

Von Steuben's *Blue Book*

Blue Book by von Steuben offers the first introduction to soldiers on a wide array of topics, including comprehensive information on health and fitness, behavior, military customs, and proper wear of uniform and appearance. The author simplified his work, explaining in plain language what needed to be studied, ways of teaching it, and the importance of the information. Moreover, *Blue Book* provided the qualities a soldier should possess to serve in demanding positions. It also set down the roles and responsibilities for sergeants, corporals, and quartermaster sergeants in the non-commissioned officer (NCO) ranks of then. Von Steuben's *Blue Book* served as a guide providing regulations for the discipline and order of troops in the U.S. Army. During the Revolutionary War, a crucial name leading the U.S. to self-governance remained unknown. Fredrich Wilhelm von Steuben, also referred to as Baron von Steuben, is one of the forgotten Americans without whom the state would not have won the Monmouth battle that gave way to independence. The War of Independence could have ended differently had it not been for the contribution of von Steuben, who laid out his military knowledge in *Blue Book*.

Background Information

Many people in the U.S. celebrate the country's independence and the Revolutionary War. Many Americans think of George Washington sailing across the frozen Delaware River in a rowboat, and Benjamin Franklin, who helped negotiate the Treaty of Paris, which ended the Revolutionary War. They assisted Samuel Adams, who helped organize the Boston Tea Party, and Paul Revere, who drove through Lexington to tell the minutemen that the British were coming. These were the men who were responsible for giving the 13 colonies a basis and being able to stand up to Great Britain.

Fredrich Wilhelm von Steuben was an ex-Prussian Army Officer who arrived at Valley Forge in 1778 in response to an invitation from George Washington. Upon his arrival,

he quickly noticed that the men lacked in drill and ceremony; the minutemen's weapons were rusted, their uniforms were tattered, and they lacked discipline (Charles Rivers Editors 2019). What Fredrich Wilhelm von Steuben managed to do for George Washington's army was to bring order, discipline, and hygiene to Valley Forge. Fredrich Wilhelm von Steuben moved latrines away from the living quarters and organized the housing according to the regiments and companies to which the troops were assigned. However, his most significant contribution was a manual for military training. This manual is still used in today's military and is known as the *Blue Book*.

Primary Sources

The main primary source in the study of *Blue Book* is its text. This source is called *Regulations for the Order and Discipline of the Troops of the United States* and is available from the U.S. Army War College. The publisher of the original book was Styner and Cist, who issued the first edition in 1779 (von Steuben 1779). This source contains much helpful information that can be used for analysis. First of all, relying on the text of this primary source, one can study in detail *Blue Book's* goals. The purpose of *Blue Book* was to lay down the responsibilities and roles for different NCO ranks, such as corporals, sergeant majors, and quartermaster sergeants (von Steuben 1779). It also outlined the characteristics a military officer should possess to effectively serve in a strenuous job in the United States Army. Von Steuben managed to whip the continental army into shape mainly during the darkest periods of the revolutionary war due to the grit, discipline, and bravery he brought to the U.S. troops.

When von Steuben arrived at Valley Forge, it turned out that all the soldiers were poorly trained and could not adequately fight because they did not have sufficient knowledge. This state of affairs left the army desperate, as the soldiers needed to be trained additionally. Von Steuben was a veteran of the Prussian army and possessed all the skills an experienced soldier would need to conduct a battle and discipline other soldiers. Accordingly, due to the

strong uncertainty in the troops, they needed mentorship and detailed manual guidance. Von Steuben, who was tasked with retraining and instructing the army, took up this problem by writing a detailed manual called *Blue Book*. Von Steuben understood that one of the central values of the army is the discipline and organization of the troops (von Steuben 1779). In this regard, much attention in the book is given to the consideration of how soldiers should behave not only on the battlefield but also in peacetime. This meant universal rewards and punishments, which were also introduced in *Blue Book* so that the soldiers were motivated to follow orders and adhere to established rules.

One of the main goals of the book was to standardize all types of troops and their duties in the forces of the American army. In this way, von Steuben ensured that each detachment could learn exactly the duties necessary for each type of military man. This achievement made it possible to significantly reduce the unsettled situation in the army and streamline the duties assigned to the soldiers of each position (von Steuben 1779). At the same time, the book's goals also included the description of drill training, which at that time became an innovation in the army, mainly consisting of people who had no previous combat experience. The systematization of preparatory marches and formations made it possible to achieve a much more effective struggle due to the correct organization and deployment of troops.

One of the problems on the battlefield at that time was the issue of sanitation and hygiene. In this regard, in *Blue Book*, von Steuben introduced the necessary hygiene measures that were to be implemented in army camps to maintain sanitary standards. His goal was to prevent many of the dangerous diseases that were a severe problem in the camps deployed by the army. They could inflict significant losses due to dysentery and accordingly require significant decisions.

