

School of Historical Defence Arts

(SHDA)

Who We Are

The School of Historical Defence Arts (SHDA) is a martial arts school focusing on the application of Historical European Martial Arts (HEMA) for the purposes of practical application in the gaining of efficiency in combat. This is not merely following the instructions found in the manuals as the plays depict but applying this to more practical situations against some sort of antagonist.

The school, as part of the process of learning and understanding the manuals, undertakes in-depth investigations of period manuals taking into account not only their martial applications but also those aspects of courtesy which are appropriate to the period and situation. This investigation focussed on the practical application of the information found in the manuals to combative situations, but taking into account those other aspects significant to the study and also to the martial art. While the manuals will primarily be the focus of the teachers, students will be encouraged to have some interest in the manuals and involve themselves in similar study.

Aim/Purpose

The aim and purpose of SHDA is to teach and study HEMA in a modern structure, in order to develop and teach technical fencing based on historical techniques, with possibility of modern application in a competitive format for those who are interested in it.

Structure

The SHDA will begin as a structured study group which will then move on to a school format with the focus on the learning and application of HEMA. Regardless of the overall structure at the time, this will be a rigid structure with defined teachers and students and goals to achieve for each training session. The study group will move to a school format once the SHDA gains the numbers to justify such a change. In any case the study group will still be very much structured.

Governing Body

The School for Historical Defence Arts (SHDA) is governed by a council of three individuals being the School Head and the two most senior trainers. This governing body makes the decisions for the running of the school and any associated items. Other members of the school may register concerns with any one of the three members of the council to be brought up in a meeting.

In general meetings will be open to all members of the school unless some sensitive matter needs to be discussed in the council. If this is the case then the council will hold a closed meeting with only members of the council present. Only paid members are able to attend open meetings. The governing body will meet at least once a month, and more frequently if required.

Membership

There are three classes of membership in the SHDA, Provisional, Associate and Full. The Provisional class of membership is available to new students for their first lesson, after this they will be expected to pay as normal and take on Full membership status.

The Associate member is a member of another swordsmanship organisation who is participating in specific activities of the SHDA such as inter-school training. This will be determined on a case-by-case basis. Evidence is required in some form of their membership to the other organisation. Such associations will be organised by the School Head or some delegated individual.

The Full member is a member who has completed his or her payment for membership in the School and who participates in all of the activities of the SHDA. Such membership status is only maintained through regular payment of the dues of membership. The membership dues also cover the training fees for that period.

All members have the right to a safe training environment which will be supplied by the school at such training sessions. All members have the right to be trained by trainers who are suitably experienced and trained in their field of study. All members have the right to bring concerns up with a member of the governing council who will decide if such a concern can be immediately fixed or will need to be attended to at a meeting of the council. Full members have the right to attend open meetings of the governing council.

Rankings

The foundation of the ranking system is based upon a simple system where authority does exist. This system is expressed as such, School Head, Trainer, Marshal and Student. The School Head has final authority in all matters. The Trainer has authority over the training session and the safety thereof, such an individual is also a qualified Marshal. The student is a person who is receiving training from a Trainer and has no authority regardless of their Study Rank. The Marshal is an individual who has been duly authorised in aspects of safety found in the SHDA and has authority only in matters of safety. This role will be detailed below.

Study Rank

The primary ranking system, also known as a Study Rank, which is present in the School of Historical Defence Arts is separate from the membership system presented above and is connected only to a course of study and demonstration of skill. This ranking system will be more useful for the SHDA when it is run in a more school-like manner than as a study group however such ranks will be established be utilised from its beginning. The ranking system is used only as an expression of the current level of study of a member and for presentation of increasing skill levels. This ranking system does not confer any additional authority over lower ranked individuals.

The Study Rank is useful for examination of students and the presentation of increasing skill levels. This system of ranking and the method of examination have an historical base founded on the examinations of the London Masters of Defence. There are six ranks for the student to progress through.

Novice

The first rank is Novice. This is the admission rank where all students of the SHDA will start. No student will be accepted at the rank of Novice without successful completion of the Induction. Only Full members will be able to participate in the ranking system and such examinations which are included. Once the Novice has successfully navigated the Single Rapier Beginner's course they may sit the examination for the rank of Apprentice.

Apprentice

The rank of Apprentice is actually the first official rank. At this level the student will be able to engage in Free-play with other students. At this rank the student will have a basic idea about the period forms and practices. The Apprentice will continue their study in the Advanced Course of Single Rapier until such time that it is completed and they are prepared to sit the examination for the rank of Scholar.

Scholar

The Scholar has completed his study of the rapier and thus it is time for them to engage in the study of off-hand devices which accompany the rapier. These devices and ones like them will complete the study of the rapier and open avenues to further study in the use of the rapier. At this rank the student should have an understanding of period practices and approaches to combat. Once this study has been completed the student can sit the examination for Free Scholar.

