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Strategy and Tactics for Longsword

A Primer on Tactical Drilling

Strategy differs materially from tactic; the latter belonging only to the mechanical movement of bodies, set in motion by the former.

– Charles James

A New and Enlarged Military Dictionary (1810)

Before hostile armies or fleets are brought into contact (a word which perhaps better than any other indicates the dividing line between tactics and strategy), there are a number of questions to be decided, covering the whole plan of operations...

– Alfred T. Mahan

The Influence of Sea Power Upon History, 1660-1783 (1890)

Fighting at any weapon is significantly more than simply knowing techniques and possessing courage in adequate degree – that is to say, *successful* fighting at any weapon involves more than just these elements. Students of any martial study frequently confuse *technical* ability, as learned and demonstrated in drills and exercises, with *fighting* ability. The former is necessary to the latter, but having technical skills is not the same as having fighting skills.

As the two quotes above indicate, *strategy* is the plan of attack decided upon by the individual combatant; *tactics* are the means to implement that plan. In fighting, the combatant must develop a strategy, and implement that strategy with specific tactics. This is a hard-earned skill, and beyond the scope of two 90 minute class sessions. But in three hours, we can develop a series of drills developed around a general strategy, and using specific tactics to achieve that strategy. The drills can take into account shifting actions on the part of the drill partner, and allow both partners limited freedom of action within a general framework. Drills of this type assist greatly in developing the ability to implement, and change, tactical approaches while under the pressure of a fight.

First, we should make the distinction between *technical* and *tactical* skills and drills. Technical skills are the execution of the specific techniques of the system, basic or otherwise. Body mechanics, footwork and bladework are all groupings of technical skills, each group encompassing a wide range of individual techniques. Tactical skills are the application of technical skills in a fighting situation. One of the most common mistakes people make in their training is to focus on *tactical* work to the exclusion of *technical* work. This generally consists of a few repetitions of a skill or two, followed by some bouting to “try to use it,” or a series of “what if I do this?” explorations. Both of these are fine things to incorporate into your training – at the right time and place.

First, however, you must develop and become truly proficient in your technical skills. Consider this: your strategic position in a fight is determined by the by specific tactics that you are able employ. Technique is the prerequisite of

tactics. If you only have limited technique at your disposal, then your tactics will necessarily be limited, which in turn limits the kinds of strategies you are able to employ.

Let's consider two cases:

- 1) You have trained at sword techniques in the zogho large (wide measure), but you have no skill whatsoever in grappling, and you're bouting at longsword. Your strategy cannot include closing to zogho stretto (grappling measure) - you must stay in zogho largo and make all your plays from there. If your adversary has skills in grappling, his strategic options are much wider than yours. This could become uncomfortable for you.
- 2) You've done a few drills in a lot of things, but you really haven't developed smooth, comfortable, competent, automatic skill. When you're surprised by something your adversary does, you won't be able to carry out your specific tactical plan, or shift immediately to a new one, because...well... you never bothered to practice. Bouting is where you practice developing strategies and applying tactics, not where you practice technique. You need to have the technique down so that you can work on those other things: strategy, tactics, and constantly assessing and revising both.

So, what should the balance be? It's not hard to figure out: you need to be good at your techniques, so that they flow reasonably cleanly and without thought, before you can really spend the bulk of your time just bouting. Prior to that, you need to spend the bulk of your time drilling. And at first, the most you should do is light tactical drills, where the attacker and defender are pre-arranged and the actions limited (for example, to one of two attacks, and a specific response to each of the attacks). Later the drills get more complicated, but until you can do some modest tactical drills with a reasonable success rate, you really can't bout in a meaningful sense. It might be great fun (it usually is) but it can work against your longer-term training by instilling bad habits. And the amount of bouting allowed should be tied to factors like control of basic technique, ability in tactical drills, and of course maturity. I've had 12 year olds in class who were very self-possessed and mature, and adults who I wouldn't trust alone with a crayon and a white wall.

