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Bagpipes at the Front: Pipers and Piping during Combat in the Great War

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There are certain ideas about music's role in warfare, and certain turns of phrase used to express those ideas, that are as persistent and ubiquitous as they are vague and potentially misleading. Music played during combat, except where its function is primarily to convey commands, is often presumed to have the function of striking fear into the heart of the opponent, or of "inspiring" or "inciting" soldiers of one's own side to the attack. To date, however, very few studies have looked in depth at the use of music at the moment of violence,[1] and even less at the specific context posed by battles in war. The need for such research is pressing. Over the past forty years, military historians, sociologists and psychologists have turned their attention more and more to the lived experiences of soldiers in battle. These studies have flagged up several anomalies in more traditional portrayals of war, pointing to great discrepancies between how battles are presented in art, literature, song, and in official and unofficial histories, and how battles in fact look, smell, feel and sound to those in the thick of them. Some studies have even questioned the ability of soldiers, the best of whom are but men and women at best, to fulfil the most fundamental task assigned them by the society which they serve: to fight and if necessary to kill the men and women on the other side.[2]

If battlefields are sites not of the glory of the charge, but of horror and, potentially, chaos; if they are peopled not by willing killers, but by men and women as afraid of

[1] On this term, see M. J. Grant, "Situating the Music of the Great War: Historical and Analytical Perspectives", in Stefan Hanheide, Dietrich Helms, Claudia Glunz & Thomas Schneider (eds.), *Musik bezieht Stellung. Funktionalisierungen der Musik im Ersten Weltkrieg* (Göttingen: V&R unipress, 2013), 13-30.

[2] Classic works in this line include John Keegan, *The Face of Battle: A Study of Agincourt, Waterloo, and the Somme* (London: Jonathan Cape, 1976); Richard Holmes, *Acts of War: The Behaviour of Men in Battle* (London: Casell, 2004; first published under the title *Firing Line* in 1985), and by Keegan and Holmes, *Soldiers: A History of Men in Battle* (London: Hamish Hamilton, 1985). On violence and killing specifically see also e.g. Dave Grossman, *On Killing: The Psychological Cost of Learning to Kill in War and Society* (revised edition; New York: Back Bay Books, 2009) and Randall Collins, *Violence: A Microsociological Theory (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2009)* both of which also draw on these earlier works.

administering the final blow as they are of receiving it themselves; if, in other words, war is neither as natural nor as glorious a state as we are often led to believe, then the question for military strategists becomes: how do I ensure control over this situation, and that our objectives are achieved? Warfare becomes a business not only of macrostrategies – of maneouvres and movements of troops and armaments and careful consideration of their best deployment – but also of microstrategies: how to ensure that each individual charged with these tasks fulfils them, overcoming ingrained resistance and emotional reactions to follow the orders they receive. The question for the musicologist researching the use of music during combat then becomes the part such musical practices play in these strategies.

The tradition whereby soldiers from "Scottish" regiments were piped into the thick of battle on the great Highland bagpipe offers a useful point of entry to such investigations.[3] This practice continued into the Great War, long after many comparable traditions of music-making on the battlefield had died out. Given the sheer amount of available material on soldiers' experiences of this war, it is thus the obvious place to start looking for first-hand accounts of what the music of the pipes actually meant to men in battle. At the same time, the dramatic changes in the art of war which this conflict brought should make us wary of taking it as exemplary of others.

Much of this essay is based on research using primary sources from the invaluable collections of the British Imperial War Museums;[4] in addition, I consulted books written both by veterans and others, and third-hand reporting from a number of national and regional British newspapers.[5] Sources used include two surveys of the military use of the pipes published within a decade of the war's end, especially John

[3] The phrase "Scottish" as applied to these regiments means not only British Army regiments based in Scotland, but also regiments styled as "Scottish" in England and in the (former) British dominions. In my research I have focused primarily on regiments from Scotland itself, as well as drawing on existing material on "Scottish" regiments in other countries. Probably the best short general introduction to the great Highland bagpipe, and its relation to other bagpipes in the British Isles and elsewhere, is Hugh Cheape, *Bagpipes: A National Collection of a National Instrument* (Edinburgh: NMS Enterprises Ltd., 2008, reprinted 2010).

[4] I cannot express too strongly my enormous gratitude to the Imperial War Museums for the work they have done to gather, catalogue in detail and make available – including online – such an enormous archive of first-hand testimony and other resources. The present essay would not have been logistically possible without these resources, and it is with great sadness that, while working on this article, I learned of the UK government's plan to drastically cut its funding of this important institution.

[5] Accessed primarily via the *Times Digital Archive* and the online *British Newspaper Archive*, both of which allowed for full-text searching. Given the vast amount of irrelevant articles relating to the phrases "piper" and "piping", I focused for the most part on reports relating specifically to the Battle of Loos.

Grant and Bruce Seton's *The Pipes of War* (1920) and also C. A. Malcolm's *The Piper in Peace and War* (1927). The former specifically focused on the Great War, and though the information it contains is not always accurate, it is a highly useful starting point not least in gathering together information from almost every battalion in which pipers served. By drawing material from all these sources together with more general research into the sociology and psychology of warfare, my aim is to challenge some of the assumptions made about the role of music in battle, and to explore what light these practices throw on more general questions related to soldiers' experience of war.

The Great Highland Bagpipe and the Military: Some Background

Despite the importance of the bagpipe for Scottish national identity and for the Scottish military, there have as yet been relatively few studies tracing the origins of the use of the pipes in warfare. Current scholarship suggests that this tradition, originally associated with the Gaelic-speaking Highland and Island regions, emerged in the later fifteenth or, more probably, sixteenth century, quite possibly from the Irish warpipe tradition, though there is still debate as to whether the Scottish or the Irish tradition provided the precedent.[6] Later assumptions surrounding the presence of bagpipes at earlier and famous Scottish battles, notably the 1314 Battle of Bannockburn at which Bruce's army defeated that of the English King Edward III, are now accepted to be the stuff of myth and legend rather than fact.

Exactly why the bagpipes came to be associated with warfare in the Scottish and Irish contexts is thus still uncertain. Other double-reed instruments including the shawm, the zurna, the hautbois and in earlier eras the aulos were no stranger to the battlefield, and seen from this point of view the use of the bagpipes is not necessarily surprising, except that this particular tradition seems to have taken root only in the Gaelic-speaking regions of the Atlantic littoral. Also interesting is the question of why the bagpipes effectively replaced the bard and his clarsach (a Scottish or Irish form of harp) in these cultures – many practices now associated with solo pipers were

[6] The conviction that the Irish tradition came first came in large part from the historian William Henry Grattan Flood, much of whose research has now been refuted; William Henry Grattan Flood, *The Story of the Bagpipe* (London/New York: Walter Scott/Charles Scribner, 1911). Part of the problem in Flood's work, and in the work of some other earlier researchers, is that they often cite references to "pipes" or "pipers" including in foreign language sources, without clarifying exactly whether this actually does mean the bagpipes. That large bagpipes were used by Irish soldiers to lead troops to the attack in the mid-sixteenth century has been suggested by an engraving from that time, but due to the lack of other reliable sources before this point it is difficult to say where, when and how this tradition really started.

previously the duty of the bard, though he did not accompany the soldiers into the battle itself.[7] This is not the place to explore this issue further, save for stating my own working hypothesis that the particular type of connection between bagpipes and the military in the Scottish case is probably an extension of the connection between the bagpipes and Highland nobility, in other words the clan chiefs. The bagpipe grows in status around the same time as fundamental changes in the governance of Highland society in the early 16th century, and it is quite possible that, around this time, some chiefs began to copy the trappings of royalty and power of other European societies. The English King Henry VIII had many bagpipers at his court; central European pageants of the seventeenth century, at a time when many European countries were simultaneously in terror of and in thrall to the Ottoman Empire, often used bagpipes to mimic the sound and fury of "Turkish" musicians.[8] The specific linking of bagpipes to positions of power – similar to the trumpet elsewhere – may provide the clue, given that bagpipes otherwise were primarily associated with the peasantry.[9]

Whatever the origins of the tradition, it was so established by the eighteenth century that several sources talk of Highland soldiers' unwillingness to fight unless a piper went with them. There were pipers on both sides during the Battle of Culloden of 1746, which ended the Second Jacobite Uprising. Though the bagpipe, unlike other cultural markers of Gaelic society including the language and the wearing of tartan, were banned for a period thereafter, its use was still subject to restrictions – famously, a piper was found guilty of bearing a weapon when the judge in the case decided that since Highland soldiers never went into battle without the pipes, the pipes themselves could be considered an instrument of war.

Restrictions on Gaelic cultural and social practices were not extended to the military, however, and some commentators have suggested that the large numbers of men who joined the new Highland regiments of the British Army in the later

[7] David Murray has suggested that the tradition of the piper accompanying troops into battle comes from a time when, after playing the initial charge, he would give his pipes to his ghillie (manservant) and draw his broadsword; he does not give a source for this information. David Murray, *Music of the Scottish Regiments* (Edinburgh: Mercat Press, 1994/2001), 47-48.

[8] See e.g. the iconographic sources given in Edmund A. Bowles, "The Impact of Turkish Military Bands on European Court Festivals in the Seventeenth and Eighteenth Centuries", *Early Music* 34/4 (2006), 533-579. Actual Ottoman bands did not use bagpipes, but a larger number of zurna.

