

THE BATTLE OF PRESTONPANS

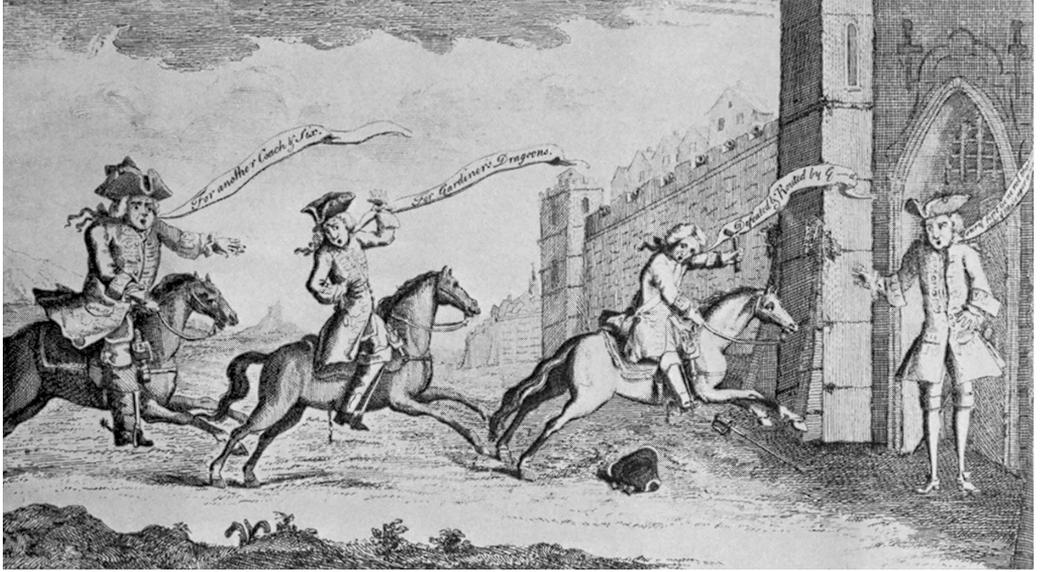
8. Let Battle Commence

On being told of the troops' movements Cope decided to change the position of his army. But it was to no avail. Even the weather was against him for there was a fog. Not a dense fog but that early, misty fog that tends to disguise the senses of both hearing and seeing. It was the kind of weather so beloved by the fighting highland forces, one that helps you slowly but surely move towards your foe without being seen or heard, particularly if you walk on all fours. By the time the Hanoverians realised what was happening and started to fire they knew they had already lost the day. When the various clans called out their battle cries, the very blood of Cope's army was chilled. When Charles' troops attacked Cope's right wing, even his artillery shots were to no avail the Highlanders being too close and the cannon balls flying well over their heads. When they, the Jacobites, discharged their fire and threw their pistols down on the ground for hand to hand combat, the Hanoverian troops fled for their lives more so when they realised how the 'rabble of the north' fought.

Having drawn their swords in their right hand and holding a spiky targe in their left hand, from which protruded the blade of their dirk, they then faced their opponents by bending their left knee in order to receive the thrust of the Hanoverian bayonet on the targe, killing the other soldier on their right with their sword while maiming the one on their left with either the spike of their targe or the blade of their dirk. Having fired once Hanoverians only had recourse to the bayonet of their musket, while the Highlanders had recourse to another two blades and the spike to inflict further damage. And then there were the dreaded scythes which could sever anything they touched. And they did swing and cut for heads, hands and legs were strewn everywhere on the battlefield. What terrified Cope's men was the fact that this was no rabble coming at them but rather a uniformed and orderly troop that was quick in movement. Cope faced a carnage he had never experienced before and fled the battle wearing a Jacobite white cockade so as not to be recognised.

Of Cope's fighting men, nine hundred were mortally wounded including Colonel Gardiner, and one thousand four hundred were taken prisoner. About two hundred, it is said, escaped. Of Charles' army, five officers died, thirty privates were killed and about eighty were wounded. The dead, as was

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'A Race from Preston Pans to Berwick': Sir John Cope brings the news of his own defeat (From a contemporary satirical print)

the custom, are said to have been buried on the very field they died on. In fact, the same would later apply to the battlefield of Culloden. I was told by Jack Robertson that, should anyone dig a few inches below the ground where the Battle of Prestonpans took place, one would reach the remains of those fallen men, Jacobites and Hanoverians alike. In 1950, when a number of bones were found at the site of the battle, a religious service was held and the remains of a number of soldiers of both sides who died on the battlefield were re-interred,¹⁵ close to the memorial cairn which was erected in 1932 by the Society for the Preservation of Rural Scotland and which stands on the B1377, just outside the town of Prestonpans at the turn off for Meadowmill Sports Centre.

