



Piper James Richardson, V.C., 16th Canadian Scottish. (Photo courtesy of National Archives)

Where have all the pipers gone?

by Capt Rita LePage

Perhaps the ultimate personification of this spirit was Piper James Richardson of the 16th Battalion, The Canadian Scottish, Canadian Expeditionary Force. During the 1916 Battle of Somme, Richardson's battalion was demoralized when they were held up in heavy fire. A barbed wire entanglement had impaired their advance. The 18-year-old Richardson picked up his pipes and played while marching up and down the kilometre of wire. His battalion rallied to the skirl of the pipes and went on to take their objective. Piper Richardson was killed when he returned to the wire to retrieve his pipes after putting them down to help fellow soldiers. He won the Victoria Cross and forever guaranteed the tradition of the pipes in the Canadian military.

After the Second World War, the Forces were downscaled to a small permanent force and the pipe bands diminished. With the advent of the Korean War, however, Canada raised two Highland battalions complete with pipe bands. The 1st and 2nd battalions of The Black Watch (Royal Highland

Regiment) of Canada each maintained approximately 20 pipers and a drum corps during the 1950s and 1960s. At that time, pipers and drummers were sub-trades of the infantry and both The Black Watch and the Canadian Guards specifically recruited individuals to fill band positions.

Between the Second World War and 1971, the Forces sent four men to the pipe majors course at Edinburgh Castle, Scotland — the most distinguished bagpipe course in the world. Each was named as the top student in his respective course and all returned to Canada to advance the quality of piping in the military. "The Canadian Forces had three world class pipe bands during the 1960s," says WO Hugh MacPherson, pipe major of the CFB Ottawa Pipes and Drums, "largely due to the expertise of these men."

Today there are 13 Regular Force voluntary pipe bands and 23 Reserve pipe bands in the CF. There are only eight full-time musician trade pipers and seven full-time musician trade drummers in the CF — the remainder of the 1,100 pipers and drummers are

There is a passion about the bagpipe which cannot be denied. Those who love them do so with passion; those who hate them do so with passion. And those who play them strive to achieve perfection with a passion fanned by four centuries of Celtic folklore.

The bagpipe has a storied history and because of that has come to be more than a musical instrument — the bagpipe is an emotion. Its haunting notes can swell the heart, cause the eye to tear, entice feet to dance and invoke a passion so fierce that as far back as 1745, the courts of the British monarch judged it to be a weapon of war.

The bagpipe and its traditions came to Canada more than 200 years ago with Scottish settlers. Its reputation as a weapon of war was soon perpetuated in 1759 when Gen Wolfe's Highlanders wavered in their fight for Quebec. The story is told that the bagpipes sounded the rallying call which inspired the Highlanders and spurred them to victory.

During the First World War, Canada sent nearly 30 pipe bands to Europe where, on many occasions, Canadian pipers played the troops into battle. "The great war showed that the pipes still possessed the uncanny power to conjure up and translate into action the spirit which knows no defeat," writes Pipe Major S. McKinnon in the *Canadian Geographical Journal*.



From left, Capt Allen MacKenzie, an aerospace engineer and quality technical services officer in Halifax; Maj Ken MacKenzie, an aerospace engineer with 413 Transport and Rescue Squadron in CFB Greenwood, N.S.; SLt Catherine MacKinnon, a chaplain at CFB Halifax; and SLt Blake Patterson, a logistics officer with HMCS Prevost, all play for the Halifax Police Association Pipes and Drums.