[9] Soldiers in other armies certainly also made use of the bagpipes around the same time, but I am not as yet aware of evidence of them being used in the same specific ways, and with the same status, as the emerging case of great Highland bagpipe. More research needs to be done on this subject, however.

eighteenth century can be explained by this fact.[10] Certainly, from the American War of Independence and particularly during the period of the Napoleonic Wars, the Highland soldier was gradually rebranded – no longer the uncouth savage of the north, the Highlanders' supposedly innate bravado and fighting skill were now celebrated and promoted, as were all the trappings that marked his difference. These included the pipes, though as with so many military music traditions, official recognition of and financial support for their deployment were not immediately forthcoming. The most important change in this regard came with the assignment of one pipe major and five pipers to Highland regiments in 1854, on the eve of the Crimean war; in 1882, an order was issued approving a similar set-up in Lowland regiments, but without providing the necessary funding. Traditionally, each company would be served by one piper for the charge, a company having around 200 men. The combined pipers also formed the backbone for the emerging tradition of pipe bands. In Highland regiments, funding for these six pipers in total was guaranteed, but any further pipers were to be maintained by the regiment itself. This led to the distinction between "full" and "acting" pipers, the latter also serving in the ranks.[11]

Generally, pipers were not the only musicians in Scottish regiments, which also often maintained more traditional bands – either full wind bands or, until the second half of the nineteenth century, fifes and drums – as well as buglers and drummers for the more practical purposes of signalling. The piper's duties effectively straddled these two quite distinctive aspects of music in the military. While they did not convey commands on the battlefield to the same extent as buglers and drummers,[12] the task of signalling reveille, dinner, and so on in barracks and in camp were often split between the drummer-buglers and the pipers.[13] Similar to other military traditions connecting words to particular bugle calls – a useful mnemomic for young buglers – tunes used

[10] For a comprehensive study of the history of the Highland regiments, including a chapter specifically on music, see especially Diana M. Henderson, *Highland Soldier: A Social History of the Highland Regiments, 1820-1920* (Edinburgh: John Donald, 1989). The book is derived from her longer doctoral dissertation, the full text of which is available online: *A Social and Domestic History of the Kilted and Highland Based Regiments of Foot, 1820-1920*, https://www.era.lib.ed.ac.uk/bitstream/1842/6864/1/384195_vol1.pdf, accessed 13 January 2015.

[11] See especially C. A. Malcolm, *The Piper in Peace and War* (London: Hardwicke Press, 1993; first published 1927), Chapter 1.

[12] As some of the sources cited later testify, in the case of offensives on the Western Front it seems to have been the case that the pipes were struck up after the signal to advance had come from the bugles or laterally, whistles.

[13] Refer for example to Charles Harry Ditcham's descriptions of life as a drummer-bugler in the Gordon Highlanders on the eve of the Great War: Charles Harry Ditcham, interviewed by David G. Lance in

for particular occasions, regiments and duties were often employed by dint of the association awakened by their text (the tune of "Hey Johnnie Cope, Are Ye Wakin' Yet", for example, was used in several regiments for reveille, "Bannocks' o' Barley Meal" or "Brose and Butter" for specific mealtimes).

There is abundant, if anecdotal, material on the role of pipers in combat before the Great War, but much of it needs to be approached with caution. A fascination with the role of music generally, and piping specifically, in the legendary exploits of Highland soldiers becomes particularly apparent from the mid-nineteenth century onwards, no doubt helped by Queen Victoria's obsession with all things Scottish. This general fascination helped produce sources for this research that might otherwise not have seen the light of day: propagandists seized the opportunity where ever they could, and stories of the bravery of pipers who played on at great personal risk and, in several cases, after being injured, emerged from every nineteenth century conflict in which Highland regiments were active. But the tendency to sum up the function of pipers in combat with the familiar vocabulary of "inspiration" – earlier sources in particular also racialise such comments by suggesting the music's effects are specific to Scots for biological rather than cultural reasons – necessitates that we approach all these reports with the utmost care. To a large extent, this trend continued into the Great War, as will become clear in the discussion below.

What we now know of the conditions of the First World War, and particular of the frontline trenches, would seem to offer an immediate check on such hyperbole. What exactly can we mean by "inspiration" in the context of the squalor, the almost constant threat of death or injury from shelling, the use (and fear) of poisoned gas? Then there is the question of the actual fate of those who marched behind the pipes. The percentage of Scottish men killed in the Great War was much higher than for any of the other constituent nations of the UK. Of 557,618 men from Scotland recruited to the British Army specifically, it is estimated that around 100,000 lost their lives, around 18% of those who served (some sources suggest figures of up to 25%, however); figures for the UK as a whole lie at around 11.5%. A soldier from London, who served with the London Scottish and from 1916 with the Gordon Highlanders, had his own theory regarding why so many Scottish recruits died:

1974, audio recording, IWM catalogue number 374, available at http://www.iwm.org.uk/collections/item/object/80000373 accessed 22 January 2015.

> […] the Scots, and I say this without a blush because I was a Londoner pure and simple, the Scots had a reputation that was not enviable, I assure you. Because if there was ever any trouble going anywhere, "Call in the Scots, they'll sort it out". And that is why, if you look at the record of the Scottish regiments, you will find that their casualties record is higher than anyone else's. Because once they get the bit between their teeth, you can't stop them.[14]

Whether the casualties were due to this tenacity, or to the tendency to select the Scottish regiments for dangerous or tricky operations, or to the legend of Scots bravery in battle that triggered and thus perpetuated such notions, is a moot point.

The Pipers of Loos

> I am glad to have seen even a little of the biggest battle in the history of the world.[15]

The vast amount of material available to the researcher working on the Great War is both a blessing and a curse. For reasons that will become evident, the main focus of this article will be two particular offensives which took place in autumn 1915 and summer-autumn 1916 respectively. Further research into the very first battles of the War would likely throw up other material and potentially quite different perspectives, given that those conflicts involved primarily the so-called "Old Contemptibles" rather than the territorial and New Army forces that became so important thereafter.[16]

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[14] Interview with Victor "Hal" Kerridge conducted by Lyn E. Smith in 1999; IWM 18836; recording available online at http://www.iwm.org.uk/collections/item/object/80018219, accessed 8 December 2014. This quotation from Tape 1, from about 28:20, my transcription. The quotation comes in the context of his reflections on the kilt as one of the attractions of the Scottish regiments even for non-Scots like himself.

[15] Letter from Captain A. Gilmour, 7th Battalion King's Own Scottish Borderers, to his father from hospital in Versailles, 27.9.1915. Gilmour was killed by a shell on 15 August 1916, not long after returning from an army instruction course. I have been unable to trace the copyright holder for these papers.

[16] The "Old Contemptibles" was the nickname for soldiers who had been in the regular Army when the war broke out, deriving from Kaiser Wilhelm II's alleged description of this as a "contemptible little army". The New Army battalions, also known as Kitchener's Army, consisted instead of men recruited only after the war had started. These included what became known as the "Pals' Battalions" because they grouped together men from the same locality and/or profession who joined up together. A popular pipe tune written during the war and dedicated to "King's George V's Army" or "Kitchener's Army" can be heard towards the end of a fascinating compilation of sounds recorded on the Western Front in 1917, available online from the Imperial War Museums: "Trench Warfare", IWM 970, http://www.iwm.org.uk/collections/item/object/80000964 accessed 21 January 2015. My thanks to Simon McKerrell for identifying the tune.

The Battle of Loos on the Western Front, which began on 25 September 1915, has been overshadowed in collective memory by other offensives, including the two Battles of Ypres, and particularly the infamous First Battle of the Somme, to be discussed later. For those serving in 1915, however, so many of whom had only relatively recently become soldiers at all, things looked different, and even more experienced soldiers recognised that this offensive, also known as "The Big Push", was in a different category altogether from the other battles on the Western Front earlier that year. The excitement and trepidation is revealed in many letters written home by officers in the few days before the attack. Officers would have known about the upcoming offensive for many weeks, but were prevented by censorship regulations from talking about it in their letters home. With only a few days to go, many clearly reckoned that there was no danger in imparting the exciting news: by the time the letters reached their destination, the offensive would be well underway, and possibly even completed. Not all of the letters are so positive in their outlook, however. All the soldiers knew that there was considerable risk of them not surviving the days to come; some letters make this clearer than others. Writing to his parents on the eve of the attack, Francis J. McCunn of the 6th Camerons wrote: "Just a line to say that we are moving forward to the attack tomorrow, and to bid you a provisional goodbye; though I am in high hopes of getting through quite all right. Perhaps I may be wounded, in which case I'll send you a line the moment I reach England. In the other event I think I am as nearly convinced as I can be, that there is no annihilation, and that our parting is not forever." McCunn died at Loos. It is stretching the point to suggest that his letter reveals some premonition of this, but researchers of the War have noted before that premonitions of one's fate in an impending battle were not uncommon.[17]

Loos was significant in two ways that make it directly relevant to the present enquiry. Firstly, this battle looms large in Scottish military history given the large number of Scottish battalions that fought there; these included those like the 4th Battalion Black Watch who served as part of the Indian division, otherwise composed largely of what were then termed "native" battalions fighting for the first time on

[17] Francis J. MacCunn, letter to his parents of 24 September 1915; University of Glasgow Special Collections MSGEN532/62. The 6th Cameron Highlanders, a New Army battalion, consisted almost entirely of students and staff of the University of Glasgow, and the University's archive contain several sources relating to their Great War service.

On the subject of premonitions, refer e.g. to the discussion between Peter Simkins (interviewer) and Oswald Croft, audio recording, Imperial War Museum catalogue number 4440, available at http://www.iwm.org.uk/collections/item/object/80004400, tape 1, from ca. 22:30.

European soil.[18] The heavy deployment of Scottish units meant that many pipers played at the attack. Secondly, Loos marked the first use of poisoned gas by the British, around six months after its first use by the Germans. This use of gas, like much else in the British attack, went badly wrong, and in so doing resulted in by far the most famous case of a piper playing to the attack in the whole of the War.

