

## Historic Essex Scottish Bagpipes Again Honour War Dead in Dieppe, France

By Regimental Major G.T. (Greg) Childs, CD

A trio of serving soldiers from The Essex and Kent Scottish Regiment recently had the honour of travelling from Windsor, ON to France, to commemorate the sacrifice of the soldiers of the Essex Scottish during the 2<sup>nd</sup> Canadian Infantry Division 19<sup>th</sup> August 1942 raid on the French coastal port at Dieppe.

Major Mitch Columba, Sergeant Hannibal Stephenson and Piper-Corporal Rhea Hodgins-Kochanowski took part in the trip to Dieppe which was funded by The Scottish Borderers Foundation.

In 2006, on the Dieppe landing site codenamed "Red Beach," the Regimental Family erected an amazing monument to the sacrifice of so many Essex Scottish soldiers during the entirety of the Second World War. Although this solemn black obelisk monument appears to be a simple memorial to our war dead and wounded, it is one of the very few monuments in the world which is celestially interactive.

By 1:00 p.m. at the end of the Dieppe Raid, codenamed "OPERATION JUBILEE," all members of the Division were to end the raid and withdraw back onto the landing craft and return to England. At precisely 1:00 p.m. - but only on 19<sup>th</sup> August every year - the sun shines through the maple leaf shaped hole in the monument and momentarily illuminates a stainless-steel maple leaf embedded in the beach rock base.

For many reasons, the frontal assault plan was disastrous and out of 553 Essex Scottish attackers, only 51 made it onto the landing craft, most of them wounded. The Regiment was quickly rebuilt and trained for the D-Day invasion 2 years later. The loss of 90 per cent of our Regiment has been sadly honoured at annual commemorations in Dieppe, France and Windsor, Ontario.

Piper-Corporal Hodgins-Kochanowski had the distinct privilege on 19<sup>th</sup> August 2022 to once again play the lament "*Flowers of The Forest*," to commemorate the sacrifice of our WWI 18th Battalion, Canadian Expeditionary Force, and our WWII Essex Scottish soldiers with the very set of R.G. Lawrie bagpipes that had been used twice before in the last century during wartime.



(LtoR) Piper Corporal Rhea Hodgins-Kochanowski, Major Mitch Columba, Sergeant Hannibal Stephenson at the Essex Scottish Dieppe Memorial, France.

"I feel honoured to have been able to play the R.G. Laurie bagpipes in France for the 80th anniversary of the Dieppe Raid. It was such an incredible experience being able to represent the Essex and Kent Scottish Pipes and Drums with an instrument that holds such great historical significance," says Piper-Corporal Hodgins. "It is humbling to know that I have now played the same pipes that have been played in France in both world wars; this brought forth a feeling of reverence for the sacrifice of our forefathers."

Master Pipe-maker Robert George Lawrie started making exceptional high-quality bagpipes in 1890. The early R.G. Lawrie bagpipes - considered by many competition pipers to be flawless and the best ever made - even received the very prestigious commission of a Royal Warrant of Appointment, supplying bagpipes to HM Queen Victoria and played by future British monarchs King Edward VII and King Edward VIII. The best materials available were used to produce a very rich sound, including dense blackwood (ebony) from Gabon, solid sterling silver and ivory fittings.

Piper John MacDonald purchased a set of 1906 R.G. Lawrie Great Highland Bagpipes and during WWI, he piped Canadian soldiers "over the top" from the trenches in France, as they put in attacks against the German invaders. These unarmed pipers, all trained infantrymen often closely followed their attacking troops while playing the tunes of glory which had the effect of spurring-on the infantry soldiers.

The enemy German officers encouraged their soldiers to target these unarmed "ladies from hell" and out of the 2,500 pipers who served during WWI, 500 were killed and 600 were seriously wounded. No piper was ever ordered to play in battle, but instead the pipers drew lots for this prestigious opportunity to play their troops into fierce combat.

John MacDonald also served overseas as a piper for the Essex Scottish during WWII, once again playing this same set of R.G. Lawrie bagpipes. As with most bandsmen, their primary task was providing first aid to wounded soldiers as stretcher bearers during battle.

Piper John MacDonald's son, George "Sandy" MacDonald, was also a piper, and he also served in the Essex Scottish during WWII, as an infantry sergeant major. After the war, Sandy repatriated to Chatham, ON, and piped for the Royal Canadian Legion.

The R.G. Lawrie bagpipes were soon passed to Sandy's son Rod, who had joined the postwar Royal Canadian Air Force and also played in the RCAF Pipe Band. Rod was trained by renowned Pipe Major Archie Cairns MMM, CD.

During his career, Rod played for U.S. General Colin Powell at the NORAD base in Colorado Springs, Colo., and also for HRH Prince Philip in 1953 at 4 Wing in Baden-Baden, Germany - to mention just a couple of significant appearances made by these pipes.

In 2011, at the age of 73 and then unable to continue playing the pipes, and in acknowledgement to the Regimental history of these prestigious bagpipes, Rod donated this set of R.G. Lawrie bagpipes to The Essex and Kent Scottish.



Piper Corporal Rhea  
Hodgins-Kochanowski

Rod stated that “if my grandfather John, and father Sandy were alive today they would’ve been very pleased with my donation to have these pipes once again played by a regimental piper wearing MacGregor tartan, as they both had done.”

Information on the Essex and Kent Scottish Regiment's current fundraising campaign through the Scottish Borderers Foundation to commemorate and honour the legacy of our veterans both at home and overseas can be found at [www.servicesacrificeduty.ca](http://www.servicesacrificeduty.ca)

***Semper Paratus! (Always Ready)***