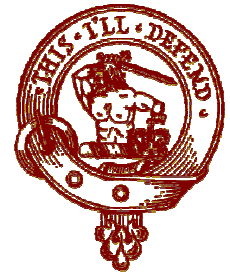


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The Scots in Wartime

(A wee look at Scottish regiments)



The 93rd Sutherland Highlanders ('The Thin Red Line') at Balaklava

Original in Stirling Castle

Until the end of World War 2, a private soldier in the British Army was paid little more than a shilling per day plus keep, for which he was expected under oath to serve his king and country to the extent of laying down his very life. Successive British governments greedily exploited the loyalty of thousands of ordinary men (and more recently women) who volunteered their lives to join the ranks - and when actual volunteers were seen as insufficient for the needs of Whitehall, thousands more were 'legally' pressed into service to defend and uphold British vested interests at home and overseas.

Since the Union of the Crowns, 1603, Scotland also provided -- possibly more than -- its fair share of what came to be described as 'human cannon fodder', all in the greater interest of an ever-expanding British Empire which came to dominate vast areas of the globe and which were often depicted coloured pink on most world maps!

In this issue we are proud to present a brief look at how Scottish soldiers have been depicted through the ages, giving some insight into the more than worthy contribution the Scottish nation has given to the steady development of what we call modern human society across the world. Even in these so-called enlightened times, many Scots and their descendants still rally to the Colours and battalions in countries worldwide. (Next Page).

The Scots in Wartime

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Part One

As a nation, the Scots have a long military history; often described as a warrior race or, more quaintly *'Bonny Fechtors'*! Our history shows that several Scottish regiments have in the past served many of the crown heads in Europe, and it has even been suggested that Scottish archers fought in the Crusades.

As early as 1417 we find Scots acting as bodyguards to French kings, and frequently in the front line of their armies. Indeed, Henry V of England, during his long campaigning in France often remarked: *'I cannot go anywhere without being bearded by Scotsmen!'* He even ordered that no Scottish prisoners were to be taken and that all lives should be spared *'except out of Wales and Scotland.'*

Scots were regarded as citizens in France and were exempt from paying taxes; a situation which greatly annoyed French troops, who resented the special treatment enjoyed by the Jocks – whom they described as *'wine bags and mutton eaters!'*

During the Thirty Years' War in Europe, King Gustavus Adolphus of Sweden also welcomed Scottish soldiers into his army who then formed the Green Brigade. One of Sweden's great generals was Sir John Hepburn of Athelstaneford, East Lothian, who commanded all the Scottish corps in that army, which also included Mackay's Highlanders and Lumsden's Musketeers.

First of Foot

Sir John was a professional soldier, who earned his knighthood from the grateful Swedish king. He also received a warrant from Britain's Charles I to raise a regiment in Scotland for service in France against Austria and Spain. Most of the Scottish recruits came from the veterans already serving in Europe, and in 1633 his regiment became established as the first foot regiment in the then British Army, better known as The Royal Scots – but originally styled by the French as *'Le Regiment d' Hebron'* (Hepburn's Regiment).

There followed an argument on the question of seniority, and the elite Le Regiment de Picardie claimed descent from the Roman legion present during the Crucifixion. Not to be outdone, the Scots – always renowned for having the last word in any debate – may have countered with: *'Aye! But we were Pontius Pilate's bodyguard that day!'* Whatever the real truth of this claim, The Royal Scots always retained and revered the nickname *'Pontius Pilate's Bodyguard'*!

Conscript warriors

It has often been argued that soldiers have forever been ill-used by politicians and public alike. But it was Oliver Cromwell who taught the British parliament the benefits of maintaining a well-trained, disciplined regular army. Before his time the Crown relied on a haphazard system of recruitment based on the ancient feudal ideals. Apart from the king's personal bodyguards, it was up to the landed gentry to raise armed forces from among their vassals and tenants. The resulting army was more often than not little more than a disorganised mob of mostly very reluctant warriors.

The Royal Scots regiment was conceived and raised during the reign of Charles I (1625-1649) as, indeed, arose another famous corps, later to become the present-day Scots Guards (1642) but the idea of creating a standing army did not materialise until the time of Charles II (1660-1686). It was from this period onwards that we see the arrival of most of the regiments of the British Army. But our concern here is with Scottish soldiers.

Cameronians

By 1700, what have since been described ostensibly as Lowland Scottish regiments, were mustered as follows.

