

# THE POSITION OF “SHOULDERED ARMS” IN THE MANUAL OF ARMS FOR THE MUSKET

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ONE OF THE DELIGHTS OF EARLY-WAR EVENTS is the widespread use of the manual of arms for the musket. For example, at the mainstream First Manassas event held in July 2006, the entire ANV (over 900 participants) portrayed five regiments of Jackson’s Brigade, and presented a majestic sight as they adhered to Gilham’s musket manual of arms.

These events made it clear to me that a large number of reenactors enact the “shouldered arms” position for the musket in a manner that is distinctly different from the way the position is described and illustrated in period manuals. These sorts of errors are common in the living history community, and come with the territory as we constantly improve on our attempts to recreate the practices of the 1860s. But contemporary errors in interpretation, once reinforced by constant habit, can stubbornly persist in reenactor group behavior.<sup>1</sup>

But there is always room to improve our knowledge of the period, and the living history impression based on that knowledge. This includes period tactics. Recently we have had the benefit of articles that address reenactor errors in the interpretation of period manual of arms positions: John Stillwagon has shown us that the correct position for “right shoulder shift” is with the piece held diagonal, not straight; and Marc Hermann has shown us that the correct position for “support arms” is with the piece held perpendicular, not sloped (all sources can be found at the end of this article). In a similar manner, what follows focuses on the position of “shouldered arms” in the manual of arms for the musket.

## PART I. THE MUSKET MANUAL OF ARMS: WHAT THE MANUALS SAY

The manual of arms for the musket in the ACW is derived, with little modification, from earlier Army practice. Although North American terrain repeatedly demonstrated the value of the open order tactics utilized by light infantry, US tactics manuals from Steuben’s *Blue Book* on followed the contemporary European military tradition, which relied on the massed firepower of close order units. Cadenced marching for controlled maneuvers, and a detailed manual of arms for efficient and disciplined fire was essential to European-style linear warfare.<sup>2</sup>

What follows is a survey of the text and illustrations from major 19<sup>th</sup> century US manuals that pertain to the position of Shouldered Arms<sup>3</sup>. I start the survey with Smyth’s 1812 manual, which establishes principles that are retained in subsequent manuals.

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<sup>1</sup> The common name given to serious errors of this sort is “Reenactorism”, which usually refers to an anachronistic practice that is created and perpetuated by reenactor culture. See the discussion on the AC Forum “My Top Ten Reenactorisms” (<http://www.authentic-campaigner.com/forum/showthread.php?t=9757&page=1&pp=10>).

Interestingly enough, none of the posts to this discussion thread, mine included, mention the topic of this article.

<sup>2</sup> Brent Nosworthy has chronicled the development of battle tactics in the muzzle-loading era. See his trilogy cited in the *Sources*, and his website devoted to tactics in the age of the musket, *La Tactique* (<http://www.wtj.com/nosworthy/index.htm>).

<sup>3</sup>The *position* is designated as “Shouldered Arms”; the *command* to assume this position is “Shoulder-arms”.

## Smyth's *Field Regulations* (1812<sup>4</sup>)

We first need to take a look at the instructions for the “Position of the Soldier”, because “Shouldered Arms” begins from this position, and then adds a musket to it. Note the position of the hands (bolded emphasis is mine):

### *Position of the Soldier.*

*The heels on the same line, and as close together as the shape of the man will allow; the toes turned out equally; the knees straight, without stiffness; the lower part of the back rising erect on the haunches- the upper part of the body inclined a little forward; the shoulders' kept back, and of an equal height; the arms hanging naturally, the elbows close to the body; the palms of the hands a little turned forward; **the little finger behind and touching the seam of the breeches**; the head erect without constraint; the chin drawn inward; the eyes fixed on the ground fifteen paces forward.*

Now the musket (“firelock” or flintlock musket) is added:

### *Principles of Shouldered Arms.*

*The recruit being placed as directed in the first lesson of the first part of this drill [i.e., in the position of the soldier, with “little finger behind and touching the seam of the breeches”], the instructor will cause him to **raise up the left hand without bending the wrist, the part of the arm from the elbow downwards only moving**. The instructor shall then **raise the firelock perpendicularly**, and place it in the following manner.*

*The firelock in the left hand; **the arm a little bent; the elbow back** and touching the body, without pressing it; the palm of the hand placed firm against the exterior side of the butt, its exterior edge on the junction of the fingers with the palm; the heel resting between the fore and middle fingers; the thumb above, in front; the two last fingers under **the butt, which will be brought more or less back**, according to the form of the soldier; so that **the firelock seen from the front may appear always perpendicular, and that the motion of the thigh in marching may not derange its position**; the rammer before the point of the shoulder; the right arm hanging naturally, as described in the first lesson of the first part of this drill.*

Of note here:

- Arms are in the Position of the Soldier to start with, little finger behind the seam of the breeches.
- The forearm moves up just enough (so the wrist does not have to bend) to receive the musket.
- The musket is raised perpendicularly, and placed in the hand.
- The musket must appear perpendicular from the front
- The butt must be brought back, yet not so that it will shift during marching.

