

# Tartan of the 64<sup>th</sup> Reg<sup>t</sup> Lord Loudoun's Highlanders

## Introduction

Following the heroic action of the 43<sup>rd</sup> Regiment, later renumbered the 42<sup>nd</sup> or Black Watch, at the Battle of Fontenoy in May 1745 the Government realised the potential of the Highland soldier. As a result letters of service were issued to a number of Scottish nobles to raise troops for His Majesty's Service. Amongst these were letters to John Campbell, 4<sup>th</sup> Earl of Loudoun. In August 1745 he raised *Lord Loudoun's Regiment of Foot*, later numbered the 64<sup>th</sup>.

Unique amongst the early Highland Regiments a number of papers survive regarding Loudoun's Regiment giving details of their clothing. For example, in 1745 a list of clothing and equipment for recruits to the regiment included the price for a plaid and coat as £1 6s 0d.

There are also two portraits; one of Loudoun (Fig 1), the other of Ensign Reid (Fig 2) in which they are shown wearing red tartans. Based on these it was assumed by some historians that the regiment wore a red sett but a chance discovery in 1979<sup>1</sup> revealed a sample of a blue, green and black tartan sent to Loudoun as an example of the soldiers' plaids.

## The Red Tartans

In 1747 Lord Loudoun was painted in what he referred to as *his regimentals*. The portrait shows a typical mid-18<sup>th</sup> century Highland gentleman. His clothes include a red military type jacket, a predominately red belted plaid and diced hose. The tartan has been identified as what is now known as Murray of Tullibardine<sup>2</sup>.



Fig 1. John Campbell,  
4th Earl of Loudoun c1747

Although the reference by Loudoun to *his regimentals* has been used as a justification to support the use of a red based tartan by the Regiment there is now strong evidence to refute the idea (see the Green Tartan discussion below) and it's probable that Loudoun meant his red jacket and other accoutrements that marked him out as an Officer. The possible reasons for Loudoun wearing that particular tartan are discussed in my paper on the [Early use of the Tullibardine Tartan](#).

The tartan of John Reid's waistcoat is more difficult to classify beyond the fact that it is predominately red and black. He is said to be wearing the uniform of Loudoun's 64<sup>th</sup> Regt in which he was Commissioned in 1745. These two portraits lead to claims that Officers at least wore a red tartan although it's by no means certain that the two are the



Fig 2. Ensign John Reid c1746 in the  
uniform of the 64<sup>th</sup> (Loudoun's Regt).

<sup>1</sup> HALFORD-MACLEOD R, Unpublished research on Lord Loudoun's Papers at the Huntington Library, California.

<sup>2</sup> HALFORD-MACLEOD R, 1984 *The Proceedings of the Scottish Tartans Society*. Series 3, No.1

same tartan. Whilst there's no evidence to support the universal wearing of a red tartan it's important to understand that at that time Officers purchased their own clothes and there was often a certain level of individuality tolerated by the military establishment. The claims that the Regiment wore a red tartan might have persisted but for the chance discovery of a letter that contained a sample of what I will describe as the Green tartan in order to differentiate it from the red ones in the two portraits described above.

### The Green Tartan

In early Sep 1746 Lord Loudoun was still in Scotland following his Regiment's actions on the Government's side against the Jacobites. Whilst there he received a letter dated 28 Aug 1746 from James Seton an Edinburgh merchant who supplied most of the Regiment's clothing. Not only does the letter survive but so too do the two samples mentioned by Seton in his quote:

Sergt<sup>s</sup> plaid to the patren enclosed @ 2/ p y<sup>d</sup>  
 Sergt<sup>s</sup> Hof<sup>s</sup><sup>3</sup> - - - - - 1/9  
 Private Mens Plaids - - - - @ 1/2 2/3  
 Ditto Hof<sup>s</sup> - - - - - @ 11 1/2 } p y<sup>d</sup>

He concludes by writing that '*What quantity of the above is wanted will be ready in two months, your Lordship paying the above prices immediately upon Delivery at Edin.*'

So, from the quote and the sample<sup>4</sup> we know that in 1746 Loudoun was about to purchase new plaids for the soldiers of the Regiment in a dark blue, green and black tartan (Fig 3). The fact that there is no mention in the letter of it being a new patren (pattern) suggests that these were replacement plaids for the initial issue ones in early 1745. The quote also shows that the Sergt<sup>s</sup> and Private wore a different quality of cloth. Although they would have had to comply with the overall uniform, Officers purchased their own clothes which is why they are not quoted for.



Fig 3. Sample of cloth for Sergt<sup>s</sup> Plaids sent to Lord Loudoun Aug 1746.

Quite unlike the red tartans in the portraits, this sample is similar to the type of pattern widely adopted for military tartans in the late 18<sup>th</sup> century. The sample has some interesting features: the colours are from natural dyes but the shades are dark which belies the common belief that today's commercial *Old or Ancient Colours* represent the original natural dyes that were lighter than so-called *Modern Colours*.

