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*The*  
**GUN  
REPORT**

**Scottish Highlanders**

By J. Garnand Hamilton

DECEMBER  
1959



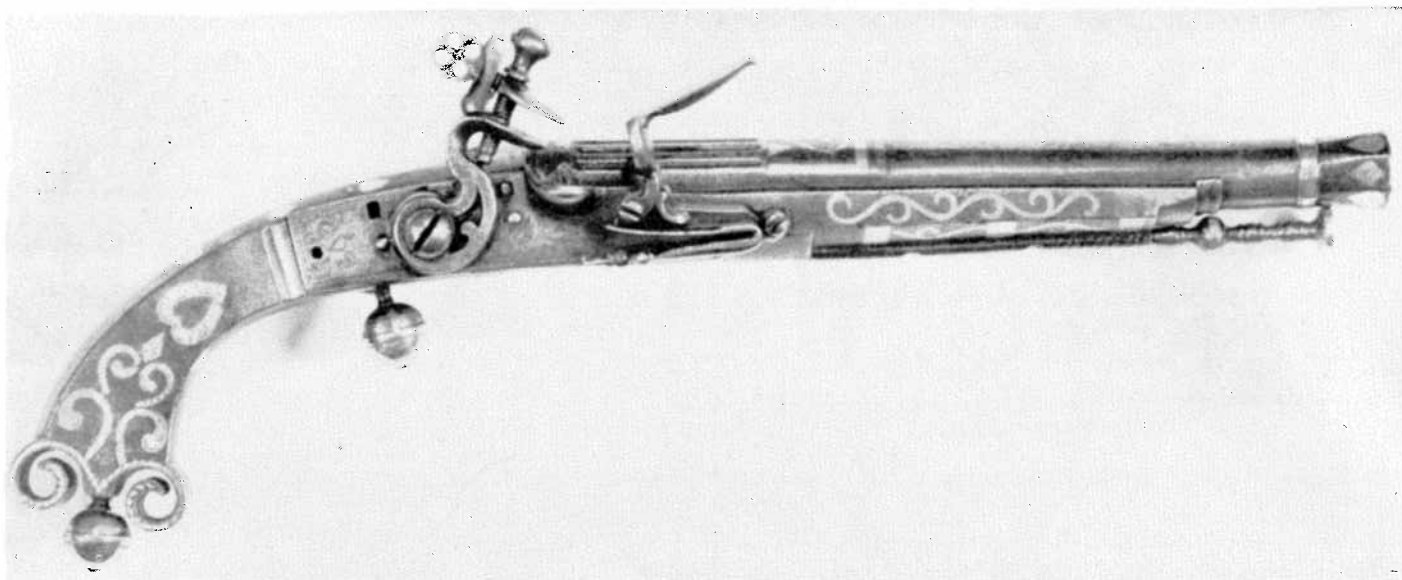


PLATE 1

Early Type Highlander converted from a dog lock, circa 1695. This gun is pictured on the cover.

# Scottish Highlanders

By J. GARNAND HAMILTON

The Scottish Highlander pistol is a distinct and unique type of firearm. The origin and much of the early history relating to the development of this firearm is shrouded in the misty haze of the past. However, there seems little doubt that it was developed by the clans that inhabited the highlands of Scotland. The clans were groups of people with the same name and similiar family backgrounds and often descended from common ancestors. The division of the highland society was not one based upon wealth, but rather it was divided according to family names. The society was divided into groups of people who were known as the MacLeods, MacKinnons, MacDonalds, Campbells, etc. Each clan recognized one of its members as the "Laird" or "Chieftan" of the group. The Laird was in essence the leader of the clan and acted as an advisor, administrator of justice etc. Like chieftans among the American Indians, the Scottish Laird sought to set himself apart from others in the group by fancy dress and by adorning himself with fine weapons. It was the demand of the Lairds for fine and showy weapons, which led to the development of the Highlander Pistol.

The manufacture of firearms in Scotland, according to the best authority, dates from the 16th century. It is doubtful if any wheellock weapons were produced in Scotland; it seems

likely that the earliest weapons were of the snaphaunce type. There is strong evidence to support this contention since the earliest weapons show a definite Moorish influence. This influence is particularly noticeable in the construction of the locks, the fancy ornamentation and graceful double scroll design of the pistol butts. However, the first pistols produced in Scotland were not of the all-metal type which we recognize today as the Highlander. They were long slender weapons with straight stocks similiar to the early wheellock pistols produced in Italy. The evolution of Scottish

weapons proceeded from the snaphaunce to the dog lock.