Piper Daniel Laidlaw was almost 40 when the War broke out and he was recalled to active service in the King's Own Scottish Borderers. He was assigned to the 7th Battalion, the "New Army" battalion in which Archibald Gilmour, quoted at the head of this section, also served. Reports of exactly what happened on this morning of 25 September 1915 vary; the official story was that a change in the wind direction meant the gas intended to incapacitate the German soldiers drifted back to the part of the British line where the 44th division, 15th Highland Brigade were waiting to attack. At least one survivor of Loos suggested that the soldiers responsible for the gas had warned the commanding officers not to use it on account of the unpredictable weather, but that they were overruled.[19]

Although numbers of deaths from poisoned gas were much lower than from other causes, it was a slow and extremely painful death. Soldiers were thus justifiably terrified of gas, and the immediate result on the part of the line containing Laidlaw's unit was that the soldiers waiting to charge – already under high stress – began to panic. It was then, according to the reports, that the commanding officer shouted for Laidlaw to play, which he duly did, jumping first to the parapet above the trench. The effect, so the stories go, was that the soldiers regained their composure, and the charge continued as planned.

The first widespread reports of a "Piper of Loos" probably came in the *Daily Telegraph*, the story then being picked up or reprinted in a number of other regional newspapers, including the *Liverpool Daily Echo* and the *Aberdeen Journal*, from which latter source I quote here:

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[18] In the period before the war, British regiments tended to have two battalions, one stationed abroad and the other stationed at home. The word "native" was still used at this point to describe the indigenous people of India in contrast to the British colonialists. Many of the colonial or "native" regiments also had pipers and pipe bands, and these often accompanied the regiments to the various fronts. In the literature on pipers in the Great War, however, they are notable by their absence. More research would therefore be required to establish whether these pipers, too, played to the charge. The digital collections of the Imperial War Museums include several images of pipers from Indian and northern African units.

[19] Private papers of 2nd Lt. G. H. Currie DCM; Imperial War Museum, Documents.153111; this consists of a typed copy of a diary entry on the Battle of Loos; p. 8-9. Currie was at that point serving with the 1st/9th Highland Light Infantry.

> At 6.30, lines of bayonets appear everywhere. Two brigades are stirring. In couples of two battalions, deployed in long waves, they rush to the attack. At this moment there is a magnificent episode which must be emphasised, because it brings out in all its beauty the elan which has characterised this first day. At one corner of the line a few men seemed to hesitate, standing for a moment on the parapet. They fell back again into the trench. Then a piper took up his bagpipes, and amidst the German bullets which were already flying about, amidst the shrapnel and the noxious smoke, he began to run, playing as he ran, and collecting everybody around him. This brave man was only slightly wounded. Perhaps the English [*sic*] will some day speak of the Piper of Loos as our French Allies speak of the Trumpeter of Sidi Braham.[20]

This report tells us as much about the vagaries of war reporting as it does about the matter in hand, and is not untypical for the manner in which pipers' role in battle was portrayed. A handwritten account of the first day of Loos by a member of Military Intelligence, digitalised by the *Europeana 1914-1918* project, provides a further example which is positively overflowing with clichés: "The mad magic of ['Blue Bonnets over the Border'] fired their Northern blood as nothing else could have done. They answered as one man to the call. As one man they streamed through the gas cloud towards Loos. And with them marched Piper Daniel Laidlaw, playing them on."[21] Who need be afraid of gas, artillery, death, defeat, when such magical, mystical powers were at work for the British cause?

There were at least two accounts from Laidlaw himself of what happened that day. While he was convalescing, a reporter noted the following from an interview with him:

> "On Saturday night, September 25," [Laidlaw] said, "when the bugles had sounded the advance, I got over the parapet of the trench and at once set the pipes going. The laddies gave a cheer as they started off for the enemy's lines. As soon as they showed themselves over the trench parapet they began to fall very fast. They never wavered, however, and dashed straight on. Playing 'Blue Bonnets over the Border,' an old tune with a lot of fire in it, I followed after them as hard as I could go, piping all the time for all I was worth.
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> "Just as we were getting near the German lines I was wounded by shrapnel in the ankle and left leg. I was too excited at the moment to feel the pain, and

[20] Report from a war correspondent originally published in the *Daily Telegraph*, reprinted in other newspapers. I have quoted here from the *Aberdeen Journal*, 11 October 1915, p. 4.

[21] Manuscript source for James Lloyd Price, "Tales of the V.C.", available at http://www.europeana1914-1918.eu/en/contributions/5466#prettyPhoto last accessed 8 December 2014. The source information

> scrambled on as best I could, changing the tune to 'The Standard on the Braes o' Mar' – a grand tune to charge on. I kept on piping, and hobbled along with the laddies until I could go no further owing to my wound, and then, seeing they had won the position, I got back to my own trench as well as I could."[22]

The fact that this account misses out central elements of the story as otherwise told – specifically, that he played as a counter to the effects of gas on his company – seems understandable in light of both official and self-censorship in reporting on the war. However, Laidlaw's account differs in from the report on his gallantry found in the very same edition of the newspaper. As recounted there,

> During the worst of the bombardment, when the attack was about to commence, Piper Laidlaw, seeing that his company was somewhat shaken from the effects of gas, with absolute coolness and disregard of danger mounted the parapet, marched up and down and played his company out of the trench. The effect of his splendid example was immediate, and the company dashed out to the assault.[23]

This official version of events came almost certainly from Laidlaw's commanding officers in recommending him for the honour. That his own account – or at least, this version of it – differs could have many reasons, ranging from a wish to protect the honour of his company, wariness regarding what information he could or could not impart, or possibly even an altered memory of the events caused by injury or trauma. It is also possible that the correspondent was not entirely faithful to his source; it is interesting, for example, that Laidlaw mentions the tunes in terms of their abilities to rouse a charge, but does not note that these are in fact the regimental marches. In another interview, published only a few days later, a version of the story is attributed to Laidlaw which is closer to the more generally accepted version:

> "There was a light wind that morning," he said quietly. "It was blowing a bank of gas towards the German trenches when their high-explosive shells burst in its midst and sent it among our own men.
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> "For a minute or two it had a bad effect on my company; but in a flash Lieutenant Young sized up the situation, and noticing I had my pipes, exclaimed, 'For God's sake, Laidlaw, pipe them together!'"[24]

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on the website states that archives relating to propaganda of this type were generally destroyed: this particular source survived only because it was still in the possession of its author.

[22] "Piper Laidlaw's Story", *Edinburgh Evening News*, 19 November 1915, p. 3. Historians of military music will be quick to pick up on the fact that according to this report, bugles were still being used to sound the advance.

[23] "Piping in the Midst of Danger", *Edinburgh Evening News*, 19 November 1915, p. 3.

[24] "The Piper V.C.", *North-Eastern Daily Gazette*, 20 November 1915, p. 2.

Notable in this second account is that, while the gas is mentioned, its drifting back towards the British trenches is attributed to German actions rather than British failures. Here too, then, we encounter a version of events which is palatable, but not necessarily entirely accurate. It would be naive to expect anything else from accounts published in the midst of the War itself; the disjuncture becomes evident, however, when we compare these descriptions to others, such as this from a memoir written in 1963 by Corporal R. E. Foulkes of the 25th Field Battalion Royal Engineers; this battalion was attached to the 15th Division:

> Well, we were over the top and running in open order at about 3 yard spacings as we had been trained to do. At about this time I saw Piper Laidlaw of the King's Own Scottish Borderers marching up and down playing his bagpipes. I don't know what the tune was but that does not seem to matter to Scotsmen. The skirl of the pipes sets them alight. And down the years I have found it stirs me too. And I am Lancashire born of Welsh and Cockney extraction. Piper Laidlaw was awarded the V.C. for this exploit and I reckon he deserved it. War is a queer business. I don't believe we realize the awfulness of it until we find ourselves in it. I know I didn't. If I had been asked before the battle if I expected anyone to be hurt I should have said of course there is bound to be lots of killed and wounded. But I shall never forget the horror and amazement that came over me when I saw the first casualty. He was a kilted soldier and half his face seemed to be blown away. He was sat down on a parapit [*sic*] of a trench trying to light a cigarette and saying oh with difficulty. And the thought came over me 'That men could do such things to one another.' It seemed unbelievable but there it was. That by the way.[25]

Foulkes does not deny the impact of the pipes, but it is noticeable firstly, that he does not link their impact to the actual situation at Loos, and that secondly, he moves immediately on to describing sights far removed from the "glory" and "elan" of the more propagandistic sources.[26] Whether or not Foulkes knew Laidlaw before the attack is unclear; it is just as possible that the fame Laidlaw achieved led him to make the connection and the attribution afterwards (and, indeed, to realise the wider significance of what he had seen).

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[25] Private papers of Cpl. R. E. Foulkes, IWM Documents.2646, Page 5 of typescript. I am grateful to R. O. Foulkes for permission to reproduce this passage.

[26] This applies to several sources I consulted in the course of this research, especially where this concerns music, a subject rarely broached directly by interviewers interested in soldiers' general experiences of the war. According to R. O. Foulkes, Foulkes senior often talked of his experiences at Loos, including the impression made by the lone piper; personal communication.

It is also possible that the piper Foulkes saw was not Laidlaw at all, for he was certainly not the only piper to have played at Loos; some of the many others also occasionally went by the accolade "piper of Loos".[27] These included two of the five pipers of the 2nd Black Watch who played that day, David Simpson and Alexander MacDonald. The 2nd Black Watch was not employed at Loos itself, but in an offensive at nearby Pietre designed to prevent German reinforcements reaching Loos. Simpson was killed, but only after he had played over three lines of German trenches; he was recommended for a V.C.[28] MacDonald managed to continue playing after being shot in the leg, which was later amputated above the knee. He was subsequently awarded the D.C.M, survived the war and worked for a while at a blacksmith's forge in the Scottish town of Cupar. He died in March 1917 following an operation for appendicitis, and reports of his funeral service in some local papers referred to him as "Piper of Loos".[29] Seton and Grant list three other pipers of the 2nd Black Watch who played: R. Johnstone, D. Armit and J. Galloway: Johnstone played until he succumbed to gas, while Armit and Galloway managed to reach the German trenches.[30] According to Seton and Grant, Charles Cameron of the 11 Argyll and Sutherland Highlanders was also known within his own battalion as "the piper of Loos", on account of his rallying his comrades, under fire, during intensive and confused hand-to-hand fighting at Hill 70 on 26 September.[31]

A further casualty of Loos was Pipe Major Robert Mackenzie. He is mentioned in a first-hand account from a soldier of the 6th KOSB, F. C. Waller, that was published before the war had even ended. Waller's book describes his experience from the training camp at Bordon in England up to the Battle of Loos.[32] The full impact of his testimony on Loos can only really be appreciated by referring to the account in its entirety, and appreciating the sharp contrast between his comparatively lengthy description of the preparations for the battle, including on the very morning it was to

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[27] That Foulkes possibly saw another piper that day rather than Laidlaw, is pure surmise on my part. He did keep in touch with many Scottish comrades from the War thereafter (personal communication from R. O. Foulkes) and may thus have had sources to corroborate this identification.

