

CHAPTER 3

THE SOLDIERS: THE BRITISH FORCES

The British forces that fought against the Jacobite forces during the rebellions were essentially two different and diametrically opposed armies. Although armed and initially trained the same, the two forces were very different. The first force to fight in the rebellions was the militia, and the second was made up of the Regulars in the British Standing Army. The former was trained yet untested and out of practice; while the latter was brimming with experienced veterans from continental warfare. This chapter will begin with a brief history of the standing army in Britain which will explain the existence of the militia; then it will explore the weapons and tactics of the British forces which fought against the Highland Charge.

The British land forces had their beginnings in the eleventh century A.D. when the Normans brought the feudal system to England. Under this system, the Anglo-Saxon fyrd developed. The fyrd was a local military force composed of all free landowners between the ages of sixteen and sixty who served approximately two months per year and who could be called upon for defense at a moments notice. King Alfred, who reigned in southern England from 871 to 899, divided the country into military districts and required landowners who owned a specified amount of land to arm themselves.¹ This was the beginning of the English militia, which was relied upon for the defense of the home front for the next eight centuries. The militia units were called upon during the threat of invasions, internal insurrections, and for service in Ireland.² For the large-scale wars during the Middle Ages however, armies were raised for the campaigns or the duration of

¹Jock Haswell, The British Army: A Concise History (London: Thames and Hudson, 1975), 9-10.

²Peter Young and J.P. Lawford, History of the British Army (New York: G.P. Putmans' Sons, 1970), 11.

the war, and then disbanded after the war or when their pay ran out, whichever came first.³

The militia was manned by volunteers who were essentially part-time, amateur soldiers. Their reliability and military effectiveness were questionable at best throughout most of the militia's history. During Queen Elizabeth's reign in 1584, attempts were made to improve the militia's training and readiness through compulsory military exercises every Sunday afternoon.⁴ Nevertheless, the militia remained poorly trained. This was due in part to an anti-army sentiment which runs throughout English history. A civilian population which was armed and trained posed a continual threat to those in power and to the population's own well-being as warfare could disrupt farming and trade, while destroying land and the peace. Britain as an island has a natural defense, thus the British relied more heavily on their navy and saw little need for a standing army.⁵ The other countries of Europe depended upon a standing army for their very existence and subsequently developed professional standing armies a century earlier than England.⁶ The definitive event of the English Civil War (1642-1649) served as the crux for anti-army sentiment in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries, yet the same period saw the genesis of the Standing Army.

Until the mid-seventeenth century, England relied upon the militia, levying of men, and foreign mercenaries for defense; however, in 1645 the first permanent professional standing army in Britain was formed. Since at least the fifteenth century, the crown had two small bodies of household guards, the Gentlemen Pensioners and the Yeomen of the Guard, from which many of the army's officers were chosen when a

³Haswell, 11.

⁴Young, 12.

⁵Haswell, 9.

⁶Young, 11.

military force was necessary.⁷ Nevertheless, this force was of little consequence compared to the continental forces. It was not until Cromwell organized the New Model Army that a national standing army was established in England. The New Model Army fought for the Parliamentary forces in the English Civil War and then for the Lord Protectorate, Oliver Cromwell, during the Interregnum period. Upon the reestablishment of the monarchy, by Charles II in 1660, the New Model Army was disbanded; however, in its place the Regular (Standing) Army was born on February 14, 1661; it was a force supported and maintained by the state.⁸ Initially, the Standing Army was a temporary force put in place to protect the king; the interference of the New Model Army in national issues increased anti-army sentiment, hence the temporary status of the army.⁹ The king was in control of the army until the Glorious Revolution in 1688, when Parliament passed the Bill of Rights (1689) which condemned the exiled King James II for retaining a large standing army in peacetime; the subsequent passing of the Mutiny Act (1689) placed control of the army in the hands of Parliament. It allowed for the existence of the standing army provided the Parliament passed a new Mutiny Act every six months but later annually, and these acts prescribed for the punishment of soldiers who deserted or mutinied.¹⁰

The strength of the Standing Army fluctuated throughout the late seventeenth and early eighteenth centuries. By 1685 the army had grown to 16,000 men, including four regiments of horse, eight regiments of foot, and garrisons in the colonies, Scotland, and

⁷Ibid., 11.

