



**NORTH-SOUTH SKIRMISH
ASSOCIATION, INC.**

Skirmisher's Handbook

Preface

Skirmishing is a unique sport. The heart of skirmishing is company competition with individual firearms; in effect, a contest to determine which group of eight competitors can eliminate a set of breakable targets faster than all other groups of eight. It is marksmanship against a stopwatch.

Skirmishing also is unique because of its historical basis. The American Civil War is a subject that fascinates tens of thousands of our citizens. Skirmishers enjoy re-creating that history through competition with the firearms of that war. Each of our member organizations takes its name and uniform from a historically documented unit that served during the war years. In this way, we commemorate the heroism of soldiers and civilians of both the Union and the Confederacy who took part in the epic struggle of 1861-65.

The N-SSA was organized in 1950 to promote the shooting of Civil War firearms and artillery. Although most of our members live in the eastern half of the United States, some unit rosters show addresses as far away as California, Florida, and Texas.

Two National Skirmishes are held annually at Fort Shenandoah, the N-SSA's 400-acre facility near Winchester, Virginia. Nearly sixty regional skirmishes are held each year in the N-SSA's thirteen regions.

Our sport, like most other team sports, is regulated by a set of rules. Those rules govern procedures, firearms, equipment, and uniforms. Knowledge of the rules enables all skirmishers to compete fairly, equitably and safely. Competitors are responsible for knowing and complying with the rules in all N-SSA competition.

Underlying all our rules is the requirement of firearm safety. The safe and responsible handling of firearms ensures the continuation of our sport.

We welcome new skirmishers to a lifetime of good competition, good memories, and good companions. Enjoy it in safety and good will.

Skirmisher's Handbook

This handbook is not a rule book. It is a manual designed to teach the basics of skirmishing. Its content is derived from the Skirmish Rules of the North-South Skirmish Association, Inc., and all members of the organization are expected to familiarize themselves with that document.

This booklet represents an outline of information a skirmisher needs in order to begin competing. It summarizes the rules regarding uniforms, arms, equipment, ammunition, competition, and safety. This is the minimum one needs to know in order to function in the N-SSA

All the information contained in this handbook is important; however, none is more important than that pertaining to safety. Your existence, as well as that of this Association, depends on the safe and intelligent handling of firearms.

Rules and commands regarding firearms safety are to be obeyed in the military tradition, which is to obey without question and without hesitation. A safety officer who calls a violation to your attention is not to be argued with; he is to be thanked for saving life or limb. He acts in your interest, and in the interest of the future of the N-SSA.

Not only will this booklet help you avoid problems, it will educate you enough to perform your inevitable duties as a line judge or a safety officer. Your effectiveness in those capacities will be determined by how well informed you are.

An understanding of the material contained in this handbook is just a beginning. We encourage all skirmishers to become familiar with the complete skirmish rules, copies of which are available at a cost of \$30.00 from the Executive Secretary, Dot Willauer, P.O. Box 211, North East, MD 21901-0211. The rules are available for download free of charge from the N-SSA website, www.n-ssa.org.

If you still have questions after reading the rules, ask your Unit Commander, your Regional Officers, or the Skirmish Director. They will share their knowledge with you, because they share with you the responsibility for safe and fair competition.

The Organization of the N-SSA

The N-SSA is an Association of member organizations, all of which have been established to enter competing companies in N-SSA skirmishes. Each member organization in good standing has a vote in the conduct of Association affairs.

The N-SSA is governed by a Board of Directors, composed of the six National Officers (Commander, Deputy Commander, Adjutant, Paymaster, Inspector General and Executive Secretary) and the thirteen Region Commanders. Except for the Executive Secretary, who is appointed by the Board, the Officers are elected by vote of the member organizations and shall (with the exception of the Paymaster) not serve more than two consecutive terms.

Skirmishes are held in all seasons, with most being held from March through November. Skirmishing is an all-weather sport. Veterans have learned to pack clothing for all extremes.

Members who live within reasonable driving distances from Fort Shenandoah can participate in twelve to fifteen skirmishes a year there. Skirmishers in the more distant regions can usually find a comparable number of matches within their own and nearby regions. Skirmish formats are nearly the same all around the N-SSA, with individual, carbine company, and musket company matches being universal throughout the Association.

