



Show Report HISTORIC HISTORICON

The first Historicon at its new venue in Valley Forge was a triumphant success, as **Chris Scott** reports.





The queue forming for the opening of the Vendors Hall which had 61 traders spread over a vast area. Photography by Richard Ellis.

Historicon is sponsored by the Historical Miniatures Gaming Society and, while the *New York Times* described it as “the mother of all wargaming conventions”, certain moaners on the web said they did not like HMGS switching the venue away from Lancaster, Pennsylvania. They were proved wrong in a big way. The pilot show in Baltimore may have been problematical but the show in July managed by Convention Director Bob Giglio at the Valley Forge Convention Centre near Philadelphia, was a big hit with everyone I met. The biggest advantage of the new location was its close proximity to an airport, which meant a lot of gamers could fly in and then take the 45 minute shuttle bus to the hotel. Even for those who drove - and Richard Ellis and I made a 12 hour trip from Tennessee - it was well signposted, just off the turnpike, easy to find and had excellent free parking. And then the show itself surpassed all previous US wargames conventions I have visited.

Billed as the biggest historical miniature gaming convention ever staged, it was certainly larger and more all-pervasive than previous years and far bigger and busier than many of the big shows in the UK. Historicon has yet to beat Salute for numbers through the door but it is not very far behind. However, conventions in the USA are not primarily trade fairs. They have several aims, all of which are important and require balance to make a successful show, but *playing* with toy soldiers is the kingpin.

Of course, you can buy figures, terrain, books, rules, paints and all the other growing ranges of wargaming impedimenta, but dominating this is the organisers’ intention to give every attendee the chance to game under the best circumstances and in the best possible atmosphere. At Historicon 2010 (or ‘two-oh one-oh’

as it was called) this was done by a multitude of gamesmasters providing scenarios, tables, terrains, armies and umpires to provide a myriad of opportunities to get involved in playing.

Wargamers don’t just drop in for an hour or two - they stay for the whole



Traders Coordinator Monica Hobbs and Convention Director Bob Giglio take a well earned rest and sample the delights of the chocolate fountain at the Speakers’ Reception. Photography by Richard Ellis.



An overwhelming French assault goes in against a sparsely held British fortification in one of the Perrys’ games. Photography by Richard Ellis.

four day event at a big hotel where they are treated as delegates and encouraged to pick and mix activities to create their type of extended weekend. At Historicon, there was a wide programme of hobby-related activities to choose from including listening to a series of lectures, watching 'military' films/TV shows, making small-scale trips to local museums or battlefields, scouring the trade stands, joining in participation games, studying demo games, entering the playing and painting competitions or buying souvenir tee-shirts, key-rings or various other products of HMGS merchandising... then there is the plentifully stocked Flea Market or Bring & Buy.

The backbone of the event was more than 490 advertised participation games and several tournaments including DBA, DBM and FoG plus 96 tables set out with excellent WWII terrain for a *Flames of War*

competition. If that is not enough, tables in the main playing area and side rooms were often taken over for personally arranged games between individuals or clubs with a 'we'll fight it out at Historicon from midnight till dawn' approach. And some of these private games brought in some of the most attractive scenery. In fact, most of the terrain for all of the games was of an exhibition standard and put a lot of the stuff we see at our UK events to shame.

One of the highlights of the show was the 14 tables given over to veteran gamesmaster Duke Siefried who staged a monumental 'last hurrah!' to mark his retirement from hosting games (see sidebar). Duke and his A Team put on repeated games over these most spectacular terrains and gave anyone who wanted to experience an Uncle Duke game a chance to say goodbye to this amazing wargamer.

John Michael Priest's 13th Day of Glory. Using 1007 Conte, Armies in Plastic, BMC, Marx and Barzo 54mm figures, John and friends Peter & Greg Hogan, Bill DiGiulio, Terry Moss and David Ferguson recreate The Fall of the Alamo in a perfectly to scale model of the famous mission fort built by William Lee Priest. Players had a great deal of fun and their home-written rules were simple, fast and adaptable to almost any early 19th century scenario. Photography by Richard Ellis.

Another of the highlight attractions was the War College, a series of 72 lectures and seminars by authors, artists, rules and scenario designers and gaming and hobby VIPs. Leading figures such as Rene Chartrand and Dale Dye (military advisor to many American films) were supported by Brits Angus Konstam, John Stallard, Barry Hilton and Michael and Alan Perry (and myself) as well as veteran US wargamer Frank Chadwick and editor of *Armchair General* Dana Lombardy. I listened to quite a few

FEATURE GAME

It was hard to choose one game to feature for this report as there were so many with quality terrain and very playable rules systems, and which gave players lots of military challenges, decision choices and fun. However, the laurels of the show must go to Duke Seifried. For Historicon 2010 'Uncle' Duke and his A Team hosted 14 spectacular games to mark his retirement from being a gamesmaster due to age and ill health. Always a highlight of any convention, Duke's participation games drew visitors from across the States and Canada who played in one or more of his last huzzah extravaganza. Each of the 14 games was played over beautiful and dramatic terrain and using a variety of home-written and commercial rules including Mark Anderson of Wisconsin's rules and *Warhammer Ancient Battles*.

