

"War or peace, war or peace, it's all the same to me,
In war I might be killed, in peace I might be hanged"

The association of the bagpipes as implements of war is as early, and most probably earlier, than the first documented mention of the instrument being played in Scotland. The harpers played and sung of great victories in battle but the harps or clarsachs had little chance of being heard over the chants and cries of the clansmen as they prepared for, and went into, battle.

The anticipation before the confrontation, the incentive to battle – Prosnacha-cath, of the Caledonians (the Cath-ghairm of the Gaels), a nervousness of what is to come, could be aroused by the bards shouting their verses through the ranks of the clann, but the Mir-cath or war cry or battle shout- Barritus, which described by Ammianus, "Begins in a slight humming, and rises higher, like beating of waves", would have drowned out both harper and bard. (LOGAN)

The Great Highland Bagpipe, the Piob Mhor, is an instrument with opposing harsh shrills and graceful tones, meant to be played out of doors, in the open countryside and it is well suited in inspiring men (and women) on the field of conflict and in the aftermath, the mourning of the fallen and celebration of the victor could equally well be beautifully composed and played in the Piobaireachd – the Ceol Mor (Great Music). The Piob Mor eventually became the voice of the bard in the community of the clann. (MANSON 115)

After 1600 the piper has a written place in documentation. Alexander MacNaughton, in raising two hundred bowmen for war against the French, in 1627, singled out two pipers for mention, "Allester Caddell" and "William Steel". (C.A.MALCOLM 24)

Also, "Harrie McGra, harper from Larg", and "Another piper" MacNaughton, in a letter to the Earl of Morton in the following year described the conditions on board the ship, forced to berth at Falmouth by severe weather and to escape a French warship:

"My L – A for newis from our selfis, our bagg pypperis and Marlit Plaidis (tartan plaids) serwitt us in guid wise in the pursuit of ane man of war that hetlie followit us." (MANSON 117)

A few years later, another letter, in 1641 by Lord Lothian, written in Newcastle makes character comparisons between the three musical disciplines, piping, fiddling and drumming. "I cannot out of our armie furnish you with a sober fiddler, there is a fellow here plays exceeding well, but he is intolerable given to drink. Nor have we many of those people. Our armie has few or none that carie not armes. We are sadder and graver than ordinarie soldiers, only we are well provided of pypers. I have one for every company in my regiment, and I think they are as good as drummers." (MANSON 117)

The drum in battle predated the pipe but both had an important role on the field of conflict. Whilst the latter incited a passion in men to fight, the former provided the all important communication between leaders and their men in the height of battle. Orders were passed, tactical manoeuvres, loading and firing of weapons – all at the signal of the drummer. About the end of the 16th century, the drummers in military regiments came under control of the Drum Major, who in turn, was under orders from the Commander-In-Chief. When Cromwell's army was occupying Scotland in the 17th century, a Drum-Major General was appointed to

recruit the drummers and oversee their training. He was paid a rate of 6 shillings per recruit.

The post of Drum-Major General lasted only until the early 18th century but the Drum-Major, as the leader of the pipe band continues today.

A skilful drummer beating on the deep-shelled wooden drums using heavy wooden drumsticks on the "batter-head" of sheepskin could accomplish intricate beats requiring supple wrists and strong arms. (MURRAY 5)

Ritual and folklore also played a part in the marching army. An animal met on the way to the fight was usually killed and the blood sprinkled over the clann or uniform colours. A detachment of Jacobites under Lord Lewis Gordon, who defeated the King's troops at Inverurie, Aberdeenshire in 1745, slaughtered a sow and her piglets at the Mill of Keith Hall on route to the confrontation. Prior to 1745, the clanns had distinctive positions in the line of battle and were fiercely possessive of them. At Culloden the MacDonalds were placed on the left wing – their usual stance was traditionally on the right. Not one MacDonald, except for Keppoch, drew a sword that day. (LOGAN) So to did drummers and pipers defend their respective positions in the ranks of the military.

