

LORD GEORGE MURRAY

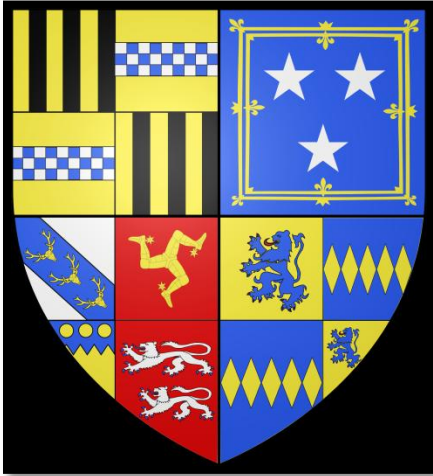
- In Arms against the Government in 1715
- Joins the Pretender in 1745
- His Character as a Military Officer
- His Conduct at the Battles of Preston, Falkirk, and Culloden
- Escapes to the Continent
- His Death

This nobleman, whom we have seen playing so conspicuous a part in the annals of 1745, was the fifth son of John, first Duke of Athol. In 1715, he had taken up arms against the government, serving as colonel under his elder brother, the Marquis of Tullibardine. He was present at the fight of Glenshiel, in 1719, shortly after which period he entered the military service of the King of Sardinia, in which he served for some years. Having at length received his pardon from the government, he returned to Scotland, where he married, in 1727, Amelia, daughter and heiress of James Murray of Strowen and Glencarse, by whom he was the father of five children, of whom the eldest, John, subsequently succeeded as third Duke of Athol.

From the period of his marriage till the raising of the chevalier's standard in the Highlands, [Lord George Murray](#) continued to live quietly on his own property in Scotland. Faithful, however, to the principles for which he had fought in his youth, on the 5th of September, 1745, he joined the standard of Charles at Perth with a large body of the vassals of his brother, the Duke of Athol, and immediately afterward had the compliment paid him of being appointed lieutenant-general of the insurgent army. His appearance in the Highland camp was hailed with the greatest satisfaction, and the happiest results were anticipated from his military experience and well-known personal intrepidity. "Lord George Murray," says the Chevalier de Johnstone, "possessed a natural genius for military operations, and was a man of surprising talents; which, had they been cultivated by the study of military tactics, would unquestionably have rendered him one of the greatest generals of his age. He was tall and robust, and brave in the highest degree; conducting the Highlanders in the most heroic manner, and always the first to rush, sword in hand, into the midst of the enemy. He used to say, when we advanced to the charge: "I do not ask you, my lads, to go before, but merely to follow me." He slept little, was continually occupied with all manner of details, and was, altogether, most indefatigable, combining and directing alone all our operations; in a word, he was the only person capable of conducting our army. He was vigilant, active, and diligent; his plans were always



judiciously formed, and he carried them promptly and vigorously into execution. However, with an infinity of good qualities, he was not without his defects. Proud,



haughty, blunt, and imperious, he wished to have the exclusive ordering of everything, and, feeling his superiority, he would listen to no advice. Still, it must be owned that he had no coadjutor capable of advising him, and his having so completely the confidence of his soldiers enabled him to perform wonders. He possessed the art of employing men to advantage, without having had time to discipline them; but, taking them merely as they came from the plough, he made them

defeat some of the best disciplined troops in the world. Nature had formed him for a great warrior; he did not require the accidental advantage of birth.”

The high hopes which were formed of Lord George Murray by his friends were fully borne out by the skill and gallantry which he subsequently displayed at the battle of Preston, where he signally defeated Sir John Cope at the head of a regular army and a superior force. In the retreat from Derby, Lord George took upon himself the difficult and dangerous post of commanding the rear, in which he was constantly harassed for several days by the enemy’s cavalry, till he finally succeeded in repulsing them at Clifton. When the moment arrived for attacking them, Lord George drew his broadsword, and exclaiming, “Claymore!” rushed forward at the head of the Macphersons. Between him and the enemy lay a thick hedge, in dashing through which he lost his bonnet and wig, and was compelled to fight bareheaded during the remainder of the fray. So well conducted was the whole affair, and so impetuous was the onset, that the Duke of Cumberland very nearly fell into the hands of the Highlanders, and subsequently had a still narrower escape with his life. “The duke’s footman declared,” says the Chevalier de Johnstone, “that his master would have been killed, if the pistol, with which a Highlander took aim at his head, had not missed fire.” At the battle of Falkirk, which was fought the next month, and where the insurgents were again completely successful, Lord George displayed his usual skill and intrepidity, fighting at the head of the Macdonalds of Keppoch, with his drawn sword in his hand, and his Highland target on his arm.

