

War Games in Tyler County – Medieval Style

by Michael G. Maness, www.PreciousHeart.net

From all over Texas and beyond, Thursday night, November 17, about five hundred began to set up camp in Jones Country, northeast of Colmesneil. The Barony of Bordermarch hosted the gathering of these aficionados of Middle Age chivalry, roughly from the 4th to 16th centuries (www.Bordermarch.org).

They came to *live* the medieval life for the weekend.

Though Coleman camping gear was there, several went without. No propane or batteries, some of the tents had banners flying and resembled a set from *El Cid*.

Most of the baronies (or districts) were part of the Kingdom of Ansteorra, which is Latin for “One Star,” representing Texas and Oklahoma. Nineteen “kingdoms” form The Society for Creative Anachronism that grew out of the first gathering in 1966 at Berkeley University, California (www.SCA.org). It has grown to over 60,000 participants worldwide.

The SCA kingdoms and baronies are led by kings, queens, barons, counts, ladies, and, of course, fighting knights. Women fight too.

This year’s equestrian champion was a woman, and her huge Belgium war horse helped.

At first glance, the sophistication, attention to detail and concern for safety might escape the novice history buff.

Researched for the medieval century of one’s choice, most pieces of clothing had a meaning. The emblem and colors from one’s kingdom and house predominated. The color of a belt. The star on the chest. A crown here and there.

Respectful language throughout.

For nearly fifty years, they have continually refined all parts, adding historical elements and increasing safety. Training on how to strike preceded certification for battle. The blunted swords, the caging over the face and neck, and every arrow were checked to SCA guidelines. Once shot, the arrow was disqualified for the remainder of the battle.

Resembling hollow bamboo, the heavy swords were made of solid rattan that will not splinter and approximates the weight of steel.

Even with heavy leather, chainmail, and armor, one could get seriously hurt.

No Broadway play here. No piano music introductions. No flimsy swords or papier-mâché shields.

“Fight all day,” one of the marshals yelled. No sound



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system. A Herald walked through the camp making announcements in a loud voice.

The battle this day was a preparation for a greater battle in March for the Gulf Wars when the Ansteorra will fight the Kingdom of Trimaris (Florida) in Lumberton, Mississippi; 5,000 are expected to gather. Then in August, south of Pittsburgh, about 50,000 will gather.

Serious about safety, still to the novice, the line between a bone-crushing blow and a violation was hard to see. To their credit, there have been few serious injuries. They were that good at training and certifying people to fight.

Marshals moved around the main battle to keep a vigilant eye.

If something went awry, the marshal called out, “Hold!” Everything stopped, to assess the danger, correct a fighting violation, or to merely to clear the field of the dead.

The rapier battles resembled the Three Musketeers with speedy swashbuckling of steel instead of rattan, using the heavily screened face-covers seen in fencing.

In front of the castle and ready for battle on the open field – an awesome sight – over a hundred armored warriors prepared to engage in a full-contact all-out melee with short and long swords. With brute force and shields, many with ten-foot lances, they marched toward each other. Archers with long bows fired from a distance, and those with crossbows from the perimeter.

The clash of two men in armor fighting fiercely can be heard two hundred yards away.

As the two armies clashed, the air resounded with hundreds of heavy blows pounding and jabbing enemy armor. Knights fell. One side got an advantage and pushed through. All determined to win.

In the brutal ravine battle, after being “killed,” one fellow lumbered up the hill, pulling his helmet off, panting, and sweating profusely. A young maid offered some water, which he poured over his head and then drank.

There was a bowl of sliced pickles – treats of the era.

Another thirsty fellow took a bottle and poured the water through his face guard. They allowed plastic bottles, Styrofoam cups, and Igloo coolers. Not completely barbaric. Yet, there were many wooden mugs.

The equestrian battles were as dramatic. Knights on huge Belgium battle horses engaged each other within similarly strict safety rules for rider and horse.

The child combat in this form of martial arts taught high honor and rigid self-discipline.



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Honor – all about honor. In every battle, if one was struck with a regulation “fatal” blow, one was bound by his or her honor to fall.

Chivalry and the code of the romantic Middle Ages, idealized in the present – creative anachronism – was being *lived* for a week or weekend as closely as possible.

To officially join, one chose a name (and persona) often related to one’s medieval profession or art. As simple as “Linda the Quiet,” “William Arrowmaker,” or as complicated as Anglo Saxon, Latin, German, or French may allow. The name was checked against an extensive registry, for one cannot assume a name from history or one previously used.

With large Russian tribal hat, Ry Lindley, aka Orlof Njordson, stood tall and proud, spokesman for Rolling Thunder, and said in a booming voice, “What do you want to know?” Rolling Thunder was one of the oldest families at this gathering, a group of “mercenaries” from Houston that were “hired” to help another house on the battlefield.

American Airline pilot Jeff Currie, aka Germanicus de Atlan, said, “I just came to fight.” He was a bit impatient with the courtly preliminaries. Such was the case with all large bureaucracies, one supposed. Yet, “Germanicus” has been coming for decades, and his son – now a strapping 6’2” – fought by his side in the brutal ravine battle.

At night, with a minimum of electricity and their vehicles all locked up – striving to relieve themselves of all things 21st century, there was a festive atmosphere filled by torch light, candle light, camp fire, and some dancing and revelry. Middle Age musicians filled the air. And food, much of it cooked over an open fire.

What else would one expect after a long day of full-contact war games?

