

The Battalia in the ECW

Let's face it, wargamers love a good story and a colourful history for their wargames units. This is especially so when it comes the English Civil War. A collection of little men is lovingly painted and based, care is taken when depicting the correct uniforms and flags, (or 'Colours' to be more accurate), and the end-result is presented as 'Sir So and So's Regiment of Foote' along with a potted history.

Sadly, this is not a real reflection of how ECW infantry were presented and used when it came to the sharp end of fighting the enemy. While it is true that an army contained a number of foot Regiments, these were administrative units - useful for sorting out pay (or arrears), issuing kit and distributing rations. However, when it came to establishing a battle-ready force, they were less than useful.

The truth is that ECW regiments very rarely took the field as a self-contained entity. They could vary greatly in size, which meant that they could be too large and cumbersome or too understrength to make a valid contribution. The answer to this was the Battalia.

Like most military practice, this had its origins in the Continental wars and was brought back to England by returning officers, of which both sides boasted a large number. The claim is often made that the ECW were fought by amateur armies, but this could only hold true for the rank and file and NCOs, and the only for the first months of the war.

The aim of the Battalia was to create viable working formations drawn from the entirety of the numbers available, rather than simply fielding widely numerically disparate regiments. Thus, a large regiment of 1000 plus men would take the field as two battalia, each 5-600 men strong. More commonly, battalia would be formed by combining the rank and file from understrength units and companies. Such units would therefore display a range of coat colours and flags.

While this loses the romanticism of your favourite unit of Red/Blue/Green/Yellowcoats, it does produce consistently sized, equipped and organised units, which makes command and deployment a lot easier and more practical.

On the battlefield, the Battalia would be formed from sub-units. I shall term these as '*divisions*', but contemporary use of terms was fluid, and in other circumstances, you may see words such as 'squadron' or 'company' doing the same job.

The pike would form as one division in the central portion of the Battalia. Senior officers would stand at the head of their divisions, junior officers to the rear, with drummers on the corners of the pike formation.

On either side of the pike, the musketeers would form up in a number of separated divisions, leaving an interval of 6-12 feet between them and their neighbours. The most common method of giving fire would be by rank, whereby the front rank would let off their weapons, and then turn off to their right, filing down the side of their division taking station in the rear, all the while reloading their muskets. As each rank filed off, the next one would step forward to take their place and the subsequent ranks would advance in turn. In this way the battalia could maintain a continuous fire, with the main limitation being ammunition supply.

The musket divisions were commanded by NCOs - as 'mechanicals' their social betters were not expected to soil their hands with gunpowder and the like.

The battalia was a very flexible formation. The shot could take, hold and lose ground, all the while keeping a good weight of fire to their front. The pike could hang back, keep formation or advance ahead of the musketeers depending on how aggressive they were required to be. These were not static bodies and experienced officers could adopt the most appropriate formation as required.

The Baccus Big Base Battalia.

The Baccus Battalia assumes a 2:1 shot to pike ratio. It consists of six divisions, (two of pike and four of shot), each 30 strong, giving a fighting strength of 180 rank and file.

NCOs are depicted at a rate of two per musket division.

Officers are depicted at a rate of two per pike division

Four Ensigns are safely tucked away in the second rank of pikemen.

Four drummers are stationed at each corner of the pike division.

This gives a total strength of 196 figures in the formation on a base measuring 20cm by 10 cm.

Constructing the basic battalia.

1) The Pike

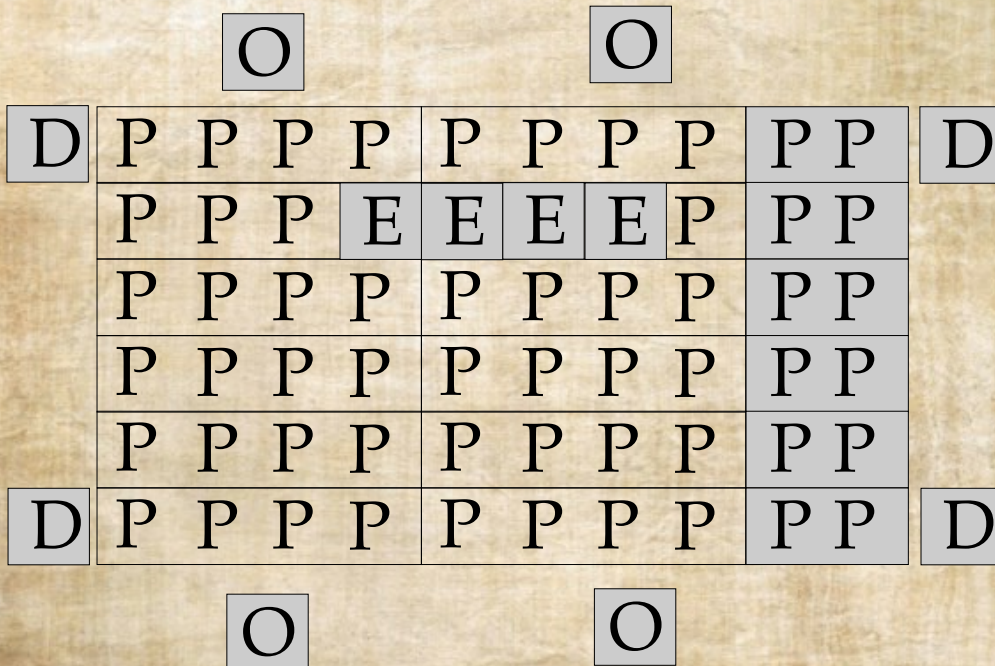
Pikemen: - These are formed as one division measuring ten figures wide by six in depth. Baccus strips come with four figures. You will need to cut five strips in half to complete the formation.

Officers, Ensigns and Musicians. - There are four command strips included. These will need cutting and dividing to give you individual figures.

Four Ensigns are placed in the centre of the second rank of pike.

Four Drummers are placed at each corner of the pike formation.

Two officers are placed in advance of the two combined pike formation, two to the rear.



The Shot

These are formed in four divisions, each measuring five figures wide by six in depth. A total of six strips will need separating into individual figures to enable the four divisions to be assembled.

Sergeants. - There are two command strips supplied, both of which will need cutting into individual figures. Each division has one sergeant stood to the right of the right hand file, and one stationed to the rear of the body.



The Formed Battalia

The formation below is a fairly standard one, consisting of a unit with a 2:1 ratio of musket to pike formed with all ranks levelled. This method can easily be adapted to depict differing ratios if required. You can also choose to model the battalia in different formations. My preference is for the 'horned' battalia with both bodies of shot deployed to the front of the base, with the front rank of pikes level with the rear ranks of musketeers.

