

UKRAINIAN LANCE FIGHT TECHNIQUE IN THE XVI-XVIII CENTURIES

P a r t I

by Edward Rozinsky

Due to the growing curiosity in America concerning European literature and theatre, the areas of interest in European Theatre Arts is also rapidly increasing. There is now a growing demand for historical combat techniques. Therefore, some information concerning the reconstruction of Ukrainian lance combat practiced during the sixteenth through eighteenth centuries could prove useful to those choreographers dealing with this time period. The technique that follows is versatile, in that it may be used as the basis for spear combat of the Roman period and for peasant stick fighting of Western Europe.

Unfortunately very little historical material deals with combat technique. However, through close examination of period materials and a little common sense some very sound conclusions concerning combat technique may be drawn.

Cold steel weaponry and ammunition were being produced in mass quantities during the beginning of the sixteenth century. At this time Ukrainian peasants began to overthrow Polish enslavement. The center of the movement was known as the Zaporozskaia Sech, a union of thousands of peasants-cossacks encamped around the Dnieper River. Having a very active battle zone, the cossacks were able to obtain a great number of weapons from the dead. Eventually, however, it did become necessary for them to produce their own weapons.

The production of weaponry reached a climax during the 1648-1654 Ukrainian War of Liberation. The weapons used at that time in Western Europe were not very popular among the Ukrainians, therefore the Eastern troops had a great influence upon the shape and use of the weaponry.

The two major types of cold steel weaponry were the sabre and the lance (see picture 1). The sabre was an honourable cossack's weapon. They respected it and even poeticized it in their songs:

Oh dear my girl-sabre
You met the conqueror
And kissed him not just once

Ukrainians produced two types of sabres: the Turkish sabre in which the blade widened toward the end, and the Iranian sabre which made use of a light thin point. The sabre, worn sheathed and held to a holster by two rings, bore one sharpened edge.

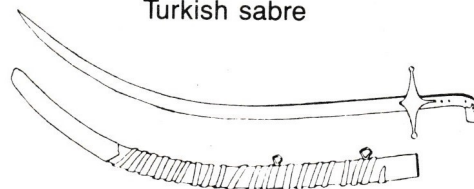
Rather than just copy their Eastern neighbors, local armorers would also impose new features and designs to their sabres. To please the aesthetic needs, sabres were ornamented with traditional design patterns and thus they were quite expensive. A considerable part of a cossack's income would be spent to purchase a good weapon. In the sixteenth through eighteenth centuries such a sabre was not just the privilege of the officer alone. Even the poorest might obtain a nice weapon, for many were won in battle.

Another integral part of a Zaporozsky cossack's equipment was his lance. There was a playful saying at the time:

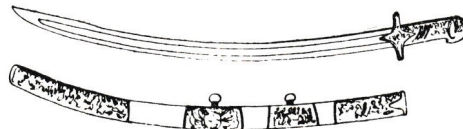
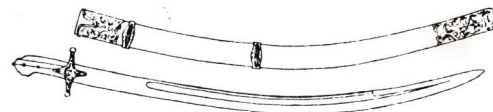
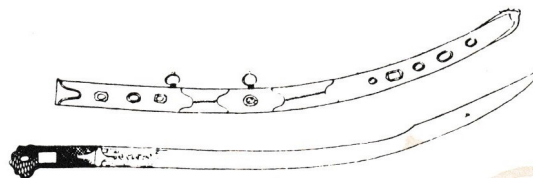
Cossack without lance like a girl without necklace



Turkish sabre



Iranian sabre



Cossack sabres

Picture 1

He fashioned his lance out of a light but strong wood. Usually about twelve feet long, the lance was painted red and black in a spiral pattern. The end of the lance bore a sturdy metal tip measuring about two feet (see picture 2).

The lance was used both in mounted and unmounted combat. When used by a horseman, the lance had a leather loop affixed to the lower end in which the cossack placed his foot. Then he banded it to his knee in order to bring the lance to a horizontal position. Some lances were designed with a metal cross behind the blade in order to keep a pierced enemy at a safe distance (see picture 2).

Though of little popularity, the Battle Axe was also used by the Ukrainians. The Ukrainian name for it was kelep. This weapon which was adopted from the Middle Asian troops had a handle two feet in length. It was used primarily in close combat to break through a knight's armour. This weapon was much more popular in earlier years when it was known as a weapon of the cossacks of Stepan Razin, and the Turkish and Polish Army.