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<sup>4</sup> Date in the text is when the manual was accepted for use. Date in *Sources* is date of publication. Brigadier General Alexander Smyth's abridgement of the French 1791 *Reglement* was arguably the most influential of the several tactical manuals used during the War of 1812. It also marked a shift from American use of the British system (which Stuben's handbook was based upon) to that of the French, which dominated U.S. Army tactics through the ACW. See Donald Graves' various works on this, especially “Dry Books of Tactics” and “From Stuben to Scott”.

The main question here is: while we are told that the musket must appear perpendicular from the front, we are not told how it is to appear when viewed from the side. Where exactly is the left hand located at the end of this process--beside the thigh, or in front? One might infer that, since the piece starts in a vertical position beside the soldier's left side at Order Arms, and is raised perpendicularly without mention of any horizontal movement, that it would retain its orientation—perpendicular, and beside the soldier's left side. While Smyth provides no plates that illustrate the positions for the manual of arms, this matter is clarified in the next major manual.

### **Scott's *Abstract* (1829)**

When drilling his brigade in preparation for the 1814 Niagara campaign, Winfield Scott preferred to combine his own translation of the standard French infantry tactics with bits drawn from existing manuals, thus continuing the tradition of military plagiarism started by Smyth, one which would persist through the ACW.<sup>5</sup> Fifteen years later he headed a board that prepared an abstract of infantry tactics for militia use. As we might expect, given Scott's reliance on the same French sources, his description of the Position of the Soldier is similar to that of Smyth's:

#### *Position of the Soldier.*

*(Pl. III. Fig. 1.) The heels on the same line, as near each other as the conformation of the man will permit; the feet forming with each other on angle something less than a right one, and turned out equally; the knees straight, but not stiff; the body perpendicular on the haunches, and inclining a little forward; the shoulders kept back and falling equally; the arms hanging naturally; the elbows near the body; the palm of the hand turned a little to the front, **the little finger back, and touching the seam of the pantaloons**; the face well to the front; the chin a little drawn in, with-out constraint; and the eyes cast on the ground, at the distance of fifteen paces.*

And, as before, Shouldered Arms starts from this position, then adds the musket. The description of Shouldered Arms is also similar to that in Smyth:

#### *Principles of Shouldered Arms.*

*161. The recruit being placed, as directed in the first lesson of the First Part [i.e., the position of the soldier], the instructor will make him raise and **turn up the left hand, without bending the wrist, the fore arm only acting**. The instructor will then **raise the musket perpendicularly**, and place it as follows*

*(Pl. III. Fig. 1.) The musket in the left hand, **the arm being a little bent; the elbow back, and joined to the body without pressure**; the palm of the hand firmly against the exterior rounding of the butt; the exterior edge of the butt resting on the joints of the fingers next the palm; the heel of the butt resting between the first and second fingers; the thumb above, in front; the third and little fingers under **the butt, which must be more or less kept back**, according to the conformation of the recruit, in such manner that **the firelock, seen from the front, may rest always perpendicular, and that the movement of the thigh, in marching, may not derange it in its***

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<sup>5</sup> See Donald Graves' studies of the Niagara campaign, and Peskin's biography of Scott, p.40. The Preface to Casey's *Infantry Tactics* acknowledges that the U.S. manuals were based on the French *ordonnances* of 1831 (heavy or line infantry; i.e., Scott) and 1845 (*chasseurs a pied*, or light infantry; i.e, Hardee). Also, see the discussion of the evolution of ACW tactics in Nosworthy, *The Bloody Crucible of Courage*.

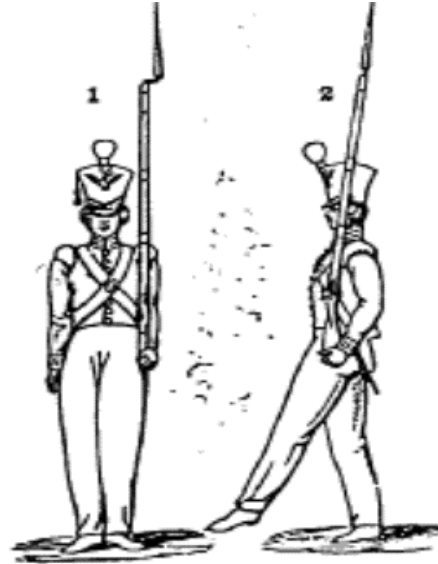
**perpendicular position;** the ramrod against the hollow of the shoulder; the right arm hanging naturally, as in No. 87.

In a pattern that we will see repeated below, Scott's *text* does not explicitly state whether or not the musket is perpendicular when viewed from the side. However, Scott's manual contains plates that illustrate the position of Shouldered Arms from the side as well as the front view.

Scott's illustration clarifies the position of the left hand:

- It is clearly *beside* the thigh (or more properly, the pelvis).
- And we can see that while the musket is vertical when seen from the front, *it is nearly perpendicular when seen from the side* as well.

These principles of the position of Shouldered Arms persist through the other manuals of our survey.



