THE CLASSICAL ACADEMY OF ARMS
WEBSITE CONTINUING EDUCATION 2016-2017

Copyright 2019 by Walter G. Green III. All rights reserved.

The following short articles appeared on the Classical Academy of Arms Website Continuing Education page at http://classicalacademyofarms.org/website-ce during the period from December 2016 through December 2017.

Articles on the Website Continuing Education page are intended to perform two key functions for members of the Academy. First, they provide continuing professional education on a monthly basis on a variety of topics related to classical fencing for trainers who teach classical fencing. The review questions after each session may be submitted electronically to the Academy for continuing education unit credit. Completion of 4 topics equals 1 hour of continuing professional education, all 12 in a year equals 0.3 CEU.

If you wish to use these archived topics for continuing education, (1) write down the letter of the answer to each of the three review questions at the end of the topic reading, (2) go to the Website CE page at http://classicalacademyofarms.org/site-ce, (3) enter the month of the archived topic in the form on the right hand side of the page, (4) select the correct multiple choice letter a., b., or c. for each numbered question, (5) complete your name and e-mail address on the form and submit it.

Second, the topics are directly tied to topics on the oral examinations of the Academy. Candidates for credentialing as Classical Fencing Demonstrators, Classical Fencing Instructors, Classical Fencing Provosts, and Classical Fencing Masters are expected to be able to answer questions from a bank of question published by the Academy. The topic articles provide additional enrichment materials for study of the oral examination questions.

The Classical Academy of Arms
P. O. Box 799
Glen Allen, Virginia 23060
http://classicalacademyofarms.org
December 2017 - The School

The term "school" is widely used in discussions of the evolution of fencing, and starts with the concept of traditions of fencing in Medieval fencing, for example the Liechtenauer Tradition. In the classical period we "know" that fencing was divided into two schools, the French and the Italian. So to understand this division, we need to understand what is meant by a school.

Although widely used, school is not widely defined. Consulting two standard sources for the definition or explanation of fencing terms, Evangelista's *The Encyclopedia of the Sword* and Morton's *Martini A-Z of Fencing*, results in nothing found. So it falls to the researcher to do a qualitative content analysis to determine the characteristics of a school based on what people view as a school. We suggest that a school is characterized by:

(1) A regional or national approach to fencing, often accompanied by an emphasis on nationalism or regional pride, or even sometimes justified by a need to develop a specific national approach. This can be easily observed in the competition between the various Italian schools or in Siebenhaar's Dutch Method.

(2) Existence over a period of time sufficient to have developed some body of fencers who practice the school. This may be as short as the life of the founding master in Siebenhaar's case or the founder and his primary student, the case with Sanz and Lancho of the Spanish School. On the other hand, it may survive even the end of a prominent fencing dynasty, as was the case with Kreusslerian thrust fencing.

(3) A coherent doctrine and technique. The two great examples of this are the French and eventual mixed Italian Schools. For decades in the early 1900s a fencer of either of these schools was readily identifiable by how he or she fenced.

(4) Texts that describe the method of fencing. A very large volume of fencing texts from the classical period exist, some as lucky finds in an antiquarian bookshop, others as reprints, still others as online documents. In addition, the growth of the historical European martial arts community has made translations of an increasing number of classical period texts available.

(5) A body of fencers and fencing masters. This criteria is difficult to assess, if for no other reason that there does not seem to be any reliable data on numbers of fencers until we reach the era of national fencing organizations. Even then such data as survives is not necessarily easy to access. We are left with a small sample of anecdotal reports. For example, we know that 80 fencing masters attended a conference at the Hague on 24 December 1864 and agreed upon the rules for fencing competitions according to the Dutch Method. That is a fairly substantial number of Masters, more than are members of the United States Fencing Coaches Association today. And we know that the Spanish School must have attracted sufficient adherents to be mentioned in other Fencing Masters' texts and significant coverage in the Spanish press.
(6) A distinctive weapon. This is not a universal accomplishment. The French, Italian, and Spanish grips are directly associated with their schools. There also may be a distinctive Kreusslerian weapon with a crossbar with the bell, but not having the arches, and thus the space, necessary to allow the fingers to wrap around the crossbar.

When we apply these criteria, it becomes obvious that the conventional view that all classical fencing is either Italian or French is an incorrect assumption. Instead we have a much larger selection (and the following short descriptions are to some degree an oversimplification of a very complex subject):

(1) The French School which remains relatively consistent in its descriptions throughout the classical period.

(1a) The Epee School which appears in France in the last years of the 1800s in reaction to the deficiencies of foil instruction in preparing fencers for the duel.

(1b) The Naturalists, who appear to be a French and later English group within the French school who pushed for greatly simplified technique and teaching methods.

(2) A mixed Italian School, which appears after the formal selection of a single approach to fencing in the training of Fencing Masters in Italy in the late 1800s. It includes elements of the:

(2a) Neapolitan School, which is distinctly Italian, and the

(2b) Northern Italian School, which was widely criticized as having been tainted by some elements of French technique.

(3) Leonardo Terrone’s Left and Right Handed Fencing, a unique bilateral development approach to fencing which evolved following 1900, ending with a small group of adherents in the United States interested in fencing with both hands prior to world War II.

(4) The Spanish School, which appears starting in the 1890s, and survives until the death of its founder and the destruction of its texts in the Spanish Civil War.

(5) The Hungarian school of Sabre, the product of the combination of existing Hungarian technique with Italian sabre technique in the early 1900s continuing as the dominant force in sabre fencing until after World War II.

(6) The Dutch Method, a very distinctive, demanding, and quite static approach to foil and sabre founded in the 1850s and which abruptly disappeared following the death of its founder in the late 1880s.

(7) Kreusslerian Thrust Fencing, a German approach to fencing with the thrust sword evolving in the 1700s, quite distinct from either the French or Italian Schools, and continuing in use into the late 1800s.
(8) German Academical Fencing, a university based fencing style fought at short range from an essentially static position with sharp weapons, achieving popularity in student fraternities in the 1800s and continuing to this day.

By the 1930s there was a well-established trend to move from purity of one school to mixed approaches. Maestro Julio Martinez Castello, trained in the French School, states that at this point he was teaching French Foil, Italian Sabre, and a personal eclectic approach to Epee. Aldo Nadi, although fencing with an Italian foil, clearly states that his technique was international in its selection of elements favorable to his approach to fencing. This trend continues to this day.

December 2017 Review

1. QUESTION: Which of the following is an element of the definition of a school used by the Classical Academy of Arms?

   a. the school must be recognized by the Federation Internationale d'Escrime as meeting the standards adopted by the FIE in 1914 for schools
   b. the school must be national in scope, ie. the French School or the Italian School
   c. the school must have texts that establish its doctrine and technique

2. QUESTION: Which of the following schools survived the death of its founder?

   a. the Dutch Method
   b. Kreusslerian Thrust Fencing
   c. the Spanish School

3. QUESTION: The distinguishing characteristic of the Naturalists within the larger French School was:

   a. the insistence on simplifying both technique and instruction.
   b. the emphasis on the use of the Epee for preparation for the duel.
   c. the incorporation of elements of the Northern Italian School in their technique.
November 2017 - Fencing at the Olympics Before World War I

The Olympic Games of the Modern Era is a watershed event in both the development of fencing and in the overall development of sports in the classical period. The idea had been considered and rejected more than once, but it took determined and sustained effort by Pierre Fredy, Baron de Courbetin, to carry it to fruition in 1896. His vision of the games as a meeting of amateur athletes, of the value of participation, and of the role of the games in promoting understanding of other cultures helped to form the idea that individual sports are part of a greater whole and that they transcend national boundaries. This represented a major change in the direction of sport as part of society.

There were a total of 5 regular Olympics and the 1906 Intercalated Games (which in 1949 were retroactively declared to have been unofficial) prior to World War I:

- 1896 - Athens, Greece
- 1900 - Paris, France
- 1904 - St. Louis, United States
- 1906 - Athens, Greece
- 1908 - London, United Kingdom
- 1912 - Stockholm, Sweden

Fencing was present in all of these games. However, not all fencing events appeared in each games, some to appear, disappear, and reappear, others to appear once or twice and then disappear, and some to become regular events for the future of the games. Participation by individual fencers and by nations similarly varied, but after World War I showed steady growth. It is worth noting that fencing was not alone in this turbulence; the line-up of the Games, both in sports and in disciplines within sports, has changed regularly, and continues to change to this day. When we look at each year:

1896

Individual Foil - 8 competitors from 2 nations - won by Eugene-Henri Gravelotte of France
Masters Foil - 2 competitors from 2 nations - won by Leon Pyrgos of Greece
Individual Sabre - 5 competitors from 3 nations - won by Ioannis Georgiadis of Greece

