

The Highland Charge and the Jacobite Rebellions

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(ABSTRACT)

From 1689 through 1746 the supporters of the deposed House of Stuart, known as Jacobites and composed largely of Highland Scots, staged periodic rebellions against the new Hanoverian rulers in London. During this period, the Highlanders of Scotland experienced a period of military triumph unlike any other in their history. Through the combination of the ancient tactic of the charge, the use of the broadsword as their primary weapon, and the implementation of the musket, the Highlanders blended the best elements of the ancient and early modern military tactics and technology to develop a unique tactic, the Highland Charge. Essentially, the Highlanders would assemble preferably on high ground, charge down upon their enemy, fire their muskets and throw them to the ground, regroup into wedge shaped formations behind the musket-fire smokescreen, and then charge sword-in-hand into the opposing army's lines. The Highland Charge repeatedly defeated the British forces, which should have been superior in virtually every respect. The British army was an early modern force using the latest tactics and technology. The British forces that fought the Highlanders were a mix of militiamen and seasoned veterans of the continental wars. In essence the military engagements between the Jacobites and British were a contest between an undisciplined archaic force and a disciplined thoroughly modern force. The combination of ancient and early modern elements, the change in formation, and the great success of the Highland Charge generates immense interest in this subject.