Free Scholar

The rank of Free Scholar is where it is expected that the student will embark on the research of period manuals and the forms associated with them. At this rank the student should be undertaking some form of research into the manuals of the Renaissance period. It is also at this rank that the student should also look at the aspects of teaching and consider "apprenticing" to one of the Trainers in order to learn how to teach. Once the student feels that they are suitably trained they should sit the examination for Provost.

Provost

The Provost is a primary teacher and is involved in the investigation of period manuals and methods of teaching the systems found therein. A Provost should be a full-time Trainer in some capacity within the SHDA and should be assembling lessons and lesson plans to teach other students, or be in a position where they are learning to be a Trainer. A Provost should be actively investigating the period manuals and practices presented and demonstrating such knowledge in lessons presented. Once the Provost is suitably experienced and knowledgeable they may choose to apply for the rank of Master.

Master

In short a Master of SHDA is a School Head and there will only be one Master for each individual school of the SHDA. This individual has years of experience in training and researching period materials and multiple weapon forms.

Additional Merit

There may be included at certain ranks and for such performance, additional merit awarded for extensive performance and research of particular weapon forms. These will be given to the student as an addition to their current rank. These

additional merits are awarded for weapon forms which are not included in the standard curriculum.

Recognition of Prior Knowledge

Where it is demonstrated, a student may be acknowledged for previous experience in a weapon form and thus have their rank increased accordingly. This will be done on a case-by-case basis and firm evidence in the form of a physical demonstration will have to be made, along with any other evidence of a non-practical sense that the student may wish to present. This experience needs to demonstrate a fit with the core syllabus of the SHDA. Some additional lessons may be required of the student before an increase in rank is possible.

Prizes

The method of examination for the Study Ranks is by prizes as were played by the London Masters of Defence in the sixteenth century. This is designed to give a practical demonstration of the knowledge which the candidate has learnt over their period of study. It is only through these examinations that a student may increase their Study Rank this is the final step of the examination for each rank.

For all ranks an examination based on knowledge and demonstrated skill is required to ensure that the candidate has gained the knowledge associated with the rank also. This is most important for those aspiring to gain the Provost rank and become a Trainer. A Prize will not be allowed to be played until the candidate has successfully completed the other examination criteria found in.

The first examination for the rank of Scholar is a simple demonstration of the basic skills which have been learnt during the Beginner's Course in Single Rapier in the form of a prize played against those of the aspiring rank or above; obviously, the higher the rank the more that will be expected during the Prize and the harder that the examiners will test. These examinations will be conducted in a fashion that the result of the pass is less important than the manner in which the pass was conducted.

Conduct of Prizes

Prizes will be announced to the SHDA membership not less than one calendar month before the examination is to take place. Prizes must be sponsored by the student's Trainer and approved by the School Head. Only a Trainer or the School Head may recommend a student play a Prize. A student may bring the skill level of a fellow student to the attention of a Trainer in order that the student may be asked to play a Prize. The acceptance of playing the Prize is up to the student nominated.

On the day of the Prize an area will be delineated for the playing of the Prize. This area should be checked by a Marshal, the sponsor and the candidate for the Prize. The School Head must be present at the Prize for the Prize to be official. Any Student or Trainer with a rank equal or above the rank aspired to may choose to participate in the Prize. Only Full members of the SHDA will participate in the Prize, unless individually invited by the School Head.

Each weapon form will be played to three good blows of edge or point from either examiner or candidate. When a hit is acknowledged the examiner and the candidate will re-set for the next pass. An examiner may request an additional pass should they feel it necessary.

The purpose of the examination is not to win the passes but for the candidate to demonstrate skill with the weapon forms for that particular Prize. Once all of the

passes have been completed by all of the examiners, the examiners will confer about the candidate away from the candidate's hearing. The decision of the examiners will be based upon the requirements of the syllabus and the overall knowledge of the weapon system. Should a majority of the examiners agree that the candidate has attained the rank then they will be presented with a suitable acclamation of their new rank. The Prize is the method of evaluation designed for the candidate to demonstrate their skill in a more practical setting.

Weapon Forms

Only those forms which can be clearly documented will be used in a Prize. Documentation for a form must come from a Renaissance period source. Only those weapons which are used and taught within the SHDA will be used in a Prize. While limited in the range of weapons to begin with the SHDA will be expanding into other weapon forms and periods. The final determination for any weapon form not standard in the SHDA is the School Head's prerogative.

SHDA Weapon Forms

The primary weapon for the School of Historical Defence Arts is the rapier and its companions. This weapon and its companions, along with any other weapons that the SHDA should decide to include, will have a clear historical basis found in primary documentation found in period in which the weapon system was primarily used. These weapons must be predominantly civilian based, with a focus on single-combat rather than mass battle scenarios.

The first syllabus presented is with regard to the primary weapon form being the rapier. This syllabus is in a generic form, but based upon the principles of the period masters. This forms a foundation in period principles of rapier combat from which students are encouraged to expand into the works of period masters.

