The Musket Report

Newsletter of the Wiregrass Chapter, Alabama Society, Sons of the American Revolution

ENTERPRISE, ALABAMA **November 2026**

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My fellow compatriots,

It has been an honor and privilege to serve as your Chapter President during the year of the 250th Celebration of these great United States of America. The Wiregrass Chapter has two more significant events coming up. First, we have the honor of unveiling the Pomeroy Historical Marker to honor the ten Revolutionary War Patriots who registered for their pensions in Dale County, Alabama. The event will take place on November 10th at 4:00 p.m. at the Ozark-Dale County Library Park. Our very own Wiregrass Minutemen will be proudly displaying the colors for the occasion.

The next event is our Regular November WSAR meeting, which will be held at the Enterprise Country Club. This is an important meeting where we will elect our 2027 officers.

Finally, the highlight of the year is the Annual Christmas Banquet, which will be held at the Enterprise Country Club on December 9th. You will receive your invitations soon. The night will be filled with great friends, delicious food, and an unforgettable time. HUZZAH!

Phillip (PK) Kitchens
Wiregrass Chapter President

New Wiregrass Chapter Compatriots!

Compatriot Brad Countryman, Colonel Peter Bellinger Sr., New York.

Compatriot Scott Caswell, Lieutenant James Drake, Virginia.

Compatriot John (Jack) Caswell, Lieutenant James Drake, Virginia.

The Wiregrass Chapter is proud to welcome these gentlemen into the Sons of the American Revolution. Their applications were approved at Louisville last October. We are our best recruiters. If you know someone who may be interested in honoring their patriot ancestor by applying for membership, contact the Chapter Genealogist at: rootsearcher6@gmail.com.

In Memoriam

The Wiregrass Chapter is deeply saddened to announce the loss of yet another of our own, Compatriot Stuart Mock, of Elba. Stuart went to his great reward on October 23rd 2026. The family requests that, if anyone wishes to contribute, please consider donating to the National Society, Sons of the American Revolution.



OUR REVOLUTION IN HISTORY:

Drill on the North American Battlefield.

James Crabtree, Chapter Historian

Today, when we think of a battlefield, we think of troops being delivered to the battlefield, sometimes by foot, other times by vehicle or from the air or even from the sea. Once on the disputed ground, platoons maneuver, supported by fire; everything from mortars to heavy artillery to air support is used to keep the defender's head down as platoons flank the enemy, or get into their rear, or generally make their positions untenable to where surrender or retreat are imperative.

250 years ago, it was a different story: the soldier always arrived by marching. They traveled in their regiments or battalions, marching the roads by way of a steady, pre-determined pace. Drummers played an important role, providing the necessary "beat to keep everyone in step and moving at the same pace. They maintained their columns throughout.

Once the regiment arrived where the battle was to be fought, it would be directed left or right from the road, executing a left or right turn. The regiments would travel in column until they reached a geographic feature, like a river or heavy vegetation, to "anchor" the line or until they reached another unit to cover their flank.

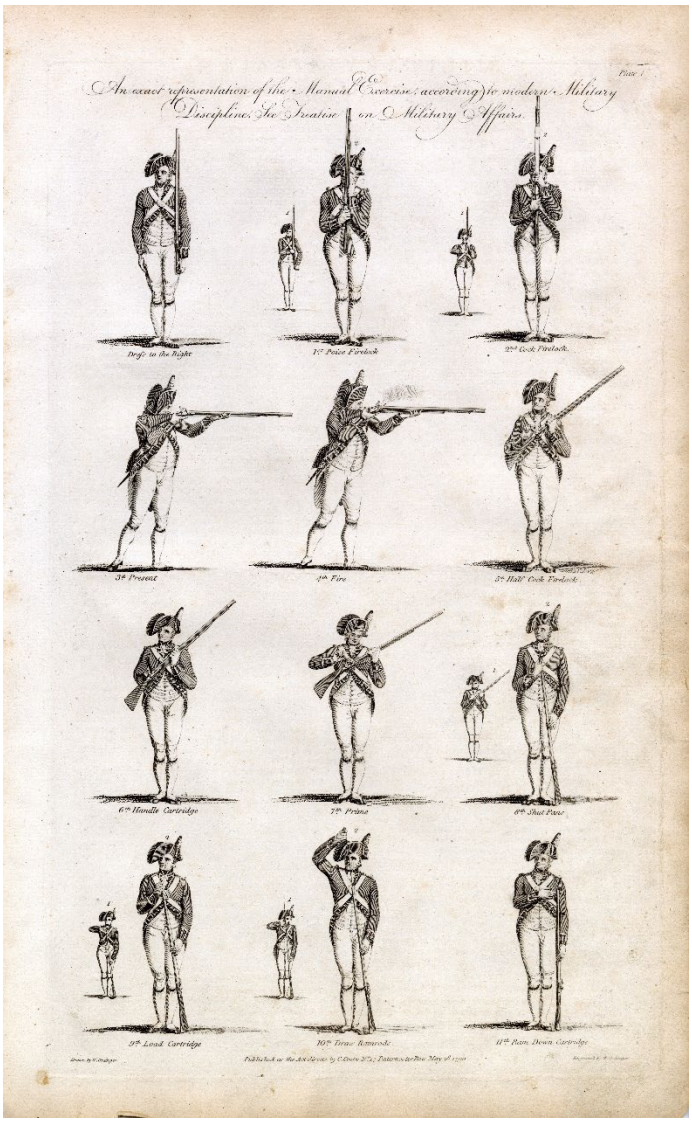
Once the brigade or division the regiment was part of had assumed their place, they would be ordered to "turn." The soldiers would make a facing movement, each man maintaining his place in the formation, each column now consisting of two to four rows of men. Non-commissioned officers were responsible for "dressing" the line so every man had space to his right and left and behind him. Now the unit was ready to fight the enemy.