[28] Seton & Grant, op. cit., 23.

[29] See e.g. "Death of 'The Piper of Loos'", *Evening Telegraph* (Angus), 17 April 1917, p. 2; "The Gallant Piper of Loos Dies At Cupar", *Dundee Courier*, 17 April 1917, p. 4.

[30] Seton & Grant, op. cit., 23, 51-52. Malcolm also names Armit – which he spells Armitt – but not Johnstone or Galloway, but does mention someone he calls a "boy piper", Wishart. Malcolm, op. cit., section "Pipers of the Black Watch (Royal Highlanders)", paragraph 31. The only Wishart mentioned by Seton and Grant was a piper of the 1st Battalion Black Watch.

[31] Seton & Grant, op. cit., 23.

[32] "C. W." [=F. C. Waller], *From Bordon to Loos with the 6th Service Battalion King's Own Scottish Borderers* (Winchester: Warren & Son, 1917).

begin, and the ensuing speed with which whole worlds collapse at the point of the attack itself. One minute, it seems, Waller and the rest of B company are waiting to advance – "Our spirits were sky high, then, and the men were dancing with anxiety to get forward".[33] They see A Company advance, and know that their own company will be next; but "While waiting for orders to follow on, ghastly forms re-appeared from the smoke and came tumbling into the trench". These ghastly forms were the remains of A Company, who had left the trench only minutes before – bloody, coughing, some begging to be killed. When the order for B Company to advance came, the process repeated itself: immediately, "men were dropping around me as ninepins".[34] Waller himself was soon shot in the leg.[35] Then begins the agonising attempt to retreat back to safety:

> It took us roughly two to three hours to get back to our front trench, and it was a marvel we were not killed as we crawled over the parapet.
>
> Outside, on No Man's Land, it was a pretty bad sight, but what met our eyes when we got into the trench, no pen could describe.
>
> On the firing step where I lay was our Pipe Major sitting bolt upright, shot through both legs. He had been playing his pipes from the top of the trench until he was hit and toppled back. I got my servant to give him some morphia which I had with me, and I think that relieved him temporarily. I heard later he died in hospital. He was the finest and grandest old man in the Regiment, and we were justly proud of him.[36]

Waller's experience tallies with that of A. Gilmour, 7th KOSB, quoted at this section's head, though he at no point mentions the pipers. Gilmour, too, fell within minutes after a blow to the leg, his involvement in this "biggest battle in the world" thus consisting of months of training, weeks of preparation, and only a few steps taken on the battleground itself. These are the stories which official accounts of pipers and soldiers in battle often overlook. Robert Burns, a Cameron Highlander who died in the year 2000 at the age of 104, remarked in a television documentary on the role of pipers in the War that "I heard the piper when I went over the top, but he didn't last long".[37] Some of Burns's other, brief reminiscences on the pipers of the Western Front will be discussed later.

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[33] Waller, op. cit., 65.
[34] Waller, op. cit., 66.
[35] Waller, op. cit., 67.
[36] Waller, op. cit., 69.
[37] *Instrument of War: Ladies from Hell* (dir. Patrick King, 1997) from ca. 46:25 on the DVD edition. The editing of the film leads to the implication that this happened on the first day of the Battle of the Somme; Burns was not however involved in that attack. He was almost certainly referring to Loos.

From Loos to the Somme

The losses incurred not only in Loos but also in the first year of the campaign as a whole seem to have led to a widescale reappraisal of the use of pipers in battle. The 1st Battalion Highland Light Infantry saw seven pipers killed, eight injured and two taken prisoner in the first six months of their deployment; thereafter, pipers were not sent to the front in any capacity. The 2nd Battalion's losses were comparable: only two pipers remained after the first few months' fighting. The 7th Cameron Highlanders still sent pipers into action after Loos, but only singly due to the losses incurred there.[38] Despite advertisements for pipers and pipe majors, such as those in the *Oban Times* in winter 1914/15 and Spring 1915 cited by William Donaldson, it was clearly the case that pipers would be a commodity in increasingly short supply if they were still to be exposed to frontline action.[39] This is also the reason why, even in those battalions which employed pipers in the ranks or as stretcher bearers, a trend towards keeping pipers back from the front in any capacity seems to have arisen quite quickly: pipers were of great value behind the lines, and very difficult to replace. The Front was not the only dangerous place, though. Pipers were among the first casualties seen by Charles Edward Honeysett, a private in the 9th Battalion Royal Irish Fusiliers, when he landed in France in March 1918. An Irish pipe band had been sent to greet his battalion, but a shell exploded among them en route. The incident, Honeysett stated, was the result of collusion between the Belgian station master and the Germans, and resulted in the station master being shot.[40]

Recruiting good pipers was problematic enough in peacetime, quite apart from the exacerbated conditions of the War. Then there was the added problem of the pipes themselves. Compared not least to other military instruments, the pipes are highly demanding in terms of maintenance, susceptible to heat and moisture, and easily incapacitated by a stray bullet; stories of pipers having to patch up their pipes in the

[38] This information is derived from Seton and Grant, op. cit., who cite responses from commanding officers of companies in which pipers served from both Scotland and England as well as Canada, New Zealand and South Africa. Donaldson also notes that John Grant placed an advertisement in the *Oban Times* looking for information: William Donaldson, *The Highland Pipe and Scottish Society 1750-1950* (paperback edition; Edinburgh: John Donald, 2008, reprint 2013, 322). I have not been able to corroborate Seton and Grant's information. Responses to their requests vary greatly in length and detail; for some battalions there is no information at all. In their book, any information available is placed at the head of the list of pipers who served in the various battalions, including information on casualties, deaths, and honours where available.

[39] Donaldson, op. cit., 317.

[40] Charles Edward Honeysett, interviewed by Jon Honeysett in 1987; recording, IWM 18043; reel 1. Currently only available in the reading room of the IWM in Lambeth, London.

middle of the battlefield are common. Back on the home front, there was at least one campaign to raise funds specifically "for BAGPIPES for the boys who lost theirs in last advance".[41]

To the extent that the information proferred to Seton and Grant is reliable, different battalions even within one regiment differed sometimes dramatically in the attitude they took to sending pipers over the top. The respondent to their enquiry from the 2nd Battalion Royal Scots reasoned that "when the men heard the pipes they would lose control of themselves and, in their eagerness to get forward would be apt to rush into their own barrage".[42] This contrasts sharply to the report delivered by the 1st Battalion Royal Scots, which in the Salonikan theatre saw pipers playing a decisive role in the capture of Karajakois in Autumn 1916; in that case, the respondent stated that "it was largely due to the presence of the pipers with the leading wave that the enemy vacated their trenches and retired in disorder".[43] According to the information garnered by Seton and Grant, pipers of the 11th Royal Scots, a new army battalion, were not allowed to play to the attack despite repeatedly requesting to do so, because the band was so highly valued; however, the 12th Battalion, which was formed at the same time and, like the 11th, arrived in France in May 1915, sent their companies into action at Loos with pipers playing, resulting in heavy losses.[44]

The use of pipers by the 1st Royal Scots in the Salonikan theatre seems to have been something of an exception; relatively unusual as well is the claim, cited above, that the pipers themselves led the enemy to flee – for all that this is often presumed to be one of the main purposes of the pipes, or indeed any other music played during a charge, it is notable that the vast majority of statements made with regard to the pipes' role relate to the emotional impact on their own side. Such reports as do exist regarding the terrifying impact of the pipes seem to be linked to the fact that since the pipes generally heralded an advance, the sound of the pipes became associated with a new onslaught: Malcolm also cites a story concerning a piper and two other soldiers separated from their unit who managed to disperse the German troops to the front of them, merely by playing the pipes and thus fooling the Germans into thinking a whole unit was behind them.[45] This tactic was not suitable everywhere: the respondent to

[41] Poster now held in the IWM, catalogue no. Art.IWM PST 10779, undated. Image available online at http://www.iwm.org.uk/collections/item/object/205073226, last accessed August 2014.
[42] Quoted in Seton & Grant, op. cit., 74.
[43] Quoted in Seton & Grant, op. cit., 73, where it is described as the capture of Karadzakot Zir.
[44] Seton & Grant, op. cit., 79.
[45] Malcolm, op. cit., section "Pipers of the Argyll and Sutherland Highlanders", paragraph 32. See also the discussion on the playing of pipes in dummy attacks, below.

Seton and Grant for the 2nd London Scottish stated that pipers were not used during fighting against the Turkish Army, on account of the importance of the element of surprise in these attacks.[46] Generally, the vast majority of reports of pipers playing to the attack in the Great War come from the Western Front.

The opinion of the 2nd Royal Scots with regard to the danger of making the men overenthusiastic is also unusual, but not exceptional. A similar response came from the 9th Battalion Gordon Highlanders, a New Army battalion first employed in July 1915: "The great value of the pipers in action is recognised by the whole battalion, but it is considered it sometimes happens that the men get so overkeen under the influence of the music that they are liable to exceed orders".[47] Other battalions of the Gordon Highlanders were less reticent in their responses: with the exception of the 8th battalion, from which no information was forthcoming, all the battalions listed at least one and generally several specific occasions when pipers played during the charge. The opinions of those officers who did express caution are interesting, however, in being among the relatively few statements on the pipers' impact that seem to derive directly from experience, and which do not have any obviously propagandistic function.

