

“En garde – un, deux!”: Military Sabre Fencing in Nineteenth-century Switzerland

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Abstract – This article presents recent research into military fencing in Switzerland, with a focus on manuals and regulations written to help instructors teach sabre fencing in Swiss officers’ schools. The publications discussed here, essentially sabre fencing manuals, can be grouped into a unique corpus based on the only official regulations for sabre fencing. They are interesting elements that can help scholars to understand not only the teaching and practice of fencing inside the infantry officers’ schools, but also the more technical aspects of an individual system: all publications in the corpus are part of the same system, although with minor variations. The system, called *Contre-pointe* (or *Stichsäbel* in some of the publications), is similar to others in France and elsewhere in Europe. Another central part of the system was its sportive aspect and use in military and civil competitions. Surprisingly, this meant that infantry officers were taught a type of fencing designed not solely for fighting on the battlefield and arguably more suited for the fencing room.

Keywords – Fencing, Switzerland, Sabre, Nineteenth Century, Military

I. INTRODUCTION

This article presents recent research into military fencing in Switzerland, with a focus on manuals and regulations written to help instructors teach sabre fencing in Swiss officers’ schools. The publications discussed here, essentially sabre fencing manuals, can be grouped into a unique corpus based on the only official regulations for sabre fencing. They are interesting elements that can help scholars to understand not only the teaching and practice of fencing inside the infantry officers’ schools, but also the more technical aspects of an individual system: all publications in the corpus are part of the same system, although with minor variations. The system, called *Contre-pointe* (or *Stichsäbel* in some of the publications), is similar to others in France and elsewhere in Europe. Another central part of the system was its sportive aspect and use in military and civil competitions. Surprisingly, this meant that infantry officers were taught a type of fencing designed not solely for fighting on the battlefield and arguably more suited for the fencing room. Another peculiar aspect of the Swiss practice of military fencing, especially sabre fencing, was that it was not only practiced by officers but also by non-commissioned officers (*sous-officiers*), particularly in military competitions. This shows how the knowledge acquired in some military structures (officers’ schools) spread to other parts of the army, or even civil society.

In the first part of this article I will discuss contextual aspects surrounding the development of the Swiss army and its officers' schools. The second part will focus on the documents relating to said schools in order to understand the role of fencing in this milieu. Finally, I will present some examples of the practice of military fencing outside of officers' schools, especially in public lessons and competitions.

II. THE DEVELOPMENT OF THE SWISS ARMY AND THE OFFICERS' SCHOOLS

The efforts to create a centralised Swiss army only go back as far as the beginning of the nineteenth century. In 1817, after the creation of the *Pacte fédéral* and the recognition of Swiss neutrality, the Confederation enacted the main regulations for the organisation of the army. These regulations relied on the mandatory service of able-bodied men (known as the *Militia system*) organised in squads from the Cantons. In 1850, a short time after the brief *Sonderbund* civil war of 1847-48, the new federal state increased the centralisation of the army, leaving only to the Cantons responsibility for instruction of the infantry. Men under the supervision of the Confederation – for example those who served in the cavalry, the artillery, or the engineers' corps – were instructed for a period between four and six weeks, with annual repetition courses.¹ These steps were essential for the development of the officers' schools and the 1874 reform in the army's organisation provided a new frame for their structure. Article 116 of the *Organisation militaire* mentions the duration of the formation, which is a first preparatory school of six weeks and a second one lasting for nine weeks; the officers' training could be completed by further and more specialised schools, as mentioned in article 117.²

The history of the development of officers' instruction in the nineteenth century is complex and goes beyond the scope of this article.³ Thus, I will herein focus on schools that integrated sabre fencing into their instruction plan, as well as the persons who participated in these schools. An early attempt to centralise the Swiss officers' instruction took place in 1819 at the first *École centrale* in Thun, which was dedicated to the improvement of the officers' instruction. The first classes, however, were only open to soldiers from the cavalry, the artillery, the engineers' corps, and the baggage train.⁴ The instruction of infantry officers was centralised only in the 1860s. In 1862, in a report published in *Revue Militaire Suisse*, the Swiss Military Department mentions that 'it is the first time that officers, young officers and non-commissioned officers from all the

¹ Kurz, *Histoire de l'Armée suisse*, pp. 18-22.

