

CHAPTER 7

CONCLUSION

The British soldiers had finally defeated the Highland Charge after being defeated by the Jacobite forces for over half a century. Since, the Highlanders did not challenge the British forces again, so it is left only to conjecture as to whether the Highlanders would have or could have adjusted to the new British tactics. After the battle of Culloden, there were still Jacobites willing to continue the Rebellion and, according to some accounts, their numbers increased, but the leadership felt all was lost.¹ The Duke of Cumberland, unlike the Jacobites, took full advantage of the victory and literally hunted down the rebels. The Duke of Cumberland earned the nickname “The Butcher” for what many today would refer to as his “policy of ethnic cleansing” in the Highlands.² Cumberland marched through the Highlands burning houses, confiscating valuables, dispersing cattle, and hunting Jacobites.³ Many of the Rebels were imprisoned, and some were even executed.⁴ The government was in full support of the Duke and his policy in the Highlands.

During the year following the defeat at Culloden, the British government passed another Disarming Act. This act essentially stripped the Highlanders of their traditions and way of life. The Disarming Act banned the traditional Highland dress, the playing of the bagpipes, the possession of arms, and removed the clan chiefs’ jurisdictional rights, thus removing the power of the clan and its chiefs. In effect, this act destroyed the clan

¹Johnstone, 131.

²John Sallnow, “Final Conflict, ” Geographical Magazine, April 1996, 39.

³Ibid., 39; MacLean, 181.

⁴MacLean, 182.

system.⁵ The act itself was harsh, but the penalty for disobeying it was severe as the following excerpt affirms.

No man or boy within that part of Great Britain called Scotland, other than such as shall be employed as officers and soldiers in His Majesty's forces, shall, on any pretence whatsoever, wear or put on the clothes commonly called Highland clothes (that is to say) the plaid, philebeg, or little kilt, trowse, shoulder belts, or any part whatsoever of what peculiarly belongs to the Highland garb; and that no tartan, or partly-coloured plaid or stuff shall be used for great coats, or for upper coats; and if any such person shall presume after the said first day of August, to wear or put on the aforesaid garments, or any part of them,...shall suffer imprisonment, without bail, during the space of six months, and no longer; and being convicted for a second offence...shall be liable to be transported to any of His Majesty's plantations beyond the seas, there to remain for the space of seven years.⁶

Not only were the Highlanders stripped of their traditional garb, but many were also stripped of their land as the Crown confiscated the chiefs' properties.⁷ In the following decade, there was an exodus from the Highlands. Many of the former warriors joined the Highland Regiments in the British army which was more than happy to accept the new recruits. As John Prebble stated in his work Mutiny: Highland Regiments in Revolt, 1743-1804,

The use that might be made of the Highlanders in the King's wars had been recognized by some English officers who faced their furious charge at Falkirk or Culloden. Soldiers must die in battles, and where else in the kingdom were there men whose courage could be better employed and whose death would be the least regretted?⁸

A multitude of Highlanders left for the American continent to start a new life where they

⁵Sallnow, 39.

⁶John Telfer Dunbar, History of Highland Dress (London: Batsford, 1979), 3.

⁷Adam, 76.

⁸John Prebble, Mutiny: Highland Regiments in Revolt, 1743-1804 (London: Secker and Warburg, 1975), 94.

could resume their traditions and escape persecution.⁹ Thousands immigrated to the regions in America most like the Scottish Highlands, in particular North Carolina, Tennessee, and Virginia. With the coming Industrial Revolution and the enclosure policies in Britain, others migrated to the cities in Scotland.¹⁰ Although many Highlanders departed over the next few decades, the first to actually leave Scotland was the very prince they fought to put on the throne of Scotland.

Following his defeat at Culloden, Charles Edward Stuart made his escape from Great Britain. He reluctantly fled to the Highlands and wandered about under the protection of his beloved Highlanders until passage to France was secured in September of 1746. The Jacobite Rebellions had come to an end, and Charles was never to return to Scotland. Charles died in 1788, without an heir. The last of the Stuarts was his brother Henry, who served in the Church; thus ended the Stuart dynasty and its threat to the British throne.¹¹

The Highland Charge too was nearing its end. For nearly sixty years its shadow loomed over the British forces, haunting every military encounter against a Jacobite force. The modern finally overcame the ancient on the field at Culloden and the British defeated the Highland Charge. Despite this defeat, the Highland Charge was by no means an obsolete tactic. Although there were many weaknesses inherent to the Highland Charge, it also possessed many strengths.

