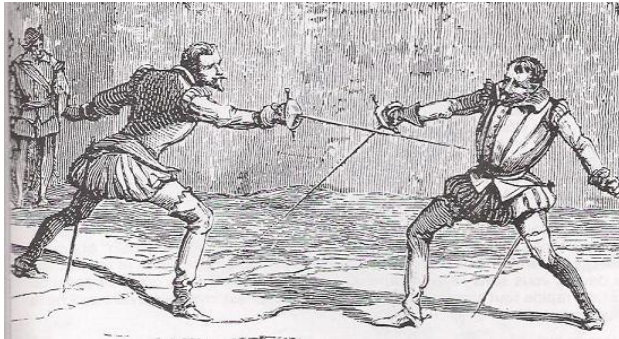


The Duel in Wargames?

A Thought by Rob Morgan

Well, I've just been reading 'The Duel', a history of duelling written by Robert Baldick and published back in the early 1960's- I don't expect it's in print now. Virtually non-existent nowadays of course duelling, though one suspects that the resolution by individual force of contempt or insult can still be found on the fringes of society. The honourable single combats of antiquity; Achilles and Hector, the seven against seven combat in which Eteocles defeated Polynices were duels, but not I think the encounters between gladiators.

It was in AD 501 that the Burgundian king Gendebald established in legal form the judicial duel, the trial by combat, and medieval fights of the duelling variety are numerous and well recorded. Some of those were remarkable to say the least, like the 'fight' between a dog and the Chevalier Maquer in Paris in 1400, which the dog actually won- the Chevalier was put to death! Chivalric duels and their rather similar cousin the tournament were fought with etiquette and both were outlawed unsuccessfully by the church. In all six Popes excommunicated all sovereign kings and Princes who allowed duels of any kind within their realms. A truly pointless exercise. No chance!



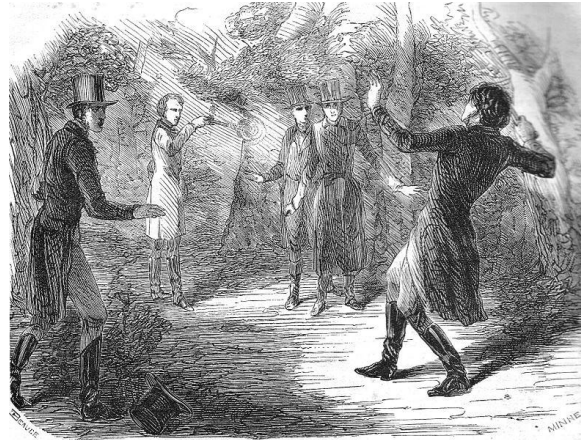
The last of these grand encounters, single and massed was over and done with by the sixteenth century, but duelling continued apace. According to Baldick during the reign of Henri IV of France, between 1589 and 1607 some 4,000+ Frenchmen of all ranks died on 'affairs of honour', and the book details quite a few of them. Seconds fought each other as well as their principal gentlemen; it was the fashion to do so. Even the 'third' the coat holders fought on occasion.

By 1765 or so, fashion changed again, and the pistol began to replace the sword, especially in Britain and Germany, the French lingering on with the blade naturally. Military duelling remained a serious problem for armies and commanders well into the nineteenth century, the novel and film 'The Duellists' has its origins in truth. It was in 1802 that one of Bonaparte's Generals, Reynier, killed another of equal rank named Destang with the pistol; they had fallen out over the merits of the disastrous French expedition to Egypt.

Even during the 100 days of 1815, Generals Ormano and Bonnet fought two duels, on consecutive days at Paris, both officers survived. It seems that the allied occupation of France resulted in countless numbers of duels, between French officers with nothing to do, and their enemies. Baldick suggests that the British came off generally better in these encounters than the Austrians and Prussians; this was because they 'knew little of the niceties of swordsmanship' and simply rushed at their opponents and spitted them!

Of course in France in particular, but also in Italy, duelling went on with little sign of dwindling away. As late as 1870, Prince Bonaparte killed a popular Parisian journalist in a duel, and duels apparently got in the way of an officer's duties to the state.

Of course in the Americas the death of Alexander Hamilton in a duel is well known and remembered, but General, later President Jackson also killed a man in a duel; and of course what if not duels are most of the 'High Noon' encounters of the wild west? Duelling was so widespread in military, naval and civilian life that every European country, apart from Iceland, enacted laws against the activity. Even women duelled and duels were fought with an enormous assortment of weapons.



Naturally, duelling from the single combat of Achilles and Hector, or de Bohun and the Bruce or even of Boney's eager generals does have a place in wargaming. Especially in campaigns. A Commander at almost any level can be given a status, rank or skill in the duel with sword or pistol, and a random chance card drawn to bring about the encounter. The fatal outcome, even the wounding or incapacitating of a particular officer can have drastic consequences for a regiment, or for a planned attack, a specialist activity, or perhaps a garrison's survival under siege.

While the winner might suffer recall, banishment or even death, with a further effect on the morale of the army or one of its units. There are interesting duels in literature. In Hornblower's novels there's a duel aboard ship in which he loses an expert diver, and in Perez Reverte's 'The Sun over Breda' an 80YW mass duel between Dutch and Englishmen and Spaniards takes place, which Reverte being from Cartagena, the Spaniards naturally win. Duels on the table-top? Or in solo wargame campaigns?

Why not?