² 'Organisation militaire' (1874), p. 444.

³ For more information on the subject, see Lättsch, *Militärische Ausbildung und Ausbilder in der Schweiz*.

⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 23.

cantons, except Schaffhausen, took part in these schools'.⁵ The article is also the first occurrence of sabre fencing instruction for officers. This example shows the increasing centralisation in the Swiss infantry officers' instruction during the second half of the nineteenth century as it had previously been handled by the Cantons. Indeed, instruction could be acquired not only in the cadet corps (military classes in schools, where children engaged in preliminary military instruction) or in cantonal officers' schools, but also during foreign service or by simply studying military manuals; such a broad range of potential approaches obviously caused a great diversity in the military knowledge of Swiss officers.⁶

As mentioned in the introduction, non-commissioned officers also practiced sabre fencing at a sportive level. This practice can be partly explained by an evolution in the 1860s when the army showed its preference for another system to that of aspirant officers (*aspirants officiers*): before entering an officers' school, the young soldier could complete a training period as a non-commissioned officer, thus ensuring a sufficient level of skill and knowledge that was not present in the previous system.⁷ One argument in the favour of the latter system was that non-commissioned officers could now enter officers' schools with experience in leadership and a broader understanding of military organisation.⁸ The Swiss Military Department was even in favour, in 1870, of replacing the aspirant system with the non-commissioned officer one.⁹ This could be one element of the explanation for how non-commissioned officers acquired knowledge of sabre fencing during their military career, along with other elements that will be presented later in this article.

One question that ought to be resolved before addressing these additional matters, however, relates to the space that was devoted to sabre fencing in Swiss infantry officers' schools. Several articles published in the *Revue Militaire Suisse* report on the activities of officers' schools in the second half of the nineteenth century. In 1862, an article was published that details differences between two schools that took place in St-Gallen and Solothurn, mentioning that sabre and bayonet fencing was 'taught more in

⁵ The *Revue Militaire Suisse* (*Allgemeine schweizerische Militärzeitung* in German) is the Swiss Officers Society's official journal. In this publication, I will use the French name of the journal for articles in French, and the German one for articles in German; 'c'est la première année qu'officiers, aspirants et sous-officiers de tous les cantons, à l'exception de Schaffhouse, ont pris part à ces écoles', Fornerod, 'Nouvelles et Chroniques', p. 378.

⁶ Lätsch, *Militärische Ausbildung und Ausbilder in der Schweiz*, pp. 21-22.

⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 141.

⁸ 'Rapport présenté à la haute Assemblée fédérale par le Conseil fédéral suisse sur sa gestion pendant l'année 1866', pp. 693-94; 'Rapport présenté à la haute Assemblée fédérale par le Conseil fédéral suisse sur sa gestion pendant l'année 1867', pp. 126-27.

⁹ 'Rapport présenté à la haute Assemblée fédérale par le Conseil fédéral suisse sur sa gestion pendant l'année 1870', pp. 186-87.

depth in the second school than the first'.¹⁰ The fencing instruction seems to have found its final form around 1865, in Solothurn, as a report mentions that the instruction plan did not differ from that of the preceding schools.¹¹ Under the management of Colonel Leonz Schädler (the author of the official regulation on sabre fencing, see below), the officers had fifteen to twenty minutes of sabre instruction every day. Things changed in the 1870s, when fencing was taught for an hour every two days, alternating with revolver shooting and gymnastics.¹² In the 1860s, when the schools lasted for five weeks, the students practiced between six and a quarter and ten hours a week, depending on the instruction's duration and the number of working days (five or six per week).¹³ In the 1870s, when the school lasted for six weeks, only six hours a week were dedicated to sabre fencing.¹⁴ Thus, over the course of one curriculum, time dedicated to learning sabre fencing apparently decreased between the 1860s and the 1870s. This hypothetical decrease, however, can be accounted for by the fact that officers had to complete two or more schools in their military career; thus, the instruction time was actually at least doubled.