**1633 – 1st or Ye Royal Regiment of Foot
(Royal Scots)**

1642 – 3rd Regiment of Foot (Scots Guards)

**1678 – 21st Regiment of Foot
(Royal Scots Fusiliers)**

**1687 – Royal Regiment of Scots Dragoons
(2nd Dragoons: Scots Greys)**

**1689 – Leven's or the Edinburgh Regiment
(King's Own Scottish Borderers)**

**1689 – Cameronians or 25th Regiment of Foot
(1st Battalion Cameronians: Scottish Rifles)**

The above-named units, along with many equally famous English, Irish and Welsh regiments, have served with distinction in every major conflict in which Britain seemed forever to become involved. We do not here have the scope nor need to list all the hard won honours of Scottish regiments over the years, and to highlight one would be to insult others.

Every regiment had its own unusual story to tell; like the strange case of Christian Davieson, alias *'Mother Ross'*, who served for four years as a trooper in the Scots Greys without her true sex being discovered: she actually received a pension from Queen Anne!

We also hear of the military band of the Scots Guards, which at one time paraded with two black bandsmen dressed in Eastern-style clothes, including turbans with feather plumes. **(Next Page).**

Then there was the tradition among the Bible-carrying Cameronians, as the only regiment allowed to carry arms to a church parade and to post a sentry at each corner outside the church. This dates back to when their Covenanting forebears were persecuted and had to post sentries at their clandestine conventicles among the hills.

The aforementioned Scottish regiments formed the main part of what came to be known as the Lowland Brigade (or Division) until after World War II. However, in 1959, the Royal Scots Fusiliers merged with the Highland Light Infantry (of which later) to become The Royal Highland Fusiliers. Similarly, in 1971, the Royal Scots Greys merged with the 3rd Carabineers (Prince of Wales Dragoon Guards) to become The Royal Scots Dragoon Guards – whose pipers and military bandmen were one-time chart busters on the pop music scene with their version of ‘Amazing Grace’. Sadly, however, the brave wee Cameronians (Scottish Rifles) – being one of the few regiments to stand its ground when confronted by a fierce Highland charge at Killiecrankie – was disbanded.

Highland Regiments

The raising of the Scottish Highland regiments tells some very different stories, which until more recent times were seldom highlighted in Britain’s official history books.

As described earlier, the Lowland regiments came into being during the period between the Union of the Crowns (1603) and the Act of Union (1707). In contrast, Highland regiments were raised after this period and were therefore the product of successive United Kingdom governments in London – and for the most part relate to the Hanoverian regime.

However, as far back as 1667, several armed Independent Companies of Gaelic clansmen had been employed to maintain peace among the warlike clans. These were generally raised out of clans which were known to be loyal to the ruling establishment. Nevertheless, they were soon proved incapable of imposing the rule of law and were finally disbanded in 1717, to be replaced by four garrisons of Lowland or English foot regiments.

Then, in 1725, with the introduction of the first Disarming Act (in the wake of Jacobite activity), and on the advice of General George Wade, six new Highland companies were raised at government expense – again commanded by ‘selected’ Highland chiefs.

These companies came to known among the Gaels as *Am Freiceadan Dubh* (The Black Watch), not so much due to the dark government tartan they wore, but more likely due to their specific duty of keeping a watch on blackmailers (black mealers?), of which the notorious Clan Gregor under the equally

notorious Rob Roy MacGregor may be cited as a prime example.

In 1739 the companies were merged to form the 43rd (Highland) Regiment (later changed to 42nd) thus becoming a regiment of the Line in the British Army. But it appears that little was done to fully acquaint the men as to their new role, and they remained under the impression that they were to serve only in Scotland, as had the earlier companies. The Crown however had other ideas and expected the regiment to be treated like any other Regular unit – which included serving anywhere the king desired.

From the beginning of its existence, the Black Watch soldiers found ample reason to complain. It began over discrepancies in promised clothing allowance, including the poor quality and diminishing size of the plaids they were issued with. The second Colonel, Lord Semphill was accused of manipulating the clothing issue to his own personal profit: a common practice, we are told.

Further unrest led to actual mutiny among the ranks, when it became apparent that the regiment was to be posted out of Scotland. At a subsequent court-martial in London, three Highlanders were executed by firing squad and 104 others were banished to various colonies: 31 of which were commandeered to serve in Brigadier-General James Oglethorpe’s regiment in Georgia, America. However, despite the few setbacks the Black Watch flourished. To taste its first real action at Fontenoy (1745).

‘North Britain’ (Scotland)

Following the disgraceful aftermath of Culloden a second Disarming Act came into force in 1747, the guts of which not only prohibited the carrying of weapons, but also banned the wearing of Highland dress and the use of bagpipes. This Act above all else shows just how paranoid the Westminster government had become over Gaelic culture.

