

The Schilhaw - Mechanics and Applications

A class delivered by Tea Kew at Fightcamp 2017

Introduction

- This class is about the schilhaw - squinting cut or shield-cut (translations unclear)
- This is Liechtenauer's swiss army knife: unique to him, and solves a very wide range of problems.
- We'll look at the basic mechanics of the cut, run through the plays given in Ringeck for it, and then cover a couple of extra applications we can extrapolate from the material.
- All sections are 15 minutes: short explanation, then drilling time.

Warmup exercises

- Hand fencing game:
 - Set distance as being able to strike with a step in (from left foot lead) for either party.
 - Coach leads, fencer maintains that distance standing in roughly vom tag at the shoulder (sans sword)
 - When the coach chooses, they pass in and aim to touch at the fencer's left shoulder.
 - Fencer turns the hips into that attack, which brings the left arm across to parry it, and shoots the right hand out in a cross to counter-strike the right shoulder.
 - Practicing the basic mechanics of a schilhaw.
- Stationary cuts - planted feet in horse stance, long flowing cuts from both sides with hip turns to practice hip engagement

Parry/Riposte

- Does everyone know how to do a basic cut? Quickly demonstrate/check
 - Cut from right shoulder, long cut at full extension to the head.
- Now a basic parry against that cut
 - Bring the sword from right shoulder to left, and turn it around to catch with the short edge. Arms somewhat bent/chambered.
 - Use the sword as high as possible for this - catch very near

- the strong.
- Turn hips, but no need to step (indeed stepping can be actively unhelpful).
- Body is a coiled spring.
- Finally a basic riposte.
 - Explode out of this position.
 - Down straight through to the right shoulder
 - Do not flow over their blade, drive it down under yours.
 - The hands finish just outside the line between your left shoulder and their right.
- Three step drill: coach cuts to head, fencer parries the cut, fencer parries and ripostes with the short edge
 - Three step drills are a concept borrowed from Axel Petterson.
 - They are good for making sure both parties are always doing the right thing.
 - Procedure: first do step 1, then do step 1&2, then do step 1&2&3. That's one rep.
 - Change roles every five reps.

Basic mechanics of the Schilhaw

*[49] This is the text and the gloss of the squint-cut and of the plays:
How a man shall execute them*

58 The Squinter breaks-in

Whatever the buffalo strikes or thrusts.

59 Whoever threatens to change,

The squinter robs him of it.

Gloss. Note here that the squinter is a cut which breaks-in the cuts and thrusts of the buffalo ([one] who acquires victory with power), and execute the cut thusly: When he cleaves-in above from his right side, so cut from your right against his cut into the weak of his sword, with the short edge [and] with up-right arms, and strike him upon his right shoulder; so you strike and parry with each other and hit him with the cut (as stands pictured hereafter next to this).

- The schilhaw is a cut directly into the previous riposte
 - It moves solely forwards and down - not up over their blade. This gives it power.
 - The other thing which gives it power is a turn of the body and

- the explosive drive of the arms - think a right cross in boxing.
 - Note how this motion is a very forward one - it flows naturally into a thrust (of which more later).
- Hand position is vitally important.
 - Hands are to the inside of the blade, both of them, with straight wrists
 - ◆ Hilt is outside the line between our left shoulder and their right.
 - ◆ This requires the core to have been properly turned to the left.
 - We've turned the blade over to get it naturally coming down on this position.
- Target is the right shoulder
 - This means that if they partially displace it, we are much more likely to still hit their head
 - In addition, by keeping our sword well out to the side, our hands and arms are safer.
- Three-step drill: cut, parry/riposte, schilhaw.
 - For this use, we are using the cut without a step, because they've closed the distance.
 - As a result, the hip turn is extremely important. No hip turn, no power.

Schilhaw against a point in line

[52] This is the text and the gloss of yet another play from the squint-cut

*61 Squint to the point
And take the neck without fear.*

Gloss. Note, the squinter breaks the long-point with a deceit of the visage and execute it thusly: When he stands against you and holds the point against the face or against the chest from extended arms, so stand with the left foot forward and squint with the visage to his point, and act as if you wish to cut to his point, and cut strongly onto his sword with the short edge, and with that, shoot the point long to his neck with a step-forwards of the right foot (as stands pictured hereafter next to this).

- This uses the 'forward' nature of the schilhaw to break a point-in-

line stance like pflug or langort.

- Claim the centre with our cut, and move forwards and slightly out to the right to draw that straight line from our left shoulder to their throat.
- As soon as the blade reaches the centre and the point is coming online, the feet follow to carry the thrust onto the target.
 - ◆ Vital that the step happens *after* the cut/hip turn.
- Important: control the central space.
 - We do this by cutting the hilt past their point, with the hands lower and the point higher.
 - This prevents a small durchwechsell from working, which is what they are most likely to try.
 - In addition, we move to about 1.30 instead of directly forward, creating a new centreline which we have better control of.
- Practice for this is the coach standing in either position. Fencer approaches and strikes in with the schiel, then follows with the step to take the throat.

