

Longsword and Sword and Buckler in the Liechtenauer School

Class Notes

Introduction to the Liechtenauer Tradition	2
Footwork – fifteen minutes	3
Primary Guards and Cuts – forty-five minutes	4
Break and Deflections – fifteen minutes	5
Break and Deflections – fifteen minutes	5
Secondary Guards and Deflections – thirty minutes	6
Striking and Receiving Deflection Drill – thirty minutes	7
Riposte Drill – fifteen minutes	8
Illustrations of Longsword Guards	9
Introduction to Sword-and-Buckler – fifteen minutes	12
Guards and Cuts – thirty minutes	13
Secondary Guards and Deflections – thirty minutes	14
Secondary Guards and Deflections Drill – thirty minutes	15
Break – Initiative Discussion and Fühlen – thirty minutes	16
Master Cuts and Other Goodies – fifteen minutes	17
Improvised Deflection and Riposte Drill – thirty minutes	18
Illustrations of Sword and Buckler Guards	19
The Tindsson Conceit	21
Sources	22

Created by Matt Hulan for a class to be taught at the Feast of St. Pyr on April 30, 2011,
near Blacksburg, VA

Introduction to the Liechtenauer Tradition

Five minutes

Johannes Liechtenauer's philosophy of combat is first described by Hans Döbinger in a book dated to 1390, and Döbinger discusses Liechtenauer as though he were already well-known as a famous master. Liechtenauer's tradition of fighting is annotated, expanded, and extolled throughout the next two hundred years as the most important Germanic school of swordplay. In Döbinger's manuscript, he refers to Liechtenauer's style as being applicable to many disciplines of fighting, from longsword and sword-and-buckler to fighting from horseback. Additionally, from a manuscript by Peter von Danzig, Andre Lignitzer's sword-and-buckler style is described by later writers as being "the sword-and-buckler techniques of the Liechtenauer tradition" – it is notably referenced by Hans Talhoffer, Samuel Ringeck, and Peter von Danzig. Von Danzig additionally refers to the "Tower Manuscript," which is more commonly known as I.33, suggesting that while I.33 predates Liechtenauer, and therefore is not in the Liechtenauer tradition, per se, it likely informed the development of Liechtenauer's techniques.

Lignitzer's form shows some similarities to I.33, notably in the guards; however, where I.33 is described as a set of specific plays and responses, the Liechtenauer style is significant in that it is reactive and improvisatory, rather than prescriptive. While I have every reason to believe that the style described in the I.33 manual would be an effective fighting style, if it were taught by a master, the I.33 manuscript does not comprise a sufficient teaching resource. It is possible to synthesize the information in I.33 and Liechtenauer's commentators into a comprehensive, 14th-century, Germanic fighting style.

Footwork – fifteen minutes

- Feet 75°, shoulder-width apart, knees slightly bent, center of balance on the balls of the feet.
- Start in a relaxed stance with feet shoulder-width apart, angled 75°, knees bent.
- Turn the hips so that the shoulders face the direction in which the forward foot is pointed.
- Push the center of gravity forward until your weight is on the balls of your feet.

Liechtenauer and I.33 are both weight-forward methods, with the exception of the Vom Tag and Nebenhut guards in Liechtenauer, which is taught weight-back. The theory espoused by Wagner and Hand is that this method was developed as a side-effect of the relatively-slick, leather-soled turn shoes that were typically worn by combatants.

The four motions.

1. Step – Gather
2. Lunge
3. Change – Passing
4. Triangle – Compass

Drill this on a ten count, as so:

1. Step
2. (two)
3. Lunge
4. (two)
5. Change
6. (two)
7. Tri
8. Ang
9. Gle
10. Rest

- Gradually speed the drill up and repeat until the participants are comfortable with the footwork drill.

Primary Guards and Cuts – forty-five minutes

Teach the guards using the Passing step as the transitional motion. Teach all guards left-foot forward, then right-foot forward.

Guards

1. Pflug = One – hilt points towards the rear foot, tip of the sword points at opponent's eyes
2. Ochs = Two – hilt by the ear, rear-foot side; tip towards opponent's eyes
3. Alber = Three – tip points at ground; hilt points at practitioner's belly – angle of blade skews the hilt slightly towards rear foot; tip angled slightly towards fore foot
4. Vom Tag = Four – cross-guard horizontal at ear level, rear-foot side; tip pointed straight up

Historical guards of these same names have a ridiculous variety of possible configurations; these are described here and taught to a HEMA standard. I tend to use this Vom Tag guard as described when actually fighting, but when I run this drill, Vom Tag usually ends up directly overhead.