After truly getting ready, it's time to set the bouting environment. In a martial situation it's death or crippling injury - but we can't simulate that. The bouting situation is artificial and always will be. Even hardcore groups such as the Dog Brothers aren't trying to kill each other, and my understanding is that no-holds-barred martial arts competitions actually bar things like eye gouges and testicle-stomping - that they actually bar some holds. So we have to regard bouting as a part of training, to be taken seriously and analyzed. This doesn't have to be formal. It just requires a recognition between parties that you're working towards the same end: to get as near to the "martial truth" of the situation as your studies, training and experience allow.

Fiore dei Liberi's Guide to Strategy and Tactics

Fiore give us critical advice when he speaks of abraçare, or wrestling, in the introduction to the Getty manuscript:

And let us start with Abraçare, which is done for two reasons, which is for sport and for anger, that is for life with every guile and deceit and cruelty that he can do. And of this that I do for life I want to speak and to show with reason and most of all gaining holds that are used when you are fighting for life. The man that wants to do Abraçare wants to be advised about he who he will fight with if the companion is stronger or if he is big of the body and if he younger or older. Also he wants to see if he uses the guards of Abraçare and of all these things is to be foreseen. And nothing less he puts himself always stronger or less strong in the prese of the ligadure and always defends from the prese of his opponent. And if your enemy is unarmoured wait to hurt him in those places more grievous and more hazardous, which are in his eyes, the nose, in the soft under the chin and in the flanks. And nothing less, watch if he can come to you with the prese or the ligadure, armoured or unarmoured, so that it was one and the other.

– *Fiore dei Liberi, Fior di Battaglia, MS Ludwig XV 13 (translation courtesy of The Exiles)*

This is clear and specific instruction: the scholar is to watch and assess the companion as much as possible before entering the fight (“wants to be advised...if the companion is stronger,” “wants to see if he uses the guards,” “all of these things is to be foreseen,” etc). The factors Fiore lays out are: older/younger, stronger/weaker, bigger/smaller, tutored/untutored (“stands in the guards”). He doesn't mention relative speed – whether the adversary is faster or slower - in his introduction, but he does mention quickness as one of the four virtues necessary to a good fighter in

his segno: prudence and judgment (represented by the lynx); quickness and agility (tiger); courage (lion); and fortitude (elephant).

This so strongly echoes advice I was taught at 19th century Italian and French swordsmanship that I believe Fiore had something very like it in mind. One doesn't go into a fight "blind" if at all possible. If you have no foreknowledge of your adversaries' tendencies, you have to assess. Briefly, you arrive at what assessments of your opponent you can make "at a glance." Gross physical characteristics, such as size and age, can easily be seen at a glance. Strength can often be assessed visually, but not always. Physical traits such as speed are harder to see at a glance, as is the combatant's degree of skill and experience. All these factors are relative: you must understand them in relation to your own abilities and characteristics. You are either taller than your opponent, or shorter; heavier or lighter; stronger or weaker, faster or slower, more or less tutored, and more experienced or less experienced. (It's important to distinguish a *tutored* fighter from an *experienced* fighter: although the two can easily go hand-in-hand, an untutored but experienced fighter can still be very dangerous.)

Establishing an Initial Strategic Position

Your assessment of these factors will determine your initial strategic position, and it is best to assess them at a wide measure. You don't want to close and grapple with an unknown adversary until you have made a good reconnaissance. We will assume an unknown opponent, meaning that relative skill, experience and speed will be hard to estimate. At wide measure the characteristics of weight and strength are less important (though not unimportant). The first things to determine are relative height and speed. Height is easy, as it can be seen, but reach is harder: your adversary may have a deeper step than you might expect, and he might know how to use it effectively. Speed can only be assessed by probing the adversary to see how quickly he reacts.

Reconnaissance using Posta Longa

It is necessary to scout the adversary for his various physical and mental capabilities, and one does so from a very safe initial strategic position: wide measure, closing only so far as is necessary to provoke the adversary's reactions, and retire safely. Fiore's *Posta Longa* is an excellent position with which to probe the adversary: it is easily assumed as a transition from any of the other guards. Fiore is very specific about its utility, and his general principles that apply to all guards amplify this:

Posta Longa is filled with deceit. She goes probing the guards if she can trick the companion. If she can wound with the thrust then she knows well how to sidestep his blows and can injure using more deception than the other guards.

