

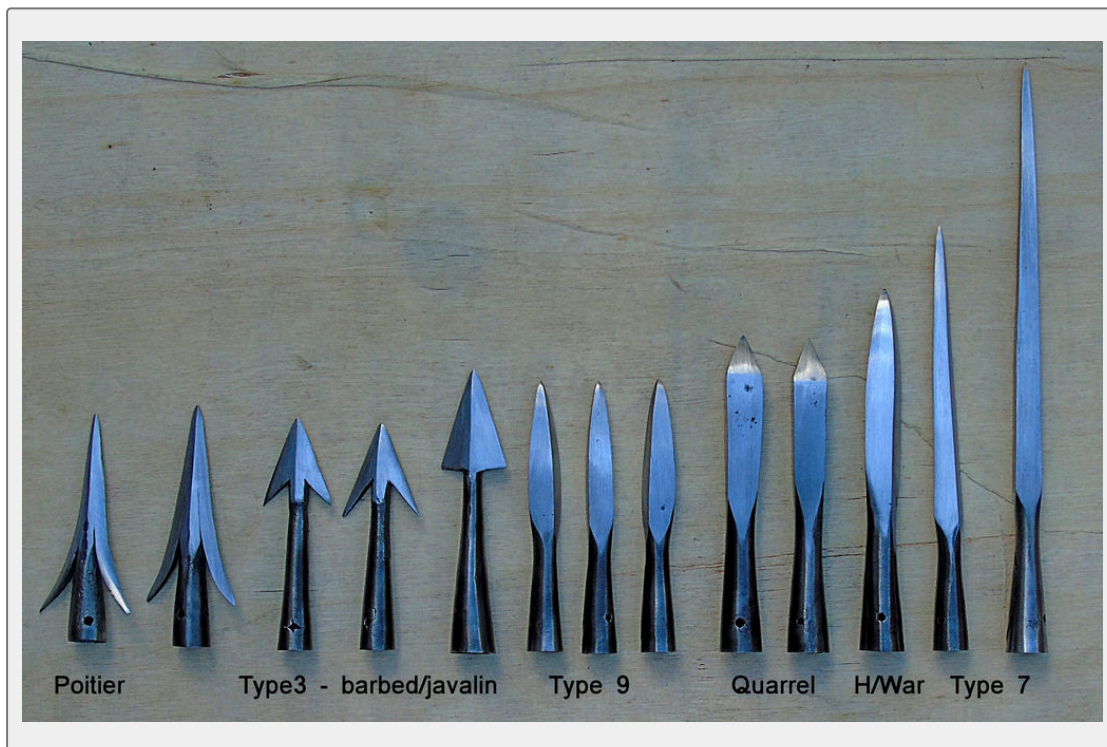
Writing Advice - On Arrow Wounds

 tumblr.com/salt-and-a-dash-of-pepper/181277837478/writing-advice-on-arrow-wounds



I have a couple pet peeves in fantasy novels, but nothing gets me more riled up than how authors treat arrows. People seem to think that arrows were nuisances rather than deadly weapons, when, no they were one of the most strategically useful weapons in all of history. You could kill people from far away without getting hit yourself, until of course in the later medieval eras, plate armor was produced. Then arrows evolved into bullets that could pierce through armor, and it was all over for both sides. I wanted to give you guys a couple of facts I've learned about arrows because they're a lot cooler than people think.

- **Arrowheads usually require surgery, with functioning tools, to remove.** This is because of the arrowhead's shape:



On the left, we see the most painful, and what I argue to be the most deadly, types. See how the bottom of the arrowheads prods out below them? Imagine pulling that backward, the way it came, and pulling the flesh with it. Hence the “tearing flesh” statement. Of course, not all arrowheads are like this, with some with thinner shapes (seen on the right) are designed to puncture armor more effectively. Some of these are from traditional arrows while others are from bolts from crossbows. When writing

fantasy, try to be familiar with the potential time period you are referencing the armor from, since that'll change the types of arrowheads that were used by the enemy, and when one of your characters are wounded from these, it's a great way to show your immersion when you use the proper arrowhead. With the arrowheads on the far left, removing them simply with your hands is risky because there's still a high chance that you will still tear the flesh out with it. Having tools that can easier part the flesh out of the way to proud it out is a better option. Doctors were sometimes forced to push arrowheads deeper into the body until it went out the other side since there was more damage done pulling it out than pushing it in.

- Doctor Joseph Howland Bill, a Civil War doctor who wrote a book called "Notes on Arrow Wounds," gives a comprehensive list on the damage of arrow wounds.

- Bill states that **arrows "inflict wounds with a fatality greater than that produced by any other weapons"** — particularly when surgical assistance cannot be obtained."
- Arrows were designed very well in his day, where the arrowhead would loosen from the shaft when connected to anything wet --*cough* blood *cough* -- **so if anyone grasped onto the shaft and tried to pull it out, the arrowhead would be left in the body and the doctor would be forced to search for it.** I don't know if this was used in medieval times, but certainly it was used in the 18th century.
- **He also stated that arrows were sometimes deadlier than bullet wounds,** which is a feat since bullets were often made of lead in the 18th century and poisoned a soldier's bloodstream
- The tissue around an arrowhead will not be able to heal and **will cause infection if not removed quickly.** This would often lead to fatal amputations.
- He also states that when lodged in bone -- and they often were, hurtling at intense speeds when shot by a 100lb bow -- surgeons had to use "great force," as well as tools, to pry the arrowhead out.

Now for their ability to heal:

- **If the arrow went through a limb,** they were easier to heal since they only made a small incision. Bill stated he would apply "cold or evaporating lotions" to the wounds and, providing there was no infection, the wound would heal in a mere week. **If the wound WAS infected, then he would apply bandages, compresses, and "an early evacuation" of any drainage.**

- **If the arrow severed an artery, good luck.** Doctors, especially in those times, were not able to staunch the bleeding before the patient died from blood loss.

- Arrows also caused severed nerves, broken bones, and fractures. These often weren't fatal, but they often affected the soldier's range of motion thereafter.

- Another interesting occurrence is when an arrowhead scrapes NEAR a bone, **the muscles will contract to such an extent it will bend the arrowhead**, making it resemble a fishhook. If this is the case, pulling out the arrowhead would cause even more damage because, as I said, it would tear flesh. Bill had to practice a specific tactic, which you can read at the bottom of this post.

- **If the arrow hits the trunk of the person, good luck once again.** Bill states that *arrowheads are more dangerous than bullets* for three main reasons: bloodloss, infection, and emphysema.

- **Arrows cut clean slits in someone's flesh, which provide clearer passage for blood to flow out of.**
- **Arrows usually stay in their targets, which result in infection until a surgeon can successfully remove it.**
- **Emphysema is more of a nuisance than a fatality, but it is caused by irregular breathing from the lungs when struck.**

- For this reason, **if the arrow hits the LUNGS or any other vital organ, they're almost always gone.** Surgeons cannot staunch the blood at this point, especially on a battlefield, so they often bleed out. As Bill states: "Arrow wounds of the abdomen are generally fatal. An arrow can scarcely pass through the abdomen and fail to open a vessel or wound an intestine."

Source: <https://allthingsliberty.com/2013/05/battle-wounds-never-pull-an-arrow-out-of-a-body/>