The type of equipment required for the lessons was planned before the publication of the first regulation. Colonel Ludwig Denzler, at the time instructor-in-chief in the federal artillery, asked the Swiss Military Department on 8 January 1851 for reimbursement of fencing equipment intended for a course given by Leonz Schädler, at the time captain and instructor:

This asks for a budget of ca. 80 francs for the purchase of a certain quantity of wooden sabres, long gloves with cuffs, linen breastplates, and individual masks.¹⁵

The use of wooden sabres seems to have been the norm for these kinds of training, as confirmed by the officers' school plan of 1875.¹⁶

¹⁰ 'enseigné plus à fond dans la deuxième école que dans la première', Fornerod, 'Nouvelles et Chroniques', p. 381.

¹¹ *Ibid.*, pp. 54-55.

¹² Stocker, 'Écoles préparatoires d'officiers d'infanterie', pp. 386-89.

¹³ The school in St-Gallen took place from 6 April to 10 May, 1862 and the one in Solothurn from 3 August to 6 September, Fornerod, 'Nouvelles et Chroniques', p. 378.

¹⁴ Stocker, 'Écoles préparatoires d'officiers d'infanterie', p. 386.

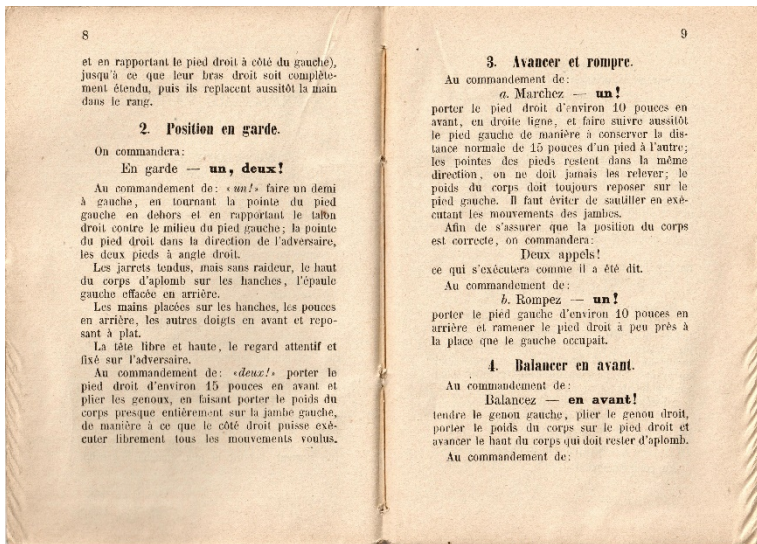
¹⁵ Lätsch, *Militärische Ausbildung un Ausbilder in der Schweiz*, p. 282; 'Dafür erfordert es aber einen Credit von cirka 80 Franken zum Anschaffung eines Quantums hölzerner Säbel, langen Stulphaudschuhen, Brustdecken von Zwillich und einigen Masken', 'Letter from Colonel Denzler to the Federal Military Department, 08.01.1851' (Bern, Bundesarchiv, E27#1000/721#7962*).

¹⁶ Stocker, 'Écoles préparatoires d'officiers d'infanterie', p. 389.

III. THE REGULATIONS AND THE FENCING MANUALS

The official Swiss military regulations for fencing were published in German in 1865 with a French edition appearing two years later in 1867. Updated versions were issued in 1869 (German) and 1876 (French) under the name *Instruction sur l'escrime au sabre (Contre-pointe)* and *Anleitung zum Säbelfechten (Stichsäbel)*.¹⁷ As the result of a decision made by the Federal Council on 15 January 1865, the regulations were to be distributed in all federal military schools and recommended to cantonal military schools. The redaction of the regulations is credited to Colonel Leonz Schädler, who was an artillery instructor between 1850 and 1856 before taking a position as infantry instructor in Aargau.¹⁸ His name is cited in a report on the discussion between members of the Federal Council as they adopted his regulations on sabre fencing.¹⁹

The regulations themselves are a little booklet (ca. 11x15 cm, 43 pages and with a paper cover) divided into two parts of eleven and nine lessons each. Each lesson is formed around a short drill, to be executed first on one rank, then on two ranks (one student against each other). The indications on how to position the students, the orders to give – for example ‘March – one!’ or ‘Retreat – one!’ – and advice on the fencing equipment show that this manual was aimed at instructors in order to help them build their lessons (fig. 1).²⁰



¹⁷ [Schädler], *Anleitung zum Hieb- und Stosfechten mit dem Säbel*, [Schädler], *Instruction sur l'escrime au sabre (Contre-pointe)*.