And I can say that the sword has three movements which are volta stabile, mezza volta and tuta volta.

– *Fiore dei Liberi, Fior di Battaglia, MS Ludwig XV 13 (translation courtesy of The Exiles)*

The following series of exercises begin by developing technical proficiency in probing with *Posta Longa*, and then expand into basic tactical drills where the defender exercises one of two choices, and the attacker responds appropriately. The attacker also learns to execute his choice from what may be a less optimal footing – an important skill for any combatant.

1) Preliminary Exercise: Reconnaissance entering into Posta Longa with a step of the right foot, followed by a mezza volta of the body to the left

Attacker: *Mezzana Porta di Ferro*, left foot forward vs Defender: *Tutta Porta di Ferro*

Correct Measure (single passing step measure (eg *mezza volta* of body)).

- a) Attacker transitions from *Mezzana Porta di Ferro* through *Posta Breve*, and into *Posta Longa*, stepping only as he passes into *Posta Longa*. He touches the defender lightly on the chest, at roughly the height of the breastbone.
- b) As the Attacker transitions in *Posta Longa* as above to attack, the Defender covers by shifting to *Posta Frontale*, framed on his left side, bringing his right hip into the action and slightly lowering his weight, and then binding sharply down to *Mezzana Porta di Ferro* as he steps right foot right (keeping in the *zogho largo*), expelling the blade. He then strikes *riverso sottano* with the step of the left foot to the rear (forming an angle of about 22 degrees to the original line of attack), and continues with a *riverso fendente* with a passing step of the right foot backwards, ending in the forward variant of *Tutta Porta di Ferro*.

c) As the Defender commits to his cover in *Posta Frontale* as in (b) above, the Attacker performs a *tutta volta* of the sword, entirely avoiding if possible the Defender's cover, and continuing to a *riverso fendete* with a step of the left foot to the left, followed by the compassing step of the right to the left. He passes back with the left foot while striking a *mandritto sottano*, followed by a *mandritto fendente* with the pass of the right foot back, ending in *Mezzana Porta di Ferro*.

2) **Preliminary Exercise: Reconnaissance entering into Posta Longa with a step of the left foot, followed by a *mezza volta* of the body to the right**

Attacker: *Mezzana Porta di Ferro*, right foot forward vs Defender: *Dente de Zenghiaro*

Correct Measure (single passing step measure (eg *mezza volta* of body)).

a) Attacker transitions from *Mezzana Porta di Ferro* through *Posta Breve*, and into *Posta Longa*, stepping only as he passes into *Posta Longa*. He touches the defender lightly on the chest, at roughly the height of the breastbone.

b) As the Attacker transitions in *Posta Longa* as above to attack, the Defender covers by shifting to *Posta Frontale*, framed on his right side with false edge to the adversary's blade, bringing his right hip into the action and slightly lowering his weight, and then binding sharply down to *Mezzana Porta di Ferro* as he steps left foot left (keeping in the *zogho largo*), expulsing the blade with his true edge. He then strikes *mandritto sottano* with the step of the right foot to the rear (forming an angle of about 22 degrees to the original line of attack), and continues with a *mandritto fendente* with a passing step of the left foot backwards, ending in the forward variant of *Tutta Porta di Ferro*.

c) As the Defender commits to his cover in *Posta Frontale* as in (b) above, the Attacker performs a *tutta volta* of the sword, entirely avoiding if possible the Defender's cover, and continuing to a *mandritto fendente* with a step of the right foot to the right, followed by the compassing step of the left to the right. He passes back with the right foot while striking a *riverso sottano*, followed by a *riverso fendente* with the pass of the left foot back, ending in *Mezzana Porta di Ferro*.

3) **Preliminary Exercise: Reconnaissance entering into Posta Longa with a step of the right foot, followed by a *mezza volta* of the body to the right**

Attacker: *Mezzana Porta di Ferro*, left foot forward vs Defender: *Dente de Zenghiaro*

Correct Measure (single passing step measure (eg *mezza volta* of body)).

