

MESSER FENCING

According to Hans Lecküchner

MESSER WORKBOOK

CURRENT VERSION 1.0

Messer translation and notes by Michael G. Thomas

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INTRODUCTION

This booklet provides a basic introduction to the 15th century messer fighting system of the German master Hans Lecküchner. Due to space constraints this guide will cover the basic footwork, guards, attacks and techniques to allow you to fight to a basic level with this weapon. If you would like to know please contact me and I will be happy to help.



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BASICS

Johannes Lecküchner was a 15th century priest and fencer of the area of Nuremberg. He produced Two fechtbücher for the großes Messer, known as Cod. Pal. Germ. 430 (Heidelberg, 1478), and Cgm. 582, Munich, 1482.

His system is based on the teachings of Liechtenauer dating to about a century earlier and also uses the same terminology that is present in his longsword teachings.

THE WEAPON

The Langes Messer, or "long knife," was a German weapon which was similar to the European falchion. The Messer was a single-edged single-handed cutting sword. The Messer tip was normally a clipped-point style, which made the first few inches of the back edge sharp. The cutting side of the Messer is referred to as the long edge and the back is called the short edge or crooked edge. Although the Messer were single-edged weapons, the first few inches on the back edge of the tip would often be sharpened. This allowed cuts to be delivered by the crooked edge.

The messer is a cut and thrust weapon and capable of taking on other weapons such as daggers, other messers,

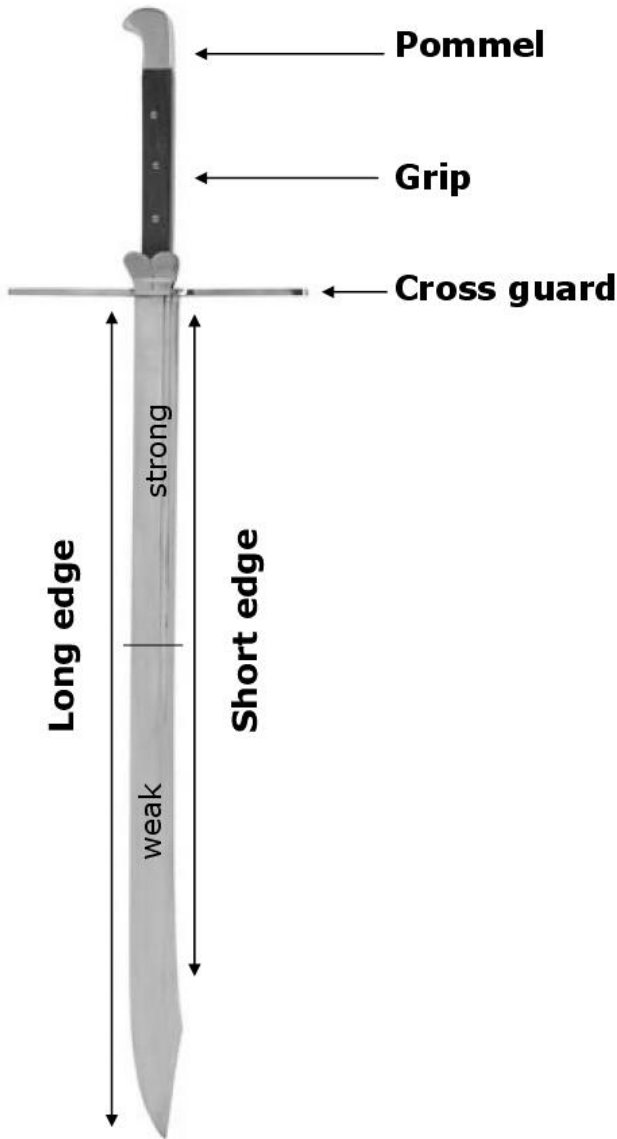
longswords and polearms. It is strong in the bind, can be half-handed (one hand on the blade) and delivers a powerful thrust. The messer is very similar in form to other weapons such as the bowie knife, modern machete and the medieval falchion.

For training you can use wooden, aluminum or steel training weapons of a variety of shapes and sizes.

