

Shield Wall 101

A Basic Understanding of what the Hell is going on.

By Troy Hafallen, Oct 2004

Fyrdman of Calontir

The Calontir Shield Wall is based on the Roman Shield wall, with each solider in it having a specific job, and trained to fight as a unit. There are numerous stories and songs that tell how effective the Calontir Shield Wall is.

Now you will learn why.

First, I will not in this paper attempt to discuss or debate which army in history was best, or other “In Period they did this” scenarios. Those topics are much better debated in other forums.

I will assume that you my reader, are an authorized SCA fighter with little to no war experience, and have questions on how the shield wall works.

Here, I will hopefully pass on the basics of how The Calontir Shield Wall performs its function to the horror of our foes. I will discuss each individual’s purpose and function in the wall, as well as some of the basic formations and commands. There is an endless amount of “what if” strategies and other details that you can only learn through experience; I do not have the time to discuss all of them here.

Many of our tactics and formations are a credit to Master Pavel. Much of what is here is condensed from his writings and teachings.

Other writings on this subject I would suggest to read are:

- * Small Unit Fighting, Fighter 201 by Duke Kensor
- * Basic Melee Skills, Fighter 202 by Duke Kensor
- * Fundamentals of Large Unit Command in Society Warfare, by Duke Kensor
- * Army Organization for Estrella by HL Nazir al-Tawil

I have also drawn on my own SCA War experience to describe the different jobs as well as some examples of how they work.

The reference to “solider” or “man” is meant as a common descriptive title of all combatant members of the Calontir Army, regardless of sex, rank or weapon style used.

What the Fluck is a Flank?

There will be times when a command will be given to form on a flank, or to watch out because they are flanking us. The *Left Flank* is the left side of the army as it is facing the enemy. The *Right Flank* is the right side of the army as it is facing the enemy.

To *Flank* your enemy means to go around to his less defended side, and to come at him from behind or through the side of his ranks.

Some of the commands you will hear are:

- LAY ON** The command given by the marshal to start the battle.
- HOLD** If you see something that warrants a HOLD or hear one called, yell it loudly to the man on your left and right, place thrusting tips on the ground and take a knee. Then wait for the marshals directions.
- Also, while in the Wall do not yell “Hold the line!” to encourage your fellow Calontirians. All they will hear is HOLD and you will have been the cause of stopping all the fun. The acceptable phrase is “Stay the line”.
- DEAD OUT** Normally given by a marshal, if you are dead roll out as safely as you can. With your weapon over your head to show you are dead, and make your way to a resurrection or water point off the field.
- RISE IF YOU ARE ABLE** – Given after a HOLD, it simply means to get up if you are alive, stay on your knees if you are legged, and continue to lay there if you are dead.
- STAY** “Stay the line” or “Stand your ground” mean pretty much the same thing. Given when the commander wants to stop the advance of the wall.
- DRESS** During the battle, the line will become sporadic as men die, or as the line moves forward. “Dress the line”, means for you to look to your left and right, and reform a straight line, shoulder to shoulder.
- STEP** The line should at all times move as a unit. You will hear the commander tell the line to step forward so many steps or to step to contact. An acceptable step is a normal stride, keeping your neighbor at your side.
- KNELL** There may come a time when the commander will want the wall to keep a piece of land from the enemy. The command is “Front rank knell”. This means just what is said. The front rank with scutum will go to their knees, overlap shields and defend. The 2nd and 3rd ranks will fill in close, usually with their knees in the backs of the scutum drivers.
- STAND** Given sometime after the “Knell” command. To get the front rank up and ready to move. “Front rank stand” or “Scutum Rise”.
- CHARGE** Self explanatory. You can not run ramming speed until contact with the enemy. You must walk the last three steps. This is to prevent people from getting run over like a football player.

First things first, where do I stand? Well that depends on the weapon system you are using. No matter if you have all weapons authorized or only sword and board; there is always room for one more falcon tabard.

Calontir does not fill the front ranks with the newest fighters so they can die first, leaving the knights to collect the glory. We blend our ranks. You can find Knights behind scutum, and men-at-arms on spears. This fusion gives us a more strengthened army, with no weak spots. A newly authorized greatswordman next to a veteran fighter becomes 10X more effective than by himself.

