

## Mourn Arms Maneuver

Mourn (or reverse) Arms maneuver is a military maneuver of sword, halberd/pike, or rifle. The Danvers Alarm List Company and the Newburyport's Continental Navy are two 18<sup>th</sup> century reenactment groups bedecked in authentic clothing representative of the war of the revolution. In 2017 in Danvers, MA., they fired three volleys from flintlock muskets, then performed a maneuver called "**Mourn Arms**", slowly inverting muskets 180 degrees so the barrel muzzle is resting on their shoe, left and right hand placed on the butt of the stock and bowing their head in a prayerful position. This maneuver is also performed by the reenactment 4<sup>th</sup> Regiment of Foote, and other reenactor groups of the Queen's/King's soldiers.

An early reference to the maneuver arises from the account of the procession and funeral of Daniel Hitchcock, born at Springfield, Mass., on 15 Feb 1739 and settled in Providence RI where he was a respected lawyer. There is evidence suggesting he was also a member of the Sons of Liberty and possibly involved in organizing the seizure of the British ship Gaspee. Three days after the battles at Lexington and Concord, he was elected lieutenant colonel of the Providence Train of Artillery. Nathaniel Greene wrote that Colonel Hitchcock, one of his regimental commanders, was a good disciplinarian. It is also believed Hitchcock was among the officers when Washington's army set siege to British-occupied Boston. His regiment served at the Battles of Trenton, Preston and Assunpink Creek. Col. Hitchcock at this time was suffering from severe illness, likely tuberculosis. Because of this illness he was not present at the Battle of Princeton. Within weeks he died 13 January 1777. Diaries of several soldiers described the funeral service of 14 January in which the phrase "**rested on arms**" was used.<sup>[1]</sup>

Mourn Arms is a military drill command used to show respect at funerals and occasions of mourning, especially in the armed forces of Commonwealth nations.<sup>[2]</sup> The most prominent early use of "**reverse arms**" was in England, and in some cases actually marched with their weapons reversed. It is believed its origin is ancient Greece.

The equivalent of today's standard was devised as a sign of special respect for the 1722 funeral at Westminster Abbey of John Churchill, 1<sup>st</sup> Duke of Marlborough.<sup>[3]</sup>

The maneuver is not used in any US Armed Services branch but can be found used by hereditary organizations to honor a deceased member, or to honor early colonial figures who served in the American Revolution.

SAR Societies have adopted subtle differences, including covering the drum with a black cloth for a muffled beat. Another is using rim-shot taps with the large end of the stick to set a slow cadence of 8 beats (1 per second) to invert arms, and the same for recovery. Arms might also remain at mourn through a prayer, or a piper or fyfer playing Amazing Grace.

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<sup>1</sup> <http://smallstatebighistory.com/colonel-daniel-hitchcock-of-rhode-island/>

<sup>2</sup> Commonwealth nations is a voluntary association of 56 sovereign nations, most of which were British colonies or dependencies of those colonies. Most apparent are the U.K., Canada, Australia, India, and South Africa.  
[https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Member\\_states\\_of\\_the\\_Commonwealth\\_of\\_Nations](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Member_states_of_the_Commonwealth_of_Nations)

<sup>3</sup> *Ibid*