In the 17th century a piper was often listed as an officer. However, on orders from General Headquarters in 1769, an edict forbade the appointment of pipers. Although pipers continued to be enlisted, often at the request of Commanders who wished to have a personal piper, they appeared on the Role as "Drummers." In the Lovat Scouts and Scottish Horse, prior to 1914, pipers appeared in the Muster Role as "Trumpeters". (C.A. MALCOLM)

This discrimination between piper and drummer sometimes led to none to friendly rivalry, particularly when the important place in leading clann or regiment was given over to the drummer – the Drum-Major. Many regiments tell and retell this same story of the altercation between an officer and his piper, the piper asking; "Will a fellow that beats a sheepskin with two sticks gang in front o' me, a musician?" The officer, in somewhat of a dilemma, resolved the argument advocating that as the drummer was recognised on the Muster Role as a "Drummer" and the piper had no official title, then the drummer would have his place at the front.

The defeat of the Jacobites at Culloden on 16th April 1746 ended the "Bliadhna Thearlaich" – "Charlie's Year", and was a decisive turning point in highland history, literally stripping the clanns of their dress and identity. The Disarming Act of 1746 and the Amendment in 1748 as laid down by King George II, followed on from King George I in 1716, "More effectually securing the peace of the said highlands", prohibited the use or bearing of the "Broad Sword or Target (Targe), Poignard, Whinger, or Durk, Side Pistol, Gun, or other warlike weapon," and, as well as laying down the law for the convictions for such offenders - six months in the tollbooth of the offender's nearest town. Transportation to the plantations "beyond the seas" for seven years was advocated for a second offence.

The same sentences were also to be enforced if, other than "Officers and Soldiers in His Majesty's Forces, Shall on any Pretence whatsoever, wear or put on the Clothes commonly called Highland Clothes (that is to say) the Plaid, Philebeg, or little kilt, Trowse, Shoulder Belts, or any part whatsoever of what peculiarly belongs to the Highland Garb, and that no Tartan, or partly-coloured Plaid or Stuff shall be used for Great Coats, or for Upper Coats..." (UNITED KINGDOM, STATUTES, 19 Geo. 2, cap.39, 1746, 587-602)

In an Act so specific it is surprising that those politicians did not include a ban on the ownership or playing of the bagpipes given their musical potency in stimulating the blood of the highlander.

The Duke of Cumberland, or the "Bloody Butcher Cumberland" as he was known by in the north, watched with intriguing interest the pipers of the regiments supporting the King (among them the Royals, the Scots Fusiliers and Sempill's – later the 25th) make ready with their pipes prior to meeting the Jacobites under Charles Edward Stuart, on Culloden Moor, to the east of Inverness. Cumberland stood awhile and then asked an aide what the men were doing with "Such bundles of sticks? (referring to the three drones, blowpipe and chanter) "I can get them better implements of war!" "They are bag-pipes", came the reply, "the Highlander's music in peace and war. Without these all other instruments are of no avail, and the Highland soldiers need not advance another step, for they will be of no service." (MANSON 114)

In the aftermath of Culloden the spirit of the highlands was bowed but not broken. There was no ban on the bag-pipes but the frequency of playing declined, thus making it more difficult for those officers wishing to enlist pipers into established and new highland regiments. The recruiting sergeant and his party scouring the land in 1794 for able-bodied men willing to fight Napoleon on his native French soil were drumming-up a goodly amount of recruits for the "King's Shilling". Such was the shortage to meet the demand for pipers in that same year, Captain Duncan Campbell wrote to a friend; "If you can meet with one or two pipers, handsome fellows and steady, you might go as far a thirty guineas for each." (C.A. MALCOLM)

The east and west of Scotland appeared to the officers of the regiments to have an innumerable supply of young, fit and strong men. Britain's overseas conflicts - the war of Austrian Succession (1740-48), the Seven Years War (1756-63) fought in Europe, North America and India against France, Austria, Russia, Saxony, Sweden and Spain, the American War of Independence (1776-1783) and in the early 19th century, the Peninsular War, demanded the raising of fighting men and regiments were formed from enlisted men throughout the towns and country. The regiments were numbered along with their respective names. For example, the oldest highland regiment, the Black Watch, formed from four companies raised in 1725 and two in 1729 (later to be a regiment of ten companies, each of one hundred men), was serving in Flanders when made the 43rd regiment. In 1751 the regiment number was changed to the 42nd, also changing its name in 1758 to the Royal Highland Foot. Renamed again as the 42nd Black Watch regiment. A second Battalion was raised in 1780 which, in 1786, became a regiment in its own right as the 73rd.

