soldier in front has no sword or carries it awkwardly, is to measure by the length of the left arm with fingers extended for one person to touch or almost touch the shoulder of his file mate in front. Regardless of the measuring method, the distance should be close to three feet or a tad less than a meter.



At this distance in the files, soldiers are not to have their weapons shouldered, rather, have them at order or at advance.

Colonel Barriffe provides commands for going to Open Order in the files and which depend on the initial status of the files:

- "Ranks open forward (or backward) to your Open Order!" (if the initial status was Order or closer)
- "Ranks close forward (or backward) to your Open Order!" (if the initial status was wider than Open Order)
- "Ranks open (or close) to front AND reer to your Open Order!" (instead of all shifting to the front or to the back, soldiers orient to the midline of their files.) By the way, "reer" is Barriffe's spelling.

Note: the only difference between these commands and the ones for Order is the addition of one word in each: "Open." All soldiers should listen closely to their superiors in order to catch this little addition.

Open Order - in the Ranks

Open Order in the ranks is double the spacing for Order between soldiers in the ranks. It is particularly useful for making sufficient room for doubling ranks.

The space for Open Order in the ranks is simply double the length of the left arm with fingers extended from one person to his comrade at his left.

Double arm's length with fingers outstretched: near two meters or six feet



Colonel Barriffe provides commands for going to Open Order in the ranks and which depend on the initial status of the ranks:

- "Files open to your right (or left) to your Open Order!" (if the initial status was Order or Close Order)
- "Files close to your right (or left) to your Open Order!" (if the initial status was Double Open Order)
- "Files open (or close) to your right AND left to your Open Order!" (instead of files shifting to one side or the other, soldiers orient to the rank's midline)

Note: the only difference between these commands and the ones for Order is the addition of one word in each: "Open." All soldiers should listen closely to their superiors in order to catch this little addition.

Open Order – in the Files

Open Order in the files is the preferred spacing for the march. With sufficient distance between one soldier and the next in front, there is room for the butt end of a shouldered pike to be near the ground and not trip the person in front. For musketeers, the muzzle of a shouldered gun is not inches from the face of the following soldier. All can view more ground immediately ahead of each step than with Order, which is a consideration on rough ground.

There are three ways to determine distancing in files for Open Order. For all methods, the result should be slightly less than two meters or approximately six feet between soldiers.

Open Order distance in the file may be measured with one of three methods:

1) Double the length of the left arm with fingers extended to reach toward the shoulder of his file mate in front.

Distance: a little less than two meters or around six feet body center to body center.



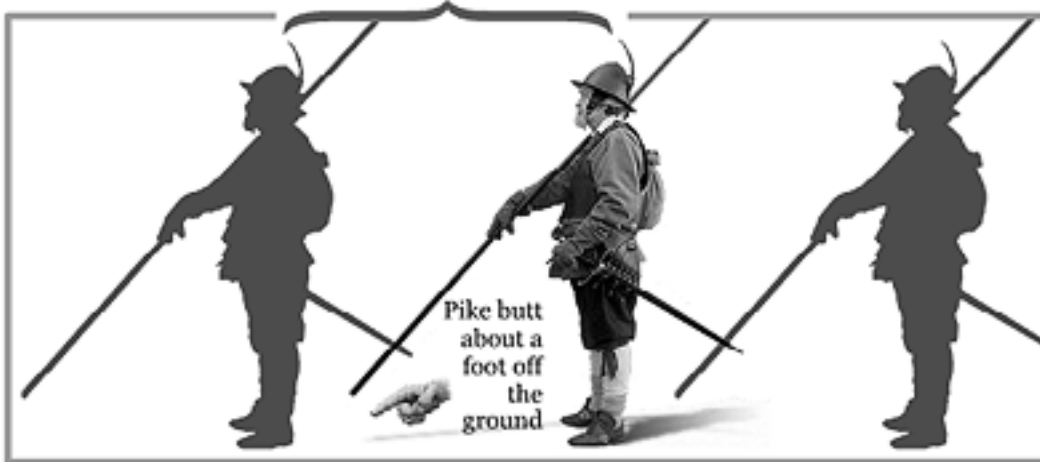
2) Double the distance of almost to the sword tip of the soldier in front.

Distance: a little less than two meters or around six feet body center to body center.



3) Butt of the pike both a foot off the ground and behind the ankles of the soldier in front, but held to the right of those ankles.

Distance: a little less than two meters or around six feet body center to body center.



