

CHAPTER 6

THE HIGHLAND CHARGE AND THE 1745 REBELLION

On September 20, the commander of the British forces, Sir John Cope, sought to intercept the Rebel army and arrayed his forces upon the ground where the first battle of the Forty-Five Rebellion would be fought. The ground was near the town of Prestonpans; it consisted of a large flat cornfield, “without a bush or tree”; it was just past the time of the harvest, and thus the ground was covered “with a thick stubble” of stalks.¹ Initially, the British forces expected the Rebel army to approach from the west; General Cope chose a superb piece of land for a defensive stand since he was flanked by the sea, enclosures, and a marsh.² When the Highland forces came into sight to the south of the British lines, Cope pivoted his line of battle to the south.³ The British line was now fronted by the marsh which seemed impervious to the Rebel army positioned directly across the marsh.⁴ Although a defensive position encouraged the Highlanders who naturally wanted to take the offensive by employing the Highland Charge, the marsh was thought to be impregnable.⁵ Fortunately for them, the Jacobite forces had an advantage in a man known only as Mr. Anderson, a proprietor of the marsh, who knew of a road across the marsh; the decision was made to cross the marsh in the hours before daybreak

¹Home, 118. John Home was a Scottish leader of the Enlightenment. He fought for the Jacobites during the 1745-6 rebellion and wrote a history of his experiences in the rebellion.

²Johnstone, 35.

³Speck, 49.

⁴Johnstone, 35.

⁵Elcho, 269.

and position the Prince's forces in front of the British camp.⁶ General Cope, assumed the marsh to be impassable and failed to post a sentry on that front.⁷ At three o'clock in the morning, the British were receiving reports that the Rebel army was moving to the east and General Cope again ordered his line to wheel to the east; his infantry was in the middle with dragoons on either wing and his cannon on the right. The Highlanders were nearly in position when dawn arrived and the mist that cloaked their movements began to lift. As the British troops tried to form their order of battle, General Cope rode across his front ordering his dragoons to draw their swords and his infantry to maintain their ranks and continue to fire and "they would easily beat the Rebels."⁸

As the sun lifted into the sky and revealed the armies to each other, the Highlanders let out a "hideous noise" and began their furious Highland Charge in the traditional column formation.⁹ The left column of the Highland Charge advanced much further than the rest and engaged the artillery, quickly overpowering the undermanned gunners which immediately broke, despite the efforts of a colonel who fired some of the cannons himself.¹⁰ The Highlanders broke the dragoons with the charge despite fire from them. They rushed upon the dragoons in their usual manner with an initial volley and then sword in hand; they aimed at the noses of the horses and ignored the riders. A horse wounded in the face will immediately retreat, and "a few horses wounded in that manner are sufficient to throw a whole squadron into such disorder that it is impossible

⁶Johnstone, 36.

⁷John Fortesque, History of the British Army, vol. 2 (London: MacMillan and Company, 1899), 130.

⁸Allardyce, 281.

⁹Elcho, 271.

¹⁰Allardyce, 281.

afterwards to rally it.”¹¹ The Highland Charge was sufficient to do exactly that and the dragoons broke. With the artillery and dragoons overwhelmed and in retreat, the infantry was alone and surrounded.

The Highlanders quickly fell upon the infantry with their traditional and often victorious tactic, the Highland Charge. The Scot’s Magazine gave an excellent first hand account of the Highlander’s charge on the British foot at Preston-pans.

As soon as the signal for beginning the attack was given, the highlanders pulled off their bonnets, looked up to heaven, made a short prayer, and ran forward. The fire of the enemy’s cannon was followed by a very regular fire of the dragoons on the right and left, and this again by close platoons of all their infantry; which our men received with the greatest intrepidity: nor did we return the enemy’s fire till we approached them so near as that the colsin of our shot might set their whiskers on fire. The highlanders, having discharged their muskets, threw them down, then drew their swords, and carried all before them like a torrent; so that, in seven or eight minutes, both horse and foot were totally routed, and drove them from the field of battle; tho’ it must be owned that the enemy fought very gallantly: but they could not withstand the impetuosity, or rather fury of the highlanders, and were forced to run when they could no longer resist.¹²

The Highlanders not only routed the British forces but also produced a great slaughter. The British defensive position became their worst enemy because they had very few options for retreat after the rout. Not only were the British soldiers terrorized by the surprise attack, the Highland Charge, and the lack of an escape route, but many of them also threw away their weapons, their only means of protection.¹³ Even their commander General Cope was in retreat and it was even said that “he carried the first news of his defeat.”¹⁴ The Highlanders had no mercy on the British soldiers and one

¹¹Johnstone, 37.