The dog lock was just a step away from the true flintlock. It was made with an external catch or dog located directly behind the hammer. When the hammer was in the half cock position the dog engaged a spur or notch in the back of the hammer and held it in this position. The Scotch dog lock was in use for only a short period of time and Scottish specimens are very rare. The dog lock in turn gave way to another unique device, an internal half cock catch which pierced the lock plate

Plate 2 shows the left side and the belt hook, while Plate 3 shows the bottom view of the pistol and the silver cross.

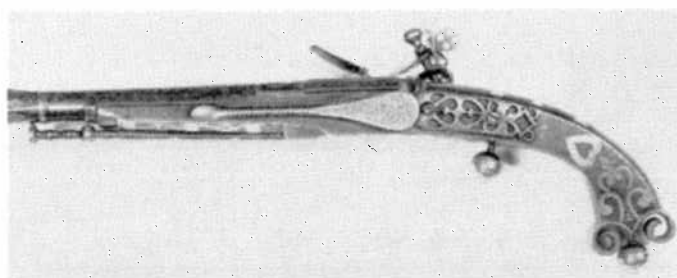


PLATE 2

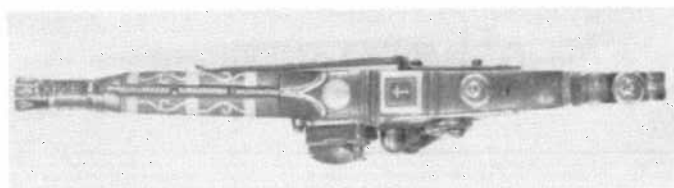
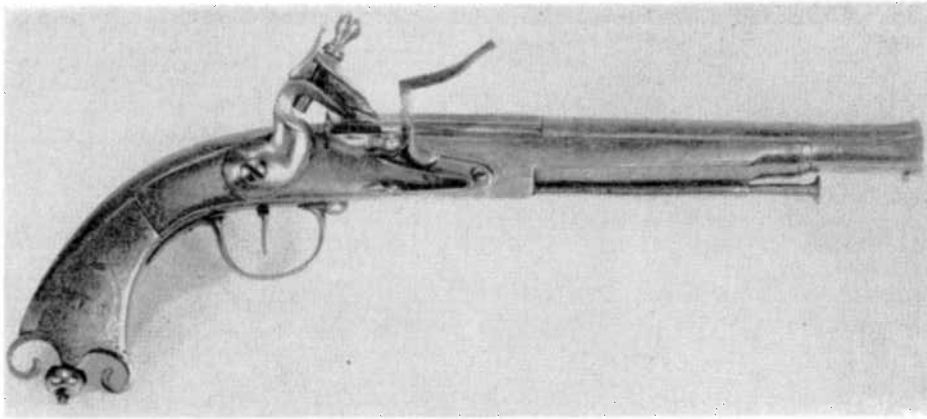


PLATE 3



**PLATE 4**

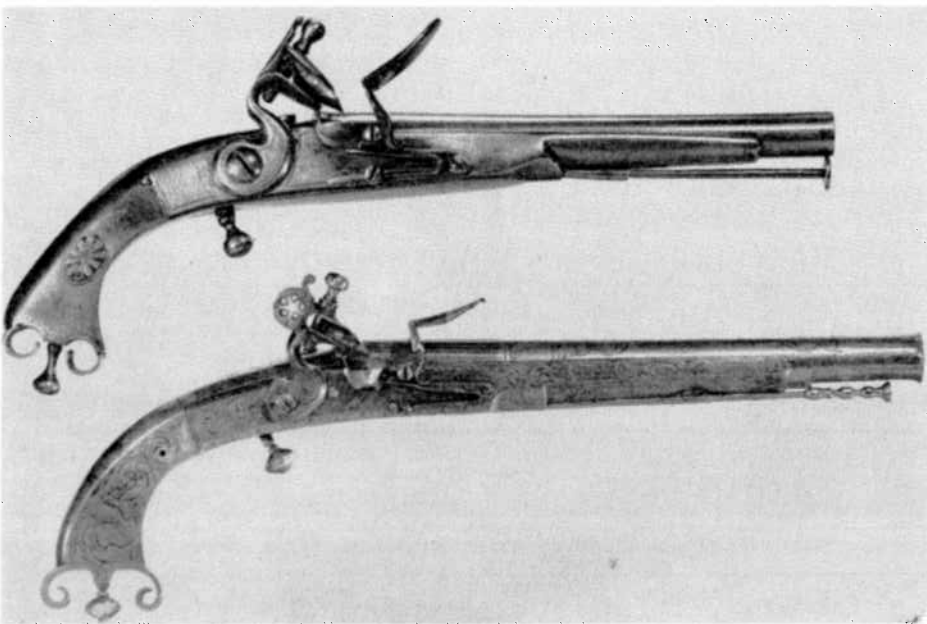
**Transition Type Highlander with brass barrel, by D. Walker, circa 1790.**