### Scott's *Infantry Tactics* (1835)

Scott's three-volume translation of the French tactics for infantry was the official Army manual from the time it appeared in 1835, through 1861, when it was partially supplanted by the *U.S. Infantry Tactics*; it was completely replaced by Casey's *Infantry Tactics* the following year. (In 1855 Hardee's manual replaced that portion of Scott's manual pertaining to light infantry.) As we can see below, his description of the Position of the Soldier, and of Shouldered Arms is quite similar to that found in his *Abstract of Infantry Tactics*:

#### *Position of the Soldier.*

88. (Pl. III, fig.1 and 2) Heels on the same line, and as close together as the conformation of the man may permit; the feet forming with each other something less than a right angle, the toes equally turned out; the knees straight without stiffness; the body erect on the hips, the upper part inclining a little forward; arms hanging naturally, elbows near the body, the palm of the hand turned a little to the front, **the little finger behind the seam of the pantaloons**, or the centre of the thigh; the face well to the front, the chin a little drawn in without constraint, and the eyes striking the ground at the distance of fifteen paces.

#### *Lesson I.*

150. Each recruit being in the position prescribed in the first lesson of the first part, the instructor will cause him to **turn up the left hand without bending the wrist, the left fore-arm only acting**. The instructor will **raise the piece perpendicularly**, and place it as follows:

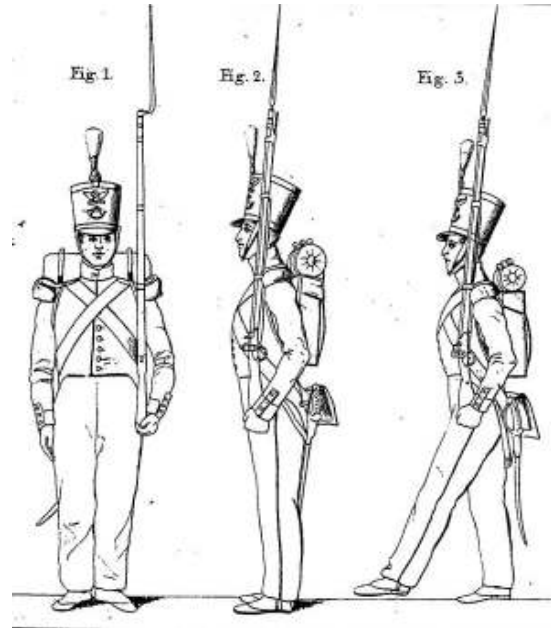
151. (Pl. III, fig, 1 and 2.) The piece (fusil, musket, or firelock,) in the left hand, **the arm but a very little bent, the elbow back, near the body**, the palm of the hand pressing on the outer flat of the butt; the outer edge of the latter on the upper joints of the fingers, the heel of the butt between the fore and middle fingers, the thumb on the front screw of the butt plate, the remaining fingers

*under the butt, the butt more or less kept back, according to conformation of the recruit, so that the piece, seen from the front, shall appear perpendicular, and also that the movement of the thigh, in marching, may not raise it, or cause it to waver; the stock, below the tail-band, resting against the hollow of the shoulder, just within the joint, the right arm hanging naturally as prescribed in the first lesson of the first part,*

This time Scott provides three views of the position of Shouldered Arms.

The plate illustrating this position from the side (Plate III, figure 2) clearly shows that:

- In the position of Shouldered Arms the left hand has not moved very far from where it is in the Position of the Soldier.
- *The piece is held nearly perpendicular when viewed from the side, whether the soldier is halted or marching.*



### Cooper (1836)

Scott's manual is the tactical bible for the Regular Army. Cooper, like Scott before and Gilham after, adapts the official tactics for volunteer and militia forces. His language for the Position of the Soldier and for Shoulder-Arms is essentially the same as Scott's:

#### *Position of the Soldier.*

*HEELS on the same line and as close together as the conformation of the man will permit; toes turned out equally, so as to form nearly a right angle; knees straight but not stiff; body inclined a little forward; shoulders square; arms hanging naturally; elbows near the body; palms of the hands turned a little to the front; **the little finger behind the seam of the pantaloons**; face direct to the front; chin a little drawn in without constraint; eyes looking to the front so as to meet the ground at a distance of fifteen paces.*

#### *Position of shoulder-arms.*

*(FIG.1.) The musket in the left hand, **the arm very little bent, the elbow back, near the body, the palm of the hand pressing on the outer flat of the butt, the outer edge of the latter on the upper joints of the fingers, the heel of the butt between the fore and middle fingers, the thumb on the front screw of the butt-plate, the remaining fingers under the butt, the butt more or less kept back**, according to the conformation of the soldier, so that **the piece seen from the front may appear to be perpendicular, and also that the movement of the thigh, in marching, may not raise it, or cause it to waver**, the stock below the tail-band, resting against the hollow of the shoulder, just within the joint, the right arm hanging naturally, as prescribed for the soldier without arms.*

Cooper's illustration of the shouldered arms position portrays it from the front view only. It is located in the following section, so that it may be compared to the illustrations from Gilham's manual.

### **Gilham (1860)**

William Gilham not only abridged the official tactics for volunteers and militia in the manner of Cooper; his *Manual of Instruction* dealt with many other matters which a citizen-soldier, unfamiliar with the routines of the regular Army, would need to know. With respect to the portion of his work pertaining to tactics, Gilham specifically states in his Preface that "*The whole will be found to be in strict conformity with the requirements of the United States service.*"

Gilham presented the material in his own style. But, as the following passages show, his discussion of the Position of the Soldier, and of Shoulder Arms retains the essential elements found in previous manuals.

