

# Bugle Calls Everyone Should Know

Lesson One: The Basics  
Forward, Halt, and Cease Fire  
By: Sean Smith

## Introduction to the Lessons

More and more units are learning to maneuver and respond to bugle calls in today's re-enacting, and being able to do so will soon measure the authenticity level of a unit. If you have a unit that can maneuver by bugle calls, they can prove to be a valuable asset to any commander on the battlefield. Every soldier knew the bugle calls. He lived by them everyday of his soldiering career.

This series of articles will hopefully improve the ability of a unit to learn the bugle calls. To have a unit successfully learn the calls, each man must take initiative upon himself to learn the calls. Nothing can be done without each man doing his part. And if one person doesn't learn the calls, then the unit will lag. One man can set off an entire unit in maneuvers. I suggest that the learning does not stop with this article. There are many ways to learn the calls. There are many cassette tapes and CD's available today for someone to buy. The best available is RJ Samp's tapes and CD's for non-buglers. George Rabbai's tapes are also a great resource. Be careful what you buy though, some tapes advertised as Civil War bugling tapes are not in actuality Civil War era tapes, but are post-war calls. Also, at an event, if a bugler is present ask him to teach you. ANY bugler would be more than willing to do this and this is the real way to learn.

There are ten Infantry calls that are considered "Must Know" bugle calls. These are calls generally recognized by all buglers as the calls most played and therefore, should be the ones taught first. This series of articles will go through all of the calls. I will start with what I consider the three most important calls.

For the purposes of this article, the music will be given, but realizing that most people cannot read music, the music will be given and the interval direction will be given; up arrows mean higher notes, down arrows mean lower notes. All the calls will also have ditties (words) for you to learn them with.

### Forward-March

This call is used in both skirmish level and battalion level. The first level analyzed will be the smaller, the skirmish formation.

When deployed in a skirmish line, the line is usually about 100 yards in front of the Captain of the unit, think of how hard it would be to yell commands to a skirmish line from that distance with the discharging of weapons, the yelling of men in the field, the commotion, and the animals if where were any in the vicinity. Sadly to say, in re-enacting, we do not usually use the actual distances, the discharging of weapons isn't as concussive, not that many men are yelling, and there isn't much livestock; but that shouldn't abstain us from using bugle calls.



## Halt

Halt is a simple and short call, consisting of six notes. This will be the easiest call to memorize. The call is used in skirmish and battalion formations. Movement should cease on or before the last note. Simple, right?



## Cease Fire

This call means to stop firing. This call is to be executed **as soon as recognized**. This call can be given for several reasons. The most important is because of an emergency. If a man is down on the field this will most likely be the first call you hear played. It can also be used to signify the end of a battle. And then there is the most obvious reason, to make you stop firing for scenario purposes. This call can be recognized because it is all in the higher range of a bugle.



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Sean is currently a high school student at Naperville North High School. He is very active in the music program and plans to major in music in college. Aside from school, re-enacting is a major part of the day, spending about 8 to 12 hours a week doing research for Civil War re-enacting.