1900

Individual Foil - 54 competitors from 8 nations - won by Emile Coste of France
Masters Foil - 60 competitors from 8 nations - won by Lucien Merignac of France
Individual Epee - 104 competitors from 9 nations - won by Ramon Fonst Segundo of Cuba
Masters Epee - 54 competitors from 4 nations - won by Albert Ayat of France
Epee for Amateurs and Masters - 8 competitors from 2 Nations - won by Albert Ayat of France
Individual Sabre - 33 competitors from 7 nations - won by Georges de la Falaise of France
Masters Sabre - 29 Competitors from 7 nations - won by Antonio Conte of Italy

1904
Individual Foil - 9 competitors from 3 nations - won by Ramon Fonst Segundo of Cuba
Foil Team - 2 teams from 2 countries - won by a mixed team of Ramon Fonst Segundo and Manuel Diaz Martinez of Cuba and Alberston Van Zo Post of the United States
Individual Epee - 5 competitors from 3 nations - won by Ramon Fonst Segundo of Cuba
Individual Sabre - 5 competitors from 2 nations - won by Manuel Diaz Martinez of Cuba
Single Stick - 3 competitors from 1 nation - won by Albertson Van Zo Post of the United States

1906
Individual Foil - 37 competitors from 12 nations - won by Georges Dillon-Kavanagh of France
Individual Epee - 29 competitors from 10 nations - won by Georges de la Falaise of France
Masters Epee - 3 competitors from 3 nations - won by Cyril Verbrugge of Belgium
Team Epee - 6 teams from 6 nations - won by the French team of Pierre d'Hugues, Georges Dillon-Kavanagh, Mohr, and Georges de la Falaise
Individual Sabre - 29 competitors from 8 nations - won by Ioannis Georgiadis of Greece
Sabre for Three Hits - 21 competitors from 6 nations - won by Gustav Casmir of Germany
Masters Sabre - 2 competitors from 2 nations - won by Cyril Verbrugge of Belgium
Team Sabre - 4 teams from 4 nations - won by the German team of Gustav Casmir, Jacob Erckrath de Bary, August Petri, and Emil Schon

1908
Individual Epee - 85 competitors from 14 nations - won by Gaston Alibert of France
Team Epee - 9 teams from 9 nations - won by the French team of Gaston Alibert, Bernard Gravier, Alexandre Lippmann, Eugene Olivier, Henri-Georges Berger, Charles Collignon, and Jean Stern
Individual Sabre - 76 competitors from 11 nations - won by Jeno Fuchs of Hungary
Team Sabre - 8 teams from 8 nations - won by the Hungarian team of Jeno Fuchs, Oszkar Gerde, Peter Toth, Lajos Werkner, and Dezso Foldes

1912
Individual Foil - 94 competitors from 15 nations - won by Nedo Nadi of Italy
Individual Epee - 93 competitors from 15 nations - won by Paul Anspach of Belgium
Team Epee - 11 teams from 11 nations - won by the Belgian team of Paul Anspach, Henri Anspach, Robert Hennet, Fernand de Montigny, Jacques Ochs, Francois Rom, Gaston Salmon, and Victor Willems
Individual Sabre - 64 competitors from 12 nations - won by Jeno Fuchs of Hungary
Team Sabre - 11 teams from 11 nations - won by the Hungarian Team of Jeno Fuchs, Laszlo Berti, Ervin Meszaros, Dezso Foldes, Oszkar Gerde, Zoltan Schenker, Peter Toth, and Lajos Werkner
There are some moments in all of this that deserve notice:

... In 1896 Adolf Schmal was denied victory when the entire sabre competition was refought so that the late arriving King of Greece could enjoy it.

... From 1896 through 1906, despite the amateur ideal, professional Fencing Masters participated in the Games in their own events, and in one case a mixed amateur and professional event.

... The 1900 epee for amateurs and masters was a pool unique of the top four finishers in the Masters event and in the Individual Epee event. Albert Ayat won all 7 bouts without a single touch received.

... In 1908 Individual Foil was not held because the organizing committee determined that foil was an art form and not a sport.

... The Games of 1912 saw the first boycotts - the Italians refused to participate in Epee over the rejection of their proposal to extend the length of the epee blade to 94 centimeters, and the French boycotted the entire fencing competition.

... In the early days it was possible to win gold in two weapons. Ramon Fonst Segundo (1900 and 1904) and Georges Dillon-Kavanagh (1906) did this in Foil and Epee, Georges de la Falaise (1900 and 1906) in Sabre and Epee, Cyril Verbrugge (1906) in Masters Epee and Masters Sabre, Manuel Diaz Matinez (1904) in Foil and Sabre, and Albertson Van Zo Post in Foil and Single Stick (1904).

... Of the two less well-known fencing weapons, Bayonet and Single Stick, only Single Stick made an appearance in the Olympics, and then only in the sparsely attended 1904 Saint Louis Games.

... In modern fencing teams are restricted to 4 fencers, including 3 fencers and 1 alternate, with the alternates not accorded most of the privileges of being an Olympic athlete. This is quite different from the pre-World War I period, with the 8 man teams of Hungary in Sabre and Belgium in Epee in 1912 as prime examples.

... Throughout we see a relatively small number of nations as participants. The rosters of winners are heavily European, with only the United States, and Cuba from the Americas, and no participation from Africa or Asia. When we look at the countries placing fencers in the top 8, the list is restricted to: Argentina, Austria, Belgium, Bohemia, Cuba, Denmark, France, Germany, Great Britain, Greece, Hungary, Italy, the Netherlands, Russia, Sweden, and the United States. Fencing was clearly a white European sport.

... The biggest difference from today, however, is that women were not permitted to compete in fencing events until 1924 in Foil. Epee came later in 1996, and sabre last of
all in 2004. It was not that women were not fencing foil, and by the 1920s epee as well. It was a combination of a misogyny, a patronizing concern that women's organs could not accommodate the stresses of fencing, and a deliberate failure to recognize that women could be serious about sport.

November 2017 Review

1. QUESTION: Why do the titles of individual and team events in the Olympics before World War I not include Men's or Women's?

   a. because women were not allowed to compete until the addition of Women's Foil in 1924
   b. because all events were fenced mixed, with both men and women competing together
   c. because women were not allowed to participate in fencing until after 1918 - the large number of male fencers killed in World War I convinced Salle owners to take in female students in order to survive economically

2. QUESTION: The Olympic Games with the smallest number of fencers represented was the:

   a. 1896 Athens Games.
   b. 1904 St. Louis Games.
   c. 1906 Paris Intercalated Games.

3. QUESTION: In 1908 individual foil was not competed because?

   a. the small number of entries did not justify holding an event.
   b. the decision was made by the International Olympic Committee to restrict the number of fencing events so that medals would be available for the Tug-of-War as a Track and Field event.
   c. the organizing committee determined that foil was an art form, not a sport.
October 2017 - New York Athletic Club 1878 Laws for Fencing with the Foil

The appendix to Ben Miller's edited edition of Colonel Thomas Hoyer Monstery's *Self-Defense for Gentlemen and Ladies* includes a copy of the New York Athletic Club's Laws for Fencing with the Foil as published in 1878. This is an important document for several reasons. It is a rules set that was likely in use at the start of the classical period, at least in the New York Athletic Club, a fencing center that continues to be major influence in the sport even today. It is an early set of rules in use in the United States. And it is a set of rules accompanied by commentary of a Swedish trained Fencing Master with a broad range of other training and experience in the use of the sword in military and civil settings.

The New York Athletic Club Laws consists of 8 rules (these have been edited and the wording updated and clarified where appropriate - amplifying comments are in italics):

1. The foil blade is 34 inches long, and flat in shape. The foil is not secured by binding of the hand or wrist that would prevent the fencer from being disarmed. *This provision would seem to prohibit martingales and wrist straps or bindings used with the Italian foil.*

2. A free thrust which has hit the opponent must be followed by a pause. *The hit is used to define the end of the fencing phrase and a pause in the bout. How that pause is executed is not described, but it is a reasonable presumption that this resulted in a return to the center of the piste and to guard. The meaning of free thrust is not explained, but it may suggest a thrust that has not been parried.*

3. Reprisals or double thrusts are forbidden. The fencer who has lunged must return to guard to prevent a hand-to-hand fight. *The term "reprisal" is most likely an anglicization of "reprise." The "double thrust" is more difficult to identify. The term sounds very much like a double hit, or two simultaneous touches. However, it is hard to forbid a double touch resulting from both fencers acting at the same time, and the following rule (4) appears to sort this out by specifying what happens in a stop hit and assigning priority in a true double action to the higher thrust. The double thrust might be in the context of a remise or redouble. The combination of an attack with a remise provides the two actions for the double thrust. The "hand-to-hand fight" implies close combat, or, as we would term it in modern fencing, in-fighting. The rule can be simplified to "renewals of the attack are forbidden, and the fencer who lunges must recover to guard."*

4. Time or stop thrusts delivered without a lunge score a hit only if the fencer making the thrust is not hit. If both fencers are hit simultaneously the fencer who lands the thrust higher on the body scores the touch. If both fencers hit in the same line, no touch is awarded. *The provision that the higher touch scores reflects the old concept that hits higher than the opponent's hit are more honorable and thus receive preference in
scoring (a right of height combined with a right of way to gain the touch). The provision for hits "in the same line" must refer to hits at the same height on the body (otherwise a higher hit in the same lateral line would not be awarded). Monstery definitely does not like the priority for a higher attack. He makes the point that, should the weapons have been sharp, a higher thrust which causes a minor flesh wound in the shoulder should not be given priority over a lower hit that pierces a lung with a fatal thrust.

