



Show Report HISTORICON

This year's Historicon was a particularly special one as the US wargames show celebrated its first quarter century.

Chris Scott was there to help push the boat out.



Bill Wehr and Boy Scout Troop 610 from Watsontown, Pennsylvania having a fabulous time shooting each other down in a Hal Dyson-run WWI dogfight game of Aerodrome. With 10 authentically recreated and painted model aircraft battling it out, it all looked chaotic but gradually the endless machinegun chatter emptied the skies. Bill, the Scout Committee Member, who has been bringing his troop to Historicon for five years, was an early victim. Hal's customised control panels with their cut-out individually-painted wing frames were a novel idea despite being "a pain in the butt to transport." Historicon allows free entry to any Boy Scout in uniform as part of their attempt to encourage younger people into the hobby. Photography by Richard Ellis.



Alongside the games, there was a giant sports hall that trader-managers Monica and Jefferson Davis Hobbs told me held 91 traders catering for every aspect of wargaming and figure collecting. If you wanted it, and even if you didn't know it, you'd find it here. Photography by Richard Ellis.

Happy Birthday Historicon, and you certainly knew how to celebrate in style. The Historical Miniatures Gaming Society held its 25th Annual Main Convention in late July this year. A record 4,100+ flocked to the Pennsylvanian town of Lancaster and filled its hotels and motels for miles around. American shows are different to those held in Europe due to the immense distances people travel to play wargames - one player told me he did a 300 mile round trip every Wednesday for a game with his nearest wargamer. Conventions are events to which people go to play as well as shop; and play they do. The show opened at 10.00 a.m. Thursday but when photographer Richard Ellis and I arrived at the hotel about midday on Wednesday there were lots of games in full flow, and they were still at it when we left the bar around midnight.

Historicon is the world's leading wargames event and it lived up to its reputation with 583 participation games and no end of private battles taking place on almost every flat surface available. There were queues to book seats in each four-hour game and players were at their places on time as latecomers lost their place to the keen people hovering around the table hoping for a 'no-show'. It was very different to the UK, where those running games sometimes plead with passers-by to spend 30 minutes with them.

Historicon's theme was 'Ride to the Sound of the Guns', and called for

games and events based on the battles, skirmishes and various other actions of Napoleon's 1809 Austrian campaign and the Peninsular War 1807-14. Being an extremely popular era among gamers around the world, the theme allowed for a wide array of scenarios from the formal combat of the massed battalions of European armies to the desperate Spanish guerrilla ambushes modelled on the deeds of those famous riflemen, Sharpe and his chosen men.

Historicon was a truly international gathering with gamers and speakers coming from all over the world. I spoke to people from nearby Canada and Bermuda but also from Italy, Germany, Japan, Singapore, Australia and New Zealand. Notable internationally-known attendees from America included Duke Seifried, Dick Bryant, Pete Panzeri, Howard Whitehouse, Pat Condray, Jim Getz and Bob Pavlik and, from Great Britain, our esteemed editor Andrew Hubback, former rival editor Duncan Macfarlane, Phil Barker and of course new-Tennessean Richard Ellis and curmudgeonly Brit Chris Scott.

A few months ago (*MW April 2009*), I praised the Penarth club for their two lectures so I was somewhat overwhelmed by the number and quality of speakers gathered together by Convention Director Bob Giglio under the auspices of the HMGS War College. Among the names of the authors, historians, hobbyists, rule writers, figure designers, artists, academics and actors were Scott

Bowden of Military History Press, Rene Chartrand and First Sergeant Matthew Eversmann upon whose heroic actions the film *Black Hawk Down* was based. There were 39 lectures/seminars advertised although I was disappointed that military artist Keith Rocco didn't turn up to honour his commitment.

