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Bring Forrit The Tartan!¹

By Insp. R.G. Muir

"A" Division Commercial Crime Section

It is the best dress fitted for the country of Gael, ... they required a dress which united the recommendation of lightness and comfort, and in no other dress are these so completely obtained as in that which is a plaid, formed during the day a graceful ornament, and at night a comfortable covering when forced from their pastoral employments to repose upon their native heath ... It is an ancient dress, a martial dress, and a becoming dress ...

Sir Walter Scott



This is a tale best told from its closing chapter: Cst. Colin Grinstead from Vancouver, B.C., stands on the battlement at the Nova Scotia International Tattoo as the "lone piper," resplendent in the new RCMP tartan and kilted Red Serge uniform. (See "The Nova Scotia International Tattoo" article, Vol. 63 No. 4, Fall 1998 issue of the "Quarterly". — Ed.) With the Canadian flag filling the stage backdrop, he plays his lament to a packed house at North America's preeminent marshal music festival. In honour of the RCMP's 125th anniversary, the Force is show-cased throughout the week-long evening performances. On this, the closing night, Commissioner Philip Murray has travelled to Halifax in the company of C/S/M Yvon Mercier to take the final salute.

It is a defining moment, not only for the Force, but for the RCMP 125 Tartan Subcommittee which laboured long and hard to bring the "tartan initiative" to fruition. The tartan, kilt and unique uniform for pipers and drummers had been the sole domain of this sub-committee for fully one year.

Just days earlier, in Fredericton, Her Royal Highness Princess Anne arrived for a four-day visit to New Brunswick, escorted by Federal Solicitor General Andy Scott. The Princess visited the RCMP's "J" Division Headquarters where, accompanied by the music of the Codiac Regional RCMP Pipe Band, she inspected the RCMP honour troop and presented the official *Certificate of Accreditation* from the Scottish Tartans Society to D/Commr. Terry Ryan. Having been registered at Pitlochry, Scotland, the RCMP tartan was, thus, formally presented to the Force and to the Canadian public.

A tradition long in the making

This had been an RCMP 125th anniversary project. However, it was hardly an idea conceived and carried out in the anniversary year. The tartan, along with other Celtic traditions such as bagpipe music, has long been associated with the RCMP. Regimental dinners frequently begin with the "piping of the head table." Regimental weddings and funerals often include the playing of the pipe. For many years "Depot" Division has engaged "recruit pipers" for parade and ceremonial purposes. National and divisional headquarters routinely call on the services of pipers for the hosting of conferences, Mess functions and community-related special events. Indeed, police pipers and pipe bands are common-place in Canada and abroad. Most major police forces of the Commonwealth foster strong traditions associated with the "pipes and drums." The playing of the bagpipe has become integral to ceremonial occasions for the police and the communities they serve.

Thus it would follow that the RCMP would adopt an official tartan into its complement

¹"Bring forrit the tartan!" the motto of the Scottish Tartans Society commemorates the occasion in 1857, when General Sir Colin Campbell and his Scotland Highlanders laid siege to the fortress of Secundrabagh, in India. After several unsuccessful attacks by other units, the command to his regiment became historic. "Bring forrit the tartan: let may ain lads at them!" The Scots successfully breached the walls, winning no fewer than six Victoria crosses in battle.

of uniforms. However, the road to the RCMP tartan was a long one, paved with ambivalence and reluctance by the management of the day. In March 1972, Insp. Feagan, OC, Yellowknife Sub-Division, noted that a "Fathers of Confederation" series of tartans was designed by Fromm Brothers Ltd., of Galt, Ontario, as part of Canada's centennial year celebrations, and that a "NWMP Tartan" formed part of the series. In July, 1975, as consideration was being given to adopting the NWMP tartan as the Force's official tartan, it was concluded that the colours were "not altogether satisfactory" and registration was not officially pursued by the Force.

Over the years, in fact, there were to be several star-crossed attempts to convince the mandarins that tartan and kilts were congruous with the affairs of the Force. Honourable mention goes to Cst. Ewen Booth of Shoal Lake, Manitoba, who submitted a detailed written proposal in 1990 to (then) C/S/M Eric Young to adopt a tartan and kilted uniform for RCMP pipers and drummers. Cst. Booth fell heir to a polite but tepid response. Sgt. Graham Muir and Cst. Dan Roy, of the National Capital Region, followed hard on the heels of Cst. Booth in 1991, and again in 1992, with the same disappointing results. Their submissions disappeared into the bureaucratic morass that was National Headquarters of the day. There just seemed to be too many good reasons to say "no."