#### *Position of the Soldier.*

83. *Heels on the same line, as near each other as the conformation of the men will permit; because, if one were in rear of the other, the shoulder on that side would be thrown back. The feet turned out equally, and forming with each other something less than a right angle; because, if one foot were turned out more than the other, a shoulder would be deranged, and if both feet be too much turned out, it would not be practicable to give the body its proper position. The knees straight, without stiffness; because, if stiffened, constraint and fatigue would be unavoidable. The body erect on the hips, inclining a little forward, because it gives stability to the position. Soldiers are at first disposed to project the belly and throw back the shoulders when they wish to hold themselves erect, from which result many inconveniences in marching; it is, therefore, important that the instructor should be particular to enforce this rule at the beginning.*

*The shoulders square, and falling equally; if the shoulders are advanced beyond the line of the breast, and the back arched, (the defect called round-shouldered,) the man cannot align himself nor use his piece with skill. In correcting this defect, the instructor will take care that the shoulders are not thrown too much to the rear, causing the body to project, and the small of the back to curve.*

*The arms hanging naturally; elbows near the body; palms of the hands turned a little to the front, **the little finger behind the seam of the pantaloons.** These positions are important to the shoulder-arms, to prevent the man from occupying more space in ranks than is necessary, and to keep the shoulders in proper position.*

*The head erect, and square to the front, without constraint; the chin slightly drawn in; the eyes fixed straight to the front, in order to prevent derangement of the shoulders, and striking the ground at the distance of about fifteen paces.*

#### *Principles of Shouldered Arms.*

94. *Each soldier being in the position of the soldier, the instructor will cause him to **turn up the left hand without bending the wrist, the left fore-arm only acting.** The instructor will **raise the piece perpendicularly,** and place it as follows:*

*(Fig. 27.) The piece in the left hand, **the arm very slightly bent, the elbow back near the body,** the palm of the hand pressing on the outer flat of the butt; the outer edge of the latter on the upper joints of the fingers, the heel of the butt between the middle and fore-fingers, the thumb on the front screw of the butt plate, the remaining fingers under the butt, **the butt more or less kept***

*back according to the conformation of the man, so that the piece, seen from the front, shall appear perpendicular, and, also, that the movement of the thigh, in marching, may not raise it or cause it to waver; the stock, below the tail-band, resting against the hollow of the shoulder, just within the joint, the right arm hanging naturally as prescribed in the position of the soldier.*

Like Cooper, Gilham provides only one illustration of the position of Shouldered Arms (Figure 27; Figure 28, Support Arms, is included as well). Not much change over 25 years:

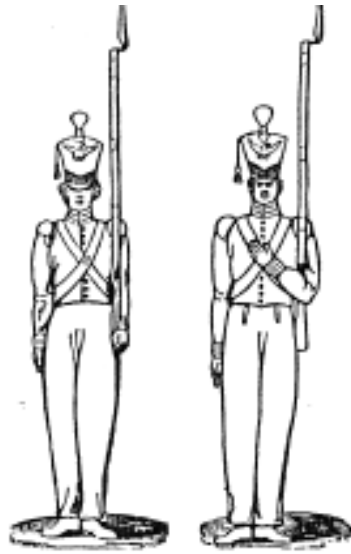


FIG. 4.

Cooper, *A Concise System of Instructions and Regulations* (1836)

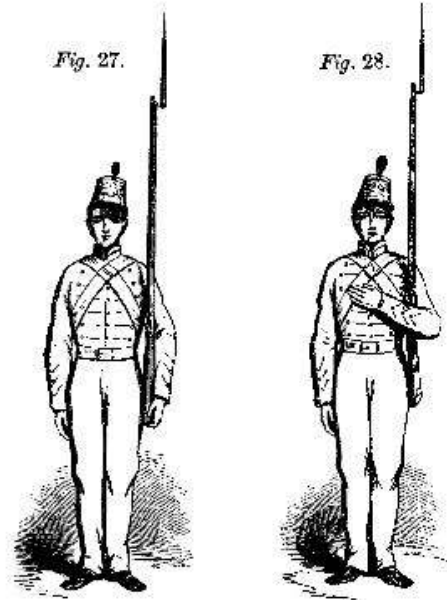


Fig. 27.

Fig. 28.

Gilham, *Manual of Instruction* (1860)

Unfortunately for clarity regarding the exact position of the left hand in Shouldered Arms, we are now back where we started with Smyth. Someone that was unfamiliar with either Scott's *Abstract* or his *Infantry Tactics*, and who relied solely on Gilham would have no specific direction regarding placement of the left hand for the Shouldered Arms position.

It is possible that this matter was generally understood, and taken for granted at the time. Also, as Gilham intended his work as a primer to, and not a replacement of, the existing tactical works, he likely would have simply pointed questioners to Scott for clarification. But I suspect that reenactors, lacking Gilham's context, may have inadvertently perpetuated a misinterpretation.