Some historians would have us believe that, being denied so much of what was symbolic of their native culture, the young Gaels would eagerly spring forward to volunteer for the new Highland corps that were due to be raised – they alone being able to wear Highland garb and carry arms. The sad truth is that more young men were eventually coerced or pressed into service than actually volunteered. As we shall see, early recruitment in the Highlands was seldom a happy experience.

Successive London governments have continually misunderstood the true nature of Scottish Gaeldom, and there appears to have been an underlying compulsion towards universal Anglicization. Indeed, during the early 18th century the very name ‘Scotland’ seemed vulnerable, when everything north of Hadrian’s Wall began to be styled ‘North Britain’! (Next Page).

(Continued from Page 3)

Thus, we hear of the Royal North British Fusiliers (Royal Scots Fusiliers), the Royal North British Dragoons (Scots Greys). Moreover all troops in Scotland came under the jurisdiction Commander-in-Chief of North Britain! In contrast, their appeared to be no corresponding 'South Britain'. It really seemed there would always be an England!

Yet, however much the British government seemed to misunderstand Scottish Highlanders, it could always be put down to sheer indifference or pure ignorance. But the same cannot be said of the many clan chiefs who, anxious to adopt the lifestyle of English landowners, appeared ever ready to 'sell' their clansmen to the recruiters, who were soon to be as numerous among the hills and glens as the flocks of Cheviot sheep.

Much has been written about the intrigue, injustices and common treachery surrounding the mustering of Highland regiments. However, in spite of all, they were raised in times of need, even if few Gaels could comprehend any connection between fighting in foreign lands and their own miserable existence at home. A common tactic was to inform the young recruit that his aged parents' tenancy depended on his compliance and subsequent good behaviour in the ranks. Subtle, but effective, although there would be many instances where a young veteran returned to his glen only to find his cottage roofless and his family scattered.

The Seven Years' War (1756-63) with France was fought in many sectors of Europe, America and India. Eight new Highland regiments were raised, namely:

- 77th – Montgomery's Highlanders
- 78th – Fraser's Highlanders
- 87th – Keith's Highlanders
- 88th -- Campbell's Highlanders
- 89th -- Duke of Gordon's Highlanders
- 100th – Campbell of Kilberrie's Highlanders
- 101st – Johnstone's Highlanders
- 105th – Queen's Highlanders

All of the above were disbanded in 1763 and many of the Highlanders who fought in North America elected (or were encouraged?) to remain there – some of which later enlisted in colonial regiments. Indeed, many Gaels served in George Washington's army, and should be fully credited with assisting in the formation of that great country, USA. However, those who chose to remain loyal to the Crown were soon to find themselves disenfranchised, which caused many Scots to move north into British Canada.

(To be continued).

Malcolm Lobban



EDITORIAL

During my life in the Auld Country. I never ceased to be amazed at how Gaelic-speaking Highlanders seemed forever able to identify with not only their own family's history, but also the genealogy of so many of their neighbours.

It seemed that those who had moved into the Lowlands for work, never lost sight of their roots, and whenever two Gaels met in a pub or elsewhere down south, they immediately appeared to find common ground – even if they came from different areas up north. For some strange reason they could establish a family link to some remote relative. Indeed, for a while I believed that all Highlanders were related to one another. In their beautiful native tongue, they could spend hours in deep conversation, totally oblivious to those around them – a trait which many Lowland Scots mistakenly saw as bad manners in public.

Traces of this same attitude are present here in Australia, even among second and third generation Scottish Aussies. Of course a similar instinct may be present among descendants of other migrant ethnic groups – the desire to find a link with forbears is very strong in many people. This very neatly brings me to the real point of this editorial.

We regularly appeal to our members to let us share their family stories and connections with Scotland. Such data, if published in 'Lantern' would surely be of great interest to other members, and since copies of every edition of our newsletter are sent to the National Library of Australia, Canberra and to the State Library, Victoria – they become an essential part of the national archives of this great country and for the benefit of future generations.

Similarly, we know that some members are actively involved with researching their own family's history, and often with spectacular results. And I hasten to add here that members with surnames related to Clan MacFarlane (Septs) are included, these are the Millers, Allans, Robbs and others.

The best way to create and maintain proper Clan cohesion in the traditional style of the old Highland culture is to share with one another and form a close relationship. This can be done easily via our 'Lantern' and our website. **But first we must have your permission in writing.** So, those members who have already submitted lineage data for our own records, and those who have yet to do so, PLEASE drop us a line and let's talk about it. LET'S REALLY GET CLANNISH! Ed.