A foothold was gained in 1992 when the Commanding Officer, "K" Division (Alberta), A/Commr. Les Holmes (now retired), took up the cause of his members to adopt a kilted uniform for pipers and drummers as a "Canada 125" initiative. A small corps of pipes and drums was formed in Edmonton, sporting the MacLeod of Harris tartan in honour of the Force's second Commissioner, James F. MacLeod. The Red Serge was modified to wear with the kilt and, thus, a precedent was set. This same group was to form the core of the composite band that would be travelling to the Nova Scotia Tattoo over the years.

From good ideas to good deeds

Significant strides in Alberta aside, promoting the idea of a unique tartan and Force-wide acceptance of a kilted uniform was akin to "sewing seeds on barren ground." Getting Headquarters' approval had proven a tortuous, tiresome and tenuous undertaking.

However, early in 1997, C/S/M Mercier sought out S/Sgt. Muir, one of the last-standing champions of the cause, to announce that the tartan issue was "off the back burner!" It appeared as though the enthusiasm surrounding the Force's 125th anniversary celebrations might just provide the necessary impetus to breathe new life into this cause. C/S/M Mercier was to provide the much-needed stewardship to make it all a success: guiding the process through sundry rounds of consultation and committee work; carefully currying favour and crafting consensus; and prevailing in the face of gruelling bureaucracy.

It was recognized early on in this venture that there could be no legitimate progress in the absence of cross-country consultation — and so was formed the RCMP 125 Tartan Sub-Committee, comprised of: Sgt. Colin Abel (Pacific Region), Supt. Gerry Simmonds and Sgt. Jim Medley (North West Region), S/Sgt. Graham Muir and Cst. Dan Roy (Central Region), and Cst. Marion Fraser (Atlantic Region), and C/S/M Yvon Mercier as honorary chairman.



Regimental RCMP weddings and funerals often include the playing of the pipe, like Supt. Joe Healy's wedding recently, in Ottawa.

Courtesy of Insp. G. Muir



Mrs. Violet Holmes, artist.
Photo by Kathy Naiman (1992)

For most of 1997, there was a myriad of meetings, cross-country video-conferencing, and a flurry of telephone, fax and e-mail traffic — a Trojan effort that led to a nationwide communication strategy announcing the search for a unique RCMP tartan. The RCMP's tartan, it was decided, should be an original design. The contemporary significance of tartans is that they express a sense of identity and of belonging to a family. Provinces, cities, universities, corporations and even police departments have adopted tartans. The RCMP is seen by many as a symbol of Canada and this is why the sub-committee wanted the RCMP to have its own tartan.

A dozen submissions from prospective designers were whittled down to a single design: "A Unique RCMP Historical Tartan," submitted by Mrs. Violet Holmes — wife of retired A/Commr. Les Holmes — in collaboration with Mr. Gordon Kirkbright. Mrs. Holmes was one of about a dozen people who submitted a tartan design after the sub-committee requested the input of RCMP employees through the *RCMP Quarterly* and the *Pony Express*.

The "Canada 125" project leading to kilts and MacLeod tartan had piqued Violet Holmes interest. As an accomplished artist in her own right, she had clearly envisaged a tartan that would one day be worn to complement the Red Serge tunic. The water colour studies of 1992 found their way through several iterations, including a final computer rendering, to become what is now the Force's very own RCMP tartan.

From colours to cloth

By September, 1997, it had been determined that the Holmes' tartan would be ours. But

the true test of partnership was upon the committee. There was an urgent need to get from colours to cloth. The prototype tartan would need to pass muster with the artist and the Scottish Tartans Society would need cloth-in-hand before the registration process could be properly completed. And most important, Commissioner Murray needed to know and to see what he would be saying "yes" to!