⁸Haswell, 9.

⁹J. R. Western, The English Militia in the Eighteenth Century (London: Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1965), 3.

¹⁰J. P. Kenyon, The Wordsworth Dictionary of British History (Hertfordshire: Market House Books, 1981), 251.

Ireland.¹¹ Before the Glorious Revolution in 1688, James II had a standing army of 34,000 men, which was one of the reasons for his deposition.¹² When William took the throne, it was Parliament's intention to reduce the army, but King William's War, or the War of the Grand Alliance, against Louis XIV of France kept the strength of the army up. In 1689, the Highlanders rose against King William at the Battle of Killiecrankie, yet another reason for the standing army to remain in place. William established a well-trained, experienced army, but Parliament disliked the large standing army and in 1697 after the Treaty of Ryswick ended the War of the Grand Alliance the army was reduced to "guards and garrisons," a force of approximately seven thousand men.¹³ The growth of the Standing Army was synonymous with Britain's ever expanding role in continental warfare and the army was once again at full strength as it engaged in the War of the Spanish Succession (1701-14).¹⁴

The British army underwent a great deal of change during the late seventeenth century and early eighteenth centuries, particularly during the War of the Spanish Succession under the leadership of Marlborough. Jeremy Black has described the changes that took place in the early modern period of warfare as a

general shift in European Warfare away from speed, mobility and primal shock-power and towards defensive tactics based on infantry firepower, a shift that was already apparent among the major European powers during the first half of the sixteenth century.¹⁵

These changes were evident in every aspect of warfare, from the tactics used by the

¹¹Charles Messenger, History of British Army (Novato, California: Presideo Press, 1986), 16.

¹²Haswell, 22.

¹³H. C. B. Rogers, The British Army of the Eighteenth Century (New York: Hippocrene Books, 1977), 19.

¹⁴Messenger, 23.

¹⁵Jeremy Black, European Warfare (New Haven, Connecticut, 1994),15.

infantry and cavalry, to changes in the weapons which were used, to changes in the very make-up of the military forces.

Prior to the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries, soldiers fought in deep square formations; now they fought in what is known as a linear formation, in which infantrymen fought in long thin lines. Gone were the days of the pikemen, who were replaced by the addition of the bayonet to the infantryman's weaponry. The cavalry no longer fought in a rotation style, where they would come upon the enemy, fire, and fall back to their original position; now they charged the enemy and fought with their sabers on horseback.¹⁶ By the eighteenth century, the British army and militia fought with three distinct land forces: infantry, cavalry, and artillery.

The infantry was the largest and most valuable of the land forces, but its composition and maintenance by the state would suggest otherwise. The infantry was made up of the two extremes of society; the officers were from the upper class, many of them second sons, and the rank and file were often the lowest levels of society, the agricultural workers and the unemployed.¹⁷ The majority of the army was recruited from the low classes of society. Nevertheless it was often difficult to get recruits, and the regiments were rarely at full strength.¹⁸ The recruits had to meet certain requirements to be admitted into service, but they could be easily met by a large portion of the population.

The criteria for recruits granted a great deal of latitude to a new soldier, but they

¹⁶Parker, 196.

¹⁷Peter Harrington, Culloden 1746: The Highland Clan's Last Charge, Osprey Military Campaign Series, ed. David Chandler, no. 12 (London: Osprey Publishing, 1991), 25. As a second son, a man had few options to carve out his own life. The first son usually inherited the majority of his father's land. Often the second son chose to enter the military rather than remain possibly under the power of the first born son.

¹⁸Rogers, 61.

were embarking on what was traditionally a harsh and unforgiving existence. First, they had to be between the ages of eighteen and forty-six.¹⁹ Second, they had to meet a minimum height of five feet six inches.²⁰ An early military manual described the type of rigors a soldier had to be able to endure as an example of why a soldier, and particularly an infantryman, must be in good health.

