

MARSHALING MELEES

by Master Pavel Isovich

Melees, because of size, complexity and rule differences, are a lot harder to marshal than the average tourney. Because of the complexity of melees, I will try to first give an overall view of marshalling a melee and then some of the specifics of different melee situations. Melee fields are seldom as well marked off as a tourney field. Also, spectators try to get as close as they can for that "perfect shot" of Sir Glung swinging his 19' glaive. Because of the open nature of melee and the fact that there are so many bodies on a melee field, the marshals must watch all things at once. They can't just focus on one small area without running the real danger of being flattened by a 300 pound suit of animated plate armor. One of the easiest ways of keeping the spectators from getting hurt is to keep the fighting away from where they are. Do this by surrounding the fight completely by constables and marshals. If you don't have enough people to completely surround the fight put your people between the fight and the spectators. Only authorized marshals can be on the actual fighting field, constables should be outside the fighting area between the fighters and the spectators.

Mark a boundary that the spectators aren't allowed to cross. For most small melees, a 10-15' dead area is good enough if you have marshals every 10-20' around the fight. With really large wars, a 50' boundary is not a bad idea.

If you don't have the room for lots of dead space for a boundary, try to put the spectators in areas that the fighters will try to avoid (i.e. on a steep hillside, on top of a retaining wall, inside pavilions, etc.) If you can get the spectators in one area, it's a whole lot easier to watch them.

A constable posted in front of a crowd of spectators needs to fully understand that he is there to prevent fighters from reaching the unprotected spectators, therefore even under pressure he may not abandon his post. His first defense is to yell a loud and long "HOLD", his second defense is the staff or weapon he should carry, with which he should try to stop the fighters from entering the crowd area and block any shots which threaten him. Anyone who is timid or unfamiliar with using a staff should not be entrusted to guarding the crowd in a large melee.

Once you have your fighters in one place and your spectators in another, you have to decide which marshal goes where. Usually the Royalty requests a seat close to the action. This means that they are in danger of getting 279 pounds of Lord Upchuck in their collective lap at any moment. For this reason, you need to place at least one experienced marshal between the Royalty and the great unwashed. If there is a crowd of Mundanes watching, they will also need their own marshal, maybe two, one to watch the fight and one to explain why Sir Piccolo doesn't just hit all those guys in the back. If you have only one experienced marshal, you'll have to use constables for these jobs. There must be at least one experienced marshal who only has to worry about the fighting and the fighters in it.

Some cases require a certain type of constable. If the nightly eyewitness primetime news report is out to film the battle, you will need to let them get closer than you would allow others. Mild-mannered heralds and ex-journalism majors make the best candidates for controlling the camera. Put them in front of the camera and tell them to guard it. In melees the major dangers the weapons present are incorrectly used weapons, (like a spear being used to hack or thrust with a non-thrusting tip) and flying weapons. A five pound broadsword will leave some nasty bruises through armor; imagine what it will do to some unarmored bystander. Always try to make sure the single-handed weapons are strapped to the owning fighters before the battle begins. During holds have all weapons that have been pulled during the battle lanyarded or secured in some other manner. While

weapons that become missiled represent a danger to both marshals and spectators, an entirely new set of problems pop up when missile weapons are allowed on the melee field. The only truly safe way of dealing with spectators is to move them beyond the maximum range of any missiles on the field.

[Where missile combat is to take place, a readily identifiable boundary for the combat shall be established. All spectators shall be at least 40 yards beyond this line unless the Marshal-in-Charge determines that a lesser distance will be adequate.]

In most battles with missile weapons, the majority of the missiles will be traveling in one or two directions. On a bridge or fortification battle, it's real easy to predict where most of the missiles will land. When marshalling one of these battles keep all of the spectators off to the sides, away from the line of fire.

The second problem with missile weapons is that there is a real possibility of marshals being hit. Whenever possible, marshal these battles from the sides, never cross directly through the line of fire of archers and try to work in pairs to give you better protection from, unseen missiles. Do not use local holds during this type of battle since an archer fifty feet away may not hear the hold and continue to fire into the area of a local hold. Field battles with missile weapons are a real pain to marshal or constable. Since the battle can move in any direction, missile weapons may be coming from every direction. Move the spectators as far as can be comfortably managed away from the edge of the field. If there isn't enough room for spectators to get out of the firing range, you may have to restrict missile weapons to specific areas of the field.