(5) A disarm does not allow a hit unless it is followed immediately by a thrust. If the foil is lost while making an attack and hitting the opponent, it is to count for one point. The first sentence makes sense and was a standard rule for many years as a provision that an opponent who drops his or her weapon may be hit until the dropped weapon hits the piste. Monstery disagrees with the first sentence and suggests that it should be that a disarm results in one point to avoid having to hit an unarmed opponent. The second sentence is not as easily understood, and the equivalent rules for broadsword (sabre) and singlestick are virtually identical, offering no clarity. The key appears to be the phrase "and hitting the opponent." The most likely interpretation is "if the foil lands a touch in the attack, but is dropped after the hit, it will count for one point for the attacker." Allowing the fencer to lose control of the weapon before it hits and still benefit with a point would seem to be an invitation to throw the weapon as a spear.

(6) A fencer may not parry or take hold of the opponent's weapon with an unarmed hand. This rule reflects the final demise of the use of the unarmed hand to parry, a point of contention in the 1800s.

(7) If one of the fencers withdraws before completion of the bout, he or she loses the bout.

(8) Bouts will be fenced for no fewer than 5 points and no more than 10, to be determined by the judges or the referee. The fencer who first reaches the full number of points is the winner.

Eight rules on one page makes an interesting contrast with the 215 page modern fencing rule book. On one hand, this suggests that there was a general and common understanding within a relatively small number of fencers of many of the things that are now defined as rules for a large, international population of fencers. On the other, it undoubtedly reflects the reality that rules and regulations steadily expand to address ambiguities and bad conduct.

October 2017 Review

1. QUESTION: In the New York Athletic Club rules, if there is a simultaneous hit with fencer on the left landing higher on the target than fencer on the right does, how is the touch awarded?
a. because it is a simultaneous hit, no touch is awarded  
b. fencer on the left is awarded the touch  
c. fencer on the right has the more honorable thrust and is awarded the touch  

2. QUESTION: A stop hit is only awarded a touch if:  
   a. it is more honorable than the original attack.  
   b. it lands before the original attack.  
   c. the original attack does not land.  

3. QUESTION: Fencer on the right attacks fencer on the left’s blade with a beat. Fencer on the left loses control of his weapon and drops it. May fencer on the right hit fencer on the left?  
   a. yes, as long as the thrust is immediate  
   b. yes, but only until fencer on the left’s foil hits the piste  
   c. no, it is ungentlemanly to hit a disarmed opponent
September 2017 - Chalk, Eyeballs, Tin Tacks, and Pointes d'Arret

Foil and sabre appear to have always relied on the human eyeball and the vigilance of the jury to determine the materiality of the hit (whether it arrived on target, off target, nor not at all) throughout the classical period. The use of chalk (see below) may have been used in foil before 1900, although the extent to which this was the case is unknown. Although efforts to develop electrical scoring in foil started in earnest in 1937, it was not until 1955 that electrical foil its appearance at the World Championship level. Sabre took even longer; electric sabre's introduction started in 1988.

However, epee went through a series of different approaches to scoring:

1. Chalk. The first approach was the used of chalk, transferred from the tip of the weapon to the opponent's target. In the United States epee fencers wore dark jackets so that the chalk hit would be visible, but chalk appears to have disappeared by 1897.

2. The single Pointe d'Arret, commonly referred to in English as the Tin-Tack. This device looked very much like a carpet tack and was affixed to the nail head point of the epee. The Tin-Tack eventually disappears in the second decade of the 1900s.

3. The bouton marqueur Pointe d'Arret, the three-pronged point. This version of the pointe d'arret put a small ball of cotton between the points soaked in phenolphthalein or other red marking fluid, with the whole assembly bound to the nail head with waxed thread. The three prongs caught the jacket or the glove, and the phenolphthalein marked the hit location. The three-pronged point was in use in the first decade of the 1900s and survived until electrification became general in the 1950s.

The two versions of the pointe d'arret were dangerous, ripping jackets and inflicting lacerations on the fencers' arms. Epee fencers of the day could be identified by jagged scars tracking up the forearm. The phenolphthalein left red marks on the jacket which were either marked through with a pencil or daubed out with vinegar. The vinegar made the uniform and the fencer smell like a pickle and created one of the more imaginative ways to cheat in fencing history. Fencers with a desire to absolutely not be hit are reported to have soaked their jackets in vinegar, let the jacket dry, and then let sweat rehydrate the vinegar on the piste preventing the registration of hits.

4. Electric scoring. Electrical scoring in essentially its modern form is introduced in Europe in 1931, was approved for use in competitions in 1933, and was first used in the Olympic Games in the 1936 Berlin Olympics. The electric system did away with lacerated uniforms, did not inflict actual wounds on the fencer, and eliminated the vinegar miasma surrounding epee fencing. Finding a fencer who seriously fenced competitive epee in the
pointe d'arret period who misses the wounds, the ripped up jacket, and the pickle smell is a difficult proposition - the point's demise was widely welcomed.

The general attraction of electrical scoring lies in two dimensions. First, electrical scoring significantly increases the probability that a possible touch will be correctly assigned materiality if it meets the technical requirements of the rules. Hits that otherwise were missed due to their location or simple error by the members of the jury were now recorded unambiguously and accurately.

Second, electrical scoring eliminated unconscious bias and even conscious bias in favor of noted fencers and against the unknown fencer. And as the jury disappeared, it eliminated manifest cheating by judges in favor of clubmates or fencers of the same nationality, a well understood and relatively frequent occurrence.

This leaves us with three interesting questions. First, why did epee fencers adopt the pointe d'arret to secure obvious arrests, when foil fencers seem to have been satisfied well into the 1960s with visual judging, unassisted by any device on the weapon? One is left with the impression that this was a result of some distinct cultural value in the epee community.

Second, why is there interest in fencing pointe d'arret in modern classical circles? Both versions of the pointe d'arret were dangerous and acknowledged as such at the time. Today, with the understanding of the potential for disease transmittal through open wounds, including serious infections, why take the risk, especially given fencers’ predilection for not washing their jackets?

Third, the electric epee clearly is a classical period weapon. Why should it not be part of classical fencing?

September 2017 Review

1. QUESTION: The first Olympics in which electric scoring was used was the ________ Olympics.
   a. 1936 Berlin
   b. 1940 Rome
   c. 1948 London

2. QUESTION: The single point pointe d'arret was known as the:  
   a. bouton marqueur. 
   b. tin-tack. 
   c. pointe unique.
3. QUESTION: What was used to erase the marks of hits left by the red marker fluid?

a. water
b. art gum eraser
c. vinegar
August 2017 - The Fleche

Among the critics of modern fencing technique, the fleche, a footwork technique for the delivery of the attack, has received its share of negative commentary. It is not allegedly as extreme a contributor to the destruction of decent and honorable fencing as is the flick, but it certainly receives blame for the degradation of what was beautiful technique. Classical fencers would never do anything so gauche as run at each other with the fleche. Christoph Amberger relates in a Spring 2004 article in *Fencers Quarterly* that even in 1938 after a bout in Budapest, Colonel Verderber asked a Lieutenant Kevey "But Lieutenant, as a professor at this fencing academy, you shouldn't be using such horrid attacks. Who taught you this kind of thing?"

So let's take a look at the technique of this supposed abomination. The first technical description in English that we have located is Alfred Finckh's *Academic Fencing*. Although, based on internal evidence, publication Finckh's manual dates from at least 1940, and possibly after World War II, Finckh states that the core of the work dates from 1928 or before. Finckh describes the fleche as an attack which "consists of thrusting placing the left foot some eighteen inches in front of the right foot and at right angles. The lunge is then made by pushing off the right foot." Finckh is quite critical of fencers converting this into an attack on the run, emphasizing that it should be a controlled movement, and that one foot must remain on the ground at all times. The level of control should allow the fencer to quickly recover from the initial forward pass back to a guard position to deal with an attack into the movement.

Maestro Julio Martinez Castello's 1933 text *The Theory and Practice of Fencing* diagrams the progression of the fleche, showing this same model of passing the back foot in front of the front foot, followed by the former front foot coming forward into the lunge. In Castello's case, the length of the forward movement of the front foot is approximately the same as would be expected from a normal forward pass.

Geoffrey Hett, in his 1939 volume *Fencing*, provides another description of the fleche. The attack by fleche is delivered by (the subdivision of the steps by numbers is our addition to break the technique down into chunk):

1. "Place the rear foot as unobtrusively as possible in front of the front foot,"

2. "which is then brought quickly around to the lunge position."