and held the hammer in the half cock position. This particular mechanism is found on many Highlander pistols, particularly those made before 1800. The trend to encase the wood on the pistols in metal began about 1650 and continued until 1700, at which date the all-metal Highlander with the double scroll or ramshorn butt came into existence.

The Scotch Hammermen were skilled in the art of metal working and it was only natural that they employ this skill in the manufacture of firearms. Highlander pistols were produced mostly of steel but occasionally brass, copper and bronze was used. In rare instances a combination of metals was used including some gold and silver. The decoration applied to the pistols varied according to the ability of the maker and the taste and means of the purchaser. The pistols being of all metal construction, the hardness of the metal necessarily limited the type and amount of ornamentation applied. This was overcome to some extent by the more skilled makers who inlaid the metal with silver, bronze and copper.

The inlays were often finely engraved, the softer metals lending themselves to this type of ornamentation. The design of the inlays varies with the products of the different makers but for the most part consists of fine scroll designs, rosettes and plain or ribbed silver bands. Silver plaques were inlaid in the grip on each side on the more expensive weapons. The plaques were in turn engraved or embellished with the crest of the owner, a motto or emblem of a particular Scotch society or order. Some few very fine pistols were inlaid with gold but these are the exception rather than the rule. The metal was usually finished bright but upon occasion was blued.

The Highlander pistols are noted for the grace of their lines and balance of construction, rather than for their shooting qualities. M. Georges Stalin, a Frenchman, in his book "Le Pistolet Ecossois" was among the first to comment on the ability of the Scottish makers. He described the Highlander as "a little masterpiece of precision and good taste—leaving nothing to be desired on the scores of balance, form and decoration".



**PLATE 5**

**Top—Bissel Royal Highlander Regiment pistol circa 1760.  
Bottom—Typical Highlander by Ja. Michie. (Ray Althausser Collection).**

The distinguishing features of the Highlander, other than grace of line and proportion, are the silver button triggers, the ball shaped vent picker placed between the double scrolls in the butt, the sear which pierces the lockplate to hold the hammer on half cock or safety, the fretted and ornate base plate of the belt hook, the cannon shaped barrels and the all-metal construction of the pistols. The pistols were frequently made in pairs and until the 17th century were often equipped with right and left hand locks.

It should be mentioned that not all Highlanders were made with the characteristic double scroll or ramshorn butt. T. Murdoch made pistols with lemon-shaped butts. Pistols made by Jas. Christie have graceful rounding butts and the very early and rare pieces are found with the deer-heart shaped butts.

The village of Doune in Perthshire was the early center for the fabrication of Highlander pistols. Stirling, Perth, Edinburg and Dundee were other centers of manufacture of Highlander pistols. In these centers the masters such as Caddell, Campbell, Murdoch and Christie worked. These men were masters of their trade as evidenced by the examples of their work which survive today. They were noted for their fine scroll work, engraving, inlay and chiseling with which they embellished their work. They were more than craftsmen, they were artists in the true sense of the word.

The Scottish Highlander pistols have a rich background of romance and history. Rob Roy, the famous outlaw, is said to have owned a very fine pair. The Scottish Lairds or Chieftans possessed them, army officers cherished them. They were highly prized by the nobility both in England and on the Continent. They are important in American history as they were carried and used by both English and American officers in Colonial times and during the Revolutionary War.