Accounts of the casualties suffered and the achievements recorded by pipers during the Great War can be misleading if we do not realise that these by no means all relate to activities as a piper as such. Acting as opposed to full pipers, as previously noted, generally served in the ranks, and as well as combat roles pipers like other musicians often served as runners or stretcher-bearers. These activities could be every bit as risky as playing the pipes, and recognised acts of bravery by men who were pipers in most cases relate to these other duties. These included the Military Medal awarded to Daniel Alexander MacLeod of the 4th Black Watch for his part in the Battle of Loos, when he tended to the wounded in No Man's Land and carried his commanding officer back to the British lines; the officer died the following day.[48]

MacLeod's war diary, a copy of which is held by the Imperial War Museums, does not make any reference to pipes at the Battle of Loos, though Seton and Grant state that he played his company into action there.[49] What makes his participation in this

[46] Seton and Grant, op. cit., 144. See however also footnote 67, below.
[47] Seton & Grant, op. cit., 129.
[48] Biographical notes to the private papers held in the Imperial War Museum, Documents.16387.
[49] I am very grateful to Nancy Rattray, MacLeod's daughter, for permission to quote directly from her father's diary, and to her daughter and MacLeod's granddaughter, Gill Robinson, for answering a number of further queries related to MacLeod's service. She was not able to confirm whether or not he

form unlikely is the structure of his diary entries for the period preceding and following Loos. Beforehand, he writes on occasion only about other battalions' pipers, specifically of watching the 2nd Black Watch playing up the trench, and being present at their practice sessions. After Loos, however, he was most definitely employed in a more musical role, and it is from this point that the diary entries begin to consist mainly of references to his own pipes, to pipe practice, and other related matters. The 4th Black Watch had been decimated at Loos, with over 50% of its men becoming casualties; it was subsequently merged with the 5th to form the new, 4th/5th Battalion Black Watch. In the weeks immediately following the Battle, and before this merging of the remnants of the 4th and 5th took place, MacLeod began to practice with the 2nd Black Watch at billets in Locon; his entry for 12 October 1915 – "Got pipes ready and cleaned up" – implies that he had not been able to play properly for some time. As noted above, the 2nd Black Watch's pipers had played at Loos and had suffered heavy losses there and earlier in 1915 as well; possibly the intention was that McLeod would help make up the numbers. In January 1916, however, he was promoted first to Acting Pipe Major and then to Battalion Sergeant Piper of the new 4th/5th Battalion. From this point, his daily routine revolved almost exclusively around the pipes, be this practicing (including chanter practice in billets, and practice with the drums which the band acquired in spring 1916) or indeed composing, including a tune called "Colonel Sceale's Welcome To the 4th Black Watch" written on 3 July 1916, after a day of "Usual practice" on which he also notes that there were "Terrific bombardments every night". We know now that these bombardments were from the first stage of the Battle of the Somme.

At this early stage of the Battle of the Somme, MacLeod's routine hardly changes; in late August, however, come a handful of entries which are as revealing as they are short. On 30 August, he notes: "Names of pipers drawn for companies. A: Findlay, B: F.A. Mitchell, C: J. Begg, D: C. Gibson". This allocation of pipers from the band to individual companies, thus into their traditional role, makes sense in light of the next day's entry: "Got instructions for pipers. Everything in preparation for attack. Noticed over 30 kite balloons and 60 aeroplanes up. Village being shelled." After two days postponement, the attack itself took place on 3 September:

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had played the pipes at Loos; in general, he had been reticent about talking about his experiences. Personal communication.

> 3/9/16 Heard terrific bombardment at 5 am. No definite news. We all went about the camp very much down in the mouth. The news did not seem very bright. Our bombardment ceased about 1 pm which I thought was a bad sign. Spoke to some of the wounded. Heard pipers had done grand. News came that the Black Watch had got over to third line. They held on until ordered to "Retire". Some held on until night. News came Sgt. Stirton, C. Scott, Joe Baird seriously wounded. Police Sgt. Simpson, Dave Murray, Captain Duncan and Shepherd killed. Captain Cunningham missing. Some more. Ordered to be ready to move in 5 minutes.
>
> 4/9/16 Moved off at 11 am to meet Battalion at Englebelmer. Found pipers all safe. F.A. Mitchell had been buried for two hours in dug-out where 5 were killed and rest injured out of fourteen. Begg made a great name having played a lot during charge and bombardment. Findlay was first to go over and played Highland Laddie with A. Coy. Gibson got separated from his Coy. Billeted with Sgt. Ogilvie & Frankie in little place at Headquarters.

This was the Battle of Pozieres Ridge. The role of pipers of the 4th/5th in this attack is not mentioned directly in the two main sources written in the post-war decade (namely, Seton and Grant, and Malcolm) though there are certainly many other reports of pipers playing their comrades over the top at the Somme. Interesting in McLeod's account is not least that the order for the pipers to play clearly came from above, and that this was seen as part of the preparation for the attack. Without consulting regimental records and other sources it is difficult to know what exactly is implied by McLeod's comment that the names of the pipers were "drawn". In a slightly later entry, he mentions that the band was now up to a full compliment of pipers, namely twelve, but it is not directly clear how many were available at the time of the attack. Was the drawing of names merely to attribute pipers to a particular company – perhaps those who, as full pipers, had no other crucial role – or, as seems more likely, was it to select those pipers from the slightly greater number available who were to play in the attack? That McLeod himself stayed back is not necessarily a sign of his good luck at not being selected. His appointment as Pipe Major, and the resources obviously made available to him to build up a full-scale Pipes and Drums for the new, amalgamated battalion, as well as the very fact that the battalion's head officers clearly wanted pipers to play to the attack, indicates a recognition on their part of the importance of pipers: it would be foolish, in that case, to risk sacrificing the Pipe Major. What is more interesting is the question of whether the other pipers not selected for this duty – if such there were – served in other capacities that day. In stating that the pipers had come through relatively unscathed, MacLeod mentions only those by name who had been selected to play to the attack. This need not necessarily mean that other pipers

were not involved; by the same token, as valuable as they were obviously taken to be, it would also seem likely that any others were consciously held back.

The importance of McLeod's brief entry lies not least in offering a further window into the question of just when, and why, pipers were employed during direct combat, and in particular as a further record of the significant employment of pipers in this role during the Somme offensive – significant not least given how many commanding officers were by that point holding their remaining pipers back from the front. It may be that the relatively large number of pipers noted as playing at the Somme is due to the scale of the operation in terms of the number of troops involved. Alternatively – and I suspect this is more likely – it could be that the return to the use of pipers in this role was related to recognition of the importance of this operation.[50] The memorialisation of the Battle of the Somme plays a further role in ensuring the availability of information on pipers and their role. This applies particularly to what people in Britain now refer to simply as the "first day of the Somme", 1 July 1916, when, after several days of preparatory bombardment, Allied soldiers went over the top. Total British casualties that day came to 60,000, of which 20,000 soldiers died – the greatest loss of life in a single day in British military history.[51] It is well documented that pipers played on this historic day as well as at several of the later Somme attacks. Both the Tyneside Scottish and the Tyneside Irish were led by pipers, and thanks to a recent publication specifically on the former, we have several first-hand reports from that day on what happened to the pipers. These include the following quotation reported from an officer of a Middlesex battalion:

> The pluckiest thing I ever saw was a piper of the Tyneside Scottish playing his company over the parapet in the attack on the German trenches near Albert. The Tynesiders were on our right, and as their officers gave the signal to advance I saw the piper – I think he was the Pipe Major – jump out of the trench and march straight over No Man's Land towards the German lines. The tremendous rattle of machine gun and rifle fire, which the enemy at once opened on us completely drowned the sound of his pipes. But it was obvious he was playing as though he would burst the bag, and just faintly through the din we heard the mighty shout his comrades gave as they surged after him. How he escaped death I can't understand

[50] One wonders, too, whether the fact that the British Army was by that point headed by a Scot, Field Marshall Douglas Haig, played any role. The First Battle of the Somme was the first major offensive instigated by Haig on being appointed following the death of Lord Kitchener. Haig provided a short preface to Seton and Grant's book, which he wrote less than a month after the Armistice.

[51] For a detailed and moving account of the first day of the Somme, see the relevant chapter in John Keegan, op. cit.

> for the ground was literally ploughed by the hail of bullets. But he seemed to bear a charmed life and the last glimpse I had of him, as we too dashed out, showed him still marching erect, playing furiously, and quite regardless of the flying bullets and the men dropping all around him.[52]

Other pipers were not so lucky. Cited in the same publication are the reminiscences of one soldier of the 20th Tyneside Scottish who stated that, while he did not hear the pipes, he did see their piper, "Aggy" Fife, "riddled with bullets, writhing and screaming".[53] Piper Griffith of the 21st recounted how he got as far as the barbed wire, but then had to abandon his pipes and reach for his rifle. He continues:

> Fellow piper Willie Scott, a shipyard worker from Elswick in Newcastle, was still ahead of me playing. When I reached the German trenches and jumped in, the first man I saw was Willie – dead, but still holding his pipes. If ever a man deserved the VC Willie did.[54]

A later Somme offensive did result in a second Victoria Cross for a piper, this time posthumously. The recipient was James "Jimmy" Richardson, who had migrated to Canada from Scotland as a child, and who served on the Western Front with the 16th Canadian Scottish. At the Regina Trench on 16 October 1916, the 19-year-old Richardson played while his comrades struggled to negotiate heavy barbed wire just in front of the German trenches. His Sergeant Major was injured in this action, and Richardson brought him back to safety before returning to No Man's Land in search of his pipes, which he had left behind. He was never seen again. His commanding officer wrote of this incident,

> I really think his V.C. performance was one of the great deeds of the war. The conditions were those of indescribable peril and terror. The lad's whole soul was bound up in the glory of piping, and he was only taken into action after imploring his colonel with tears in his eyes. Altogether a most wonderful example of high souled courage and enthusiasm.[55]

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[52] John Sheen, James Stewart & Graham Stewart, *Tyneside Scottish: 20th, 21st, 22nd and 23rd (Service) Battalions of the Northumberland Fusiliers* (Barnsley: Pen and Sword, 1998); I have quoted here from the Kindle edition; Chapter 6. There is unfortunately no further source given for this report, which makes it difficult to evaluate it.