Cope had not coped at all. It was then the satirists and songwriters went into full flow. By the former he was called the 'pudding-headed general' and the latter let rip with comments on his troops' flight back over the border:

“But when he saw the Highland lads,
Wi' tartan trews and white cockades;
Wi' swords and guns, and rungs and gauds,
O, Johnnie he took wing in the morning” *Robert Burns*

and

“In faith,” quo Johnnie, “I got sic flegs
Wi' their claymores and filabegs,

THE PENNY LONDON POST.

From Wednesday, October 2d, to Friday, October 4th, 1745.

BATTLE AT PRESTON PANS.

(NEAR EDINBURGH.)

LONDON.

From the LONDON GAZETTE,

Whitehall, Sep. 24.

BY an Express which arriv'd this morning, we are inform'd that Sir John Cope, and the Troops under his command, were attack'd by the Rebels, on the 21st instant, at day-break, at Preston, near Seaton, seven miles from Edinburgh; that the King's Troops were defeated, and Sir John Cope, with about 450 Dragoons, had retir'd to Lauder; Brigadier Fowkes and Colonel Lascelles had got to Dunbar; but as yet we have no account of the Particulars of this Action, nor of the Loss on either side. The Earls of Loudoun and Home, and some of the Gentlemen Volunteers were at Lauder with Sir John Cope.

The following is the most exact List we have as yet receiv'd, of the Killed & Wounded at the Battle at Preston Pans, near Edinburgh:

Colonel Gardner's Dragoons.

Colonel Gardner, killed.

Lieut. Colonel Whitney, wounded.

Hamilton's Dragoons.

Lieut. Colonel Wright, wounded.

SCOTLAND.

The following journal is taken from the *Caledonian Mercury*, that our Readers may see in what manner the Rebels have chosen to give an account of their achievements.

EDINBURGH, Sep. 19. On Monday last, the Highland Army stood under Arms about Corstorphine, two miles west of this City, till about Four in the Afternoon; then their advanced Body march'd up to attack Hamilton's and Gardner's Dragoons, and the City Companies, who stood under Arms on this side the Colt Bridge, a mile west of this City; immediately after the Dragoons, &c. retired, rode off down the north side of this City towards Leith, then they fled away for Haddington, leaving their Baggage to the care of our Magistrates, who saw the same into the Castle. This Flight occasioned a general consternation here, so that the principal inhabitants, considering there was no expectation of General Cope's Army, and that the two Regiments of Dragoons had abandon'd them, address'd the Lord Provost, Magistrates and Council to capitulate, in regard the City was not tenable, lest, if the Highlanders took it by storm, the inhabitants might be pillag'd and destroy'd.—The Magistrates ordered the Fire-Bell immediately to be rung, to summon all concern'd to attend them in the new Church, and give them best advice: They were scarce met when a Letter was presented to them from the Pretender, and a Person began to read it; but being stopp'd short a Voice

JOURNAL OF THE PRETENDER'S ARMY.

Aug. 27. The Chevalier being inform'd that Lieut. General Cope was to march that day over Corrieyeroig, order'd his whole Army to decamp, and at four in the morning march'd from Aberchalladree, in Glangruy, over the hill of Corrieyeroig, with a resolution to fight Cope; every Man shewing by his behaviour the general inclination of the whole to attack him, and were determin'd all to a man to conquer or die on the spot; but to their great grief were disappointed, as Cope, the day before, having intelligence of our strength, was intimidated that he alter'd his Route from Corrieyeroig to Ruthvin in Badenoch, and made such dispatch to prevent our attacking his Rear, that in two days he perform'd four days march. That night, after our arrival at Garvamore, the men were so vex'd at being discompt'd of fighting that day, that 500 of them propos'd to follow Cope, and march 24 miles under Cloud of Nature consideration, the proposal was not thought practicable. The 28th we march'd to Dulcharnny; the 29th to Dalnacairdach; and the 30th to Blair. From Blair the Army march'd, Sept. 2, from Dunkeld; and the 3d to Perth, when they quarter'd till the 11th; when they march'd that day to Dumblain, where the Army rested the 12th, and encamp'd that night a mile without the Town. The 13th we march'd from Dumblain, across the Forth at a Ford near Balquhain, and expected