

Military file note - Paper copy in Collection
 prepared September 2004, by Denise Ferne, Historylinks
 Uniform on display from July 2004. These notes were compiled to produce display information.

Soldiers in the Highlands

REGULAR UNITS

Fencibles

The Earl of Sutherland raised the 1st Sutherland Fencibles in 1759. 1100 men joined within the first nine days. This was a full-time regular army, which was originally intended to serve at home.

Militia

When militia forces were introduced in Scotland in 1797, all men of qualifying age (18-45) who were not already serving in a regular, fencible or volunteer regiment, were balloted for service in the militia. This was a full-time regular home defence force. It was to protect the country from overseas threat, but also required to support local magistrates to maintain law and order, and men could be drafted into the regular army

93rd Sutherland Highlanders

The regiment was raised in 1799, under General Wemyss (cousin of the Countess of Sutherland). As regular soldiers of the British Army, the 93rd served in places like South Africa, Spain, America, Crimea, and India. In 1881, wide-ranging reforms of the army led to the formation of the Argyll and Sutherland Highlanders. Their base and recruiting area moved south in Scotland. Sutherland became an area of recruitment for the Seaforth Highlanders. Both the Seaforths and the Sutherland then adopted the Black Watch tartan (also called Sutherland) but the Sutherland men wore the tartan folded to show the green (rather than the blue).

Volunteer Regiments

Volunteer Regiments were first raised during the Napoleonic Wars between Britain and France. They were disbanded at the end of the war in 1815, They were formed again as a homeland defence force when French invasion was feared in the late 1850s.

Men in the northern Highlands formed local companies of the Sutherland Highland Rifle Volunteers

- 1st Golspie Company 1859
- 2nd Dornoch Company 1859
- 3rd Brora Company 1860
- 4th Rogart Company 1861
- 5th Bonar Bridge Company 1868

Units were also raised in Caithness, Orkney and Shetland. The regiment was under the leadership of the Duke of Sutherland, in his role as Lord Lieutenant of Sutherland.

In 1864, formed into 1st Battalion Sutherland Rifle Volunteers, with headquarters in Golspie. All units adopted the Sutherland tartan kilt, but these part-time soldiers had little contact with the regular army.

In 1881, when incorporated into the territorial army, the Sutherland Rifle Volunteers became part of the 5th Seaforth Highlanders, a territorial army unit based at Fort George—east of Inverness. They retained their original uniform and name, and their local association with Sutherland.

In 1914, the 1/5th (Sutherland and Caithness) Battalion was mobilised and moved to France in May 1915 as part of the 51st Highland Division, where it fought in some of the fiercest battles of the 1914-18 war after which it was disbanded.

Uniform of the First Sutherland Volunteers

Tartan kilt. The kilt was worn on parade and on active service. The tartan is the 'new' Sutherland tartan (same as Black Watch). The tartan was adopted when the 93rd Sutherland Highlanders amalgamated with the Argylls in 1881. It is pleated to favour the green part of the sett.

Doublet – red close fitting jacket, with regimental buttons.

Yellow epaulettes are marked 1st Sutherland Volunteers
Three stripes on the right sleeve, indicate the wearer is the rank of sergeant
White Belt, with regimental buckle shows the cat of Sutherland and the motto Sans Peur (*without fear*)
Sporran – dark horse hair, with two white tassels (sporran is gaelic for 'purse')
Glengarry bonnet – diced band, designed to be a smart bonnet, that could easily be folded flat in a haversack.
Regimental cap badge is a reproduction, but shows the cat-a-mountain of Sutherland, and the 'Sans Peur' motto
Diced hose with ribbon Garter Flashes. A decorative adaptation of the full hose, and tuck in the top of the spats
White spats - short gaiters to keep the hose dry and prevent stones getting into the low cut shoes.

This uniform belonged to

Colour Sergeant William Allison Bethune (1858-1944)

William lived all his life in the same house in Bonar Bridge. He and his wife Margaret MacLeod had 6 daughters and 3 sons. One of his sons died in childhood, Daniel died in action before his father, Duncan was a Corporal in the Seaforths in WWII.

