



# Scots who made their mark in.....



## The Armed Forces

### “For Gallantry”

Some 180 Scots-born men have been awarded the highest accolade given to military personnel, but all 17 of those referenced on stamps have been so on foreign issues, mostly via a Canadian souvenir-sheet in 2004, with a handful of others in 2006, the 150th anniversary of the awarding of the first Victoria Cross. That year’s Royal Mail issue of six stamps which typically aims for a British geographical spread across a topic took an historical one showing VC winners from the Crimea to World War Two, depicting three Englishmen, one born in Ireland another in New Zealand and a Gurkha soldier.

Curiously, the Micronesian island states of Kiribati\*, and Nauru\* in what might have been planned as a small omnibus issue in 2006 provided a dozen commemorative stamps, using contemporary engravings the like of which regularly appeared in *The London Illustrated News* depicting re-imagined jingoistic accounts of the reported events, five of relevance here.

#### Pte Thomas Beach 1854 Battle of Inkerman

Private Beach was born in Dundee in 1824 and was serving as a member of the 55th Westmoreland Foot. On 5th November whilst on sentry duty in a forward position he went to the aid of a wounded officer Col Carpenter who was being robbed by a group of Russian infantry scavengers. Beach killed two of them, drove off the rest and stayed with his wounded colleague until further help arrived. Beach eventually returned home to Angus and died there ten years later.



#### Sgt-Maj John Grieve 1854 Balaclava

Originally from Mussellburgh, Grieve (32) was a member of the 2nd Dragoons (Royal Scots Greys) when on 25th October he saw Heavy Cavalry officer isolated and harassed by enemy horsemen. Grieve rode into the group killing one and driving off the other Russians so rescuing his colleague. He died in Inveresk in 1863.



\*The souvenir sheet format in which these stamps are available contains labels which contextualise each of the illustrations of bravery, not necessarily clear from the stamps themselves. Part of the illustrated selvage is shown right.

#### Capt Charles Lumley 1855 Siege of Sebastopol

Born in Forres in 1824, whilst serving in the 97th Regiment of Foot on 8th September, Lumley helped to lead the assault on a redan and when attacked by three Russian gunners, shot two with a revolver, recovered from a blow from a stone, regained his feet and was beginning to lead the assault again on the salient when shot in the head. He later recuperated enough to continue in active service and was promoted to Major. He died in 1858.



#### Pte Roderick McGregor 1855 Siege of Sebastopol

McGregor, from Inverness, was serving in the 1st Battalion, The Rifle Brigade when on 22nd April he retaliated to a Russian assault by leading an attack on the enemy trenches driving some out and killing others. Three months later he performed a similar feat having crossed open space under rapid fire in order to do so. (Note that the label spells MacGregor’s name differently).



#### Cpl John Ross 1855 Siege of Sebastopol

Born near Stranraer in 1822, Ross was 33 when whilst serving with the British Engineers he led a night-time working party of 200 men to dig an important connecting trench towards Russian positions. A month later he led an attack on the redan, filling twenty five gabions (cages) whilst under persistent fire. A fortnight later (in the episode illustrated in the stamp above) he crept up to the redan and brought back an injured colleague. He lived to be 57, dying in London.



The names of a further ten Scots-born soldiers serving in Canadian forces are listed in the central panel of the 2004 souvenir sheet (shown in part right in reduced size) which references all 94 Canadian winners of the VC.

On 6th November 1917 **Cpl Colin Barron** (1895-1959) born in Boyndie near Banff, attacked a German machine-gun position firing at point blank range before rushing the guns, killing four enemy soldiers in order to turn the weapon on the fleeing German soldiers, injuring several and so promoted the attack that day.



**Lt-Col William Clark-Kennedy** (1879-1961) originally from



Dunskey, Wigtownshire led his depleted brigade forward on the Fresnes-Rouvroy line in late August 1918 collecting together some lightly injured but disoriented soldiers and though severely wounded himself refused evacuation until consolidation of his position was established.

**Lt Robert Combe** (1880-1917) from Aberdeen repeatedly led his company forward south of Acheville on 3rd May 1917 accompanied only by five men to inflict heavy casualties before capturing 80 prisoners. He was killed by a sniper later in the day.



