Rules and Regulations for a French Army Encampment

The French army had precise regulations concerning lay-out and organization, in particular the *Ordonnance portant règlement sur le service de l'infanterie en campagne* of 17 February 1753, and the *Ordonnance sur l'exercice de l'infanterie* of 5 June 1755. [1] Concerning the basic camp-lay-out, the 1753 regulation states that each row of tents is made up of only one company, but the 1755 exercise manual changes that regulation in that companies are now paired to form platoons which will camp together, meaning that each row of tents is now composed of two companies except for the grenadier company in the First Battalion and the chasseur company in the Second Battalion (following the army reforms of 1776 which created two-battalion regiments), which as elite companies always camp by themselves.[2] The drawing represents the battalion camping on the left (grenadiers are on the left); the second battalion camping on the right would be an exact mirror image of the drawing with chasseurs on the right. As shown in the camp lay-out, v*ivandiers*, i.e., the sutlers, camped in the same row as the tambours, right after the kitchen fires but before the *officiers subalternes*.

The set-up of a French army camp was based a set of rules determined by the number of brigades, squadrons, or battalions and the seniority of regiments and of the captains of the companies. "When all regiments of infantry, cavalry and dragoons camp such that each one, following its seniority, occupies the place that it must, according to its rank, either in first or second or third line, that is called to be camped *in order of battle*, because it is the same order that they keep when they *present battle* to the enemy".[3] Therefore a camp was established hierarchically from the right to the left and from the rear to the front of the camp. It was made on two, three or four lines according to the lay of the land. Places were assigned by the *maréchal général des logis de l'armée*, with the cavalry on the wings, and the infantry in the middle. When the *maréchal général des logis* had determined the site of the camp he put the detachments of infantry, cavalry or dragoons that accompanied the vanguard in charge to delimit with stakes driven into the ground, the place to be occupied by each battalion or squadron, the width of streets, the place of tents. What is described here is a French infantry camp for a battalion consisting of sixteen fusilier companies of 40 men and one grenadier company of 45 men.

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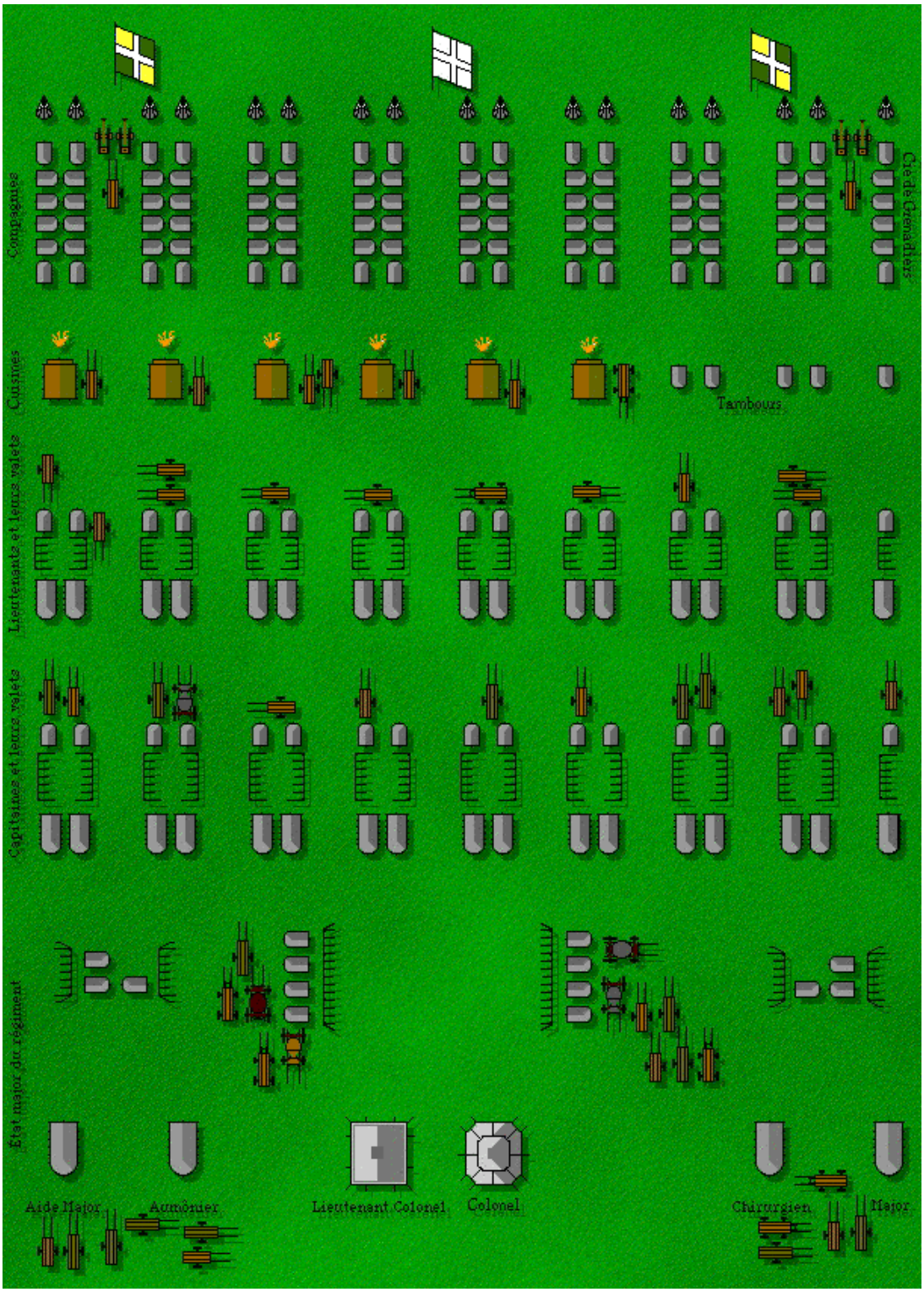
[1] I am very grateful to M François Gousse, and Jean-Louis Vial for providing most of the information on French camps either in personal communication or from their websites.