Hett then goes on to note that often, when the opponent realizes what is happening and retreats, the flecheur breaks into a quick rush. This results partly from being off balance and partly from the desire to hit in what the flecheur perceives as a favorable opportunity. Hett is a credible commentator, even though not a fencing master, having
fenced as part of the British International Team in Vienna in 1931, Budapest in 1933, New York in 1934, as part of the Olympic Team in Berlin 1936, and Paris in 1937.

Joseph Vince, coach of the United States Olympic Sabre Squad in 1936, describes the fleche in the 1937 edition of his manual *Fencing*. In his description the fleche is executed by placing the left foot in front of the right and executing one or more running steps. Vince suggests that it is best employed against an opponent who keeps distance outside of the range of an attack by lunge or advance lunge. The use of the technique as a distance closer against long or out of distance opponents is different from the modern use of the fleche at lunge distance, and probably accounts for the development of its employment in the rush or running attack.

Maitre d'Armes Clovis Deladrier, in his 1948 text *Modern Fencing*, provides a later (although practically not much later, World War II having effectively stopped international fencing for seven plus years) description that retains much of the technique described by earlier writers:

"1. The arm is extended with opposition, the point directed at the target.

2. The weight is shifted from the left to the right leg, and the left foot is brought up to a position slightly in front of the right foot.

3. From this position, the arm and shoulder stretch out as far as they will go, the body inclines forward until it is almost off balance, and the distance is closed with a rush, preventing the opponent from riposting."

The last example of the forward pass model of the fleche that can be attributed to classical period training appears in John Kardoss's *Sabre Fencing* in 1955. Kardoss, a former Royal Hungarian Army officer, describes and illustrates what he terms a French method fleche that:

1. Is initiated from the guard or half-lunge position, with the extension of the weapon arm.

2. The weight of the body is unobtrusively shifted to the front foot. This results in a forward lean of the torso.

3. The back leg comes forward to approximately the same distance between the feet as would be expected in a guard position.

4. The original front leg then swings forward apparently to first touch with the heel and then extend into the full lunge.
What our sources are describing is an attack that is essentially a modified forward pass that flows into a lunge. Done correctly it is a smooth, flowing movement that covers a significant distance quickly, allowing the attacker to accelerate the attack into any attempt to retreat, as well as very quickly collapsing the distance if the opponent is advancing. The conversion to a rush or running attack, is not universally approved of or embraced in the classical period.

However, this poses a problem for classical fencers. The problem is that the fleche is part of the lexicon of fencing in the post-World War I years of the classical period. Maitre d'Armes Julius Palfy-Alpar, a graduate of the Toldi Miklos Royal Hungarian Sports Institute, in his 1967 *Sword and Masque* attributes its origin to the start of the 20th Century. Castello establishes that the fleche was in regular use by 1933. Based on Finckh’s text, and the tendency of fencing manuals to lag the introduction of new technique, it seems certain that the fleche predates 1928. By the start of World War II it was clearly in common use in epee and sabre, and making inroads in foil. If the Master or School you study falls in this time period, you may need to add the classical fleche to your curriculum.

**August 2017 Review**

1. **QUESTION:** The classical fleche can best be described as:

   a. a running attack executed inside lunge distance by compressing the muscle of the front leg, extending the weapon arm and springing forward off the front leg and ending with a run past the opponent.
   b. a forward pass transitioning into a lunge as the weapon leg continues forward.
   c. a slow attack executed by pushing forward with the rear leg, followed by a walk forward with the blade fully extended.

2. **QUESTION:** In what time period does the fleche become part of classical fencing?

   a. it never actually does - although fencing masters wrote about it, fencers in the classical period refused to use such crude tactics.
   b. prior to 1900.
   c. in the time period of the 1920s and 1930s.

3. **QUESTION:** What may be an explanation for the conversion of the lunge in the fleche into a forward run?

   a. the use of the fleche to close to hitting distance when the opponent is at long distance or out of distance
   b. the gradual decay of fencing form among the societal changes in Europe before World War II
c. the development of the sports factory model and emphasis on winning at all costs replacing the perfection of self and fencing form as the goals of the sport after World War II.
July 2017 – Tempo

Any discussion of fencing will inevitably involve the word "tempo." A quick check of dictionaries shows that tempo is defined in most contexts as the speed or rhythm of activity. In music work it is the speed or pacing at which the work is to be played. In military operations it is the speed, intensity, and work load imposed by the requirements of war - the "ops tempo." It can be used to describe the pressures of daily life in business. But this is not the context of its use in fencing.

In fencing tempo is defined as the period of time required to complete one simple fencing action. The actual time length of a tempo depends upon the speed with which the action is executed. Two one tempo actions executed at different speeds by different fencers will require different actual times for their completion.

This means that, as fencers, we inevitably have to consider two types of time, tempo and actual time. In foil and sabre tempo is critical, serving as an artificial construct to define the flow of the bout. Fencer A is going to attack; Fencer B has the choice of defense or counteroffense. If Fencer A initiates a slow straight thrust, and Fencer B immediately counterattacks with sufficient speed that her action lands clearly before Fencer A’s leisurely hit, whose is the touch? Fencer A, of course, because A initiated a one tempo action. The governing rule is that a counterattack must land before the start of the final tempo. Actual time in this case is only relevant (1) in determining that Fencer A started first, or (2) in giving Fencer B enough time to instead execute a parry with the blade or by distance.

When we look at multiple tempo actions, real time becomes critical to the defender in two ways. The speed with which the actions are executed by Fencer A allow or limit Fencer B’s choices. A fast attack may reduce the time of the two tempos effectively to one tempo for the defender, making it impossible to insert a counterattack to land before the final tempo starts, and forcing the use of a parry. A slow attack may bring the fast counterattack on the first tempo into play, while still allowing either a parry and riposte of the final action or, for the fast and well drilled opponent, a counterattack-parry-riposte sequence to hit the first tempo and parry and riposte the second.

It is worth noting that this is a relatively modern interpretation. When we look at rules sets in the early days of the classical period (see, for example, in Rondelle's 1892 Foil and Sabre, including his extensive analysis of the determination of double hits, or in Monstery's comments on the New York Athletic Club's rules of 1877), right of way and the interpretation of tempo does not exist in its modern form. The possibility exists that even a simple attack that is poorly executed may allow the counterattacker’s action to be seen to be a scoring or nullifying hit. By the 1930s the modern interpretation is clearly the governing one.
This changes in epee. It is a common error to assume that tempo plays no role in epee. Tempo remains important in teaching the synchronization of actions. But it is most important in the timing of multiple intention actions and actions that involve distance, especially those in countertime or to control the opponent's blade. The ability to understand the actual time of an opponent's tempo and to change speed within that tempo is very valuable. It should be noted that this is true in all three weapons, but the absence of right of way and the use of actual time to determine the priority of the hit emphasize it in epee.

As a final thought, it is important to understand that how fencing is officiated is one of the key elements in determining how fencing is fenced. Over the years the rules of fencing have grown from 1 to 2 sheets of paper in the 1870s-1880s to a volume of over 200 pages today. Understanding the rules and how the rules were interpreted in the part of the classical period in which you fence is very important to understanding the technique and tactics of your weapon.

July 2017 Review

1. QUESTION: The understanding of tempo as a determinant of the right to score in the rules:
   a. has remained the same from 1880 to today.
   b. has evolved as the rules have evolved.
   c. means that tempo is irrelevant to epee fencers.

2. QUESTION: What is the tactical relationship between tempo and actual time in foil and sabre?
   a. there is no relationship - everything is governed by who initiates the first tempo action
   b. the only application is that a counterattack must land before the completion of the first tempo of any attack.
   c. the actual speed of an offensive action may control whether counterattack or parry and riposte is the best choice for a multiple tempo attack

3. QUESTION: Tempo is defined as:
   a. the actual time to complete a simple action, and is established in the rules as 1/3 of a second.
   b. the time to complete a simple action, and varies based on the actual speed of execution.
   c. the actual speed with which a simple action is completed.
June 2017 - Classification of Fencing Actions

In our examination of the wide variety of techniques of classical Fencing (see the current edition of the Classical Fencing Actions Project Catalog), we have tried to categorize fencing actions in a logical way. Surprisingly, this is an area of some considerable variety - terms are not necessarily used the same way and in many cases period authors of texts do not offer a systematic classification system.

It is also an undertaking not without some dispute. For example, the term "attack on the blade" has been widely used for those actions that are intended to displace the opponent's blade from the line with pressure or percussion (rather than leverage or by feints). This seems reasonable enough - you hit the opponent's blade and it goes somewhere the opponent did not intend. It would seem to be an aggressive, attack-like action. But there has been at least one Fencing Master who held that it cannot be an attack on the blade because the blade is not target, and attacks are aimed at the target.

When we examine period texts, it is possible to understand that Masters tended to group like techniques together. In those cases where there is a discussion of tactics, that discussion helps us understand how the application of technique contributes to classification. The simplest and most basic outcomes is three types of actions:

OFFENSE - actions intended to hit the opponent. These include simple attacks and attacks with a preparation intended to clear the opponent's blade from the final line of the attack, including by feints (compound attacks), by leverage (the takings of the blade), by percussion (the attacks on the blade), and by combination actions that use more than one method (for example, a feint of straight thrust followed by a disengage ending with opposition to prevent an effective parry). Ripostes are generally considered to be offensive actions following a parry, both because they are attacks following the failure of the opponent's attack, and because they are done using offensive techniques. A case can be made that invitations, essentially a second intention action (see our discussion of intent in the May 2017 continuing education), belong in offense.

