

# WARGAMING BOSWORTH

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On 22 August 1485, the largest army within memory assembled under the royal standard of the King of England, Richard III. Nearby, the smaller army of a young Welsh adventurer, Henry Tudor, prepared to do battle with the king. The results of this battle would change English history forever. In fact, some historians would later assert that this battle signaled the end of the Middle Ages (Rowse 223). For on this bloody day, the smaller Tudor army would defeat and kill King Richard III, bringing an end to the Plantagenet dynasty and the rule of the House of York. According to various chroniclers, on a small hillock (known today as “Crown Hill”) overlooking the field of his victory Tudor’s allies from the house of Stanley<sup>1</sup> would place Richard’s crown on Henry’s head and proclaim him to be King Henry VII (Bennett 121, 187n).

This result was hardly a foregone conclusion. On the morning of the battle, it would certainly have been difficult to find many that would wager on behalf of young Tudor. Unlike the battle-tested King Richard III, who led a division of his older brother’s army in combat while yet a teenager, Bosworth was Henry Tudor’s first battle. Further, his small force of French and Scottish veterans, supplemented by English and Welsh recruits, was outnumbered by the royal host. Despite the size of his army, however, King Richard III suffered from problems of his own. The king’s main difficulty seems to have been loyalty, or rather a lack of it. While the royal army was larger than Tudor’s, it was smaller than the combined strength of Lord Stanley’s force and Tudor’s army. Stanley, nominally part of Richard’s army, was Henry Tudor’s step-father and his loyalty was indeed questionable at best. Additionally, Henry Percy, Earl of Northumberland, envied the king’s popularity in the north of the River Trent, the traditional power base of the Percy family. It would be an extremely difficult fight for both.<sup>2</sup>

Perhaps the best way to study history is to re-live it. For my final project in pursuit of my Master of Arts degree, I designed a “conflict simulation” (a.k.a. “board war game” or simply “war game”) of the battle entitled *Bosworth, 1485: A Tactical-Level Simulation of the Battle of Bosworth*. The scale for the simulation map is one hexagon (hex) equals approximately 200 meters. Each turn represents 15 minutes of real time and each unit “strength point” on the playing pieces represents

approximately 100 soldiers. The goal for the simulation is not to force players to undertake the historical courses of action, but rather to allow players freedom of action within the limits of those options that were available to their medieval counterparts. In the war game, you are in the place of King Richard III or Henry Tudor. As King Richard III, can you defeat the army of this young upstart, retain the crown and change history? Or will you too go down to bitter defeat, your name and reputation dragged through the mud of Tudor propaganda? As Henry Tudor, can you overcome the numbers of the royal host, making your place in history as King Henry VII? Or will you be vanquished on the field of battle, destined to be merely an inconsequential footnote on the pages of history?

As Society members are certainly aware, Bosworth is a battle worth studying. While the English may boast that their isle has not been successfully invaded by a foreign army since 1066, the composition of Henry Tudor’s army refutes this assertion. This battle brought a cataclysmic end to the reign of King Richard III, the Plantagenet dynasty and the fortunes of the House of York. Simultaneously, the consequences of Bosworth Field elevated a relatively obscure claimant to the throne, and ultimately produced the powerful Tudor dynasty and Henry VII’s more famous successors: King Henry VIII and Queen Elizabeth I. There are tactical-level simulations of earlier English victories at Crécy and Agincourt (perhaps the best were designed by Rob Markham) and strategic/political simulations of the Wars of the Roses (such as Andrew McNeil’s *Kingmaker*), but there are none that simulate this crucial struggle.

As with all aspects of the short reign of King Richard III, the Battle of Bosworth is laden with controversy. It is perhaps the most poorly documented battle of the period. The site of the battlefield, the location and disposition of the forces involved, the location and direction of King Richard’s famous charge, and even the battlefield topography are all subject to the most heated of debates. An analysis of the battle is thus reduced to probabilities, rather than certainties.

The primary points of contention for the battlefield can be summarized as follows:

- Where was the location of the marsh spoken about by the chroniclers?

## Wargaming Bosworth

- Where exactly was the battle fought?
- Where did King Richard III's charge culminate, and how many of his men participated?
- Where is "Sandeford," said to be the place of King Richard's death?
- Where did the "battle of the vanguards" between the Earl of Oxford and the Duke of Norfolk occur?
- Where were the Stanleys (Thomas Lord Stanley, and Sir William Stanley) located during the battle?
- Was the Earl of Northumberland's behavior on the battlefield treasonous to the king?
- Was King Richard III's charge a reasonable maneuver, or the last desperate act of a madman?

Answering these questions is based on what is most likely, rather than what is certainly known. As Richard III's biographer Charles Ross notes: "The main problem arises from the fact that no reliable and first-hand account of the engagement was ever written, or, at any rate has survived" (216).

