

Solthurner Fechtbuch

Rare Dagger Techniques from an Anonymous Manual

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What is the Solthurner Fechtbuch?

So-named for the Archive in Solothurn, Switzerland where it was found, this book is believed to be from the 15th century and its author is unknown. Its techniques closely resemble the ones from some of Talhoffer's Fechtbuchs. There are conflicting theories about its origins, with guesses as to the date of publication from 1420-1490, but I believe from the costuming of the people and the technical material it is probably from the 1480s and is in fact a semi-rip-off of Talhoffer.

Though the exact origin of the book is uncertain, it is physically smaller than any of Talhoffer's works and contains much less material on each topic. There are techniques shown with long swords, dueling shields, dueling shield and short sword, wrestling, fighting on horseback, fighting in armor, and the duel between husband and wife; though most of these areas only contain a few techniques. The longest sections are devoted to the long sword, dueling shield, dagger, and wrestling (though only the long sword depicts more than a dozen movements.)

What Dagger Techniques does it Contain?

The Solthurner fechtbuch contains only 9 plates showing the knife being used. Of these, 7 times it is pictured in the forward grip, and 9 times it is pictured in the reverse grip. This is a higher proportion of forward grip to reverse grip techniques than most of the other Medieval manuals, which greatly favor the reverse grip. This may be by design, or simply because of the brevity of the instruction. In the Solthurner techniques, the forward grip is generally used for long range cutting or thrusting against the enemy, while the reverse grip is used for hooking, trapping, and stabbing.

Over the next few months we will be presenting all these as photo techniques, as well as giving you some other ideas on how to train these concepts.

Dagger in Unarmored Combat

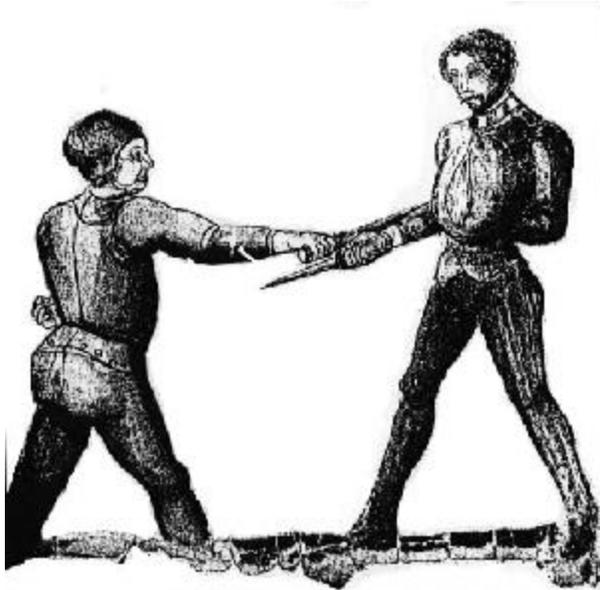
There are 7 techniques shown in the Solthurner fechtbuch for unarmored combat. The first 3 emphasize the long range dueling aspect of dagger work. The first two techniques emphasize the long range cut to the opponent's hand as a defense against an attack, first against the forward and then against the reverse grip stab. The third defense uses the alive hand to parry the attack and then you return a stab.

The fourth technique is an entry into grappling following the open hand parry and an arm hook/cut with the dagger. From here we get closer, and the final three movements of the unarmored section are for

grappling. The fifth technique shows the classic “Scissors hold” using the dagger, and numbers 6 and 7 are both counters to this. Next month we will feature photos of techniques 4-7, but for now, enjoy!

Solthurner Fechtbuch Dagger Techniques

1-3



Dagger Technique 1:

Cut the Hand

This technique exemplifies the long range play, as you stay out of range, and the moment you can first cut his hand you do so right away. Practice defending through different angles using slashes and hacks to the fingers, hand, wrist, and forearm. Cutting the weapon hand or arm is one of the oldest military methods of blade combat that there is, taught to the Roman Legions of the ancient world and probably even earlier. Imagine the defender striking, and possibly cutting off, the attackers thumb. Try and hold onto that dagger now, Sparky!