Other weapons used in the period were the Sickle and the Mace, not to mention countless types of daggers and knives. Peasants would even adapt farm tools to be used for battle. It was very common for two enemies to fight using different types of weapons. For instance, one could be armed with a sabre, and the other with a lance.



Picture 2



Picture 3

MAJOR POSITIONS AND MOVEMENTS IN LANCE COMBAT

For the sake of convenience I shall divide the lance into three parts:

1. The wooden "shaft"
2. The "metal tip"
3. The "butt" of the shaft at the lower end

STAND EASY POSITION

The lance is held in the right hand at chest level with the metal tip of the lance pointed upward. The butt is placed beside the right foot (see picture 3).

STAND EASY SET I

The body weight is placed on the right leg and the left leg is to the side and flexed. The arms are extended downward, with the lance held parallel to the ground, the metal tip to the left. The right hand grasps the lance in pronation, the left hand is supinated (see picture 4). To move from Stand Easy to Set I position, straighten the right arm, while sliding the hand down the lance. Swing the lance to the left, stopping it in a horizontal position with the supinated left hand. Remove the left foot aside at the same time.

To resume the Stand Easy Position, the lance is brought to a vertical position with both hands. Then the right hand is moved to chest level and the left hand is dropped. At the same time shift the left foot toward the right foot.



Picture 4



Picture 5

STAND EASY SET II

Leaning on the lance, the metal tip upward, the left heel twelve inches from the right foot, the lanceman places his right hand on the lance at chest level and his left hand at eye level (see picture 5).

MARCHING POSITION

The lance is held on the right shoulder. The right hand, with arm slightly bent, supports the shaft. The metal tip of the lance is pointed back and up.

To move from Stand Easy to Marching, slip the right hand down the lance, lifting it onto the shoulder.

GREETING

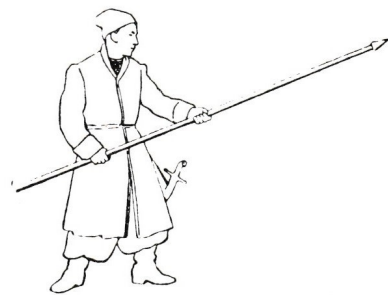
Greeting is made from the Stand Easy Position. Without moving the hand, straighten the right arm with the lance to the side, simultaneously placing the left hand on the hip and turning your head toward the person being greeted. The butt of the lance remains in place (see picture 6).



Picture 6

FIGHTING POSITION

From Stand Easy Position, slide the right hand down the shaft until the arm is fully extended. Stepping forward with the left foot, abruptly throw the lance forward with the right shoulder and arm, and at the same time catch the shaft with the supinated left hand. Both arms should now be in a half-bent position, right hand next to the waist, and the left hand below the chest. The tip of the weapon should be pointed above the opponent's head, with your left foot pointed forward and your right foot to the side, with about a two foot distance between them. Also, the legs should be kept flexed as in the fencing positions (see picture 7). To return to the Stand Easy Position, place the left foot back into the Easy Position, returning the butt of the lance to the ground beside the right foot.

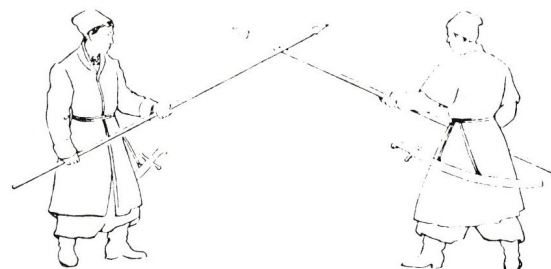


Picture 7

MOVEMENTS

The movements in lance combat are similar to those in fencing. Holding the lance in a Fighting Position, regular steps are used to reach the enemy. Steps, thrusts and closings remain the same as in foil fencing, although when using the lance a thrust may be executed with either the right or left foot forward, depending on the distance to the opponent.

To switch from left set (Fighting Position) to right set, take a large step forward with your right foot, while bringing the lance to a vertical position. Now quickly exchange hand positions and return to Fighting Position (right set).