The 92nd Gordon Highlanders was raised by the Duke of Gordon, largely with men from his Inverness-shire estate. A bonus for new recruits, over and above their Guinea Bounty, was a kiss from the Duchess of Gordon, a woman with a reputation of high spirits and unconventional behaviour. The Disarming Act of 1746 exempted "Officers and Soldiers in His Majesty's Forces" from not wearing "Highland Clothes". Those kilted regiments, among them the 92nd and 42nd, the 71st, 72nd, 74th, 75th, 78th, 79th, 91st, 92nd, and 93rd, had Englishmen in their ranks and it is a false belief that these regiments were descendants of the warring clann system although many of those enlisted indeed came from localised clans to serve in their home regiments.

In 1809 a decision was taken to abolish the wearing of kilts in a selection of regiments - the 72nd, 73rd, 74th, 75th and the 91st. A war of words was barraged

until 1881 when the kilt was restored. (MURRAY 44-45)

The highland companies which formed the regiment, although in the King's service, were proud tradition bearers of a rich heritage. Naturally, if the Commanding Officer and other officers desired it, all that could be done was done to secure a piper in the ranks. As the clann chief had his piper, so to did the captain of the Battalion.

In battle the pipers proved their worth, not only as soldiers, but in boosting morale amongst the rank and file. Apocryphal stories of incidents abound through regimental lore and the columns of the press. Fraser's, one of the regiments in the command of James Wolfe in 1760, reacted badly to the pipers being disallowed from playing in the mornings on their retreat from Quebec. The officer-in-charge, contrary to the General's decision, challenged his superior in his decision. "Then", said the General, "let them blow like the devil if that will bring back the men." This was not the first, nor will it be the last time that the pipes have been associated with the antics of "Auld Nick".

General Sir Eyre Coote commanding the 73rd (MacLeod's Highlanders) in India in 1778 described the bag-pipes as sounding like, "A useless relic of a barbarous age!" He was to change his opinion some three years later at the battle of Port Novo when the 73rd led all the attacks to the strain of the pipes and won the day despite being vastly outnumbered. Sir Eyre Coote shouted to the ranks and pipers of the 73rd, "Well done my brave fellows, you shall have a set of silver pipes for that." As good as his word each piper was given £50 and each set of pipes was inscribed with the General's thanks. (MANSON 119-120)

The heroic bravery of individual pipers playing in the heat of battle has been documented by the regiments from as far back as the 17th century. At the battle of the Haughs of Cromdale on 30th April 1689, ending the Scottish Civil War, one Piper Hamish, a Jacobite, was badly wounded but managed to scramble onto the top of a large boulder and continued to play tune after tune, spurring on his men in their battle on Cromdale Hill against the Royalist forces until he collapsed and died. In memory, the stone was christened Clach A Phiobair – "The Piper's Stone".

At Waterloo in 1815, a Pipe-Major of the Gordon Highlanders, in the face of a rain of continual musket fire, stood on a hillock and played as the Gordon's charged at their enemy. Through history, pipers are remembered for being mortally or seriously wounded the latter whilst continuing to play in the face of adversity. These exploits and deeds have often stirred poets into verse as memorials to their bravery. A poem celebrating George Clark, a Piper with the 71st at Vimiera, who was wounded in the leg by a musket ball was written by Charles MacKay, an extract of which begins:

"A Highland piper shot through both his feet,
Lay on the ground in agonising pain,
The cry was raised, The Highlanders retreat,
They run, they fly, they rally not again!
The piper heard, and, rising on his arm,
Clutched to his heart the pipes he loved so well,
And blew a blast – a dirge-like shrill alarm,
That quickly changed to the all-jubilant swell
Of 'Tullochgorum'."

Again, at Waterloo, Piper Kenneth MacKay of the 79th Cameron Highlanders from Tongue in Sutherland stepped forward of his Battalion to the front of the bayonets at Quatre Bras and played "Cogadh Na Sith" (War or Peace), a commonly

used tune by all the regiments. MacKay stood in the face of the charging French cavalry of Bonaparte. Alice C. MacDonnell of Keppoch wrote in 1895:

"At Quatre Bras they bounded o'er,
Graceful, poised, with scarce an effort,
Wild on high the pipes resounded
From MacKay, who stepped without
'Cogadh na Sith!' the soldiers answered,
With a loud, triumphant shout.
Wild notes playing, streamers flying,
Defiance to the foe was thrown."

