

From the Archives of “The Light” Newsletter of the 5th MI, Co. K

Random Drill Tips Will Eichler

Drill Pointers: I’ll use the rest of my space this month to put into writing some of the ideas I gave at the January drill on how to improve your drill. You guys who were there did a great job! If you weren’t able to join us, we look forward to seeing you on Saturday, February 19 for the next drill. Come on out and brush up on your skills or learn some new ones. Here are some of the things we talked about:

Quiet the Piece coming to shoulder: The term “quiet the piece” was used in School of the Soldier EVERY time a soldier returned to shoulder arms. To quiet the piece, simply raise your left hand up to the height of your shoulder and settle the musket into the hollow of your shoulder before dropping your left hand by your side. This often seems like a little thing but it is the little thing that is VERY visual and will help us grow a uniformity in our drill.

Posture at aim: If there is one condition that gives me worry about safety, it is our posture. Let me explain. When we were working on firings, I saw a lot of guys shifting all their weight onto one foot or the other, even in the front rank. We should work on ending this practice. I know that after not having had a musket in your hands for a couple of years or never if you are new, the Springfield gets heavy at aim. The natural tendency is to lean back to make it easier. PLEASE DON’T DO THIS! It is for your safety that I mention this. If you are in the front rank and lean back, you may put your head behind our file mate’s lower band and expose yourself to the blast of the cap. Trust me, getting hit by an exploding cap hurts. It’s happened to me!

If you’re in the rear rank and lean back to support the musket, you risk exposing the front rank to your barrel blast. So dangerous I don’t even need to explain the risk!

So, now that we know the issue, how do we fix it? Let’s get as many to drill as possible. That is a start. The next part is up to you. Please take a few minutes a week to build up your strength. No, I’m not asking you to get Arnold or Sly to be your gym partner and I’m not asking you to suck down massive protein shakes. Your strength will improve steadily if you spend a few minutes once or twice a week holding your musket. The two positions I recommend you practice are “Ready” and “Aim.” Practice them as if you are in the front rank and don’t worry about moving your foot.

The best place to practice this that I’ve found is in the bathroom. Don’t laugh. Most bathrooms I’ve been in have room for one man with a musket at either “ready” or “aim” and the mirror makes it easy for you to check your posture.

You are correctly at ready when you are in the following position. Your feet are in the “T” position with the hollow of your right foot touching the heel of your left foot, which is facing forward. You are standing straight upright with your weight evenly distributed between both your feet. Hold the musket at the small of the stock with your right hand. The butt of the weapon is under your right arm and two inches below your right breast (yup, I said it). Your left hand is holding the forearm of the weapon at the lower band. The barrel is at your eye level (check this in the mirror). Your left arm is resting against your body for support.

Work up to standing like this for a few minutes. Yup, I mean minutes. Take a watch or a kitchen timer in with you. Next practice “Aim.”

The correct position for “aim” as if you’re in the front rank is as follows. Nothing changes from “ready” in the lower half of your body. Keep your feet in the “T” and make sure you stand up straight with your weight evenly spread on both feet. Raise the piece with both hands, and support the place the butt on your right shoulder. Keep your left elbow down as you do this so you won’t hit the man next to you when you rejoin the ranks. Rest your head on the butt of the musket and sight down the weapon.

This will be a harder position to hold. Trust me. Again using your timer, start with shorter intervals of time and build up until you can hold it for one minute three times in a row, only taking 15 second breaks in between. Make “ready” your break position.

It sounds weird to do this, but if you take ten minutes a couple times a week, it will build up your strength and posture. Both will contribute both to safety and accuracy.

Right Shoulder Shift: The last drill point to work on is the raising and lowering of your musket going to and from “Right Shoulder Shift.” You’ll need an area to work in this that is very tall. Don’t screw up you parents or spouse’s living room ceiling then blame it on me! I’ll send them a copy of this article and stick it back on you!

This exercise is all about getting to know the balance of your musket. Start with the butt of the musket in your right hand with your right arm fully extended. The beak of the butt (the part that points at the ground when you aim) should be between your first and middle finger. To start, hold the musket with your left hand at the lower band. Do you recognize this position? It’s exactly where this movement is during the maneuver.

Now – let go with your left and drop it by your side. As you do this, use your right hand to raise the musket up to the position of “right shoulder shift.” You’ll turn the weapon so the lock faces out as you do. Forget to make that twist with the weapon and you’ll know it as the hammer digs into your underarm. Work to keep the musket steady as it raises and lands in place. When you’re steady at the top and have rested a couple of seconds, extend your right arm straight down and turn it so the trigger guard is to the front. As you lower the weapon, meet it at the bottom of the move by grasping it with your left hand at the lower band. Once you get this, you’ve mastered what I think is the toughest move in the Manual of Arms.

That’s more than enough for one month. We’ll continue to take small steps together as we grow this unit! Have a great month. I look forward to seeing you in the field!!!