Picture 8

ENGAGEMENTS

Although engagement, as understood in foil fencing, is not necessary for lance combat, when in an engagement position the upper one-third of the weapons touch, the metal tip of the lance pointed above the head of the opponent. The opponent's lance is then in contact with yours on the left side or inside line (see picture 8).

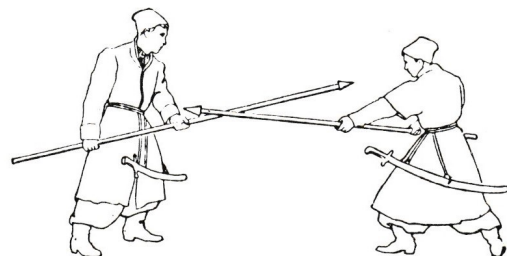
To change engagement, lower the lance by raising the right hand and lowering the left hand, moving your lance tip under your opponent's to the opposite side. A double and triple engagement may also be employed in combination with stepping forward. With each step use only one engagement change. For a double step use two engagement changes, and so on.

ATTACK AND DEFENSE IN LANCE COMBAT

Lance attacks are chiefly thrusts. However, blows from above, from the left and from the right are also possible, as is the use of the butt.

THRUSTS

Thrusts, which are directed toward the chest, abdomen and legs, are generated from the Fighting Position. A thrust to the face on stage is very dangerous and is not recommended. To execute a thrust to the chest, abdomen or right leg you must make an engagement change (with one step). Without moving any other part of your body, point the metal tip directly toward the chosen target by extending your left arm (right arm remains slightly bent). Through this movement you are showing your partner exactly what part of his body you are going to attack. This is called "Show the Touch." The next movement is the actual thrust (see picture 9). The thrust to the left leg is done without an engagement change.



Picture 9

BLOWS

1. A Blow From Above

A blow from above may be used to strike your partner's head or left shoulder. This attack is produced by swinging the lance upward over your head so that the butt of the lance is pointed forward. This will indicate to your partner the area you are about to strike, i.e., his head. Now, thrust forward and swing the weapon downward. Aim for the center of your opponent's head, but stop a foot above the head. Your partner must be sure that you are swinging for the exact center of his head so that he can safely take the corresponding defense (see picture 10). A step forward with the right foot can be used when a distance is larger than usual at the time of attack.



Picture 10

2. Right Flank Blow and Right Shoulder Blow

This blow is begun in the same way as a blow from above, although when you swing the lance downward, stop your left hand above your left shoulder (not above your head as before). You can also specify what part of the body is going to be attacked by pointing the butt of the lance to the flank or to the shoulder prior to swinging the lance downward. Avoid sweeping the lance far out to the side for a flank or shoulder blow. It is extremely dangerous for other students or actors working next to you. Actually, Left Flank Blows and Left Shoulder Blows may be produced from the same position as a Blow From Above. Just show your partner the target with the butt of the lance.



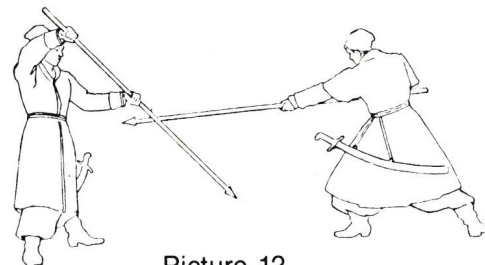
Picture 11

DEFENSES

There are five defenses in lance combat: two upper defenses, which protect the upper body (third and fourth), two lower defenses, which protect your lower body (first and second), and the fifth defense which protects your head and shoulders.

First Defense-Repulse

This protects the lower left part or inside line of the body. From the Fighting Position, with one sharp movement, quickly bring your lance to the slanted position to the left of your body, the metal tip pointing down, the butt up. Thus the right hand should go up and stop slightly above your head (see pictures 11 and 12).



Picture 12

Second Defense-Repulse

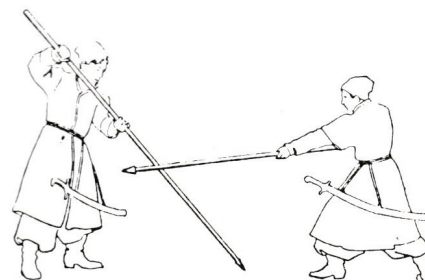
This protects the lower right portion or outside line of the body. From the Fighting Position shift the lance to a slanted position to the right of your body, the metal tip pointing down. Your right hand is next to your ear and your left arm is extended (see pictures 13 and 14).