William's brother Daniel was the teacher at Larachan School, later went to South Africa (after being jilted), and died there.

He spent his working life as a river pilot for shipping. Approaching ships would sound their horn while at sea near Pormahomack. Hearing it, William would cycle from Bonar to Newton Point, join the ship and guide it through the shifting sands of the Dornoch Firth to the Bonar Bridge wharf and back again.

It seems he did not serve in the Boar War

1881 attended 'Wet review' in Inverness, as a sergeant in the Sutherlandshire Rifles

1892 at Bisley – near Woking, Surrey. National Rifle Association Bisley Meeting - for Volunteer Corps.

1883 Sergt Mackay won Queens Medal

In 1885 Corporal Wm Bethune in 1st Sutherland Volunteers (info from note seen on display at Dunrobin Castle 2004)

Then in 1892 Bethune attended Bisley meeting (aged 34)

In 1893 Reached final stage of Kings Prize at Bisley

1894 Sergt W Bethune and Corpl Bethune at Bisley (& Lairg)

1905 attended review by King Edward

1908 Enlisted in 5th Battalion Seaforth Highlanders

1910 Discharged from 5th Battalion Seaforth Highlanders (Golspie) Territorial Force

1917 Pass (in Collection) issued – on temporary service in 2nd V Bn Seaforth Highrs (no information about what service he performed in WWI)

In 1919 Discharged from volunteer force

In 1920 Last competed in national rifle shooting competitions at Wimbledon and Bisley

Sources;

Interview with Dennis Bethune, Donor of uniform and grandson of W A Bethune. July 2004.

FAIRRIE, Angus Queen's Own Highlanders (Seaforth and Camerons) An Illustrated History.

Northern Times, Golspie 1998

Website of Argyll & Sutherland Highlanders Museum. www.argylls.co.uk

Website www.electricscotland.com/history (general background)

Notes prepared by Graham Park

Notes prepared by Christine Murray

Loose sheet from Sgt Mackay scrapbook (the red bound book) from unnamed magazine article dated 27 May 1893. The Million. Romances of the Teregiments. No 2 The Highland Regiment.

SUTHERLAND, Malcolm A fighting clan. Sutherland Officers 1250-1850. Avon Books London 1996

Death Certificate of W A Bethune

Additional information about Bisley is associated with Sergt Mackay (red bound cuttings book in Collection)

Notes from Christine Murray.

copied June 2004.

Volunteers

- 1859 / meeting held Golspie Inn in June
 - Lord Stafford to be Commandant &
 companies raised in Dornoch, Golspie, Clyne
 & Kildonan - Duke accepted, in his
 office as Lord Lieutenant, the services of the
 Sutherland Rifle Volunteers. Uniform - dark
 grey tunic & trousers but when Rogart Co. was
 formed in 1860 they adopted the uniform
 of 93rd Sutherland Highlanders - viz. scarlet
 doublet, Sutherland tartan kilt, green gaiter
 bonnet, white belts - this a few years later
 became uniform of the whole battalion.
- 1866 Visit of Prince of Wales (Edward VII later)
 - volunteers played leading part. Dornoch Co.
 formed a guard of honour at Clashmore
- 1867 - a fifth company was formed at Bonar
- 1871 - Duchess of S. presented new set of colours
 to the 93rd Sutherland Highlanders to replace
 those which had been carried through the
 Indian mutiny. Officers of 93rd decided
 to hand over ~~the~~ old colours to Dunrobin
 & Duke asked sergeants of S. volunteers to

receive the colours & bring them north.

When the Duke went to Eder Castle for the ceremony he had a body guard of 20

privates from the Regent Coy. not a man of whom stood less than 6ft.

1883 Sgt. Robert Mackay of Dornoch Coy. of S.R.V.

carried off the Queen's Prize.

ROMANCES OF THE REGIMENTS.

No. 2.—THE HIGHLAND BRIGADE.



