

Master at Arms Addendum 1 – June 2005

Throwing spears for use in combat on the field - Darts

Small throwing spears were an extremely common feature of warfare in our period. The English referred to them as Darods, from which is derived the word 'Dart'. In general the heads of such weapons were around 2-3 times the size of an arrow head. The weapons were not very heavy at the head end and not intended to be thrown from a great distance. Two or three of these small spears can be held in one hand, sometimes even with the shield gripped with the same hand.

The wide variety of spear types in our period can cause confusion. I have already had one spear presented to me this season as a single-handed fighting spear which on reflection I would prefer to regard as a dart. A fighting weapon needs to have a reasonably sized head to make it truly effective in combat and a shaft thick enough that a sword or axe will not easily smash through it.

Of course in reality, a dart could be used for thrusting in battle, just as a fighting spear can be thrown to devastating effect at your enemy. However, for competitive combat, it falls upon the Master at Arms to draw artificial lines of specification, in order to provide as far as possible a safe and fair environment for all combatants.

Tests with a type of combat-safe throwing spear conducted at Fritton and Islip have satisfied the Missiles officer, the Military Training Officer and myself that, used correctly and after appropriate training, the type of dart specified below offers no more risk on the Regia battlefield than any other facsimile of a weapon that we employ.

The specification below allows us to begin using this vital weapon in the display clashes of our combats, adding fun, excitement and greater authenticity to those clashes both for ourselves and the public alike. It is hoped that as we develop this, Regia may be able to improve corporately upon this specification, for instance by arranging the production of a more authentic looking neoprene Dart head (this is already being looked into). The Master at Arms and Missiles Officer will be grateful for any ideas or assistance members may be able to offer on improving these weapons. **However it must be stressed that only methods that can be manufactured to a consistent specification will be entertained.**

The relevant officers will be developing an appropriate training and testing regime in the immediate future.

Master at Arms Specifications for Construction and Maintenance of Darts.

Since these weapons are likely to be picked up and thrown by persons other than the owner and maker all darts must be manufactured to the same specification, just as is the case with combat blunt arrows – no exceptions. No other type will be permitted for use on the battlefield display.

Darts must be constructed from Ramin dowells (22mm diameter). This is lighter than ash, and less expensive.

Darts must measure a minimum length of 5'6", and a maximum of 6'6".

All Darts must be headed with a standard archery blunt, until further notice.

Darts must be tapered, using a suitable plane or spoke shave, to provide the correct weighting and balancing. This will result in the first 12-18" being tapered to around 1cm to fit the archery blunt head, and the last half of the dart's length tapering to around 1.5cm.

All darts will be planed all over to remove evidence of the modern milling process by which the dowell is produced. All darts will be sanded to remove splinters.

Darts will be checked at muster by MAA assistants and deputies before every use.

It is recommended that Dart throwers have two or more of these weapons, and that they mark them somewhere on the shaft with their authentic name, initials or other individual system so that they may be identified after combat.

Tips on Manufacture

A dart of this specification takes only a few minutes to make.

I would recommend the use of a spoke shave, or a small block plane to taper the shaft. The latter are available from any hardware shop for around £5. This plane can also be used to rake and taper your fighting spear shaft, which I would recommend. Such planes can be held easily in one hand, allowing the other hand freedom to hold and rotate the shaft.

Note – a fighting spear, single or two-handed, may be tapered but the butt end must not be reduced to less than 2cm.

Simply shave off the excess timber, taking care to set the plane so that it does not bite deeply into the wood, but removes only small shavings. Continuously rotate the timber as you make long strokes along the length of the shaft, taking into account the sections in the specifications that require tapering. If in any doubt, ask the MAA who will be happy to advise.

NB: Do not taper the front too much. The rubber head should be a very tight fit, needing to be bashed on. If mounted correctly, there will be no need to glue the head to the shaft.
