

## Battle of Flodden (1513)

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### Flodden Field; Friday September 9th 1513.

#### Strategies of the Border Pike and Border Lance Divisions.

The battle commenced with an artillery duel, although the Scots who were drawn up on Branxton Hill were unable to depress their cannon enough to inflict serious casualties on the English. The English artillery had no such disadvantage as they were firing uphill and inflicted substantial casualties on the massed Scottish ranks. On James IV's left flank The Border Pikes under Lord Home, unable to endure the cannonade any longer, broke ranks and charged the English right wing, commanded by Edmund Howard. Howard's forces were outnumbered in this attack by three to one and totally unnerved by the attacking Pikes of Home, panicked and ran, leaving Howard with a few loyal men standing their ground. Howard put up a desperate but losing fight and although his standard bearer was dead and he had been downed three times, he managed to regain his feet each time and continue his struggle. Just as Home's Pikes were about to charge him yet again, no doubt with a borderers eye to the ransom, 1,500 of Lord Dacres Border Lances (made up of his men from Gilsland and therefore Bell's of Farlam), charged the Scottish flank and held them. Then a handpicked band of Border Reivers under the outlaw "Bastard" John Heron (note bastard referred to a comparison with the calibre of a large cannon) hacked their way through the Scots around Howard and freed him. Heron's reivers "making even work before them" cut their way through the Scots towards the English ranks; on the way they were confronted by a party of Scots lead by the young Sir David Home, who was cut down and killed by Howard.

Meanwhile the main forces of Home and Dacre were locked together and James IV, thinking that the battle was nearly won, left his headquarters and lead his army from the front rank into the battle down below, perhaps seeking the glory of leading his men to victory. Just before the two main armies joined battle, Home and Dacre withdrew their forces from the field and watched each other cautiously from opposite sides of the battle. Being Borderers, they were later accused of limiting their casualties by means of a tacit agreement, although both hotly denied it. Home had initiated the Scottish onslaught on the English and would nearly have brought about their defeat single handedly, but for the intervention of Dacre and in the process lost his son and several close relatives. Dacre lost 160 of his Border Lances to the Border Pikes of Home, but he had broken Home's initial and most dangerous Scottish charge. King James fighting on foot almost cut through to the English Commander in Chief, Earl Surrey's standard, but both his wings were being cut down by the English billmen and the Scots were hemmed in. Dacre seeing that victory was nearly assured took his Border Lances around the back of the Scottish army, completing their entrapment and began cutting the Scots down. with the result that King James IV was killed and the Scottish army routed. Flodden Field cost Scotland her King, 10,000 men and the flower of her nobility in her greatest military defeat. The English gained Border security and exacted a terrible revenge for Bannockburn.

## Aftermath of the Battle:

Lord Home was never forgiven for his "desertion" and the consequent death of King James IV; As the battle had drawn on, Home watched as the English continued their destruction of the Scottish ranks, until it was obvious that "all was defeat"; He was pressed to go James's aid, but shrewdly remarked that "He does well that does for himself, we have fought our vanguard already, let others do as well as we". Home's actions were rewarded by his eventual execution for treason three years later by Lord Albany the Governor.

The records note that the Border Reivers had a busy day pillaging the English camp in Teviotdale, taking tents, horses and baggage: "The Borderours did full ill and be falsar than the Scottes and have doun more harm at this tyme to our foulkes than the Scottes dyd..... thay nevir lyghtyd from their horses, but when the bataylis was joynyd, they felle to ryfelyng and robberyng aswelle on our syde as the Scottes" It was obvious to the Bishop of Durham, that the Borderers were more concerned with their own welfare than the national interest, At the same time it is doubtful if the English would have won without their Dacre Lances. It is interesting that military strategists regard this battle as the first major engagement to show that the dominance of longbowmen divisions was ending. Flodden Field was a good example of battles beginning to be won in the armourers workshops; The Scottish pike which had proved so effective at Bannockburn was out-fought by the sharper English bill which had a cleaving edge for close quarter work and could kill or disable at a stroke; It's main advantage at Flodden was cutting the Scots long pikes at the head, thus rendering them ineffective with no more use than prodding poles. The close quarter battle allowed by this type of weapon along with more accurate cannon obviated the need for the longbowmen's devastating volleys of arrows.

Thanks to [James Bell](#) for providing this account.

Information from Electric Scotland