The problems are in the details, as accounts *generally* agree on the overall course of the battle. The battle may be quickly summarized as follows. On the night of 21 August 1485, the two armies were not far apart from each other. Richard's army encamped atop Ambion Hill and its environs, while tradition locates the Tudor army at White Moors, a distance of two kilometers to the southwest. Thomas Lord Stanley, nominally part of the royal host, stood off apart from both armies avoiding a show of overt support for the Tudor cause. Sir William Stanley also stood apart from the Tudor army with a force distinct from that of his brother. Because of its small size, on the morning of 22 August 1485, the Tudor army formed a single division or "battle." With the Earl of Oxford in command, Tudor's army marched in an easterly direction. Then, encountering a marsh, Oxford changed directions and wheeled to the north and then northeast to skirt it. Oxford fought against Richard III's vanguard, commanded by the Duke of Norfolk. This fight ("the battle of the vanguards") was generally a stalemate, but Oxford seemed to be gaining the upper hand. At some point during the melee, Norfolk was killed.

While the fight between Oxford and Norfolk raged, some of Richard's command located Henry Tudor's personal standard. Tudor was separated from Oxford's force, and guarded by only a small contingent. With the tide turning against Norfolk's vanguard, the king decided upon quick and decisive action. In what has poetically been termed "the

swan-song of medieval English chivalry," Richard led a mounted charge, variously estimated at between two hundred and one thousand strong, around one of the flanks of his vanguard seeking to slay the pretender and thus end the battle. In the first clash of arms, the king personally slew William Brandon, Tudor's standard bearer. Richard must have been only a few feet from piercing the very heart of the rebel host. Richard knocked down Sir John Cheney, who probably blocked the way to Henry Tudor himself. Yet, the small band surrounding Tudor fought resolutely, and Tudor himself fought more stoutly than his supporters thought likely.

As the issue hung in the balance, Sir William Stanley, finally committed his force into the melee. Soon, the Stanleyites overwhelmed Richard III and his knights. Some escaped, but many were killed, including King Richard III himself. The king is commended in the accounts, even by later Tudor historians, for fighting bravely to the very last. In any case, however, once it became clear that the king was dead, the battle was essentially over, although many of Richard's supporters may have been killed in the rout that followed the king's death. The consensus is that neither Lord Stanley nor the Earl of Northumberland engaged in the fight. The end state was that King Richard III was killed, along with many of his chief supporters including the Duke of Norfolk and Sir Robert Brackenbury, while Henry Tudor was hailed as England's king.

Recent scholarship on the location of the battlefield has primarily pitted Peter J. Foss (and to a somewhat lesser degree, Michael Bennett) against the late D. T. Williams, who sharply disagree as to the location of key terrain features associated with the battle, as well as where the battle actually took place. A recent (1999) work, Christopher Gravett's *Bosworth 1485: Last Charge of the Plantagenets*, provides an excellent and well-written account and suggests two alternate "Sandeford" locations, both of which are located in the vicinity of where streams cross Fenn Lanes.

### The Simulation

So, how does one reduce this all this debate and controversy into a simulation of history? There are several main components in any battle. These include weather, terrain, the soldiers involved (to include weapons, equipment, training and morale) and leadership quality. At Bosworth, the weather is the least controversial aspect. As there is no discussion of any inclement weather, I concluded that 22 August 1485 was a typical late summer day. For

simulation purposes, the most relevant factor is wind direction.

An official at the UK Meteorological Office's Climate Services Unit confirmed that the prevailing wind direction for the Bosworth area is from the southwest (Stewart). Given the predominance and reliance upon the longbow, having the wind to ones' back may provide a significant tactical advantage. Foss sums up: "In a single manoeuvre Oxford was able to get a south-westerly (prevailing) wind on his side for this archers, to avoid direct sunlight from the south-east, (and) to use the marsh as a protection on his right" (45).

The basics of the terrain are simple. The simulation map represents parts of the parishes of Sutton Cheney, Shenton, Dadlington and Stoke Golding in which the battle was fought. The area is south of modern day Market Bosworth, the nearest large town, and west of the city of Leicester. A map area covering just over six square kilometers seemed sufficient. A hexagonal grid is superimposed on the map to regulate play. Bosworth is on the north side of the map, and the towns of Dadlington and Stoke Golding are on the south side of the map.

### The Marsh

Yet how does one reach consensus given the widely divergent views on the location of the battle itself? The terrain proved to be most difficult to resolve, particularly with respect to the location of the marsh that existed in 1485. As there truly is no clear consensus as to the marsh's location, I printed a map overlay with the three basic alternatives for the Marsh's placement and stipulated that this must be agreed upon prior to commencing game setup.