### **Baxter (1861)**

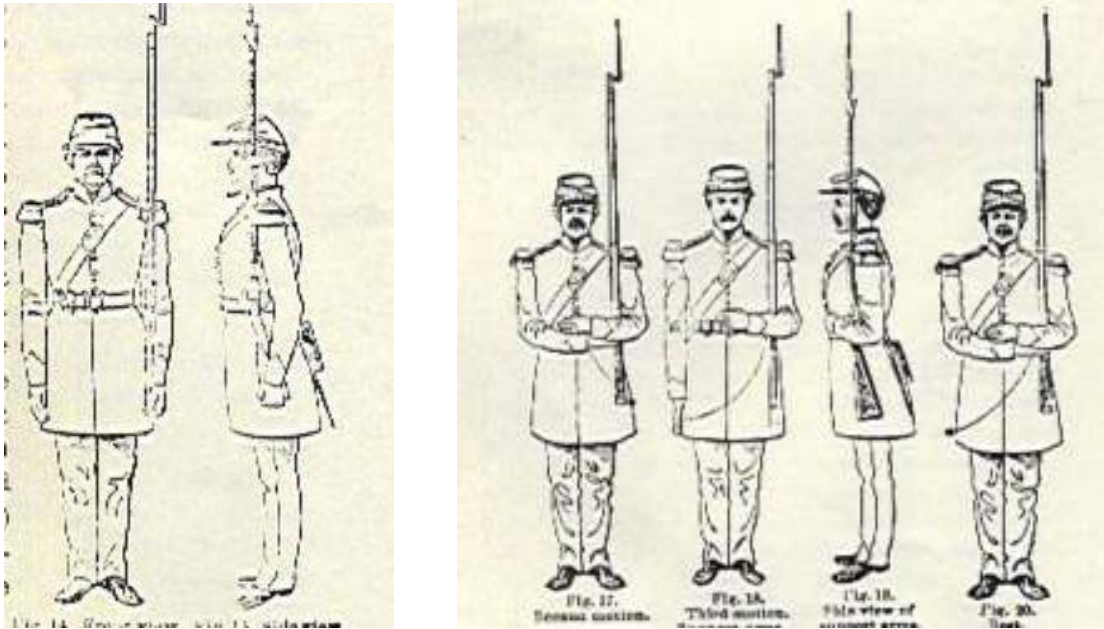
Baxter's *The Volunteer's Manual* was one of the many manuals offered to fill the vast need for tactical instruction at the beginning of the ACW. Baxter, clearly a man of the old school, provided instruction in the manual of arms for the percussion musket only. His text repeats that of the manuals covered above; however, his illustrations are clear and detailed.

#### *The Principles of Shouldered Arms*

*The musket in the left hand, the palm pressing upon the outer flat of the butt; the outer edge of the latter on the upper joints of the fingers; the thumb, on the front screw of the butt plate; the remaining fingers under the butt; the fingernails next to the left thigh; **the butt more or less kept back**, so that **the piece shall appear perpendicular**; the stock below the tail-band resting against the hollow of the shoulder, just within the joint: (See fig. 14.) **the elbow slightly bent, and near***

*the body; (See Fig. 15.) the right arm hanging naturally, as prescribed in the position of the soldier.*

Here we can see that, as was the case in both of Scott's manuals, *when viewed from the side in the Shouldered Arms position, the musket is perpendicular.*



Furthermore, we can see that *the musket remains in a perpendicular position* (when viewed from the side) *when the position is shifted to Support Arms*. The musket does not move at all during the shift from Shouldered Arms to Support Arms.

Marc Hermann has demonstrated through the use of period photographs that the correct position of Support Arms is with the piece perpendicular when viewed from the side. I think that we can now see that *this is because originally* (in the manual of arms for the musket) *the musket was already perpendicular in the position of Shouldered Arms*, and simply remained perpendicular during the shift to Support Arms. That is, the perpendicular position of the piece at Support Arms in the manual of arms for the rifle/rifle-musket is a holdover from the perpendicular carry in the musket manual of arms.



Peter Newark's Military Pictures, in Smith and Field.



The above illustration of the Garibaldi Guard (39<sup>th</sup> NYVI) parading past President Lincoln demonstrates this relationship. The sergeant in the colour-guard is at Shouldered Arms, while the privates in the following unit are at Support Arms (thereby freeing their right hands to wave sprigs of foliage at the President). The pieces are identically perpendicular in both positions.

### Patten's *Infantry Tactics* (1862)

Perhaps the most explicit description of the position of Shouldered Arms is found in George Patten's lesser-known manual for volunteers (copyright 1861, published 1862).<sup>6</sup> This manual conclusively states that at Shouldered Arms, at the halt and on the march, the musket is to be held vertically: "...the piece seen from the front or side shall appear perpendicular, ...."

Patten likely knew his stuff. An 1827 graduate of West Point, Patten was Lt. Col. of the 2<sup>nd</sup> US Infantry at the time he wrote his manual. He retired in 1864. The manual's subtitle states that it was "*Compiled agreeably to the latest regulations of the War Department, from Standard Military Authority.*" The endorsement found on the title page further attests to the accuracy of its instructions:

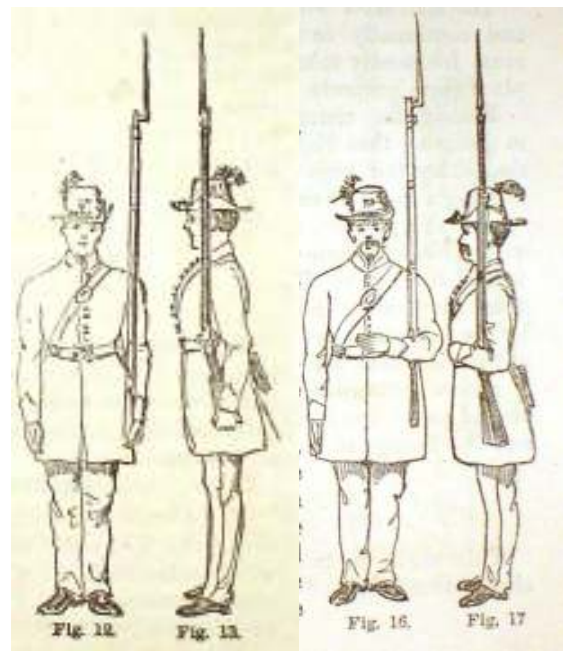
*I cordially approve of this work, and recommend it to the use of Officers of Volunteers.*  
Geo. B. McClellan, Maj-Gen. United States Army. Washington, C.C., July 26, 1861.

Illustrations and text from Patten's manual appear below. Note the strong similarity to the illustrations found in Baxter's contemporary manual for volunteers. Note that in Patten's manual also, the musket remains perpendicular when in the position of Support Arms.

#### *Position of Shoulder-arms.*

*The recruit being in the position of the soldier without arms, the instructor will make him turn up the left hand, without bending the wrist, the part of the arm from the elbow downward only acting, and shall raise the pieces perpendicularly, to be placed as follows:*

*The piece in the left hand, the arm being a little bent, the elbow back and joined to the body without pressure; the palm of the hand firmly against the exterior rounding of the butt; the exterior edge of the butt resting on the upper joints of the fingers (the inner edge on the lower joints of the fingers, and the ends inside), the heel of the butt between the fore and middle fingers, the thumb on the middle screw of the butt-plate, the remaining fingers under the butt, the butt more or less kept back according to the conformation of the recruit, so that the piece seen from the front or side shall appear perpendicular, and also that the movement of*



<sup>6</sup> My thanks to Paul Kenworthy for providing the text and illustrations from his copy of Patten's manual.

*the thigh I marching may not raise or cause it to waver; the stock below the tail band resting against the hollow of the shoulder just within the joint, the right arm hanging naturally, as prescribed in the position of the soldier. (pp. 13-14)*

## U.S. Infantry Tactics (1861)

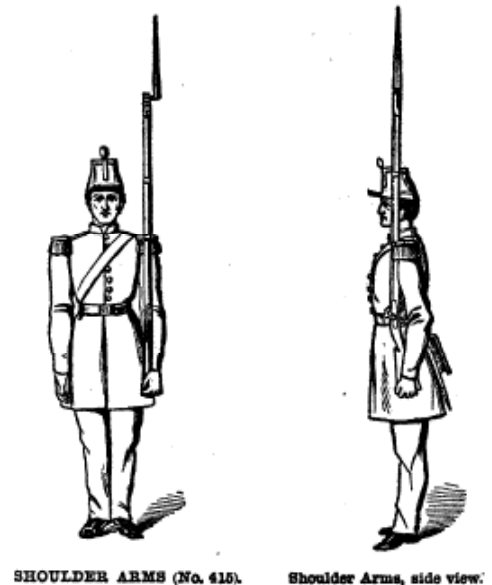
With the *USIT*, Hardee's 1855 manual for light infantry (minus his name) became the official tactics for all Federal infantry. However, as so many troops were still armed with percussion muskets, the manual of arms for the musket was inserted. Thus, the *USIT*, like Gilham's manual, includes manuals of arms for both rifle and musket.<sup>7</sup>

### *Manual of Arms for the Musket.*

414. *This manual differs in so many respects from that of the rifle and rifle musket that it becomes necessary to specify it for the use of infantry troops armed with the percussion-lock musket.*

### *Shoulder—Arms.*

415. *The piece is held in the left hand, the arm being a very little bent, the elbow close to the body, the butt of the musket grasped in the palm of the hand, the heel of the butt between the fore-finger and the middle finger; the thumb on the front screw of the butt-plate, the butt kept well back, so that the piece shall appear perpendicular when seen from the front, and not to be moved from its position by the movement of the thighs in marching; the stock below the tail band, lying in the hollow of the shoulder; the right arm hanging naturally at the right side.*



<sup>7</sup> With an interesting difference. Gilham suggests that infantry of the line, whether armed with smoothbore, “altered” musket, or rifled musket, would use the manual of arms for the musket; light infantry, whether armed with the musket or the rifle, would use the manual of arms for the rifle (Art. I, para. 2-3.). Gilham thus assigns manual of arms by *function* (i.e., whether serving as line or light infantry). The *USIT*, on the other hand, designates manual of arms according to *type of armament*: troops armed with rifles or rifle-muskets use the rifle manual of arms; only troops armed with the musket use the musket manual of arms. Thus, under Gilham (as with Scott) most infantry uses the musket manual of arms, whereas under the *USIT* most infantry uses the rifle manual of arms. This trend of increasingly favouring the rifle manual of arms continued with Casey, whose 1862 manual finally dispensed with the manual of arms for the musket.