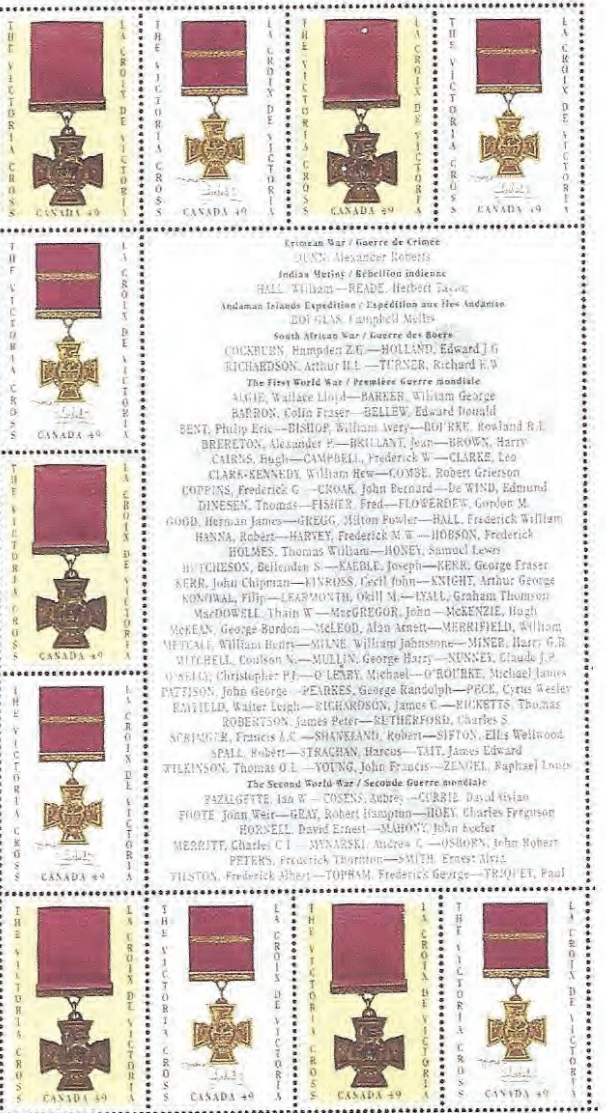
**Capt John MacGregor** (1888-1952) from Cawdor, near Nairn though wounded on 29th August 1918 during the Battle of Canal du Nord led his company under intense fire to deactivate enemy machine guns, killing four Germans before reorganising the original attack. He was also awarded the Military Cross and bar.

**Lt Hugh McKenzie** (1885-1917) from Inverness. At Meetschele Spur, Passchendaele on 30 October 1917 Lt McKenzie was i/c four machine guns. Seeing that his officers were all casualties he rallied his men to lead an attack on a pill box before being fatally wounded. (Note: the National defence and Canadian Forces gives McKenzie's birthplace as Liverpool).



**Pte William Johnstone Milne** (1892-1917), born in Wishaw, was serving near Thelus, Vimy Ridge in France when on 9th April single-handedly he crawled through No Man's Land and captured two enemy machine gun positions but was killed whilst attacking another position. His body was never recovered.

**Piper James Clelland Richardson** (1895-1916) originally from Bellshill, Lanarkshire. "Jimmy" Richardson obtained permission from his commanding officer to play his company "over the top" on 8th October at Regina Trench during the Somme Offensive. When many members of his company were held up by barbed wire obstructions and were taking



heavy casualties Richardson coolly marched up and down the line so inspiring his colleagues to new heroics and the position was captured. Later in the day whilst helping to recover a wounded soldier the piper forgot his pipes and going back to recover them was never seen alive again. His pipes with their distinctive Lennox tartan did find eventually their way back home—but that's another story!

**Lt Robert Shankland** (1887-1968) was born at St Quivox, Ayr. On 26th October 1917 at Passchendaele, whilst serving with the Cameron Highlanders of Canada he regrouped those of his own men who had survived heavy casualties and pursued the enemy killing many of them before reporting what had happened to HQ, (Pine Street in which lived in Winnipeg produced three VC winners and was later renamed Valor Road).