The number and variety of traders' stalls was staggering as was the quality of figures and accessories they offered. OK, the 54mm toy soldier stands lacked the older elements seen at the Royal National Hotel shows in Russell Square but the variety of wares in all scales was mind-blowing. Oh how I wanted the 15mm Alamo, whilst the DVD stall made me envious with their copies of those 1940s films like *Fredericus* telling the stories of Frederick the Great's victories with thousands of German soldier extras, the new CGI dogfights of *The Red Baron* and the Russian or Japanese naval epics *Admiral* and *Yamato*. It was a great pity these disks won't play on European systems otherwise I'd have spent a fortune. One interesting stand belonged to Field of Glory Miniatures - lead players in the plastic 28mm revolution. With a show price of £15 for 30 foot or 12 cavalry, they sold like the proverbial hot cakes. Tim Barry was demonstrating his CAD programme for virtual figure sculpting (creating a Roman head with the face of Marcus Pollo!) while Howard Whitehouse helped give away pre-release samples of their excellent new German Barbarians. Hopefully we'll receive



One of the famous guests appearing at the show was British actor Jason Salkey pictured here with Andrew Hubback and Gareth Marfarlane of *Miniature Wargames*. Jason played the ginger, bespectacled Harris, the scholarly rifleman in most of the *Sharpe* TV series. Not only did he meet and greet his seemingly endless line of fans but he gave two presentations: one an entertaining tour de force of witty anecdotes about his experiences while filming the series, and another featuring readings from *Recollections of Rifleman Harris*, the memoirs of the 95th veteran upon whom his character was based. Perhaps Salkey would like to host Sergeant Harper or even get a performance by 'Hagman the merry songster'? Photography by Richard Ellis.



In 1984, *Historicon* used the symbol of clasping hands as their logo, so it was only fitting for it to feature on their 25th anniversary cake. Bob Giglio and Duke Seifried, both driving forces of the event for years, cut the celebratory confectionary construction by Charm City Cakes and gave away 400 portions to attendees - and there was another out back for when they ran short. Photography by Richard Ellis.



The impressive recreation of the action at Burnside Bridge on the ACW battlefield of Antietam by John McConnell and John Wilk. This 28m game fought with Brother Against Brother rules and using Old Glory figures got every player fully involved as, to avoid the Union forces being pinned down, the gallant 68th Ohio crossed a shallow part of the river and then stormed up the bluffs into two dug-in Georgian regiments that held them. The rules needed special modifications to encompass river crossings and one player discovered to his chagrin he needed an NCO present in order to volley. Although under fire, his bridgehead section fell to ineffective, desultory shooting as their sergeant was back hurrying men through the water. Photography by Richard Ellis.



We've seen these excellent ready-painted, 90mm Schleich figures in the shops but at Historicon they were used to wargame. This game by Jamie Schempp and Joe Kapes may have been a kid's game but this dramatic and bloody HYW siege was not for the faint-hearted. Jamie teaches industrial arts (woodwork) in Parkesbury, PA and meticulously constructed the castle from jig-sawn willow and made the siege towers too. Joe told me it was real pleasure to see so many younger gamers having a great time without gamesmasters being precious about their figures. The mechanics are Lord Merlin's Rules of Engagement if you want to find them on the web. Photography by Richard Ellis.

some painted samples and a box of these figures for review when they become available in the UK. Also featured were period tournament games for the competitive and fantasy fun games for younger players, painting competitions, a raffle for a superb Battle of Aspern print, a huge bring and buy, various displays and exhibitions and even a film night. There were celebration dinners, official receptions and presentation ceremonies, most of which were open to everyone including a free-beer party. All this and an amazing selection of refreshments. The on-site food was good quality, had variety, and sold at reasonable prices - three thick slices of roast beef, severed with a roll and an open free salad bar for about £4, or an eat-as-much-as-can buffet breakfast of cereals, full fry-up, fresh fruit, toast and marmalade, plus bottomless orange juice, tea or coffee for £7.50. Lots to enjoy, rather than cellophane-wrapped, skimpy-filled sarnies or lukewarm pulp pasties we Brits endure for extortionate prices at our events.