¹²“Domestic Affairs.” Scot’s Magazine, September 1745, 439-440.

¹³Johnstone, 40.

¹⁴Ibid., 41.

account of the carnage on the battlefield recorded the savageness of the broadsword: “the field of battle presented a spectacle of horror, being covered with heads, legs, arms and mutilated bodies; for the killed all fell by the sword.”¹⁵ John Fortesque, author of a classic work in military history on the British Army, wrote, “Prestonpans brought with it a memory and a tradition of horror, for all of the slain English had perished by the sword, and the field presented a frightful spectacle of severed limbs and mutilated bodies.”¹⁶ Once more the Highland Charge produced a psychological effect that would be difficult for the British to elude. Approximately five hundred British soldiers were killed, nine hundred wounded, and another fourteen hundred were taken prisoner; the Rebels also captured the British artillery, some horses, tents, and arms.¹⁷ The Rebels’ losses were minimal and yet again the Highlanders and their charge carried the day.

The ancient tactic of the charge gained the Jacobites another victory against the British forces which were, as usual, better trained, better equipped, regular soldiers using contemporary methods of warfare. Not only this, but the Jacobite forces lacked cavalry support and had very few pieces of artillery at the battle.¹⁸ Although most of the British forces were on the continent fighting the French, contemporary accounts claim that the British troops at Preston-pans were regular, that is, professional soldiers who had experience on the continent. The Chevalier de Johnstone, a Jacobite officer who wrote Memoirs of the Rebellion in 1745 and 1746, stated that, “These were, however, the same English soldiers who had distinguished themselves at Dettingen and Fontenoy, and who might justly be ranked amongst the bravest troops of Europe.”¹⁹ Despite this claim, the

¹⁵Ibid., 41.

¹⁶Fortesque, 131.

¹⁷“Domestic History.” Scot’s Magazine, September 1745, 440.

¹⁸Ibid., 440.

¹⁹Johnstone, 41.

Highland forces put the British forces to flight in a matter of minutes. Lord David Elcho, a Jacobite commander, implied in his account that General Cope was well aware of the differences in the two forces and should have taken advantage of this.

As his was [sic] regular troops, he ought to have look'd upon them [the Jacobite force] as militia and never show'd the least fear for them, but attack'd them whenever he met them, and his always showing an inclination to decline the combat was the greatest fault he committed, for every motion he made to shun an engagement added so much courage to the Princes Army.²⁰

The British forces were much better trained than the Jacobite forces; however, the surprise of a dawn attack before formations could be completed, the terror evoked from the Highland charge, and the rush of the Highlanders at close range on a line of soldiers who had fired their weapons prematurely and did not have time to reload, proved too much to endure.

When the Highlanders reached the British front, the British soldiers' only means of defense was their bayonet. In fact, the bayonet, although effective at times, was not the greatest challenge for the Highlanders. The Highlanders had developed a technique for dealing with the bayonet that proved simple and effective. They would use their target to get under the bayonet, deflect it upwards, and then use their swords to slash at the exposed soldier's torso. The broadsword was also much more maneuverable than the bayonet. The bayonet was essentially used to thrust at the enemy, while the broadsword could thrust, cut or slash. The weight of the two weapons was also important in the heat of battle; the bayonet was attached to the soldier's musket which weighed approximately ten pounds and made it much harder to fight in close quarters with a soldier wielding a lighter sword. In his account of the battle of Preston-pans, John Fortesque stated that "the bayonet was no match for the broadsword and targe."²¹ The broadsword was simply

²⁰Elcho, 267.

²¹Fortesque, 130.

lighter and more maneuverable in hand-to-hand combat; although it took much more practice to use than a bayonet, this was a traditional weapon of the Highland warrior and he knew how to use it.

Not only was the broadsword an important weapon against infantry, but also when faced with cavalry. The Highlanders rushed upon the cavalry and instead of trying to wound the rider, went straight for the horses' noses. Wounding a horse in the face would make the horse retreat. The sword was actually a second line of defense against cavalry, the initial firearm volley being the first. One of the contemporary British military manuals instructed soldiers to fire a volley at the horse when in close proximity to them and that this alone would be sufficient to break a body of horse.²² As part of the Highland Charge, the Jacobite forces were already firing a volley at close range, and according to this military instruction manual this alone should serve to at least disrupt the cavalry forces. Thus, cavalry was not as great an obstacle as it might seem to the Highland Charge.