As Christmas approached, Burnett's and Struth Scottish Regalia Ltd. of Barrie, Ontario, came on board. Margaret Struth, business person and kilt maker extraordinaire, took to the project as though it were her own. As Canadian agent for Lochcarron Mills of Scotland, Mrs. Struth saw to much of the minutiae associated with rendering colours to cloth. There was to be a spate of eleventh hour consultation "across the pond" involving S/Sgt. Muir, Mrs. Holmes and the very accommodating Mr. Alistair Buchan of Lochcarron Mills. And once there was consensus on colour, there was to be "work into the wee hours," while Margaret Struth and her staff made the kilts to be worn by the RCMP band in Halifax.

Bringing it all together

As 1997 turned to 1998, things proceeded at a frenetic pace. There is much to be said for concurrent activity — the fine art of having all of your irons in the fire at the same time. And so it was with the "tartan initiative." Extensive consultation took place with those who know the business: Mr. Scott MacAulay,



Kilt-makers, Burnett's and Struth Scottish Regalia Ltd., Barrie, Ontario.

Courtesy of Insp. G. Muir

RCMP tartan colours and what they represent

The design of this tartan was undertaken to mark the 125th anniversary of the RCMP. The tartan colours are as rich and varied as the heritage they represent. They are true to RCMP tradition as they are derived from the colours of the Force's uniform and badge. The colours weave into a perfectly balanced tartan design; the overall effect is pleasingly subtle, reflecting a harmonious interplay of colours that provide an excellent complement to the Force's world-renowned Red Serge tunic.

Dark Blue. The background or theme colour is dark blue. It is the colour of the riding breeches traditionally worn by Mounties and is also characteristic of the shabrack or saddle blanket used by the Musical Ride. The dark hue of this blue lends a subtle character to the tartan and assures that it complements the Red Serge tunic.

Scarlet Red. Scarlet is the colour of the tunic for which the RCMP is known the world over. The rich red recalls the early years of the Force and Canada when scarlet was worn "in the service of Her Majesty," manifesting the presence of the Monarchy throughout the British Empire.

Yellow. Yellow represents the cavalry stripe of the RCMP's distinctive ceremonial uniform. It also adorns the regular working dress, on both the hatband and trousers, of the dedicated men and women who serve Canadians on a daily basis. This yellow is also taken from both the crown and gull letters of the Force badge. It is, in many ways, as distinctive to the RCMP uniform as the scarlet tunic itself.

Sienna Brown. Sienna is taken from the bison which is the centre-piece of the RCMP badge. It is symbolic of Canada's expansive western plains and the heartland of the RCMP.

Forest Green. The green is representative of the maple leaves which surround the scroll and bison on the badge. The maple leaf, itself, is distinctively Canadian — it symbolizes Canada as a nation. The dark green of the tartan is a link to the land, the country, and the people served by the Force from coast-to-coast.

White. The fine white accent of the tartan is reminiscent of the lanyard worn as an accoutrement to the RCMP's ceremonial uniform. It is also intended as a link to Canada's First Nations people as this colour has special spiritual significance, symbolizing strength and endurance — traits which are the legacy of the RCMP in Canada.

Sky Blue. The bison on the RCMP's badge is set into a background of sky blue. This same hue of blue is readily associated with the United Nations and has special significance to the Force, given its new-found role in international peacekeeping.

Director of the College of Piping and Celtic Performing Arts in Summerside, PEI, was there to lend advice and guidance; Major Archie Cairns (retired), Pipe Major of the London City Police Pipes and Drums and "eminence grise" of Canadian piping, provided sage counsel born of decades of experience; S/Sgt. Patrick Hayes, Pipe Major

of the Ottawa-Carleton Regional Police, offered an attentive ear and was a sounding board throughout. This broad consultation kept the process grounded and headed in the right direction.