One of the most popular games was his Jolly Roger pirate game which had gamers role-playing and moving and fighting their own 25m ships in a Caribbean frenzy of skull-duggery and downright savagery to seize treasure hordes and safe havens from each other. What made this game outstanding was the simple but brilliant idea of doing away with the sea! Lots of 25m pirate ships manned by wonderfully painted crews were mounted on waist-high movement

stands, and the game was played on the chequered tile floor. This allowed a lot more movement than any table could offer and also meant floating islands could be included as well as

safe and hostile ports marking the edges of the playing area. Using Duke's *Jolly Roger* rules, each ship tried to out-sail and board or sink its rivals, avoid the Royal Navy, raid rich ports or find buried chests on the various threat-infested islands. The game was extremely popular with players of all ages and kept Duke and



What do I need to throw for my shore battery to blast that galleon out of the water? Photography by Richard Ellis..



his theme-dressed assistants running around adjudicating and throwing the odd curve ball; such as "One of your crew has got pox - what do you do about it?" A series of resulting actions, dependent upon the player's answer, meant players had to think outside the box as well as fight their campaign. Duke told me it was the most demanding of all his games as they tried to meet the needs of players for adventure, imagination and detailed storyline for each element.

The other games, too, were magnificent as the photos will show. For old times' sake, Jim Getz umpired a Napoleonettes game and I know the Fire & Sword in the Sudan Game was hard fought several times with it often coming down to the proverbial 'one man and a dog' slogging it out! 'Uncle Duke's Diamond Jubilee' was one of those iconic moments in the history of wargaming and, thankfully, his doctor allowed him to stage this last massive show. At the official HMGS dinner, the great showman was honoured by all and, dressed as Abraham Lincoln, he made the following speech (edited) which cleverly parodied the Gettysburg Address.

Three score and fifteen years ago my Father brought forth a new Son - conceived with a love of lead soldiers and dedicated to the proposition that all Gamers must uphold The Grand

Obsession. Now we are met here in a place of many battlefields - testing whether this obsession with tin soldiers so conceived and dedicated can long endure. Yet here we are engaged once again, year after year, following our favourite

pursuit. It is altogether fitting and proper that I should take my leave here in this place, this hallowed place, Valley Forge.

HMGS has given me this rare opportunity to ride off into the sunset



Romans and Carthaginians face off ready to engage in another epic struggle for Mediterranean dominance. Photography by Richard Ellis..

of these inputs and it was both an interesting and valuable aspect of the weekend. I know Crusade at Penarth have two 'resident speakers', but this is something other UK shows could investigate as a crowd puller.

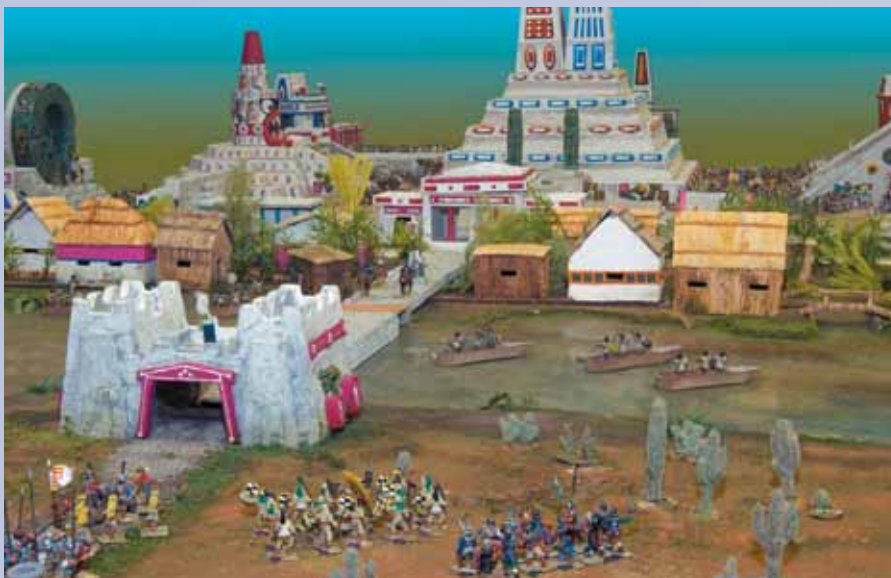
The size of the venue meant there was plenty of room to walk round the tables and nearly 4,000 gamers moved about the playing and trading areas without a crush. Jeff and Monica Hobbs, the Traders Co-ordinators, told me they had 61 trade stands with each merchant having about 20 feet of display space, although some had treble that. Their newest innovation was to bring in specialist military artists such as Mark Churms to sell his prints, original drawings and oil paintings. Wonderful displays or what! The variety of 'stuff' available was incredible, ranging from figures of many manufacturers in all sizes and periods, to scratch-built 25mm

models of famous fortifications. There were all manner of terrain pieces, plastic order counters and explosion-markers, obscure military DVDs, hot-wire tools, paint guns, dustbins of pre-cut bases, must-have commemorative T-shirts, books covering all periods and even beautifully crafted oak wargames tables which can convert to dining tables if desired. My old friend Phil Nickson of the Swindon Irregulars was like a kid in Santa's storehouse and came home with a laden suitcase despite his favourite figure-maker forgetting to pack his pack-mules.