The Attacker proceeds as in exercise (1) above, but the Defender covers as in exercise (2). This teaches the Attacker to enter with the right foot, and make an immediate second step with that foot. (Note that this is a skill requiring much practice.)

4) **Preliminary Exercise: Reconnaissance entering into Posta Longa with a step of the left foot, followed by a *mezza volta* of the body to the left**

Attacker: *Mezzana Porta di Ferro*, left foot forward vs Defender: *Tutta Porta di Ferro*

Correct Measure (single passing step measure (eg *mezza volta* of body)).

The Attacker proceeds as in exercise (2) above, but the Defender covers as in exercise (1). This teaches the Attacker to enter with the left foot, and make an immediate second step with that foot. (Note that this is a skill requiring much practice.)

5) **Preliminary Exercise: Reconnaissance entering into Posta Longa with a step of either foot, and a cover from either side**

Attacker: *Mezzana Porta di Ferro*, either foot forward vs Defender: *Mezzana Porta di Ferro*.

Correct Measure (single passing step measure (eg *mezza volta* of body)).

This is an extension of the exercises (3) and (4). The attacker learns to commit a foot to movement, and make a quick second movement with that same foot. As attacker proceeds as above, defender crosses either to the left or the right of the Attacker. The attacker, using visual cues as well as tactile cues (the pressure on his sword), performs *tutta volta* and *fendente* while stepping in the appropriate direction. If the Defender presses to the Attacker's right, the Attacker makes a *mezza volta* of the sword to the right, and cuts *riverso fendente* while stepping left. If The Defender presses to the Attacker's left, the Attacker makes his *mezza volta* to the left, and cuts *mandritto fendente* while stepping right.

A combatant who probes his adversary with the skills developed in these exercises may well strike a telling blow and end the fight in short order. Even if he doesn't, he will gain valuable information about his adversary's

capabilities, particularly his speed – so long as the combatant plays in the zogho largo by keeping the measure wide. If he plays too close initially, he may well receive his adversary's intended strike. Armed with information about his adversary's reach and speed, the combatant can now revise his initial strategic position and adopt a general strategy, as follows:

The 4 Basic Strategic Positions

(with Acknowledgements to Maître d'armes Adam Crown)

| If you are: | Faster | Slower |
|-------------|---|---|
| Taller | Taller & Faster: Offensive Out-fighting. Keep your adversary at maximum range, and press him with offensive actions. | Taller & Slower: Defensive Out-fighting. Your adversary will likely press you with offensive in-fighting, and you want to keep him out of his range, but within your range. His arms are a good target. |
| Shorter | Shorter & Faster: Offensive In-fighting. You need to get inside your adversary's effective sword range to press him with offensive actions. Arms are a good target. Caution: this can more easily bring you into grappling range! | Shorter & Slower: Defensive In-fighting. You need to close with covers and immediately play within his range. |

Note that there are two general combinations of combatants that can arise: Taller & Faster vs Shorter & Slower, or Taller & Slower vs Shorter and Faster. It is possible for opponents to be very closely matched in their physical characteristics. Where there are differences, the degrees of difference may be more or less obvious. Obvious or not, you have to test. Think of what *posta longa* does, in testing the guards. You move just barely out of measure, change guards, provoke by stepping into measure or threatening attack, or creating openings, and observe the tendencies, all the while attempting to conceal your own preferences and tendencies. And then you decide if he's lying to you or not...

Borrowing from later advice that I think fits any fighting system, Fiore included, you can either attack or induce him to attack. Note I don't say "defend," although you will respond to his attack. Inducing attack can be done in a variety of ways, from a simple invitation (for the credulous) to an apparent opening in false tempo at the edge of measure. But you don't do this without some idea of what your adversary might do, and precisely where you are vulnerable.

Now, the weapons are different, but I have been doing this at dueling sabre and dueling sword for so long that the process feels like second nature to me. Sometimes it even works as I want it to ;-). And I'm aware of all the differences between systems and weapons, as well as the agonistic (non-lethal) nature of the combats. But the process seems pretty sound.