**Lt Marcus Strachan** (1884-1982) born near Bo'ness in West Lothian gained his VC for actions at Masnières during the Battle of Cambrai on 20th November 1917, when he took command of a mounted squadron of the Fort Garry Horse and led them through German machine gun fire to kill seven gunners with his sword before returning on foot at night with his uninjured men and over a dozen prisoners. He died at Vancouver BC in his 98th year.

Legendary **Piper George Findlater** (1872-1942) is the only Scottish VC to be even vaguely referenced by a British issue—via the 1994 Scottish Airletter #40 commemorating his regiment—The Gordon Highlanders, shown opposite.

Born at Mill of Turriff, Aberdeenshire, Piper Findlater was serving in the 1st battalion during the Tirah Campaign on India's North West Frontier when on 20th October 1897 despite being shot through both legs he propped himself against a boulder and continued to play to encourage his colleagues to charge despite coming under heavy fire. He recalled playing a strathspey—*Haughs of Cromdale*, though the official record has it that he gave the regimental march *Cock o' the North* ! (The Battle of Cromdale in 1690 had apocryphally seen a wounded Jacobite piper perch on a rock and play his comrades into battle, and the traditional ballad itself described how "the Gordons boldly did advance ... upon the Haughs o' Cromdale.) George Findlater later acquired the rank of Pipe-Major and his VC is displayed at the Gordon Highlanders museum in Aberdeen.

Being then something of a celebrity Findlater supplemented his Army pension by performing at music halls, but when the Army authorities indicated their distaste concerning this practice he retired to take up farming in Banffshire in 1899. In 1914, he served as the senior piper for the 9th Battalion until the end of 1915, when he returned home because of ill health. He played in his local pipe band until his death.



There are a number of paintings of this legendary encounter between the Gordon Highlanders, the Gurkhas and the native Pashtuns. The painting shown left is 'Storming of the Heights of Dargai' by the Scottish military artist Vereker Hamilton.

Author's footnote: I am once again greatly indebted to *Scots and Philately* by Trew and Burns for making the sourcing of stamps for this article so straight-forward.

**Lt James Tait** (1886-1918) from Greenbrae, Dumfries was serving with the Winnipeg Grenadines—having been awarded an MC in April—when in early August 1918 at Amiens he rallied his company faltering under intense machine gun fire. He then advanced on his own to an enemy turret where he killed the gunner, his actions so inspiring his men that they rushed the position and captured a dozen machine guns and twenty prisoners. Displaying outstanding courage, he was killed when the Germans attempted to regain their old position.



**Col James Forbes-Robertson** (1884-1955) was the highest ranking Scot to be awarded the VC in the Great War.

Forbes-Robertson was born at Strathpeffer in 1884 and was educated at Cheltenham College. An Acting Lieutenant Colonel in the 1st Battalion, The Border Regiment, during the First World War at the Battle of Estaires, he was awarded for his actions on 11/12 April 1918 near Vieux-Berquin: Four times he saved the line from breaking and averted a most serious situation. On one occasion, having made a reconnaissance on horseback in full view of the enemy under heavy fire, he led a counter-attack which was completely successful in establishing the British line. When his horse was shot under him he continued on foot, steadying the men and inspiring confidence by his disregard for personal danger. On the second day he lost another horse and again continued on foot until he had established a line to which his men could withdraw.



**Cpl Samuel Frickleton** (1891-1971) was born in Slamannan, near Falkirk, one of 11 children born to a coal-miner and his wife. He emigrated to New Zealand in 1913 and served in France with the N.Z. Rifle Brigade.



On 7th June 1917 Frickleton took part in the Battle of Messines, his battalion charged with attacking the edge of the village. Though wounded he led his section through a barrage and destroyed two enemy machine guns and their crews killing over a dozen Germans before being wounded more severely. His pre-emptive actions so saved the lives of many allied troops. He is commemorated along with all N.Z. winners of the V.C. in an issue from 2011.

## Legendary Pipers: Findlater, Richardson and Laidlaw

More information courtesy of Avon McMillan, New Zealand:

James Richardson is featured in detail on St Vincent & Grenadines 2007 VC issue (SG MS 5683) marking 150 years of the Victoria Cross shown right, which is very difficult to obtain.

Below a larger detail of Scottish Airletter no 40 dedicated to the Gordon Highlanders