The primary strength of any charge is its shock value. The impact of the Highland Charge on the British lines was the essential element of the tactic. The Highlanders always made every attempt to obtain the high ground on the field of battle. This gave the Highlanders an advantage because they would be running downhill at their enemy which

⁹Adam, 76.

¹⁰MacLean, 189-90.

¹¹Ibid., 186.

provided greater speed to their charge and thus greater impact when they collided with the line of troops. When the Highlanders struck the British lines, the force of the charge either broke the lines or disorganized the troops. The force of the charge ultimately decided the fate of the battle. The Highland Charge was quick and decisive. The battle was won or lost based on the impact of the Highland Charge and whether the force was sufficient to break the lines or disorganize them enough to prevent the soldiers from retaliating. The speed, shock value, and decisiveness of the Highland Charge was its greatest strength. The simplicity of the Highland Charge was its next greatest strong point.

For the most part, a charge was a simple tactic; the force ran *en masse* into the opposing force to fight one-on-one. The Highland Charge was somewhat more complicated since the Highlanders first fired their weapons, then formed wedge shaped columns which charged sword in hand into the British lines. Nevertheless, this was the tactic of their ancestors, thus the Highlanders were familiar with the conduct of the charge. The Highland Charge required virtually no training. The initial formation of the charge was simply the clan organization; each clan formed a regiment, and had a specific place in the battle formation. From there all the clansmen had to do was charge forward, stop within musket shot of the enemy, fire, and then form a wedge-like column, and charge into the line. Once the Highlanders engaged the British line, they fought hand-to-hand with the British soldiers. The clan traditions encouraged individual combat. This style of warfare was undisciplined and the responsibility of combat was placed on the individual. Thus the Highland Charge fit perfectly into the clan system. The emphasis on individual combat as opposed to the British style of mass training and discipline gave a great advantage to the Highlanders once they encountered the British lines. The Highlanders were accustomed to individual combat and all the elements of it. For the Highlander great glory was placed on success as an individual warrior and the Highlanders were well acquainted with the arms of individual warfare.

The weapons the Highlanders used were the weapons of individual warfare and placed them at a great advantage when they engaged the British lines. Not only had the Highlanders grown up using the broadsword and target, but these weapons were much more efficient in hand-to-hand combat than the British musket and bayonet. The target protected the Highlanders from the bayonet, at least until the development of the new bayonet tactic, and the sword was easier to wield and more maneuverable than the bayonet. The sword could be used continuously, whereas the musket had to be reloaded. Many of the Highlanders possessed a broadsword and target, as they were the traditional weapons of the clansmen. The primary weapons of the Highland Charge did not need to be acquired prior to the Rebellions; the men came equipped with their weapons. Many of the Highlanders also brought their own muskets or, after routing the British, confiscated the discarded muskets. This also made the Highland Charge less expensive, an advantageous element for staging a rebellion. Thus the weaponry of the Highland Charge was a great advantage of the tactic; it blended the best of the old and new in weapons technology. The musket used only once took advantage of this new technology, as with one volley the Highlanders could create confusion among troops and horses. The smoke screen created by the musket created greater confusion and shielded the Highlanders movements. Since the Highlanders only used the musket once, they were not concerned with the time involved in reloading the musket. Then when the Highlanders engaged the enemy they were using their ancient weapons, the broadsword and target, which were better suited to individual combat than the musket and bayonet used by the British. This combination of weapons put the Highlanders at a great advantage.

A less obvious advantage of the Highland Charge had less to do with the tactic itself, but more with the image of the Highland warrior. The reputation of the Highlanders as fierce, ruthless, and blood-thirsty warriors enhanced the effect of the Highland Charge before the armies ever took to the field. Many Englishmen and Lowland Scots saw the Highlanders as savages that were uncivilized and brutal. This image and the tales that

surrounded the mystique of the Highland warrior struck fear into the British soldiers before they ever saw their enemy. The idea that the British soldier was superior, yet time and again had been beaten by the Highlanders, created a type of psychological warfare in the minds of the British soldiers. The great carnage that the broadsword inflicted, and the slaughter of British troops at Killiecrankie and Preston-pans simply enhanced the fear of the Highlander. The characteristic howl that the Highlanders let out prior to the charge intensified the psychological effect of the Highland Charge. All the elements of the Highland Charge: simplicity, speed, shock value, individual combat, the most effective use of the musket, broadsword, and target, the decisiveness of the tactic, the lack of necessity for training, and the psychological elements associated with the Highlanders, made this tactic formidable. Nevertheless, no tactic is invincible forever, and as the British gained more experience against the Highland Charge, the weaknesses of the tactic became more apparent.