Teach the cuts, again using the Passing step as the transitional motion. Teach all cuts left-foot forward, then right-foot forward.

Cuts

5. Vom Tag to Alber = Five = Diagonal Cut
6. Alber to Ochs = Six = Reverse Diagonal - discuss the Italian prejudice (Fiore) for executing this strike with the short edge - I prefer the long edge in this strike
7. Ochs to Ochs = Seven = Unterhau
8. Ochs to Pflug = Eight = Funkyhau (funky oberhau, if you prefer)

I have a tendency to refer to these as “master cuts” in casual conversation. This is, in point of fact, not the proper name for these basic cuts. Liechtenauer's “Master Cuts” are different and specific. They are covered in another section of the lesson. What I call the “funkyhau” probably has a proper method name, but I don't know it. Plus, I like the word “funkyhau.”

- Drill the guards in left-forward and right-forward - 4 steps starting in Alber, which is counted as zero, per HEMA drill
- Drill this until people are comfortable, then switch to forward and back
- Switch to 8 steps forward and back until people are comfortable either way
- Drill the cuts similarly, then combine the drills for a full count of eight

Break and Deflections – fifteen minutes

Discuss the concept of weak and strong ends of the blade.

In deflections, weak meets strong: *receiving* deflection; strong meets weak: *striking* deflection.

Liechtenauer has receiving deflections typically stepping off-line, striking deflections typically stepping in-line; however, this is not to be considered a hard-and-fast rule.

1. Demonstration of receiving and striking deflections

Secondary Guards and Deflections – thirty minutes

Teach secondary guards, again emphasizing Passing step. Teach left foot forward, followed by right foot forward.

In Döbringer's manuscript, he has Liechtenauer stating that there are only four guards. However, many other sources in the tradition describe the four secondary guards, as well. Following Viggiani's dictum that every strike lies between two guards, and every guard lies between two strikes, the secondary guards may be seen as useful end points for many of the regular cuts, and consequently starting points for other cuts, c.f. a variation on cut #1, taking Kron to Schranckhut instead of Vom Tag to Alber.

Demonstrate secondary guards drill, as follows

1. Nebenhut to Langenort
2. Langenort to Schranckhut
3. Schranckhut to Kron

Secondary Guards

1. Nebenhut – aka “Longtail;” blade pointed at ground behind fighter; hilt at waist; short edge will be pointed towards the opponent – this may be seen as the natural end point of a diagonal cut from Vom Tag
 2. Langenort – aka “Longpoint;” arms are at full extension; point of blade will be directly at opponent's eyes; flat of blade is parallel to ground
 3. Schranckhut – blade is perpendicular to line of sight; point is towards the ground opposite the forward foot; hilt at waist
 4. Kron – arms extended; hilt is at brow height, blade again perpendicular to line of sight
- Drill the guards in left-forward and right-forward - 4 steps starting in Nebenhut, which is counted as zero, per HEMA drill
 - Drill this until people are comfortable, then switch to forward and back
 - Switch to 8 steps forward and back until people are comfortable either way

Full Guard Drill

Begin in Alber

1. Pflug
2. Ochs
3. Alber
4. Vom Tag
5. Schranckhut
6. (through Langenort)
7. Nebenhut
8. Kron

Striking and Receiving Deflection Drill – thirty minutes

Teach the receiving drill left-foot forward and right-foot forward:

Hold the blade in Schranckhut. The blade is angled to receive a blow on the flat as much as possible. The blade is rotated through Kron with the Passing motion, as if a windshield wiper. This drill is meant to emphasize receiving deflections. The only difference between left-foot and right-foot forward in this drill is the direction of the first deflection.

Teach the striking drill left-foot forward and right-foot forward:

Hold the blade in Nebenhut. The blade is snapped from Nebenhut to Langenort with the Passing motion. This drill is meant to emphasize the striking deflections.

1. Drill the receiving deflections four steps up and back for left-foot forward until participants are comfortable.
2. Repeat the drill with right-foot forward.
3. Drill the striking deflections four steps up and back for left-foot forward until participants are comfortable.
4. Repeat the drill with right-foot forward.

Riposte Drill – fifteen minutes

Teach the concept of the riposte and combination.