That's a lot fuzzier than "this is how you determine that you will or won't cross at the *punta spada*," but it is how tactical analysis operates. It's an iterative process - and hopefully you get it right in very few iterations!

Technical Exercises

NOTE: In all exercises, **true** fendente refers to the tightly angled blow shown by Fiore in the manuscripts, and not a shallower cut. All covers below will work if the cut is shallower or even comes as a *mezzano*, save the deflection from below.

Start both people from *posta di donna*, forward weighted. In response to the attack, the master makes a cover with a fendente - a tight, proper fendente with the edge angled forward - that passes through *breve* on the left side. He must be careful to close the line to the left quickly and decisively. I put my right hip into the action (we're forward-weighted for this example, so no *volta stabile*), and follow Fiore's direction to move the lead foot off the line (which in this case assists in closing the line against the adversary's sword).

If the player is also making a sharp proper fendente, with his hands crossing the line of offense to his own left while his point is still just to the right and thus placing the true edge of the blade across the line of offense, then you get the crossing at the *punta spada*, because the two swords are traveling in very nearly the same plane (eg, vertical, not

horizontal). If the player continues the arc of his blow to the master, the line closes like magic a very high percentage of the time. The angle of the crossing is very sharp, and you get that wonderful expulsion-like quality. If the player shifts to cover himself during the masters' cover, the line will be closed, and the play to the other side ensues.

If the player is making a fendente at, say, 45 degrees from the vertical, you get the crossing at the middle. If he makes a mezzano, you get a crossing at the strong. I drill these also with the cover using the volta stabile, and I cover from any low posta on the right. For these you have to bring your blade essentially through posta di donna (or more of a Vom Tag-like variant of posta di donna), and the time is different: this more often generates a cover at the mezza spada. Obviously you can also cover in frontale or bicornu here, as well.

These should also be drilled tactically, so that the player sometimes shifts to cover against the cover, sometimes not, resulting in a choice between thrust through or cut over. In a different drill, the player sometimes makes a proper fendente, sometimes a 45 degree fendete. The scholar's job is to see, feel, and respond correctly with either the 1st master's plays or the second master's plays. I sometimes combine the drills. Failure rate goes up the more complex it gets, so I don't do that with people who aren't prepared.

Essentially, the decision point is the moment of the crossing, when by sight and feel you make your play. It's not about choosing your cover in advance: it's the same cover each time, but against three different blows. The principle is extended into covers against all the other attacks from the right posta di donna, as posta di donna makes and breaks all seven blows of the sword, but with slightly different positions of the covering sword.

Technical Drills

NOTE: The drills below cover all **basic** possibilities for thrusts and cuts from either side, and defended from either side (note that covers against *sottani* and *mezzani* can be extrapolated from the defenses against thrusts and *fendenti*, respectively). Drills are reversible; for example, drills specifying a mandritto fendente can be done with a riverso fendente, with the cover coming from the opposite side. In all drills below, if the named Attacker hesitates, the defender can enter with a transition to *Posta Longa* and thrust. If the Attacker doesn't cover, the thrust is completed. If the Attacker covers from his *Posta di Donna* with a fendente, the "Defender" makes a *mezza volta* of the sword and cuts *riverso fendente*.

Additionally, the footwork patterns provided here are standardized for the sake of these exercises, but they are mutable. The measure, particularly, can be opened or closed as the combatant requires.

6) Defending *mandritto fendente* with a cover in *Posta Frontale*.

Attacker: *Posta di Donna* vs Defender: *Tutta Porta di Ferro*

Correct Measure (single passing step measure (eg *mezza volta* of body)).