Picture 13

Third Defense-Repulse

This protects the upper right part or outside line of the body. From the Fighting Position extend your right arm downward while raising your left hand, so as to bring the lance to a slanted position with the metal tip pointing forward-and-right (see picture 9).



Picture 14

Fourth Defense-Repulse

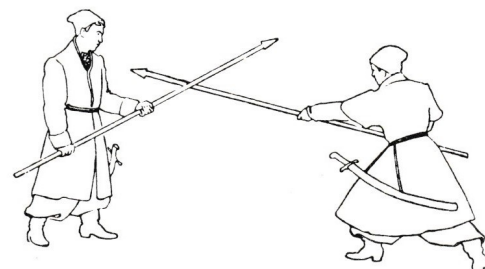
This covers the upper left part of the body. From the Fighting Position move the lance to your left while raising your left hand. The lance should stop in a slanted position with the metal tip pointing forward-and-left (see picture 15).

Fifth Defense-Repulse

This protects the head and shoulder from attack. With both arms raised and bent slightly, hold the lance in a horizontal position (the edge a bit higher) above and in front of the head, the butt pointed to the right (see picture 16).



Picture 16



Picture 15

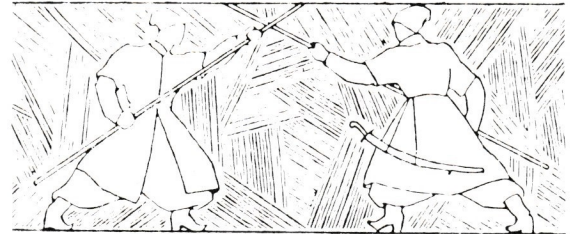
UKRAINIAN LANCE FIGHT TECHNIQUE IN THE XVI-XVIII CENTURIES

P a r t II

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PASSAGES FROM ONE DEFENSE POSITION TO ANOTHER

To parry a series of attacks one should pass from one Defense Position to another. This is used both when in a lance duel or when fighting with two or more opponents. Only after mastering all of the five basic Defense Positions described in the May 1984 issue of *The Fight Master* can one begin to learn the passages from one line to another, for they demand a great deal more coordination. Lance combat requires twice the space as foil fencing; therefore, be sure you have enough space to practice in.



Passage from the Third to the Fourth Defense Position

From the Third Defense Position with the lance slanted upward and to the right covering the upper right or outside line of the body, shift the metal tip of the lance to the left into the Fourth Defense Position with the point slanted upward and to the left covering the upper left side or inside line of the body. This can be done quickly and easily by allowing the left hand to move the lance from the Third Defense position into the Fourth Defense Position.

Passage from the Fourth to the Third Defense Position

This is accomplished in an opposite direction from that described in the passage above. The metal tip of the lance is shifted from the upper inside line to the right into the upper outside line with the left hand moving the shaft of the lance.

Passage from the Third to the First Defense Position

This is done by first shifting the metal tip of the lance from its upward slanted position covering the upper outside line downward and then secondly shifting the lance to the left into the First Defense Position covering the lower inside line with the metal tip pointed downward and to the left and the right hand slightly above and to the right of the head on the butt end of the shaft. Through practice all two movement passages should be executed as one continuous movement.

Passage from the First to the Third Defense Position

This is done in two movements opposite to those described above. From the First Defense Position with the metal tip pointed downward and to the left covering the lower inside line, first bring the metal tip to the right or lower outside line and then move the top up into the Third Defense Position covering the upper outside line.

Passage from the Second to the Fourth Defense Position

From the Second Defense Position with the metal tip slanted down and to the right covering the lower outside line, lift the lance with the left hand while simultaneously moving the right hand down. Then move the metal tip of the lance to the left into the Fourth Defense Position with the tip slanted upward and to the left covering the upper inside line of the body.

Passage from the Fourth to the Second Defense Position

The metal tip of the lance is dropped from the upward slanted position covering the upper inside line of the body to the lower left and then moved to the right with the point down and covering the lower outside line of the body. The right hand is next to the ear on the shaft of the lance.

Passage from the Second to the First Defense Position

This is done in the quickest and most efficient direction by shifting the downward pointed metal tip of the lance from the right side covering the lower outside line to the left side to cover the lower inside line, with the butt of the lance remaining to the right side of the head.