Every hotel function room was full, especially Saturday when the entire world and his brother seemed to be immersed in a game, including the various tournament contests. I watched several WAB competition games managed by Scott Holder and Don Effinger who told me this was the 10th year they've been running. What was nice about the games was that players were always prepared to stop and chat about their figures or their tactics - again very unlike Britain. Games of all ilks in the US seem slower

and less intense with plenty of talking and a high degree of enthusiastic yelling! There were queues too for every Bring & Buy session. They operate along the lines of the Bristol Table Top Sale with owners hiring three hours of table space for \$20 (£15) to sell their redundant wares. Some items were viciously priced at £13 for a cavalrman while others were real bargains at £4 per cavalr figure with an almost identical paint job. I was sorely tempted but airlines are not enamoured with carrying extra lead.

I could, however, just drool over the beautiful figures in the painting competitions and, if I fancied lessons in how to use washes and inks, create shadows or paint faces or terrain, then there were master-classes being held in a giant marquee by the enormous swimming pool, near the massive outdoor cinema screen, within easy reach of the free golf buggies and course - get the picture?

If all this whets your appetite, then next year Historicon 2010 will be even



Well, I've not heard of the Battle of Farmington Moor, 1644 but that didn't stop Bob Moon from Florida putting on an exceptionally picturesque game based upon the Earl of Essex (Tony Schockey) trying to prevent King Charles I (Pete Burke) from reaching Oxford. It was the culmination of a five-year painting project involving Essex and Redoubt figures and Building Authority models. Nice to see old re-enactment mate Allen Hughes of San Diego commanding the royalist right even if I know he is a Hampden. The game was fought using Fire & Fury rules modified for the ECW and, yes, we did discuss the fences. Photography by Richard Ellis.



← Robert (in blue) and Ann Bowling doing brisk trade at their RLbps stand in the traders hall. RLbps are American importers of quality wargames miniatures and accessories - particularly Askari, Dazed, Jungle Rot and Pulp figures. They can be reached at bob@rlbps.com. Photography by Richard Ellis.

↓ Chris and Deborah FitzPatrick of Crocodile Games, Indianapolis, posing behind an impressive cased diorama of their fantasy figures built by Herb Gunt of H G Walls. Their products revolve around the mythology of ancient Egypt where swamp and river-dwelling crocodile warriors live side by side with humans and battle magical and mythical species for control of Crocodileopolis. Chris is the designer and sculptor while Deborah, who originally hails from Stoke, handles the business side, and both ran a huge game one evening featuring their wares and involving 20+ players. Photography by Richard Ellis.

easier to get to for foreign visitors. Based in a luxury hotel on the Baltimore waterfront, in the historic Inner Harbour, it will be bigger than usual and the planning is underway to make it a superb occasion. Themed around the Pike and Shot period, Bob Giglio is already inviting speakers and agreeing games. One gamemaster present will be the famous Duke Seifried who will be making this his retirement event. He and his team will be staging *Uncle Duke's Diamond Jubilee - End of an Era*, consisting of 12 games with his wonderful scenery and amazing figures as a last hurrah. Duke is now 75 and he told me, "I'd rather go out in a blaze of glory than a whimper of disappointment." One thing is certain - Historicon 2009 was fabulous and if you do go to Historicon Two-Oh One-Oh you will not be disappointed. Go on - you know you want to!



↑ Bringing up kids to enjoy playing wargames can't get much more fun than this. A fancy dress costume competition followed by a boys vs girls cowboys and Indians wargame. From left to right Tommy, Margaret and Anna Thomas, Hannah Kovel, Pete Panzeri III and Alex Kurival with HMGS President Pete Panzeri. The children then got down on the carpet and threw plastic balls with astonishing inaccuracy and lots of shouts at locomotives, wagon trains, forts and wigwam encampments full of armies of 54mm plastics. With parents looking on all dressed in cowboy hats and bandanas, it was loads of fun and destined to bring more and more children into the hobby. Photography by Richard Ellis.



↑ Chef J.W. Topper and manager Darlene Almodovar prepare to start carving the barbequed pig for lunchtime attendees. What a magnificent spread - a whole hog roast served in generous portions with mash, veggies and a variety of sauces for £6. How about emulating this at British shows and making lunch a bit special for all those who drive so far and spend so much? Photography by Richard Ellis.