

HORN SIGNALING

A Working Bibliography of MHI Sources

Although horn instruments--trumpets and bugles--have sounded signals since the Rev War, fife and drum actually predominated until after the Civil War. Trumpet or bugle signals were heard by those relatively few troops who served in certain specialized units. While line infantry in its compact tactical formations heard and responded to the limited reach of drum beats, the lighter and more mobile formations of cavalry (dragoons) and riflemen needed the more extended reach of the sound of brass.

Early American use of horn signaling paralleled that of the British Army. Shortly before the outbreak of armed rebellion in North American colonies, the British Army had introduced trumpet signals for dragoons and the so-called German post-horn (a kind of bugle?) for light infantry. One scholar (see Camus, cited below) suggests that American militia and some elements of the Continental Army incorporated these British horn signals into their field music.

After the Revolution, during the 1790s when the US Army briefly assumed its unique legion structure, Congress authorized one "trumpeter" in each of the four company-size units of the legion's dragoon squadron. In the cavalry volume of an unofficial military treatise published in 1798, American compiler E. Hoyt listed and described trumpet calls, including "Boots and Saddles." Hoyt's 1811 Practical Instructions for Military Officers covers trumpets ("Each troop of cavalry has one") and "Bugle-horns" ("now used by the light infantry and rifle corps...also used by the horse artillery and some regiments of cavalry"). Another compiler of military information, William Duane, in his 1809 compendium, proposed a standard system of signals for the army's field instruments and adapted his music to the bugle.

An early--possibly earliest--officially promulgated reference to a bugle appears in War Dept General Order 38 of 1825, which authorized two bugles to be furnished those companies designated light artillery, grenadiers, light infantry or rifles. Unfortunately, we have no copy of that order on file, but found it cited in an index of War Dept general orders spanning 1809-1860, in which it was the only such reference. A similar compilation for the 1860-1881 period shows no reference to a bugle until 1877.

During the late 19th century, some interchangeability or possible confusion existed in terminology or definition of trumpets and bugles. For example, Army Regulations, 1863 (Paragraph 232) cites drum and trumpet signals (no bugles mentioned), while the War Dept's Cavalry Tactics, 1864 (UE160A5) contains a section of music notes entitled "Bugle Signals." Although the first 1867 ed of Upton's Tactics for infantry contains a section entitled bugle music, the 1874 ed changed the section title to "Trumpet Signals--Infantry." Thus, trumpets for infantry and bugles for cavalry seemingly reverse the previous arrangement. Adding to the apparent confusion is War Dept General Order 48 of 1877 (mentioned previously as the first post-Civil War reference specifically to bugles), which directed the Quartermaster's Dept to "supply bugles to foot troops, in addition to drums and fifes." Five years later, GO 12 (21 Jan 1882) directed that issues for field music shall be confined to "trumpets, drums, and fifes"

(no bugles!). Furthermore, the order authorized the "F" trumpet with a "C" crook for mounted troops and the same trumpet without crook for foot troops. Although AR 1889 confirmed the trumpets-only situation, amendments soon appeared in GOs 9 & 35 of 1892 to furnish "a small brass bugle" for light

artillery. No change in this pattern of crooked trumpets for cavalry, trumpets for infantry, and bugles for light artillery was found through 1910. Beyond that point further research will be needed.

Incidentally, if the Army's orders and regulations in fact were followed, does this mean that the popular 20th century image of a cavalry charge could be erroneous? No bugles sounded "Charge." Trumpets did.

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