THE Highland regiments will always be picturesque. In any representative review of the British army the absence of the kilted and bonneted Scotsmen would leave a sense of incompleteness for which nothing could compensate. What a history is wrapped up with the dark tartan of the "Black Watch," the gallant 42nd! What desperate deeds of valour are connected with the shot-torn and tattered standards deposited in hallowed shrines in Edinburgh, in Glasgow, in the Town Hall at Dingwall, and other centres of the Scotch recruiting grounds in the far North. The badges of the regiments proclaim their prowess. The 78th, or Ross-shire Buffs, won the privilege of bearing a third colour, in addition to the King's or Queen's colour ("the Great Union") and the other customary flag of the regimental facings, by their irresistible charges at Assaye, Wellington's greatest Indian victory. The same battle entitles it to the regimental badge of the elephant. The "Black Watch" has the Sphinx, commemorating its services in Egypt, where, in 1801, Bonaparte received his first serious check from British troops. The Argyll and Sutherland (Princess Louise's) Highlanders, the old 91st and 93rd regiments, now linked together have nearly equally proud records; while the Gordon Highlanders, the 75th and 92nd, played an important part in the recent Egyptian campaigns, and the Queen's Own Cameron Highlanders, the 79th, have fought side by side with their hardy countrymen on fields that have marked the growth of the British Empire.

THE SUTHERLAND GIANT.

The origin of these regiments is particularly interesting as illustrating the prescient statesmanship of the elder Pitt. Their later history has amply proved the wisdom of his policy in enlisting the warlike clansmen of the Highlands into the service of the British crown. Later on in the 18th century, at the period of the great war, the raising of the Gordon Highlanders and the Queen's Own Camerons evinced the same spirit of loyalty to the old clan ties, and eagerness to exercise the Gaelic martial instincts. Many a Highland gentleman offered his aid to the Government, and, when a commission was given him, called upon his relatives and clansmen to join him. The regiments were thus quickly raised. Composed of kith and kin, of stalwart, tireless mountaineers, and fighting under the direction of leaders whose claims to chieftainship were still strong, it was no wonder that the regiments displayed a wonderful discipline and cohesion. When the Earl of Sutherland raised the 1st Sutherland Fencibles for Pitt in 1759, 1,100 men assembled at his call within nine days at Dunrobin Castle. Of these 260 were above 5ft. 11in. in stature. A private soldier whose name figured largely in the regimental annals of that period, has not yet totally passed into oblivion. He was called "Big Sam," and, standing 7ft. 4in. in his stockings, well merited the epithet. When he was recruited into the Sutherland Fencibles, the Countess of Sutherland allowed him 2s. 6d. a day extra pay, as so large a body must, she thought, require extra sustenance. The Prince of Wales, hearing of his fame, made him a porter at Carlton House, but he did not live long to enjoy the honour.

Though of such size, he was extremely gentle in manners, and only exerted his strength on an occasion such as that which is recorded of his encounter with an Irish giant. The Irishman challenged him to fight, and Sam said it was customary first to shake hands. His grip made the blood gush out of the Irishman's fingers, who excused himself proceeding with the contest on the ground that it was "enough."

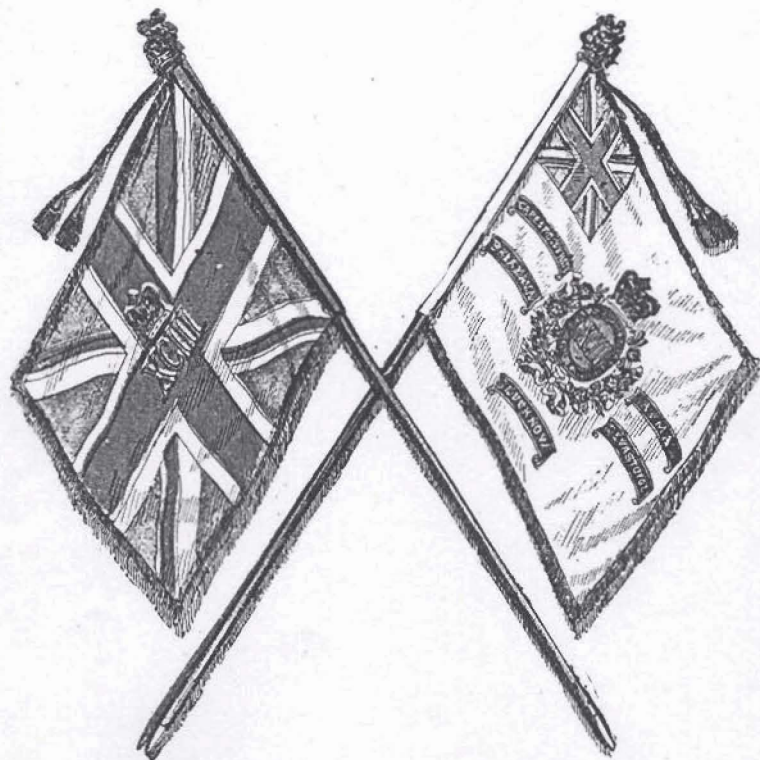
The Gordon Highlanders hand down the tradition that their regiment owes its existence in great part to the assistance the