DEFENSE - actions which prevent the opponent's attack from landing. The obvious ones are parries and the variety of evasions that take the body out of the line of the attack (inquaretata, passatta sotto, ducking, and sideways lunges as examples). In this discussion the definition of parry is a cause for some argument - does a parry only consist of a blade action on the opponent's blade, or is there such a thing as a parry by distance (a step back to cause the opponent's attack to fall short)? The exact date at which the parry by distance appeared is not well understood, but Parise mentions it in 1884, so this is clearly a classical usage.

COUNTEROFFENSE - actions which steal the attack's time and which prevent it from scoring. This includes not only the counterattacks as discussed in our April 2017
continuing education topic, but also the Point in Line. Some authors do classify the Point in Line as a defense, but its primary function is to deny the opponent the opportunity to attack, a counteroffense. Logically counteroffense might also include other actions designed to hamper the ability of an opponent to attack or to delay the attack in progress (especially in epee). False attacks to hamper the development of the attack would seem to fit in this same category.

But there are other actions that must be considered and that logically can be lumped together as:

**ACTIONS NOT INTENDED TO HIT** - actions the fencer does to create conditions that may be exploited to hit but are not inherently offensive or counteroffensive in their own right. Examples include footwork to manage the strip to the fencer's advantage, footwork designed to close or open distance for tactical reasons, and false attacks to gain information about the opponent (reconnaissance) or to force the opponent to retreat.

This leaves an entire category of actions unclassified. The related categories of multiple intentions and countertime actions are only partly developed in most classical period texts. In all fairness, these are more tactic (a combination of technique, timing, distance, psychological conditions, speed, initiative, etc.) than technique (how a commonly understood fencing action is performed). They can consist of elements of two, three, or all four of the other categories we have defined. And they are commonly at least second intention in nature. This suggests that there is a fifth category of **COMPLEX ACTIONS**, not defined as such in most period texts, but described in some, even if not named.

Remember in this discussion that these are general classification categories for convenience in thinking about classical actions. They are not necessarily aligned with how the School or Master that you study taught, either in general or in detail. Differences in how specific types of actions are classified usually reflect the unique nature of the tactical doctrine of a system developed in a School or by the Fencing Master. Your responsibility is to understand your source and accurately reflect the source's doctrine in your teaching.

**June 2017 Review**

1. **QUESTION:** You attack your opponent. The opponent parries your attack and ripostes. You parry and counterriposte. What is the sequence of your actions by classification?

   a. action not intended to result in a hit, defense
   b. offense, defense, offense
   c. offense, defense, counteroffense
2. QUESTION: A point in line is logically which of the following types of actions?

a. action not intended to hit
b. offense
c. counteroffense

3. QUESTION: You are teaching the system developed by a Fencing Master in the classical period. This Master considered counterattacks and ripostes to be defensive in nature. How should you address this with your students?

a. I will use the classifications used by the Master whose work I am teaching.
b. I will avoid explaining that there is a difference in interpretation, and instead use the classification system in this article.
c. I should explain to my students that, although the Master was brilliant in his own way, he failed to understand the real relationship between different types of actions.
May 2017 - It Is All About Intention

The concept of intention is central to more complex fencing actions, and classical fencing has long recognized the complexity of actions of more than one intention. So what is intention in a fencing context? Let’s start with what it is not. If you have ever heard a modern referee comment, as he awards a counterattack priority over a properly executed and first initiated simple attack, "you did not demonstrate intent," we are not talking about that. That is a completely bizarre statement which suggests that an attack only exists if the referee somehow divines that the attacker met, or failed to meet, some referee-created standard of evaluation of the attacker's mental state. Intention is not an examination of anyone's thought process or mental state.

Instead intention is a tactical concept - do I execute this particular part of the fencing phrase with the objective of hitting the opponent, or is it instead executed to create the conditions under which I can hit in a subsequent part of the phrase? A first intention attack is thus an attack in which the objective is to land on the initial attack. This may be a simple attack, a compound attack, an attack with footwork preparation, an attack prepared by an attack on the blade, an attack prepared with a taking of the blade, or a riposte (direct, indirect, compound, etc.). This does not mean that the defender will not successfully parry the attack and riposte. It does mean that if the attacker has chosen the right moment and distance, and no defensive actions intervene, that the attack is coming to hit.

At this and each subsequent level of intention, the actions you take are planned - I plan to hit on my first action, or on the second, etc. This is different from attacking, being parried, and descending into a parry-riposte battle with the only goal being survival.

So what is second intention? Well, the simple answer is a fencing cliché - you attack with a false attack deliberately short to draw the opponent's parry and riposte so that you can counterriposte to hit. That is "second intention" as it is most commonly taught. This sequence in the phrase has the advantage of fixing the opponent so that she does not retreat out of your attack (because she sees the opportunity to score easily), and of stimulating the opponent to extend his blade and lunge into your reach for your counterriposte.

But is that all there is? Ah - no. Second Intention can be defined more correctly as any planned action that you take to draw a response which creates the opportunity to hit the opponent. For example, in foil I invite in fourth (understanding that the fourth invitation opens the line in sixth), so that you will attack in sixth. Your attack is met by my second intention parry and counterriposte.

Countertime actions are also fundamentally second intention. In sabre, I execute a slow attack to draw your stop hit, so that I can stop hit your stop hit in counteroffensive
countertime or parry and riposte in defensive countertime. Note that when you read older texts the term countertime may be used differently - the more complex modern countertime terminology starts to emerge in the 1880s but takes some time to evolve.

But wait, there is yet another intention, third intention. Third intention actions are executed to defeat the opponent’s second intention. To take our first example, fencer A attacks with a false attack, fencer B answers with a parry and false riposte, allowing fencer A to complete second intention with the first counterriposte, leading to fencer B executing third intention with a parry and second counterriposte. The common third intention is the feint in tempo (a disengage of the stop hit to defeat defensive countertime).

And there is fourth intention, planned actions you take to defeat an opponent’s third intention to defeat your second intention. As might be expected, this is very difficult to realize as it requires an opponent who can be led through the intricate dance involved. Parise in 1884 mentions third and fourth intention actions but does not describe them. He suggests that they are almost impossible to execute. In a more modern Italian text, Mangiarotti and Cerchiari’s 1966 La Vera Scherma, third intention appears, suggesting that third intention survived the intervening years, but that fourth intention had been abandoned at the latest by that date.

Actions of more than one intention approach being a tactical art form, requiring evaluation of the opponent’s habitual responses, perfect false actions that create a believable narrative, and a psychological understanding of the opponent’s tactical thought processes. From second intention on, this is the chess game requiring thinking multiple actions ahead while understanding what the opponent’s responses will be. As a spectator, the pity is that you can see second intention but that third and fourth intention are almost invisible, existing only in the fencers' minds.

A note - the North American Mangiarotti Society's May continuing education topic (at http://mangiarottisociety.org/ce) includes a discussion of Mangiarotti’s view of intention. Mangiarotti’s career spanned the end of the classical period and the start of modern fencing, and his perspectives are of value in understanding earlier Italian technique.

May 2017 Review

1. QUESTION: Intention refers to?

a. a planned tactical decision as to whether an action is intended to hit or to create conditions for a hit later in a phrase
b. the sequence of parries and ripostes in any phrase executed by the fencer who first attacked
c. the degree to which you commit to an action.

2. QUESTION: Which of the following actions is an example of second intention?

a. an attack delivered with two or more blade movements
b. a feint in tempo
c. an invitation to draw an attack so that you can parry and riposte

3. QUESTION: In the following action you are Fencer B. You have watched Fencer A, know that he likes to use a compound riposte in second intention, and believe that you can successfully defeat the riposte with a stop hit. Fencer A attacks, Fencer B parries and ripostes with a false riposte, Fencer A parries and compound counterripostes, Fencer B hits with a stop hit against the compound riposte. What intention is your action?

a. second intention
b. third intention
c. fourth intention
April 2017 - A Variety of Counterattacks

Counterattacks have long been a part of fencing in all three weapons. As the term suggests by its name, a counterattack is an action made by one fencer to score a hit in reaction to an attack initiated by the other fencer. With sharp weapons, the counterattack could literally stop the attack as it developed by inflicting a wound that prevented continued forward movement. With the two conventional fencing weapons, the rules started with a series of propositions as to which type of action had precedence over the other. This eventually evolved into the concept that a counterattack took the opponent's right of way if it landed before the start of the final action of the attack. The dueling sword preserved the reality of he who hits first wins.