Another purpose of *Blue Book* was to give a more comprehensive application to American military doctrine, which was then in its infancy. Most of the operations carried out by U.S. forces up to that point involved the guerrilla techniques used in the early years of the Revolutionary War. Irregulars were deployed to British ambush troops and used few tactics for direct confrontation. The manual written by von Steuben (1779) revealed the deeper goals of the war company, emphasizing the importance of direct combat tactics. This opened up new opportunities for the American army, which at that moment could open up new strategies for confronting the enemy. This approach of open war later played an important role in military operations and allowed the American army to gain a significant advantage.

The second primary source for the study of *Blue Book* is its expanded and adapted reissue. It was published in 1985 under the title *Baron von Steuben's Revolutionary War Drill Manual* (von Steuben 1985). The publisher, in this case, is Courier Corporation, and relevant information can be found on the online libraries or other university resources. However, this reading has essential information about what are the main points of *Blue Book*.

With von Steuben's guidance, the American army kept the ball rolling as he trained them on techniques of planning and managing services, programs, and resources, including maintaining hygienic standards and proper bookkeeping. In addition, von Steuben taught the soldiers correct methods for managing charges against the use of bayonets and ways of swearing in multiple languages (von Steuben 1985). The main points of *Blue Book* were grouped into regulations to guide the soldiers. During the dark revolutionary days, all officers' uniforms were pieced together by volunteer patriots. Hence, one could not differentiate a non-commissioned officer from an official or a soldier. One of these regulations was to have different uniforms for the NCOs, officers, and troops. According to von Stueben, uniforms served as precise indicators of different ranks.

Another critical point of *Blue Book* is the significance of drilling and ceremonies. The majority of sections in the book are committed to coaching troops on the correct marching procedures, the necessary steps they must take, and how to present their hands to their superiors (von Steuben 1985). Since its inception, the soldiers had to spend many days rehearsing on the parade ground and still do the same in the future. Another vital aspect that von Steuben teaches the troops in his book is the benefits of maintaining high standards of cleanliness. Maintaining high hygiene standards could save troops from outside-of-combat, escapable deaths.

Furthermore, the book emphasizes the importance of doing paperwork in the military to promote accountability. Bookkeeping is vital as it encourages taking responsibility (von Steuben 1985). The chain of command should record the number of ammunition and rifles every platoon has at their disposal. On the same note, those who fail to do their jobs effectively must be punished through forfeiture of payments, allowances, and confinement until lost items are recouped.

Another key message from *Blue Book* is that leaders should be humane by allowing their soldiers to be sent on sick calls. One of the critical innovations was the instruction for officers on how to change the wounded troops and withdraw units in time to prevent defeat (von Steuben 1985). One more takeaway from *Blue Book* is that as leaders, NCOs must lead from the front by coaching their subjects on what it means to be a soldier. They should provide incentive and reward systems to motivate them while serving as role models. Additionally, the leaders should support the troops while still realizing the tasks of military officers and be on the watch and in control.

Finally, soldiers should follow and fulfill the general orders, which include obeying special instructions and executing their responsibilities in a military, professional manner. The book details the duties of each soldier, depending on their position and position in the

army (von Steuben 1985). Lastly, all disciplined forces must report any violations of the emergencies, special orders, and all that is covered in their instructions to the relief commander.

Secondary Sources

One of the leading secondary sources is *Baron von Steuben: The Life and Legacy of the Prussian General Who Drilled the Continental Army at Valley Forge during the Revolutionary War*. This text was independently published in 2019 in digital format (Charles Rivers Editors 2019). This source can be found both online and in public libraries. The book contains essential information about the history of von Steuben and the book he wrote for the American army.

There was a need for more guidance for the roles and duties of the citizens who volunteered to serve as soldiers during the early American Revolutionary War. The continental army in the United States did not have a central leadership and was comprised of a state-controlled military force that worked separately. Soldiers were guided by laws and regulations created by the state legislatures. In 1777, von Steuben came forward to aid the American president in training the armed forces and building the identity of the United States troops as a joint military force (Charles Rivers Editors 2019). Von Steuben volunteered his military expertise the following year through statesman Franklin, who sent a letter of reference to the president. After the meeting, the president was impressed with von Steuben's forceful character and military presence. Von Steuben's character allowed training a company that had one hundred guards on the basics of soldiering. He demonstrated his capability as a training master through his extraordinary experience and skills. His tactfulness made him designated as the inspector general of the armed forces.