One cannot write a report on Historicon without a mention of the HMGS Annual Awards. Naturally, Duke Seifried was the centre of attention receiving a Lifetime Achievement Award and presenting a Gamesmaster of the Year Trophy named in his honour. Among the other awards presented were

trophies for the Best New Miniatures Range, which went to the Perry twins, and Barry Hilton, of *Under the Lily Banners*, picked one up for Best Themed Game.

As to support services... the hotel rooms were comfortable, spacious and compared favourably with most good hotels in the UK (and were much cheaper) and the buffet breakfasts were superb (eat-as-much-as-you-like with unlimited juice and coffee was \$15 - £10.50) with a chef constantly knocking out fried or scrambled eggs or omelettes with any type of filling. Beer was expensive (\$6 per half litre) but there were several bars, all running happy hours, and one providing free chicken wings, nachos and salad; there was even an all-night disco for the younger element (20s to 30s, that is). What was a disappointment was the day-time concession food. Gone were the massive beef or hog



Part of the hotel given over to Duke Seifried's Diamond Jubilee games. . Photography by Richard Ellis..

in the expected Duke blaze of glory. I am most appreciative for the privilege of offering you (this year of 2010) 'Uncle Duke's Diamond Jubilee'... to mark the end of my era. I wish for you to remember me as strong and vibrant. This may not last much longer as I am taken with a terminal disease with questionable time remaining. I would prefer not to be seen in a deteriorated state so I leave you at the top of my game.

I want to thank all of you: my friends, colleagues, participants, gamers and

The conquistadors' desire for gold leads them to assault an Aztec city. Photography by Richard Ellis.



One of several games run by John Stallard and Alan and Michael Perry using Blackpowder rules to fight Napoleonic conflicts. Photography by Richard Ellis.

roasts and crispy fresh salads of Lancaster, and in their stead was an array of mass-produced, chips-with-everything burgers, dogs and deep-fried lumps of who knows what! I hope that next year the hotel can up its game considerably in this area.

However, overall Historicon 2010 was a fabulous four-day experience and one that I hope many more Brits will have in future years. I cannot cover everything on offer in such a show report but I do hope this article and Richard's pictures have given you a flavour of what it was like and encourage you to save up and take the plunge and go. It may sound like jargon, but US conventions try to give everyone a 'quality



Another of Duke's famous participation games. A Hittite army besiege the walls of Babylon - hanging gardens to the right.. Photography by Richard Ellis..

especially my patient wife, Annette - who have followed my adventures through these many years. It has been my privilege and honour to present my extravaganzas for your entertainment. I have gotten to know most of you personally and quite a few have become good friends - sharing our grand obsession proudly

The world will little note, nor long



Duke explaining to the garrison commander of a Caribbean island and the captain of a raiding pirate ship that there's an outbreak of plague in the town and wanting to know what they're going to do about it!. Photography by Richard Ellis..



experience' and at Valley Forge they certainly did. Bob Giglio said, "The convention generally went off without a hitch in the nice large venue, with plenty of parking, well-working A/C, nice lighting, and decent food, so much so that the vast majority of comments have been very positive, especially for a first time in a new venue. That bodes very well for 'Historical Miniature Gaming's Biggest Summer Vacation' having found a new home at Valley Forge." We differ on the food!



➔ The Perry twins with their Historicon Trophy for the year's Best New Range of Historical Miniatures, presented by Awards Coordinator Christin Sciuilli. Perry Miniatures is a relatively new company run by well-known 28mm sculptors Alan and Michael Perry. Former sculptors of Foundry, the Perry brothers' day job is with Games Workshop. Photography by Richard Ellis.

remember what I say here - but hopefully you will not forget my work as I pass from the scene. Perhaps I have established a level of gaming you may use to build on for the future. During life, the journey is more important than the destination? ...

...God Bless You, my friends. You have made my journey in The Grand Obsession a trek of camaraderie and warm friendships. I can't adequately express how moved I am to be the recipient of this unique Lifetime Achievement Award. Having a yearly award named after you is a singular honour. I thank you and HMGS for the honour of this distinctive recognition.

Unaccustomed as I am to public speaking, I leave you with this: Thanks for the memories.

Duke's intention was "to go out with a big bang!" What else would you expect from such doyen of the hobby? The wargaming world will be greatly impoverished by the absence of Duke and his games from its shows.



➔ Dressed as Lincoln, the irrepresible Duke Seifried receives his Lifetime's Achievement Award from master-wargamer Frank Chadwick. Photography by Richard Ellis