Major Pitcairn, on April 19, 1775, fired the first shot of the American Revolution from a Scottish Highlander. On that memorable day Major Pitcairn carried a fine and beautiful pair of Highlanders in his saddle holsters. Later during the battle he was wounded, his horse bolted and ran into the American lines and the pistols fell into the hands of the Americans. Thereafter, the pistols were carried by General Putnam during the war.

The pistol in plate 1 is a very early and unusual type of Highlander. It was originally equipped with a dog lock and later converted to flintlock. It is a long graceful weapon beautifully inlaid with silver and bronze. The inlay is delicately engraved with floral and scroll designs. Even the all metal ramrod is inlaid with silver. The reverse side of this fine pistol is illustrated in plate 2, and here can

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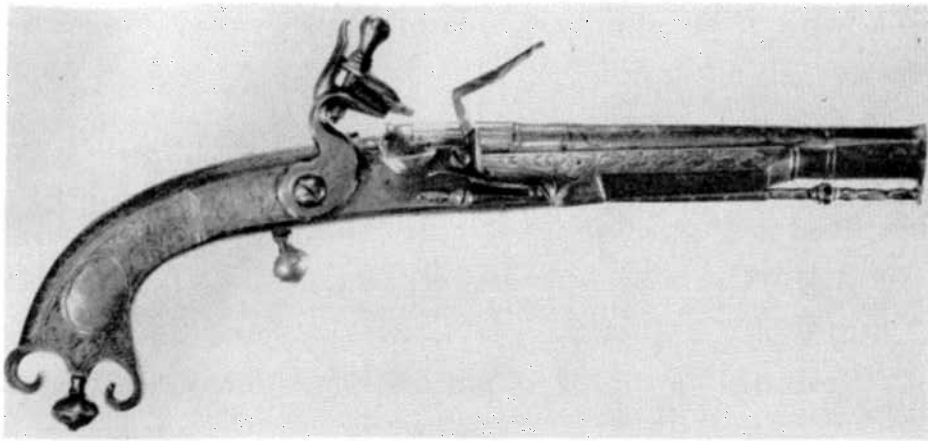


PLATE 6

Alexander Campbell Flintlock. (J. E. Hamilton Collection).

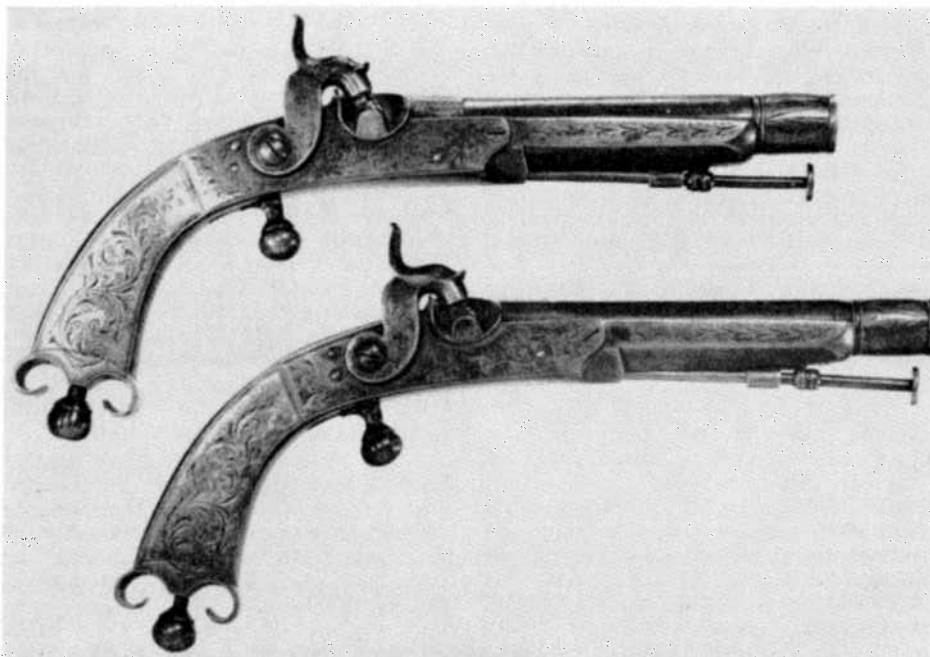


PLATE 7

A pair of percussion Highlanders, circa 1835.