Central to the idea of the counterattack is the idea of time, both actual time (in the case of the dueling sword) and tempo (in foil and sabre). Remember that one tempo is the amount of time needed for the completion of a simple action. However, this has not always been the only definition of tempo. Paolo Bertelli's 1800 fencing treatise discusses actions in time in the terms of movement, faults of movement, and blade actions by the opponent which create the conditions in which the fencer can launch a time action to hit. As late as 1884 Masaniello Parise defined tempo in a similar way as a favorable moment in which an action can be executed when the opponent pauses or is distracted.

The following examples show the variety and subtleness of differences between them (and this is not a complete list of contemporary variations). In 1884 Parise lists four pure blade actions in tempo:

- **Arrest** - a straight thrust closing the line against feints or disengages.
- **Appuntata** - an action from the lunge to land on the opponent's feint when the opponent detaches to riposte with a feint.
- **Cavazione in Tempo** - a disengage counterattack against an opponent who tries to find the fencer's extended blade.
- **Imbroccata** - an opposition counterthrust against gliding attacks starting in the fourth or second lines.

In 1892 Louis Rondelle lists three counterattacks:

- **Time Thrust** - a thrust with opposition that intercepts the attacker's final action, preventing it from landing with opposition while simultaneously scoring a hit.
- **Stop Thrust** - an extension of the arm at the start of an opponent's attack or in a wide feint to stop the execution of the attack.
- **Tension** - condemned by Rondelle as an action of chance driven by desperation, this is an extension of the arm in an attempt to hit the incoming attacker.
The American translation of the 1908 French fencing manual of Joinville du Pont lists three types of counterattacks:

**Time Thrust (coup de temps)** - a counterattack that gains one or more tempos on the opponent's attack. In other words, this is the modern stop hit which seizes right of way by landing before the start of the final attack.

**Stop Thrust (coup d'arret)** - an attack executed on the opponent's advance, whether or not this advance leads to an attack. This appears to be the modern attack into preparation.

**Tension** - elevated in this source to a simple extension of the arm without cover, a riposte without a parry, and very close to the modern stop hit.

In 1915 Master of the Sword George Patton described three counterattacks with the epee:

**Stop Thrust** - an action directed at an exposed part of the opponent who is making a vigorous attack.

**Counter Thrust** - a direct action counterattacking the opponent at the psychological moment at which he is initiating his attack and is most unlikely to effectively react.

**Time Thrust** - a thrust made when the opponent is changing position or making a slow or poor feint.

Julio Martinez Castello's 1933 text described two counterattacks:

**Time Thrust** - a counterattack with opposition catching the opponent's blade and preventing its movement to the desired final line of the attack.

**Stop Thrust** - a thrust with complete extension and opposition against a bent arm or wide attack.

In 1948 Clovis Deladrier identified the same basic actions that are commonly used in modern fencing:

**Stop Thrust** - a straight thrust executed on the moment of the advance or the start of the attack to land cleanly before the attack lands.

**Time Attack** - a counterattack by extension closing the line into which the opponent is expected to attack.

When we examine this list, we can identify certain common characteristics for counterattacks:

1. delivered against the attack, either when the attacker is exposed, hesitates, or uses actions that require multiple tempos to complete,

2. in most cases based on the straight thrust,
(3) often with opposition, either to control the opponent's blade or to close the line as a precaution,

(4) requiring the ability to identify the moment, whether that moment is psychological in determining the attack or physical with the start of movement, and

(5) delivered with decision, speed, and courage,

(6) and in accordance with the specific theories of a fencing master or a school of fencing.

The variety of terminology and the subtleties of interpretation in defining the varieties of stop thrusts, time thrusts, counter thrusts, tensions, etc. mean that it is important that your teaching of technique and terminology is consistent with that of the texts you use as sources.

April 2017 Review

1. QUESTION: Which of the following is the best practice when teaching counterattacks?
   a. use the standard terminology that a stop hit is direct and must land before the start of the final tempo and that a time hit is a stop hit with opposition
   b. use the most current terminology used by the school that you are teaching
   c. use terminology consistent with the fencing master and text that you use as your source

2. QUESTION: What function does opposition perform in a counterattack?
   a. it encourages the opponent to deceive the opposition with a circular parry which the counterattacker can then deceive by feint in tempo
   b. it causes the opponent to attempt to attack in a different line
   c. it intercepts the attack or closes the line so that the attack cannot hit

3. QUESTION: What does Patton's Counter Thrust attempt to exploit?
   a. the psychological moment in the start of the attack in which it is most vulnerable to disruption
   b. the tendency of many attackers to fail to properly cover themselves against a counterattack
   c. the moment at which the opponent starts to step forward
March 2017 - A Matter of Hands

In a previous month's continuing education, we made passing reference to hand positions. This is a complicated subject that deserves more attention, because the varieties are characteristic of different schools and because it influences the outcomes of combat.

Note that the following descriptions reference blade positions applicable to foil and epee. The hand positions described are also correct in sabre, but the curve of the blade is sideways when mounted in the weapon, rather than vertical.

The French School defines three basic hand positions for the weapon hand - supination, pronation, and a middle or neutral position.

In supination the hand is horizontal with the palm upward, and the knuckles downward. The top surface of the blade (the top surface is the wider surface of the blade that is aligned with the top of the grip and with the bend appearing downward when the grip is held in the neutral position) is to the fencer's outside, with any curve to the blade displacing the point toward the inside. Used in the Fourth, Sixth, Seventh, and Eighth parries.

In pronation, the hand is horizontal with the palm downward and the knuckles upward. The top surface of the blade is to the fencer's inside, with any curve to the blade displacing the point toward the outside. In first guard or parry the hand is vertical with the thumb downward and the back of the hand toward the fencer. Used in the First, Second, Third, and Fifth parries.

In middle or neutral position, the hand is vertical with the thumb up and the palm facing to the inside. The top surface of the blade is upward, and the curve of the blade displaces the point downward.

The French School creates two complete parrying systems, one composed of all the pronated parries and one of all the supinated parries. Texts describing the French School vary as to whether the middle or neutral position is an accepted hand position. Some exclude it; some include it, and some include it but only for one guard or parry (typically Fourth). Other schools use variants of the French system:

The Spanish School (which combines some elements of the French and some of the Italian Mixed Schools) prefers the use of the middle position for all guards and parries.

The Kreusslerian Thrust Fencing School (German, as described by Roux) uses pronation (Second and Third parries) and supination (Fourth parry).
Siebenhaar’s Hollandsche Methode (the Dutch School) lacks a detailed description of how to hold the weapon. However, the illustrations and descriptions of technique appear to show four parries with a modified supination, turning the nails "a little down" (Parry Right and Parry Low Right) or "a little up" (Parry Left) in three parries, complete supination in one (Parry Low Left), and complete pronation in three (Low Right with the Hand Inverted, High Left, and High Right parries).

Italian technique starts with four hand positions (see Bertelli in 1800) numbered sequentially First through Fourth. These same four positions eventually are joined by two, or three, others to form what we commonly think of as the characteristic Italian system:

1. First places the hand in a vertical, thumb down position, with the knuckles and back of the hand toward the inside and the palm toward the fencer’s outside line.

2. First in Second is an intermediate position with the hand turned at a 45 degree angle from the vertical between First and Second positions. This hand position does not appear in all Italian texts.

3. Second is a position of complete pronation with the knuckles and back of the hand upward and the palm downward. Used in the Second parry.

4. Second in Third is an intermediate position with the hand turned at a 45 degree angle from the horizontal between Second and Third positions. Used in the Third parry.

5. Third is essentially the same as the French middle position with the hand vertical, the thumb uppermost, the knuckles and back of the hand to the outside, and the palm to the inside.

6. Third in Fourth is an intermediate position with the hand turned at a 45 degree angle from the vertical between Third and Fourth positions. Used in the Fourth and Half-Circle parries.

7. Fourth is a position of complete supination with the knuckles and back of the hand downward and the palm upward.

Hand position plays a significant role in whether or not the attack or counterattack arrests under the pressure of the bout. Some period texts emphasize the arrival of the point as placing the point on the target, an approach that values accuracy in point control. However, the reality is that stress degrades accuracy. A relatively small horizontal deviation with the thumb and index finger in supination or pronation introduces a probability of a miss. The same deviation in the hand in the middle position is a vertical deviation with the probability of hitting the target or at least off target.
There is another variable in hand position that is not generally identified as important as pronation and supination, but obviously is. Does the grip and pommel remain in the contour of the hand, or is the pommel displaced, with the blade forming an angle with the hand and arm? French First and Barbasetti's Italian First with the blade vertical requires the blade, grip, and pommel to rotate free of alignment with the horizontal groove of the palm into the vertical groove. Similar displacement occurs in two of Siebenhaar's Dutch parries. Depending on the characteristic length of the grip this may be a factor in angulation in attacks as well.