He ought to have a strong body, found free from sickness, and of a good complexion: So shall he be able to resist the continuall toile and travell, which of necessitie he must daily take, as continuall and extreame cold in the winter, immoderate heate in the summer, in marching in the day, keeping sentinell in the night, and his cold cabben, in secret ambushes, and in trenches, where perchsnce he shall stand a number of houres in the water and mire up to the knees: and besides upon bulkwards, breaches in espiall, in sentinels, perdues and such like, when occassion requires and necessitie constraines: of all which exploits and discommodities hee must perforce be partaker.²¹

Once a man joined the army, it became his life for better or for worse. Despite the hardships, for the most part, the army took care of its soldiers. A soldier was outfitted with a coat which incorporated the regiment's colors, a waistcoat (vest), wool breeches, stockings, shoes, shirts, a neckcloth, and hat.²² The troops were housed in barns, inns, forts, or castles until military barrack's were built during Queen Anne's reign (1702-14).²³ In addition, the soldiers were paid eight pence a day for infantry, two shillings and a sixpence a day for cavalry, and eighteen pence for a dragoon, out of which the soldiers paid for their food and the upkeep of their animals. Certain deductions for medical

¹⁹Edward Davies, The Art of War and Englands Trynings (London: Edward Griffin, 1620), 2.

²⁰Harrington, 25.

²¹Davies, 2.

²²Harrington, 28.

²³Haswell, 31.

expenses and eventually other items were taken from their pay.²⁴

The soldier was also provided with his weaponry. These weapons provided to the British soldier were the very weapons that would be necessary to defeat the Highland Charge. The primary weapon of the land soldier from the late seventeenth century through the first quarter of the nineteenth century was the flintlock musket. The flintlock was developed around 1600, but because of its cost, it was not adopted by most European armies until the late seventeenth century. The flintlock was an innovation in hand-held gunpowder weapons because it lit the powder for the soldier without the need for a wick. The flintlock operated by having a flint on a trigger hit a piece of steel. This created sparks that fell into a pan with a fine powder, which then lit the coarser powder in the chamber, thrusting the ball out the muzzle of the weapon.²⁵ Thus the soldier fired the ball by simply pulling a trigger, and with the introduction of the iron ramrod in 1720, the infantryman's rate of fire was greatly increased.²⁶ In 1685, James II ordered the English forces to adopt the flintlock musket, and over a period of forty years, the flintlock evolved into the Long Land Musket, better known as the Brown Bess.²⁷

The Brown Bess was a flintlock musket that measured over five feet. The barrel itself was forty-six inches long with a smooth bore inside, and the musket weighed nearly ten pounds.²⁸ With a three-quarters of an inch bore the Brown Bess shot soft lead balls

²⁴Ibid., 29.

²⁵Frederic J. Baumgartner, From Spear to Flintlock: A history of War in Europe and the Middle East to the French Revolution (New York: Praeger, 1991), 292.

²⁶Young, History, 253.

²⁷Baumgartner, 293.

²⁸Ibid., 293.

which weighed about one and one-third ounces.²⁹ The barrel was browned, hence its name, to reduce the glare off of the muzzle and to help prevent it from rusting.³⁰ The Brown Bess was fairly accurate up to fifty yards, but could be used effectively at longer distances against a massed enemy, which was the way it was primarily used in the tactics during the eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries.³¹ A well-trained infantryman could fire his musket an average of three times per minute. This rate of fire was not only due to the firing mechanism of the Brown Bess, but also to the type of cartridge which was used. The cartridge was made of paper and contained the powder and the shot.³² The soldier would put the fine priming powder in the pan, and then take out his cartridge which he would place in the muzzle; next he would take his iron ramrod out and ram the cartridge down the muzzle after removing the ramrod, the musket was ready to be fired.³³ The Brown Bess was a large weapon alone, but with the addition of a seventeen inch bayonet on the end of the muzzle, it was frightening.

The bayonet, one of the most important military innovations in the early modern period, was of great importance to the study of the Highland Charge. The bayonet was named for the place where allegedly it originated, Bayonne, France which was known for its cutlery and daggers.³⁴ The bayonet had its humble beginnings as a hunting knife

²⁹Stuart Reid, 1745: A Military History of the Last Jacobite Rising (New York: Sarpedin, 1996), 190.

³⁰Peterson, 48.

