

PART ONE

DRILL

“Gentlemen: you have now reached the last point. If anyone of you doesn’t mean business let him say so now. An hour from now will be too late to back out. Once in, you’ve got to see it through. You’ve got to perform without flinching whatever duty is assigned you, regardless of the difficulty or the danger attending it. If it is garrison duty, you must attend to it. If it is meeting fever, you must be willing. If it is the closest kind of fighting, anxious for it. You must know how to ride, how to shoot, how to live in the open. Absolute obedience to every command is your first lesson. No matter what comes you mustn’t squeal. Think it over - all of you. If any man wishes to withdraw he will be gladly excused, for others are ready to take his place.”

Theodore Roosevelt, Remarks to Recruits, 1898

INTRODUCTION

The purpose of drill is to enable a commander or noncommissioned officer to move his unit from one place to another in an orderly manner; to aid in disciplinary training by instilling habits of precision and response to the leader’s orders; and to provide for the development of all soldiers in the practice of commanding troops.

HISTORY

Military history reveals that armies throughout the world participated in some form of drill. The primary value of drill, historically, is to prepare troops for battle. For the most part, the drill procedures practiced are identical to the tactical maneuvers employed on the battlefield. Drill enables commanders to quickly move their forces from one point to another, mass their forces into a battle formation that affords maximum firepower, and maneuver those forces as the situation develops.

a. In 1775, when this country was striving for independence and existence, the nation’s leaders were confronted with the problem of not only establishing a government but also of organizing an army that was already engaged in war. From the “shot heard around the world,” on 19 April 1775, until Valley Forge in 1778, Revolutionary forces were little more than a group of civilians fighting Indian-style against well-trained, highly disciplined British Redcoats. For three years, General George Washington’s troops had endured many hardships—lack of funds, rations, clothing, and equipment. In addition, they had suffered loss after loss to the superior British forces. These hardships and losses mostly stemmed from the lack of a military atmosphere in country. Thus, an army was created with little or no organization, control, discipline, or teamwork.

b. Recognizing the crisis, General Washington, through Benjamin Franklin, the American Ambassador to France, enlisted the aid of a Prussian officer, Baron Friedrich von Steuben. Upon his arrival at Valley Forge on 23 February 1778, von Steuben, a former staff officer with Frederick the Great, met an army of several thousand half-starved, wretched men in rags. He commented

that a European army could not be kept together in such a state. To correct the conditions that prevailed, he set to work immediately and wrote drill movements and regulations at night and taught them the following day to a model company of 120 men selected from the line.

c. Discipline became a part of military life for these selected individuals as they learned to respond to command without hesitation. This new discipline instilled in the individual a sense of alertness, urgency, and attention to detail. Confidence in himself and his weapon grew as each man perfected the fifteen 1-second movements required to load and fire his musket. As the Americans mastered the art of drill, they began to work as a team and to develop a sense of pride in themselves and in their unit.

d. Watching this model company drill, observers were amazed to see how quickly and orderly the troops could be massed and maneuvered into different battle formations. Officers observed that organization, chain of command, and control were improved as each man had a specific place and task within the formation. Later, the members of the model company were distributed throughout the Army to teach drill. Through drill, they improved the overall effectiveness and efficiency of the Army.

e. To ensure continuity and uniformity, von Steuben, by then a major general and the Army Inspector General, wrote the first Army field manual in 1779, *The Regulations for the Order and Discipline of the Troops of the United States*, commonly referred to as the Blue Book. The drill procedures initiated at Valley Forge were not changed for 85 years, until the American Civil War, and many of the drill terms and procedures are still in effect today.

f. Drill commands are about the same as at the time of the War of 1812, except that then the officers and noncommissioned officers began them by saying, "Take care to face to the right, right, face." Also, during the American revolutionary period, troops marched at a cadence of 76 steps a minute instead of the current cadence of 120 steps. Then units performed precise movement on the battlefield, and the army that could perform them best was often able to get behind the enemy, or on his flank, and thus beat him. Speed spoiled the winning exactness. Also, firearms did not shoot far or accurately in 1776, so troop formations could take more time to approach the enemy.

g. As armament and weaponry improved, drill had to adapt to new tactical concepts. Although the procedures taught in drill today are not normally employed on the battlefield, the objectives accomplished by drill—professionalism, teamwork, confidence, pride, alertness, attention to detail, esprit de corps, and discipline—are just as important to the modern Army as they were to the Continental Army.