Passage from the First to the Second Defense Position

This is done by reversing the above shift of direction of the downward pointed lance from covering the lower inside line to covering the lower outside line.

Passage from the Second to the Third Defense Position

This passage involves the metal tip of the lance making a semi-circular movement before stopping in the Third Defense Position. The tip is raised up from the Second Defense Position covering the lower outside line and to the left in a semi-circular movement that then shifts to the right, stopping in the Third Defense Position covering the upper outside line of the body.

Passage from the Third to the Second Defense Position

This is again a semi-circular passage, the opposite of the above. The lance tip is moved from its forward slanted position covering the upper outside line to the left and then downward and to the right in a semi-circular movement, ending in the Second Defense Position with the point downward protecting the lower outside line.

Passage from the First to the Fourth Defense Position

This is a semi-circular passage with the metal tip of the lance ending in the Fourth Defense Position covering the upper left or inside line. The tip is moved up from its downward slanted position covering the lower inside line and to the right before moving left and ending in the Fourth Defense Position covering the upper inside line.

Passage from the Fourth to the First Defense Position

This movement is the opposite of the above. The metal tip of the lance is first moved to the right and then downward and to the left ending in the First Defense Position with the tip slanted down and to the left covering the lower inside line.

Passage from the First to the Fifth Defense Position

The lance is shifted by the quickest method from its downward slanted position in the First Defense Position covering the lower inside line into the Fifth Defense Position protecting the head and shoulder with both arms raised and bent slightly, holding the lance in a horizontal position above and in front of the head with the metal tip to the left and the butt of the lance to the right.

Passage from the Fifth to the First Defense Position

This passage is done by first shifting the metal tip of the lance in the overhead position down and to the right with the second movement of this passage moving the lance to the left and into the First Defense Position with the metal tip slanted downward and protecting the lower inside line.

Passage from the Second to the Fifth Defense Position

This passage is accomplished by shifting the lance from the downward slanted position protecting the lower outside line and bringing it up and to the left into the overhead horizontal position by the most direct route.

Passage from the Fifth to the Second Defense Position

This is a semi-circular movement. The metal tip of the lance in the overhead horizontal position makes a semi-circular movement in the air as it travels downward and to the right, stopping in the Second Defense Position with the tip slanted down and to the right, protecting the lower outside line.

Passage from the Third to the Fifth Defense Position

The lance is shifted from the Third Defense Position covering the upper outside line to the overhead horizontal position of the Fifth Defense Position by the shortest route possible.

Passage from the Fifth to the Third Defense Position

The passage is the shortest route possible from the overhead horizontal position to the Third Defense Position which covers the upper outside line.

Passage from the Fourth to the Fifth Defense Position

The lance shifts from covering the upper inside line to the horizontal position by the shortest route possible which is accomplished by bringing the butt end up and in front of the head.

Passage from Fifth to Fourth Defense Position

The butt of the lance in the horizontal overhead position is shifted down in the first movement of the passage. The second movement moves the lance to the left stopping in the Fourth Defense Position with the metal tip slanted upward and to the left protecting the upper inside line.

CIRCULAR DEFENSES

In lance combat a circular defense is often used. This movement allows the metal tip of the lance to make a full circle and return to the starting point. The following are the techniques used for the Second, Third and Fourth Circular Defenses.

Second Circular Defense

Beginning in the Second Defense Position with the metal tip slanted downward and to the right, allow the metal tip to make a full circle by traveling upward and then moving in a counterclockwise direction in the air, returning to the position from which the movement began. This way you can repel your attacker if he repeats his last attack. This may also be used for disarming your opponent. This motion can be very strong but one must remember that people can be hurt and objects around can be broken. Therefore, it is wise to stop one's motion at the point of contact with your partner's lance and allow your partner to throw his weapon in a safe direction.

Third Circular Defense

This movement is done by allowing the metal tip of the lance to make a full circle under the opponent's weapon and return to the same Third Defense Position. Start the circle by moving your left hand down and your right hand up. Then, with a counterclockwise motion, disarm your opponent by throwing his weapon up and to the right.

Fourth Circular Defense

The edge of the lance makes a circular motion under your opponent's weapon from the Fourth Defense Position and returning to the starting point. This clockwise motion ends with a repulse on the opponent's weapon.