March 2017 Review

1. QUESTION: In which hand position are the nails and palm up, the thumb toward the outside line, and the back of the hand downward?

   a. supination or Italian Fourth
   b. middle position or Italian first
   c. pronation or Italian second

2. QUESTION: The Spanish School, which uses a modification of the Italian family of grips, predominantly uses what hand position or positions?

   a. the full range of Italian hand positions, first, second, second in third, third, third in fourth, and fourth
   b. the full range of French hand positions, supination, pronation, and middle
   c. the French middle or neutral hand position

3. QUESTION: Which hand positions offer the greatest tolerance of point displacement errors in the riposte?

   a. those with the hand horizontal, the palm up, knuckles down, thumb to the outside
   b. those with the hand vertical, the palm to the inside, knuckles to the outside, thumb on top
   c. those with the hand horizontal, the palm down, knuckles up, thumb to the inside
February 2017 - Positions, Guards, Invitations, etc.

In our January continuing education post, we discussed lines, specifically including the standard high line, low line, inside line, and outside line. These lines are numbered in a system that varies with the school and that has as much to do with the historical orientation of the fencer's hand, as it does with the physical space covered. The lines are an important construct because of what happens in them, and that is our topic for this month.

When we talk about lines we are talking about two static concepts (position and guard), two offensive acts (attacks and invitations), and two defensive acts (closing the line and parries). All of these are about the same thing, how the space around the fencer's target area is used.

First, for convenience, let's review the lines and the numbering system associated with those lines in the two most commonly described schools of fencing, the French and the mixed Italian (note that (p) indicates hand in pronation and (n or s) hand in supination in the French school):

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>The Lines</th>
<th>French</th>
<th>Italian</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Inside Line</td>
<td>Entire line</td>
<td>1st (p)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Inside High Line</td>
<td>Fourth (n or s)</td>
<td>Fourth</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Inside Low Line</td>
<td>Fifth (p), Seventh (n or s)</td>
<td>First</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Outside Line</td>
<td>Outside High Line</td>
<td>Third (p), Sixth (n or s)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Outside Low Line</td>
<td>Second (p), Eighth (n or s)</td>
<td>Second</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

This is admittedly an oversimplification (it omits high and low variants as well as differences between Italian sources). But it will serve as a convenient basis for discussion. It should be noted that French numbering creates two defensive boxes, based on hand position: the supinated or neutral hand box of 4th, 6th, 7th, and 8th and the pronated hand box of 1st, 2nd, 3rd, and 5th.

POSITION is the actual position of the blade, hand, and arm in one of the four lines relative to the target. The presumption is that the positions of 1st, 2nd, 3rd, 4th, 5th, 6th, 7th, and 8th close the line so that an attack into that line without angulation or opposition will not succeed. There is one additional position adopted by some portion of the contemporary classical fencers, the central position in which the blade is positioned at the intersection of high and low, inside and outside lines.

GUARD is the combination of blade position with body position in readiness for combat. A fencer who is in a guard of 4th has the inside line closed, the torso, non-weapon
arm, and legs in a position that facilitates movement in offense, defense, and counteroffense. In common usage, position is not commonly referred to, and guard serves interchangeably for describing the line of the blade.

ATTACKS and preparations are executed in one or more lines. Thus a feint to the inside high line can be described as a feint to the inside high line or as a feint in 4th. In those schools in which hand position is considered descriptive of the action (such as in French school) the attack is normally described by the appropriate number - thus an attack in 2nd or in 8th depending on whether the hand is in pronation, supination, or a neutral position.

INVITATIONS are actions conducted to stimulate an opponent to execute a specific attack so that the attack can be parried, followed by a riposte to score, or can be hit by counteroffense. English language texts of the French School do not generally make a point of naming invitations. However, Italian sources name invitations based on the resemblance of the invitation to a parry. Thus an invitation of 4th resembles a parry of 4th and opens the opposite line, the high outside line.

CLOSING THE LINE is defensive in nature, although it can be both the restoral of a defensive blade position and as a part of an attacking action to prevent a successful counterattack (thus defending the attack from interference). The fencer closes the line of 4th.

PARRIES are the operationalization of a blade position and the guard to defend the fencer from a specific attack. Parries are almost always referred to by number, thus a 4th parry defends the inside high line from a high inside attack. Where the blade ends up in a parry does not always conform to a guard, both because of the type of parry executed and because of the action to deliver a riposte.

Thus these terms are closely linked. A guard of 4th presumes that the inside high line is closed. An invitation in 4th falsely opens the outside high line to stimulate an attack in that line. An attack in 4th tries to fill the opening created by either error or an invitation of 6th. And a parry of 4th operationalizes the guard to block the attack by closing the line to restore the guard. It is tempting to say that this is all a matter of word choices. However, that is not the case. Each term defines a specific tactical choice - for example, if a line is open you can choose not to close it to leave it open as an invitation or to close it to restore the guard or to execute a parry. Understanding that each is a choice is important to being able to applying tactics to the bout to reach a positive outcome.

February 2017 Review

1. QUESTION: What is the difference between a guard and a parry?
a. there is no difference - a guard properly taken is a parry
b. there is no practical difference between a guard and a parry - when the parry is completed against the opponent's attack it will always form a guard
c. a guard is a combination of blade and body position; a parry is the operationalization of the blade position in the guard to defend against a specific attack

2. QUESTION: In the period 1880-1939 how are attacks described in relation to lines in most cases?

a. attacks are described by the line into which they are made, typically by the number of the line (Italian) or line and hand position (French)
b. attacks are described by the line from which they originate, typically by the description of the line, such as a high outside attack
c. attacks are not described by lines, but rather by the correct parry that would be used to defeat them

3. QUESTION: Closing the line is described in this article as being defensive. How can you explain its use in an attack?

a. closing the line is not defensive; it is always an offensive action
b. properly done closing the line prevents the opponent from easily executing a time or stop action into the attack, thus defending the attack from interference
c. this is an example of how fencing terminology creates confusion - there is no relationship between defensive closing the line and offensive closing the line
The term line in fencing refers to two classes of things, one on the piste and one on the person. Although it might seem that this should be confusing, in reality the two uses of the term support each other, and both occupy an important part of theory of fencing.

French fencing theory did not direct much attention in published texts to the concept that there is a geometrical relationship (as opposed to one of distance) between the two fencers on the strip. Rondelle does describe the concept of "being in line" as being in a good guard position and in line with the opponent, but does not describe what in line with the opponent means.

However, Italian theory was more explicit in dealing with relationships between fencer positions on the strip. For example, Parise defined a Line of Direction (also termed the Directing Line) as a straight line drawn between the centers of the heels of the two fencers along the axes of the fencers’ right feet. When the fencers were on guard, he described the Line of Offense as the straight line between the fencer’s weapon and the opponent’s chest. Both of these lines connect the two fencers, as opposed to describing the target or position of one of them.

The French did address Lines of Attack, but in a very different way from the Italians. Both Rondelle and Castello do identify the concept of a Line of Attack, areas on the opponent into which an attack may be executed. Rondelle tied these to the normal lines on the person, and Castello frames them in broader regions which could encompass several lines.

However, there was general agreement between the two schools as to the subdivision of the target. These subdivisions actually serve four purposes: a position of the fencer (as on guard in a line), an invitation to attack (into a line), the attack itself (in the open or opening line), and the parry (which closes the line).

An imaginary horizontal line from the bell separated High (above the guard) and Low (below the guard) Lines. A vertical line from the bell divided the target into Inside (to the fencer’s chest and abdomen) and Outside (toward the back) Lines. The result was four quadrants, each of which was a line: High Outside, High Inside, Low Inside, and Low Outside (also identified in both schools by the guard or parry that defended the quadrant). These quadrants grew or shrunk in size in relation to the movement of the bell.

There are any number of fencing manuals that depict the four lines by drawing lines that equally divide the torso. Earlier versions equally divide the earlier target when it was restricted to the area above the waist. Even when they were first drawn, these diagrams did not reflect reality. No contemporary author describes a hit delivered to the inside of
the opponent's blade on an area labelled High Outside on an equilaterally divided illustration of the torso as being a High Outside touch. But if the division were really related to lines drawn on the torso, they should have said that hit to the inside of the blade landed in the Outside Line, an assertion that would have made no sense.

These lines on the person come back to relate to the Italian lines relative to the piste. If two right handed fencers come on guard on the Line of Direction, the Line of Attack and the Line of Direction are quite close. At the same time hits to the Inside Line become more difficult. And the old practice of engagement in fourth rather than sixth or third makes more sense. Fourth engagement was used extensively because of the perceived strength and speed advantage of the sixth parry.

However, if the fencer shifts his position laterally to the opponent’s inside even a small distance, rather than a straight Line of Direction paralleling the edges of the piste, the fourth High Inside Line becomes more accessible, and thus more vulnerable. This is a practice of some antiquity – Saviolo describes rapier play trying to gain the advantage of an opponent’s exposed Inside Line by circular movement to the inside in detail in 1595. It is useful to experiment with fencing maintaining rigorous attention to position on the Line of Direction to see the difference between fencing to the outside of the line, on the line, and to the inside of the line.

More difficult to understand was the use of a central guard (at the intersection of the vertical and horizontal lines drawn on the torso already discussed). In the central guard the diagram with four quadrants found in some textbooks becomes truth, as the fencer's bell is positioned at, or close to, the intersection of the vertical and horizontal lines. The central guard was certainly used, and used by some prominent fencers. The argument in its favor is that from this guard the fencer could move equally quickly to defend any line. The disadvantage is that when the fencer was on guard, no line was protected, forcing the fencer to be ready to move in any direction and leaving her exposed in all.