Furthermore, A/Commr. Frank Richter stepped forward to assume nominal costs



*Playing the pipes,
wearing the new
RCMP tartan and
modified Red Serge.*

Courtesy of Insp. G. Muir

associated with kick-starting the process; Mr. Emanuel Lavidiotis, Master Tailor, applied his talent to fashion a prototype tunic that would be worn with the kilt; C/M Rick Van Gastel, HQ Forensic Identification Unit, tended to the studio photos that would accompany future committee deliberations up to and including the Commissioner's Senior Executive Committee (SEC); Sgt. Brent MacDonald, HQ Materiel and Services Management Branch, steadfastly shepherded after policy issues and logistical chores; Insp. Gord Finck offered up the National Operations Centre (NOC) and its state-of-the-art video conferencing facilities, allowing committee work to proceed apace. Thanks to the miracles of modern technology, much of the necessary ground work required to vet, register and certify the RCMP tartan was accomplished via the Internet. With the able assistance of Mr. Keith Lumsden of the Scottish Tartans Society, "killing trees" readily gave way to electronically fast-tracking our efforts. Mr. Lumsden also lent his considerable talent and experience to suggesting appropriate protocol for Princess Anne's presentation of the Certificate of Accreditation.

Strategy is everything!

If the tartan was to be approved and if the kilt was to be worn in time for any of the RCMP 125 anniversary celebrations, key dates had to be nailed down, around which energy and enthusiasm could coalesce.

Talks were well underway between Halifax and Edmonton about the prospects of a "Mountie band" at the 1998 Nova Scotia Tattoo. At the urging of Insp. Keith Sherwood, in Halifax, Supt. Gerry Simmonds and the "K" Division crew threw themselves into the breach and committed to making the trip — one way or the other. The tartan they would wear very much depended on how successful the tartan sub-committee would be in stick-handling its recommendations through the national policy centre and on to the Commissioner and SEC.

During the bitter cold days of February 1998, C/S/M Mercier and S/Sgt. Muir, worked back from critical dates pending in June and July — the Royal Visit and the Nova Scotia Tattoo — and locked in on deadlines to ensure the necessary approvals for tartan, kilts and accoutrements. These two events were to be the beacons towards which the committee would navigate — the first opportunities to showcase the new kilted uniforms.

At the end of the day, the Clothing and Equipment Design Committee (CEDC), chaired by A/Commr. Richter, received and supported the Tartan Sub-Committee's recommendations and sponsored them to the Commissioner. By mid-April, it was left to Commissioner Murray and SEC to decide. With a clear appreciation for what lay ahead, the record of decision was straight and to the point: the tartan was to be adopted and there was to be a kilted uniform for RCMP pipers and drummers — make it so!

Just in the nick of time, Keith Lumsden, with "pen poised," completed the all-important certification process in Scotland. "J" Division was in the final throes of completing Princess Anne's agenda. C/Supt. Garry Leoppky had things well in hand, and thanks to the yeoman service of Insp. Barry Harvie and S/Sgt. Jacques Ouellette, it all came off without a hitch. As various members of the "Mountie band" were winging their way to the maritimes for Tattoo rehearsals, boxes of kilts and accoutrements were moving cross-country by courier.

Looking to the future

Cst. Colin Grinstead's fine performance may have been the closing chapter in the RCMP 125 "tartan initiative," but it is just the beginning of a much bigger and better story. As the acting Pipe Major, Cst. Grinstead was joined in Halifax by 25 other pipers and drummers from six provinces, forming the first-ever RCMP composite band of pipes and drums. Some of the men and women forming the band were regular members of the Force, while others were civilian volunteers. Under his direction, and that of Drum Major (Cst.) Mike McGinley and Drum Sergeant (Cpl.) Rob Smith, the band gave an outstanding account of itself.

When Commissioner Murray ratified both tartan and uniform, he expressly encouraged its wearing by regular and retired members, employees, and civilian volunteers. His decision reflects the reality of police community bands of pipes and drums across the country and the Commonwealth. On receiving the Certificate of Accreditation from HRH Princess Anne, D/Commr. Ryan had this to say:

Over recent years we have made a commitment to "partnership." The RCMP tartan we see worn here today could not have been possible without true partnership. More than this, though, is the very real potential that the tartan has as a device to encourage future partnership. As an example, the tartan will be worn by a composite band of pipes and drums at the Nova Scotia Tattoo. This group is comprised of volunteer serving members of our Force, along with community members from as far away as British Columbia and Alberta. The future looks promising indeed for community-based initiatives that will witness the wearing of the tartan in partnership with the public we serve.

Now the approximately 200 RCMP pipers and drummers across Canada will have an opportunity to be identified as members of the Force when they volunteer their time and talent in community bands ("A" Division has about half a dozen pipers). In the past, a large

S/Sgt. R. Graham Muir (recently promoted inspector) and his father, Supt. D. Muir (retired), at the Ottawa area's Officers' RCMP 125 Mess Dinner.