Once the field is laid out and all the Marshals have agreed on the rules and the weapons being used, gather all the fighters present together to go over the rules. Make sure everyone on the field is playing by the same rules before the first melee starts and it will save a lot of problems later on. In our kingdom, face thrusts and butt spikes are allowed. A fighter from the Middle Kingdom may be thoroughly surprised and upset the first time he is stabbed in the face or blasted by the butt end of a short pole arm. So take a few minutes before the beginning to go over all the conventions being used or not used: can you kill from behind, use running charges, face thrusts, 8' pole arms, etc. Don't assume just because the fighting is in Calontir that the fighting will be by our rules or that everyone knows our rules. Being familiar with the rules of surrounding kingdoms will give you a good idea of rules that need to be discussed before the battle begins.

As both sides are forming up for the opening gun, walk through the sides and see if there is any strange equipment. Some fighters will have special war equipment that wasn't inspected with their tourney stuff. In this kingdom, we allow longer polearms and spears in melees than on the tourney field, also there are a lot of special war shields. Casually inspect this stuff to make sure it's safe. Make sure everyone remembered to put on their gauntlets, close their faceplates, or attach their lanyard, etc.

Now comes the time to take your place as much out of harm's way as possible and begin the show. Visually check that both sides are ready, made sure that all non-combatants are where they are supposed to be, all your marshals and constables are positioned and awake, remind everyone that they are on the field to have fun and then let the hittin' and wackin' commence.

Before the fight begins, the Marshal-in-Charge should make it clear when and why "holds" should be called. Every fighter on the field has the right and duty to call a hold if he sees something that is obviously dangerous. The constables should call hold to prevent the fighting from moving off the field, although they should not cry hold every time the fighting merely moves close to the edge. The Marshals on the field should call a "hold" anytime they see the fighting endangering spectators, whenever something dangerous happens on the field, in case of injury, or to clear the field of dead.

During a melee, if any Marshal calls "hold" all the fighters, the marshals and constables should loudly call "hold" so that everyone gets the message. All fighters should go to their knees unless impossible because of crowding or terrain and remain quiet. If someone else called the "hold" find out what the problem is and, if you are not involved in correcting it, use the break to check the armor and weapons of fighters in your area.

Each Marshal must learn when to use "hold" and when the problem can be dealt with without stopping the fighting. We have all been in a charge or seen a charge that was killed because some marshal got excited by all the rushing bodies. "Holds" should be called only when there is a visible safety problem, not because people are moving with speed.

Marshals should be reminded before the battle begins that holds should not be called for lost weapons or fighters who have fallen down. Fighters should also be reminded that if they lose their weapons or fall down during the fight they are still legitimate targets. Because no one really wants to hit a man without a weapon, or one who is lying helpless on the ground, a fighter should be prepared to yield in that type of situation. A fighter who has fallen down during a melee should be allowed to get to his knees without being struck and the fight resumed (in most cases this should not require a hold).

A good reason to stop the fighting is when the fight has moved too close to the crowd, piles of armor, or some other hazard to the fighters. When this happens call "hold", and ask the fighters to please center up on the field. Try to make sure that all the positions are the same as when the "hold" was called. Once everyone is happy in their new location, restart the fight.

The most important reason for calling a "hold" is to pull an injured fighter from the field. If the fighter is badly injured (i.e. back hurt, leg busted, concussion, heat stroke, etc.) move heaven and earth to get the person some help. Break the melee up to get the ambulance in or to give the surgeons room. In the case of anything you think might be a serious injury, get a surgeon and, once they are called onto the field, they are in charge until the situation is handled.

In some of the longer battles, you will need to consider when a water break can be fitted in. Often a long "hold" will come along and do nicely as a chance for water but if there have been no long holds, consider the heat and humidity of the day. Only the Marshal-in-Charge should call a break for water, and check with him before you allow any water bearers onto the field. When the break is over check carefully that all the water bearers are off the field and everyone has replaced their helms and gauntlets before resuming the battle.

