

The Banner On-Line July-September 2004

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Defending against and killing combat archers with a sword and board.

(Version 3.6) By Duke Patrick Devilin Of DarkWrath Keep KSCA copyright 2003

Years ago, when spears were first introduced to the SCA against sword and shield fighters, the same complaints about "killing from out of range" were made about spearmen. Today, spearmen are an accepted and formidable presence on the battlefield, due to the fact that, after many years, the sword and board fighter has learned how to apply tactics to minimize the spearman's dominance on the battlefield.

Due to a medical condition, I have found it difficult to participate in the physical rigors of SCA combat. However the combat archery has allowed me to return to the battlefield. Participation in this part of the SCA war fighting has convinced me that combat archery is as integral to SCA war combat as the use of spears. The intention of this article is to help the sword and board fighter evolve into his rightful place as a combat archery killer. Archery is the 3rd component in the ROCK, PAPER, and SCISSORS of the battlefield: archer kills the spearmen, spearmen kills the shield men, and shield men kills the archers.

The basis of all strategy is to throw strength against weakness. Integral to this is an understanding of the combat archer's assets and liabilities on the battlefield.

The archer's assets include:

Range

Mobility

Very inconspicuous on the field

Can attack your rear flank

Can attack through small openings

Vertical aim is good at close range
Psychologically intimidating
Dangerous to spearman
High crossfire ability

The archer's liabilities include:
Instantly dead when they lose range
Slow rate of fire
Limited number of attacks
Needs more elbowroom to operate
They miss moving targets very easily
Normally miss the target horizontally
They cannot "wrap" in attacks
Attacks gravitate to the centerline
Shield men are dangerous for archers

Archers have a very short ineffective range and a long total range. Not only does the combat archer have superior long distance offensive, but their best defense is their range. Combat archers are most effective when the opponents either cannot or will not cover the ground between them quickly. Do not let them maneuver you behind obstacles in the terrain like trees, hill ridges, grounded shield walls or dead bodies. Maneuver around them until you have a clear route to chase them down that has no or few obstacles.

They have great mobility in an open field: Part of their offense requires them to maneuver to a favorable angle to bare down on their target. Herding archers backwards or into boxed areas, walls or bushes is extremely disruptive to their efficiency.

They are very inconspicuous on the field: Archers will covertly integrate themselves into a unit, moving among and behind the spears and shields or they will peek around the flanks looking for targets.

Be aware of what's going on around you, Fighter pilots have a motto that applies: "Lose sight and lose the fight"! Watch for archers out of the corner of your eye. Keep your view unobstructed. Do not get distracted from your attention on an archer. Archers are waiting to catch you not paying attention. don't focus on one danger to the exclusion of all others, look for archers setting you up for a kill on the angles to left and right as well as from high positions and from low positions. One of my best tricks is to kneel down on the ground "under" a shield wall.

Archers are often ignored until they reach a certain range. An archer can find that range and stand just outside of that range to become psychologically invisible but still deadly. They will get their kill and move on to a new location to do the same thing. Beware of archers hiding behind a shield wall or behind other fighters waiting to pop out for the kill.

Beware of archers hiding below your normal sight line (on their knees) behind a shield wall or behind other fighters waiting to pop out for the kill.

They can attack your rear flank: Reserve shield men must pay attention even when they are back behind the shield wall. They will be able to see archers flanking the rear and easily chase them down for the kill or to at least make them run away.

They can attack through small openings: Fight on the oblique, this means not hitting a battle line that has archers head-on. Hit them from an angle at their right side (your left side). In this way the openings in your shield wall that can appear on the sword side of your shields (for the right handed) are facing away from the arrows. Your shields act like a series of slanted blinds instead of open doors!

Keep aware of your lower body, as shield men concentrate on the defending their heads, their bellies, hips, and legs become easily vulnerable to arrows.

Avoid over extending, an archer will happily kill you rather than the shield man in front of you. When arrows miss the target, they normally miss horizontally: Keep your gaze just barely over the shield rim and protect the top of your head by holding your weapon in front of your face in a vertical (not horizontal) position. A horizontal slot position is more vulnerable to arrow fire than a vertical slot at medium and close range.

Crossbows are psychologically intimidating: Many fighters fear the archer excessively. This is mostly because of unfamiliarity with the archer's assets and liabilities. Archers may sometimes stop a charging fighter by pointing his weapon at you in a threatening manner, even if it is not loaded. This sometimes provides the extra time he needs to run away. If you hold a shield and you have a clear path to charge the archers then **DO SO WITH NO HESITATION AT ALL!** Even without a shield it will do you no good whatsoever to unnecessarily freeze up and hold range when you can charge the archer.

Archers are dangerous to spearmen: When archers are a threat, put the shield men out in front of the spearmen. Or at least have one or more shield men per 2 spearmen up with the spears to block incoming arrows. If possible, use spearmen as bait to herd archers into locations and positions that are strategically advantageous to wiping them out.

