

“The Kentucky Swing”

by Col. Elmer Ellsworth



The "Kentucky Stack" or "Kentucky Swing," was introduced in 1861 in a manual of arms for the Kentucky State Guard. However, evidence indicates that this method was in use at least as early as 1857 (possibly even 1855) by E. E. Ellsworth's Zouave drill demonstration units, and Ellsworth was given credit for inventing it. Basically, this method hooks the shanks of the bayonets together, and locks them by swinging the butt of one of the muskets out to the front. This results in a very stable musket stack. The method is similar to the arms stacking found in Scott's musket drill, but it is easier and quicker. Each group of four men, front and rear ranks Numbers One and Two (the "comrades in battle" of skirmishing), forms a separate stack. In detail, the stack is formed as follows:

The men being at ordered arms, the instructor will command:

Stack Arms

First Motion - At this command, Number Two of the front rank will pass his piece before him, seize it with the left hand about the middle band, slope it across the body, barrel to the rear, the butt three inches above the right toe of the man on his left, muzzle six inches to the right of his shoulder.

Second Motion - Number Two of the rear rank will turn his piece, lock square to the front, and pass it to his front rank man. who will seize it with his right hand about the middle band and incline it forward, resting the neck of the bayonet on that of his own bayonet and close to the blade. Number One of the front rank will turn the barrel of his piece square to the front, slope it across the body, place the neck at his

bayonet, above the necks, and between the blades of the other two bayonets, holding the piece with the right hand at the middle band, the butt three inches from the ground in front of his right toe.

Third Motion - Number Two of the front rank will throw the butt of the rear rank man's piece about 30 inches to the front, at the same time resting the butt of his own piece on the ground on the left, and a little in rear of his left toe. At the same instant, Number One of the front rank will rest the butt of his piece on the ground a little in front of his right toe. Number One of the rear rank will incline his piece on the stack thus formed. [File closers are apparently to lean their muskets against the nearest stack, without waiting for command to do so.

To Resume Arms - Both ranks being reformed in rear of their stacks, the instructor will command: Take -- ARMS. At this command Number One of the rear rank will retake his piece [file closers will also retake their leaners, if they did not do so upon falling in. Number Two of the front rank will seize his own piece with his left hand, at the middle band, and his rear rank man's piece in the same manner in his right hand; and Number One of the front rank will seize his piece with his right hand in the same manner. These two men will raise the stack, bring the butts toward each other, and disengage the bayonets. Number Two of the rear rank will receive his piece from his front rank man, and all will resume the position of ordered arms.