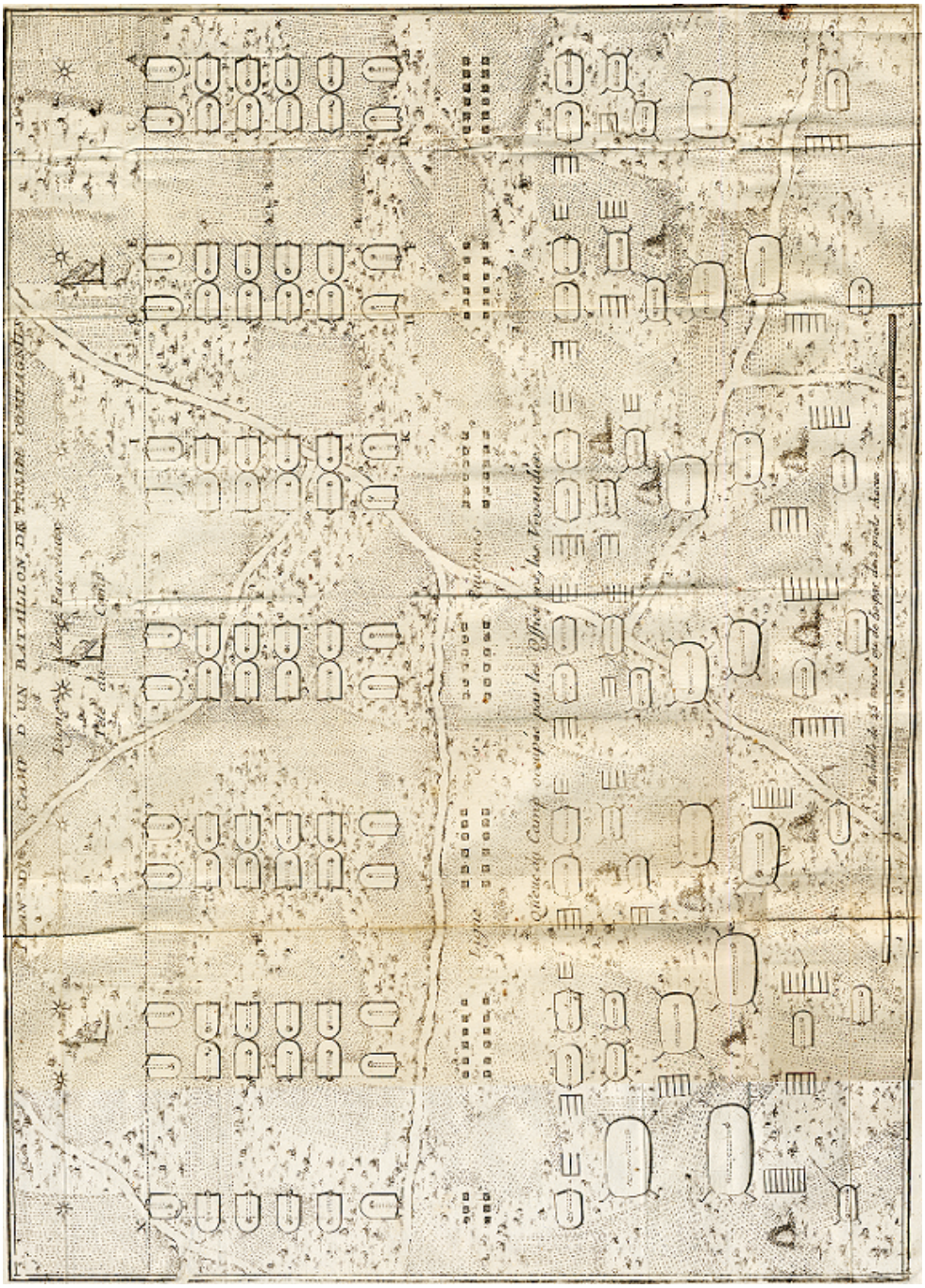
[2] The *ordonnances* creating the two-battalion regiments do not address the camp lay-out it is assumed that the French army continued to pair its fusilier companies during the 1780s.

