

Lacaze Sword and Dagger
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In the early 20th century, the French fencing master Albert Lacaze and his associate Georges Dubois developed a unique method of “two-handed fencing” inspired by both Renaissance rapier and classical French methodology. More importantly, they applied a very effective pedagogy to sword and dagger training.

This article is based on a class I gave at the Known World Academy of the Rapier in November 2012. It is designed to give an introduction to a fast, fun, and furious school of sword and dagger fighting that not only gives an excellent method for training in Renaissance styles, but also happens to be a living tradition. I will be following up with a full translation of Lacaze and Dubois’ manual.

Note that I am assuming at least a basic familiarity with classical or modern fencing, particularly standard French terminology. (Note that, as far as two-handed fencing is concerned, we can speak of “outside” the dagger or sword, as well as “inside,” which is between the two.)

A description—and videos!—of Lacaze and Dubois’ work can be seen here:

<http://freelanceacademypress.wordpress.com/2012/03/28/georges-dubois-the-forgotten-master-of-ancient-fencing-lescrime-ancienne/>

Footwork

The following are the footwork actions we’ll be using. Practice them as you would any other footwork:

- On guard: One can go on guard in sixth (as is demonstrated in the book and video) or in third (as the system was development after Hungarian sabre-style cuts were introduced to the system). Since we are staying with the “original” thrust-only play, we will go on guard in sixth with the sword and third with the dagger.
- Advance: This is a normal fencing advance. Remember that the classical French stance is not as deep as the rapier stance, and the torso is more upright.
- Retreat: This is a normal fencing retreat
- Change lead: Advance or retreat “on the pass,” changing your lead so that the other foot is forward.
- Lunge: An ordinary lunge keeping the same body orientation
- Lunge on the pass: A lunge on the non-dominant hand, changing your lead and striking with the dagger
- Reassemblément with cross-parry: From the guard position, the weapons are crossed in front of the face, arms mostly extended, both hands pronated. The sword may be in front of the dagger or vice versa. The student then executes an ordinary reassemblément, bringing the front foot back so the heel touches the

- instead of the rear foot while raising the center of gravity. This can also be done as a “low cross,” arms about waist-height.
- Volte: As with a classical volte, save that the dagger-hand is kept at chest height

Basic mechanical drills

These are intended to build basic facility in managing the two weapons together.

Drill 1: *Tirer au mur* (“fencing at the wall”) with dagger parries

In this first drill, the student is placed on guard with his back against a wall and his dominant foot forwards, but armed only with the dagger in the non-dominant hand. The instructor makes, by turn, thrusts to:

- his high line near the dagger (student parries counter-third)
- high line far from the dagger (student parries fourth)
- low line under the dagger (student parries second)
- low line diagonally opposite the dagger (student parries first, or, alternately seventh or low fourth)

Drill 2: Change of engagement with sword and dagger

- Both student and instructor are on guard with sword and dagger, right feet forward.
- The instructor engages the student’s weapons in sixth with his sword and in third with his dagger, commanding the inside line with both weapons.
- The student changes the engagement by coupé with his sword over the instructor’s dagger and circular change of engagement with his dagger under the instructor’s sword. The instructor then regains the engagement by change and coupé.
- The student changes the engagement in turn
- Once a degree of facility is achieved, this can be done coordinated with footwork

Drill 3: Simultaneous parry and counterthrust

- The student is placed on guard with both sword and dagger
- From engagement in sixth, his point to the student’s outside, the instructor makes each of the four attacks from the first drill
- The student parries each in turn with his dagger and makes a simultaneous counterattack with his sword. Note that it is advantageous to take the inside line on the pass, forwards or backwards, to bring the left shoulder forwards; for the high inside line, the right hand must also drop.

Drill 4: Deceive a dagger parry

- The student is placed on guard with both sword and dagger

- From engagement of the student's sword in third with his dagger, the instructor makes a circular change of engagement
- The student disengages his sword under the dagger and hits with a lunge
- Once the basic movement is mastered, the instructor can add a coupé of his sword over the student's dagger, which the student must parry counter-third with his dagger simultaneous with his lunge.

Drill 5: Blade replacement

- From engagement in sixth, his blade to the student's outside, the instructor disengages and attacks to the student's inside
- The student parries in fourth with the sword and immediately makes a second parry of counter-third with the dagger, securing the opposing steel (the "replacement")
- The riposte follows immediately by detachment, the dagger holding the opposing steel

Drill 6: Cross-parries

- From engagement in sixth, his blade to the student's outside, the instructor disengages and attacks to the student's inside, either high or low.
- The student makes a cross-parry with reassemblent, either high or low as appropriate, alternating between having the sword and the dagger in front
 - From the high cross with the sword in front, the student can hold the opposing steel with the dagger and riposte with the sword. With the dagger in front, he can hold the opposing steel with the sword and lunge on the pass, striking with the dagger.
 - From the low cross with the sword in front, he can hold the opposing steel with the dagger and riposte with the sword. With the dagger in front, he can either riposte with the dagger on the pass or "slide up" the opposing steel and hit with a bind.
 - Another variation will be seen below

Tactical Drills

Having gained facility with the basic movements, we can apply these in tactical contexts.

Drill 7: Offense: Feint, deceive the dagger and hit while closing the line

- From out of distance, the student, on his own initiation, advances with a feint to the instructor's inside, close to his dagger
- The instructor attempts a parry of counter-third with his dagger while counterthrusting with his sword to the student's inside, close to his dagger
- The student deceives the dagger parry and hits while making a parry of counter-

- third with his dagger to defeat the instructor's counterattack
- This can also be done with feints, counterthrusts, and hits to the low line (dagger parry of second, deceived by disengagement over the hand to the high line)

Drill 8: Defensive second intention

- From out of distance, the instructor feints to the student's inside, close to his dagger
- The student parries counter-third to draw the disengagement
- The instructor obliges by deceiving the parry and lunging
- The student parries fourth with the sword, picks up the the weapon with a replacement of counter-third with the dagger, and ripostes with the sword

Drill 8 variation

- From out of distance, the instructor attacks the student's inside, close to his dagger
- The student parries counter-third to draw the disengagement
- The instructor obliges by deceiving the parry
- The student makes a high cross, dagger in front, frees the sword by making an ascending moulinet as in an *enlevé* in *la canne*: The weapon travels first backwards toward the right shoulder, then strikes from low to high, travelling in as vertical a plane as possible.

Drill 9: Offensive second intention:

- From out of distance, the student advances and attempts a forced glide (*coulé*) with his sword against the instructor's sword
- The instructor parries sixth and ripostes with opposition
- The student yields to first with his sword, picks up the opposing steel with his dagger in fourth with a replacement, and makes a counter-riposte in first

This can also be set up, for instance, by the student forcing the instructor's parry of counter-sixth by making an attack close to the blade and then yielding to the riposte.

Drill 10: Counteroffensive second intention

- From out of distance, the instructor advances with a feint to the student's inside, near the dagger
- The student parries counter-third with the dagger
- The instructor deceives and lunges
- The student again parries counter-third with his dagger, simultaneously executing a volte and striking with his sword, which is held in fourth

After practicing these exercises, it will be much easier to understand and copy the drills in the video and book, which I am currently translating.