

The American Civil War Society Ltd

Notes for guidance on correct answers to the Firearms Safe Practice Examination

INFANTRY

These tests can be conducted piecemeal and built up over a number of events/opportunities. ALL those who go on a battlefield and/or acts as an Infantryman, needs to do this test once a year. Each soldier should have his/her own test sheet (or, preferably, a senior holds all test sheets until all tests completed), kept by company, and as each part is successfully passed, tick it off and examiner initials with a date. At conclusion of all parts the examining officer and the soldier sign and then a copy to Soldier, copy held by Company and copy to H&S Director.

1. Basic Arms Drill and firing positions in the Ranks. The Officer/S.NCO of Regt/Coy is required to drill the unit/group of examinees so that ALL the arms drill movements are carried out correctly by all members, first when static and second on the march. Also particular attention is to be paid to correct and safe firing positions. The gap between ranks and the positioning of muzzles, hands and percussion caps/nipples is to be checked. No stepping back, leaning forward or variations in aim leading to risk to others in the ranks is acceptable. The positioning of the feet is to be checked. Riflemen are not to directly aim at a target – slightly to one side or overhead is acceptable. To pass a soldier must get all these issues 100% correct. All officers and NCO's must also carry out ALL the tests too (as private soldiers in the ranks) as well.
2. Wheeling and turning in the ranks with weapons and correct dressings.

The group of soldiers under examination must achieve

- (a) getting from 2s to 4s and back again on the march
- (b) right face and left face on the march (marching to the flank)
- (c) right about face on the march as a body of troops
- (d) form battle line from column of 4s on the march
- (e) wheel to right and left, keeping dressings and ranks successfully, then halt and go through firing procedures safely and in a straight line
- (f) firing obliquely both right and left correctly, without endangering soldiers on either side.

This is to ensure that the ranks do NOT get ragged or mis-aligned, so as to endanger anyone with muzzle flash or other risks of injury or harm. Several attempts at these drills and manoeuvres are acceptable, but failure after the 5th attempt under examination (as opposed to ordinary drill practices) will disqualify and the exam must be done again on another occasion. Failure to keep the line straight whilst wheeling, and thus on the halt (with no further dressing of the line) is incorrect and the immediate firing line is unsafe and unacceptable.

3. Weapon Maintenance

Cleanliness and safety are the main issues. Ask the soldier how a black powder weapon is to be cleaned and when. After each days firing is a good answer. After a weekend's events is acceptable, provided that the nipple is checked and cleaned (e.g. pricked out etc) once a day minimum. Prior to firing each day, the weapon must be checked for safe operation e.g. does NOT fire on half cock, ONLY on full cock, that hammer and nipple strike alignment is correct and that trigger pull is firm and true. Check all screws tight and nothing loose, split or rusted.

Why is it important to ensure you clean? So it works! So the corrosive effect of black powder residue does not rust through barrel anywhere/make use of weapon unsafe to firer or anybody else.

Clean by wiping off mud and muck from external surfaces and pour boiling water down barrel from muzzle end. Ideally, nipple should be removed and cleaned separately. Once a clean flow of water out of nipple achieved, that is acceptable. Better still, use black powder solvent or washing up liquid to get firing residue removed from all internal surfaces. Wire brush attachment to ramrod or cleaning rod also acceptable to clean and scour-out after use of boiling water. Then barrel and nipple areas must be dried out : small pieces of dry cloth on cleaning rod/ram rod attachment used until all dry. A light film of gun oil/3 in one/light squirt of WD40 also advisable but not an excessive amount of oil. Ensure chamber below nipple and touchhole into barrel clear and clean, so that percussion cap spark has free access to ignite powder. Oil on the internal trigger and spring mechanism to ensure proper operation and to prevent corrosion is also recommended.

Soldier must demonstrate need to clean for safety reasons and a common sense, practical approach on how to thoroughly clean a weapon after use.

4. Loading/priming/cartridge preparation.

The test is „load in four motions“, NOT in 9 for Federal or 10 for Confederate Drills. Examiner to run through the drills with the soldier, dry, by mime, including ending up back at the shoulder. It must be clear no hands end up over the muzzle, save when pouring powder, and muzzle must at all time be inclined away from face and not towards anybody else’s face. Tap butt to seat powder, save when rammer used. No use of ramrods except (i) if permitted, when loading first round (ii) when jam or mis-fire, retire to rear and dealing with a problem under appropriate supervision and (iii) when springing rammers at end of event. Rammers may, however, be used when expressly permitted e.g. filming work OR living history, with prior consent of a Director/Army Commander. A confidence with the weapon and a clear ability to handle it safely and positively is to be demonstrated.

Cartridge preparation is to include soldier explaining how empty cartridge to be made (no staples, masking tape or sellotape). Heavy duty paper, e.g. telephone directory, sheets or thicker, not recommended for muckets, but might be appropriate for other types of weapon. How much gunpowder to load? Depending on calibre of gun but in any event NOT MORE than 65 grains. Needs to know how to check. Suggest consult gunsmith or Armourer Sgt. On (i) how to measure right amount for THAT weapon and (ii) how to ensure load never excessive. Show how to remove loaded cartridge from ammunition pouch, bite off twisted paper end so that powder measured-charge exposed and pour in from side of muzzle. ONLY gunpowder goes down the barrel – NOTHING else.

5. Safe Distances/elevation for firing

Never fire directly at any person or animal. When firing in massed ranks, elevate weapon to between 20° and 30° from horizontal, especially when volleying the crowd at the end of an event. Ensure nothing down barrel other than gunpowder ever : no paper : no ram rod etc. etc.

