**Duel At Dawn, 1804**

**T**he relationship between Alexander Hamilton and Aaron Burr was filled with political rivalry and personal hatred. Alexander Hamilton, the nation's first Secretary of the Treasury, was the chief author of *The Federalist* papers. He wanted a strong central government. Burr represented the old Democratic-Republican Party. His greatest accomplishment was achieved in 1800 when he was elected Vice President to Thomas Jefferson.

The hatred between the two came to a head in 1804 when Hamilton helped prevent Burr's attempt to gain re-nomination for Vice President as well as his bid to win the governorship of New York. Burr responded by challenging his Hamilton to a duel, an invitation Hamilton felt compelled to accept.

**The View of the Seconds**

*The day before the duel Alexander Hamilton wrote his will, setting his affairs in order. In the early morning of July 11, 1804 he boarded a barge and set sail from Manhattan to the New Jersey shore. Accompanying him were his second, Nathaniel Pendleton and Dr. David Hosack, a physician. The party reached their destination shortly before 7:00 to find Aaron Burr and his second, W. P. Van Ness, awaiting them. The two had already cleared away some underbrush to form a dueling field.*

*After the duel the two seconds collaborated in writing a description of the event that was published shortly thereafter:*

"Colonel Burr arrived first on the ground, as had been previously agreed. When General Hamilton arrived, the parties exchanged salutations, and the seconds proceeded to make their arrangements. They measured the distance, ten full paces, and cast lots for the choice of position, as also to determine by whom the word should be given, both of which fell to the second of General Hamilton. They then proceeded to load the pistols in each other's presence, after which the parties took their stations. The gentleman who was to give the word then explained to the parties the roles which were to govern them in firing, which were as follows:

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| The parties being placed at their stations, the second who gives the word shall ask them whether they are ready; being answered in the affirmative, he shall say- *present!* After this the parties shall present and fire *when they please*. If one fires before the other, the opposite second shall say *one, two, three, fire*, and he shall then fire or lose his fire. |

He then asked if they were prepared; being answered in the affirmative, (yes) he gave the word *present*, as had been agreed on, and both parties presented and fired in succession. The intervening time is not expressed, as the seconds do not precisely agree on that point.

The fire of Colonel Burr took effect, and General Hamilton almost instantly fell. Colonel Burr advanced toward General Hamilton with a manner and gesture that appeared to General Hamilton's friend to be expressive of regret; but, without speaking, turned about and withdrew, being urged from the field by his friend, to prevent his being recognized by the surgeon and bargemen who were then approaching. No further communication took place between the principals, and the barge that carried Colonel Burr immediately returned to the city. We conceive it proper to add, that the conduct of the parties in this interview was perfectly proper, as suited the occasion."

**The View of the Physician**

*As Hamilton fell to the ground, Dr. Hosack rushed to his side. His observations were also published:*

"When called to him upon his receiving the fatal wound, I found him half sitting on the ground, supported in the arms of Mr. Pendleton. His countenance (expression) of death I shall never forget. He had, at that instant, just strength to say, 'This is a mortal wound, doctor;' when he sunk away, and became to all appearance lifeless. I immediately stripped up his clothes, and soon, alas I ascertained (found out) that the direction of the ball must have been through some vital part. His pulses were not to be felt, his respiration was entirely suspended, and, upon laying my hand on his heart and perceiving no motion there, I considered him as irrecoverably gone. I….believed….that the only chance for his reviving was immediately to get him upon the water. We therefore lifted him up, and carried him out of the wood to the margin of the bank, where the bargemen aided us in conveying him into the boat, which immediately put off. During all this time I could not discover the least symptom of returning life. I now rubbed his face, lips, and temples with spirits, applied it to his neck, and to the wrists and palms of his hands, and tried to pour some into his mouth.

When we had got, as I should judge, about fifty yards from the shore, some imperfect efforts to breathe were for the first time manifest; in a few minutes he sighed, and became sensible (revived) to the impression of the spirit or the fresh air of the water. He breathed; his eyes, hardly opened, wandered, without fixing upon any object; to our great joy, he at length spoke. 'My vision is indistinct,' (unclear) were his first words. His pulse became more perceptible, his respiration more regular, his sight returned. I then examined the wound to know if there was any dangerous discharge of blood; upon slightly pressing his side it gave him pain, on which I desisted (stopped).

Soon after recovering his sight, he happened to cast his eye upon the case of pistols, and observing the one that he had had in his hand lying on the outside, he said, "Take care of that pistol; it is undischarged, and still cocked; it may go off and do harm. " I did not intend to fire at him.”

He then closed his eyes and remained calm, without any disposition (attempt) to speak; nor did he say much afterward, except in reply to my questions. He asked me once or twice how I found his pulse; and he informed me that his lower extremities had lost all feeling, manifesting to me that he entertained no hopes that he should long survive."

*Carried to his Manhattan home, Hamilton lingered in agony - the pistol's ball lodged next to his spine. He died the following day.*

**References:**   
   Coleman, William (ed), A Collection of Facts and Documents, relating to the Death of ... Alexander Hamilton (1804); Mitchell, Broadus, Alexander Hamilton, The National Adventure 1788-1804 (1962).

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DUEL AT DAWN

1        What brought the hatred between these two men to a point of dueling?

2        Who challenged who?

3        What did Hamilton do before leaving that morning?

                  The view of the Seconds………

1.      Who arrived first?

2.      At what distance did the two fire?

3.      Why did they cast lots?

4.      What were the rules? Explain.

5.      Does it say who fired first?

6.      Who hit the mark?

7.      What did Burr do after Hamilton fell?

8.      Why did Burr leave quickly?

The view of the Physician......

1.   Did Hamilton realize how serious the wound he had received was?

2.  How were Hamilton's vital signs after the doctor immediately examined him?

3.  What did the doctor do to try and revive Hamilton?

4.  What happened to Hamilton's sight?

5.  What happened to Hamilton's feelings in his legs?

6.  When did Hamilton die?