The Association is divided into thirteen regions, which serve as governmental sub-units, and also sanction skirmishes within their geographic areas. Member organizations are assigned to regions by the Board of Directors.

Staff officers are appointed by the Board to oversee various aspects of the operation of the Association, and Committees are appointed by the Commander to provide input to the Board on matters of business and to carry out specific tasks.

The N-SSA is incorporated in the Commonwealth of Virginia and is a non-profit organization. Donations (money or property) to the N-SSA are tax deductible.

The Board of Directors meets four times each year, the last weekend in January, the first weekend in August, and at both National Skirmishes. All meetings are open to the general membership.

Membership meetings are held at each National Skirmish. Membership meetings are open, but only one representative is permitted to speak or vote on behalf of each member organization. Unit attendance at these meetings is mandatory.

Member organizations elect their own officers and set their own qualifications for membership, however members must be at least fifteen years of age. The organizations select the skirmishes in which they choose to participate. Membership in the N-SSA is maintained by payment of annual dues, and by participation in at least three official skirmishes each year. There are no individual memberships in the Association.

Skirmishes

Skirmishes are programs of competitive shooting matches with Civil War firearms. They include programs of individual matches on paper targets and company matches fired at breakable targets.

Some skirmishes include revolver, smoothbore, and/or breechloading rifle company matches, and some have artillery competitions.

The focus of all skirmishes is the musket company match, featuring teams of eight competitors firing at breakable targets. Finish placement is determined by accumulating the elapsed times of all the events each company shoots. Those with the lowest total elapsed times are declared the winners.

Many companies compete in the hope of winning medals for their marksmanship; all compete for fun.

The Skirmish Rules

All the rules pertaining to skirmishing are published in a book called *N-SSA Skirmish Rules*. It is your responsibility to be familiar with those rules, and to abide by them.

Ignorance of the rules does not excuse any infraction, and violations can result in the disqualification or penalization of you or of the company with which you are competing.

This handbook is a general guide, a narrative summary. For your own education you should study the rule book.

In addition to the rules which are summarized in this booklet, the rule book provides detailed information about:

- Types of competition
- Competitor eligibility
- Competitors' duties and responsibilities
- Firearms, equipment, and ammunition
- Uniform and equipment regulations
- Competition regulations
- Challenges and protests
- Range safety
- Inspections
- Company commanders' responsibilities
- Official program of events
- Time limits
- Range layout
- Range control and commands
- Statistics operations
- Skirmish staff
- Awards
- Individual qualification and classification
- Company qualification and classification
- Skirmish finances
- Artillery matches
- Revolver company matches
- Bivouac and camping rules
- Range use at Fort Shenandoah

The Uniform

N-SSA rules require that you wear the uniform of your parent organization when participating in all team matches. Certain exceptions to this rule are allowed for inclement weather conditions.

The basic uniform is hat, coat, trousers, and shoes. If you take off the uniform coat, you must wear a Civil War-period shirt. Shoes may be of a modern style, but tennis shoes (or any style of that genre) are prohibited. Civil War brogans or boots are recommended.

Modern clothing, such as shirts, undershirts, or jeans may not be worn during shooting activities which require uniforms. Remember, you are to present the appearance of a soldier of the American Civil War.

You are required to wear your N-SSA membership card in a readily visible area on your uniform. This is for security purposes. Other than the membership card, no modern pins, buttons, badges or other adornments are permitted.

Items of uniform and insignia are available for sale at national skirmishes, or from reputable vendors, some of which advertise in The Skirmish Line. High-quality uniform parts are worth the expense, because they will give long service. Consult members of your parent organization for advice as to good vendors for the items of uniform your organization may require.

Firearms

Your firearm may be either an original arm or a replica that has been accepted for use in N-SSA skirmishes. Arms may be re-barreled, if the replacement barrel has been accepted for N-SSA service. The Small Arms Committee maintains a list of all accepted reproduction arms and replacement barrels.

The use of non-approved reproduction arms or replacement barrels will cause your disqualification from competition, or will cause your company to be disqualified if used in company matches.

All shoulder arms must have a trigger pull of no less than three pounds, and must have a functional half-cock. Revolvers must have a trigger pull of at least two pounds and also must have a functional half-cock.