As in the past, the Jacobites' field position was greatly superior. Again the Jacobite commanders positioned their forces in an advantageous situation and used the element of surprise as the foundation of their attack. Although the Highland Charge was the most essential component of their victory, the field advantage that the Jacobite commanders were constantly finding never harmed their chances for victory. In spite of the pre-battle discipline and planning involved in the successful positioning of the Jacobite forces, after the charge began the discipline dissipated. After the British lines collapsed, the Jacobite army broke into great confusion, with some hunting down the enemy as they fled and others taking to plunder in a disorganized frenzy.²³ The lack of discipline and organization after the initial charge was a glaring weakness of the Highland Charge and one that would make the pursuit of a long war difficult at best. If the battle

²²Bland, 93.

²³Elcho, 273.

was not won on the initial charge, the chances for the renewal of an attack, reenforcement of a line, or the organization of a defense were minimal at best. However, for now the Jacobite army was successful and the rebellion would continue. Once again, the Highland Charge was proven triumphant against a professional force and this gave the Jacobites a renewed sense that they could be victorious against what were thought to be better soldiers. In fact, following the decisive victory at Preston-pans, the Jacobite ranks grew. This significance is best summarized by the following statement from Johnstone's Memoirs of the Rebellion in 1745 and 1746: "the greatest advantage we derived from it was the reputation that the Prince's army acquired in the outset, which determined many of his partisans, who were yet wavering, to declare themselves openly in his favor."²⁴

The Jacobite ranks continued to grow. On November 8, 1745, the Jacobite forces crossed the English border on their way to London. The capital was in a panic as the Jacobite forces arrived at Derby, only 135 miles away. At that point, Charles held a war council to decide on the Jacobite's next move; however, against his objections, the decision was made to retreat back to Scotland and attempt another invasion in the spring. Consequently, on December 20, the Jacobite forces crossed the border back into Scotland.²⁵ The Jacobite army was not by any means free to roam about the countryside; for there were two government forces pursuing the Rebels, one led by General Hawley and the other by King George II's son the Duke of Cumberland. Despite these circumstances, by the middle of January the Jacobite forces were double that of the force that invaded England and estimated to be at eight thousand.²⁶ On January 16, 1746, General Hawley's forces were encamped at Falkirk and the Jacobite forces were several miles away. That same evening, Charles ordered his troops to ready themselves for

²⁴Johnstone, 42.

²⁵MacLean, 174-5

²⁶Johnstone, 82.

review the following morning. After Charles reviewed his troops, they began a march toward Falkirk and the waiting British forces.²⁷

Charles's objective was to take the heights to the west of General Hawley's camp. Upon discovering the Rebels' intentions, General Hawley sent several regiments of dragoons to cut off the Rebels' approach, but they were too late. By two o'clock, the Rebel army was in possession of the heights and the British troops were scrambling to take their positions.²⁸ The Highlanders had numerous advantages in this position. Not only were they in possession of the high ground, but they had the element of surprise. They were very close to the British camp, and that very afternoon a strong storm blew in over the field at Falkirk, and as luck would have it, the wind and rain were to the Highlanders' backs and in the faces of the British troops. General Hawley organized his infantry into two lines and put his cavalry in front. Despite their positioning, both armies were outflanked on their left.²⁹

General Hawley ordered his cavalry on the left to attack the Rebels at three-thirty in the afternoon to buy time for him to get the rest of his line in order. The British cavalry slowly advanced toward their enemy, stopping at close range as a temptation for the Highlanders to prematurely fire their weapons, which they did. Although the Highlanders killed nearly eighty men and momentarily threw the dragoons into confusion, Hawley's horses quickly recovered and were upon the Highlanders trampling them under foot. Although on the ground, the Highlanders reached for their dirks and stabbed at the bellies of the horses or dismounted the riders by tugging at their clothes and feet. The dragoons finally broke and retreated directly into their infantry in the center, throwing

²⁷Ibid., 87.

²⁸Ibid., 87.

²⁹Chambers, 83.

them into great confusion.³⁰ The Highlanders and Lord George Murray, who also commanded at Preston-pans, saw the confusion and began the Highland Charge on the right and center of the British lines.

