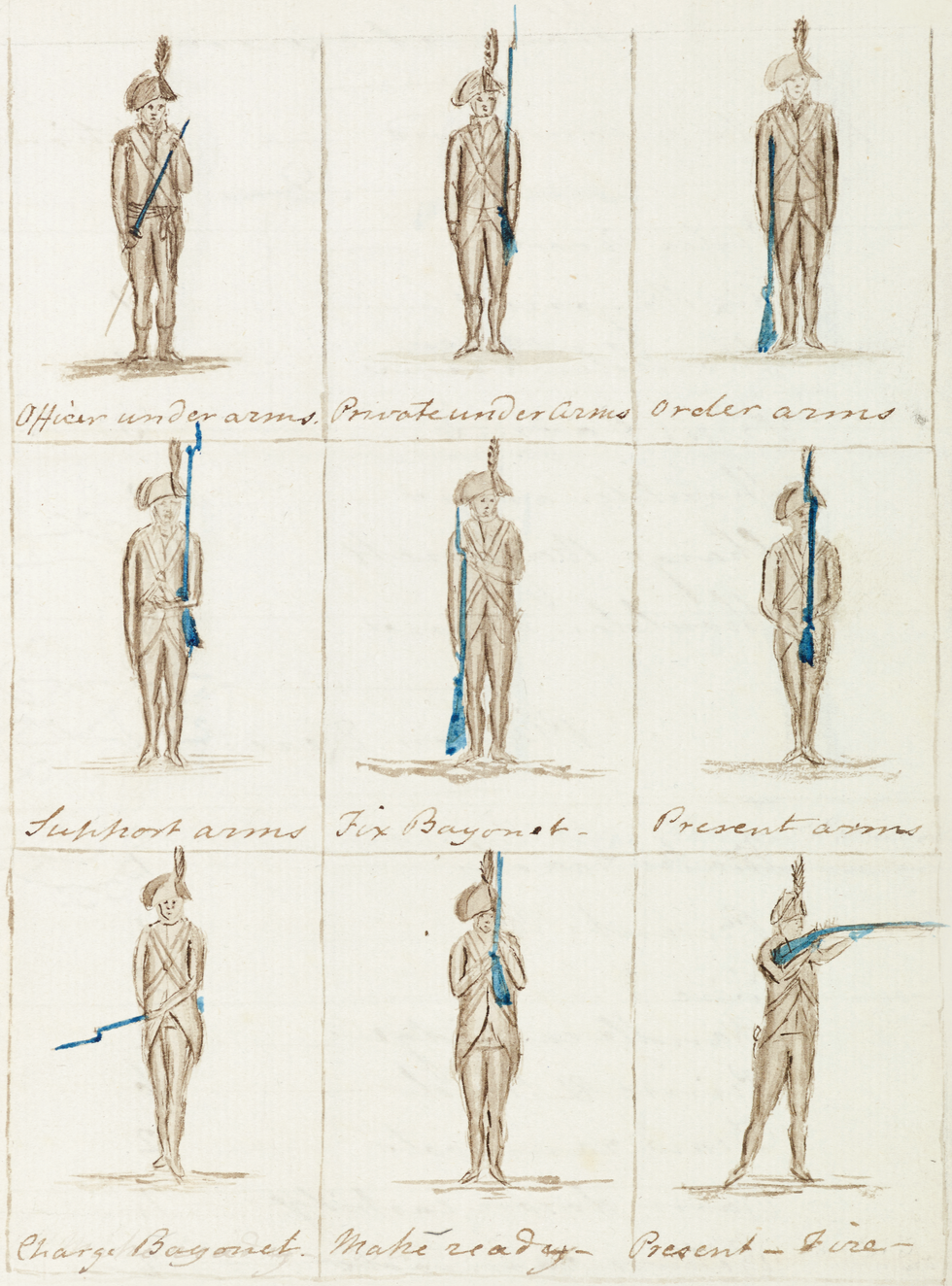
DEFENDING THE REALM

Although Britain is a seafaring nation, the threat of a French invasion led to an expansion of the nation's defensive capabilities during the Napoleonic Wars.