Only once a student has navigated the study of the single rapier will they be able to move on to its companion implements and then on to other weapon forms. The student should also be at the start of examining period works which feature the use of the rapier after, and even before, the completion of this course. There are checks within the syllabus in order to monitor the progress of students.

Standards

Combat

There are four levels of combat within the SHDA each with its different approach and requirements. It is important to understand each level of combat in order to understand each level's safety requirements. It will be noted that the higher levels tend to blur into one another but they are still distinct.

The first level is Training. This is not actually free combat at all these are drills and controlled elements described by the Trainer for the training of students. These will be supervised at all times by the Trainer and students are expected to conform to the elements which the Trainer has put in place. For this level light armour is sufficient.

The second level is Free-play. This is a light form of combat where the speed is not up to its full capacity and the focus is more on the skills presented and demonstrated in a bouting environment rather than any attempt to win the combat. To use a loose term this could be seen to be done at about half the full combat

speed. This form of combat will be supervised by at least one Trainer at the least. Sparring armour is recommended.

The third level is Sparring. This is a more intense form of combat than found in the previous level. The idea in this form is to strike without being struck. While there should be a focus on skills during this combat, there is also an increased emphasis on the results of the combat as well. This could be seen loosely as three-quarter speed combat. This form of combat should be supervised by a Marshal at the least. Sparring armour is required.

The final level is Tournament. This form of combat is official competition level. It is the combat done at full speed and intensity. In this form of combat it is the result which is the primary concern for the combat, but the combatant should also be considerate of how he gets to this result. This is full-speed with full intensity combat, as close to the real thing as the standards will allow. This combat will be supervised by at least one Marshal with a preference for two if possible. Sparring armour is required and if percussive cuts are to be used, Cut and Thrust armour is required.

Matters of combat are discussed in detail in the **SHDA Combat Standards**. Questions with regard to combat should be researched here, if a sufficient answer is not found in these standards the question can then be referred to a Trainer or the School Head. All combat within the SHDA is designed to emulate the combat of the associated period as closely as possible within the restrictions of these safety standards.

Armour and Weapons

Armour and Weapons standards can be found in the SHDA Combat Standards. In brief description these weapons and armour have been selected in order to increase the level of safety for members of the SHDA. These in no way can replace an individual's common sense in their approach to safety.

The weapons themselves by choice are modern reproductions of weapons of the appropriate period which contain characteristics which make them appropriate to the combat they are involved in. Such weapons for use should be presented to a Marshal, Trainer or the School Head before engaging in any form of combat within the SHDA.

The armour is designed to prevent major injury in the case of a failure in some part on the part of the combatant and/or the weapon. Such armour has been selected to be appropriate for the different levels of combat which have been described above. The presence of this armour in no way should reduce the level of care taken by the wielder of the weapon in its use. Armour should also be presented to a Marshal, Trainer or the School Head before use.

Officers

There are various officers within the SHDA which hold various positions and perform various functions. The three which are of concern to the student or prospective student of SHDA are the School Head, Trainer, and Marshal. Each of these serves a particular function within the school.

School Head

The School Head is the one who oversees the entire school and is the final arbiter for all disputes within the school. He may perform the duties of both Trainer and Marshal if it is required or he so desires. This is the leader and head of the

school and holds the rank of Master within the SHDA. He has the top rank in all instances.

Trainer

The Trainer is an individual whose primary role is to oversee and teach students within the SHDA. This individual holds the rank of Provost within the SHDA and is also a qualified Marshal. This individual answers to the School Head and no other. The two most senior Trainers within the school along with the School Head form the governing council of the SHDA.

In order to become a Trainer a student must first hold the Study Rank of Provost. The student must then undergo a period of apprenticeship to a Trainer in order to learn the skills in order to become a Trainer. The period of apprenticeship to the Trainer will depend on the skills of the student in order to complete the tasks that the Trainer sets.

Marshal

The Marshal is a safety officer. The Marshal will inspect weapons and armour to ensure that they are suitable for combat within the SHDA and will oversee combat during Free-play, sparring and tournament combat. A Trainer may be a Marshal, but a Marshal may or may not be a Trainer.

A student who wishes to become a Marshal must become intimately familiar with all of the standards of the SHDA, understand them and know how to apply them to all forms of combat. In order to gain the position of Marshal the student must undergo an apprenticeship to a Trainer in order to learn the skills to become a Marshal. The period of apprenticeship will depend on the skills of the student and their ability to fulfil the tasks set by the Trainer. A student must hold at least the rank of Free Scholar before being eligible to study as a Marshal.

One of the tasks will be to sit an authorisation examination in which the candidate will be expected to demonstrate a full knowledge of the combat standards and the skills of a Marshal in both inspection and field marshalling. The Trainer and School Head will sit as examiners for this authorisation process. In the earlier parts of the SHDA only the senior Trainers and School Head will be authorised for this role.

Contact:

You can contact the SHDA at shdacontact@gmail.com