Divisions of the Messer

The messer, like the longsword is divided up into different sections based upon their function or design.

The blade is divided up into two main parts, based around the amount of pressure that can be applied from the weapon. The 'strong' is from the hilt to the middle of the sword; the rest forward on out on the messer to the tip is the 'weak'.



Hans Lecküchner followed the traditional system of fencing as laid out by the German fencing master Johannes Liechtenauer. The messer system is based upon a series of 23 parts that include:

1. The six Strikes
2. The Four Stances
3. Displacing
4. Nachreysen (Travelling After)
5. Uberlauffen (Over Running)
6. Absetzen (Setting Aside)
7. Durchwechselln (Changing Through)
8. Zucken (Twitching/pulling)
9. Durchlauffen (Charging Through)
10. Abschnid (Cut Off)
11. Hendtrucken (Hand Hitting)
12. Ablauffen (Flowing Off)
13. Benemen (Taking)
14. Durchgehn (Going Through)
15. Der Bogen (The Arch)
16. Messer nehmen (Messer Taking)
17. Hengen (Hanging)
18. Winden (Winding)

The principles of initiative are considered fundamental to the understanding of the German system, be it with longsword, messer or rapier. This is a literal translation of the first part of Lecküchner's manuscript:

Lie He who stands to displace will often become stricken

When you come to your opponent; you should not wait on his strike in displacement; but deploy your work on and on.

You be Just As; The Before and After, to learn effect of Weak and Strong

The Before is; as you come before; So that he must first displace you; thus letting him come to no work.

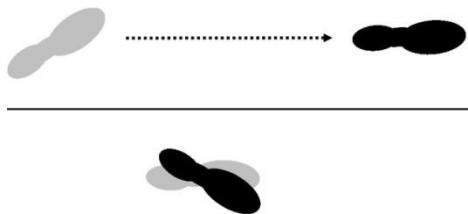
If he comes before you; then work Immediately nimbly; if you want to take the Before from him.

FOOTWORK

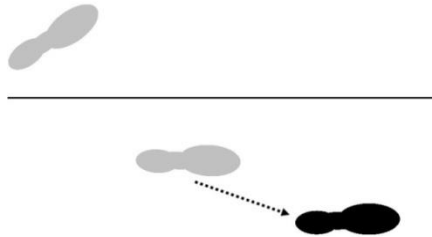
Footwork, as with all martial arts is critical. Below is a very basic overview of the footwork used in messer fighting. The two most important movements are the passing step and the triangle step.

PASSING STEP

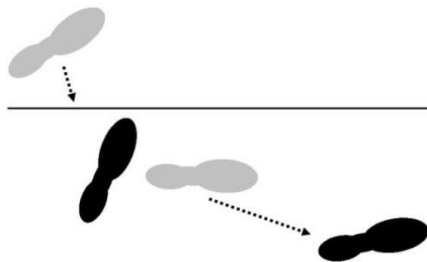
The first method of movement is a simple backward and forward. This is simple movement, much as the way you would walk towards or away from a person. The main difference is that you must be ready to stop, adjust or continue your movement during the step. Keep your body upright and your stance firm and ready.



TRIANGLE STEPS



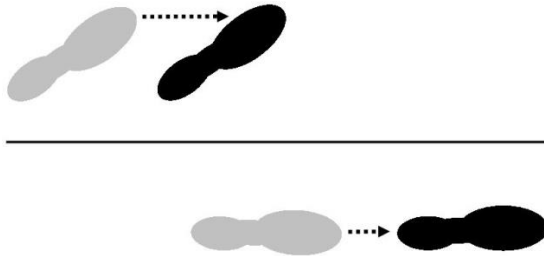
To execute a triangle step stand in a straight line with your right foot before your opponent, and with the left behind the right. Step toward his left whilst moving out to the side. This is the first step. The second step which is done as a double step you do in a similar way to the first step.



Step as before with the right foot against his left, then follow with the left behind the right somewhat to the side to his left, and then again with the right farther to his left. This should move your entire body off his line to his left.