*Photo by
Cpl. Bob Jeffrey,
"A" Division Ident.*



majority of these men and women had to wear the uniform of other bands — including other police bands. Now the people who make up RCMP bands will be able to wear a tartan that specifically represents the RCMP. Needless to say that civilians wishing to participate in RCMP community pipe bands will be expected to adopt the same standards of uniform dress and conduct as is already expected from regular members of the Force.

There are already three RCMP pipe and drum bands in Canada. The first band was formed in 1992 in Edmonton, by (then) CO, A/Commr. Les Holmes, as a Canada 125 initiative. A second band was subsequently formed in Sherwood Park, Alberta, and the RCMP just inherited a pipe and drum band when it recently took over policing duties in Moncton, New Brunswick.

As this article goes to press, the National Capital Region is well on the way to establishing its own band and others will surely follow. The NCR Band is looking for donations of second-hand Red Serges to be worn with the newly approved RCMP tartan kilt. Please take a trip to your closet and enclose your "old" Red Serge in a box to send to: Insp. R.G. Muir, "A" Division CCS, Léomont Bldg, Room 534, 155 McArthur

Avenue, Vanier, ON K1A 0R4. The future does indeed look promising. Bring forrit the tartan!



Hats off to those who made it happen (in alphabetical order):

Sgt. Colin Abel, Training Branch, Fairmont Barracks, Vancouver; A/Commr. Dwight Bishop, CO, "H" Division, Halifax; Cst. Ewen Booth, Shoal Lake Detachment; Alistair Buchan, Lochcarron Mills, Scotland; C/Supt. Allan Burchill (retired), RCMP 125 Anniversary National Committee, Ottawa; Major Archie Cairns (retired), London Police Pipes & Drums, London, Ont.; Insp. Gord Finck, OIC National Operations Centre; Cst. Marion Fraser, Lower Sackville Detachment; S/Sgt. Patrick Hayes, Ottawa-Carleton Regional Police Pipes & Drums; Insp. Barry Harvie, Fredericton; Violet Holmes, Burnaby; Emanuel Lavidiotis, Master Tailor; C/Supt. Garry Loepky, CO, "J" Division, Fredericton; Keith Lumsden, Scottish Tartans

Society, Pitlochry, Scotland; Scott MacAulay, Director of the College of Piping and Celtic Performing Arts in Summerside, PEI; Sgt. Brent MacDonald, Materiel and Services Management Branch; Cst. Mike McGinley, Edmonton; Sgt. Jim Medley, Immigration and Passport Section, Edmonton; C/S/M Yvon Mercier; A/Commr. Ray Mercier, CO, "A" Division, Ottawa; Insp. Graham Muir; Commissioner Philip Murray; S/Sgt. Jacques Ouellette, Fredericton; D/Commr. Larry Proke, Commander, Pacific Region; A/Commr. Frank Richter, Director, Corporate Management Directorate, Ottawa; Cst. Dan Roy, Plaster Rock Detachment, N.B.; D/Commr. Terry Ryan, Commander, Atlantic Region; Insp. Keith Sherwood, Staffing and Personnel, Halifax; Supt. Gerry Simmonds, Criminal Operations, Edmonton; Cpl. Rob Smith, "E" Division HQ, Vancouver; Margaret Struth, Burnett's & Struth Scottish Regalia Ltd., Barrie, Ont.; C/M Rick Van Gastel, Forensic Identification, Ottawa; A/Commr. Brian Watt, CO, "F" Division, Regina. ❖

Burnett's & Struth Regalia Ltd. is stocking the RCMP Tartan and taking orders for kilts and other garments. They also have a complete inventory of accoutrements to the uniform to be worn by RCMP community bands of pipes and drums. Approximate costs are: glengarry \$60, kilt \$475, broad belt and buckle \$100, hair sporan \$275, hose tops \$85, garter tabs \$15, spats \$50, pipe bag cover and chords \$100. Please direct your enquiries to:

**Burnett's & Struth Scottish Regalia Ltd.,
61 Patterson Road, Barrie, ON L4N 3V9**

or

Tel.: (705) 728-3232.