The three alternatives for the Marsh are as follows:

- Option 1: This is the location put forward by D. T. Williams and favored by the Bosworth Battlefield Center.
- Option 2: This is the location put forward by Peter J. Foss based on a reassessment of the evidence, particularly soil conditions and the contemporary use and meaning of what Foss argues is the original name of the battle site: "Redemore."
- Option 3: This is the alternate location suggested recently (1999) by Christopher Gravett.

- I personally prefer Option 2, but acknowledge that the location is far from certain and is the subject of heated disagreement. I suggest that each of the locations be experimented with, enabling players to draw their own conclusions. If players cannot agree on the location of the Marsh for the simulation to be played, the marsh location chosen must be done randomly. Where one locates the marsh tends to drive where one places the location of "Sandeford" (the culmination of King Richard's charge) and "Redemore" (the location of the "battle of the vanguards") so no special treatment for these locations was given in the game.

### Loyalty and Treachery

Perhaps *the* most intriguing thing about this battle is the subject of Loyalty. Put another way, who would prove himself loyal, and who would prove a traitor? King Richard III is said to have gone down fighting, yelling: "Treason, Treason!!!" One of the men he most depended upon, the Earl of Northumberland, did not engage in the battle. Was the king shouting at Northumberland, or was he shouting at Lord Stanley, his Great Chamberlain (and stepfather to Henry Tudor) or Sir William Stanley, whom the king had declared a traitor a week before. If Northumberland were secretly in league with Tudor, why did Tudor have Northumberland imprisoned in the Tower of London following the battle? Henry Tudor, for his parts, seems to be unsure of his where his stepfather's loyalties stood (Lord Stanley had remained loyal to King Richard during the Rebellion of 1483, during which Tudor had attempted to



*Fig. 1. "Sandeford" according to Foss, taken from vicinity .SP 391985. Photograph by author, June 1999.*

## Wargaming Bosworth

invade near Southhampton). In the event, of the three, only Sir William Stanley's force engaged in the battle. These loyalty issues, of course, continue to be the subject of hot debate.

A rule that provides a feel for the uncertain loyalties of the period in general, and those of the Stanleys and the Earl of Northumberland in particular, is clearly a must for any attempt to simulate Bosworth. In the game, the the Richard III player sets up Northumberland's forces and the Henry Tudor player sets up the forces of both Stanleys within certain limitations. Northumberland and his forces begin the simulation as "Neutral/ Pro-Richard III." Thomas, Lord Stanley and Sir William Stanley and their respective forces begin the game as "Neutral/ Pro-Tudor." Until such time as any of these forces join one side or another, they may not be moved following the initial setup.

During the course of the simulation, Northumberland and the Stanleys may be activated individually, and join the side that obtained a favorable result on the Neutral Activation Table. The chance for success is increased if the fight is going well. There is a possibility that Lord Stanley, for example, will change to "Neutral/ Pro-Richard III" or even activate for the King given favorable results in the fighting as well as a little luck. Sir William Stanley is less likely to do so, but would be more likely to do so if Lord Stanley activation for the King. Thus, while you may "make your own luck" there remains a distinct feel of uncertainty.

### Leadership, Unit Strength and Morale

Other rules for the game cover such areas as leadership, the strength of the armies present, and the morale of those armies. Leaders help move units more quickly and influence combat relative to their leadership ability. The leadership ability and unit morale ratings are, of course, somewhat subjective. The following leaders are represented in the game: King Richard III; John Howard, Duke of Norfolk; Thomas Howard, Earl of Surrey; Sir Robert Brackenbury; Henry Percy, Earl of Northumberland; Henry Tudor; John de Vere, Earl of Oxford; Philibert de Chandee; Sir John Savage; Sir Gilbert Talbot; Rhys ap

Thomas; Thomas, Lord Stanley; and William Stanley. The best leadership ratings in the game belong to King Richard III and the Earl of Oxford, respectively. Unit strength ratings are based on the best estimates available with generally one strength point per hundred men.

Researching Bosworth and designing the game has been an extremely enjoyable experience. The design is currently being reviewed for possible publication by Decision Games of Bakersfield, California.



Fig. 2. *The Field of Redemore, according to Foss.*  
Photograph by author, June 1999.

## ENDNOTES

1. The question is which Stanley faction placed the crown on Tudor. It was either Sir William or Lord Stanley depending on whose narrative is being followed.
2. The reasons for this disloyalty are the subject of significant debate. Some assert that the suspicion that Richard III killed his nephews, the "Princes in the Tower." For further study of this, I recommend Rosemary Horrox's *Richard III: A Study of Service, and Richard III: Loyalty, Lordship and Law*, edited by P.W. Hammond.

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## Wargaming Bosworth

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