Since cuts fall between guards and vice versa, all deflections should similarly set up return attacks.

Typically, Liechtenauer's deflections are performed in conjunction with an attack. It is an axiom of Liechtenauer's that merely defending is weak fighting, or what Talhoffer calls "play fighting," as opposed to "fighting earnestly."

1. Students pair up and practice cuts five, six, seven, and eight against the striking deflection. Upon deflecting a cut in one of the guards, students should return a cut of their own on the way to another guard.
2. Students pair up and practice cuts five, six, seven, and eight against the receiving deflection. Upon deflecting a cut in one of the guards, students should return a cut of their own on the way to another guard.

Illustrations of Longsword Guards

Pflug



Alber



Ochs



Vom Tag



over the head



Since my source does not include instruction on the Kron or Nebenhut guards, I do not include them here. There is additionally a great deal of variation in the sources and commentaries concerning the execution of the various guards, so while these images are representative, they should not be considered definitive.

Intermission

Introduction to Sword-and-Buckler – fifteen minutes

Discuss open- and closed-shield styles

- I.33 is closed-shield – sword and buckler move together
- Talhoffer is open-shield – sword and buckler move independently

Applicability of Liechtenauer's longsword techniques to sword-and-buckler implies a closed-shield system, and Andre Lignitzer's system in the von Danzig manuscript is largely a closed-shield system.

Tindsson conceit sword-and-buckler is a closed-shield system with simplified guards and cuts based on Liechtenauer. I.33's other guards are not to be discounted, but Sean Hayes, among others, has voiced the opinion that the guards are to be entered into as one steps into measure and attacks, and I have found that practicing Liechtenauer's theory using sword and buckler tends to take the practitioner through several of the I.33 wards during the plays.

This system is designed to emphasize half-shielding, cuts, and deflections, which tend in practice to combine in organic ways to create the wards of I.33 on the fly.

Guards and Cuts – thirty minutes

Teach the guards using the Passing step as the transitional motion. Teach all guards left-foot forward, then right-foot forward. In all of the guards except Pflug, the buckler may be treated as if it were the second hand of a two-handed grip. I recommend the student start by lightly gripping the pommel with the thumb and forefinger of the buckler hand.

Guards – buckler at rest

1. Pflug = One = Sword is held much like in longsword; however, the shield is held below the blade, such that the blade rises up from above and behind the buckler, as if the edge were resting on the edge of the buckler
2. Ochs = Two = Sword is in hanging guard; buckler is outside
3. Alber = Three = Sword hand is under-hand, blade flat is towards the opponent, buckler covers wrist
4. Vom Tag = Four = As with ochs, buckler is on the outside

Teach the cuts again using the Passing step as the transitional motion. Teach all cuts left-foot forward, then right-foot forward.

Cuts – buckler follows sword hilt – guards hand – works as “second hand” on the longsword

5. Vom Tag to Alber = Five = Diagonal Cut
 6. Alber to Ochs = Six = Reverse Diagonal
 7. Ochs to Ochs = Seven = Unterhau = This one requires that the buckler move from outside to outside during the cut – I think a separation of the sword from the shield works best, here, as with the Pflug guard, above
 8. Ochs to Pflug = Eight = Funkyhau
- Drill the guards in left-forward and right-forward - 4 steps starting in Alber as zero, per the Sword Guild
 - Drill this until people are comfortable, then switch to forward and back
 - Switch to 8 steps forward and back until people are comfortable either way
 - Drill the cuts similarly, then combine the drills for a full count of eight

In Lignitzer and I.33, the guard known as Wild Boar is additionally included in the system. Wild Boar is often taught as a sword-and-buckler version of Ochs; however, I prefer to include Ochs as a hanging-guard position, and I tend to think of Wild Boar as a variation of Pflug or Langenort. As Wild Boar as I practice it is a fairly aggressive guard, I included it in the Guards and Cuts section. The buckler is held forward, fending off the opponent; the sword is held waist-high, point forward, ready to thrust. In this position, the buckler hides the tip of the blade from the opponent. The buckler can block high or low, allowing the thrust to come from the opposite side.

Secondary Guards and Deflections – thirty minutes

Teach secondary guards, again emphasizing Passing step. Teach left foot forward, followed by right foot forward.

