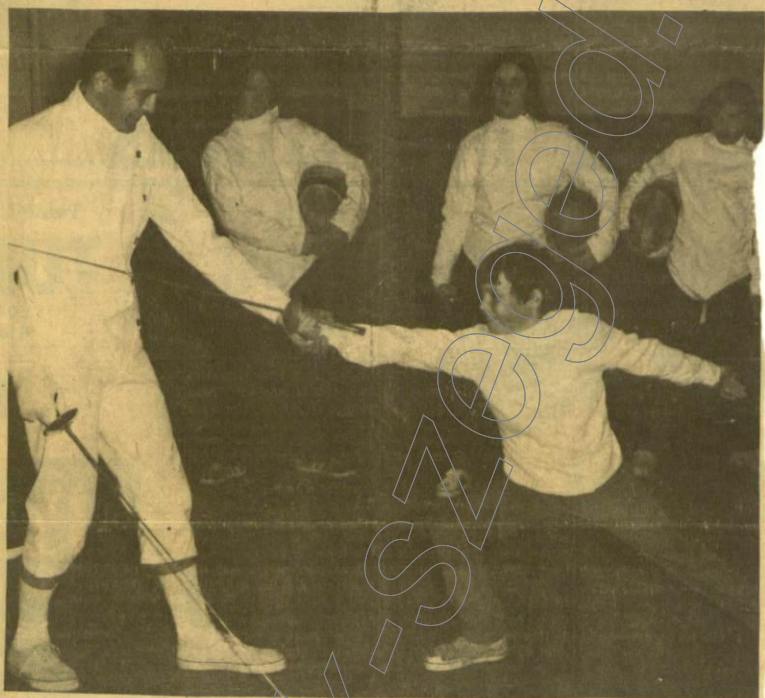


Dr. Alföldi László
Carlisle, Pa

THE GUIDE



LASZLO M. ALFOLDI, INSTRUCTOR, GIVES MIKE FEELEY, AGE 11, ASSISTANCE IN THE PROPER FORM FOR A THRUST. THE REST OF THE CLASS ATTENTIVELY WATCHES.

Fencing teaches you to be a gentleman or a lady --- even in sneakers 'n blue jeans!

BY MARTIE KUNKEL

"En garde" the teacher shouts and the well-worn sneakers snap into position. The "uniforms" may be sweat shirts and faded jeans, but the agility and grace are there in the movements of these young people. They're doing something that they enjoy doing and they're trying to do it well.

The place is the gymnasium at Carlisle Barracks, the students are members of a class in fencing that is being taught each week by Laszlo M. Alföldi, a former fencing champion at the University of Innsbruck, Austria.

Alföldi is of the opinion that American teens need a good basic lesson in fencing. The art, he says, is not a competitive sport here as it is in European countries, and so the U.S. makes a poor showing in international competition.

A naturalized citizen, Mr. Alföldi began fencing in his native Hungary at the age of eight, under the supervision of his father. He was twice named fencing champion while a student at the University of Innsbruck and also competed in international championships in Europe.

"I more or less grew up with the sport," says Mr. Alföldi. "I watched my father and couldn't wait till I could begin myself. It seemed a most exciting sport, and I wondered if I could ever emulate the graceful moves of my father.

Fencing was a very popular sport when I was growing up. It seemed that everybody wanted to learn how to do it.

The basic position in fencing is

the en garde -- or starting position. You're getting in position to meet your opponent. Fencing is principally done with bent knees, and from the bent knee position you can lunge out at quite a great length and still not lose your balance. Fencing is a sport of exact balance and extreme speed. You must keep ahead of your opponent at all times, and if you are off balance, he can easily overcome you.

"If you learn the proper balance when you're young, it just sort of stays with you. The balance that you learn helps you in fencing and the fencing helps you to learn balance -- each helps the other."

"It's good to learn about balance. Life is a balance, you know."

"For quite awhile when you're learning the fencing skills you must stay with the basic footwork, even though you'd like to take up the foil and get together in a challenging bout with an opponent. You want to show what you can do, but it's like anything where you really want to become a master. You must learn the basics first. And even though that part is tedious -- and while you're going through it you think it will never end -- later on in the sport you'll be glad that you stuck with the basics until they became almost like a second nature to you."

In Hungary, according to Mr. Alföldi, fencing students might work as long as six months just on the basic footwork. "You can't allow yourself to become bored," he says. "You must tell yourself

that it's all for a good purpose." "Fencing will help you to have grace in your movements. It will help you to become physically fit, but fencing isn't only physical. It's a great teacher of politeness, too. I believe that it teaches the students to become ladies and gentlemen, and I think that ladies and gentlemen are a scarce commodity lately."

"You are taught to respect your opponent. You must make allowances for him in some cases. For instance, if your opponent should drop his foil, you will step back and allow him to pick it up. Perhaps if this was a life and death struggle, it wouldn't be true, but in fencing as it's done in competition and as a sport, you would definitely do this. And then -- all things being as equal as possible -- you'd continue the contest."

Emotionally, also, fencing is good for a person, believes Mr. Alföldi, because it gives the person the feeling that he is in control of his body and mind. He looks on the sport as a discipline, too. "And it always makes a person feel good to know that he has mastered a skill," he says.

Skill in fencing was essential for a soldier when a sword was one of the most deadly weapons. Later when dueling was a common way of settling quarrels, fencing was a necessary part of a gentleman's training.

Fencing, or the systematized art of using the sword is only about 500 years old. It is believed to have started in Italy and Germany,

and soon became popular in Spain and France. The upper classes in these countries practiced the sport.

In the U.S. the military academies first became interested in fencing as a sport. In 1891 fencing had become so popular outside the academies that the Amateur Fencers League of America was organized. Fencing is now taught in most colleges, and has become popular among both sexes. It is valued for the grace and muscular co-ordination it develops.

The standard weapon for fencing in the U.S. is the foil -- a four-sided blade about 32 inches long, with a rubber or leather tip at the end. Fencers wear vests which cover them from the neck down to the hipbones. The object of fencing is to touch any part of an opponent's vest. Fencers also wear wire masks to protect their faces.

Another weapon called the epee, a triangular blade, heavier and more rigid than the foil is sometimes used. A third fencing weapon is the saber.

"Touche" is a valid hit on the target; "feint" is a movement to mislead the opponent; and "parry" is a defense against a thrust -- and so it goes -- it's a new language in words and movements. And the young people in Mr. Alföldi's class are learning their lessons well. If you should see one of them in the "en garde" position -- serious about the sport -- blue jeans and all -- you'll probably wish you had taken a few lessons yourself!