On the eve of the battle of Culloden, Lord George Murray advocated and commanded the famous night march to Nairn, which, it will be remembered, was undertaken for the purpose of surprising the English in their camp. That the enterprise failed as it did, was certainly attributable to no fault of Lord George. The Highlanders, it will be recollected, were greatly harassed and dispirited by

the privations and fatigue to which they had recently been exposed, while the unusual darkness of the night impeded and embarrassed them in their march, so that, when the hour arrived which had been fixed upon for the attack, they were still within four miles of the English camp. Under these circumstances,—the daylight already beginning to glimmer, and the roll of the enemy's drums announcing that they were on the alert,—Lord George issued the order for retreat.

For having taken this step, which it was asserted was in positive disobedience of orders, Lord George was accused of treachery by his enemies, and, moreover, rendered himself, most undeservedly, an object of suspicion to Charles, whose mind was already sufficiently prepared to receive any unfavourable impression in regard to the conduct of his faithful general. Lord George, indeed, by the waywardness of his temper, and his cold and unconciliating manners, had contrived to make many enemies in the Highland camp, who accordingly missed no opportunity of infecting the prince with their individual prejudices and dislikes. Whatever cause of offence, however, he may have given to these persons, it is certain that in his public capacity his conduct was unimpeachable; that he served his young master to the last with unvarying zeal and fidelity; and that, more especially as regards the retreat from Nairn, the act was not only that of a prudent general, but one which existing circumstances rendered imperatively necessary. Lord George subsequently drew up a paper in vindication of his conduct on this occasion. Charles, too, at a later period, entirely exculpated his faithful companion-in-arms; and though his account of what took place differs in some particulars from that of Lord George, it is nevertheless much to the prince's credit that he acquitted Lord George even more fully than Lord George in his own account acquits himself.

At the battle of Culloden, Lord George Murray headed the right wing of the insurgent army, consisting of the Camerons, the Stuarts, and other clans. During the action, he displayed his usual decision and intrepidity, dashing forward at the head of his gallant Highlanders with the same heroic energy which had distinguished him in more successful fights. At the close of that eventful day, his sole wish appears to have been to expire on the plains of Culloden, for, being thrown from his horse severely wounded; he refused to quit the field of battle, and was only removed to a place of safety by the kind force used by his devoted followers. However, he soon recovered his wonted energy, and by his unceasing efforts to retrieve the past misfortune, and by the spirit which he infused into all around him, he soon found himself at the head of a small army at Ruthven, consisting of the fugitives from Culloden, and amounting to about twelve hundred men. At the head of this gallant band, he still proposed to carry on the war in the Highlands; but already the Duke of Cumberland was approaching with his victorious army; supplies of all kinds were procured only with the greatest

difficulty; and, finally, a message was received from Charles, cordially thanking his adherents for the zeal which they had displayed in his cause, but



recommending that each should secure his safety as he best might. It was then that Lord George took a last farewell of that devoted band; many of whom were destined, like himself, to pine as exiles in a foreign land; many to wander, proscribed fugitives, among their native fastnesses, and to behold the ruin of their families and the conflagration of their homes; and others—who were perhaps the most to be envied—to expiate their imprudence and their gallantry on the scaffold.

Lord George affected his escape to the Continent, where he resided for some time both in France and Italy. He subsequently retired to North Holland, where he assumed the name of De Valignié, and where he died on the 11th of October, 1760.

May it please your Royal Highness,—As no person in these kingdoms ventured more franckly in the cause than myself and as I had more at stake than all the others put together, so to be sure I cannot but be very deeply affected with our late loss and present situation, but I declare that were your R.H. person in safety, the loss of the cause and the misfortunate and unhappy situation of my countrymen is the only thing that grieves me, for I thank god, I have resolution to bear my own and family ruine without a grudge.

Sr, you will I hope upon this occasion pardon me if I mention a few truths which all the Gentlemen of our army seem convinced of.

