



The Black Watch (Royal Highland Regiment) of Canada

via The Black Watch of Canada Foundation

Return to Mons, Belgium 100 years later



November 11th, 1918 the Armistice announcing the end of World War I is put into effect by the Canadian Army in Mons, Belgium at 11 am. The city is liberated by the Canadian Army led by the 42nd Battalion of the Royal Highlanders of Canada based in Montreal. The Pipes & Drums lead the Canadian troops through the streets, thronged by cheering citizens. One hundred years later, to the day, the continuation of this unit, now the Black Watch (Royal Highland Regiment) of Canada will recreate this momentous parade.

Background:

Close to midnight, 11 November 1918, advanced elements of the 42nd Battalion, Royal Highlanders of Canada, pushed into the western outskirts of Mons, the first Allied troops to enter the city. By daybreak, the whole city had been mopped up with outposts established on the eastern high ground. Once secure, troops fanned out across the city, running their bayonets along the grilled cellar windows, calling out to the inhabitants who had hid there for protection. Soon, the Highlanders were surrounded by crowds of wildly excited Belgians. As detachments of the Black Watch of Scotland had been near Mons at the beginning of the war in August 1914, as soon as the inhabitants saw the Highlanders of the 42nd Battalion, wearing a similar uniform, they shouted out: “We knew you would come back.”

According to the Battalion’s War Diary, the pipe band of the 42nd “played its way into the city at about 07.00 Hours and created tremendous enthusiasm,” the diarist adding:

“Thousands of civilians lined the streets and the Grand Place, and the Battalion was given such a welcome as it had never seen before. Men, women, and children vied with one another in expressing their hospitality – hot coffee, cognac and wines were distributed with the utmost generosity. Soldiers were everywhere embraced and kissed. In a few moments the whole city was bedecked with flags, flying from every window.”

At 7:45 a.m., official word was received that the Armistice had been signed, and that hostilities would cease at 11 a.m. Just before the cease-fire, all of the troops not required for defensive purposes had been formed up *en masse* in the *Grande Place*, the great cobbled square brimming with happy civilians. At precisely 11 a.m., Brigadier



John Arthur Clark, commanding the 7th Canadian Brigade, was presented with the keys to the city by the Burgomaster, “in honor of its capture by units of his Brigade.” After the celebrations had ended, the troops marched past the dignitaries, proudly led by the Pipes and Drums of the 42nd Battalion.

For the soldiers of Canada’s Black Watch, the First World War ended in Mons on 11 November 1918.

Black Watch of Canada officers welcomed by Mons city officials
11Nov 1918



MIKAN 3522381 [Full size] (25/30)
(W.W.I - 1914 - 1918) The first time since 1914 that kilts have been seen in Mons, with the exception of prisoners; 42nd Battalion entering temporary barracks on the morning of November 11, 1918. [153 KB, 1000 X 716]



Exhausted Canadian Black Watch soldiers in the square

AIM: To have the Pipes & Drums of the Black Watch (Royal Highland Regiment) of Canada march through the streets of Mons, Belgium exactly 100 years after the Regiment marched into Mons to end World War I on 11 November 1918 and to perform at other World War I sites of significance in the area.

PROJECT:

1- Assemble as many Black Watch pipers and drummers as possible to travel to Mons in November 2018. They will be dressed in WWI pattern combat uniforms, as shown in the photos. Non-serving members will include former pipe band members, cadets, members of the Association Pipe Band, the Black Watch Royal Nova Scotia Tattoo Pipe Band and many other piper/drummer re-enactors from across Canada. Members of the serving pipe band are expected to be in attendance as well, on duty, with the Department of National Defence. They will be dressed in their modern uniforms. In addition, the Commanding Officer is planning to include 5 serving soldiers on this trip as a recognition of their outstanding service to the Regiment and to be witnesses to this extraordinary moment in history.

2- This will be a 5-day excursion and includes performances at:

- **Wednesday, 7 Nov** - Assemble and Practice (near main square in Ypres)
 - **Thursday, 8 Nov** - During the day visits of the Vimy Memorial and underground tunnels. There will be a ceremony here.
 - Evening, the retreat ceremony at the Menin Gate in Ypres, France. The gate lists the names of all the British and Commonwealth soldiers without a known grave. This ceremony has been held every night (except for the German occupation during WWII), since 1928. Of note for Canada's Black Watch is the name Lance Corporal Frederick Fisher, VC – the first Canadian winner of the Victoria Cross in WWI and whose VC medal is in the Regiment's possession.
- Friday, 9 Nov** – Visits of Waterloo Battlefield and WWI Cemeteries. (move to Mons for remainder of trip)
- **Saturday morning, 10 November**, the group has been invited to the town of Wallers, France, (1 hour from MONS) which was liberated by the Black Watch's 13th Battalion in October 1918. There will be a commemoration ceremony at the town cenotaph which lists the names of the 13th Bn soldiers who died in the liberation, as well as, a ceremony to name a street after Cpl Grey, one of these Black Watch soldiers. The town is going "all out" to welcome the descendants of their Canadian liberators.