[53] Quoted in Sheen, Stewart & Stewart, op. cit., Chapter 6. This was Lance Corporal Piper Garnet Wolsley Fife; the soldier who reported this memory was a Private Elliot.

[54] Quoted in Sheen, Stewart & Stewart, op. cit., loc. Chapter 6.

[55] Quoted from Seton & Grant, op. cit., 61. The book also includes a reproduction of a painting showing Richardson on the battlefield.

According to the information collated by Seton and Grant, Richardson was one of four pipers that played with the 16th Canadian Scottish that day, and one of two that died, the other being Piper John Parks. A set of bagpipes believed to have been Richardson's was later recovered, and is now held at the regimental museum.

The latter years of the war still saw some use of pipers during attacks, despite the generalised tendency to save the pipers for the apparently more important task of accompanying soldiers back from the front.[56] Pipers of the 4th Gordon Highlanders, for example, played at a number of attacks in 1917-18, including the second battles of Ypres and Marne; regarding the former, an officer responding to Seton and Grant stated that Piper P. Bowie "rallied the men at a time when fighting was very fierce".[57] Piper G Paterson was awarded the military medal for playing on three successive charges in the attack on Cantaing during the Battle of Cambrai in 1917.[58] In general, though, it would seem that the Battle of the Somme was a watershed not only in the Great War itself, but in the history of piping during battle.

What the pipers played

Given the general lack of detailed reference in the testimony of soldiers regarding the use of the pipes during an assault, it is not surprising that information on the tunes the pipers played on these occasions is even rarer. Several reports on the many public appearances made by Daniel Laidlaw after Loos refer to him having played the same two tunes he had played on that occasion, naming these as "Blue Bonnets Over The Border" and "The Standards On the Braes Of Mar"; as already noted, these are the two regimental marches of the King's Own Scottish Borderers.[59] A report from a mock assault on the German trenches at Laventie ahead of an actual attack notes that Piper Ferguson of the 6th Black Watch played "Hey Johnnie Cope, Are Ye Wakin' Yet",[60] a tune mentioned previously as being normally associated with reveille – the joke being

[56] That this should be the case indicates just how important pipe music was deemed to be as a method of psychological healing for the returning troops. Grossman, op. cit. notes that rituals which help soldiers legitimise experiences of death and killing by honouring them are an important tool for preventing longer-term psychological trauma. Generally, the benefits of music and entertainment as a form of psychological support for soldiers, while this had always been practiced by the military, became more and more recognised and strategically supported from the Great War onwards.

[57] Seton & Grant, op. cit., 57.

[58] Seton & Grant, op. cit., 127.

[59] See e.g. "News in Brief", *The Times*, 20 December 1915, 5; "News in Brief", *The Times*, 5 February 1916, 3; "Miss Mary Anderson: A Stage Reappearance for War Charity", *The Times*, 8 March 1916, 11.

[60] Seton & Grant, op. cit., 52.

that on this occasion, the pipes were played to test the Germans' capabilities to respond to an attack (as it were, to check how awake they were). This was not the only occasion when this strategy was used: a response to Seton and Grant from the 9th Battalion Highland Light Infantry stated that they normally kept pipers back from the front, but that they did play to simulate an attack at one stage.[61] G. H. Currie also mentions this in his memoir on Loos, stating that this dummy attack took place twenty-four hours before the actual assault.[62]

The repertoire of the Highland bagpipes in Scottish regiments is drawn largely from the wider repertoire of Scottish songs and tunes, supplemented with newer tunes written specifically for the pipes and often commemorating certain campaigns, events or persons.[63] As with the tunes used to signal different day-to-day events in camp, tunes used by different regiments as their regimental marches often have a connection to the history or geographical home of the regiment involved. These are the tunes also most often mentioned with regard to pipers in combat. A report that may have originated in the *Daily Mail* stated that two of the pipers from the 2nd Black Watch played "Highland Laddie" at Loos.[64] This would have been an obvious choice, given that it was one of the main regimental marches of many of the Highland regiments. Sources differ with regard to this incident, however. Another newspaper source refers only to Piper Simpson playing "the battle tune of the Black Watch", while Piper MacDonald is said in some sources to have played "MacGregor's Gathering".

Reports of pipers of the Seaforth Highlanders playing on two different occasions – Sheik Saad and Loos – mention "Caber Feidh", the regimental march of the Seaforths.[65] Pipe Major David Anderson of the 15th Royal Scots, who played on the

[61] Seton & Grant, op. cit., 108-109.

[62] Currie, op. cit.

[63] Both Murray, op. cit., and Roderick Cannon, *The Highland Bagpipe and its Music*, (new edition: Edinburgh: Birlinn, 2008) give many musical examples. Following the amalgamation of the different Scottish regiments into the single Royal Scottish Regiment, consisting of battalions largely named after the older regiments, the music associated with those regiments has largely been carried over into the new formations. See the *Royal Regiment of Scotland: Regimental Marches, Tunes and Songs*, available online at http://www.electricscotland.com/history/scotreg/RegtlMusicHandbook.pdf accessed 13 January 2015.

[64] "Pipers Head Attack: Black Watch Clears Parapet To Strains of 'Hielan' Laddie'", *Evening Telegraph and Post*, 25 October 1915, p. 2.The battalion is unnamed in this report, but would have been the 2nd Black Watch, which – based on evidence derived from Seton and Grant – seems to have been the only Black Watch unit to employ pipers as such on this occasion. The report says that one piper died, another was wounded. On 25 September, the 2nd Black Watch were employed with the 7th (Meerut) Indian Division in an attack on the German lines at Pietre which was a supporting action to the main fighting at Loos; "a battalion of Indians" is mentioned in this newspaper report.

[65] Seton & Grant, op. cit., 53, 76.

first day of the Somme, is said by Seton and Grant to have played "Dumbarton's Drums", likewise one of their regimental marches.[66] The tendency at least in *reporting* these incidents is thus for the tunes named to be regimental marches. While the veracity of these reports cannot always be corroborated, it would make a good deal of sense, for reasons I shall elaborate further below. There are exceptions, however. James Richardson reportedly played the "Reel of Tulloch" and "De'il's in the Kitchen" at the Regina Trench, tunes which did not have any specific or official significance for his regiment, but which may simply have been popular amongst the soldiers or favourite tunes of Richardson himself.[67] Harry Lunan, who was the longest surviving piper of the war and led his company into action and across to enemy lines at High Wood during the Battle of the Somme, stated when asked for a TV documentary that he played simply whatever came into his mind.[68] A Canadian piper who served with the Canadian Ottawa Scottish (Camerons) at the Second Battle of the Somme in Spring 1918 played not a regimental march, but the tune of a song called "We have lived and loved together" – a strange choice if one presumes that the music is there to fire up the soldiers for the attack; a revealing one if we question this assumption.[69] Alexander Boyd of the 22nd Battalion Tyneside Scottish wrote of his piping at the first day of the Somme, "I was playing Tipperary and all the boys were singing and shouting. I could see them falling all about me."[70]

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[66] Seton & Grant, op. cit, 48.

[67] My thanks to Roger McGuire and Wade Calder, former and current pipe majors of the Canadian Scottish, for speedily responding to my enquiries on this topic. "De'il's in the Kitchen" is also mentioned as the tune a piper of the Lovat Scouts chose when pipers were instructed to play to give the Turkish forces at Gallipoli the impression that the trenches were fuller of soldiers than they were; the officer in charge laughingly responding that this tune was a good choice – "de'il" means "devil". Malcolm, op. cit., Chapter "Scottish Horse", paragraph 7.

[68] Interview with Harry Lunan for the television documentary *Instrument of War, Part 1: Ladies from Hell*, dir. by Patrick King (1997) This comment comes at ca. 46:39 of the DVD edition.

[69] I am grateful to Ernst-Heinrich Schmidt for this information. There were several nineteenth- and twentieth century editions of a setting of a poem by Charles Jeffreys with the title "We have lived and loved together" to a melody from Isuard Nicolo's 1814 comic opera *Joconde*; in particular, arrangements by Heinrich Herz from the 1830s onwards. There is also a different poem with the same first line and the title "Hand in Hand", by the Scottish poet Robert Maclean Calder, who later settled in Canada. A collected edition of Calder's work lists this as a song set to music, but I have been unable to trace any sheet music for this, and think it more likely that the tune played by the Canadian piper derived from the other source, which was much more widespread. Herz's setting of Jeffreys' text and Nicolo's melody – neither credited in this case – can be viewed e.g. at https://jscholarship.library.jhu.edu/handle/1774.2/10360 accessed on 8 December 2014.

[70] Letter to his mother shortly after the offensive, quoted without further reference in Sheen, Stewart & Stewart op. cit., Chapter 6. For more examples, see e.g. Seton & Grant, op. cit., 42 ff.

Why the pipers played

> It gave the soldiers courage, you see, it made them feel good and made them feel like advancing, you know, when we played the pipes. If we didn't have the pipes, it wouldn't be so good, they wouldn't have any incentive.[71]

The types of warfare pioneered between 1914 and 1918 changed not just the sound of battle but how it looked and the distances at which it was fought. It saw the use of an essentially invisible agent, namely gas, which necessitated that soldiers regularly donned gas masks that were only partly effective and rendered their wearers temporarily faceless. By the war's end, the introduction of tanks had reintroduced a shielding of the combatants' humanity more complete than at at stage since the days of heavy armour. The increasing distance between combatants reached in every sense a new level with the introduction of the airplane as a fighting machine. Sending pipers onto the battlegrounds of the Great War seems to be something of an anomaly in this new and increasingly faceless form of warfare. Their employment, however, was linked specifically to the most archaic types of fighting which the Great War saw – hand-to-hand combat, initiated with firearms certainly, but concluding, if those who went forward got that far, with the use of bayonets.