When they came near the foot of the King's army, some regiments of the first line gave them a fire: the rebels returned the fire, and throwing down their muskets, drew their swords and attacked the regiments in the left of the King's army, both in front and flank: all the regiments in the first line of the King's army gave way, as did most of the regiments of the second line. It seemed a total rout . . .³¹

It seemed a total rout, but three British regiments remained hidden on the Highlanders' left flank. These regiments remained composed and delivered a heavy fire by each line, which broke the Highlanders' charge and sent their left into retreat just as the Highlanders had done to the British left just minutes before. The British losses were estimated at two hundred, and the Jacobite losses at approximately sixty.³² The battle was a stalemate; the left flank of each army was defeated, but for the first time in this campaign the British repulsed the Highland Charge.

Yet again the Highlanders had many advantages which aided in the use of the Highland Charge. Charles had correctly found the most advantageous ground for the charge, a hill to charge down, and which was located very near to the British camp. The ground was also somewhat rugged, a characteristic which only gave greater impact to the charge and reduced the capability of the British troops to effectively use their maneuvers.³³ The speed with which the Highlanders took the high ground made it nearly impossible to get the artillery in position. The British too had set up camp only recently

³⁰Johnstone, 88.

³¹Home, 172.

³²"Domestic History." Scot's Magazine, January 1746, 35-40.

³³Hill, Celtic Warfare, 127.

and had not brought their artillery up.³⁴ Therefore the artillery could not be used against the Highlanders to reduce their numbers before they charged. The weather too seemed to be on the Highlanders' side. A fierce storm blew in right before the battle began. The rain and wind blew directly in the faces of the British, reducing their visibility. The weather was only a nuisance to the Highlanders, at least until their retreat. The weather also played a vital role in the use of firearms in the battle. The British muskets could not be shielded from the rain and therefore many of them misfired during the battle, yet another advantage for the charging Highlanders.³⁵

The battle of Preston-pans also had a profound impact on the battle at Falkirk. The British soldiers who fought at Falkirk were more experienced than those at Preston-pans; "they were the veteran troops of Britain, who had fought the battles of Dettingen and Fontenoy."³⁶ Battle-hardy soldiers faced the Highland Charge at Falkirk and still at least half of them broke and fled after the collision of the charge. This may be due in part to the Highlanders' reputation as vicious warriors who "eat children" and the gruesome carnage they immersed themselves in at Preston-pans.³⁷ Nevertheless, the British soldiers had recently faced professional French soldiers on the continent, and thus the Highlanders should not have been as great a challenge. Regardless of what the world or military commanders thought, the ancient tactic of the charge with all its shock on a line was still more than the present tactics could handle.

General Hawley, however, did not believe this to be so. Only days before the battle of Falkirk, he issued instructions on how to defeat the Highland Charge:

The manner of the Highlanders way of fighting which there is nothing so easy to

³⁴Home, 170.

³⁵Fortesque, 140.

³⁶Home, 178.

³⁷Johnstone, 76; Fortesque, 141.

resist. If officers and men are not presposess'd with the lyes and accounts which are told of them. They commonly form their front rank of what they call their best men, or True Highlanders the number of which being allways but few, when they form in battallions they commonly four deep, and these Highlanders form the front of the four, the rest being lowlanders and arrant scum, when these battallions come within a large musket shott, or three score yards this front rank gives their fire and immediately thro' down their fire-locks and come down in a cluster with their swords and targets making a noise and endeavoring to pearce the body, or battallions before them becoming 12 or 14 deep by the time they come up to the people they attack.

The sure way to demolish them is at 3 deep to fire by ranks diagonally to the center where they come, the rear rank first, and even that rank not to fire till they are within 10 or 12 paces but if the fire is given at a distance you probably will be broke for you never get time to load a second cartridge, and if you give way you may give your foot for dead. For they being without a firelock or any load, no man with his arms, accouterment &c. can escape them, and they give no quarters, but if you will but observe the above directs, they are the most despicable enemy that are.³⁸

Hawley's orders called for the British to form three lines, one behind the other; this would help the lines to absorb the shock of the Highland Charge. It would not only physically reinforce the lines, but also psychologically reinforce the lines of soldiers as they would be surrounded by their comrades. This would help increase the courage of the soldiers since they would not be alone trying to hold their part of the line. The orders also called for the soldiers to fire at a very close proximity to the charging Highlanders. The volleys would come consecutively one after the other. This type of firing at close range could kill or wound many of the Highlanders before they get the chance to engage the lines with their broadsword and if enough of them fall, it may even serve to repulse the charge altogether. Again the support of other soldiers could help the lines to resist the temptation to fire before the Highlanders come into range. The idea of firing diagonally concentrates the fire on the center where the bulk of the Highlanders would charge and

³⁸Elcho, 460.

thus, where the line is most likely to break. These orders were not carried out very well at Falkirk, but would become a key element in the British Army's continuing struggle against the Highland Charge.