- **Sunday, 11 November** – The 42nd group will unveil a plaque at the house which was established as Head Quarters by Major General F.O.W. Loomis, a former Black Watch of Canada Officer, who was in command of the 3rd Canadian Division on the liberation. At 11am the 42nd group will occupy the town square (exclusively) for a commemoration ceremony followed by the recreation of the 1918 parade to the barracks. Later that afternoon, the group will participate in the Official ceremony marking the end of the War with representatives of Great Britain, France, Belgium and Canada. The CBC is expected to cover this ceremony live with corresponding coverage of the ceremonies in Ottawa.
- Monday, 12 November – the group disbands.

Concurrent activities

- Arrangements are being made for some of the artifacts from the Canadian Black Watch Museum and those of the town to be displayed in the Mons Memorial Museum.
- One of the great stories of this period was the death of Flora Stuart, the goat mascot of the 13th Bn who died a few kilometers from Wallers. A goat is being trained now to replace Flora for this project and will attend the Wallers and Mons events.
- Visits to the graves of Canadian soldiers (Friday) will be marked by the positioning of miniature Canadian and Regimental flags.
- The granddaughter of MGen F.O.W. Loomis will be in attendance and will bring his medals with her. There will be a number of other descendants in the accompanying group.
- The regiment's famous WWI bagpipes, as shown prominently in the Bundy painting of the Canadian Division landing at St-Nazaire France (which is in the Senate Chamber) will be played during these events.
- Local French re-enactors with Canadian uniforms will be present throughout the events.
- The Black Watch Association (Montreal Branch), a veterans' association, has organized a 10 day Battlefield Tour in France that will end to coordinate with the 42nd group's 5 days in the area. This will add to the critical mass of the Regiment's presence.

Contact

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“FLORA STUART,” 1915-18

The mounted goat horns shown here once belonged to the mascot of the 13th Battalion, Royal Highlanders of Canada. As the 13th Battalion marched out of the Ypres Salient in 1915, its pipe band was led by a white female goat which the pipers had “found near the position of some Indian troops...and adopted forthwith as the Regiment’s official mascot.”⁴⁴ Tended and trained by the pipers and wearing a Royal Stewart tartan cloak on parade, “Flora Stuart”⁴⁵ became a feature of the Battalion on the march. Her skill in wheeling at the exact moment when a turn was required “was the envy and admiration of all units whose mascots could not be trained to do likewise.”⁴⁶ In July 1918, with the 13th in GHQ Reserve at Arras, all Highland units of the 3rd Canadian Infantry Brigade⁴⁷ were invited to attend a “Highland Gathering,” along with two British Divisions, the 15th (Scottish) and 51st (Highland) – a true gathering of the clans. The feature of the day was “Retreat,” played by 24 massed pipe bands with 284 pipers and 164 drummers. At the head of the centre column, “bursting with pride and keeping in time to the fraction of a second,”⁴⁸ marched Flora Stuart, the highlight of her brief military career. On 22 October 1918, with the war almost over, Flora occupied



her usual place at the head of the Battalion then marching to billets in Fenain, France. She seemed in good spirits and swung into step as soon as her beloved pipes struck up a familiar tune. But, sadly, it was Flora’s final appearance. She sickened on the march and died within a few minutes, likely the result of eating grass polluted by poison gas. As noted by historian R.C. Fetherstonhaugh, “one wonders if she knew that her task was finished, that the Battalion she had served so faithfully and loved so well was never again to fire a shot in action...”⁴⁹ Flora’s remains were sent back to London for curing, and later shipped to the home Regiment in Montreal. In October 1965, Flora’s silver collar and shield were presented to the Regiment by a former commanding officer of the 13th Battalion, Lieutenant Colonel Ian M.R. Sinclair. A plaque mounted on the display board simply reads: “April 1915 – October 1918 – Died on Active Service.”