For all the bravado displayed in letters and diaries by those who fought, there is every reason to presume that soldiers advancing on the Western Front were as likely to find themselves unable to kill as soldiers in most other wars – and this not least because the bayonet was one of the principle means by which they would do so. Dave Grossman, formerly military psychologist to the US Army and author of several books on the psychology and psychopathology of killing, has argued that the threat both of killing and being killed with a bayonet is often the thing that soldiers fear most. He suggests this is in part because weapons like the bayonet act like extensions of the soldier's own body, radically decreasing the distance between the soldier and the act of killing.[72] Grossmann also points out that John Keegan, in his analysis of the Somme and also two previous major British battles fought in the same general region, Agincourt and Waterloo, found very little evidence for the actual use of bayonets during those battles, despite this being the soldiers' most basic weapon in all these

[71] Harry Lunan, interview (ca. 1997) from the TV documentary *Instrument of War: Ladies from Hell*, dir. Patrick King, from approx. 29 minutes of the DVD edition.
[72] Grossman, op. cit., 120-121.

situations; perhaps this is in part because most people would rather flee or, failing that, beg for any other method of execution, than be bayoneted.[73]

It is worth stressing this point because, for all that it is so common in discussions of music and war to talk of music's role in promoting aggression or the willingness to kill, this is rarely contextualised in an analysis of what actually happens to people in the midst of battle itself. It is here that the important work undertaken in the past decades on soldiers' experiences in combat is invaluable, giving new insights into what precise roles music might play immediately before, during and after the moment of violence itself. Take for example the pipers and the courage they are so often reported as showing in battle. Attention is often drawn to the fact that they were generally unarmed when they went over the top, which seems to underline the fact of their great courage in doing so (at least, psychologically: in reality, going over the top was a lottery in which having a weapon hardly influenced one's chances of coming out alive). In many other ways, however, the pipers were at a psychological advantage. They were at least as much at risk of being killed as their comrades, but were excused from the obligation themselves to kill.[74] Instead, the piper provided reassurance and a focal point in an essentially inhumane and chaotic environment, a point which I will elaborate further below. Moreover, in the very act of playing he himself was forced to concentrate on other things entirely than the danger he and his comrades were in, and of musical necessity was regulating his own breathing, perhaps the single most effective thing anyone in such a situation of fear and anxiety can do.[75]

The case of Laidlaw is an interesting one in this regard. Let us bear in mind that his great achievement was to rally troops who were beginning to panic when gas intended

[73] Grossman, op. cit., 122, drawing on Keegan, op. cit.

[74] They were generally not obliged to fight when employed on the battlefield as pipers, though there are some reports of pipers who reached enemy lines doing just that. It is also worth pointing out that some of the pipers had actually exceeded the normal age limit for service for soldiers, which was 38 for regular soldiers, and up to 42 in the case of former soldiers now in the Special Reserve. George Findlater, who had won a Victoria Cross at the Battle of Dargai Heights on the Indian frontier in 1898, had passed his 42nd birthday when he served on the Western Front from 1914 to the end of 1915; Daniel Laidlaw was just over 40 when he played at Loos. Robert Mackenzie, the "grand old man" described by Waller, quoted above, was 60 when he was killed at the same Battle.

[75] The report from a piper of the Tyneside Scottish at the Somme, cited above, that his comrades in the rank and file were singing and laughing as they went over, also needs to be seen in this context. Like the oft recounted story of the British soldiers who kicked a football before them as they advanced that day, such reports can easily be taken as an indication of the naivety of the troops with regard to what lay ahead. On the contrary, it has also been suggested that kicking a ball – and chasing after it – could have help the men concentrate on something quite different as they moved forward (another strategy often promoted for dealing with fear and anxiety). It is in such a context as well that we should perhaps read Harry Lunan's revealing comment, at the head of this section.

for the Germans floated back to their own trenches. Soldiers' fear of gas may not have been in proportion to the actual number of deaths and injuries it caused relative, for example, to artillery fire, but it was none the less a justifiable and wholly understandable fear (and the soldiers, of course, had no access to the statistics). When Laidlaw, in the midst of this, climbed onto the parapet and began to play, he was not merely focusing the soldiers back on the job at hand. Quite obviously – and yet rarely if ever commented upon – he was also demonstrating that the gas was not as bad as it seemed, once one was out of the trenches. Standing up on the parapet certainly exposed one to artillery fire, but since the gas tended to sink, it did potentially offer a way round that other and more feared hazard.

Laidlaw's case is also interesting in demonstrating certain tendencies in how, when and if pipers are singled out for praise – generally, in the context of an attack or manoeuvre in danger of going severely wrong.[76] This applies not only to Laidlaw's playing at Loos and Richardson's at the Somme, but to several other cases as well, including that of Simpson and MacDonald at Loos, who played at the beginning of the assault when some soldiers, struck by fear, returned to the trench. As I have already suggested with regard to contemporary reports on Laidlaw's actions at Loos, there are several reasons why such instances would be picked out from the rest – not least of these being to detract from more unsettling aspects of the incident in question. At the same time, however, there is an undeniable logic to exactly these situations being the ones where the pipers' employment was highly important. When pipers, as vague talk has it, "cheer" or "inspire" their comrades, they are above all helping counteract the feelings of fear and panic that soldiers may experience, emotions which are highly dangerous in warfare (particularly panic).[77] And as Lunan suggested, they were important as an incentive to the men advancing at all: this may not seem logical until we remember how much the pipes were a symbol of history and status; the charge itself may not have been glorious, but to advance behind the pipes was itself a kind of honour, and moreover an honour shared.

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[76] This is particularly the case where pipers played on after being injured: there are several examples of this from the 19th century.

[77] On panic and unplanned retreat as a response to confusion in battle, see e.g. Richard Holmes, *Acts of War: The Behaviour of Men in Battle* (London: Casell, 2004), 223 ff; also Collins, op. cit., who introduces the concept of "forward panic" – release from fear in the face of a weak opponent that triggers acts of senseless brutality.

To return briefly to the responses Seton and Grant received from battalions whose C.Os. believed the pipes made the men too eager, and therefore a liability, it is thus also clear that in a situation where the men were under-eager to advance, the pipes could prove very important indeed.

Experts in military strategy have long recognised that the connections soldiers have to the primary group around them, and to a slightly lesser extent to the secondary group formed for example by their regiment, is crucial in convincing them to fight and fight well. In addition to this, following the actions of a leader helps them focus and believe in the endeavour: if (or when) their commanding officers crack under the strain, the impact on the rank and file is much more extreme than if one at their own rank were to do so.[78] I would suggest that it is in this double function that the piper's place at the front is best understood. For when the piper steps up to the frame, he is both setting an example of bravery – a leader to follow – and simultaneously, through the playing of familiar and regimental music (and not least through the performance of this well-known ritual at all) helping soldiers stay focused on the larger social context, on what they have been drilled to do, and on all that binds them to the men around them.[79]

It is important, therefore, that we understand that this happens not simply by dint of some magical acoustic qualities of the pipes themselves, except to the extent that the sound of the pipes, over the course of several centuries, had become so closely associated with Scottish culture generally and Scottish military prowess specifically. In other words, the pipes' impact is related to the larger social contexts which months and in some cases years of regimental life have helped instill. A report published in 1918, when Jimmy Richardson was awarded the V.C., noted that "Inspired by *his splendid example*, the company rushed the wire with such fury and determination that the obstacle was overcome and the position captured" (my emphasis).[80] The piper as example, rather than the music he played, is picked out here. It would be wrong to discount the impact of the music played on this and other occasions, but the tendency not only in musicological research to substract a layer known as "the music itself" from all the conditions and actions, people and contexts that give rise to it, can sometimes distract us from what is actually happening.

There is evidence, too, that the opposing forces also recognised the pipers' role in exactly in these terms. According to Seton and Grant, German officers captured by the British said during interrogation that they had received the command to fire at the

[78] On fear, its impacts, and the strategies military organisations and individuals take to combat it, see particularly Richard Holmes, op. cit., Chapter 6.

[79] On military training and traditions as rituals to counter battle stress, see e.g. Richard Holmes, op. cit., 28 ff., also 42 ff.

[80] "Canadian Piper Wins V.C.", *Dundee Courier*, 23 October 1918, p. 3.

pipers with the same priority as they attacked officers.[81] It may be that the German commanders presumed the pipers to have tasks similar to those of drummers and buglers, actively signalling to the soldiers behind them. It is probably more likely, however, that they were aware of the psychological impact of the piper, literally leading the other soldiers like a modern-day piper of Hameln, and, as Harry Lunan suggested, possibly one of the main reasons that these soldiers endeavoured to advance at all.

All Quiet on the Western Front?

There is one very important rejoinder about the use of the pipes in this War. This is that, among those who experienced these battles directly and have passed on their reminiscences to us, there is precious little reference to the pipes at all.[82] Veteran Robert Burns stated in an interview given in 1998 that

> You'll always find a piper going over with his regiment, piping us on to victory. There's always a piper that leads the Scots over the top. There's nothing better than to hear the pipes, it gee's you up. When you're out on a glen and you hear the pipes you think "och!" the sound travels for over a hundred yards and you can hear the pipes away in the distance.[83]

Burns's description is interesting not least because of how it moves so directly from the specific case of battle to the general case of *hearing* the pipes in other contexts. In his own memoirs, published just after his death and apparently drawing extensively on a diary kept at the time, he is similarly restrained regarding the pipers' impact at Loos:

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[81] "The Germans certainly were not slow in forming an estimate of the military value of the piper. From a very early stage in the war they learned to associate the instrument with a type of troops for whose mentality, as exhibited in the attack, they had more respect than sympathy, and the piper at once became a marked man whenever he went over the top. The casualties among pipers while playing would of themselves suggest that this was the case; but the statements of officer prisoners show that orders were given to pick off pipers for precisely the same reason as officers commanding platoons or companies." Seton & Grant, op. cit., 65. In the course of this research I was unable to look specifically at German troops' responses to the pipes.