Discharge of musketry must NOT take place at any person when closer than 15 metres or yds. [For horses and mounted cavalry see (11) later and artillery see (10) later or can be answered here]. Never fire when it is unsafe to do so or if you have concerns. Beware firing in close country e.g. woods/bushes : you may not have a clear line of sight and your hammer must not be cocked until the very last moment before firing – a trip or a branch may render you or the

weapon unsafe. The examiner can also ask „How do you cross an obstacle with a loaded weapon?“ This will test the soldier’s practicality and common sense. Answer must include – remove percussion cap, hammer down and either hand gun to another with muzzle elevated as you cross fence, ditch etc. and recover and re-prime once it is safe to do so, or cross with weapon in elevated position, so muzzle does not point at you or anyone else.

6. Being charged when loaded

Never go into hand-to-hand combat when loaded. If assaulted by the other side when you are loaded, discharge your gun safely (elevated) if you can. If not possible, fall to the ground and pretend to be dead. Get your percussion cap off the nipple and hammer down. Ensure gun is safe and cannot go off. If surprised, tell your assailant clearly and loudly you are loaded and they should give you space to make safe. Never, ever start hand-to-hand with a loaded gun – that’s how accidents happen.

7. Misfire procedures on Infantry rifles/whistles on a battlefield

If your musket fails to fire, re-cap and try again. If it continues to fail to fire, tell your Cpl and step out of line to the rear, keeping the muzzle safely elevated. Once you are a safe distance, out of the fight, check the musket. Has something fallen off or broken? Does the hammer operate? Use a pricker to clear the nipple/touch hole. Perhaps take out nipple to clear any blockages. With consent, use ramrod to firmly seat charge (or see if there was one in there in the first place!). Ensure ramrod NOT in barrel and go back through the loading and firing procedures and if it fires safely, back into line and continue as ordered. If it’s too big a job to solve on the field, you could then just fire caps/become a casualty. Ensure you are (a) supervised when going through the gun clearing procedures and (b) that you report back to your Cpl when you can carry on as normal again.

When whistles or a whistle sounds on a battlefield – that signifies a REAL casualty. Stop what you are doing and kneel down. The person with, or near, the injured person will attract the attention of the Medics. (Hat on raised sword or musket etc). When the person in charge of your unit deems it safe or appropriate to carry on, you will be so ordered. Help an injured person and/or medics if you can and you are near, but stay out of danger yourself. Secure and clear any abandoned weaponry.

8. Capping off at the end of an event – why?

To ensure the weapon is NOT loaded with any gunpowder, for safety reasons (therefore the weapon must be handled as if it was loaded). What happens next? Spring rammers or other appropriate safety procedures for other weapons – so your supervising officer and NCO can physically hear/have demonstrated all barrels in the unit are empty.

9. Clearing the field

It is essential to thoroughly and conscientiously clear the field of battle at the end of the event to ensure no explosives, pyrotechnic effects or anything dangerous or any lost equipment remains before anybody else (e.g. member of the public) is allowed anywhere near. It is also an exercise in tidying-up and removing litter and any dropped cartridge papers. Perhaps that „empty looking“ cartridge paper still does have a little gunpowder in it, although NO cartridge papers should have been dropped anyway. If a child picks it up, plays with it, eats it or sets it alight, it will be harmed. This must NOT happen.

Also the Society’s very expensive Public Liability Insurances will be claimed against and the cost of the policy on its renewal will rocket with an adverse claims experience. Therefore it is

in everybody's interests to ensure the event site is clear and safe immediately after the end of the event. Whilst artillery and pyro team will be responsible for their own mess, help to fill in divvets or pointing – out undischarged ground charges would be useful : DO NOT attempt to dig up a ground charge – leave that job to the pyro team, but guard the site until done.

10. Artillery Matters

When guns are in battery and in firing position **LOADED**, other arms must **NOT** come within 25 yds or meters of the muzzle **PLUS** the arc of fire. When gun crew are physically loading and/or hold their rammer and worming tools upright, you know it's loaded. If the gun crew hold or have put the gun tools crossways (X) it means gun **IS LOADED** but has had a misfire, having fire or some other problem, so stay clear and again do not go within 25 yds/m of the muzzle.

11. Equine safety measures

Horses are big animals and can harm you if they bump you. Do not frighten them or hit them in any way. A bolting horse and/or an unseated rider are risks to troops and the public – unpredictable and uncontrollable. Horses, as for cannon safety distances, must **NOT** be fired at directly and never discharge a gun closer than 25 yds/m. of a horse.

If mounted cavalry come in close to an infantry unit, depending on unit size eg, „guard against cavalry“ drills should be carried out. Do not frighten the horse by shouting or waving or brandishing a sword or weapon near the animals head/eyes.

Horses are not necessarily easy to manoeuvre, so do **NOT** move or run. Stay put and the cavalryman has time to go round you.

12. Ground Charges

The examinee must demonstrate a common sense understanding of what to look out for with ground charges e.g. wires leading to them and the displaced earth etc. where one is buried. They need to avoid the area of the ground charge as much as possible (save when a formed body of troops under orders – in which case the commander will have ensured it is safe to do so by reference to pyro team operatives). Ground Charges come in all sorts and sizes : you can never know what is buried at the end of the detonation wires. The minimum safe distance is 15 yds/m. but beware (s) falling debris on detonation, so never look up and (b) effects of blast. Also blown charges holes and det. Wires are trip hazards. Wires pulled before detonation might disconnect a ground charge and render it unsafe, so watch where you're going and always be cautious and observant.