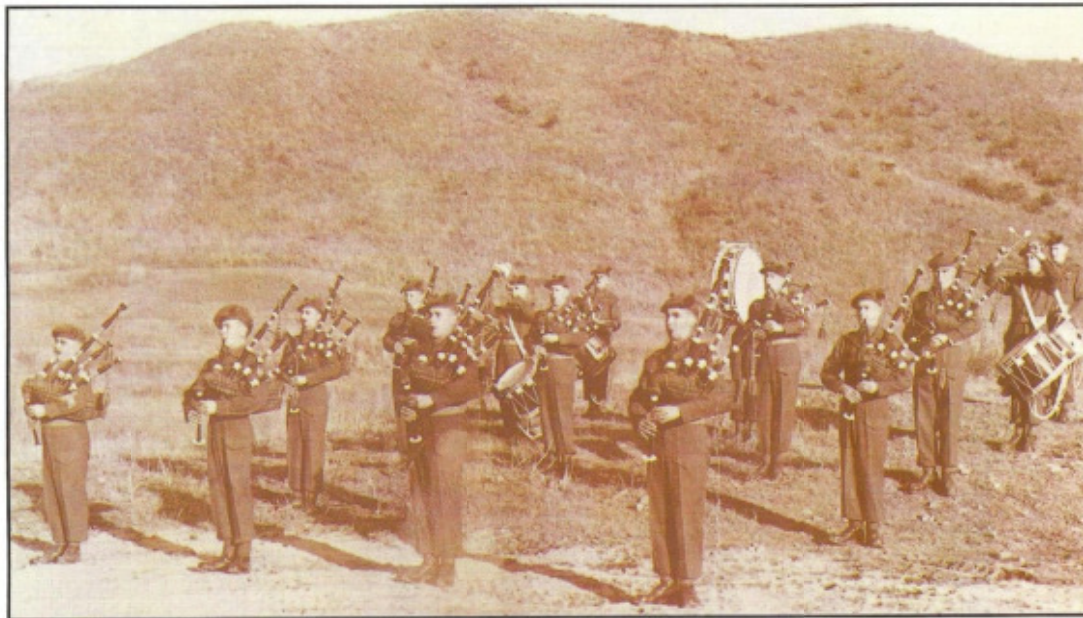
The CFB Borden Pipes and Drums marches off the playing field after capturing second place at the North American championships in Maxville, Ont. (Photo by Capt Rita LePage)

volunteers! These 15 full-time musicians administer and teach the pipe bands whose members are infants and padres, engineers, bosuns and a surprisingly large number of civilians — 35 of the 48 bandsmen in the CFB Ottawa Pipes and Drums are civilian!

So where are all the pipers in the CF? "They are scattered," says WO MacPherson. "When The Black Watch and the Canadian Guards were disbanded, the army stopped actively recruiting and training pipers — well, 2nd Battalion, The Royal Canadian Regiment continued into the 1980s but now even they have stopped."

In 1991, 2 RCR Pipes and Drums won the North American championships in their grade level. Today they do not have enough members or expertise to compete. The same fate befell the Special Service Force Pipes and Drums who, in 1990 and 1991, were supreme Canadian champions — accumulating the most points in the competition Highland games circuit in their grade level — but were not able to compete this year because of declining numbers.

"It is frustrating," says CWO Fred Alderman, the CF's senior pipe major. "Volunteer bands can experience more than a 50 per cent turnover in personnel from year to year. It is difficult to plan from one tasking to the next, let alone one year to the next, because you just don't know what calibre of players you will have." CWO Alderman is the senior piper and instructor at the School of Music at CFB Borden, Ont. The school, which was moved to CFB Borden from Ottawa last year, forms a small nucleus of the CFB Borden Pipes and Drums. CWO Alderman and MWO Mike Steele, the senior drum instructor at the school, led the 10-month-old band to a first-place finish at the Canadian Champion Supreme



The Pipes and Drums of 1st Battalion, The Black Watch (Royal Highland Regiment) of Canada in Korea during the Korean conflict.



Sgt John MacDonald, a reservist with the Cameron Highlanders of Ottawa and formerly with The Royal Canadian Regiment, and Cpl Philip Nicholson, an intelligence operator and former piper with The Royal Canadian Regiment who learned to play with the Camerons, continue to play the pipes with the Ottawa Police Band. (Photo by Capt Rita LePage)

"The great war showed that the pipes still possessed the uncanny power to conjure up and translate into action the spirit which knows no defeat."

Highland Games at Cambridge, Ont., in July. Three weeks later the band placed second at the North American championships in Maxville, Ont.