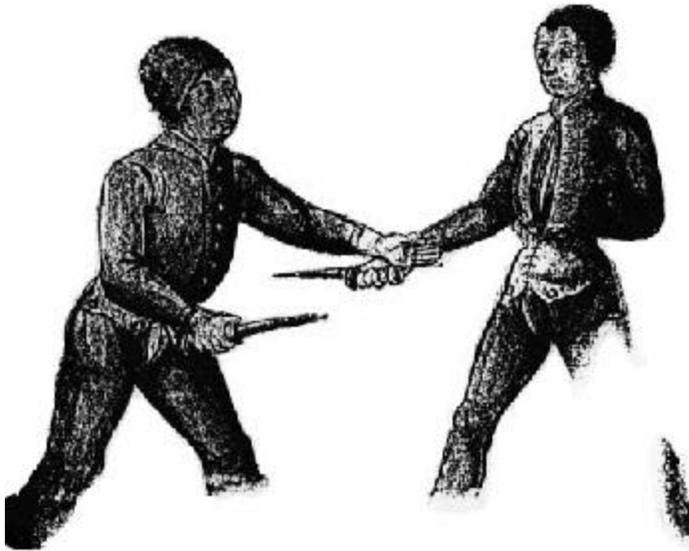


Dagger Technique 2:

Cut the Hand

In this scenario you have the saber grip and play long range as the opponent takes the reverse grip and tries to close in with the high stab. The reverse grip will force him to close, because he will be unable to match your superior range using the forward grip. You try to stay at long range, and look to evade and slash or hack the opponent's hand as he attacks. Against the downwards stab pictured you slash across the hand with a backhand motion. Imagine the defender striking, and possibly cutting off, the attackers pinkie.





Unarmored Technique 3:
Hack and Stab

The opponent stabs at your body. Using your left hand you parry/hack it aside with a low outward and downward blow and immediately counter with your own stab. This is a quick stab and counter, and makes an excellent back and forth style flow drill. Once you and your partner can both do it, then try to do it in 3 or 5 step exchanges. When this is easy, experiment with changing angles on the return stab and how that then changes the follow ups and forces different types of footwork and evasion.

Though in still pictures it looks like a 1-2 motion, in fighting the closer you can deliver the stab after the parry the better. Timing and rhythm can not really be shown in these kinds of pictures. If you are too slow and make it a "1 and 2" kind of exchange you are giving the opponent a window of opportunity to interrupt your pattern and counter you of the half-beat. (If you think of the parry as "1" and the stab as "2" the opponent counters you on the "and" between 1 "and" 2.



Extension Drill from Technique 3



In the extension we just start to work stabbing from different angles, evading and parrying with the empty hand and stabbing back quickly. Thrust along all 8 angles of the *segno* and try to maneuver around your training partner, so you can stab him where he can not parry...force him to move or get hit. Every so often let yourself get hit also...then you know that your partner is not just playing a pretty game with you and is *trying to hit you*.

This is NOT about trying to hurt your partner! If we see you try to hurt someone in our classes you will get your kicked out on your ass...there is no place for that kind of behavior. However, you must be willing to HIT your partner to help them learn. If you are not aiming to hit when doing drills in your school you are

RIPPING OFF your training partner. It is your duty to hit him (or her) and it is their duty to block or not be there. If no one has really tried to hit you, how can you be sure your defense really works? You can go on for years being "helped along" by a nice friendly *uke* in the martial arts and have fun, but for real, you have nothing for the time spent...or worse, only an ability to give hurt and no ability to defend...you can "dish it out but you can't take it"!

These kinds of things are what make the difference. You must learn to "Invest in Loss" as the Tai Chi Chuan (Grand Ultimate Fist) people would say. You lose to learn. Your conditions of winning change. You "lose to win". You try, and if you get hit it is learning not failure. Pain is feedback of bad performance...the trick is to learn to appreciate the feedback and be sensitive to change what you are doing. Greater awareness leads to deeper learning. The speed and power of the opponent can literally make you move faster than you could if you thought about it. You move faster simply *because you must!* This sounds crazy, but the experienced know it is true!

When training these techniques, a safe training weapon and facial protection quickly become a necessity. A padded dagger and a fencing mask or hockey helmet will suffice, with some kind of gloves (hockey, street hockey, lacrosse), forearm pads, elbow pads, etc. at your option. I prefer to use less armor and a safer weapon, so will use daggers made of folded cardboard for some of the full speed drills. These still hurt quite a bit (and could break a rib on a thrust) and can last for many months if made correctly, yet will *usually* break before your opponent's body does on a dangerous thrust (certainly far safer than a pvc core or wood in a similar circumstance!) When making these, fold (don't roll) them out of cardboard and fold with the corrugation. A piece about 15x24 will fold into a nice 15" dagger. Make the fold neat and tight every time and tape securely.

One other thing we have found is that if you are breaking a lot of these, it is likely because you are hitting with the flat of the dagger and that is causing it to bend (as it would when it fails). If this is the case, go back and work your basic cutting angles of attack, focusing on cleanly cutting with the edge for each one.