³¹Reid, 1745, 190.

³²Harrington, 29.

³³Humphrey Bland, A Treatise of Military Discipline; In which is laid down and explained the duty of the officer and soldier thro' several branches of the service (London: Sam Buckley, 1740), 22-25.

³⁴Peterson, 37.

which was stuck in the muzzle of a gun and used as a spear.³⁵ By the 1640's the plug bayonet was making an appearance on the continent; this type of bayonet did just what its name suggests, it plugged right into the muzzle of a musket. One can easily see the disadvantage of such a bayonet, for it created one weapon by disarming the other; with the plug bayonet in place, one could no longer fire the musket. Nevertheless, it was a very useful weapon in widespread use in the seventeenth century. Soon the problem of the plug bayonet was solved with the development of the ring bayonet. Now the musketeer could fire with the bayonet attached, but it still had problems because the rings slipped and would not hold the bayonet in position. Nevertheless, the bayonet replaced the need for pikemen in an army, thus relieving the army of one entire branch of its force.³⁶ However, it was not until the late seventeenth century that a reliable bayonet was developed.

The socket bayonet was invented by Lieutenant-Colonel Jean Martinet, Inspecteur de l'Infanterie in the army of King Louis XIV of France. The socket bayonet fit over the gun barrel, the end of which fit into a sleeve on the barrel and locked into place. The socket bayonet also had a characteristically triangular shaped blade which was roughly fifteen to eighteen inches long.³⁷ In 1688, the bayonet became a permanent part of the English armament.³⁸ By 1702, the British army no longer had pikemen and all infantrymen were equipped with socket bayonets.³⁹ The development of better armaments also allowed for the development of new tactics and a variation on the

³⁵Oakshot, 234.

³⁶Ibid., 234.

³⁷Ibid., 234.

³⁸Anthony Kemp, Weapons and Equipment of the Marlborough Wars (Dorset, England: Balndford Press, 1980), 29.

³⁹Rogers, 66.

organizational patterns of armies.

The infantry was organized into companies with an average of strength of sixty men, including officers. There were thirteen companies in each battalion, one of which was an elite company of the biggest and best soldiers, called a grenadier company.⁴⁰ Each battalion then consisted of approximately seven-hundred and eighty men. The generals would position the battalions on the battlefield in such a way as to produce a long line of fire all the way along the front.⁴¹ When the companies set up for battle, they formed three lines or ranks, with the grenadiers divided equally into two platoons, one on each side of the line infantry.⁴² The objective was to win the firefight and go in with the bayonet to finish off the enemy.⁴³ It was often the firepower that determined the winners and losers in the eighteenth century.

The placement of the companies and the men within the companies was essential to the style of warfare which the British army employed. The men were positioned in such a way that they could fire over the top of each other. The front rank knelt down on their knees, then the center and rear rank fell in behind the front; the center rank placed their left foot to the inside right foot of the man in the front rank, then the rear rank placed their feet to the inside right feet of the center rank; this was called locking and it positioned the men so that they could fire in the intervals between the men in the ranks in front of them.⁴⁴ The soldiers were formed in three lines to produce platoon firing, which

⁴⁰Ibid., 42.

⁴¹Haswell, 27.

⁴²Before the development of the flintlock musket, the infantrymen had to form at least six ranks with the matchlock to achieve a rate of fire that was anywhere near that of the three ranks of flintlock muskets. Rogers, 66.

⁴³Messenger, 28.

⁴⁴Bland, 72.

was where one line fired, then the second line fired, then the third, and then the first again. This produced fire along the entire front. According to a British military discipline book from 1740, there were four reasons for this system of firing:

First, the disposing of the platoons of each firing into different parts of the battalion, will extend your fire in such a manner, as to do execution in different parts of the opposite regiment. . . . Secondly, their being divided in this manner, should the enemy and you join before those platoons have time to load, not any part of your battalion is very much weakened by it; . . . Thirdly, should the platoons of each firing be together, too great a part of the battalion would be exposed in one place before the men could load, . . . Fourthly and lastly, the firings being thus disposed of, it makes the exercise appear the more beautiful, and accustoms the men to hear firing on their right and left, without touching their arms 'till they have orders for it. . .⁴⁵

Theoretically this type of fire would be steady and efficient, but in the heat of battle, this was not always so, since the soldiers reloaded and fired as quickly as possible after the first volley. Since firepower was so essential to victory on the eighteenth century battlefield, drill, discipline, and training were imperative.