The commanders of the Jacobite forces were shaken by the success of the British right against their left wing. After the battle of Falkirk, many of the Highland officers could see that the Highland Charge, the tactic that had carried their victories for nearly sixty years, was in grave danger under the right conditions.

The best of the Highland officers...were absolutely convinced, that, except they could attack the enemy at very considerable advantage either by surprise or by some strong situation of ground, or a narrow pass, they could not expect any great success especially if their numbers were no ways equal, and that a body of regular troops was absolutely necessary to support them, when they should at any time go in, sword in hand; for they were sensible, that without more leisure and time that they could expect to have to discipline their own men, it would not be possible to make them keep their ranks, or rally soon enough upon any sudden emergency, so that any small number of the enemy, either by keeping in a body when they were in confusion, or rallying soon, would deprive them of a victory, even after they had done their best.³⁹

The commanders could see the weaknesses and strengths of their main tactic. Discipline was a continual problem for the Jacobite forces and one which they may not have the time to resolve. They knew that their greatest hope lay in fighting irregular warfare and quickly breaking the British lines to the point that they could not rally.

Following the British Army's disgrace at Falkirk, British spirits were low and it appeared the Duke of Cumberland was the only prospect left. A letter from Edinburgh asserted: "We have only one hope remaining, which is, that the arrival of his Royal Highness the Duke will give spirit and activity to the motions of our army."⁴⁰ The hope of the British lay in King George II's third son, William Augustus the Duke of

³⁹Chambers, 93-4.

⁴⁰Merchant, 317.

Cumberland, a hero of the War of Austrian Succession, and in his tactical knowledge. His arrival at Falkirk was greeted with great anticipation and he immediately set out after the Rebel forces. The Duke made it to Perth, but was delayed. However, he began training his men using the orders Hawley issued before the battle of Falkirk. Cumberland also instructed his men in the use of the bayonet against the charging Highlanders, ordering them to aim their bayonets to the man to their right then the Highlanders could not block the thrust of the bayonet with their target.⁴¹

Over the next three months, the British Army grew larger and stronger while the Jacobite forces grew weak and their numbers dwindled as their hunger and need for supplies grew stronger. By the end of February the Duke had set up his headquarters at Aberdeen, while Charles and the Jacobites held Inverness. The Duke continued to train his battalions. Meanwhile, the Jacobite forces were without money or supplies as the British had blockaded the French supply ships; therefore, the men were hungry and they had not been paid, so many of them returned to their homes.⁴² By the first weeks in April, the weather was beginning to break and the two armies began to converge on Culloden where the fate of the Highland Charge and the Jacobite cause would be determined.

On Monday, April 14, Charles was informed that the Duke had left Aberdeen and was heading toward Inverness. Charles immediately ordered his troops to assemble at Culloden Moor. By Tuesday, the Rebel army was assembled and awaiting the arrival of the Duke of Cumberland. Most of the men had only eaten one biscuit, which was their provision for that day; they were hungry and many had set off in search of food, and as a result not all of the Prince's men were assembled.⁴³ The Duke was camped at Nairn,

⁴¹Fortesque, 142.

⁴²Elcho, 396-7, 415.

⁴³Chambers, 137-8.

approximately eight miles from Culloden, and Charles called a war council to plan the Rebels' next move. Since Tuesday was the Duke's birthday, it was hoped that his men would be wrapped up in the revelry and would be intoxicated.⁴⁴ It was decided that a surprise attack would be advantageous to the Highlanders' style of warfare and if the British soldiers were a little intoxicated and off guard, all the better. The Rebels would march under the cover of night to surprise the British forces before dawn. The Rebel forces marched in one column which greatly slowed their eight mile march. As dawn approached, it was evident that the Rebel force would not be in place to execute the surprise attack. The commanders were inclined to march back to Culloden since the element of surprise was lost, but Charles was not in favor of this; despite the objections of the Prince, the army returned to Culloden now exhausted and hungry.⁴⁵