¹⁸ Lätsch, *Militärische Ausbildung un Ausbilder in der Schweiz*, p. 309.

¹⁹ ‘Extrait des délibérations du Conseil fédéral’, p. 147.

²⁰ ‘Marchez – un !’, ‘Rompez – un !’, [Schädler], *Instruction sur l'escrime au sabre* (1867), p. 9.

Figure 1. Orders to give to the students and description of the actions that have to be executed. [Schädler Leonz], *Instruction sur l'escrime au sabre*, (1867), pp. 8-9. © Bibliothèque du Château de Morges et ses Musées. Reproduced with the permission of the institution.

Three other manuals (two of them written in both French and German) stemmed from the official regulations and were published between 1887 and 1897. Captain Emil Probst's was published in 1887 (in both languages, and reprinted in 1889), as was the German edition of Captain Friedrich Schneider's instructions (with the French edition published in 1889, the same year as a reprint of the German version).²¹ In 1897 appeared Captain Walther Franke's manual.²² All manuals copy, generally speaking, the title of the official regulations; Emil Probst named his book *Instruction sur l'escrime au sabre (Contre-pointe)*, or *Anleitung zum Säbelfechten (Stichsäbel)* in German, the same as Walther Franke, whilst Friedrich Schneider used *L'enseignement de l'escrime au sabre* and *Anleitung zum Unterricht im Säbelfechten*.

An 1887 article about the publication of Emil Probst's manual indicates that the official regulations were regularly complemented by the instructor's experience and readings:

This little publication is destined to bring much help. Until today, as said the author in his prologue, only limited instructions and regulations about sabre fencing were available. Therefore, a good part of the instruction relied on the fencing master's memory, memory that developed by the number and the type of lessons he had to give, thus the high number of methods employed and the divergences in the instruction. To more or less settle those differences, the author set upon completing the current instruction and presented one that contains as much as possible all the others in a progressive order.²³

The article reproduces the prologue of Emil Probst's manual verbatim. It shows, however, the importance of the contributions from personal initiatives to the sabre fencing instructions. The three manuals add more techniques, exercises, tactical advice, and even illustrations to the 1865 regulations. Emil Probst and Friedrich Schneider were

²¹ Probst, *Anleitung zum Säbelfechten (Stichsäbel)*; Probst, *Instruction sur l'escrime au sabre (Contre-pointe)*; Schneider, *Anleitung zum Unterricht im Säbelfechten*; Schneider, *Instructions pour l'enseignement de l'escrime au sabre*.

²² Franke, *Anleitung zum Säbelfechten*.

²³ 'Cette petite publication est appelée à rendre d'excellents services. Jusqu'à présent, comme le dit fort bien l'auteur dans son avant-propos, il n'existait sur l'escrime au sabre que des *Instructions* ou *Règlements* très peu développés. Aussi une bonne partie de cette instruction incombait-elle à la mémoire des maîtres d'armes, mémoire qui se développait suivant le nombre et le genre des cours qu'ils étaient appelés à donner. De là aussi les masses de méthodes employées et les divergences dans le mode d'instruction. Pour arriver à régler plus ou moins ces divergences, l'auteur a entrepris de compléter l'instruction actuelle et d'en présenter une qui, autant que possible, renferme toutes les autres dans un ordre progressif.' 'Bibliographie', *Revue Militaire Suisse*, p. 237.

not only infantry officers but also instructors. In fact, they were both appointed second class instructors in the same year, 1876.²⁴ Their status as instructors can be seen as a sufficient motivation for publishing fencing manuals as it could expand upon the rather slim 1865 regulations.

Both the official regulations and military fencing manuals present a form of sabre fencing we could call ‘sportive’ fencing. Indeed, even if the 1865 regulations were written to teach the handling of the sabre ‘in case of need’, the first argument invoked in favour of learning fencing was ‘the exercise of gymnastics’ and the strengthening of the student’s nature.²⁵ Furthermore, the regulations explicitly mention the *assaut*, a bout between two fencers under a defined set of rules.²⁶ Emil Probst cites the 1865 regulations’ prologue verbatim, the same – at least in spirit – also being true for Friedrich Schneider’s publication.

