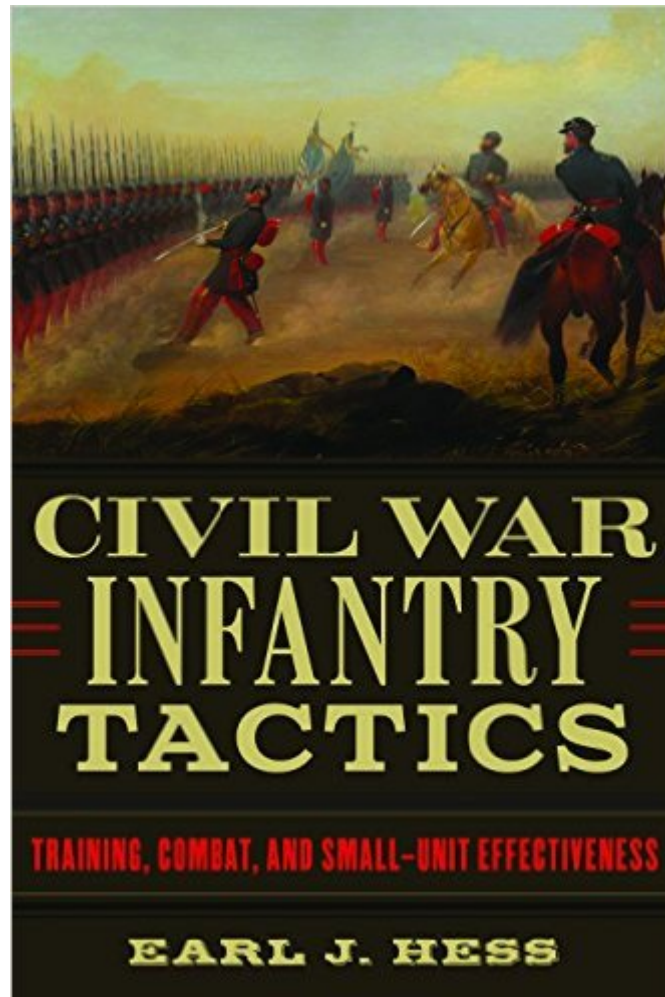


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# Civil War Infantry Tactics: Training, Combat, And Small-Unit Effectiveness



## Synopsis

For decades, military historians have argued that the introduction of the rifle musket—with a range five times longer than that of the smoothbore musket—made the shoulder-to-shoulder formations of linear tactics obsolete. Author Earl J. Hess challenges this deeply entrenched assumption. He contends that long-range rifle fire did not dominate Civil War battlefields or dramatically alter the course of the conflict because soldiers had neither the training nor the desire to take advantage of the musket rifle's increased range. Drawing on the drill manuals available to officers and a close reading of battle reports, *Civil War Infantry Tactics* demonstrates that linear tactics provided the best formations and maneuvers to use with the single-shot musket, whether rifle or smoothbore. The linear system was far from an outdated relic that led to higher casualties and prolonged the war. Indeed, regimental officers on both sides of the conflict found the formations and maneuvers in use since the era of the French Revolution to be indispensable to the survival of their units on the battlefield. The training soldiers received in this system, combined with their extensive experience in combat, allowed small units a high level of articulation and effectiveness. Unlike much military history that focuses on grand strategies, Hess zeroes in on formations and maneuvers (or primary tactics), describing their purpose and usefulness in regimental case studies, and pinpointing which of them were favorites of unit commanders in the field. The Civil War was the last conflict in North America to see widespread use of the linear tactical system, and Hess convincingly argues that the war also saw the most effective tactical performance yet in America's short history.

## Book Information

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## Customer Reviews

Earl Hess has written an excellent narrative history that provides a solid review of how both the Union and Confederate armies fought in the American Civil War. Having said that, this is the kind of book that the tactics or Civil War aficionado will appreciate; it is not for a casual reader of the Civil War. The author presents a very logical approach to the subject. Hess's first two chapters review the tactical heritage inherited by those who fought the Civil War, both European and early American. The author then reviews the three primary manuals available to the two antagonists and how the officers and men trained for battle. Hess then gets into the meat of the book with six chapters reviewing specific, actual tactical situations as they were fought on the battlefield based on first person accounts by soldiers of both sides. He reviews moving forward and skirmishing, multiple lines, changing front, columns, multiple maneuvers, and large formations each with their own chapter. Although a bit dry at times the author really gets into these tactics as they were actually executed vice what the drill manuals said or where they used formations as designed. At the same time he demonstrates that, as the war went on, how the efficiency of the soldiers and their commanders steadily improved, as they were able to execute more complex tactical maneuvers even under fire. Chapter 11 then provides an overview of how tactics evolved after the Civil War.

As the plethora of Civil War studies goes on, many narratives attempt to explain the intricacies of infantry tactics as they occurred within a battle or campaign. There are a select few books on infantry tactics themselves, most of which are reproductions of existing tactics manuals from the period. In his book, *Civil War Infantry Tactics*, Earl J. Hess explains the very nature of how tactics evolved into what they become for the time of the Civil War from European Influences to Early American Tactics and even mentions the difficulties of the introduction of the rifled musket. Throughout this book, all aspects of infantry tactics are explained in detail and with sheer excellence that this book is a welcome addition to the lack of modern tactical study. Earl J. Hess is the Stewart W. McClelland Chair in History at Lincoln Memorial University and is the author of many works. Some of his most famous works include his three part study on field fortifications which includes *In the Trenches at Petersburg*. He is also the author of *Kennesaw Mountain: Sherman, Johnston, and the Atlanta Campaign*; *The Knoxville Campaign: Burnside and Longstreet in East Tennessee* and *The Civil War in the West: Victory and Defeat from the Appalachians to the Mississippi*. He is also the author of one of the most esteemed works on Pickett's Charge: *The Last Attack at Gettysburg*, which was the 2001 winner of the James I. Robertson Jr. Prize from the Civil War Library and Research Center. There are many places in this book which causes it to shine. First and

foremost, the book is solely dedicated to the study of infantry tactics during the Civil War and the immense amount of knowledge which he placed to help the reader understand what was being said.

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