Solthurner Fechtbuch - Part II

More Rare Dagger Fighting Techniques from the
Anonymous Manual

Techniques 4-7



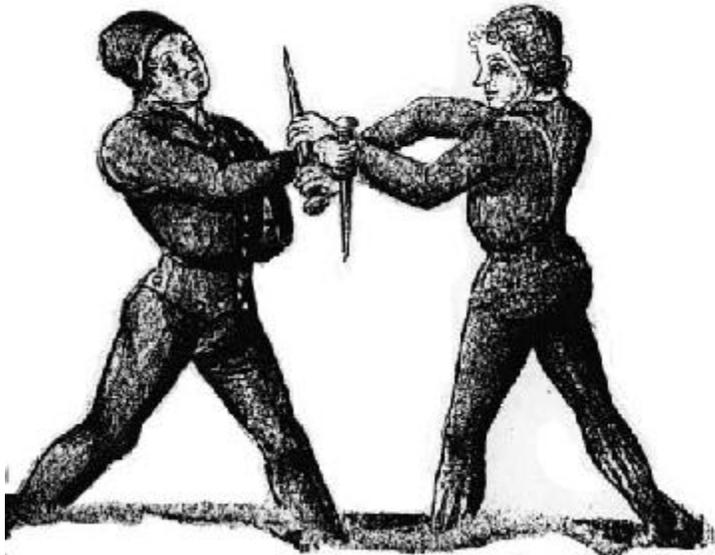
Dagger Technique 4: Triceps Hook

The opponent stabs with a middle thrust and the defender hack parries the wrist of the attacking arm from the inside with their free hand, while hacking to the biceps or inner elbow of the arm with their dagger. This motion is a type of double hack parry, letting the attacker supply much of the momentum needed to do the damage. Grab the wrist upon contact, and immediately after you hack through the biceps, hook back with the false edge of the dagger and pull-cut the triceps. Use your hip rotation to power the pull by simply reversing the body mechanics of the initial blast.

The opponent delivers a backhand blow or thrust. Double hack parry with the dagger and free hand as before and swing the arm down and through. Grab the wrist with your free hand as you continue moving the dagger to the triceps hook position, and cut out as before.

The last picture shows the same technique from the opposite side, this time grabbing the wrist before delivering the cut. Had the material on my arms protected me, however, this could also be a counter to the technique as Mike follows with the stab.





Dagger Technique 5: Scissors Hold

In this depiction, the attacker stabs with an overhead strike from a knife-in-back stance. You high outward hack parry with your empty hand and guide his wrist counter-clockwise into the dagger's rising 'hook'. Grab your dagger's blade with your empty hand and lock in the triangle. Pull and circle to take him off balance and deeply cut his tendons by the wrist and then follow up with strikes.

You can also drag a man to the floor with this hold, but you do not need to. At any point after the attacker is "jolted" by the triangle lock, quickly stab them as they are fighting for balance and follow up with another technique. The quick pull of the triangle lock can add a "whiplash" effect to the follow up strike.

Though this lock may appear bizarre, and may be more appropriate for use with a semi-sharp pry bar or when wearing gloves, it was quite common in the Middle Ages. The triangle wrist lock is seen in every Medieval combat manual, and in a number of variations. Exactly for this reason, it should be studied - When every master shows it it must have value, yes? Like all things, there is a time and place for its use.





Dagger Technique 6:
Backattcha'

Triangle Wrist Lock Counter

Here we see a triangle lock done as a counter to a triangle lock! The trick to making this work is having the quick reaction and changing the angle at which you are applying the lock. This can only be done by feeling the lock. No amount of words can describe the possible variations. Learn the triangle lock well first, and then learning this will be "naturally easy".

In the unarmed combat spectrum, this is the equivalent of the wrist center lock. When you are in position for a center lock, you are also generally in position to have it re-applied to you.

If both your hands get locked up in this high or mid line standoff for any length of time, look for the low line to open and for knees or kicks to be delivered. Right here if either of us landed a solid kick to destabilize the others base we could get a take down.





Dagger Technique 7:

Switch Hands - Scissors Hold Counter

This is perhaps one of the simplest counters there is, but one which is often overlooked. The hand switch is seen throughout Medieval combat manuals as a counter to a number of different more sophisticated holds. Though it appears obvious to do this, many people panic and cling to the dagger under stress. By training the response in combat scenarios like this one you will build the reaction and timing.

The Dog Brothers use the term "Monkey Trapped" to describe a fighter who is so fixated on holding his weapon that they will not let go of it. Like the monkey who reaches into a jar to grab the fruit and then can not pull his hand back out of the jar, and so remains holding the fruit and not wanting to give it up is stuck there, trapped by its own will. There are times where to let go of the weapon is the best way, but this can only be learned in practice.