The fencing system used in all manuals and in the regulations uses cuts and thrusts in a versatile way and is sometimes named *contre-pointe*, or *stichsäbel*. This system was already present in Switzerland as early as the 1850s, as demonstrated in Joseph Tinguely’s *Manuel d’Escrime à la Contre-pointe*, published in 1856.²⁷ The word *contre-pointe* was already present in France in the eighteenth century.²⁸ The system was considered as a complement to foil or *épée* fencing, called *pointe*.²⁹ This is, however, not sufficient to conclude that the fencing system practiced in Switzerland was directly imported from France in the eighteenth or the nineteenth century; the word *contre-pointe* may just have been the most common term in French to designate any fencing system mixing cuts and thrusts. More research has yet to be done on the possible influences on Swiss military fencing from France, Italy, Germany, and other regions. A clue to the official regulations’ influences is, however, mentioned in a report on a fencing lesson during the winter of 1882-83, in which the author considers the regulation as ‘a mix between

²⁴ ‘Extrait des délibérations du Conseil fédéral’, Appendix (1876), pp. 2-3.

²⁵ ‘L’escrime, envisagée comme exercice de gymnastique, développe la force de toutes les parties du corps et les habitue à agir avec accord. Elle éveille et entretient chez les jeunes gens un esprit viril, le sentiment de la force et le sang-froid en présence du danger. L’escrime familiarise, en outre, ceux qui la pratiquent avec le maniement des armes et leur apprend à s’en servir, en cas de besoin, d’une manière efficace’, [Schädler], *Instruction sur l’escrime au sabre* (1867), p. 3.

²⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 29.

²⁷ For more information on Joseph Tinguely and his manual, see Roelofsen and Zufferey, ‘Sweat and Blood: Swordmanship and Sabre in Fribourg’.

²⁸ ‘Il y a quelques espadonneurs qui entremêlent leur jeu de coups de pointe, ce qu’on appelle faire la contre-pointe’, Angelo, *L’École des armes*.

²⁹ See for example a fencing manual published by the French Ministry of War in 1877, *Manuel d’escrime*.

German, Austrian and French schools of fencing'; it could be interesting to follow this path in future research.³⁰

IV. CELEBRATIONS AND COMPETITIONS

Military fencing was not only practiced in the military, but also as part of festive events and competitions; the most important of these events were the federal celebrations (*Fêtes fédérales* or *Eidgenössische Feste*). *Fêtes fédérales* were organised throughout the nineteenth century in the spirit of national unity and liberalism and were the occasion for Swiss societies (shooting, gymnastics, etc.) to gather at a national level.³¹ Swiss non-commissioned officers' societies (*Sociétés de sous-officiers*) also organised *Fêtes fédérales* and fencing events. This part of the article will look into some examples of military fencing practiced outside of the officers' schools from the 1850s to the 1880s.

Three types of events concerning the practice of sabre fencing outside of the officers' schools can be identified: fencing lessons, competitions, and public competitions organised by fencing societies (the first two types were both organised by non-commissioned officers' societies). Turning to the first of these – fencing lessons organised by non-commissioned officers' societies – several examples, also from the *Revue Militaire Suisse*, illustrate how the fencing lessons took place and who was involved. A report on a fencing lesson that took place in the winter of 1869-70 gives a good instance of such events:

So we held, this winter, a fencing lesson under the lead of First-Lieutenant Mohr, in which 12 members of the society took part. The progress, with only 2 hours of practice per week, was quite satisfactory, so that we were able to give an *Assaut d'armes* at the end, whereby our performances were judged very favourably by the officers who were present.³²

It is difficult to estimate the exact number of lessons per year or season, or even the required amount of training time needed to acquire a sufficient level in military fencing. In another article on a lesson organised by Zürich's non-commissioned officers' society

³⁰ 'dem Gemisch aus deutschen, österreichischen und französischen Fechtschulen', 'Eidgenossenschaft', *Allgemeine schweizerische Militärzeitung* (1883), p. 15.

³¹ Leimgruber, "Frisch, fromm, fröhlich, frei": Die Eidgenössischen Turnfeste im 10. Jahrhundert', p. 12.