BROKEN STEPS

The third type is called the broken or stolen steps. These are essentially smaller steps used to adjust your distance without changing the leading leg. We can do this moving either one leg or both to alter distance. For example, we can move the leading foot a short distance and then execute a passing step. The more common way though is to move the leading foot a short distance and then do the same with the following foot.



Simply move the leading leg half the distance you would normally and then follow up with the trailing leg. You will maintain your stance and cover a short distance forward to backwards.

DREI WUNDER (THREE WOUNDERS)

Liechtenauer and other German masters describe three basic methods of attack with the sword. They are sometimes called "drei wunder", "three wounders", with a deliberate pun on "three wonders". It is important to remember that as with longsword, all parts of the sword can be used as a weapon.

CUTS

The German term for cutting is hauen. A cut is a strong slashing attack made with either edge of the messer. This is a strong attack initiated with the blade starting away from your opponent. There are two main cutting attacks with the messer, the oberhau and the unterhau.

The oberhau (over cut) cut is delivered from above the attacker. The attack can strike any target area from the head down to the leg.

The unterhau (under cut) cut is delivered from below the attacker and like the oberhau, can strike any target from the leg to the head.

THRUSTS

The German word for thrusts is stechen (stabbing). A thrusting attack is made with the point of the sword, primarily at the face or head of your opponent.



SLICES

The last method of attacking is abschnneiden, (slicing off). Slicing attacks are made with the edge of the sword by placing the edge against the body of the opponent and then pushing or pulling the blade along it.



VIERLÄGER (THE FOUR STANCES)

There are four fundamental stances for the German tradition of messer fighting. Later manuals add extra stances and also revise the earlier ones. This text is specifically concerned with the material of Lecküchner from 1492.

From the original text:

you shall consider in the Messer fencing; if you will win; Bastion and Look into Land, Steer and Boar are known to you.

These four guards can be directly compared with the four primary guards of German longsword, alber, pflug, vom tag and ochs. Similar guards also exist in the Italian system.

PASTEI (BASTION)

Set your left foot forward; hold your messer with before you with a straight arm; with the point to the ground so that the short or blunt edge stands above.

The Bastion guard is used similar to the Fool guard of the longsword. Move the left foot forward. The body leans forward with the arm extended and the hilt pointed up and the tip of the messer pointed down.



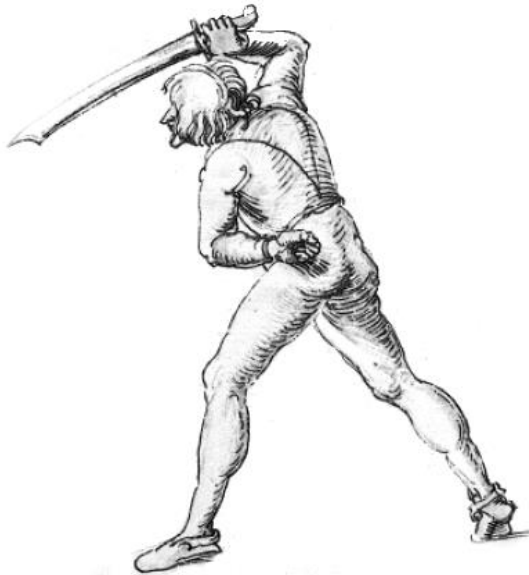
LUG INS LANDT (LOOK INTO LAND)

Hold your messer with a straight arm high before your head; and the long or sharp edge ahead; stand thus in the guard. The Look into land guard is similar to vom tag in the longsword traditional or posta di falcone in the Italian.



STIER (STEER)

Stand with the left foot forward; hold your messer to the left with the hilt before the head; so that the short edge stands against you; hold the point toward his face.



For the right Steer the left foot is forward and the right foot is in back. The sword is held on the right side with the hilt up near the head and the tip pointed towards the opponent. The cutting edge of the sword faces up. On the left side the right foot is forward and the sword is held in a similar manner on the left side of the head.

EBER (BOAR)

Set your left foot; and hold your messer on your right side near your right leg; with the hilt near the hip; so that the blunt edge stands above; and the point stands out before you; toward the man's face. Eber is similar to pflug in longsword.