- a) Attacker cuts true *mandritto fendente* and hits with a half blow, drawing the blade out to *Dente de Zenghiaro*, making second step of left foot to right (eg triangle step).
- b) Attacker cuts true *mandritto fendente* to hit with a half blow, but Defender covers by shifting to *Posta Frontale*, bringing his right hip into the action and slightly lowering his weight, and then binding sharply down to *Mezzana Porta di Ferro* as he steps right foot right, expulsing the blade. He then *strikes riverso sottano* with the step of the left foot to the rear (forming an angle of about 22 degrees to the original line of attack), and continues with a *riverso fendente* with a passing step of the right foot backwards, ending in the forward variant of *Tutta Porta di Ferro*.
- c) Attacker cuts true *mandritto fendente* as above, but as Defender binds down to *Mezzana Porta di Ferro*, Attacker yields his sword point down and to the right, raising his hands and stepping left foot left while cutting *fendente* around to the other side, accompanied by the compass of the right foot to the left, or an entering step of the right foot to the left. (This play can be viewed as a use of the principles of the second master of the sword in two hands, *zogho largo*, or as an application of the play of the *colpo di villano*.)

7) Defending *riverso fendente* with a cover in *Posta Frontale*.

Attacker: *Posta di Donna* vs Defender: *Dente de Zenghiaro*

Correct Measure (single passing step measure (eg *mezza volta* of body)).

NOTE: the above drill is reversed.

8) Defending *mandritto fendente* with *rompere di punta* (breaking the thrust).

Attacker: *Posta di Donna* vs Defender: *Posta di Donna*

Correct Measure (single passing step measure (eg *mezza volta* of body).

Note: this actually breaks a cut, but uses similar principles too the break of the thrust.

- a) Attacker cuts true *mandritto fendente* and hits with a half blow, drawing the blade out to *Dente de Zenghiaro*, making second step of left foot to right (eg triangle step).
- b) Attacker cuts true *mandritto fendente* to hit with a half blow, but Defender covers by cutting *fendente* with a step of the left foot left, followed by right foot left, bringing his right hip into the action and driving the opposing sword sharply down. He then *strikes riverso sottano* with the step of the left foot to the rear (forming an angle of about 22 degrees to the original line of attack), and continues with a *riverso fendente* with a passing step of the right foot backwards, ending in the forward variant of *Tutta Porta di Ferro*.
- c) Attacker cuts true *mandritto fendente* as above, but as Defender cuts down with his *fendente*, Attacker yields his sword point down and to the right, raising his hands and stepping left foot left while cutting *fendente* around to the other side, accompanied by the compass of the right foot to the left, or an entering step of the right foot to the left. (This play can be viewed as a use of the principles of the second master of the sword in two hands, *zogho largo*, or as an application of the play of the *colpo di villano*.)

9) **Defending *riverso fendente* with *rompere di punta* (breaking the thrust).**

Attacker: *Posta di Donna senestra* vs Defender: *Posta di Donna senestra*

Note: The above drill is reversed.

10) **Defending *mandritto fendente* with *mandritto fendente*.**

Attacker: *Posta di Donna* vs Defender: *Posta di Donna*

Correct Measure (single passing step measure (eg *mezza volta* of body)).

- a) Attacker cuts true *mandritto fendente*. Hits (half blow) and draws out to *Dente de Zenghiaro*, making second step of left foot to right (eg triangle step).
- b) Attacker cuts true *mandritto fendente*. Defender covers with tight *mandritto fendente* and thrusts.
- c) Attacker cuts true *mandritto fendente*. Defender covers as above. Attacker immediately shifts to *Posta Frontale* and seizes Defender's blade, cutting to hands or to face. NOTE: Attacker must **react** to the cover and thrust, not anticipate it!

11) **Defending *riverso fendente* with *riverso fendente*.**

Attacker: *Posta di Donna senestra* vs Defender: *Posta di Donna senestra*

Correct Measure (single passing step measure (eg *mezza volta* of body).

Note: The above drill is reversed.

12) ***Scambiar de punta* (exchange of thrusts) from *Tutta Porta di Ferro*.**

Attacker: *Mezzana Porta di Ferro* vs Defender: *Tutta Porta di Ferro*.

Correct Measure (single passing step measure (eg *mezza volta* of body)).

NOTE: thrusting measure is slightly wider than cutting measure.