Sights must be the correct pattern for the arm, and must be in the correct positions on the barrel. Modifications to the height and to the sighting-surface contour are allowed, within specified limits. All modifications must be of metal.

Other modifications, such as serrated triggers or stock chequering, are prohibited.

Musket company match arms must be muzzle-loading. They include muskets, rifles, rifle-muskets, and rifled muskets.

Carbine company match arms may be either muzzle- or breech-loading. All must use externally-primed ammunition. Allowable arms are carbines and musketoons.

All arms used in revolver individual or company matches must be approved cap-and-ball arms.

Breechloading/Carbine II matches may be held with approved breechloading or repeating rifles or carbines using internally primed cartridges.

All firearms are subject to inspection at any time to assure that they conform to the Skirmish Rules. If you have doubts concerning the acceptability of a particular firearm, ask your Region Commander, Region Inspector, or a member of the Small Arms Committee.

Proper loading of muzzle loading arms requires that the butt of the arm be on the ground (or on your foot) and that the muzzle be angled downrange. Always leave the hammer down on the last cap fired while loading.

Occasionally powder will detonate while it is being poured into the barrel. Such an event (called a "cook-off") can result in a bad burn to any parts of your hand that may be over the muzzle. The danger of a cook-off requires that you keep all body parts away from the muzzle.

In ramming the bullet, use only your thumb and one finger to grasp the ramrod. Never put a finger or the palm of your hand over the end of the ramrod. Do not try to smash the bullet down the barrel. Usually a single steady stroke will do the job.

A good rule to remember about loading a musket is "Don't place anything you are not willing to lose over the muzzle."

Most skirmishers stick a bayonet or large knife into the ground at their feet and lean the ramrod against it during competition. You may do this, or you may hold the ramrod in your hand. You may *not* return the ramrod to the channel beneath the barrel until after you have fired your last shot for that event or relay.

Capping the firearm is the last act of the loading procedure. Once capped, the arm is to be held at the "ready" position: the butt is away from the shoulder and the arm is held parallel to the ground, muzzle downrange.

Firing

Firing is to be done only at your targets, or those of your company. You are not permitted to fire on targets of other competitors, on those of another company, or at target fragments which remain in your frame after you have completed a company event.

Firing at another competitor's targets or at a fragment on your company's frame (even a fragment of a target which is obviously hit) will result in a substantial penalty being assessed against you or your company.

After each shot, leave the hammer down on the cap. Never remove the last cap fired before reloading the arm. Leaving the hammer on the last cap creates a seal which prevents air from getting into the barrel, reducing the likelihood of a cook-off.

Accoutrements

N-SSA rules require the use of accoutrements of the Civil War period. The cartridge box and cap box must be of leather of the approximate thickness of original items. Belts, buckles, slings and haversacks must be of Civil War pattern. Specific styles of buckles, belts, etc. usually are covered in the regulations of each unit. The use of post-Civil War items is prohibited.

Because of the scarcity of original accoutrements, their use in skirmishing is discouraged.

Select quality leather goods, and they will last through years of service. Inexpensive or ill-made items usually do not. Good accoutrements are available for sale at National Skirmishes, and also through vendors who advertise in The Skirmish Line.

Ammunition

Once you have acquired a firearm for skirmishing, the next important task is to acquire a good bullet mold. Most good shooters use a sizing die to ensure uniformity in their ammunition. There are several styles of bullets available. For guidance, seek the advice of skirmishers who hit regularly.

The only propellant permitted to be used in skirmishing is black powder. There are black powder substitutes on the market, but none are allowed in N-SSA competition.

Ammunition for muzzle-loading arms is usually made up in plastic or paper tubes. Paper-wrapped cartridges are allowed, if they are accepted by the Inspector General, but they increase bore fouling. Plastic tubes, readily available at nationals, hold up far better in service than paper tubes.

All ammunition must be pre-loaded. Loose powder is not permitted in the ready area. Ammunition must be carried to the firing line in cartridge boxes, and percussion caps must be carried in cap boxes. No ammunition or caps may be carried on the person in any other manner.