LOCATION : PIPE BAND ROOM

REGIMENTAL IDENTIFICATION NUMBER : 38-1-42-2



APRIL 1915-OCTOBER 1918
DIED ON ACTIVE SERVICE

Pipe-Major David Manson's bagpipes
will be in Mons



PAINTING, LANDING OF THE 1ST CANADIAN DIVISION, 1915

Completed in 1916 by the English painter, Edgar Bundy (1862-1922), the oil on canvas, measuring an impressive 453 by 272 cm, commemorates the landing of the 1st Canadian Infantry Division at the French port of Saint-Nazaire on 16 February 1915. Commissioned by the Canadian War Memorials Fund and now part of the Beaverbrook Collection of War Art at the Canadian War Museum, the painting currently hangs in the Senate Chamber of the Parliament of Canada in Ottawa. This stirring figurative work records the colourful entry of the pipes and drums of the 13th Battalion, Royal Highlanders of Canada, led by Pipe Major David Manson (later major and quartermaster), his bagpipes still in use today by the current pipe major of the Regiment. Manson was pipe major of Canada's Black Watch between 1897 and 1907. The group of officers on the right consists of the staff of the 3rd Canadian Infantry Brigade as well as officers of the 13th Battalion. The officer shaking hands with the French officer is Brigadier General Richard E.W. Turner, VC. The officer standing behind Turner's left shoulder is the commander of the 13th Battalion, Lieutenant Colonel Frederick O.W. Loomis. Other officers of the 13th Battalion in this group include: Major Victor C. Buchanan; Major Douglas R. McCuaig; Captain George E. McCuaig; Captain Alex. G. Cameron (brigade orderly officer); and Lieutenant Clarence N. McCuaig. Tied up at the dock in the background is the steamship *Novian*, commanded by Captain McCormack, which carried the 13th Battalion and its 31 officers and 1002 men across the Channel, as well as the Divisional Ammunition Column with its complement of over 200 horses. Interestingly, the War Diary of the 13th Battalion for 16 February does not record Bundy's colourful landing, but simply states: "S. Nazaire – Disembarked from ship and boarded train at 8:30 p.m."³⁸

LOCATION : SENATE CHAMBER, OTTAWA

CWM IDENTIFICATION NUMBER : 19710261-0110

ARMISTICE MESSAGE, 1918

Confirmation of the armistice ending World War One was received by telephone at the headquarters of the 42nd Battalion, Royal Highlanders of Canada at 7.45 AM, Monday, 11 November 1918. The message was received by the Battalion's signaling officer, Lieutenant Louis H. Biggar, who had helped to establish Battalion Headquarters at the Hôtel de Ville in Mons an hour earlier. The message reads: "Hostilities will cease at 1100 Nov. 11th – Troops will stand fast on line reached at that hour which will be reported to Bde [Brigade] HQ – Defensive precautions will be maintained – There will be no intercourse of any description with the enemy – Further instructions follow." Lieutenant Biggar then delivered copies to the various detachments of the Battalion scattered about the city, the message to the advanced platoons being delivered by bicycle. The hand-written copy shown here was initialed by two company commanders, Captains Eric B. Finley and James B.T. Montgomerie, after they had read the message to their men in the firing line. Lieutenant Biggar, along with the Battalion's scout officer, Lieutenant Jordayne W. Cave, had been the first officers of the 42nd to enter Mons. No sooner had they entered the main square, when the "Gold Book" was taken out of the city vaults where it had lain for over four years.⁶¹ Biggar and Cave had the distinction of being the first British soldiers to sign the book – the previous entry was that of King Albert of Belgium, who had signed it in 1913 on his first visit to Mons after ascending the throne. Detachments of the Black Watch of Scotland had been near Mons at the beginning of the war in 1914, and as soon as the inhabitants saw the Highlanders of the 42nd, they shouted, "we knew you would come back."⁶² The following day, a funeral was held for those Canadians killed during the advance into Mons, including four Highlanders of the 42nd who were killed on 10 November. All funeral arrangements were taken over by the city and in the words of the 42nd's War Diary, "no other British soldiers had had such an elaborate and memorable funeral as these."⁶³ They were buried with all military honors near the graves of the British soldiers who lost their lives at Mons in 1914.

Received by phone
at 7.45 AM. 11/11/18
at Hotel de Ville, MONS
by Lieut. L.H. Biggar
Sp. Off. 42nd Bn. R.C.

Sm 0735
c.29 55

4 2nd Bn.

Bm 53 11 AAA

Hostilities will cease
at 1100 Nov. 11th
aaa Troops will
stand fast on line
reached at that hour
which will be reported
to Bde. 149. aaa
Defensive precautions will
be maintained. aaa There
will be no intercourse of
any description with the enemy
and further instructions follow

J. H. C. B.

LOCATION : REGIMENTAL MUSEUM

REGIMENTAL IDENTIFICATION NUMBER : 13-1918-11

Le jour, onze novembre mil neuf cent dix-huit, dès cinq heures du matin, les Membres du Collège des Bourgmestre et Echevins ont eu l'honneur de recevoir les premiers officiers du corps canadien de l'armée britannique, arrivant de la bataille, qui se sont rendus à l'Hôtel-de-Ville, après la délivrance de la ville de Mons, de l'occupation allemande.

Ces officiers ont bien voulu constater cette réception, par leur signature autographe.

W. King

Blacklock
D.A.A.G.
3rd Canadian Division

The Royal Canadian Regt

L. A. Beggan Lieut.

L. J. Deckers
Officier belge - interprète.

4th Bn Canadian. B.E.F.

J. W. Cave Lieut

42nd Bn Canadian. B.E.F.

A. Breakey Lieut

W. King
The Regt.

The Royal Canadian Regt

