

CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION

Friends, I am now an old man and it is a long, long time since the year of Charles. But if you want a story, I shall tell you....At that time I was a young and strong man. I had not left home and worked the croft with my father and brother. News came to our glen that Duke William and the red soldiers were approaching Inverness and that Prince Charles and the Highlanders were preparing to fight against them. No sooner had we got the news than my father, brother and myself and quite a number of others from the glen left to go to the aid of the Prince.

We went through the town of Inverness and reached Drumashie where we found the Highland army in battle formation on the hill. They put us in the Glengarry regiment where we had many relatives and friends. When we reached the army a great shout of joy went up, welcoming us. Prince Charles himself, riding a white horse, was moving around among the Highland army. He was a fine fellow, a true prince. There has not been seen, and there will never be seen again in the Highlands, a prince of his equal.

The morning was cold and stormy as we stood on the battlefield - snow and rain blowing against us. Before long we saw the red soldiers, in battle formation, in front of us and although the day was wild and wet we could see the red coats of the soldiers and the blue tartan of the Campbells in our presence. The battle began and the pellets came at us like hail-stones. The big guns were thundering and causing frightful break up among us, but we ran forward and - oh dear!, oh dear! - what cutting and slicing there was and many brave deeds performed by the Gaels.¹

The previous account was written by an eyewitness and participant in the battle of Culloden in 1746. The account provides the reader with an idea of what conditions were like for a Highlander in the Jacobite Rebellions as he participated in the Highland Charge and witnessed the carnage the Highlanders inflicted with their charge.

From 1640 to 1746 Scotland experienced a new age of military success on the

¹Donald Mackay, “The Battle of Culloden by Eyewitness Donald Mackay,” The Inverness Courier, Highlander Web Magazine, (www.highlandweb.co.uk/index.htm), 1995-6.

battlefield. This was due in large part to the development and use of the "Highland Charge." The "Highland Charge" was exactly what its name suggests; it was a violent rushing attack by men from the Highland clans on an opposing military force, specifically, the English or British. The "Highland Charge" was however more organized than it would appear. When the Scots and English met on the battlefield, they would line up opposite each other. The Scottish front line consisted primarily of the Highland clans who would carry out the charge. Essentially, the Highlanders would fire one volley, throw down their muskets, and behind the smoke screen, charge the English lines in small groups with their swords and targets, in an attempt to break the lines.

The charge evolved from an ancient tactic used for its shock value. The shock of a charge often sent armies to flight. It was a quick, decisive tactic which was successful almost immediately or not at all. It required very little training or discipline which fit perfectly into the Highlanders' style of warfare. It also fit well into the rebellion, where large numbers of men gathered from various corners of the country to fight for a cause, and in most cases had very little time to practice maneuvers. The Highland Charge developed from the ancient Celtic charge that had been used for centuries by the Celts and their descendants the Scots. The basic tactic of the charge was used by the Scots and their ancestors against the Romans and later the English. By the seventeenth century the ancient Celtic Charge had developed into the Highland Charge.

The Highland Charge could not develop until weaponry advanced. The Highlanders during the sixteenth century had carried a two-handed claymore. The evolution and adaptation of the one-handed sword, the broadsword, then led to the Highlanders' use of the target or shield, as a defensive weapon. By the seventeenth century, many Highlanders were using the musket. This was the last element of the Highlanders' arsenal that was necessary for the Highland Charge to develop out of the traditional Celtic charge. One of the characteristics of the Highland Charge that distinguishes it from other charges was the use of the musket to produce a projectile

volley and thereby provide a heavy smokescreen. The abandonment of the musket for the sword and hand-to-hand combat not only distinguished the Highland Charge from other charges but also masterfully blended the ancient with the modern to produce a simple, effective, and victorious tactic. Although the Highland Charge employed both ancient and modern attributes, the Jacobite forces were archaic even by early modern military standards.

The Jacobite forces were composed primarily of Highlanders. Most of them were experienced in individual combat; few were accustomed to the discipline and precise manouevring of the pre-modern military establishment. For the Highlanders, combat came in the form of clan clashes and individual contests. Some had experience on the continent as mercenary forces, but most had little experience as a cohesive military unit. The only unit most Highlanders knew was their clan. Therefore, it was natural for the clans to become the basic military units in the Jacobite Rebellions. Because of the Highlanders' stress on individual combat, lack of formal training and discipline, and their propensity for violent combat, it was fair to classify the Highland forces as warriors rather than soldiers.

In contrast, the English forces were trained and disciplined in the latest methods of warfare. They possessed the latest military technology and weaponry. The infantryman was the primary fighting unit in the English army. Each man was equipped with a flintlock musket as the chief offensive weapon, and a socket bayonet for defensive purposes. The average infantryman no longer carried a sword, as it was thought that the musket was a far superior weapon. It is true that at a distance the musket was the weapon of choice, but at close range in hand-to-hand combat the infantryman did not necessarily have enough time or space needed to reload a musket and the bayonet required some skill in order to be fairly effective. Nevertheless, the battles of the day were usually carried by the infantry force with the most effective musket fire. A majority of the English soldiers had experience on the continent in the various wars fought during the late seventeenth

and early eighteenth centuries. Most of the men who fought against the Jacobite forces were professional soldiers. They were well practiced in the drill and maneuvers of the day. The English did, however, use several militia forces against the Jacobites because they lacked respect for the Highlanders as a serious threat to the kingdom, and at the time, the main English forces were occupied on the continent. The English army was up to date in every way, from their tactics to their weaponry, which presented a true dichotomy to the Jacobite forces.

The contrasts between the English and Jacobite forces seemed too overwhelming for the Jacobite forces. Still, the Highlanders possessed an effective weapon of their own, the Highland Charge. The Highland Charge was truly formidable, with many strengths and weaknesses inherent to the tactic itself, and to a force such as the Jacobite army. Nevertheless, the Highland Charge created a crisis for the English army, who for all of their technology and discipline was repeatedly beaten by an untrained, undisciplined force using in essence an ancient tactic.