[3] Louis Charles Dupain de Montesson, *L'art de lever les plans de tout ce qui a rapport à la guerre et à l'architecture civile et champêtre* (Paris, 1763).



French campsite for one battalion by Jean-Louis Vial.[4]

[4] The drawing as well as the following slightly edited essay are available at http://vial.jean.free.fr/new_npi/revues_npi/1_1998/npi_198/1_inf_camp_im

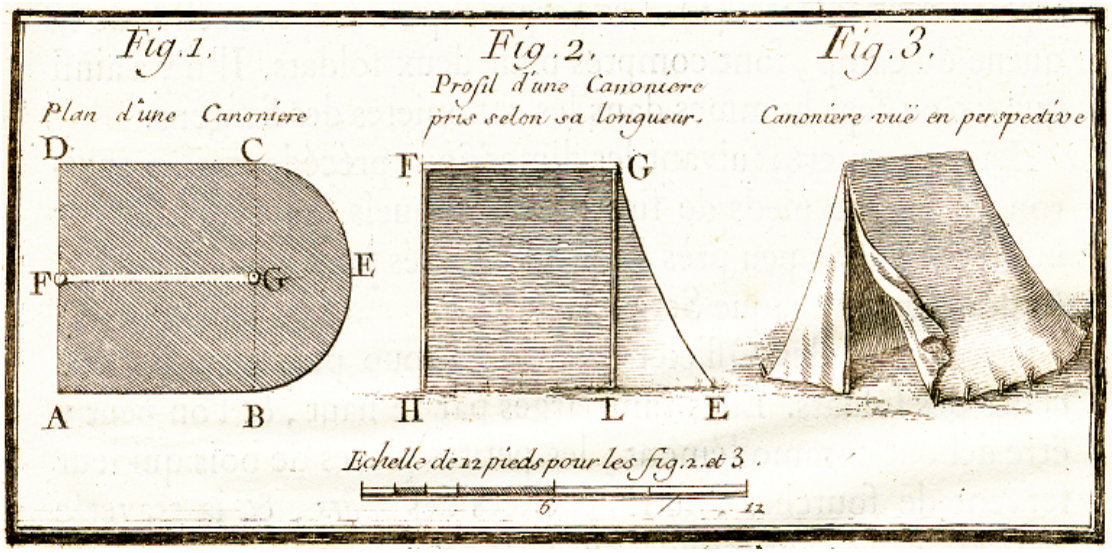


French campsite drawing for a single bataillon from Guillaume Le Blond, *Essai sur la castrametation, ou, Sur la mesure et le tracé des camps: contenant les premiers principes pour l'arrangement des troupes: la formation de l'ordre de bataille & la distribution ou construction du camp: avec un précis des différentes gardes qui en font la sûreté* (Paris, 1748)[5]

[5] Available at http://patricemenguy.free.fr/sujetsdubienaime/Sommaire.html 1 *pied* = 12.8 inches.