One of the Highland Charge's greatest strength was also one of its greatest weaknesses. The Highland Charge was quick and decisive; it worked immediately or not at all. If it worked immediately, it meant victory for the Highlanders; if it did not work soon after the impact, then the Highlanders had little chance for a victory. If the charge did not break or at least disrupt the British lines after the Highlanders struck, it would be necessary for the Highlanders to regroup. Due to the undisciplined nature of the Highland Charge, it was difficult at best for the Highlanders to regroup, reinforce a line, renew an attack, or organize a defense, as was evident at the battle of Sheriffmuir when the Highland right was successful, but the left in need of reinforcements was lost. Once the Highlanders encountered the British lines, a total melee took place. If the British lines broke, then the Highlanders either pursued the British as they fled or plundered the dead and injured on the field as evidenced at Sheriffmuir, Preston-pans, and Falkirk. It would have been impossible for the Highlanders to wage a lengthy battle, much less a prolonged war, without the discipline, leadership, and organization required to regroup and continue

a battle after the initial charge. Again the Highland Charge had its strength in its ability to quickly break the enemy, but its weakness in the fact that if the charge did not immediately break the lines, the Highlanders did not possess the discipline needed to regroup.

Yet another weakness of the Highland Charge was the need for manpower. Because of the nature of the Highland Charge, mass numbers charging into an enemy's lines, the greater the number of men making the charge, the higher the success rate. Particularly with the development of the new bayonet tactic, it was imperative that the Highlanders outflank the British and have the numbers necessary to break the lines. Although the Highlanders were usually outnumbered the psychological factors and the British soldiers' inability to cope with the broadsword and target, were the main factors involved in the victories. Once the British had the confidence and techniques needed to overcome these factors, the Highlanders needed mass numbers to compensate. The immense impact that the cannon had on the Highlanders prior to the charge also necessitated greater numbers.

The greatest threat to the Highland Charge was artillery as demonstrated at Culloden. As foot troops, many assumed that cavalry was the greatest threat to the Highlanders, but because of the initial volley of the Highland Charge and the subsequent use of the broadsword, the horse were greatly affected and removed from the scene as at the battle of Preston-pans. Artillery was the greatest threat and the ultimate final blow to the Highland Charge. The artillery, if well placed, could eliminate the threat of the charge by eliminating the Highlanders themselves. At Culloden the Highlanders were positioned in their traditional clan units. The artillery tore through the clans as they awaited the order to charge. The grapeshot was particularly devastating as shards of metal flew in every direction. A wounded Highlander would have great difficulty making the charge then engaging in hand-to-hand combat. Thus one key to defeating the Highland Charge was artillery. If the Highland Charge was crippled before the Highlanders reached the

British lines, then it was no longer a threat. This same idea applied to the platoon firing that took place at Culloden and on the Highlanders' left at Falkirk. Effective, continual fire was key to repulsing the Highland Charge. It was this element that would end the reign of the Highland Charge.

The Highland Charge could still be an effective tactic at least until the development of a repeat firing weapon. Blunders on the part of commanders, such as ill placed cannon, or undisciplined, inexperienced soldiers could render the cannon and the new tactics ineffective. However, once a force was equipped with repeat firing weapons they could efficiently eliminate the Highlanders before they reached that force's line, simply by standing their ground and firing their weapons.

The Highland Charge was used one final time by the British Highland Regiments in Canada during the French and Indian War at the battle of the Plains of Abraham. The Highland Charge was a success and changed the course of the war. This time the Highland Charge was modified slightly by the continuous fire of the British Regulars prior to the charge.¹² The Highland Charge could be an effective tactic with or without slight variations, depending on the unique situation of a battle, until the development of the repeat firing weapon which would finally render the Highland Charge obsolete. The Chevalier de Johnstone expressed the essence of the Highland Charge best.

They proved that bravery may supply the place of discipline at times, as discipline supplies the place of bravery. Their attack is so terrible, that the best troops in Europe would with difficulty sustain the first shock of it; and if the swords of the Highlanders once come in contact with them, their defeat is inevitable.¹³

In a time of disciplined, professional forces, a group of undisciplined warriors, which received little respect from their adversaries, combined the best of an ancient tactic and their ancient weapons, with the best application of a pre-modern musket to defeat the

¹²Hill, Celtic Warfare, 163-67.

¹³Terry, 12.

greatest army of the era.