The armies of the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries were changing rapidly with advances in military technology. The training of an infantry man in particular was centered on the handling of his weapon. The trend in British military training during this time was centered primarily around the individual. Each new recruit was trained under the direct supervision of an experienced soldier who taught him the basics of the firearm drill and maneuvering.⁴⁶ Great care was taken in training each recruit due to the importance of having well trained and disciplined recruits; often it was months before a recruit actually trained with a unit.⁴⁷ In peacetime most of the regiments were scattered

⁴⁵Ibid., 67-8.

⁴⁶Mark Danley, "Combat motivation in the Eighteenth-Century British Army" (M.A. thesis, Virginia Polytechnic Institute and State University, 1991), 9, 11.

⁴⁷Ibid., 16.

about the countryside manning various posts and the infantry required such a large space in order to draw up in any formation, that most training and practice was focused on individual weapon handling.⁴⁸ Nevertheless at least part of each soldier's day was spent on the drill. One contemporary commented on the importance of training during this era:

The exercise and discipline of troops is the first and most essential part of the Art of War, and which therefore principally excites the attention of every martial prince. It is this exercise and discipline which forms both men and horses for the evolutions necessary in the day of battle.⁴⁹

This was a complete about face from the occasional training which the militia engaged in. This is not to imply that the British army was constantly training; for with any army in peacetime, it had its share of boredom and revelry. However, this training and discipline would be put to the ultimate test against the fierce Highland warriors.

Although the infantry was the primary fighting force in the army, the artillery and cavalry did have an important part to play in most battles. The British cavalry was divided into two different types, horse and dragoon. Dragoons were simply mounted infantry; they were the skirmishers of the British army and were often required to fight on foot. They were named for the firearm that they carried, and were trained as both infantry and cavalry. The horse cavalry on the other hand were simply "big men on big horses."⁵⁰ These troops were specifically trained to charge the infantry with swords. The horse cavalry would charge side by side with saber in hand toward the enemy to deliver the final blow. Although they did have firearms, they were used primarily for protection while dismounted, not for battle.⁵¹ During battle, the horse cavalry fought in two or three

⁴⁸Reid, 1745, 185, 192.

⁴⁹M. de Jeney, The Partisan (London: R. Griffiths, 1760), 21.

⁵⁰Reid, 1745, 192.

⁵¹Haswell, 28.

squadrons of approximately one hundred men per squadron.⁵² The cavalry finished off the battle and pursued the enemy.

The artillery was the final component which completed the British army. Although artillery was used by the army as early as the fifteenth century, the Royal Regiment of Artillery did not become a formal part of the British army until 1716.⁵³ The British artillery was comprised of field, garrison, and siege artillery, which ranged in size from twenty-four to one-and-one-half pounds. Each company of gunners consisted of thirty men and their horses, which pulled the artillery trains. During battle, the heavier artillery was placed on the high ground, while the lighter artillery was placed on the flanks and at times among the infantry.⁵⁴ The shells that were used during this time were solid iron roundshot; when they were fired, they usually bounced around smashing things or buried in the ground. When the artillery was at close range, they used case shot or grapeshot which was simply a bag filled with musket balls or shards of metal.⁵⁵ During the Jacobite risings artillery did not play a major role in the battles until Culloden, in which its role was decisive.

During the Jacobite Rebellions of 1715 and 1745-6, the British army was comprised of trained and discipline soldiers, infantry, cavalry and artillery. The British army had technological advantages, well trained and at times seasoned veterans of continental warfare, and pre-modern tactics. A force as formidable as the British army should have had no trouble with an undisciplined force with no formal training, and using as the centerpiece of their offensive the Highland Charge, which by the days standards was primitive. The question is, would this be the case?

⁵²Messenger, 28.

⁵³Young, History, 253.

⁵⁴Messenger, 28.

⁵⁵Reid, 1745, 194.