Inspections

Inspections of firearms are conducted by lottery at regional and national skirmishes. The inspector will test the trigger pull of a shoulder arm with an NRA three pound weight. Revolvers have a trigger pull of at least two pounds. The inspector also will check the half-cock and visually inspect the arm to assure compliance with N-SSA rules.

The inspector also will order the removal of any non-compliant article of clothing or equipment. Arms, equipment, and uniforms may also be inspected if another competitor or unit lodges a protest with the skirmish staff.

You can save yourself embarrassment and inconvenience if you check your equipment with an inspector before a match. You bear the responsibility of complying with the rules.

Firing Procedures

Loading

The watchword in shooting is "*safety*." No firearm may be loaded except on the range, and except after the command "*LOAD*" is given.

If you have a loaded arm when an event ends, the safety officer will direct you to unload it by firing it from the shoulder into the backstop. Do not fire it from the hip; always maintain complete control of the arm.

Clearing the Firearm

Firearms should never be loaded with powder and ball until they have been cleared by snapping caps.

When the command “*SNAP CAPS*” is given, fire two or more caps on the unloaded arm. The first cap *always* should be aimed from the shoulder — not merely “pointed” at the backstop. Snap the second cap at the ground slightly in front of the firing line. If you suspect that there may be oil or other moisture in the breech area of the barrel of a muzzle-loading arm, snap several caps to dry it out.

The purpose of firing the first cap down range is in keeping with the first rule of firearm safety: always assume that the arm is loaded, even if you are certain that it is not. In the event the arm might actually contain a load, the first cap snapped will send the bullet harmlessly into the backstop.

The second cap should be aimed at a blade of grass or a clump of dust, so that the pressure from the cap causes visible movement of the grass or dust. That visible movement is your confirmation that the fire channel is clear, and that the flame from the cap has an unimpeded passageway to the powder in the barrel.

Snapping extra caps, especially prior to your first event of the day, serves to prevent a powder charge from being fouled by oil or by the residue of cleaning solvents.

A blocked or fouled barrel must be cleared in an approved manner by range officials at the end of a company match event or individual relay. If you are unable to discharge a fouled arm, ground it by placing it on the ground with the muzzle pointed toward the backstop and immediately notify the safety officer of the problem.

The snapping of caps is not an empty ritual. It is a way to assure that the barrel is clear of obstructions and may safely be loaded.

Firing Line Behavior

Some Basic Guidelines to Remember

Wait for range control commands to be issued from the tower, and obey them promptly.

Obey the directions of the safety officer assigned to your position.

Take adequate ammunition and caps to the line. You are not permitted to leave the line after the commencement of a company event or to receive replenishment from anyone behind the line, as it may create an unsafe situation.

Keep your firearms clean and the bores dry. Dirty or wet barrels may foul, and cost your company your help on that event.

Be a good sportsman. Courtesy and common sense should be observed at all times.

Leaving the Line

When you have finished an event, either individual or company, you may not leave the firing line until it has been proven to the Safety Officer that your firearm is unloaded.

If the arm is a breachloading Carbine, the inspection procedure is to simply break the arm open so that the Safety Officer can look through the barrel.

For muzzle-loading arms, the Safety Officer will watch you fire the first cap at the backstop, from the shoulder. Fire the second cap at the ground, or at a flag held in front of the muzzle by the Safety Officer. When the Safety Officer is satisfied that all arms are unloaded, you will be directed to leave the firing line.

Do not leave the line after a company match event until the Safety Officer says "The line is cleared." Do not leave the line after firing an individual relay until the Safety Officer says, "You are clear."

Line Judge and Safety Officer

Each skirmisher in a company match may have to take a turn as a Line Judge or Safety Officer. When it is your company's turn to provide line judge and safety services to another company, be behind the firing company on time, prepared to do your duty. Your Company Commander should tell you when it is your turn.

Line Judge

The general duty of a Line Judge is to gather and report accurate statistical data. The specific duties are to:

- start the stopwatch on the tower's signal and stop it when the firing team's commander calls "time!"

- watch for early or late shots, shots fired at other companies' targets, and hits on target fragments, and report such illegal firing to the skirmish Statistics Officer for the appropriate penalty.

- count hits in silhouettes or in other point event targets. Count only those which you can definitely see.

- examine breakable targets after the event, to judge whether or not all are actually hit.