<sup>3</sup> The 'fs' in *Hofs* is an example of the old method of writing a double 's'. Hoss is an old spelling of hose (socks/stockings). The sample in the letter is a simple red and white dice of approximately 1".

<sup>4</sup> The sample is approximately 5" x 6".

A particularly striking feature of the tartan is the selvedge. The use of a herringbone selvedge was a common feature of many 18<sup>th</sup> century Highland plaids but this is the only example I've ever encountered of a chevron design. Both techniques require the section of warp to be threaded differently to the rest of the plaid and whilst both look superficially similar, a chevron is a true zigzag formed by the direction reversing at the point of the change whereas in a herringbone (confusingly sometimes called a broken chevron) a thread jumps one place when the direction changes. It's impossible to know whether the threading in this sample was by design or error but the overall strengthening effect on the selvedge would have been similar.

Finally, there is the oblong appearance of the blue, green and black blocks. Examination of the warp and weft reveals that each block has about  $\frac{2}{3}$  the number of thread in the weft compared with the warp. The difference is found throughout the sample meaning that it must have been done deliberately as it would have been possible to square the colours by weaving either to threadcount or by eye. I cannot explain why this should have been woven this way but elongated setting are not uncommon in the early 18<sup>th</sup> century specimens.

Based on the sample Jamie Scarlett<sup>5</sup> speculated that the sett (Fig 4) was a variant of what he believed to be the generic early military sett of alternating blue and green grounds.



Whilst the letter represented an incredibly important historical find it unfortunately didn't completely answer the question of what tartan the Regiment wore. Clearly the tartan was a blue, black and green based sett but the sample is too small to show the pattern fully. The colour strips below show the warp and weft sections of the specimen. They don't fully match and the selvedge technique lead to a misunderstanding by some researchers who assume two red lines in the sett whereas the one at the selvedge is merely decorative and should be ignored.

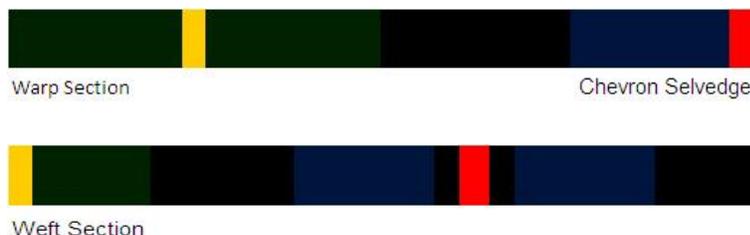


Fig 4. Reconstruction of the Loudoun's tartan by Scarlett.

If the decorative red line at the selvedge is omitted from the setting, and the two original strips overlaid, then the result is the small section left that shows just over a half repeat of Scarlett's reconstruction below.



However, we cannot know if the sample showed the full repeat. The purpose of including it in the letter would have been to show the quality and overall colours but there are other possible

<sup>5</sup> SCARLETT J.S. 1990 *TARTAN The Highland Textile*. Shepherd-Walwyn., London



## Conclusion

Lord Loudoun's Highlanders, the 64<sup>th</sup> of Foot, was only the second Line regiment to be raised amongst the Highland clans and although only short lived (1745-8) we know considerably more about their dress than their slightly earlier contemporaries, the Black Watch. The survival of a number of letters to John Campbell offers an incredibly valuable historical insight into the clothing of an early Highland regiment. The survival of an original piece of tartan is invaluable. It is in fact the oldest known piece of military tartan by some 40 years and the only such piece to survive from the Culloden era.

We don't know where the cloth was woven but from other correspondence James Seton shows that he searched widely across the country in the hunt for raw materials and given the requirement to weave up to 10,000 yards for the regiment's new plaid it's likely that he'd have had to put the weaving out to more than one group of weavers. They would have followed the basic instructions for the pattern but it's inconceivable that there would not have been variations in dye lots and perhaps such things as the selvedge technique, hence perhaps the unusual chevron one in the sample submitted to Loudoun.

It's important to appreciate that any reconstruction of a sett based on an incomplete specimen will always be open to different interpretations. Scarlett's simple alternating Blue/Green ground one is one possibility but I would argue that as it's based on the premise of a generic setting that is not supported by any firm evidence it's at best speculative. My alternative setting is also an extrapolated from the sample in Seton's letter of 1746 but influenced by the fact that it was for Plaids, that the Government sett was originally a plaid setting, and that similar tartans were used by other regiments (including 77<sup>th</sup>, 78<sup>th</sup> and the Baillie Fencibles) some years later.

On the balance of probabilities I believe that larger setting has a stronger claim to be the correct setting of the Regiment's tartan but one can never be certain and further research may provide further evidence that will resolve the question conclusively.