Die vi Häu (Six Strlkes)

Just like German longsword, Lecküchner's messer includes a series of important strikes. There are six in total and whilst being powerful techniques in their own right, they are also fundamental in breaking the four guards as described previously.

The fours master strikes designed for breaking the primary guards are as follows:

- The Wecker breaks the guard of the Stier
- Entrüsthau breaks the guard of the Lug ins Landt
- Zwinger breaks the guard of Eber
- Geferdhau breaks the guard Pastei

The Zornhau is designed as a diagonal Oberhau or for breaking opponent's Oberhau.

The zornhau carries out just the same function as it does in longsword. Its default use is as a simple diagonal cut or strike. The zornhau can then also be used to stop an oberhau by simply striking into their blade with the same cut. At the same time you must step of the line and then work to strike them from this position. The default option is to push the blade forwards into a thrust to the face or upper body.

If, when the blades are in contact (the bind) you can feel your opponent pushing hard on your blade you can simply release your messer, this will throw their balance and open them up to an easy strike to the other side. If they are more cautious and hold their messer gently you must use force and push through to their head.

Wecker breaks the guard stier.

The Wecker is similar to the Krumphau as used in longsword fighting. The attack to the sword is carried out with the long edge of the blade with a windscreen wiper motion to knock the blow aside. Immediately follow this with a cut or thrust depending on position in the fight.

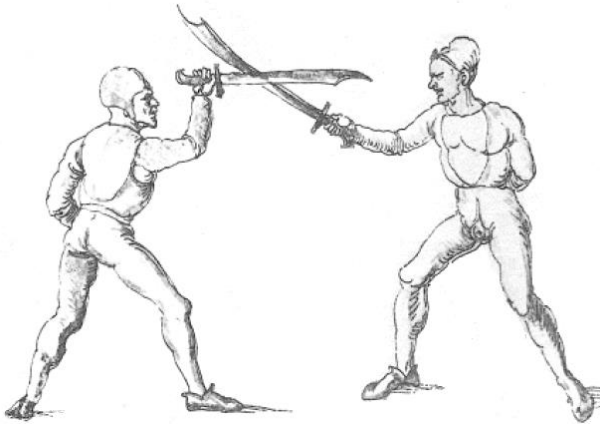
The Wecker can also be used from a low guard such as Bastion. From the low guard an attack or thrust can be displaced

If you are close to your opponenet it is also possible to use the wecker to strike their hands first and then possibly followup with a striem to the head.

Entrusthau breaks the guard look into land.

Shock takes thus what comes from above / Shock to the strong mark your work with it / Shock to the Target / Come therein; you'll have success

The Entrusthau is similar to the Zwerchau used in longsword fighting. The technique is based upon a rotor type of movement, similar to that of the blades of a helicopter.



The technique is carried out by stepping forward whilst attacking with the back edge of the messer, ending in a high hanging, similar to the guard stier.

Zwinger breaks the guard of Eber

The Restraining Strike breaks into what the Buffalo strikes or stabs. He who trusts Changes, the Restrainer does rob him

The Zwinger is similar to the shielhau used in longsword fighting and uses a vertical rotational attack. From a low guard lift the point whilst twisting the blade, bring the sword up higher and then force the back edge of your blade against his using the strong and then push into a cut or thrust to their upper openings.

The end position looks much like a left eber guard and is ideal for attacking a person in a middle level guard such as eber.

Geferdhau breaks the guard Pastei

Shock takes thus what comes from above / Shock to the strong mark your work with it / Shock to the Target / Come therein; you'll have success

The Geferdhau is similar to the shietelhau of longsword and uses the principle of uberlaufen to allow a high strike to defeat a low one. The geferdhau is simply a vertical oberhau, delivered with an outstretched arm and with the hilt lifted high.

If you opponent moves into a low guard such as pastei you can immediately step in with the geferdhau technique.

If your opponent attacks with a low strike, bring your leading leg backwards whilst simultaneously striking the geferdhau to their head.

