

The following account of the skirmish at Clifton is extracted from the manuscript Memoirs of Evan Macpherson of Cluny, Chief of the clan Macpherson, who had the merit of supporting the principal brunt of that spirited affair. The Memoirs appear to have been composed about 1755, only ten years after the action had taken place. They were written in France, where that gallant chief resided in exile, which accounts for some Gallicisms which occur in the narrative.

‘In the Prince’s return from Derby back towards Scotland, my Lord George Murray, Lieutenant-General, cheerfully charg’d himself with the command of the rear, a post which, altho’ honourable, was attended with great danger, many difficulties, and no small fatigue; for the Prince, being apprehensive that his retreat to Scotland might be cut off by Marischall Wade, who lay to the northward of him with an armie much supperior to what H.R.H. had, while the Duke of Comberland with his whole cavalerie followed hard in the rear, was obliged to hasten his marches. It was not, therefore, possible for the artilirie to march so fast as the Prince’s army, in the depth of winter, extremely bad weather, and the worst roads in England; so Lord George Murray was obliged often to continue his marches long after it was dark almost every night, while at the same time he had frequent allarms and disturbances from the Duke of Comberland’s advanc’d parties.

‘Towards the evening of the twentie-eight December 1745 the Prince entered the town of Penrith, in the Province of Comberland. But as Lord George Murray could not bring up the artilirie so fast as he wou’d have wish’d, he was oblig’d to pass the night six miles short of that town, together with the regiment of MacDonel of Glengarrie, which that day happened to have the arrear guard. The Prince, in order to refresh his armie, and to give My Lord George and the artilirie time to come up, resolved to sejour the 29th at Penrith; so ordered his little army to appear in the morning under arms, in order to be reviewed, and to know in what manner the numbers stood from his haveing entered England. It did not at that time amount to 5000 foot in all, with about 400 cavalerie, compos’d of the noblesse who serv’d as volunteers, part of whom form’d a first troop of guards for the Prince, under the command of My Lord Elchoe, now Comte de Weems, who, being proscribed, is presently in France. Another part formed a second troupe of guards under the command of My Lord Balmirino, who was beheaded at the Tower of London. A third part serv’d under My Lord le Comte de Kilmarnock, who was likewise beheaded at the Tower. A fourth part serv’d under My Lord Pitsligow, who is also proscribed; which cavalerie, tho’ very few in numbers, being all noblesse, were very brave, and of infinite advantage

to the foot, not only in the day of battle, but in serving as advanced guards on the several marches, and in patrolling during the night on the different roads which led towards the towns where the army happened to quarter.

‘While this small army was out in a body on the 29th December, upon a rising ground to the northward of Penrith, passing review, Mons. de Cluny, with his tribe, was ordered to the Bridge of Clifton, about a mile to southward of Penrith, after having pass’d in review before Mons. Pattullo, who was charged with the inspection of the troops, and was likewise Quarter-Master-General of the army, and is now in France. They remained under arms at the bridge, waiting the arrival of My Lord George Murray with the artillirie, whom Mons. de Cluny had orders to cover in passing the bridge. They arrived about sunsett closely pursued by the Duke of Comberland with the whole body of his cavalrie, reckoned upwards of 3000 strong, about a thousand of whom, as near as might be computed, dismounted, in order to cut off the passage of the artillirie towards the bridge, while the Duke and the others remained on horseback in order to attack the rear.

‘My Lord George Murray advanced, and although he found Mons. de Cluny and his tribe in good spirits under arms, yet the circumstance appear’d extremely delicate. The numbers were vastly unequal, and the attack seem’d very dangerous; so My Lord George declin’d giving orders to such time as he ask’d Mons. de Cluny’s opinion. “I will attack them with all my heart,” says Mons. de Cluny, “if you order me.” “I do order it then,” answered My Lord George, and immediately went on himself along with Mons. de Cluny, and fought sword in hand on foot at the head of the single tribe of Macphersons. They in a moment made their way through a strong hedge of thorns, under the cover whereof the cavalrie had taken their station, in the struggle of passing which hedge My Lord George Murray, being dressed en montagnard, as all the army were, lost his bonnet and wig; so continued to fight bare-headed during the action. They at first made a brisk discharge of their firearms on the enemy, then attacked them with their sabres, and made a great slaughter a considerable time, which obliged Comberland and his cavalrie to fly with precipitation and in great confusion; in so much that, if the Prince had been provided in a sufficient number of cavalrie to have taken advantage of the disorder, it is beyond question that the Duke of Comberland and the bulk of his cavalrie had been taken prisoners.

‘By this time it was so dark that it was not possible to view or number the slain who filled all the ditches which happened to be on the ground where they stood. But it was

computed that, besides those who went off wounded, upwards of a hundred at least were left on the spot, among whom was Colonel Honeywood, who commanded the dismounted cavalerie, whose sabre of considerable value Mons. de Cluny brought off and still preserves; and his tribe lykeways brought off many arms;—the Colonel was afterwards taken up, and, his wounds being dress'd, with great difficultie recovered. Mons. de Cluny lost only in the action twelve men, of whom some haveing been only wounded, fell afterwards into the hands of the enemy, and were sent as slaves to America, whence several of them returned, and one of them is now in France, a sergeant in the Regiment of Royal Scots. How soon the accounts of the enemies approach had reached the Prince, H.R.H. had immediatly ordered Mi-Lord le Comte de Nairne, Brigadier, who, being proscribed, is now in France, with the three batalions of the Duke of Athol, the batalion of the Duke of Perth, and some other troupes under his command, in order to support Cluny, and to bring off the artilirie. But the action was entirely over before the Comte de Nairne, with his command, cou'd reach nigh to the place. They therefore return'd all to Penrith, and the artilirie marched up in good order.

‘Nor did the Duke of Comberland ever afterwards dare to come within a day's march of the Prince and his army dureing the course of all that retreat, which was conducted with great prudence and safety when in some manner surrounded by enemies.’