High crossfire ability: Avoiding being shot at from several directions at the same time. Only a few sword and board fighters can actually hit you when you are surrounded by them. Archers can attack you in crossfire with **DOZENS** of arrows.

Most archers will yield (instantly dead) when they lose their protective range: Isolate individual archers and overwhelm them quickly. When running down an archer as a group split up. It will take a group of fighters to cut off the archer's avenues of escape. but chase him down individually without one person dictating the running speed to all the others. It only takes the one fastest person in your group to close range for the automatic kill.

Slow rate of fire: Seize the opportunity to charge when the archer has fired a shot, is disorganized, or otherwise unprepared. Unlike a spear, archers have a limited number of attacks. Most battles impose a limited number of arrows that the archer can fire. If you look at an archer, he will know that you are aware and are more likely not to try and shoot at you for fear of waiting his arrow. You can bait him into firing a shot at you by pretending not to look at him, your peripheral vision will tell you when he has shot the arrow, with a shield you will not need to use anything but your peripheral vision to block the simple arrow attack and this will waste his precious supply of arrows.

Needs more elbowroom to operate: One big weakness is elbowroom. Crossbows need a lot and even archers require more elbowroom to draw, load and aim for an attack than most other weapons. If crowded either by an opponent or their own side, they lose almost all effectiveness. They will have to fall way back to reload and their aim will be poor as they are bumped around in the crowd. Often in crowded situations like that their own shield men will lift their weapons and accidentally deflect the arrow attack.

Pushing units in tight is useful for bunching up the archers inside of their units making it hard for them to maneuver or be offensively effective.

They miss moving targets very easily: Archers' targets are often only available for a second, so keep moving! Even swaying back and forth is better than standing still. Remember that especially with SCA combat archery a moving target is hard to hit. Keep in mind the saying 'if you stop you are dead.' When you stop the archer will assess you, and move to where they can inflict damage to you or your group.

Never dodge in the same predictable direction to avoid arrows, alter your head and body movement left and right and sometimes up and down. Avoid coming back up in the same predictable place when shooting from behind cover, such as castle turrets or shield walls.

The arrows cannot "wrap" in: Remember that an archer can only perform a simple straight thrust attack.

Hold your shield in a perpendicular stance and abandon all forms of defense that are designed for the possibility of wrap shots such as the angled shield stance with the sword held behind your head. This sounds obvious but many fighters do this instinctively because of years of guarding wrap shots.

Making use of cover, both natural, artificial and even use other fighters. However be warned that sometimes a fighter in front of you will dodge an arrow and you may take the hit instead!

When running down an archer stay behind your shield and do not throw blows unless the archer refuses to die otherwise. If you throw blows unnecessarily and torque your shield you can easily be killed at close range by the same archer (double kill) or one behind him.

Attacks gravitate to the centerline: The two most effective and common killing targets for archers on the battlefield are the face and center of the chest. Even holding a sword vertically to cover the center of the face and the center of your torso will catch a surprising number of arrows!

Arrows normally miss the target horizontally: Part of the reason an archer focuses his attack on your centerline is because it is harder to hit accurately on the horizontal plane. So zig-zag as you run down an archer. Move in non-rhythmic (random like) horizontal evasion patterns to best hinder the archer's aim. When you have a choice pop your head out horizontally to see around an obstacle not over it vertically.

Shield men are dangerous to the archers: If a unit has mostly archers, and they are lacking shield support, charge and they will soon either turn and run or be easily killed. Treat archers like prey and force them to use their reactions rather than plans of attack. Like the mongoose family

attacking a snake, distract the archer with one fighter and kill the archer from behind with another fighter. Heard archers into groups then wipe them out. Otherwise separate individuals from the group, and overwhelm them quickly. Drive the archers to a location where the conditions offer you a tactical advantage.

When archers come forward to harass your shields, pulse charge into them just long enough to disrupt them, hopefully killing a few, and sending the rest running away. Retreat back to your original position: if they come forward again, then perform another charge.

You can even have a few shield men out in front of the shield wall, pulse charging the archers to keep them from getting up to close to your shield wall.

Contrary to most people's perception of SCA combat arrows, they do not move faster than the sword blows that all fighters are comfortable blocking or dodging. Arrows may seem to move faster than they actually do because the attack is traveling in a path toward your eyes. If you watch for the archer's bow to spring it is very easy to shield block the arrow.

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Wicker Man Festival

Episode 1 - The Phantom Fire

As the Fall growing season comes to a close, come join us, the Barony of Blackstone Mountain, in our celebration of the Wicker Man Festival. A celebration of the coming darkness of Winter. So come all ye Bards, Fighters, Fencers, Archers, Throwers of weapons, Makers of things (A&S), and Sellers of stuff, and those who enjoy watching. All will come to glorious fruition with the launching of wishes and dreams in the redemption fires of the Wicker Man.

The Event will be held at the easy to find Jackson County Fair Grounds outside Ripley, WV on Saturday October 23rd, 2004. Please join us in celebrating the burning of the Wicker Man.