The winker is a special plunging attack that is described in Lecküchner's text. The blade is twisted around and lifted high to strike with the back edge in a position that is very similar to stier. Although not often used as a first strike technique it is very effective if you wish to change your attack to the other side of your opponent whilst keeping your sword away from being displaced.

For example, you attack with an oberhau and spot your opponent moving to displace it. You drop your point, twist the sword away from his sword with the long edge facing upwards and drive a thrust or cut far to hit side. You should notice the messer follows the path of a figure of eight as it twists and turns.

COUNTERS

Lecküchner's messer system includes an excellent series of techniques that I have included in this section. They are designed counters to actions taken by your opponent when they initiate a technique.

LEMSTUCK

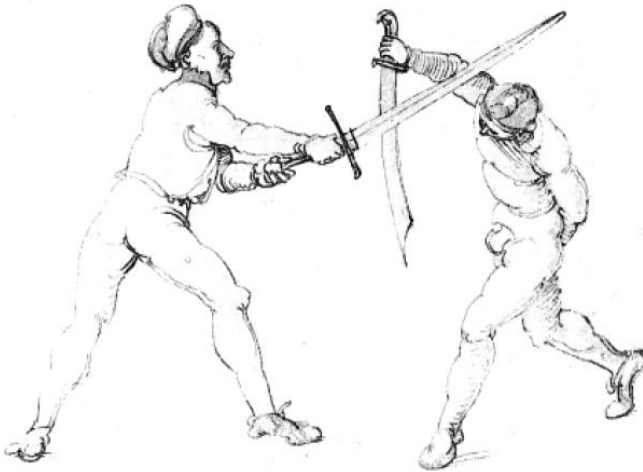
Lemstuck is the simple system of avoiding your opponent's attack whilst cutting to their hands or arms. The technique is usually carried out with a short step back or to the side to move yourself off their line. A quick cut with the long or short edge then follows directly to their limbs, thus laming them. This technique is especially effective from a low guard like bastion.



BOGEN

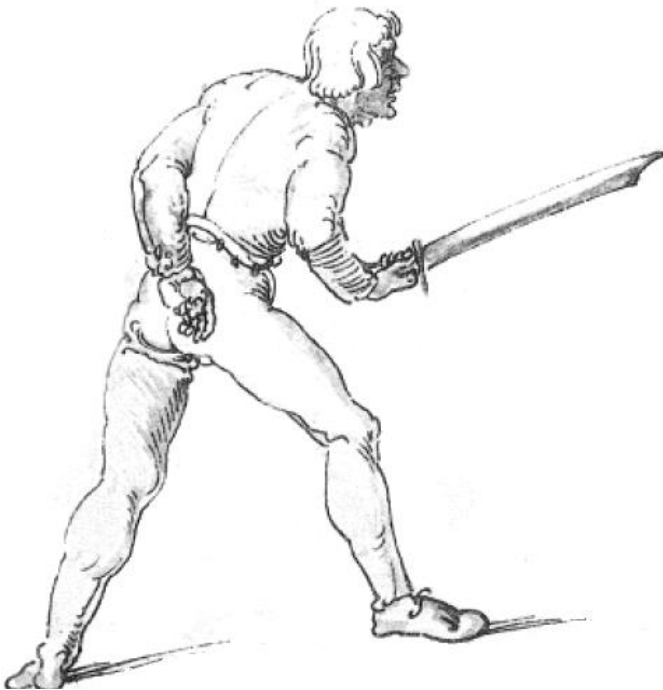
The bogen is a very powerful technique and bastion carried out from low guards like Eber or Bastion. When the enemy attacks you with a cut you throw up your hilt and drop the point to block the attack with a sloping parry. Immediately follow the stroke with a diagonal step forward and cut down into the body.

The figure to the right is executing the sloping parry as used in the bogen.



ANSETZEN (ATTACKING WITH THE POINT)

Ansetzen is the simple process of attacking your opponent with thrusting attacks to disrupt their own techniques. For example, if they start to attack with a vertical oberhau you can quickly step in and thrust to their arm or upper body. Timing is critical as a late thrust can result in you being struck before you cut hit them with the tip.



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