- a) Attacker transitions from *Mezzana Porta di Ferro* to *Posta Breve*, and steps to thrust, targeting middle of torso (eg just below chest level). NOTE: *Posta Breve* must be properly formed, elbows close to the body. The step will be slightly shorter than possible, so that the blow does not quite hit.
- b) Attacker transitions from *Mezzana Porta di Ferro* to *Posta Breve* and thrusts, as above. Defender transitions to *Posta Breve*, framed on the left side, makes the outward step of the left foot, and exchanges thrusts on a pass. NOTE: for this variant, Defender remains in *Posta Breve*. It is possible to transition to *Posta Longa*, but this variant preserves strength in the thrust by keeping the elbows in close. This is a good armored variant. The transition to *Posta Longa* is quick, but loses strength, and is a poor armored variant.
- c) Attacker thrusts as above, but as Defender makes his cover, he performs a *mezza volta* of the sword and cuts *riverso fendente* while stepping left foot left, and completing the step by following right foot to the left (triangle step), drawing the blade out to the forward variant of *Tutta Porta di Ferro*.

13) The above drill is done with reversed poste.

14) ***Scambiar de punta* from *Posta di Donna*.**

Attacker: *Posta di Donna* vs Defender: *Posta di Donna*

Correct Measure (single passing step measure (eg *mezza volta* of body)).

- a) Attacker transitions from *Posta di Donna* to *Posta Longa*, passes, and targets middle of chest for hit. NOTE: *Posta Longa* must be properly formed, with arms extended but **not** locked, and shoulders relaxed. The step will be slightly shorter than possible, so that the blow does not quite hit.
- b) Attacker transitions from *Posta di Donna* to *Posta Longa* for a thrust, as above. Defender covers with exchange of thrusts. NOTE: the cover is virtually identical to the action of crossing the *mandritto fendente*.
- c) Attacker transitions from *Posta di Donna* to *Posta Longa* for a thrust, as above, but makes his initial step slightly short. As defender crosses, Attacker makes a *mezza volta* of the sword and cuts true *riverso fendente*, stepping left with left foot and following with the right foot to the right (triangle step) and drawing the blade out to the forward variant of *Tutta Porta di Ferro*.

15) The above drill is done with reversed poste.

16) **Defending against *mandritto fendente* with a deflection from *Mezzana Porta di Ferro* through *Posta Finestra*.**

Attacker: *Posta di Donna* vs Defender: *Mezzana Porta di Ferro*, left foot forward.

Correct Measure (single passing step measure (eg *mezza volta* of body)).

- a) Attacker cuts true *mandritto fendente* and hits with a half blow, drawing the blade out to *Dente de Zenghiaro*, making second step of left foot to right (eg triangle step).
- b) Defender shifts from *Mezzana Porta di Ferro* to *Posta Finestra*. As Attacker cuts true *mandritto fendente* to hit with a half blow, Defender deflects by levering his blade sharply up with a downward pull of the pommel hand, bringing the sword roughly into line with the forearm of the right. He then turns his weapon true edge out to Attacker, without withdrawing his arms or hand behind his head, and cuts true *mandritto fendente* while making a quick *volta stabile* forward. NOTE: *Posta Finestra* **must** be correctly formed, with the point angled roughly 22 degrees to the Defender's own left!
- c) As Attacker cuts true *mandritto fendente* to hit with a half blow, Defender transitions quickly from his forward-weighted *Mezzana Porta di Ferro* to *Posta Finestra*, deflecting and returning the strike as above. NOTE: *Posta Finestra* **must** be correctly formed, with the point angled roughly 22 degrees to the Defender's own left!

17) The above drill is done with reversed poste.

18) **Defending against *mandritto fendente* with a deflection into *Falcone* from *Dente de Zenghiaro*.**

Attacker: *Posta di Donna* vs Defender: *Dente de Zenghiaro*

Correct Measure (single passing step measure (eg *mezza volta* of body)).