Safety Officer

The general duty of a Safety Officer is to assure that all skirmishers on his position observe safe loading and firing procedures. The Safety Officer also

inspects each firearm to ascertain that all are unloaded after the event. The specific duties are to:

courteously inform shooters to cease unsafe practices.

order the grounding of fouled arms which cannot be cleared by the competitor.

order the grounding of arms by competitors who persist in unsafe practices.

prevent assistance, tools, coaching and ammunition from being given to a competitor on the line during an event by anyone other than a firing member of the same company.

remain on the firing line with fouled arms until properly relieved by the skirmish ordnance officer.

notify the range tower, by the waving of a flag, of the status of the competing company's firearms after the completion of the event. Wave the green flag when all firearms have been inspected and have been proven clear. Wave the red flag if there is a fouled arm which must be cleared by the skirmish ordnance staff.

wave the red flag during the event only when there is an emergency on the line which makes the shutting down of the line necessary. Do not use the red flag to signal a fouled arm during an event. When you wave the red flag during an event, all firing on the range must cease at once.

At all times the safety officer is to observe loading procedures and range security. He is never to observe the progress of the breaking of targets. His full attention must be always on safety!

Some Basic Don'ts

Do not fire before the command to fire, or after the command to cease fire.

Do not crossfire onto another's target.

Do not shoot target fragments.

Do not shoot at frames, or at anything not designated as a target.

Do not leave the firing line until cleared.

Do not shoot on more than one company at a skirmish.

Do not mix drinking and shooting. The rules state that you are not allowed to consume alcoholic beverages until you have finished shooting for the day. The use of illegal substances will not be tolerated.

Fort Shenandoah

Fort Shenandoah, the N-SSA's home range, is located at 480 Chalybeate Spring Road, Winchester, VA 22603, approximately eight miles northwest of downtown Winchester.

The original section was acquired in 1962, with an additional 112 acres of impact area added in 1990, another 33 acres added in 2001, and an additional 30 acres added in 2008. The total area is approximately 400 acres.

Fort Shenandoah's central activity area is its musket range. Nearly one-third of a mile in width, it is purported to be the largest offhand shooting range in the world. A second, smaller range is used for revolver matches. Laid out diagonally across the musket range is a 200-yard artillery range, which can accommodate twenty guns at a time. Fort Shenandoah is the largest privately owned range on the East Coast.

Member organizations of the N-SSA have permanently assigned campsites on the property. Many units have improved their sites by the addition of cabins or pavilions. Members are welcome to use their campsites for vacation camping for periods of up to two weeks.

Sanitary facilities and drinking water are located throughout the camp areas.

A commercial area known as "sutler's row" is located near the range, and is occupied by dozens of sutlers during national skirmishes. A few are open for business at regional skirmishes.

A medical unit is on site at all national and some regional skirmishes.

Food service is available, serving breakfast and lunch items at all skirmishes held at Fort Shenandoah.

The range is open for members' use at any time a skirmish is not being set up or under way. Rules covering its use, and the use of the camping areas, are detailed in the Skirmish Rules. Members visiting the property during non-skirmish times must sign in at the Property Manager's house as soon as they arrive.

No camping fees are charged at Fort Shenandoah. It is owned by the members, and the members are welcome to use it. Members are expected to use it responsibly, and to keep the facility in excellent condition.

A full-time Property Manager is in residence at Fort Shenandoah. He is responsible for the maintenance and upkeep of the property, but is not expected to clean up after the members who use it. Fort Shenandoah is a remarkable facility, and it is the pride of the N-SSA. Maintain your share of it as if you owned it, because you do.

The Skirmish Line

The magazine of the North-South Skirmish Association is *The Skirmish Line*. It is published four times each year. *The Skirmish Line* is the N-SSA's direct line of communication to the individual members. It contains addresses of Board and Staff officers, results of national and regional skirmishes, columns by Board, Staff, and Committee members, summaries of acts of the Board of Directors, articles of general interest to the membership, and advertisements of skirmish-related enterprises.

The magazine relies on material submitted by the membership. All are welcome to submit articles for publication.

Read each issue carefully. Important information is relayed to you through its pages.

For additional information, please contact your unit commander, your region commander, or visit our website, www.n-ssa.org.