It was highly wrong to have set up the royal standard without having positive assurance from his most Christian majesty that he would assist you with all his force, and as your royal family lost the crown of these realms upon the account of France, The world did and had reason to expect that France would seize the first favourable opportunity to restore your August family.

I must also acquaint your R.H. that we were all fully convinced that Mr O'Sullivan whom your R.H. trusted with the most essential things with regard to your operations was exceedingly unfit for it and committed gross blunders on every occasion of moment: He whose business it was, did not so much as visit the ground where we were drawn up in line of Battle, and it was a fatal error yesterday to allow the enemy those walls upon their left which made it impossible for us to break them, and they with their front fire and flanking us when we went upon the attack destroyed us without any possibility of our breaking them, and our Atholl men lost a full half of their officers and men. I wish Mr O'Sullivan had never got any other charge in the Army than care of the Bagage which I have been told he has been brought up to and understood. I never saw him in time of Action neither at Gladsmuir, Falkirk nor in the last, and his orders were vastly confused.

The want of provisions was another misfortune which had the most fatal consequence. Mr Hay whom Y.R.H. trusted with the principal direction of



ordering provisions of late and without whose orders a boll of meal or forthing of monie was not to be delivered, has served Y.R.H. egregiously ill, when I spoke to him, he told me, the thing is ordered, it will be got etc. but he neglected his duty to such a degree that our ruin might probably been prevented had he done his duty: in short the last three days which were critical our army starved. This was the reason our night march was rendered abortive when we possibly might have surprised and defeat the enemy at Nairn, but for want of provisions a third of the army scattered to Inverness he and the others who marched had not the spirits to make it quick as was necessary being faint for want of provisions.

The next day, which was the fatal day, if we had got plenty of provisions, we might have crossed the water of Nairn and drawn up so advantageously that we would have obliged the enemy to come to us, for they were resolved to fight at all hazards, at prodigious disadvantage, and probably we would in that case have done by them as they unhappily have done by us.

In short Mr O'Sullivan and Mr hay had rendered themselves odious to all our army and had disgusted them to such a degree that they had bred a mutiny in all ranks that had the battle (not) come on they were to have represented their grievance to Y.R.H. for a remedy. For my own part I never had any particular discussion with either of them, but I ever thought them incapable and unfit to serve in the stations they were placed in.

Y.R.H. knows I always told I had no design to continue in the army: I would of late when I came last from Atholl have resigned my commission, but all my friends told me it might be of prejudice to the cause at such a critical time. I hope your R.H. will now accept my demission. What commands you have for me in any other situation please honour me with them.

I am with great zeal, Sr, Your R.H. most dutifull and humble servant,

GEORGE MURRAY
Ruthven 17th April 1746

At Medemblik, October 10th 1760, Lady Murray wrote to her son James (the future Duke of Atholl): “Dear Son,....My dearest friend was not at all well Thursday night last....God pity me, I have small hopes”. Another letter, October 12th says: “Your father turned worse and worse, and at four o’clock of the 11th in the morning it pleased God to take him....God only knows my sad and afflicted heart, and disconsolate situation in the loss of so kind and affectionate and inestimable Friend and Husband, but I shall not insist upon this so deeply affecting subject.....my dearest and best life is to be interred in the Church here upon Tuesday, at which will be present some of his acquaintances of Amsterdam, and all the people of any fashion in this place, of whom he was much regarded while living by those who knew him, and now extremely regretted that he is no more”.

”Bonifaciuskerk” in Medemblik, Holland



St. Boniface Church, [26 Overtoom, Medemblik, Netherlands](#)

The grave of Lord Murray



Against the west wall, in the south aisle, there is the beautifully ornamented gravestone of Lord George Murray.

This Scottish nobleman, fifth son of the Duke of Athole, ended up in Medemblik after many journeys. He died here in 1760 and was buried in the choir of the church. When the church was scaled down in size in the 19th century his grave was then positioned outside the church. This place is now covered with a simple stone. The original gravestone was placed inside the church; initially in the north aisle. After the

renovation in 1991-1993 it was moved to the present location. Above the gravestone hangs the lozenge shaped escutcheon of the Dukes of Athole, divided in sixteen quarters and with the aphorism "Tout prest". The text at one of the quarters reads "Prince d'Orange": the great-grandmother of George Murray was Charlotte de la Trémouille, a daughter of Prince William of Orange and Charlotte de Bourbon.