When the Prince's army returned to Culloden on Wednesday morning, April 16, they were greatly fatigued and many fell to the ground asleep where they stopped or went into Inverness two miles away in search of food.⁴⁶ Upon arriving at Culloden, Charles sent out men to determine the position of the British forces; they soon reported that the Duke's forces were marching in three columns with their cavalry on the left; in this formation they could immediately be ready for battle.⁴⁷ Charles asked the opinion of a French officer in his company concerning the Duke's forces to which the officer replied, that "he believed it lost, for he had narrowly observed the Duke's Army and never saw men drawn up with more conduct or advance in a more cool regular order."⁴⁸ Despite this news, Charles was determined to fight. He recalled as many men as possible and

⁴⁴Johnstone, 119.

⁴⁵Elcho, 427-9.

⁴⁶Johnstone, 121-122; Chambers, 140.

⁴⁷Chambers, 140.

⁴⁸Kane, 125.

attempted to form his force of five thousand into two lines, with his cavalry in the back and cannon in the front.⁴⁹ The ground on the Rebel right was swampy which protected them from the British cavalry.⁵⁰ However, this time, unlike in the past, the weather was uncooperative and the Rebel army had rain, wind, hail, and even snow in their faces.⁵¹ The British forces formed in three lines within cannon shot directly in front of the Rebel forces. They outflanked the Prince's army and had a numerical superiority of nearly three thousand. The British forces placed their horse on both flanks and two cannon between each of the battalions on the front line, with three additional cannon on each end.⁵² The Rebel army was at a disadvantage numerically, they had severe weather in their face, they were extremely fatigued and famished, and the ground was not the most favorable for the Highland Charge as it was open land. These British troops were well trained in the new bayonet tactic and seemed to be more disciplined than ever before, and they had the leadership of their King's son, the Duke of Cumberland, who had experience on the continent. Nevertheless, the weather could be an advantage since the British firearms were more likely to misfire; the numerical superiority of the British forces had been faced before; the fury of the charge had sent well trained, disciplined, and battle hardy troops into retreat; and the ground did have some benefit because it was swampy and protected the Rebel right. Still, would the charge carry once again or had the British finally found a way to defeat the ancient tactic?

The battle began when the Rebel army opened fire on the British forces. The Rebel cannon was poorly placed and aimed, and did very little damage to the British forces. The Rebel fire was quickly met by British grapeshot which was well aimed; the

⁴⁹Elcho, 430; Chambers, 140.

⁵⁰Johnstone, 123.

⁵¹Chambers, 141.

⁵²Elcho, 425.

Rebel “ranks were so close, that avenues were fairly cut thro them.”⁵³ The British fire was quickly becoming unbearable. The Rebels, and in particular the Highlanders, “had orders not to move untill the word of command to advance was given them, and then they were to give their fire very near, draw their swords and rush in.”⁵⁴ The Highlanders stood by while their ranks were being decimated and thrown into confusion by the British fire, and then finally the order to begin the Highland Charge was given. The Rebel right charged the British left.

[They] rushed in sword in hand with great intrepidity, determined to bear down all before them. The King’s troops reserving their fire till close up, did great execution; yet their undaunted commanders lead them down; on which Barrell’s and Dejean’s [*sic*] opens for them to pass, then close them up between the first and second lines, where they were severely handled on all sides, that their broad swords and targets were of small service, few escaping to their main body.⁵⁵

The British had finally achieved greater discipline among their troops and were able to hold their fire until it would be effective. Still the Highlanders continued their charge. Now, the new bayonet tactics that the British had been practicing for months were finally put into practice on the British left.

They fired but once; then as usual threw down their firelocks, and closed upon Barrel’s, Price’s, and Monro’s. The battle was now entirely fought between swords and bayonets. Our soldiers, by a new practice of using the latter, became much too hard for the swords and the rebels, as they pushed forward, fell on certain death....The rebels finding their only manner of fighting ob[li]viated, and those which supported their front cut off, they at first made a short pause, retreated a little, and then turning short round, fled with the utmost precipitation.⁵⁶

⁵³Kane, 126.

⁵⁴Elcho, 431.

⁵⁵Kane, 126.

⁵⁶“Domestic History.” Scot’s Magazine, April 1746, 192.