In the front of the battalion were placed on the same alignment the stacks of arms, situated at almost 10 pas (9m 75 cm) in front of the line of the first tents. Stacks of arms were opposite to each company and covered with a coarse linen or drill called coat of arms (*manteau d'armes*) to protect arms from inclement weather. To construct a stack of arms the quartermaster from each company traced a circle of approximately 8 *pieds* (2m 60 cm) of circumference on ground for the guns of his company, soldiers dug around this circle a groove of approximately 3 *pouces* (8 cm) in depth and 1/2 *pied* (16.5 cm) in width, and they put earth in slope against the stack of arms, they filled in the groove with grass and drove small wood stakes of half foot in length into the middle of the groove to sustain the gun crooks and thus to insulate them from the humidity of the ground. They drove in center a stake of 8 *pieds* (2m 60) in length and 8 *pouces* in circumference along which they hung the coat of arms that formed a cone. This model of stack of arms was only built for instruction or stay camps. For temporary camps the circumference was simply fitted with branches intertwined on which rested crooks. There was one coat of arms per company and one more per battalion for the picket. The coat of arms measured 6 *pieds* high and 1 *pied* 9 *pouces* in circumference in the upper part and 19 *pieds* in circumference on the lower part of which 2 *pieds* were needed to close the opening. Tents and coats of arms were marked in black letters with the name of the regiment and the company number (as of 17 February 1753).

In the right part of the battalion camp was the grenadier company, then further at left were the colonel's company and then that of the lieutenant-colonel, called "lieutenance" in French if he commanded a company; then came the other fusilier companies. During campaigns regiments camped by brigade, a brigade being a unit of two regiments, the older regiment occupied the right and the younger regiment the left. According to the instruction on 17 February 1753, infantry tents measured 10 *pieds* 4 *pouces* (3 m 35 cm) in length with the apse, 6 *pieds* (1 m 95 cm) width and 5 *pieds* 8 *pouces* (1 m 84 cm) height, they were held up by two wooden forked stakes of 10 *pieds* and one strut of 8 *pieds* (2 m 60 cm) and stretched with 21 small stakes, the name of the regiment had to be written in black on the linen. These tents were not large yet had to lodge a *chambre* of eight soldiers, though in practice they housed fewer as there were always detached or invalid soldiers in a company. A sergeant counted for two soldiers, one camped in the first tent and the other in the last of its company. Therefore for a regiment there were 7 tents for the grenadier company, 96 tents for the sixteen fusilier companies, and 3 tents for drummers for a total of 106 tents. Since Rochambeau's 10-company infantry regiments were hardly ever at their full strength it is safe to assume a similar number of tents. The first tents of each company opened toward the head of the camp, the last toward the outside and the others toward the great streets, they were back to back keeping a space between them of one *pas* (1 m approximately) called the small street. Only the grenadier company did not put up its tents according to this principle, but side by side looking at the exterior of the battalion camp.



French tent from Guillaume Le Blond, *Essai sur la Castramétation ou sur la mesure et le tracé des camps* (Paris, 1748), p. 333

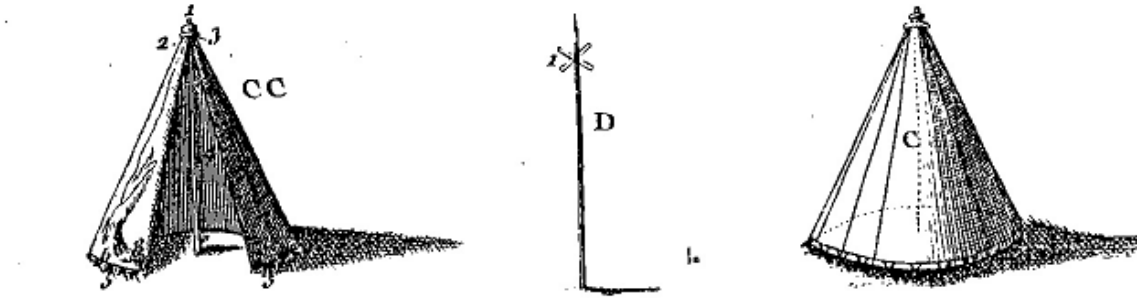
In his Art *de la Guerre*" of 1748, Puységur shows this engraving with nine soldiers in a tent of 8 *pieds* square excl. the apse and 7 feet (2 m 27 cm) high.[6]

[6] Jean-François de Chastenet, *marquis* de Puysegur, *Art de la Guerre, par Principes et par Règles* 2 vols., (Paris, 1749), vol. 1, plate X.