[82] An important proviso here is that in researching this topic, I was to some extent looking for possibly inexistent needles in various haystacks. The audio interviews and interview transcriptions, and many of the collections of private papers, which I consulted at or via the IWM came for the most part with brief, online-searchable descriptions of their contents which made it possible to search specifically for references to pipes and pipers. I also called up a number of collections of papers of men who had served in regiments known to have used pipers in certain offensives. But these searches represent only a fraction of the material available.

[83] Interview with Robert Burns, January/February 1998, interviewed by James Florey; transcript held in IWM, "Interviews with First World War Veterans", Documents. 16278.

> Wherever he was, I could not see him, but a Piper, in accordance with tradition was there to inspire us; he may even have belonged to the Black Watch. Because of the awful gunfire noises it was only occasionally we could hear the mournful drone of the pipes.[84]

Note the contrast, here, between the "inspiration" the pipes were to offer and the description of "their mournful drone". This could imply that the drone rather than the generally more upbeat melody was all that could really be heard; it could, of course, also reflect Burns's own feelings in remembering this event. His suggestion that the piper may have been from the Black Watch is also interesting given that, according at least to Seton and Grant, Burns's own battalion, the 7th Cameron Highlanders, also employed pipers in the attack at Loos, suffering such great losses that in subsequent actions single pipers only were employed.[85]

Other veterans also seemed to link the sound of the pipes with negative, rather than positive emotions, albeit not in the direct context of battle. Edmund G. Williams, who served with the King's Liverpool Regiment on the Western Front and who was interviewed in 1986, mentioned the following scene while describing their passage up to the front, somewhere in the Somme region, in October 1916. Looking down to bivouacs set out on a platform below the road on which they were marching, he states that

> they were empty apart from one lone Highland regiment piper […] he was standing there and he was stamping ground and he was playing the pipes to himself. And so, the troops, we heard him as we advanced, we heard him as he diminished. And that was our introduction to the sad music of the Highland pipers. […] You see, this was grim, this was as you would hear pipes being played.[86]

On the whole, there are very few references in the reminiscences and stories given by survivors as to the impact of the pipes during attacks. Burns's comments are quite unusual in that he refers on more than one occasion to actually having heard the pipes, however briefly. Readers may wish to review the few other first-hand testimonies I have quoted above and note that they more often talk of seeing the piper rather than hearing him. In terms of the psychological role of the piper, seeing the piper would

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[84] Robert Burns, *Once a Cameron Highlander: The Life and Times of a 104-year-old Survivor of the Battle of the Somme in World War I* (Bognor Regis: Woodfield Publishing, 2000), 68-69.

[85] Seton & Grant, op. cit., 134.

[86] Edmund G. Williams, interviewed by Chris Thistlethwaite; IWM 10604; from reel 12, my transcription. Recording currently only available in the research room of the Imperial War Museum in Lambeth.

still fulfil much of his primary function: simply knowing he was still there, still playing, would be enough. Nevertheless, the lack of references to the pipes either being seen or heard when soldiers went over the top is interesting, not least since it is in stark contrast to the frequent references to the impact of the pipes on other occasions, especially on the march, whether the context be route marches during training, or when soldiers were en route to or returning from the front line.

There are many possible reasons for this. The first point to be made, clearly, is that although in researching this topic I have consulted a wide range of papers, interviews and published material on the experiences of those who fought, these still represent only the minutest sample of those hundreds of thousands of men who fought either in battalions which used pipers or in their immediate vicinity. Within this small sample, we also need to consider that these men may have been fighting in positions relatively far from where the pipers were. Also, the attention given to musical matters varies widely between individuals, with some giving quite detailed accounts of the most varied array of musical activities and incidents during the war, while others do not mention music at all, even in quite extensive memoirs. Interviewers, too, may not necessarily think to address the topic: in the interview conducted with Burns in 1998, his reference to the pipes comes at a tangent to the main topics.[87] Furthermore, attacks of the scale and nature of those during which the pipes were employed were relatively scarce over the course of the war, whereas marching was a regular occurrence.

There is also the question of what, exactly, survivors remembered, if indeed they remembered at all. Here, again, survivors' experiences differ. For many, these battles were extremely traumatic experiences, and both at the time and thereafter, such experiences can be perceived and processed by the human mind in ways that do not necessarily reflect what "happened" in any objective sense.

In this regard I can do no better in conclusion than to quote from a letter written by Lt. Roderick "Rory" MacGregor to his father after the Battle of the Somme, where he received a head wound. MacGregor's letters home to his family, now in the collections of the IWM, are a delight to read not least because of the extremely dry sense of

[87] In the case of this particular collection, only the interviewee's answers are given, transcribed more or less as a single flow of reminiscences; comparison of the different interviews indicates however a set of lead questions structuring each interview, questions in which music does not play a role. It is generally the case that some of the most interesting reflections on war come at apparent tangents – particularly since these reveal much about how and what veterans remember (or forget), and why: tangents, after all, also touch the centre at one point. This also applies, for example, to Cpl. R. E. Foulkes' reflections "by the way" on the nature of war in his description of the Battle of Loos, quoted previously.

humour he manages to maintain (even if the humour is increasingly black in parts as the war proceeds). MacGregor, who survived the war, was clearly very interested in music, and he provides sometimes extensive details of musical events and experiences both in the trenches and behind the front line as well as during training, leave, and while convalescent. The extent of the focus he puts on musical matters makes it all the more interesting that he does not talk about the use of pipers in action. MacGregor served as an officer with the 5th Battalion Queen's Own Cameron Highlanders from 1915, but appears to have been on training in the UK at the start of the Battle of Loos when, according to Seton and Grant, his battalion's pipers played to the attack, almost all of them becoming casualties; thereafter, pipers were not used in this role.

The letter from which I nevertheless want to quote, addressed to his father, is the only one in the collection clearly marked for the attention of the family only. Its serious and heavy tone also sets it apart dramatically from the others. It concerns the action at Delville Wood during the first battle of the Somme in 1916. South African troops had been ahead of MacGregor's unit and were retiring with the Germans advancing after them. According to MacGregor, none of the South Africans made it to the safety of the trenches, and it was then up to MacGregor's company to face them directly. He writes:

> It was tried. Right or wrong we did our best. Like wild fire came the word of the line, "A Co[mpan]y, advance." and silently we scrambled from our trench and crept forward. It was too far, and the ground too broken to charge, but we crept from tree to tree, picking up S Africans on the way, and they joined us, and came on. We soon saw a target, a body of some 100 Huns, and gave them 5 rounds rapid. They seemed to be walking towards us in quite an ordinary way. None of the glory of a charge, or bugles, or singing or anything. In fact the whole battle seemed extraordinarily silent. I fired twice, and the range was such that I couldn't miss. Moreover I was absolutely steady in my aim, and know it was good. Then they stopped walking forward, and my men started curling up on the ground, or rolling on their backs, kicking up their legs, again quite the natural thing to do. Had anyone spoken to me, I should have told him "Oh yes, there[']s casualties, that's all." It all seemed so natural and commonplace. My rifle was knocked out of my hand and I found I couldn't pick it up, so I used my revolver. I don't suppose I did much excecution [sic] though as it was over the hundred yards.[88]

[88] Letter from Lt. Roderick MacGregor to his father, post-dated as July 2014, archived as 2/5, pp. 6-8. IWM, Documents.13511. I have unfortunately had no response from the copyright holder of these papers, and therefore include this quotation pending and in anticipation of such approval.

At the conclusion of his letter, MacGregor cites the first verse – it would appear from memory – of war poet Gilbert Frankau's "The Voice of the Guns", written in Flanders in the winter of 1915.[89] Given MacGregor's own skills as a writer, demonstrated throughout his letters, it is interesting that here he is moved to cite from another source, from another's experience which clearly tallied closely with his own. Indeed, what is expressed through the voice given to the guns in Frankau's poems, the depersonalisation or even dehumanisation of battle, calls to mind also the description of the attack given by Erich Maria Remarque in *Im Westen nichts neues* [*All Quiet on the Western Front*] in which it is Death itself who appears as the real enemy;[90] also war artist Percy Smith's reinterpretation of the Dance of Death on the battlefields of Flanders, a series of images in which even Death seems on occasion taken aback at the carnage.[91] Such representations are also a form of distancing between the soldiers and the violence they are inflicting, a silence imposed, as it were, by their own consciences to protect them from the human reality of what they have been made to do. And by the end of the Great War, the bagpipes, too, would fall into a silence more lasting than that unreal quiet of combat experienced by MacGregor. No longer do they accompany soldiers into the face of battle, though they are still there to greet those who return, and to lament those who do not.

[89] Full text of the poem available at e.g. http://www.nationalarchives.gov.uk/education/greatwar/transcript/g3cs1s2t.htm accessed 19 January 2015.

[90] "Aus uns sind gefährliche Tiere geworden. Wir kämpfen nicht, wir verteidigen uns vor der Vernichtung. Wir schleudern die Granate nicht gegen Menschen, was wissen wir im Augenblick davon, dort hetzt mit Händen und Helmen der Tod hinter uns her, wir können ihm seit drei Tagen zum ersten Male ins Gesicht sehen, wir können uns seit drei Tagen zum ersten Mal wehren gegen ihm, wir haben eine wahnsinnige Wut, wir liegen nicht mehr ohnmächtig wartend auf dem Schafott, wir können zerstören und töten, um uns zu retten und zu rächen". Erich Maria Remarque, *Im Westen nichts neues* (Cologne: Kiepenheuer & Witsch, 2011; first published 1929), 63-84 (Chapter 6).

[91] Percy Smith, *The Dance of Death* 1914-1918. We could add to this list the fact that in *Acts of War*, Holmes in a chapter heading terms fear and terror "the real enemy". Richard Holmes, op. cit., Chapter 6.