The success of the CFB Borden Pipes and Drums is an example of what can be achieved in a short period of time with dedicated musicians. The band has only one musician-qualified piper and one musician-qualified drummer, four students at the school and 19 civilians who live in the local area.

And this is where the dedication and passion are exemplified. Three-hour practices are held once a week in the evenings. Almost without exception, weekends from May to October are committed to a Highland game, parade, civic function or ceremonial function. "We attended eight weekend competitions this season," says CWO Alderman. "The

band members give up virtually all of their summer weekends and even their summer vacations to compete. And they do it voluntarily. They certainly don't get paid. Without this kind of dedication, we couldn't have a band. There are just not enough of us in the CF." They play in the scorching heat and in torrential downpours, always wearing their heavy wool uniforms. Pipers either lose five kilograms in sweat or soak up five kilograms of rain while they're playing. "Either way, they're always damp," says CWO Alderman.

Most CF members who play the bagpipes do so as volunteers, many in civilian bands. They are either posted to an area where a military band does not exist, or choose to play with civilian bands whose membership and calibre tend to be more stable. At the North

American championships this summer, fewer than 10 military pipers and drummers played in the CFB Borden band — the only Regular Force band to compete — and nearly 100 military pipers and drummers played for the more than 40 other bands competing!

"If they put all of the military pipers in one bandroom," says CWO Alderman, "the CF could go after the world championship."

"The pipe band doesn't have a technical application in a mechanized military," he continues. "But it still has morale value for units and immense public relations value for the CF."

But don't sound the lament for the bagpipe. It will endure, because it still possesses the mystical musical power to move the spirit which knows no defeat and inspires those for whom bagpipe music is a passion. ♣

It's a kilt — not a skirt!

If you've ever called a kilt a skirt, pondered why the men wear a leather purse around their waists and tuck a small dagger into their stockings, or wondered whether undergarments are worn under the kilt — read on.

The tradition of the kilt and most every other piece of kit worn by those who espouse the Highland dress dates to the 1700s and has changed little in the past 200 years. There are variations in Highland dress, depending on the unit; however, there are some basic features common to most Scottish dress uniforms.

The kilt and *plaid* — the fabric draped over the shoulder to hang down the back — were originally one piece of material. Approximately three metres long and 1.5 metres wide, the length of fabric was actually a blanket. Putting the blanket on was an interesting exercise in itself. First, one would lie down and roll in it before securing it at the waist with a heavy belt. The remaining fabric then crossed the chest and was thrown over the left shoulder. The plaid is separate from the kilt now and is generally worn only when full dress is worn.

The sporran was originally a simple leather purse worn about the waist and used to carry money, grain or other small personal items. Some Highlanders continue to wear the traditional sporran while others opt for the embellished version of a horsehair fall with contrasting horsehair tassels.

The *sgian dubh* (skean-dhu) is the little jewelled knife carried in the right stocking. Now ornamental, the *sgian dubh* was in fact a weapon of last resort for a Highlander.

There are other pieces — feather bonnets and Glengarry caps, colourful woollen stockings held up by garters and partially obscured by gleaming white spats, various swords and knives like the claymore and dirk — all accoutrements which add to the dash and mystique of the Highland uniform. Is it any wonder the awe inspired by the sight and sound of a Highland pipe band — the uniform as colourful and captivating as the music, and both harkening back to an era which, for the Highlander, will never be lost?

Oh, the answer to the question foremost in everyone's mind — the 'do they or don't they' question. Well, if you consider how much attention has been paid to maintaining, to the smallest detail, the integrity of the traditional Highland uniform, and if you consider that undergarments — at least as we know them today — were not worn 200 years ago, you can probably answer the question yourself. It is one of those little details steeped in so much folklore that a simple answer cannot be found. My advice to you? Ask a piper ... he's expecting the question!

WO Hugh MacPherson wearing the air force tartan of the CFB Ottawa Pipes and Drums.
(REC92-2086 by Cpl Jean-Claude Marcoux)