(MANSON 131-132)

Through history the regimental piper has distinguished himself both as a soldier and as a musician. Regiments take pride in highlighting their own individuality by chosen pipe tunes, and every Regimental Museum has encased sets of bagpipes which once belonged to honoured pipers. In every conflict from clann rivalry to international warfare the music of the pipes is very much to the fore. During and in remembrance of great and small conflicts, in memoriam of men and women, mourning or in celebration, the piper can compose a tune.

Before a Piper can become a Pipe-Major or Sergeant-Piper, as is the rank, his capabilities must not only be of a distinguished player but also of composer of Piobaireachd and the Ceol Beag (Little Music), the marches, strathspeys and reels. (C.A. MALCOLM)

Titles of tunes can be set to a specific geographical area. For example, "The Battle Of Alma" composed from its namesake in the Crimean War by Pipe-Major William Ross of the Black Watch (42nd), the anonymous "Heights Of the Alma", and "Sir Colin Campbell's Farewell To The Highland Brigade". Likewise, "The Siege Of Delhi" and "Jessie Brown Of Lucknow" from the Indian Mutiny of 1857/58. The Ashanti War of 1873 inspired another Black Watch composition by Pipe-Major John MacDonald, "The Black Watch March To Coomassie." The Egyptian campaigns of the late 19th century produced "The Highland Brigade At Tel-El-Kebir" by Piper John Cameron.

It is not unusual for tunes to keep their format but be renamed, and thus depending on the date and/or version of the music, could be presented as the same tune under a different title. Prior to the outbreak of the Great War in 1914 Piper John MacLellan had composed a march entitled "The Bens Of Jura". During the South African War he changed the name to "The Highland Brigade's March To Heilbronn", (MacLellan had by this time enlisted in the Brigade). Thereafter, on being posted to Egypt it was again renamed, this time, "The Burning Sands Of Egypt". Soon after the outbreak of the Great War words were added by a Scots minister, and, in its newly adopted poetic form, appeared as, "The Road To The Isles", which although criticised as being steeped in sentimentality, became a favourite in the music halls. (MURRAY 287-289)

In barracks the piper still has an important role in communicating information. The "Duty Tunes" vary from regiment to regiment but all have an occasion to serve. Reveille - "Johnny Cope" or "Brose And Butter", or "Bannocks O' Barley". The Gordon Highlanders play, "The Greenwoodside" – a difficult and lively air on a frosty morning for the piper's fingers. First Breakfast Pipes, Sick Parade, Second Breakfast, Call Quarter, Call Commanding Officer's Orders (The Burn's song, "A Man's A Man For A' That" is played by the Argyll and Sutherland Highlanders and the Scots Guards, to name but two regiments.) Tea Call - "Jenny's Bawbee", to the tune of the nursery rhyme, "Polly Put The Kettle On" is

the adopted tune of some regiments, including, the King's Own Scottish Borderers and the Royal Scots. Last Post - the pipers of the Royal Scots and the King's Own Scottish Borderers play "Lochaber No More", as do the Highland Fusiliers. A fitting note to finish is the final pipe tune of the soldier's day, Lights Out, for which the piper usually plays the Gaelic lullaby, "Cadail, Mo Ghaoil" – "Sleep, Darling, Sleep". Put to words the soldiers know it as

"Sodger, lie doon on yer wee pickle straw,
It's no' very broad, and it's no' very braw
But, sodger, it's better than naething at a',
Sae sleep, sodger, sleep."

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Piper George Findlater VC 1872 - 1942 Greg D. Allen

Almost every region in Scotland can boast a piper hero and Aberdeenshire is no exception.

Allen George Findlater was born at Forgue, near Turriff in Aberdeenshire, in 1872. He enlisted in the Gordon Highlanders in 1888 and soon after was posted to the 2nd Battalion with which he served in Belfast and Ceylon. Whilst serving in Ceylon in 1891 Findlater was transferred to the 1st Battalion Gordon Highlanders. Four years later, in 1895, he accompanied the Battalion on the expedition to relieve Chitral, and in December 1896 he was appointed to the rank of Piper.