By now it should be abundantly clear that there were only two positions of Shouldered Arms in U.S. infantry tactics, which are consistent throughout all the major tactical manuals—that of the **musket** (for line infantry), and that of the **rifle** (for light infantry). The issue is thus not “Which manual?” but rather “Which manual of arms?”

Here, in the last Army manual featuring the manual of arms for the musket, we see that, as was the case for the illustrations of Shouldered Arms in Scott's *Abstract*, Scott's *Tactics*, Baxter's *Volunteer's Manual*, and Patten's *Infantry Tactics*, the musket is shown as being *perpendicular* when seen from the side.



The above survey of 19<sup>th</sup> century US infantry tactics manuals demonstrates that the essential language governing the position Shouldered Arms in the manual of arms for the musket is remarkably consistent. Although there is some textual ambiguity regarding placement of the left hand, illustrations for the three major US manuals (and two volunteer manuals) clearly indicate that the left hand holds the butt of the piece next to the hip, so that the piece is perpendicular when viewed from the side. To my knowledge, there is no illustration or explicit language in any period tactics manual that indicates otherwise. Perhaps unfortunately, the significant manuals for volunteers and militia (Cooper and Gilham) do not illustrate the position of Shouldered Arms from the side view.

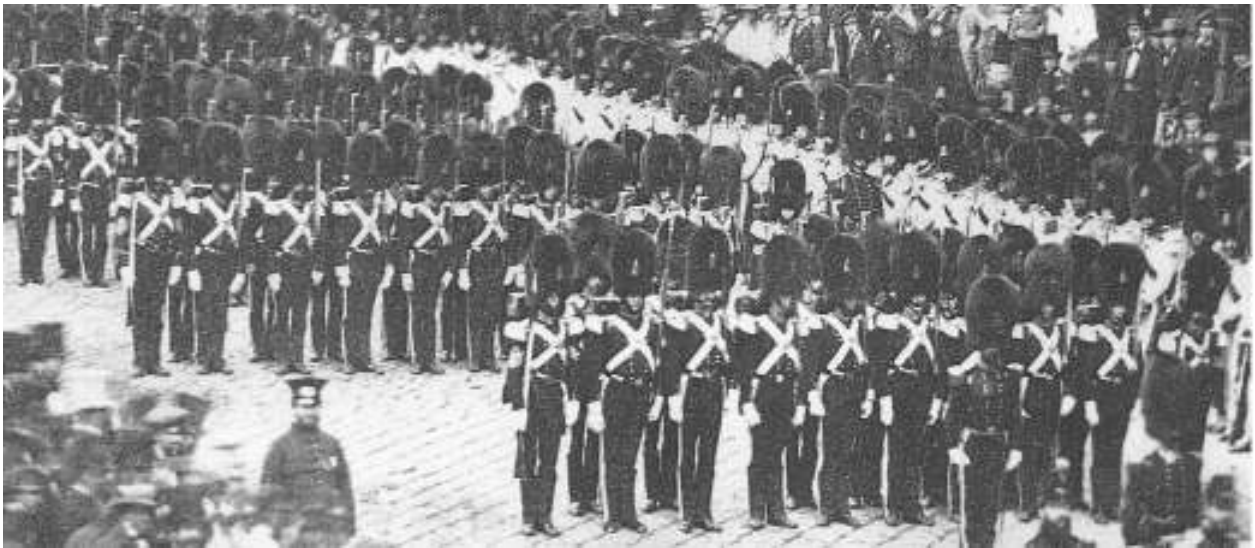
## **PART II. THE MUSKET MANUAL OF ARMS: IMAGES**

Period images also show the musket in the position of Shouldered Arms to be as perpendicular in practice as it was in theory. In the image of a Wisconsin unit below, we can see that the musket is certainly perpendicular when seen from the front:



State Historical Society of Wisconsin, in Davis.

The pre-war image below (the Boston Light Infantry in New York, c.1856) clearly shows that the muskets are sharply and uniformly perpendicular when seen from the side. Thanks to the white gloves, the position of the left hand is very clear in this photograph; it is against the outside of the thigh or pelvis, near to where it would be in the Position of the Soldier—that is, exactly where it should be, according to the above survey of tactics manuals.



US Army Military History Institute, in Davis.