The *ordonnance* of 1749 established two flags per battalions, placed at 5 *pas* (5 m approximately) before the first tents, opposite the great street of the center. Each of these flags was guarded by a soldier, holding his sword in hand with a loaded gun deposited nearby on small two wooden forked stacks driven into the ground.

From January 1757 onward the infantry was provided with battalion support guns composed of one light 4-pounder *à la suédoise*.[7] This piece and its limber were probably placed before the first tents on the alignment of the stack of arms of the great street, between the colonel company and that of the lieutenant. Each piece was served by a crew of sixteen gunners: eight detached from the Royal Artillery Corps, eight were pulled out the regiment plus one supernumerary. The 1774 *ordonnance* for the artillery increased the number to two Gribeauval 4-Pounders per battalion; their crews most likely camped next to their pieces.[8]

The arms stand was build at the right part of the battalion camp across from the tents of grenadiers, one *pas* before the first stack of arms. The arms stand was used to keep the arms of soldiers that were at work. It was built with two wooden forked stacks and one strut, sometimes covered with branches; it also served to deposit the arms of the forty eight fusiliers appointed for different services and was called a *picket*. A guard consisting of one man per company was posted at hundred *pas* before the battalion camp.



Arms Tent *(manteau d'armes*)[9]

[7] *Ordonnance du Roi portant établissement d'une pièce de canon à la Suédoise à la suite de chacun des bataillons de son infanterie, tant françoise qu'étrangère, qui serviront en campagne* of 20 January 1757.

[8] See the *Ordonnance du roi concernant le corps royal de l'artillerie* of 3 October 1774, Titre huitième: "Du Service du Corps-Royal en campagne." It was re-confirmed in the *Ordonnance du Roi concernant le corps royal de l'artillerie* of 3 November 1776, Titre IX., Du service du Corps-Royal en campagne.

[9] Joseph-Ignace-Magnus de Spahr, *Instructions militaires*, (Paris, 1753) Plate 1e.

