

Rapier Melees
by Baron AElfired of Chester
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Rapier melees tend to be much faster and more fluid than armored combat melees. Yet rapier fighters in a melee must solve the same problems as those our armored brethren have faced for years. There are basically three types of battles in any kind of combat: 1) Limited Front, (2) Denial of Territory and (3) Interdiction engagements. A Limited Front engagement involves units meeting at a narrow opening such as a bridge or gate. In a Denial of Territory engagement a unit is assigned to hold territory, such as guard a banner, in an open field and, finally, an Interdiction engagement is a search and destroy mission like any open field melee.

There are three different battle lines that are used for each of these types of engagements: 1) Skirmish order, (2) Battle order and (3) Assault order. Skirmish order is the most open of the three battle lines. A rapier unit in skirmish order will have the fighters spread out so that the swords of the fencers can cross about two thirds of the way up the blade. In Battle order the fencers should be close enough together so their rapiers can cross about halfway up the blade. In Assault order the fighters will stand almost shoulder to shoulder.

Skirmish order is used in an Interdiction engagement as it allows a unit to cover a large area of the field and also allows for rapid deployment and great flexibility of movement. Battle order is used more often in a Denial of Territory style engagement as the fighters in the unit can then protect each other better but still allows for the unit to move easily. Assault order is used to cover a small narrow area, such as a Limited Front engagement. Assault order allows the most protection to each individual fencer by his comrades in arms.

In rapier melees we do not have the shield wall to protect us or the long weapons, except guns, to kill from a distance so we must depend on maneuver and tactics to accomplish the same goals. The front ranks of fighters in any rapier unit should be armed with Case of Rapiers to allow the greatest coverage and protection at the same time. If the unit also has fencers armed with other weapons, they should be used in the rear ranks to bolster the front ranks and to move up in the ranks to help when the enemy is pushing against a unit.

Although we do not have long weapons such as polearms and greatswords, we do have fighters who have longer blades on their rapiers. These fencers can be used to float behind the first rank of fighters to snipe at the enemy fighters as they become engaged with the front rank of the unit.

Holes in the front rank must be filled in quickly by reserves in the second rank. It is the one of the commander's jobs to see these holes and move fencers into them as rapidly as possible. On the other hand, fencers need to learn that they can sound off when they see a

problem or situation developing. All fencers must learn to echo commands from their rear and the calls for help from the front lines.

Commanders should not fight, ever! A commander who fights is no longer a commander but just another fighter. If a commander has to fight, then the unit has lost all cohesion and it is every man for himself. This is one of the hardest things for a commander to learn. I would advocate that a commander should go into battle with single rapier or better yet, just a dagger (just kidding folks) so he is not tempted to jump into the thick of battle.

Every unit has those fencers who are not suited to fighting in a group. These heroes should be used as flankers to slow down and distract the enemy. Do not try to get these fencers to fight with the unit. Instead use their strength as solitary fighters and let them do what they are best at doing.

Gunners can make or break a melee. A unit with well trained and protected gunners can take out the enemy with very little chance of losing. Gunners have two missions; 1) to snipe at commanders, the good fighters bolstering a line, and other gunners and 2) to break up a line during a charge. As snipers, gunners should work in pairs. The two-man hunter/killer team should select a target and get as close to him as possible behind their own lines. The members of the team should then fire on their target when he is distracted by the action going on around him. A two-man team is used because they can shoot from slightly different angles increasing the odds of scoring a kill. Gunners used to break up a unit either on the attack or as it is being attacked must fire a mass volley into the enemy unit, again from close behind the front line of their own unit.

Gunners must also be protected. Fencers should tell the gunners when they see an enemy fighter targeting them. Several fighters should also be assigned to the gunnery unit to protect them from enemy fighters who will try run down the gunners as they are reloading.

There are many aspects of melee combat that cannot be covered in a short article. Fighters, either with the rapier or in armor, must practice together. Find experienced fighters who can teach you the movement commands used in melee fighting. Get out and practice the movement commands together whether you wear armor or fight with a rapier. Talk about and work out tactics based on previous battles fought by fighters in your area. Most importantly have fun, doing it!

Oh, and don't forget, "Leg 'em and leave 'em."

Anyone who has a question about this article can contact Baron AEIfred/C. Allen Reed at GallowglassAcad@aol.com