Schilhaw to the hands

[53] *This is the text and the gloss of yet another play from the squint-cut*

62 Squint to the top of the Head if you wish to ruin the hands.

Gloss. Note, when he wishes to cleave-in to you from above, so squint with the visage (as if you wish to strike the head), and cut with the short edge against his cut, and strike him upon his sword's blade with the point to the hands (as stands pictured hereafter next to this).

- Parry notes: they are transforming their cut into a parry because they believe our cut is coming at their head
 - That parry has their hands approximately on the line between your right shoulder and their left - it's setting them up for a quick riposte much like our initial parry was.
 - Uses the long edge for easier movement from having begun a cut.
 - Hands are often somewhat extended, since it began as a cut, and generally below the shoulders.

- To beat this, we can again use the schilhaw
 - Now we carry ourselves out to the right a little with a step, and keep the hands higher, to allow our point to drop onto the hands.
 - This may not work too well if they have lots of schilt or side-rings, sorry.
 - This also doesn't work against hugely wide or very hands high parries, those require other solutions.
- Three-step drill: schilhaw vs oberhaw, parry schilhaw, schilhaw on hands.

Breaking absetzen with the schilhaw

This is drawing on some commentary in pseudo-Peter von Danzig:

*60 Squint that he is short on you,
Changing-through defeats him.*

...Or, if he lies against you in the guard of the Ox or the Plow, so is his sword but shortened. Also know that all Winds with the sword before the man are short and shorten the sword, and whatever fencer the Winding drives thus, then freely Change through from hews and from stabs, and shoot in the long point therewith into the next opening.

In general, this part of the zettel/gloss is very allusive and quite difficult to interpret - the suggestions in these sections are certainly not the only possible actions which can be used to fit the text. However, they are practically effective, and fit very naturally as applications of the schilhaw.

- Absetzen is a very standard response from pflug or langort to an apparent cut to the head.
 - Demonstrate this - cut at the head of someone in langort, who winds to left ochs and thrust the face.
- However, we are told that when they fence short (without the arms extended towards you) the schilhaw can break this with the point
 - It does this by taking the centre with full extension to shoot the point in.
 - And by placing our strong through their weak to dominate the bind and control their point

- So we are going to use the schilhaw against absetzen, to break the ochs they move into
 - What's vital here is controlling their sword in the centre. Moving slightly to the right helps have a nice secure body position and get your own targets out of the way of their sword.
 - Make sure you have enough downwards pressure onto the blade to stop them easily disappearing under.
- Three-step drill: Cut head in langort, absetzen against cut, schilhaw vs absetzen
 - You might miss with the cut - if this happens, do mutieren (see below)

Breaking the zwerhaw

- Another very common way to arrive in ochs is the zwerhaw.
 - Demonstrate quickly- hands above head, turn and punch out to your left.
 - This catches the descending cut and is thus advised for attacking someone in Vom Tag - which is where we tend to begin the schilhaw from.
- We can break it with the schilhaw
 - Step the foot out slightly with a hip turn
 - Cut through their point to the head/shoulder, or allow the point to shoot to their face
- Missing is more likely when countering the zwerhaw.
 - If that happens, turn the point down and thrust to a lower opening with mutieren.
 - This is a really good setup for mutieren, since the preconditions (overbind, opponent soft, short edge on) are already met.
- Three-step drill: oberhaw to head, zwerhaw to break, schilhaw to break it.

Addendum, with thanks to Matt Galas: A third common way to end up in (left) ochs is from durchwechseln.

- Attacker cuts in with oberhaw
- Defender attempts to parry
- Attacker drops the point and lifts the hands to left ochs, passing the parry and thrusting on the other side of the blade.

A schilhaw can break as above, as long as your timing is exactly right.

Conclusion

- Recap the mechanics of the cut.
 - Like a boxing cross.
 - Comes from the right side, down and forwards with the short edge
 - Aimed to the right ear, with the hilt out to our left side.
- Recap the various plays that we've demonstrated - first from the book
 - Schilhaw vs oberhaw
 - Schilhaw vs langort
 - Schilhaw vs pflug
 - Schilhaw to hands
- And then new applications of the principles.
 - Schilhaw vs absetzen (from langort)
 - Schilhaw vs zwerhaw (from tag)
- As you can see, this is an extremely useful and versatile technique
 - It really is Liechtenauer's Swiss army knife.
 - Almost any initial action from the opponent can be effectively responded to with the schilhaw.
- Q/A time

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