And how did they fight? If on the offense they could march forward as a brigade or division, hoping to force the enemy to retreat or surrender due to the sheer mass of men that their unit brought to the battlefield. The pace for this march would be maintained by drumbeat again, and could be leisurely or relatively fast ("quick time"). This movement would, of course,

bring them under fire, not just from enemy musketry but from artillery pieces set to support the enemy line.

The defending units would fire volleys. Each rank in the line would move by the numbers. Sequencing so that the first rank would fire, followed by the second rank firing, the third rank, and then the fourth. Each rank would do the steps of reloading so that ideally by the time the fourth rank fired, the first rank would be almost ready to fire their next volley.



As the men marched across the battlefield, their ranks would be thinned by casualties. Musketballs slammed into flesh and bone, shattering arms and legs beyond repair. Cannonballs rolled through ranks, taking out several men at a time. Imagine the man next to you is felled by a ball…

But you continue to march to the pace of the drum. The NCOs order men to fill in the gaps. More men fall…

But you continue to march to the pace of the drum. Another man marching next to you falls to a ball. Your own jacket jumps as a ball passes through the right arm of your jacket…

But you continue to march to the pace of the drum. It's called "discipline," and it makes the difference between an army and a mob.

If your regiment is equipped with bayonets, the drumbeat might quicken to close with the enemy. Sometimes the shock of a bayonet charge will break the defenders. Sometimes it will not. Discipline makes the difference.

At the beginning of the Revolution, the units raised were all militia and state units. Training, such as it was, consisted of a muster and a formation. But to really fight required discipline… and a drill book.

Drill books were what made a battalion or a regiment or a division a UNIT, a formation of soldiers who knew the commands and understood what was expected of them. Remarkably, there was not a single drill book in use within the British Army, but several. This made little difference so long as the "unit of maneuver" (the regiment) trained to the same high standard and its leadership.

On the American side, there was no drill book at all except what copies of British books were available. The lack of drill and exercise on the parade ground was evident in the New York and the Pennsylvania Campaigns. British and German units outmaneuvered their American counterparts, while American forces struggled with unit cohesion and marching discipline. This led to the loss of New York City and Philadelphia, despite the courage and determination of the defenders.

Fortunately, a former Prussian officer arrived in the United States and volunteered his services to General Washington. Frederick William Baron von Steuben took his place as drillmaster at Valley Forge in February of 1778. While in winter quarters, von Steuben formed a "model company" of soldiers chosen from units throughout the camp. Every night the Baron would write out his lesson plan for the next day, and every morning the Model Company would form up and be walked through their paces by von Steuben… assisted by a translator since his English was not yet up to where it needed to be.



The Baron used what we would now call the "crawl-walk-run" method of teaching tasks. He started with the basics: single men going through their facing motions, practicing loading and firing "by the numbers." Then practicing firing by the ranks: one rank fires while the other reloads, alternating to keep up the fire. Military thinkers had little confidence in aimed fire, relying instead on volleys delivered by an entire unit and pointed at an enemy unit.

Then marching by battalion, getting to the battalion's place on the battlefield and ready for action. Pacing the march so that the entire line arrives in order and no gaps are created which can be exploited by the enemy.

Finally, maneuver by brigade and division to defeat the enemy's army. Strike by brigade where the enemy's line is weakest, fix the enemy's rearguard in place while a division seeks a route to the enemy's rear.

Von Steuben spent the winter 1777-78 at Valley Forge training the Continental Army. After this, the Americans proved they had the discipline and skills to stand up against the best the British could throw at them and even beat them. From the beginning, the United States Army was instilled with an appreciation for training and the need for discipline. It was a recipe for success that has served America well.

Important Dates

Tuesday, November 10th, 4 pm: Pomeroy Sign Dedication. Ozark-Dale County Public Library.

Thursday, November 19th, 11:30 am: Chapter Meeting & Elections. Enterprise Country Club.

Wednesday, December 9th, 6 pm: 34th Annual Wiregrass Chapter Chartering & Awards Banquet. Enterprise Country Club. Invitations will be sent shortly. Several speakers will be on hand. We hope to take a Chapter photo with as many members as we can get to celebrate the 250th. Please make every effort to attend.

The Sons of the American Revolution honors our Revolutionary War patriot ancestors by promoting patriotism, serving our communities and educating and inspiring future generations about the founding principles of our Country.