While the Highlanders were being repulsed, two regiments and part of the British cavalry broke through the enclosures on the Rebel right and attacked the fleeing Highlanders.⁵⁷ Finally, the Highland Charge had been defeated by the British forces. However, this was only one portion of the British forces on the field at Culloden that day.

The British right and center was now in the path of the furious Highland Charge. Three times the Highlanders fired their pistols, brandished their swords, and rushed toward the British. Each time they drew the British fire, but only a few engaged the British lines. The regiments on the right, where the Duke positioned himself and where he thought the greatest force of the charge would fall, “hardly took their firelocks from their shoulders.”⁵⁸ They kept up their fire and more importantly their nerve. The Rebels after seeing their right fall and realizing the British were going to stand firm on their left, broke and fled. The subsequent slaughter of the Rebel forces was great. One report from the Scots Magazine stated: “The moor was covered with blood; and our men, what with killing the enemy, dabbling their feet in blood, and splashing it about one another, looked like butchers.”⁵⁹ The carnage did not end on the battlefield, the Duke’s troops pursued the Rebels and slaughtered them from Culloden along the four-mile road back to Inverness.⁶⁰ Those Rebels who were wounded were left by the Duke on the battlefield for two days, then the few still alive were killed.⁶¹ The numbers of those killed are somewhat disputed. The Rebels lost somewhere between one and two thousand men, while the

⁵⁷Allardyce, 609.

⁵⁸Marchant, 384.

⁵⁹“Domestic Affairs.” Scot’s Magazine, April 1746, 192.

⁶⁰Kane, 126.

⁶¹Johnstone, 129.

British lost approximately three hundred men.⁶²

“At last we have done it,” a man wrote in a letter the day of the battle.⁶³ Many contribute the victory at Culloden to the Duke of Cumberland and his military prowess.

The success has been greatly owing to three points of generalship, not thought of in the preceeding actions; or perhaps, then esteemed of little importance. The first is, the manner of placing the cannon....some pieces were always capable of flanking the enemy...as far as we could conceive, more of the enemy fell by the fire of the cannon with cartridge-shot from our right, than by the musketry and sword on the left. His Highness had likewise taken ware to observe which way the wind set...as those that have the wind, see the enemy clearly,...The next was, the direction given about the use of the bayonet....Before this, the bayonet-man attacked the sword-man right fronting him: now the left-hand bayonet attacked the sword fronting his next right-hand man. He was then covered by the enemy’s shield where open his left, and the enemy’s right open to him.⁶⁴

Another account exclaimed, “this great event, under God, is entirely the work of his Royal Highness. The disposition and ordering the execution of it all was his own.”⁶⁵ The leadership of the Duke of Cumberland was a factor in the revival of the British army against the Highlanders. The British were being led by the son of their king, a young, vigorous soldier who had fought in the War of Austrian Succession. It is true that after the Duke arrived the army was much more disciplined, but a greater number of the troops under him were seasoned veterans he brought back from the continental wars. Nevertheless, he did more to prepare his men than had previous commanders, training his men in the new bayonet tactic and preparing them mentally to stand against the Highland Charge.

The entire attitude of the British army was changed with this one battle. No

⁶²“Domestic Affairs.” Scot’s Magazine, April 1746, 188; Elcho, 434.

⁶³“Domestic Affairs.” Scot’s Magazine, April 1746, 185.

⁶⁴“Domestic Affairs.” Scot’s Magazine, April 1746, 192-3.

⁶⁵Allardyce, 609.

longer did they feel that the broadsword was a serious threat.⁶⁶ Prior to Culloden, the British troops had a great fear of the Highlanders and their dreadful charge, as to be expected considering they had been unable to defeat the Highland Charge for nearly sixty years despite their obvious technological advantage in training and weaponry. Add to this the dreadful slaughter of British troops at the battle of Preston-pans and you have a recipe for panic. A letter from Inverness described a “rumor” circulating among the British soldiers:

There had been an opinion industriously propagated at Edinburgh, and elsewhere, among the soldiers to intimidate them, that the Highlanders, with their broadswords and targets, were irresistible, being more than a match for troops not armed in that manner, his Royal Highness had taken great pains to undeceive his men, and convince them that a regiment of the English foot, with musket and bayonet, was much superior to a Highland regiment, notwithstanding their pistol and targets.⁶⁷

This was a part of the Highland Charge that had to be fought long before the troops took the field, and it was also this psychological warfare that had played to the advantage of the Highlanders. Here was one area where the Duke was a great aid to the British forces; if he could steady the men’s nerves and convince them that the Highlanders were no match for them, then the tactics he had been training his men in might be effective. Apparently the Duke was successful as the British troops stood firm and beat back the Highlanders. After the battle, one observer stated, “they are now thoroughly convinced, that highlanders and broad swords signify little against us.”⁶⁸ The psychological battle was consequently won; however, if many Highlanders made it to the line and the infantrymen saw the ferocious blows a broadsword delivered in the hands of a skilled Highland warrior, they might still break.