³² 'so hielten wir auch diesen Winter unter Leitung unseres Ehrenmitgliedes Hrn. Oberlieut. Mohr einen Fechtkurs, an dem sich 12 Vereinsmitglieder beteiligten. Die Fortschritte, bei nur 2 Stunden Uebung wöchentlich, waren ziemlich befriedigend, so dass wir am Schlusse ein *Assaut d'armes* geben konnten, wobei unsere Leistungen von den anwesenden Herren Offizieren sehr günstig beurtheilt worden sind', 'Eidgenossenschaft', *Allgemeine schweizerische Militärzeitung* (1870), p. 183.

in 1883, participants' experience in fencing seemed to have been an important matter, as four to six months of practice was not seen as enough:

Those in the society's sabre fencing course, under the lead of our members Kasp. Ernst and Eugen Schnider, had unfortunately only 4 to 6 months of experience; they were, however, assiduous and made good progress.³³

Participants in fencing lessons organised by the non-commissioned officers' societies came not only from the military, but also from civil society. During the winter of 1882-83, in Luzern, Captain Luternauer conducted for the fourth time a collective lesson not only for the members of the society, but also for the local gymnastics society, showing the interest of civilians in these annual lessons:

Lucerne. Fencing Lesson. [...] Like the last three years, this winter, a fencing lesson was organised under the lead of Captain Rud. Luternauer and has already started on 1 December. The lesson was divided into two sections: the beginners and the experienced that had already received fencing lessons. All of the military societies, as well as the gymnastics society, have participated in the lesson and follow the course with pleasure.³⁴

Thus, non-commissioned officers' societies appear to be an important milieu not only for the regular practice of military fencing, but also for the transmission of knowledge to civilians.

Non-commissioned officers' societies did not only organise public lessons, but also military competitions at both regional and national levels. During these events, non-commissioned officers could compete against each other in the disciplines of foil, sabre, and bayonet fencing. A course tells us how participating in this kind of competition could tie into one's military career and raises further questions regarding the circulation of fencing outside of officers' schools. Between 1882 and 1885, a sergeant from

³³ 'Der vom Vereine veranstaltete Kurs für Säbelfechten unter Leitung unserer Mitglieder Kasp. Ernst und Eugen Schnider war leider auch wieder durchschnittlich nur von 4 bis 6 Monatesucht, diese aber waren durchwegs fleissig und machten gute Fortschritte', 'Eidgenossenschaft', *Allgemeine schweizerische Militärzeitung* (1883), p. 364.

³⁴ 'Luzern. Fechtkurs. [...] Wie seit drei Jahren wird auch diesen Winter wieder ein Fechtkurs unter der Leitung von Hauptmann Rud. Luternauer abgehalten und hat bereits am 1. Dezember begonnen. Derselbe ist in zwei Abtheilungen geschieden, in Anfänger und solche, die schon Fechtunterricht genossen. Sämmtliche Militärvereine, sowie der Turnverein sind bei den Theilnehmern vertreten und nimmt der Kurs einen ganz erfreulichen Verlauf', 'Eidgenossenschaft', *Allgemeine schweizerische Militärzeitung* (1883), p. 14.

Lausanne, Henri Hürni, won the first prize in sabre and bayonet fencing repeatedly.³⁵ In 1889 he is mentioned as a jury member in the same type of competition as a lieutenant.³⁶ Hürni had to finish at least one officers' school to become a lieutenant, but he was fencing for several years before becoming an officer, maybe even before he entered a school. Non-commissioned officers seem to have regularly practiced military fencing, particularly with the sabre, outside of officers' schools.

Military competitions were not the only events to display sabre fencing. Civilian events, called *assauts d'armes*, were commonplace and included the same weapons as the military competitions. A representative example of a fencing competition in Monthey (Wallis) in 1853 shows the interest of civilians in this kind of art:

The cantonal fencing society will meet on 19 and 20 October at Martigny-Ville and will hold an *assaut* with *pointe*, *contre-pointe* and staff. The participation of numerous fencing masters and amateurs is expected.³⁷

In addition to *pointe* and *contre-pointe* fencing (foil and sabre), staff fencing was also present during these events. Even though the staff was not part of the officers' and soldiers' instruction, it still remained popular at least until the 1860s:

This Sunday 23, at 2 pm, fencing masters and amateurs of the city will hold, in the Grand'-Places hall, exercises in *pointe*, *contre-pointe*, staff and bayonet, to support a former soldier, fencing master in the canton of Fribourg.³⁸

A fencing manual published by Léon Galley in 1877, but not linked to the corpus studied in this article, indicates that staff fighting may still have been practiced in these years.³⁹ The manual dedicates an entire chapter to the handling of the staff, on par with sabre and bayonet fencing.