- a) Attacker cuts true *mandritto fendente* and hits with a half blow, drawing the blade out to *Dente di Zenghiaro*, making second step of left foot to right (eg triangle step).
- b) Attacker cuts true *mandritto fendente* to hit with a half blow, and Defender covers by cutting false edge *riverso sottano* into *Posta Falcone*, arcing it slight to the right as he strikes the attacking *fendente*, and taking care to position his pommel above and slightly in front of his forehead, with his point aimed upwards and no more than very slightly angled back, and elbows "chicken-winged" out from the head at 90 degree angles. The right foot must be drawn up near, but not behind, the left. He then returns *riverso fendente*, leading with the blade and following quickly with the step, ending in a *Posta Longa* framed on the right and with the hands low (or, if you prefer, a *Posta Breve* framed on the right with the hands extended!), thus closing the line.
- c) As in b above, but the Defender steps right foot right and across the line as he makes his deflection, and enters with a *fendente*, drawing out to either *Mezzana Porta di Ferro* or *Dente di Zenghiaro*.

19) The above drill is done with reversed poste.

Combining into Tactical Exercises

The above drills can be combined into tactical exercises of more or less complexity. It's important to start with simpler drills, and have named Attackers and Defenders. Partners should practice being in each of the 4 strategic

positions discussed – optimally, this will be done with people who actually fit those characteristics, but it can be simulated by opponents who do not. Remember, it is a *drill*, and students in a drill work to *facilitate the training* of their partners!

| Strategic Position | Tactical Preference | Sample Offensive Tactic | Sample Defensive Tactic |
|---|-----------------------|--|--|
| Longer-Faster | Offensive Outfighting | Direct attacks at your wide measure with strong follow-ups | Induce your opponent to attack specific lines, cover and strike from your wide measure |
| Longer-Slower | Defensive Outfighting | Stay at the border of your wide measure, and enter with indirect attacks | Stay at wide measure; induce opponent to attack specific lines so that you constrain his actions |
| Shorter-Faster | Offensive Infighting | Enter your wide measure with indirect attacks, exit with covering actions | Induce opponent to attack specific lines, cover and close to your wide measure while returning the blows; exit with covering actions |
| Shorter-Slower | Defensive Infighting | Enter your wide measure with indirect attacks and exit with covering actions | Induce opponent to enter his wide measure, cover, close and strike, exiting with covering actions |
| Note: When assessing measure in combat, it is important to remember that the opponent's wide and close measures may be larger or smaller than your own. | | | |

Using the above strategic matrix, you can begin putting together tactical drills using the above technical drills. Here are some possibilities:

- 1) Attacker assumes a *postea*; if a high *postea*, he will cut *fendente*; if low, he will thrust. In response and in measure, Defender assumes a *postea* and defends against the pre-selected attack. This continues for a series of repetitions before the partners switch roles. The repetitions should have a very short pause between them – only long enough to resume *postea*.
- 2) Defender assumes a *postea*. In response and in measure, Attacker assumes a *postea* and attacks. Again, the type of attack is pre-arranged and continues as in 1 above.
- 3) As 1 & 2 above, but the partners start from slightly out of measure.
- 4) Attacker and Defender assume their *postea* simultaneously, at a given signal from a drill leader (or by making eye contact and nodding). This is done both in measure and out of measure, as above.
- 5) Both parties assume their *postea* slightly out of measure, but no attacker or defender is named. They maneuver, each seeking measure to attack. When one attacks, the other must defend.
- 6) Drills 1 through 5 above are repeated, but this time the partners do their next Attacker-Defender sequence from the *postea* they assume at the end of their previous action. This results in a two-step sequence.
- 7) The drills above are repeated, but the Attacker then counters the Defender's action. This develops the complexity of the drills.

Conclusions

Using the sample exercises provided, you can develop your own complete repertoire of technical drills and work them into tactical drills of increasing complexity. Remember to start slowly! Drills should be done at slow speed at first, and only gradually (over the course of many practice sessions) speeded up. Similarly, you should not attempt to jump into the most complex levels of drills in a single night or in just a few sessions. The tactical drill work outlined here should cover many weeks of training.

The Strategic Matrix discussed in this class and handout provide tools for assessing and analyzing the opponent provide a means of planning your entry into combat. By combining these tools with regular practice at technical and tactical drills, you can improve your martial decision-making process, and bring your bouting up to a new level.