⁶⁶It should be noted that the British Army were not challenged again by the broadsword.

⁶⁷Marchant, 395-6.

⁶⁸“Domestic Affairs.” *Scot’s Magazine*, April 1746, 193.

The psychological aspect was addressed, but that alone could not defeat the Highland Charge. The new tactics that the British used against the Highlanders at Culloden proved to be very challenging to the charge. Firing by rank was initially effective in battle; however, a well trained infantryman could only fire three rounds in one minute and if the three ranks fire sequentially, there would be a small lapse in time between the third ranks' initial firing and the first ranks' second firing, allowing time, even if it is only five to ten seconds, for the uninjured Highlanders to reach the front ranks of the British. From there, the Highlanders would have to deal with the new bayonet tactic which proved to be formidable. The bayonet drill was invaluable against the Highlanders. As long as there were more British soldiers on the front line so that they could not be outflanked, this tactic proved successful. However, if the lines were not long enough, there was the chance that the Highlanders that were on the flanks could reach the British lines with success, particularly if they outflanked them on their left. Otherwise, the tactic was sound, for if the Highlander attacked the man in front of him, he exposed himself to the man on his right. If he attacked the man to his right he was at a disadvantage because he wielded his sword with his right hand and his target with his left. If the Highlander attacked the man to his left, he exposed his right again and had to rely on the man to his right to kill or injure the British soldier on his exposed side. Culloden was the first and only battle in which this tactic was used against the Highlanders, so it is difficult to speculate whether or not the tactic would have continued to be successful. It becomes more difficult when one considers a statement by Lord Elcho, who was present at the battle, which claimed that some of the Highlanders had left their targets behind to make their march easier.⁶⁹ Thus these Highlanders were easily slaughtered if in fact they did not have their targets to defend themselves and this may have contributed to the success of the new bayonet tactic. Hence, between the lack of targets, the new tactics, and the breakthrough of the regiments on the enclosure, the Rebels had little chance for

⁶⁹Elcho, 433-4.

success. This was true even more so when the British unleashed their cannon on the Rebels.

The greatest threat to the Highland Charge was by far the cannon. If cannons were well placed, they could hit the Highlanders' line before they charged, wounding or killing many of them. If cannons were fired on the Highlanders after they fired their weapons and were forming their wedges for the charge, it would have a greater impact and remove more men from the charge. With the addition of grapeshot to the British arsenal, several well aimed cannons could decimate the Highlanders since they scattered metal fragments in every direction. The grapeshot could wound enough men so that only a few would actually reach the British lines. If the charge was stopped before it began or before it reached the enemy's lines, it was no longer a threat. Consequently, well aimed cannons loaded with grapeshot had the ability to ruin the Highlanders' greatest tactic and crush the Highlanders themselves.

At Culloden, one of the greatest components of the defeat of the Highland Charge was fatigue. The Highlanders had marched throughout the night to attack the Duke's forces, and were then ordered to return to the position they held the day before. Many of them fell asleep where they stopped, while the rest went to Inverness to scavenge for food. This left the Rebel force scattered and reduced in number. When the Duke's forces approached, it was nearly impossible for Charles to gather his forces in time to engage the Duke with the same numbers he had the previous day. This reduction in manpower greatly diminished the impact of the Highland Charge. The fatigue and hunger also changed the priorities of the men. Their physical needs tended to overpower their will to fight for Charles. Food and rest became more important than king and country. Thus the true numerical force of the Rebel army and the impact of the Highland Charge was not realized at Culloden.

After decades of dominating the British forces, the Highland Charge had been defeated. The combination of fatigue, hunger, the leadership of the Duke of Cumberland,

the change in the mentality of the men, the new bayonet tactic, the line firing, and the cannon loaded with grapeshot were all detrimental to the Highland Charge. Despite the loss at Culloden, the question remains, was the Highland Charge now truly an ancient and obsolete tactic?