The wall is broken down into ranks; some people may describe them in different ways. Here I have broken the wall into five ranks for descriptions of their jobs.

First Rank – Scutum and other large shields. This rank forms first, in a location as directed by the field commander. They will stand shoulder to shoulder with shields overlapping, facing the enemy.

Their job is to stay alive for as long as possible. You will accomplish this by protecting the man to your left and right as well as yourself. Most of your actions should be defensive, using your sword to block blows and fowl weapons. Resist the urge to take a step and hit someone, because as soon as you leave, you will die. Stay alert for the spearman and pole arm fighter two or three away from you; they are the one that is likely to kill you. At all times, stay in communication with the soldier on each side of you and the soldier behind you working a spear or great weapon. The fact that the wall talks to each other is the main reason we are so deadly.

There are a limited number of times that a hole large enough for a soldier to walk through, should be in the line. Always, unless directed otherwise by your commander on the field, always stand with your shield overlapping the shield next to you 4 – 6 inches. This will have the effect of strengthening the wall tremendously. Because now, that pesky spear or polearm that is trying to pull your shield over, now is pulling on your shield *and* the soldier next to you.

Since you are in the front rank, you are very likely to be among the first to die. Remember to die with your shield over you, because you **will** get stepped on.

Most important, one scutum is not a wall. However, add a spear or great weapon, and you can deny the enemy the field. This bare minimum shield wall is known as the Sir Simyanka Express.(Gulf Wars, 2004)

Second Rank – Great Weapons (Artillery) Weapon types found here are polearms and greatswords. This rank forms directly behind the scutum, with individuals placed between the men on the first rank, so as to allow their weapon to strike the enemy over the scutum.

When fighting here, remember that the scutum in front is yours to direct, they will need to get directions from you from time to time. And likewise that scutum driver is likely to spot a target for you.

It is possible that a polearm or spear is going to get a hold on to your scutum friend. If you have a hook on your weapon, hook the top of the scutum and help him pull it back. With the enemy's weapon busy on the scutum, he is defenseless. Yell for a spearman to get the enemy pulling on the scutum.

Fowl weapons as much as trying to kill the enemy, for each time you fowl a weapon, you save a Calontir fighter.

Beating on the shield of the enemy can weaken their spirit as well as their body. But take care not to wear yourself out early in the fight.

When the enemy charges and attempts to push through the ranks, turn your polearm sideways, and hold it across the backs of the scutum to halt the enemy's advance. This will buy time for the ranks behind you to kill them.

Third Rank – Spears Spearman will form as a third rank, finding locations that allow for them to work their spear in an area needed as directed by the commander.

Remember to defend the scutum, by holding on to them with your hook and pushing on the back of the scutum when they press.

Find a friend. Teaming up with another spearman can make a deadly team that will have the enemy dieing in mass. One of the pair can fowl a weapon, or hold a shield open to allow the other to strike at a vulnerable target. It is this teamwork that makes the Calontir Spearman respected the Known World over.

Listen to the scutum, great weapon fighters and field commander. They may see a need for a spear. Heed the call.

Fourth Rank – Secondary Shields You may have a scutum or other shield to be here. As the fight progresses, replacements to the front line will be needed.

Fifth Rank – Other Replacements Any soldier that does not have a place in the first few ranks, can find a place here. Replacements will be needed, and you can move up to fight as needed. Depending on the battle, the commanders plan and the number of soldiers in the army, this rank may be formed into another wall.