beautiful Duchess of Gordon gave to her son, the Marquis of Huntley. When other arguments failed, she placed the bounty between her peerless lips, and none could withstand the attraction. That regiments with histories such as these should jealously preserve their distinctive characteristics is but natural, and any proposal to change their tartan, to abolish the kilt for the "breeks," or to break up their regimental individuality, has at all times roused the deepest protests.

A TERRIBLE TIME.

If the Peninsula records relating to the adventures of the Highlanders are somewhat meagre, this is owing more to the loss of permanent memorials than to fragments of standards and time-worn medals. The Highland regiments had their full share in the campaigns of the "great war," and the bare list of their exploits is a long one. But the finest courage does not need only a battlefield for its display by a soldier. On a crowded troopship the perils of any disaster are greatly magnified, but to the honour of the British army be it said, finer instances of disciplined fortitude have never been

given than in the calamities which have overtaken soldiers at sea. The wreck of the 78th in the Bay of Bengal deserves commemoration. Six companies of the regiment, which had just assisted in the capture of Java, the last colonial possession of France in 1816, had embarked in the "Frances Charlotte," transport. All was going well when on the night of November 5, the vessel struck suddenly upon a rock about twelve miles from the island of Præpolis. In fifteen minutes the vessel had filled to her mainmast, but though it seemed as if the ship were about to sink at any moment the soldiers preserved a firm self-command. The boats were got out, the women, children, and sick passed into them, and for four days the task of transferring the troops to the island went on. During that time a large number of the men remained on the rock scarcely able by means of ropes to prevent their being washed into the sea by the waves at high water. Two ships came to the rescue, but even then it was necessary to leave over 100 men on the barren island for nearly a month, maintaining a bare existence on shell-fish. Their sufferings were



THE COLOURS OF THE 93RD SUTHERLAND HIGHLANDERS

(Now the 2nd Battalion, (Princess Louise's) Argyll and Sutherland Highlanders).

These colours, now in use, were presented to the regiment in 1871.

so acute that many died subsequently from the privations endured, but no murmuring or selfish dissatisfaction marred the general brave spirit with which the trial was faced.

A ROMANCE OF THE SEA.

A Highland regiment is coupled with the burning of the "Kent," East Indiaman, in a peculiar way. Sir Duncan Macgregor, then serving with the 31st Regiment, was on board the ill-fated vessel when that terror-striking event occurred in 1825, in the Bay of Biscay. The flames had got the mastery and death appeared imminent. Macgregor wrote in pencil a few lines to his father and enclosed them in a bottle, but happily a brig, the "Cambria," came with timely aid, and was able to take on board the greater part of the "Kent's" passengers. The first to be handed over the vessel's side was Macgregor's son, a child then only five weeks old, who lived to be brought up as a "child of the regiment" with the 93rd, and to become well-known as "Rob Roy," the famous canoe voyager. His father arrived at Barbadoes as Lieutenant-colonel of the 93rd in the year following the burning of the "Kent," and was then presented with the bottle containing his letter which had been cast into the sea by the explosion, washed across the ocean, and picked up on the coast of the island. The wreck of the "Abercrombie Robinson" with the 91st, in Table Bay, 1842, and the wreck of the "Birkenhead" in Algoa Bay, in 1852, when drafts of the 74th under Colonel Seton, and of the 91st, were among the 631 souls of