Site Fee: Adults-\$6, Children over 6-\$4, Children 5 and under-Free

Feast: Limited to 50 (so pre-reg is encouraged) \$10

(remember a \$3 non-member charge applies)

Make checks payable to SCA Inc. - BOB MT.

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Directions:

If coming from the North --- I-77 South to exit 138, turn right on to Highway 68 west and go 7 miles to County Farm Road which is the entrance to the fair grounds.

If coming from the South --- I-77 North to exit 138, turn left on to Highway 68 west and go 7 miles to County Farm Road which is the entrance to the fair grounds.

(MORE TO COME)

From the Officers

From the Chronicler

Hello everyone. Just a reminder that if you wish to submit articles or art work to “The Banner” try and get them to me early to insure they are included in the addition you wish to see them appear. I will gladly make every attempt to see that “the Banner” is informative and entertaining, but that is hard to do with no submissions. Submission deadlines are December 20 for 1st quarter, March 25th for 2nd, June 25th for 3rd, and September 25th for 4th. On another note, everyone have a great Pennsic.

In Service,
Lady Odette d’Arques

From the OUTGOING Minister of Arts & Sciences

Baronial Goings on:

Unfortunately this will be rather short. As all know we held our annual triathlon at the Barony of Blackstone Mountains Raids, along with a single entry A&S competition. As for current activities we are planning on a get together to make projects for Kingdom gifts and every one has began their pre Pennsic sewing. As for me this will be my last report as the A&S officer of Blackstone Mountain. As of June first the new A&S officer is Baroness Rowan le Beau. Her email address is RowanSCA@aol.com

Thank you all

In Service
Lady Reah Brecc

From the Chirurgeon

No significant injures have been reported to me. Just a reminder to drink water while doing physical activates.

From the INCOMING Minister of Arts & Sciences

I would like to thank Reah Brecc, my predecessor for her work toward the arts and sciences in the barony and wish her good luck in her new position as Chancellor of Minors.

I would like to plan at least one A&S activity monthly during the fall and winter. I am looking for ideas of new things you would like to learn or those skills you have, but would like to enhance together in a group. We will also need to think about where to have these activities.

We have many talented gentles in the Barony and I would like to see their skills recognized by a wider audience. To accomplish this I would like to ask that you let me know by the 1st day of each month what you have been working on so this can be incorporated into the Baronial Monthly Officers report and be included in the quarterly report to the Kingdom.

I look forward to serving you as Minister of Arts and Sciences.

In Service to the Dream,
Rowan

From the Baron & Baroness

Greetings Good Gentles:

It hardly seems possible, but here we are merely 6 weeks away from Pennsic. It sneaks up on us faster each year. The Barony will be camping again in E-04. If you aren't camping with the Barony, please at least stop by and say hello. Catherine MacUrsus is coordinating the Barony's day to guard the Æthelmearc gate. We still have several slots available. Please sign up and support the Barony and your Kingdom.

The Barony will again be hosting the Blackstone on Bourbon Street. This year it will be held on Thursday night of War week and feature Louisiana style foods prepared by some of Blackstone Mountain's best cooks.

Lady Gwennyth Olafsdottir is beginning to make plans for another ladies sewing retreat. She is looking at planning for November. Start planning now so you can attend and watch the Banner and the Baronial website for the confirmed date.

We will be attending the Investiture of Quinn and Vivienne at St. Swithins Bog on July 16 -18. The Seven Pearls Inter-baronial Fencing Championship will also be held at this event. Come and have a good time with us.

In Service,
Tomas and Rowan

Event Calendar

July

9th-11th	Pax Interruptus (Thescorre - Phelps, NY)
9th-11th	Defenders Tourney (Sylvan Glen - Martinsburg, WV)
10th	Raiders, Invaders and Privateers (Gryffyns Keep - East Millsboro, PA)
16th-18th	Bog Chaos (St. Swithin's Bog - Elton, PA)
24th	Sunderoak Summer Picnic (Sunderoak - Butler, PA)

August

6th-22nd	Pennsic War (Slippery Rock, PA)
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September

- 3rd-5th Bards & Bows (Sterlynge Vayle)
- 10th-12th Viking Village III (Heronter)
- 11th Holy Prophets III (Hunter's Home - Utica, PA)
- 11th Summer's End (Beau Flueve)
- 18th Baron Sir Alonzio's Spear and Fencing Picnic (Debatable Lands)
- 24th-26th Known World Costuming Symposium (Midrealm)
- 24th-26th Weekend of Wisdom (Abhainn Ciach Ghlais)
- 24th-26th Siege of Glengary (Sylvan Glen)
- 25th Cecilias Revenge III (Midrealm)

October

- 1st-3rd Harvest Raid (Heronter)
- 8th-10th Pumpkin Fest Demo (Riversedge - Conneaut Lake, PA)
- 23rd Wicker Man Festival (Blackstone Mountain - Ripley WV)