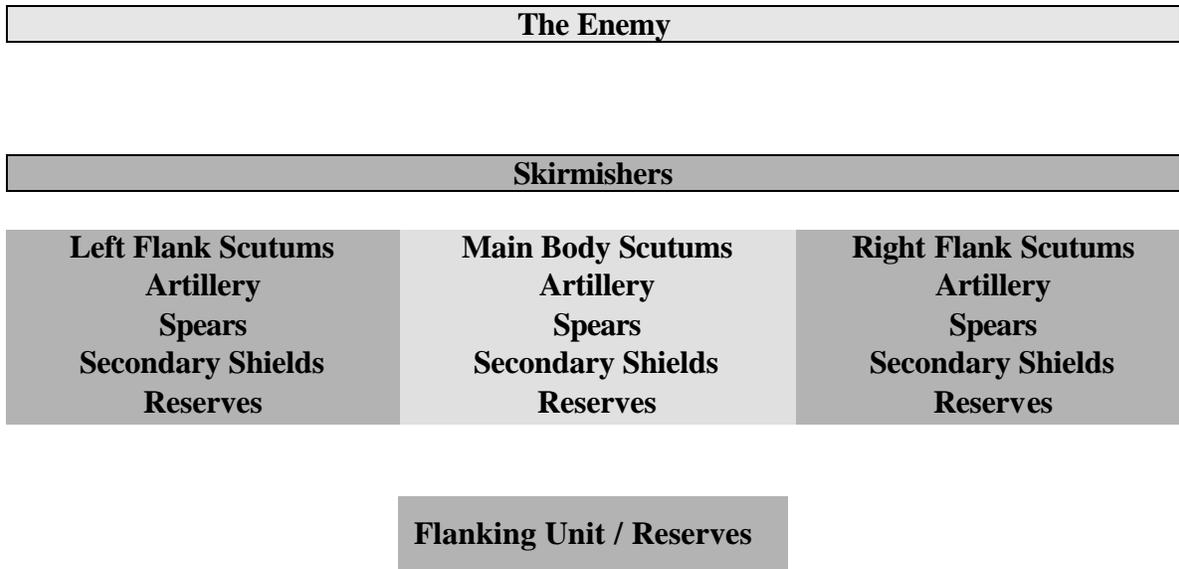
The Big Picture – There are more than scutums and spears in the wall. There are skirmishers and Special Units. They will have a special starting point in the formation, as well as a duty during the battle. If you are part of one of them, get with a veteran so you know your task.

The Door – There will be times when the enemy will do a pulse charge into our shields. If the commander is aware, we will set up a “door” for them to come through. This is done simply by a scutum driver turning his scutum to the side to allow the enemy inside our formation. Not to worry, there are several lonely Calontir artillerymen that will take care of the hapless fools. This should be coordinated with the other ranks behind the door, so they will not be caught off guard.

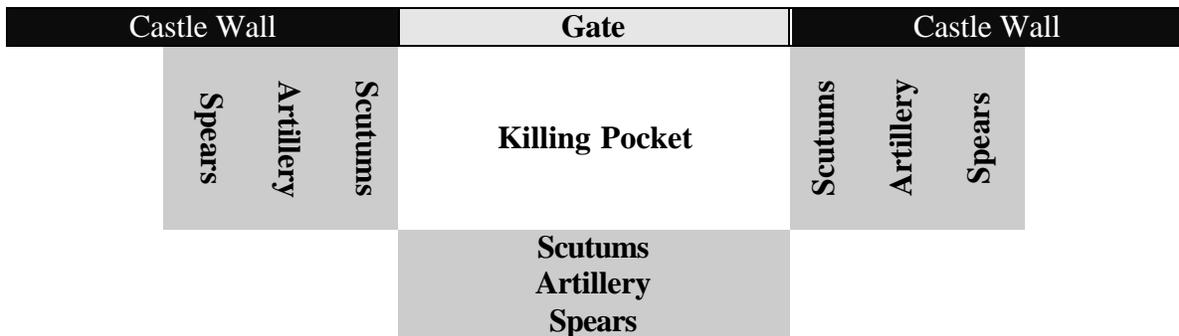
There are other times when our skirmishers will need to be let back into the shield wall; this is done the same way.

Some Standard Formations:

Open field battle. Re serves, Skirmishers, Archers, Allies and the Enemies position are all items that the field commander will have to take into consideration when finalizing plans. For the most part the basic formation will look like this.



Defense: There are times when we will hold an area, if the terrain lends itself to this tactic, a “Killing Pocket” will be made. This ‘horseshoe’ formation allows spears and artillery to attack the enemy in a small area from 3 sides. When properly employed against the enemy, you may hear the command “Kill them slower” (Phaedra’s Gate, Estrella War).



Always:

Listen to the orders of the chain of command for the army.

Never attack alone.

Protect the Calontirian to your side.

Be safe; heed the word of the marshals.

Sing.