The title of the book has its own origin and is not fictitious, but is due to a real historical event. In 1779, paper was scarce because of the war, forcing von Steuben to bind

his book *Regulations for the Order and Discipline of the Troops of the United States* using a blue-colored paper he had on his arms (Charles Rivers Editors 2019). This aspect of binding the writing using blue paper made the manual become nicknamed *Blue Book*. The Congress in America endorsed the book and ordered it to be used throughout the military in March 1779 (Charles Rivers Editors 2019). Three years later, the U.S. president facilitated enacting the Uniformed Militia Act, which encompassed some of the regulations proposed by von in his book. As a result, the guidelines on personal management provided in *Blue Book* substituted the British social pedigree, station, and class system. Steuben consolidated all military positions into a united force built on a fair and flexible social structure. With clear-cut standardization, the recruits would successfully achieve what was expected of them. Within a short time, the discipline of the United States Army nearly resembled that of the world-class military of the day in Europe.

Von Steuben's work remained the official guidebook to military maneuvers and training for a long time, and some of his regulations are still used in contemporary manuals. *Blue Book's* usefulness accelerated the publication of the formal NCO manual in 1904, with the latest version published in 2002 (Charles Rivers Editors 2019). The present-day manual offers vital data, including the significance of the professional advancement of non-commissioned officers, defining the responsibilities of the non-commissioned officer, and its history. Until 1779, there was no single standardized approach to the selection of qualified personnel in the army (Charles Rivers Editors 2019). Typically, the regimental commanders could spot a specific trait in an individual and promote them on this ground. However, Steuben's book affirmed the significance of recruiting qualified soldiers for the NCO ranks. Furthermore, during the War of Independence and the Second World War, the non-commissioned officers got their promotions straightaway from the regimental commanders.

That suggests that NCOs who would transfer regiments would only lose their position as NCOs if the general in chief of the army gave special permission.

There is an effective selection process, and the NCO officials are evaluated and promoted based on their military knowledge and performance. That allows for choosing the best talent, and at the same time, changing departments does not take the duties of the non-commissioned officers away. Since 1779 when von Steuben's book was formally published, many changes have been effective in the functioning of the non-commissioned officers (Charles Rivers Editors 2019). For instance, the NCO's selection process, training, and raking structure have significantly been improved. Additionally, the NCO officials constantly train and support their soldiers, and generally, the military force has realized the significance of having a strong and professional corps. Provided the American Army recruits and trains professional non-commissioned officers, America will become the army's backbone.

The second crucial secondary source is *A Handsome Flogging: The Battle of Monmouth, June 28, 1778*. It was written by William R. Griffith and published by Savas Beatie in 2020 (Griffith 2020). This reading can be accessed through the EBSCOhost scholarly database. The book contains important information for this study regarding the combat operations conducted by the American Army. In particular, one of the main events described in the book is the battle between America's troops and the adamant British fighters.

This book explains the last battle between America's troops and the adamant British fighters opposing the search for independence. Accordingly, Griffith's (2020) is an essential book about America's realization of freedom and the U.S. Army's significant role. Without this book and several others covering similar content, the present work's topic would lack much meaning. Monmouth remains an essential town to America because of the area's involvement in the country's struggle for independence. In this small market, von Steuben's military regulations and orders led to a historic victory for the country, making *Blue Book*

crucial to the Americans and the entire U.S. Before the battle, the U.S. fighters veiled themselves inside Valley Forge due to fear (Griffith 2020). As a result, the team lost all the confrontations between them and the professional British soldiers staged earlier. However, von Steuben's book allowed them to identify each other, operate under organized command, and launch planned and controlled ambushes. The achievement caused a draw between the two forces, forcing the U.K. fighters to retreat, which led to independence.

The information inside this source is vital to anyone studying U.S. history. The book gives a special meaning to *Blue Book* other than informing concerned readers of the origin of things like a uniform in the U.S. troops. Moreover, Griffith (2020) plays a significant role in revealing a neglected party in U.S. history. Many sources focus mainly on George Washington and other American fighters while disregarding the Prussian commander responsible for the team's success. Meanwhile, true history requires fairness, and this source provides a significant basis for realizing this necessary aspect.

Conclusion

Von Steuben's *Blue Book* is vital to U.S. Army troops as it provides guidelines and regulations to help them maintain discipline and order. Throughout the book, soldiers can learn and read about the army's history, culture, values, and the training they must go through. Owing to the experience that von Steuben passed on to the Americans, being a competent military leader, the American army was able to acquire new necessary abilities. They were concerned with the primary forms of formation, hygiene, and discipline of soldiers during the battle and outside it. Von Steuben, more than anyone else, was responsible for transferring European military practice and thinking to young American troops. He successfully formed the first real United States Army and subsequent ones.

References

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