In Döbringer's manuscript, he has Liechtenauer stating that there are only four guards. However, many other sources in the tradition describe the four secondary guards, as well. Following Viggiani's dictum that every strike lies between two guards, and every guard lies between two strikes, the secondary guards may be seen as useful end points for many of the regular cuts, and consequently starting points for other cuts, c.f. a variation on cut #1, taking Kron to Shrenkhut instead of Vom Tag to Alber.

Demonstrate cutting drill, as follows

1. Kron to Schranckhut
2. Schranckhut to Langenort
3. Langenort to Kron
4. Kron to Langenort

Secondary Guards

1. Nebenhut – aka “Longtail;” blade pointed at ground behind fighter; hilt at waist; short edge will be pointed towards the opponent; buckler is held forward – this may be seen as the natural end point of a diagonal cut from Vom Tag
 2. Langenort – arms are at full extension; point of blade will be directly at opponent's eyes; flat of blade is parallel to ground; buckler covers sword hand
 3. Schranckhut – blade is perpendicular to line of sight; point is towards the ground opposite the forward foot; hilt at waist; buckler covers sword hand
 4. Kron – arms extended; hilt is at brow height, blade again perpendicular to line of sight; buckler is held forward
- Drill the guards in left-forward and right-forward - 4 steps starting in Nebenhut, which is counted as zero, per HEMA drill
 - Drill this until people are comfortable, then switch to forward and back
 - Switch to 8 steps forward and back until people are comfortable either way

Secondary Guards and Deflections Drill – thirty minutes

With sword-and-buckler, shield follows hilt, as second hand of longsword

- Drill the receiving deflections four steps up and back until the participants are comfortable – blocks are made with the sword

Striking deflections, blocks made with the buckler

- Students pair up and practice cuts five, six, seven, and eight against the receiving and striking deflections – deflections should be made with the buckler for striking and with the blade for receiving

Break – Initiative Discussion and Fühlen – thirty minutes

Initiative

Liechtenauer's method includes a highly developed theory of initiative that seems fairly straightforward when described, but which is quite sophisticated when put into practice. His idea is that there are three moments in any exchange in which a combatant should act. Simply put, the three moments are before the opponent begins an action, after the opponent begins an action, or in the moment that the opponent's action meets the combatant's response. These three moments are referred to in Liechtenauer's method as Vor, Nach, and Indes, respectively.

In later commentary on Liechtenauer's method, specific guidelines are given as to which cuts and guards are best used in which moments of initiative. However, Liechtenauer himself advocates the development of what he refers to as fühlen, or the "feel" of a fight. In terms of the practical application of initiative and fühlen, this is something that can only be developed over time. However, the recommendations of the later masters can well be used as general applications of the theory, so that the student may develop a sense of how the theory works in practice.

Generally speaking, cuts are slower than thrusts. In close quarters, Ochs and Pflug are very fast guards, and the thrust may well be employed in the Vor. Cuts from Vom Tag are typically quite fast, as well: in particular, Liechtenauer's crown strike Master Cut makes a strong response in the Vor. Conversely, cuts from Ochs, Alber, and Pflug alike are often well suited to use in the Nach, as responses to the opponent's attacks. Liechtenauer's winding or grappling techniques are generally the preferred action in the Indes. Again, these are guidelines, and in practice the guidelines do not necessarily meet the requirements of every situation.

Demonstration of fühlen drill – sword against sword, practice windings, zucken, abnehmen, schnappen, and durchwechseln – use strength against weakness, weakness against strength

Master Cuts and Other Goodies – fifteen minutes

The “Master Cuts” are combinations that deflect and strike at the same time – our idea of what Liechtenauer’s specific longsword Master Cuts were actually come from Ringeck, a good hundred years or more after Liechtenauer.

1. Zornhau – Strike of wrath – diagonal oberhau from Vom Tag – the key is to use the zornhau to parry the opponent’s oberhau and to convert to a zornhau-ort, or thrust from the parry
2. Krumphau – Crooked strike – stepping offline, the attack moves diagonally back into the original line of attack, usually aimed at the wrists
3. Zwerchhau – Cross strike – a twisting strike, the sword is in what might be described as a hanging langenort, blade parallel to the ground
4. Shielhau – Squinting strike – the blade moves from a Vom Tag to the opposite Ochs, with the intention of stopping a zornhau or other diagonal oberhau, while catching the opponent on the shoulder
5. Scheitelhau – Scalp strike – Vom Tag to a high langenort, blade down – usually this is done while stepping back with the forward foot, so that the point strikes the forehead