Sometimes out of the great heaping, heaving mound of armor and bodies, things other than weapons and dead people will fly out. If it is a piece of armor or a piece of weapon, immediately call "hold". Lost weapons are considered a hazard of melee combat and should not be a reason for stopping the fight. However, if a sword breaks or a mace loses its head, stop everything and replace or remove the offending weapon. With armor you may discover that it was an optional piece of protection and the fighter is willing to continue without. If it is an important piece of equipment that can be fixed with duct tape and spit in a few minutes, fix it and allow it for the rest of the fight only. Before the battle begins the Marshal-in-Charge should explain how he wants to deal with the dead. Some places like to leave the dead on the field unless they pile up so deep that it represents a real danger to people in the pile. Other Marshals will ask the dead fighters to leave the field as soon as the fighter feels safe in moving from the spot where he died. Still others will be deeply upset if a dead fighter moves before he is told to leave by one of the Marshals. They all represent trade-offs between realism and safety, just be sure you and all the fighters know how the battle will be marshaled.

Usually, once the two sides collide, the melee will break into smaller fights and move away from each other. If it happens, put a marshal in charge of each fight. Do this fast and be flexible. If there aren't enough marshals or constables, yell at a dead knight or marshal to help watch some of the fighting. This type of open field fighting represents the greatest danger to the Marshals, be very careful about fighters moving up behind you and above all else avoid getting surrounded by fighting. If the clumps of fighters get far enough apart, "local holds" may be called. The fact that you may be having "local holds" needs to be announced at the same time you announce the rules of the battle. In a "local hold" just the little fight that one marshal is watching should go to their knees. During a "local hold" any new fighters entering the area of the hold should be stopped on the outer fringe and told to kneel until the command to lay-on is given. If the call of "hold" is shouted 4-5 times, it is obviously a "general hold". After the local problem is fixed, start the fight again.

SMALL FIELD BATTLE, 4-16 FIGHTERS

These battles are pretty easy to run. Just make sure you have enough field. Two marshals would probably be enough to handle this size of battle although a few constables will help keep the more far ranging types out of the grandstands. With this few fighters the fight will boil down to one or two fights with some individual fights around the edges. In a battle this small you should not have to call a hold to remove the dead. Just have them cover up and get them out when the fighting moves on.

MEDIUM FIELD BATTLE, 16-45 FIGHTERS

A battle of this size requires at least 4 marshals and constables. More would be a very good idea. The fight will probably break into 3-4 smaller fights. Watch for this and marshal the fight closest to you. Missile weapons in a field battle of this size are a nightmare, because the fight mills around so much and often the field is too small. Even at this size you should not have to call hold for the dead but watch for piles that may form when one group is surrounded and wiped.

LARGE FIELD BATTLES, 45-200 FIGHTERS

For the really large battles you need a marshal for roughly every 20 fighters with enough constables to have someone every 50 feet around the edge of the field. If you are really short of marshals or the field is not large enough, it is recommended that you make it a bridge battle instead. A field battle of this size will soon break into 3-4 smaller battles with other small fights scattered all over the field. These battles may last long enough that a water break will be needed and there will usually be several breaks to remove dead fighters. Because the fighting will often cover the entire field the marshals must be very careful about what is going on behind them and keep track of the other marshals to insure that all areas of the field are being covered.

BRIDGES, CORRIDORS, AND FORDS

Of all the large battles, these are the easiest to handle. If handled right, 2 marshals can run one of these fights. This is the type of battle that will need the most holds for the removal of the dead. It is best to leave the dead where they lie until a hold is necessary. Any marshal who gets close enough to gaff a dead fighter is also within range of mindless fighters with polearms and great swords.

It will take quite awhile to kill a couple hundred fighters on a narrow bridge, so consider a water break after thirty minutes or more, depending on weather conditions.

The tremendous congestion and density of a large bridge fight makes it the most dangerous type of melee under the best of circumstances. The marshals must remain in control of the battle at all times; unsafe conduct should not be tolerated. Any fighter who

is ignoring blows, swinging excessively hard, jumping on people, or doing anything else you think is dangerous, should be removed from the fight and given the option of talking to you after the battle.

WOODS BATTLES AND HUNTS

Woods melees are hard to handle because of the broken terrain and the large number of small fights scattered over a wide area. Full blown woods battles with two armies require at least one marshal with every unit as it enters the woods., If there are resurrections, there should be several marshals at the resurrection point to go out with units that leave during the battle. Woods battles tend to be wild, disorganized affairs, with each marshal pretty much on his own so you need experienced marshals who can deal with problems or emergencies on their own.

One final word on marshalling large fights; it is possible to have too many marshals on the field. I have seen fights where there was a marshal on the field for every fighter present. Too many marshals get in each other's way and block the view of the spectators. For most mid-sized melees two or three marshals can handle the fighting, anyone else who wants to help should serve as constables around the edge of the field.