BLOWS WITH THE BUTT OF THE LANCE

Right Flank Blow with the Butt of the Lance

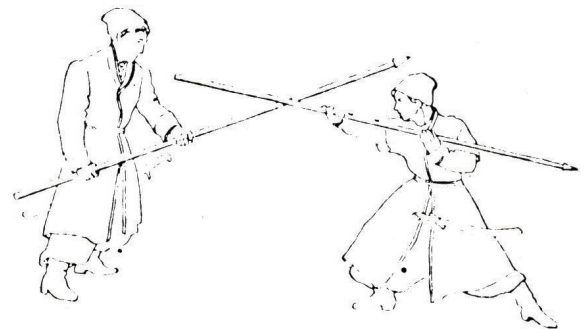
This is done usually after taking the Fourth Defense Position. After contacting your partner's weapon, do not stop the lance but allow it to follow through so that the butt will come to the left of your partner's body. Now thrust forward and strike your partner's flank, shoulder or leg with the butt of your lance. (see picture 17).

Forward Blows with the Butt of the Lance

After taking the Fifth Defense Position, point the butt toward your opponent's body and attack with a thrust. Remember that the attacked area must be the same area you indicated. Try to avoid deceptive movements on stage. A forward blow using the butt may also be done after taking the Fourth Defense Position. Do not stop the motion of the lance, and, when the butt is pointed toward your partner, attack in the same manner as above (see picture 18).



Picture 17



Picture 18

Blow Backward with the Butt without a Turn

When in combat with two or more opponents and one is behind you, a strike to the rear may be used with the butt of your weapon. But first show your partner behind you that you are going to attack: extend both your arms forward and up, so that the metal tip of the lance would rise above the head of the opponent in front. Now strike with a thrust backwards with the butt of the lance. If your partner is close, make a thrust with your right foot. If he is out of distance, thrust with your left. It is convenient to do this motion from Third, Fourth or Fifth Defense Positions.

Blow Backward with the Butt, Turning Around

The partner behind you can also be attacked with the butt and with a turn around. To produce this attack, make a hundred and eighty degree turn on the heels of your feet. At the same time shift the lance up above your head. Right after the turn, point the butt to the chosen target. Now you can make the thrust with your right foot if your opponent is in range and with your left if your opponent is out of distance.

DEFENSES FROM THE BUTT BLOWS

Against the Right Flank Blow with the Butt of the Lance take a Second Defense Position with the metal tip of the lance to your left and thrusting the lance to your left. You can do this motion either with your right or with your left foot.

Against the Forward Butt Blow use the First or Second Defense Position with a thrust or without it.

To parry the Backward Blow Without a Turn, take the First or Second Defense Position and make a jump backwards.

Against the Backward Butt Blow with a Turn take the Third or Fourth Defense Position.

REPEATED ATTACKS

As in foil fencing, lance combat also makes use of repeated attacks. This might be done while a partner is retreating whether he is defending or not. Because of the added distance created from his retreat, and additional attack is possible. Repeated attacks may be produced by a Blow or a Thrust. Before proceeding with a Repeated Attack one must first get back into a Fighting Position by shifting one's right foot forward. Only then can one begin a new attack. Repeated Attacks need not be the same as the previous attack. If the first attack for instance was focused on a partner's chest, the Repeated Attack may be aimed at his leg. This all depends on the defense position your partner used with the first attack.

ATTACKS ON THE WEAPON

It is common for one to attempt to disarm or break the opponent's weapon through attacks on it. An attack on an opponent's weapon may also be used simply in order to open an opponent for a further attack.

One of the attacks on the weapon is a Beat (a sharp blow). A Beat may be produced from right to left Engagement by a short strong blow on the opponent's weapon. Your opponent will then be open for attack by quickly coming in with a thrust.

Another attack on the weapon is the Seizure. After you have taken the Fourth Defense Position, shift your lance downward so that the Butt is resting on the floor next to your right foot. Now you are able to release your left hand. Grab "unexpectedly" your opponent's lance and pull it toward yourself. This way you may disarm your opponent or cause him to lose his balance.

You may also disarm your opponent if he were to attack your right leg and you took the Second Defense Position. Step on the butt of his lance with your right foot and with the butt of your lance make a short but strong Beat on his from above. Your opponent will lose his lance and might have to use another weapon to continue to fight with you.