³⁵ 'Réunion Générale des sous-officiers vaudois', *Revue Militaire Suisse*, p. 363; 'Eidgenossenschaft', *Allgemeine schweizerische Militärzeitung* (1883), p. 284; 'Fête fédérale des sous-officiers', p. 2.

³⁶ 'Société fédérale de sous-officiers', p. 150.

³⁷ 'La Société cantonale d'escrime se réunira le 19 et 20 courant, à Martigny-Ville, et y donnera un assaut de pointe, de contre-pointe et de bâton. Elle compte sur un nombreux concours de maîtres d'armes et d'amateurs', 'Assaut d'armes', *Courrier du Valais* (1853), p. 4.

³⁸ 'Dimanche 23 courant, à 2 heures après midi, les maîtres et les amateurs d'escrime de cette ville donneront dans la salle des Grand'-Places, des exercices de pointes, contre-pointe, bâton et baïonnette, au bénéfice d'un ancien militaire, maître d'armes du canton de Fribourg', 'Grand assaut d'armes', *Chroniqueur de Fribourg* (1862), p. 4.

³⁹ For more information, see Roelofsen and Zufferey, 'Sweat and Blood : Swordmanship and Sabre in Fribourg', pp. 116-20.

On another level, some fencing masters taught the handling of military sabre in their fencing schools, like fencing master de Coppet, which shows another vector of transmission of military knowledge:

Fencing master de Coppet, who founded his fencing school in Zürich ten years ago, will open next week an evening class on military sabre.⁴⁰

Military fencing, especially with sabre and foil, seems to have been popular in civil society. The practice of military fencing outside of the military is not a surprise; the militia system – in which every male citizen could potentially participate – and the non-commissioned officers' societies both encouraged the circulation of military knowledge between the army and civil society.

V. CONCLUSION

In conclusion, military sabre fencing in nineteenth-century Switzerland was essentially sportive in its nature. Through an analysis of the fencing manuals and documents presented in this article, it is possible to observe the spread of military fencing (both sabre and bayonet) outside of the strict limits of officers' schools. Even inside the officers' schools, the manuals show that the system was meant to be practiced more in the fencing room, as a gymnastics exercise, rather than on the battlefield. Another interesting aspect to consider is that all three manuals from the corpus analysed in this article are based on the same official regulations and thus share a highly unified system. The publication of the manuals happened in the 1880s and the 1890s, a great deal of time after the regulations' first publication in 1865. The reason behind this delay may be the formation of a new generation of instructors, for example Emil Probst and Friedrich Schneider, who improved the lessons they received during their own training with new techniques and elements.

Federal celebrations and training sessions in the societies of non-commissioned officers indicate that military fencing was commonplace among non-commissioned officers. Some, like our example Henri Hüni, practiced sabre and bayonet fencing several years before graduating as an officer. The fact that non-commissioned officers had access to officers' schools is an explanation for the transmission of this kind of knowledge to them. However, more research has yet to be done on the role of non-commissioned officers' societies in the practice of military fencing outside of the officers' schools.

Military fencing was also popular in civil society, as nineteenth-century fencers gathered during the public and non-military *assauts d'armes*. Such events provided a chance for participants to display their skill not only with weapons traditionally linked to the

⁴⁰ 'Herr Fechtmeister de Coppet, der gerade vor zehn Jahren seine Fechtschule in Zürich gegründet hat, eröffnet nächste Woche einen Abendkurs für Militärsäbel', 'Eidgenossenschaft', *Allgemeine schweizerische Militärzeitung*(1895), p. 156.

military world – foil, sabre, and bayonet – but also staves. The militia system used by the Swiss army – a mandatory military service for all able men – likely had an influence on the popularity of military fencing among fencing societies and also on the spread of competitions.

In the end, all manuals and documents are linked to different milieus in the military and civil society. Swiss military fencing manuals are thus interesting objects for the question of the transmission of military knowledge to multiple audiences.

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