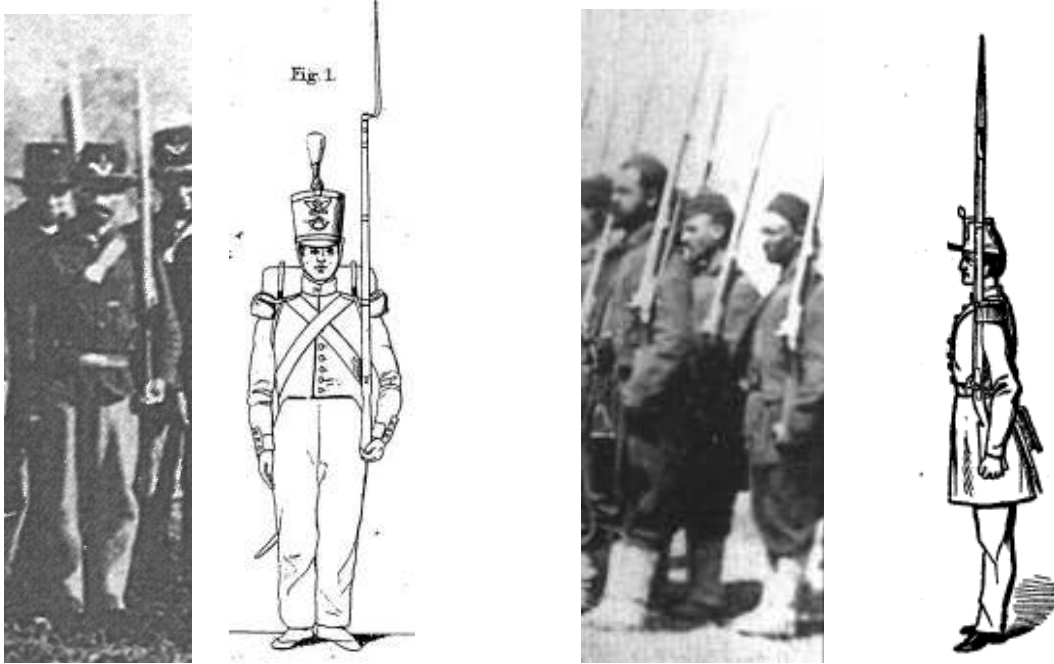
Note that in both of the images above the sergeants are at the light infantry carry, as stipulated by Scott in his *Manual of Arms for Sergeants*.

Finally, the image below of the 5<sup>th</sup> New York on the Peninsula in 1861 reinforces the above points (though in this case the pieces are *not quite* perpendicular):



Brian Pohanka, in Smith and Field.

At this point it should be evident that the period images of the Shouldered Arms position in the manual of arms for the musket are extremely close to the illustrations found in the manuals:



The period images thus reinforce the point that when at Shouldered Arms according to the manual of arms for the musket, the piece should appear perpendicular when viewed from the side.

### **PART III. THE MUSKET MANUAL OF ARMS: WHAT REENACTORS DO**

A great number of reenactors do not hold their musket in the correct position of Shouldered Arms, as that position is illustrated in the above survey of tactics manuals. Instead (as Marc Hermann has similarly documented with respect to Support Arms), the butt is held out from the body, in front of the left thigh, which gives the piece a decided slope of about 30 degrees to the rear.

As evidence, see the photos below.

Cautionary Note: These photos are all from the Stonewall Brigade site. By choosing them I do not intend to pick on that organization or its members. On the contrary: the Stonewall Brigade routinely and rigorously uses the musket manual of arms as found in Gilham's manual, so to my mind represents the "state of the art" of reenactor practice in this area. By using examples from experienced practitioners, my intent is to rule out any questions of insufficient knowledge or experience, the better to focus on any differences of interpretation.



Harper's Ferry, 2004. Image: Joe Gibson

Above is a company in line. The butts and left hands are clearly visible well forward of where they should be, instead of being “more or less kept back”--which produces a noticeable slope to the muskets. Note that the 1<sup>st</sup> Sergeant here is adhering to the Manual of Arms for the Sergeant, as found in Scott's *Infantry Tactics*. (Interestingly enough, Gilham says nothing about a separate carry for sergeants.)



Harper's Ferry, 2004. Image: Carol Whitley



Shoulder Arms, side view:

Viewed from the left flank, the same positioning of hands, and consistent slope of muskets can be seen. The left arms are considerably more than “a little bent”; some forearms are nearly parallel to the ground. Compare to the side view illustrations in Scott, Baxter, or the *USIT*.



Harper's Ferry, September 2004. Image: Joe Gibson

Battalion in column. Butt of the musket is forward, not “kept back”, thus giving the muskets the same slope as noted above.



Harper's Ferry, 2004. Image: Carol Whitley



Marching by the flank, the consistent slope to the muskets is all-too-clear. Compare to the illustrations above of soldiers marching at the carry in Scott's *Abstract* (Plate III, Fig. 2), and Scott's *Tactics* (Plate III, Fig. 3), which clearly show that the musket should be perpendicular when viewed from the side, butt against the side of the pelvis.

However, all is not lost. Note that several of these soldiers below (veterans of the War with Mexico, it appears) have the correct position for Shouldered Arms. As the above survey of textual and visual evidence indicates, theirs is the position we should all strive to emulate.



Remembrance Day Parade, November 2004. Image: Maureen Harris & George Walters

## CODA

Ironically, it turns out that there is a legitimate position for the piece carried at an angle in the musket manual of arms. It is called **Slope Arms**, and variants are found in Smyth and Jasper Lee, as follows:

### Smyth:

*Slope, ARMS.*

1. *Throw forward the butt so that the upper part of the left arm will be perpendicular, and the lower extend horizontally forward.*

*Carry, ARMS.*

1. *Bring the butt and left hand to their former position, raising the right hand smartly to the small, stop and steady the piece. Bring the right hand down by the side.*

### Lee:

*Slope (or Ease) ARMS. (One motion.)*

114. *Carry forward and raise slightly the left hand, so that the piece will rest at the lower band on the left shoulder, keep the muzzle elevated, the piece sloped diagonally to the rear.*



McAfee & Langellier



And my favourite, from Winfield Scott:

**Scott:**

*Ease—ARMS.*

237. ONE MOTION. Carry the firelock sloped indifferently on either shoulder, or with either hand; the muzzle always well up.

**SOURCES**

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