Also discuss I.33 half-shield, Liechtenauer’s half-sword, stab-knock, grapples

Demonstration of abreisen, unterhau-lunge, stab-knock from Alber to face, that sort of thing

Improvised Deflection and Riposte Drill – thirty minutes

- Participants pair and practice deflection/attack combinations against the basic cuts, choosing either longsword or sword-and-buckler

If time, run monkey-in-the-middle drill:

- One participant surrounded by four other participants – outside participants each choose one of the four cuts – as center participant turns to an outer partner, cut is thrown – center participant deflects and counters, turns to next outer partner

This also works with more or fewer people on the outside – two is minimal, more than four becomes cluttered.

Illustrations of Sword and Buckler Guards

Liegnitzer's guards, interpreted



Pflug



Alber



Ochs



Vom Tag



Langenort



Schrankhut



Kron



Wild Boar

The wards of I.33



Ward 1
(Left Nebenhut)



Ward 2
(Right Vom Tag)



Ward 3
(Left Vom Tag)



Ward 4
(High Vom Tag)



Ward 5
(Right Nebenhut)



Ward 6
(Ochs/Wild Boar)



Ward 7
(Langenort)

The Tindsson Conceit

My SCA persona is Grettir Tindsson, who would have lived between about 1380 and 1440. Such a person would likely have been a part of the fishing industry in his early life, and my idea is that he spent much of his time traveling to the mainland. After one of the plagues in the 1380s, he would have decided not to return to Iceland but to stay on the mainland. Although the Norwegian kings had by this time in history disarmed Iceland, and the Danish kings continued this policy, Grettir would have learned the Germanic style of fighting in the late fourteenth century and spent much of his later life as a mercenary and fighting teacher on the mainland. Grettir Tindsson could reasonably be believed to have been familiar with Liechtenauer's style, as well as with the style known today as I.33, which dates from a manuscript apparently written around 1290. Although the most complete Liechtenauer tradition and the modern interpretations of the I.33 system are both fairly complex, the Tindsson conceit boils them down to a few basic principles of Liechtenauer's that work together. The Tindsson conceit is intended to be a practical method for adapting HEMA longsword instruction and training drills to SCA cut & thrust unarmored fighting.

Sources

- Döbringer, Hanko. *Hanko Döbringer's Fechtbuch*. Trans. David Lindholm. Cod.HS.3227a. *Germanisches Nationalmuseum*, Nurnberg.
- Hunt, Brian. "Guards of the I.33 or Tower Fechtbuch." *ARMA*. thearma.org, Aug. 2007. March 23, 2011. <http://www.thearma.org/Manuals/I33-guards.html>
- Langes Schwert Teil 1*. Dir. Rudolf Dembach. Agilitas.tv, 2004. Film.
- Leoni, Tom. "Bolognese Swordsmanship." *Order of the Seven Hearts*. salvatorfabris.com, n.d. March 23, 2011.
- Meyers, Keith P. "Sword and Buckler of Liechtenauer." *ARMA*. thearma.org, n.d. March 23, 2011. <http://www.thearma.org/essays/LeignitzerSandB.htm>
- Reich, Steven. "An Introduction to the Fundamentals of Bolognese Swordsmanship." *Order of the Seven Hearts*. salvatorfabris.com, n.d. March 23, 2011.
- Talhoffer, Hans. *Fight Earnestly*. Trans. Jeffrey Hull. Thott 290 2°. Det Kongelige Bibliotek, Copenhagen.
- Tobler, Christian. *Fighting with the German Longsword*. Texas: The Chivalry Bookshelf, 2004.
- Wagner, Paul and Stephen Hand. *Medieval Sword and Shield*. Texas: The Chivalry Bookshelf, 2003.
- Walczak, Bartholomew and Jacob Norwood. "The Mastercuts." *ARMA*. thearma.org, n.d. March 23, 2011. <http://www.thehaca.com/essays/mastercuts.html>

I am additionally indebted to many online conversations on the sword forum; videos and images of the techniques of various schools, teachers, and fights published to youtube and flickr; documentary films by National Geographic, the History Channel, Agilitas.tv, and others; various conversations with many and sundry fighters in HEMA and the SCA; and most of all, my own studies have been driven by my involvement with my local HEMA group: the Roanoke Valley Sword Guild. Any value in this document or my class comes from these sources, and any mistake, misinterpretation, or foolishness lies only with me.