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Close Order - in the Ranks

The spacing between each in the rank is an estimated half an arm's length or less. For confronting the enemy, this is the preferred spacing in the ranks. The soldiers are concentrated into a unified front to face the attack - or to make the attack; no longer are there individual soldiers but a single force. The close spacing between each does not permit any enemy to penetrate the unit without a hard fight.

Close order may also be useful for narrowing ranks to fit a column on a thin stretch of road during the march or through a crowded area, such as camp, a throng of thrilled spectators or the entrance of a beer tent.

With only the **left arm akimbo**, touch or almost touch the sideman.

Less than half a meter, or one and a half feet



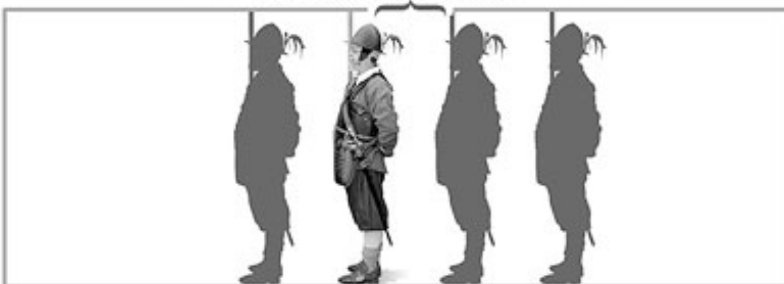
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Close Order - in the Files

As with Close Order in the ranks, this is the preferred spacing in the files for confronting the enemy. Behind the File Leaders are their comrades in line to back them up; no longer are there individual soldiers but a single force. The close spacing between each means that should the man in front fall, immediately behind is another to carry on the fight.

To close a unit for battle, Colonel Barriffe has the command "Ranks and files to your close order!" The entire unit is to draw in on both its X axis and its Y axis. With a fight only moments away, an officer may shout nothing more than "Close Order," and he refers to both files and ranks. Should the officer simply wish the soldiers by ranks to come closer together, then he would elaborate on that command with something like "Files Close Order to the right/left." (Remember, a rank is 90 degrees to a file and consists of one soldier from each of several files.)

Almost half a meter, or one and a half feet



Close Order for files is suitable only for engaging the enemy. For marching or maneuvering, this spacing is too close. A pikeman could trip his compatriot in front of him with the butt of the pike or a musketeer poke another in the file with a shouldered musket. For any activity other than combat, the minimum spacing in the files should be Order.

Close Order - How close is 'Close?'

Close Order is the distance soldiers are to take in anticipation of engaging the enemy. The intent of Close Order is to present a united front upon which the enemy shall break as a wave on a rock.

Colonel Barriffe states: "Distance is the space of ground between man and man, either in file or rank, having relation only to the place between each party." At that paragraph's end he makes the definition: "Close Order, which is One foot and a half." In small type near those two statements is: "The exact place from which to measure your distance is from the center of your men, whether it be rank or file."

For Colonel Barriffe and some other writers of drill instruction in that period, Close Order was NOT shoulder to shoulder. Any tighter, and it's Closest Order. Closest Order is just that - and it's very close. Unsuitable for musketeers, this distance is appropriate for pikemen about to thrust themselves into push of pike. William Barriffe does not include Closest Order in his discussion of distances. Closest Order, however, is in "The A.B.C. of Armes," 1616, by 'J. T. Gent' (most likely a *Gentleman* with the initials *J. T.*) and "Souldiers Accidence," 1635 (2nd ed. corrected & edited by G. Markham), and both provide the distance as shoulder to shoulder.

Other spacings

For nearly all drill and maneuvers, **Open Order** is the widest necessary. Open Order is sufficient to permit doublings.

There are wider distances, too. These were not often used historically and today are rarely seen among re-enactors (with the exception of the first one below for ranks of pikemen):

- Double Open Order (which Colonel Barriffe terms "Double Distance") is 1.8 meters/12 feet between soldiers. One possible use of this distance is for pikemen on the march. Such a wide distance between ranks leaves room for pikemen to trail their pikes while marching.
- Triple Open Order is 2.7 meters/18 feet between soldiers. Barriffe doesn't include this. This distance, though, may provide room along the route of march for pikemen to cheek their pikes. (To cheek a pike is to place the hand around the point to avoid inadvertently sticking someone, but this leaves a lot of wood dragging behind the pikeman.)

For marching re-enactors, these two distances present the temptation for audience members to cut through the formation on some urgent errand like fetching a beer. Today, we don't have the options our ancestors did who could scold, arrest, or even beat any civilian who dared trespass into a formation. (Or possibly pressing an errant male civilian into service: "Since you like being among my soldiers, you will join us!") Our only recourse is to avoid presenting temptation as much as possible.