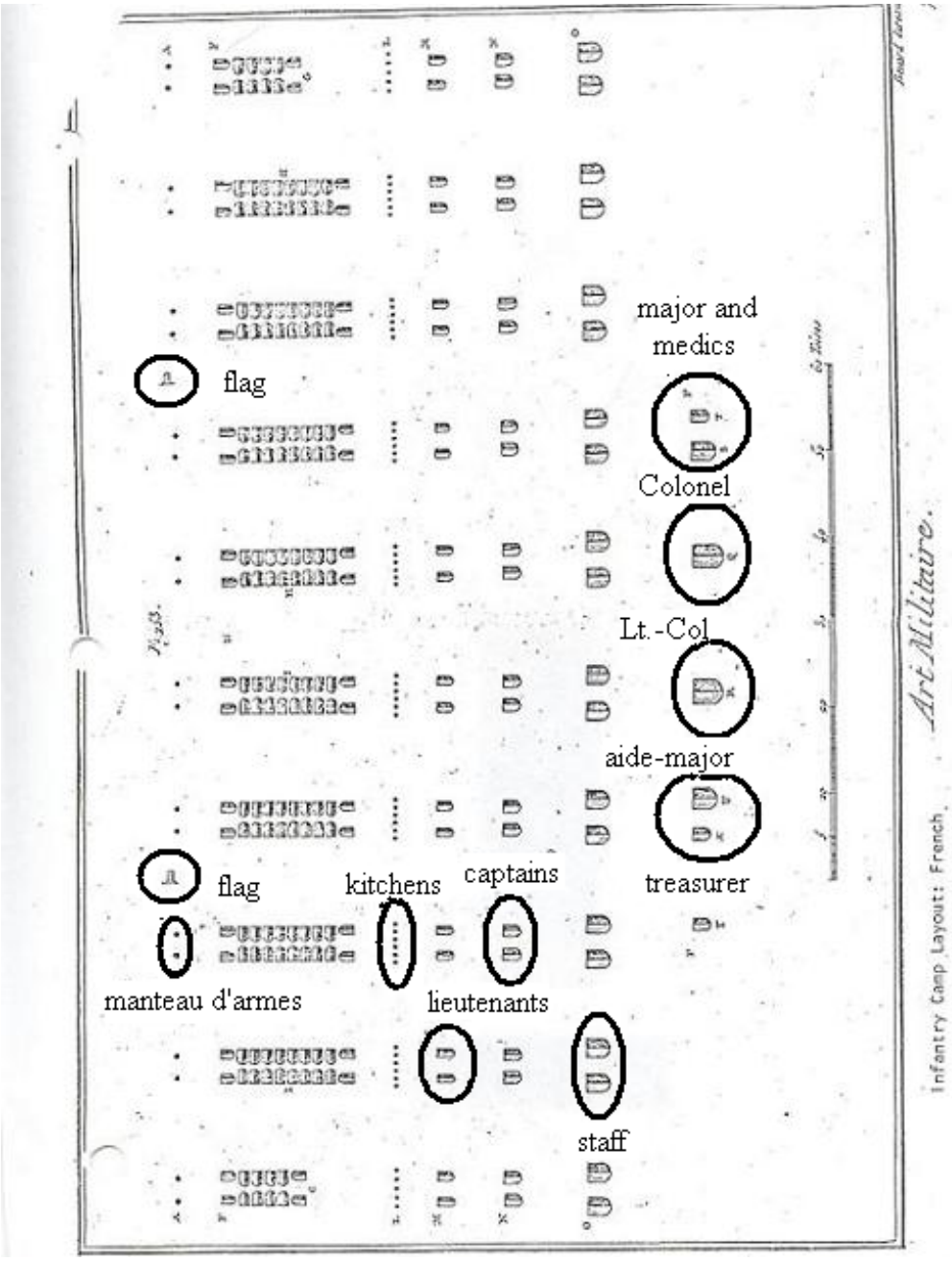
Kitchens for the soldiers were located 10 *pas* behind the company tents, the *vivandiers* were another 10 *pas* behind the kitchens with their horses, wagons, wood and forage arranged around their tents. There were three *vivandiers* per battalion that lodged in three tents similar those of the troops. There was one earth kitchen per company and one more for the drummers. The kitchens measured approximately 3 *pas* in length and 4 *pieds* in width, based on the lay of the land. The soldiers dug a pit of 2 *pied* 3 or 4 *pouces* deep. They were built opposite of the small street that separate companies. On the same alignment like the kitchens behind the first companies of the right were the three tents of the battalions' drummers and the sixth tent of the grenadier company. The Lieutenant's Camp was placed at twenty *pas* from the *vivandiers*, each lieutenant camped behind his company, in the interval of these twenty *pas* they placed their servants, their horses, their kitchen, their wood and forage. Twenty *pas further* back were the tents of captains and their servants similarly arranged.

Finally in the rear of the camp, was the regimental headquarters at fifty *pas* back from the captains. The colonel and colonel lieutenant in the center, the first at right and the second at left of the interval of the middle of the battalion. In the two-battalion regiments of the *comte* de Rochambeau's army the colonel and lieutenant colonel would have moved to the rear center between the two battalions. The major at right on the alignment of the grenadier company and the aide-major at left behind the last company of fusiliers. The surgeon was located between the colonel and the major, the chaplain between the lieutenant-colonel and the aide-major. These superior officers were theoretically required to lodge in their camp, but as the itinerary of Rochambeau's forces shows usually lodged in a near-by house or tavern. They had far more spacious tents than the troops, round or square, with camp bed, chairs, tables etc. The tents of superior and subordinate officers opened toward the head of the camp; those of servants toward the rear or sideways.

Latrines were to be dug at 150 or 200 *pas* before the battalion of the first line and at 100 *pas* behind the headquarters of the last line, they had a shelter with two forked stakes of 4 1/2 *pieds* length and a strut of 12 *pieds* length.