In 1897 the 1st Battalion was part of the Tirah Expedition to north west India to protect trade routes and suppress local, hostile tribes. The Tirah Expeditionary Force amounted to no less than 32,882 officers and men, with a supplementary back-up of 19,558 cooks, medical officers, hospital staff and various trade's persons. Blacksmiths and vets were also in attendance to oversee the welfare and treatment of the 8,000 horses, 1440 riding ponies, 18,384 mules

– not including camels, baggage ponies, wagons and carts.

A point of strategic importance for the Force to surmount was the ridge or "Heights Of Dargai", a rocky plateau with eroded natural ramparts occupied by the 8,000 strong Afridis tribe. On the 20th October 1897, assaults by the 1st Battalion Dorsetshire Regiment, the 2nd Battalion Derbyshire Regiment, and the 2nd Battalion Ghurkhas, with the Sikh Infantry, failed to gain any ground on Dargai. Early in the afternoon Colonel Mathias addressed the 1st Battalion Gordon Highlanders saying, "The hill must be taken at all costs....the Gordon Highlanders will take it!"

The Battalion Pipers, Kidd, Milne, Fraser, Wills and Findlater led the charge with Colonel Mathias at the front. Piper Findlater was wounded in both ankles during the initial charge over 150 yards of open ground from a hail of bullets from the "Heights". Nevertheless he continued to play on the bagpipes, leaning against a boulder, encouraging the "cocky wee Gordons" up the steep mountainous slopes of Dargai.

To the sounds of the Pipers and strains of "Cock O' The North" and "The Haughs O' Cromdale" the Gordons had stormed the "Heights Of Dargai" in approximately forty minutes, a climb of some 1,000 feet. By 3.15pm the Gordon Highlanders had taken and secured Dargai, and thereafter assisted in taking the wounded of all the regiments down to the hospital tents.

Findlater and the other wounded were transported to Netley Hospital in Southampton. The local newspapers and national press praised the bravery of the Gordon Highlander in this decisive attack, and when detailed reports became known Findlater was singled out for his actions in spite of severe wounds.

On the 16th May 1898 Queen Victoria visited the hospital and presented the Victoria Cross to Findlater and also to Lance-Corporal Vickery of the Dorsetshire Regiment. Private Lawson of the Gordon Highlanders was also awarded the Victoria Cross for his gallantry on Dargai.

As a result of his wounds Piper Findlater was discharged from the army. He was content, after a brief period of public appearances throughout Scotland playing to huge audiences and giving recitals on the bagpipes, to settle in Forglen in Aberdeenshire to a life of farming. However, on the outbreak of the Great War in 1914 Findlater enlisted again in the Gordon Highlanders and served with the 9th Battalion, rising to the rank of Sergeant Piper. He was discharged in 1919 and returned to Forglen and to his farm. Between 1919 and 1939 Findlater served as Pipe Major of the Turriff Pipe Band.

Piper George Findlater, VC died at Forglen, Turriff, on the 4th of March 1942 at the age of 70 years. His Victoria Cross is displayed in the Gordon Highlanders Museum in Viewfield Road, Aberdeen.

DARGAI RIDGE, 20th October, 1897.

Inscribed to Piper Findlater

The Cock o' the North, the Cock o' the North!

The Hielan' pipes did skirl,

And the Gordon men, they didna "hen",

Tho' death at their ribs did dirl.

The Cock o' the North, the Cock o' the North!

Struck up, on Dargai steep;

As furth wi' a roar, broke the kilted Core,

Where Death stood ready to reap.

The Cock o' the North, the Cock o' the North!

If ye hear the chanter shrill?

As the Gordons gay, faced Death that day,
Through the reek, on Dargai hill.
The Cock o' the North, the Cock o' the North!
Though winged in the fight still screamed,
For Findlater blew, where the bullet flew,
And Death in red riot gleamed.
The Cock o' the North, the Cock o' the North!
A bonnie red comb has he!
We're proud o' his kind – we'll keep them in mind
For the look they gave Death in the e'e,
On the rocky ridge o' Dargai o.
MAGGILLIVRAY (From the Aberdeen Journal 2nd April 1898)
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