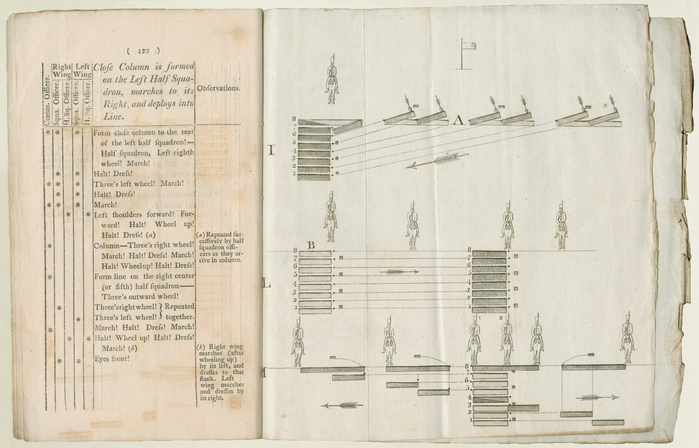
Manuscript notebook containing military drilling instructions, c.1798. From Manuscript Collections MS 122/1

An increasing number of civilians were trained for military service, in order to strengthen home defence and release the army for overseas campaigns. Companies of Volunteers, which had been raised since the 1790s, continued to expand in number. Volunteer infantrymen were drilled in the correct use and presentation of arms in the event of conflict.

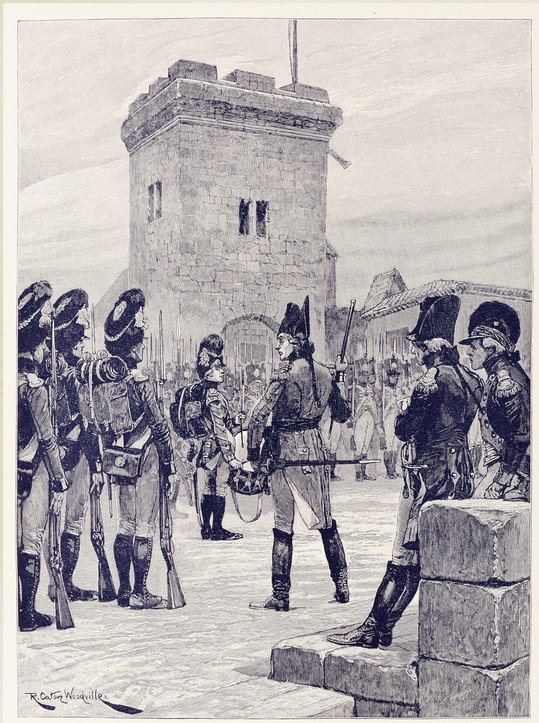
Acting upon commands swiftly and efficiently was crucial to success in battle. Detailed instructions for the movement of cavalry show the precision required in deploying from columns into lines.

Volunteers were designed to support the Militia, a collection of part-time county defence forces which were trained in basic military skills and put to service wherever the need arose. Leading politicians like William Pitt commanded troops of Militia and drilled them annually.

The creation of the Local Militia in 1809 reformed county defences. Many Volunteer corps converted to Local Militia units, which continued to train annually but were only required to serve in their county of origin. In 1814, following the peace treaty between Britain and France, the Militia, Local Militia and Volunteers were disbanded, with the thanks of the House of Commons.



Above: Printed booklet of instructions for exercising troops and squadrons of cavalry, c.1800. From Drury-Lowe collection Dr N 13



Pitt drilling militia at Walmer Castle in 1803, from William Sloane, *Life of Napoleon Bonaparte, Vol II* (London, 1896). From French Revolution Collection o/s DC203.S5