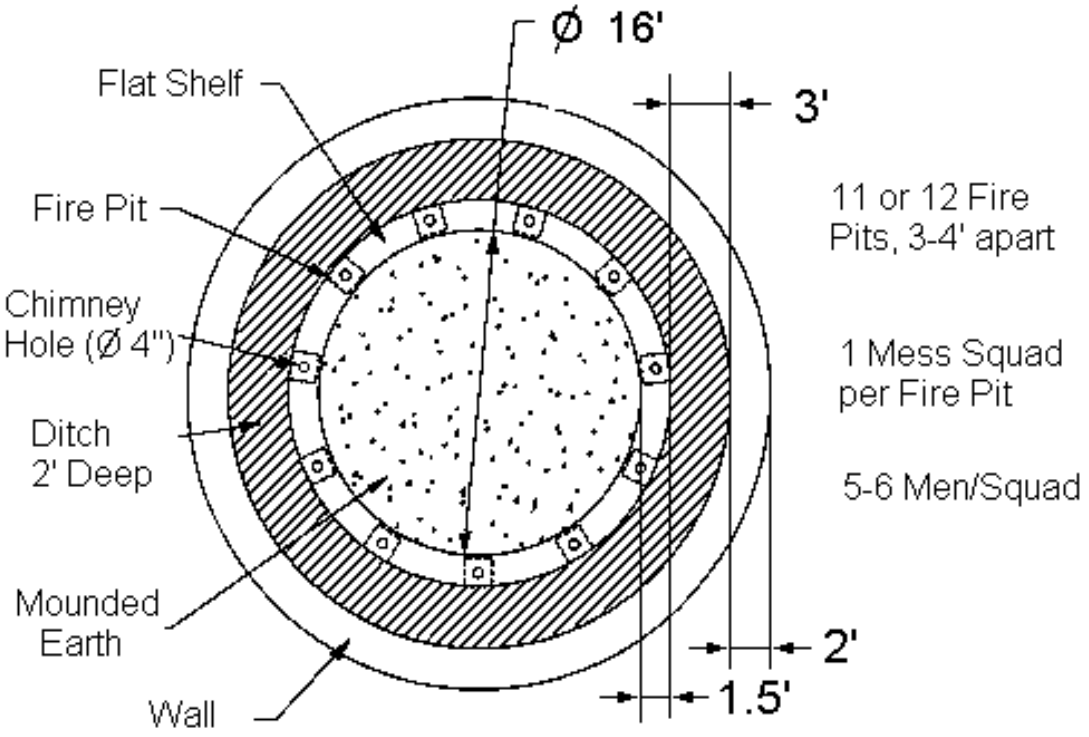
The *ordonnance* also stipulated the establishment of butcheries as one of the first tasks upon arrival at a new location. French forces began debarking in Newport on 12 July 1780; by 15 July 1780, Brissout de Barneville reported that "les boulangers," i.e., the bakers, and "les bouchers," i.e., the butchers "sont établis au camp".[10] During an encampment they were to be located 50 *pas*, about 150 feet, behind headquarters. Belvoir already had “a small butchery behind the camp in the woods” which most likely was used in the afternoon of 17 September 1781 to slaughter the cattle to feed the troops.

[10] Barneville, "Journal", p. 254.



This 180-tent lay-out of a regimental camp is about 140 toises (840 feet) wide and 80 toises (513 feet) deep plus latrines, butcheries and pasture for horses further off in the distance. The ordonnance of 1776 changed the size of a regiment but the drawing provides a rather accurate idea of the camp layout.[11]

[11] Nicolas d'Hericourt, *Elemens de l'Art militaire* (1st ed., 1739); the description is taken from vol. 2 (1756) of the 6 vols. edition printed in Paris, 1756-1758, pp. 5-12.



Overhead view of earthen kitchen[12]

Camp kitchen in use

The tin or sheet iron kettles commonly used by armies in North America would be placed on two pieces of sod to allow the draught of the fireplace to escape through the chimney hole. Barrel-hoop "broilers" constructed by the soldiers may also have been used

[12] The dimensions are given in Humphrey Bland's *Treatise of Military Discipline* (1762).

for that purpose.[13] Even though digging them for but an overnight stay may seem unnecessary, eyewitness reports confirm that these regulations were indeed followed. Capt. Samuel Richards of the 3rd Connecticut Regiment wrote that as Rochambeau's army "passed thro' Farmington in Connecticut (25-28 June 1781) I being there at the time - had a fine opportunity of seeing them ... I viewed their manner of encamping over night, the perfect mechanical manner of performing all they had to do: such as diging a circular hole & making nitches in which to set their camp kettles for cooking their food."[14]

[13] John U. Rees "As many fireplaces as you have tents..." Originally published in *Food History News*, vol. IX, no. 2 (Winter 1997), 2, 8-9; vol. IX, no. 3 (Spring1998), 2, and *The Continental Soldier*, vol. XI, no. 3 (Summer 1998), 26-32). Eyewitness reports confirm that French forces also used these kinds of kitchens.

[14] *Diary of Samuel Richards, Captain of Connecticut Line War of the Revolution 1775-1781* (Philadelphia, 1909), p. 75.