The Line of Direction and the Line of Attack survive the end of the classical period, being incorporated in Mangiarotti’s text of 1966. And the Line of Direction is still encountered as the Fencing Line.

January 2017 CE Review

1. QUESTION: Which line refers to the straight-line geometrical relationship between the fencers' feet on the piste?

   a. the Line of Direction
   b. the Line of Attack
   c. the Inside and Outside Lines
2. QUESTION: You are reading a book about fencing, and when the lines are described the description is illustrated by a diagram showing the torso facing you with the chest fully exposed. A vertical line divides the torso from neck to crotch, and a horizontal line divides it from approximately above the navel to below it. Each of these quadrants is labelled with High Outside, Low Outside, etc. and the number of the parry that defends it. When is this diagram an accurate representation of the lines on the body?

a. always - the line of an action is defined relative to the point at which it occurs on the body; if the attack lands in one of the quadrants it is an attack into that line regardless of where the fencer's weapon is
b. only when the fencer is on guard in a central guard, otherwise the lines grow or shrink in relation to the position of the bell

c. never - lines are defined from the position of the blade of the fencer's weapon

3. QUESTION: In Italian theory the Line of Attack or Line of Offense is defined as:

a. the actual movement of the blade in executing the attack,
b. the area of the target that is exposed when a fencer adopts a guard position.
c. the straight line connecting the fencer's weapon with the target.
Orthopaedic grips have widely been blamed by classical fencers for most of the ills of modern fencing. Criticisms include that they prevent the delicate fingerplay of the traditional French and Italian grips and that they encourage the use of excessive force leading to bad fencing, flicking, brutal fencing, heavy-handedness, all of the fatalities in fencing’s recent history, etc. It is well known that orthopaedic grips did not exist during the classical period. Therefore, no classical fencer should ever use one.

We admittedly live in a post-factual world, and the classical criticism of the orthopaedic grip is ideally suited for that world. Orthopaedic grips appear to fall into three basic design categories: (1) grips with a long handle, seemingly built upon the French grip (the Gardere is an example), (2) grips that appear to be modifications of the Italian grip (the Spanish grip is an example), and (3) grips designed to be manipulated with fingers and the musculature of the hand, the true pistol grip (the Visconti is an example). Some specimens have multiple characteristics, making classifying them an interesting effort. All appear to have been designed for one or more of three purposes: improved finger control, retaining the strength and power of the Italian Grip, and allowing use by individuals with injuries. Fencing’s orthopaedic grips are one of the first, if not the first, examples of adaptive sports equipment for fencers with disabilities, something of which all fencers should be proud.

Improved finger control is mentioned by classical period sources, notably Adelardo Sanz in his description of the design criteria for the Spanish grip. That orthopaedic grips reduce finger control is refuted by no less knowledgeable an authority, Genady Tyshler in the Federation d’Escrime Internationale’s current manual for training coaches. Tyshler emphasizes that orthopaedic grips offer better finger control than a French or Italian grip.

And, if we consider strength, the French critique of the Italian schools has always been the forcefulness of the technique. Castello, Sanz, and Bossini all describe the benefits of the Spanish grip as offering the control of the French grip and the power of the Italian grip. It is difficult to understand how an Italian grip strapped to the wrist is less powerful than an unrestrained orthopaedic grip.

That leaves the fact that orthopaedic grips were not used in the classical period. Well, actually that is not a fact either. Thanks to the work of George Kokochashvili we can identify a significant collection of designs of orthopaedic grips that predate the end of the classical period as the Academy defines it (1880-1939).

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Approximate Date</th>
<th>Grip</th>
<th>Notes</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1895-1902</td>
<td>Spanish</td>
<td>By Maestro Adelardo Sanz. A modification of the Italian grip with different sized...</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Date</td>
<td>Name</td>
<td>Description</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>------------</td>
<td>-------------------------------</td>
<td>---------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Early 1900s</td>
<td>Terrone</td>
<td>A straight grip designed by Maestro Leonardo Terrone for right and left handed fencing.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Early 1900s</td>
<td>Terrone-Perez</td>
<td>A straight grip designed by Maestro Leonardo Terrone with assistance from Giuseppe Perez for right and left handed fencing.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Early 1900s</td>
<td>Parise-Terrone-Perez</td>
<td>A straight grip with modified quillons designed by Maestro Leonardo Terrone as an improvement to the Terrone-Perez model with assistance from Maestro Massaniello Parise for right and left handed fencing.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1905</td>
<td>Cugnon D’Alincourt</td>
<td>A straight grip with a paddle near the pommel.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1908</td>
<td>Eugene-Louis Doyen</td>
<td>A straight grip with finger projections designed to be custom fit to the fencer.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1910-1920</td>
<td>Athos di San Malato</td>
<td>A pistol grip with a long rearward extension.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>In the 1920s</td>
<td>Gardere</td>
<td>A straight grip with finger hooks designed by Maestro Andre Gardere.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1920</td>
<td>Athos di San Malato</td>
<td>A pistol grip with a wrap-around rear projection and a thumb trough.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1920-1925</td>
<td>Herminio Eccheri</td>
<td>A grip with either a shaped or straight handle and two large circular loops apparently held horizontally designed by Maestro Herminio Eccheri.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1920-1930</td>
<td>Visconti</td>
<td>A pistol grip designed by Maestro Francesco Visconti.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1922</td>
<td>Souzy Aine</td>
<td>A straight handle with a paddle before the pommel and two short vertical quillons.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1924</td>
<td>Domenico Triolo</td>
<td>A short straight handle with two shaped quillons.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1929</td>
<td>Agesilao Greilo</td>
<td>A straight handle with a single arch on the bottom side of the grip.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1936</td>
<td>Michele Alajmo</td>
<td>A straight handle epee grip with two gently curved quillons.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The grips listed are not a complete catalog of patterns. For example, the Cetrulo and Belgian Pistol grips are certainly pre-1939 in origin, and there are a variety of patterns of
Spanish Grip that precede at least 1948, and almost certainly 1939. The list only includes those for which an approximate date and likely source could be established.

When one reads the list of grip designs, it is interesting to note that the names of the designers read like a who's who of prominent fencers and fencing masters. These are not a novice inventing a grip that will let them pummel more advanced fencers with undisciplined, heavy-handed fencing. They are leading practitioners, fencing masters, experienced duelists, formidable competitors of the day, well trained in their particular schools, and presumably valuing sentiment de fer and blade and point control to as high a degree as any other fencer of the day.

If you wish to use an orthopaedic grip in classical fencing, we do have several guidelines that you should follow:

(1) choose a grip that you can establish without doubt was in use between the years 1880 and 1939, and that is consistent with the specific school or master whose work you are studying. This may create challenges. For example, the manuals and notes of Adelardo Sanz were destroyed prior to his suicide and any writings of his primary protégé, Angel Lancho, were almost certainly destroyed during the Spanish Civil War.

(2) train to use the grip the way it was used by adherents of the school. If your fencing is French School from the late 1920s-1930s and you want to use a Gardere grip, then practice to use French fingerplay with that weapon. Don't decide you will do Italian fencing with a long handled orthopaedic grip or French fencing with an Italian design, unless you have supporting evidence.

(3) from time to time go back to the older French and Italian grips as appropriate and practice with them. Doing so will help you better understand your orthopaedic grip.

(4) understand that fingerplay is a useful concept as long as your pulse rate stays below approximately 115 beats per minute. Above that fine motor control starts to disappear, and you must be prepared to shift to hand and even arm control of the blade. This is a physiological reaction that appears nowhere in the classical manuals. If you want to do high quality finger work with an orthopaedic grip, work on relaxation and lowering your pulse rate.

December 2016 CE Review

1. QUESTION: One of the advantages of the orthopaedic grip was that these grips allowed fencers with hand or arm injuries to continue to fence. However, based on comments at the time which of the following was a primary reason for the design of orthopaedic grips?
a. to provide the ability to apply even more power to blade actions than the Italian grip could
b. to reduce the technical ability required for beginning students to be able to fight successfully in duels
c. to improve control and accuracy in fingerplay

2. QUESTION: The orthopaedic grips designed during the classical period prior to World War II were overwhelmingly designed by:

a. individuals who hoped that a weapon capable of exerting a great deal of force would compensate for their lack of skill and competitive success.
b. highly accomplished and well known fencers, duelists, and fencing masters
c. the premise of the question is false - orthopaedic grips may have been designed but were never actually used in the classical period; only the French and Italian grips can be considered classical grips

3. QUESTION: The earliest documented design for an orthopaedic grip for which we can establish a date was:

a. the Belgian pistol grip designed specifically for use with the electric foil and epee in 1952.
b. Adelardo Sanz's Spanish grip patented in 1895.
c. Athos di San Malato's modification of the Italian grip by adding a heavier pommel, offset quillons, and a differently shaped handle in 1920.