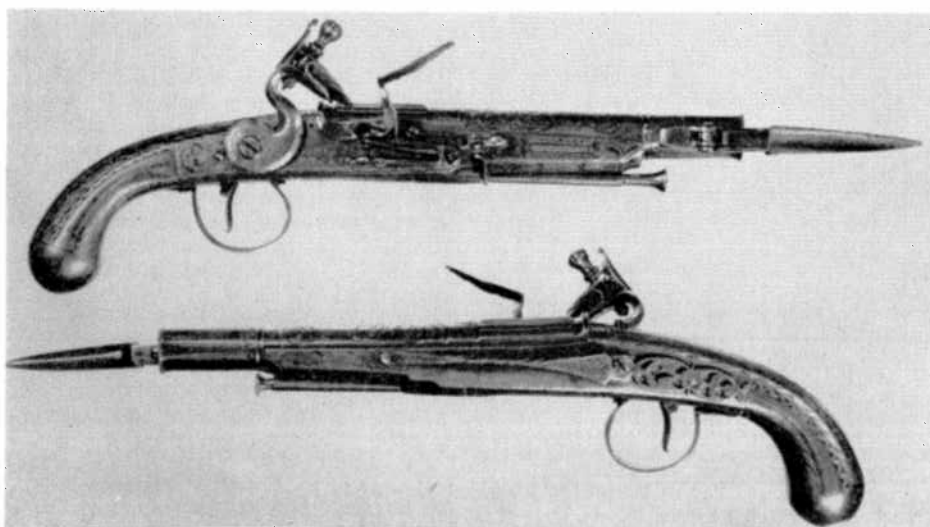


PLATE 8

This pair is by James Christie, of Perth. (George L. Deal Collection).

be seen the long graceful belt hook with its fine fretted base. Plate 3 shows a bottom view of the same gun and here can be seen a silver cross in a silver and bronze frame.

The pistol is 14 inches long and equipped with an 8 3/4 inch barrel. It was probably made during the latter part of the 16th, century.

The pistol shown in Plate 4 is a scarce transition type Highlander by D. Walker. This pistol is equipped with all of the characteristic features of the Highlander except the ball trigger. It is 13 inches long and is equipped with an 8 1/2 inch barrel. The barrel is made of heavy brass and beautifully engraved with floral designs. The remainder of the pistol is inlaid with silver and finely engraved in true Scottish style. Like all Highlanders it is equipped with a long belt hook with a fine fretted base. The caliber is .58. It was probably made about 1790.

Two pistols are shown in Plate 5, the top piece being a military model made by Bissel, and the bottom piece a typical Highlander by Michie. The pistol by Bissel carries the Birmingham proof marks and is marked on top of the barrel "R.H.R." for Royal Highlander Regiment. It was probably made in Birmingham about 1760. The J. A. Michie pistol is a beautiful example of high class Scottish workmanship. The metal is finely engraved over the entire surface with intricate scroll and floral designs. The hammer is of the rare type known as the Star Hammer. It is equipped with a long graceful belt hook.

Shown in Plate 6 is a fine Scottish pistol by the famed Alexander Campbell. This pistol is particularly sturdy and well made. The metal is very finely engraved and inlaid with silver in intricate designs. The belt hook is finely engraved and equipped with a most intricate and delicate fretted base. Each side of the rather broad butt is inlaid with a fine silver plaque. The pistol is 12 1/2 inches long and equipped with a 7-inch barrel. The caliber is .52.

Plate 7 is a fine pair of percussion pistols made about 1835. The pistols are of all-metal construction with the typical ball trigger, vent picker and ramshorn butt. There is no inlay on these pistols but they are very finely engraved with floral and scroll designs.

The pair of pistols by Christie of Perth, shown in Plate 8, are most rare and unusual. The pistols are 10 1/2 inches long, caliber .52, the unusual feature being the spring daggers. The pistols are finely engraved and equipped with graceful belt hooks. The lock plates are marked "J. Christie—Perth."

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS:

I wish to thank Mr. George L. Deal of Canton, Ohio and Mr. Ray Althausser of Massillon, Ohio for the use of their guns in illustrating this article. Also, to Mr. Herbert Sherlock of North Canton, Ohio for the drawings. Photography by Forrest Phelps of Canton, Ohio.