BLACK WATCH

By Gregory Burke
Directed by John Tiffany
The Drill Court at the Armory Community Center
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Characters, Cast, and Synopsis of *Black Watch*

The National Theatre of Scotland’s *Black Watch* premiered in 2006 at the Edinburgh Festival Fringe. It has been touring the world ever since. Most recently it was presented at the National Theater of Korea in Seoul.

**Characters and Cast of *Black Watch***

CAMMY.................................................. Stuart Martin  
GRANTY.................................................. Richard Rankin  
ROSSCO................................. Adam McNamara  
STEWARTY.............................. Benjamin Davies  
MACCA ...................................... Cameron Barnes  
NABSY........................................... Gavin Jon Wright  
WRITER........................................ Robert Jack  
FRAZ............................................ Andrew Fraser  
KENZIE ..................................... Scott Fletcher  
SERGEANT.............................. Robert Jack  
OFFICER/LORD ELGIN................. Stephen McCole

**Setting of *Black Watch***

A pub in Fife, Scotland; Central Iraq, 2004.

**Synopsis of *Black Watch***

Lance Corporal “Cammy” Campbell meets Sophie, a pretty researcher who found his name in the newspaper, and she convinces him to persuade his Black Watch unit to talk about their experiences during the Iraq War. Cammy tricks his brothers-in-arms into meeting by telling them how attractive Sophie is, so they are disappointed when they are introduced to the male Writer who will interview them. Once the Writer offers to buy them drinks, however, they agree to stay and talk.
Flashback to 2004. Cammy's unit in Scotland's 300-year-old Black Watch regiment has been sent to assist the U.S. military in North Iraq's “Triangle of Death” region. As the Americans gear up for an attack on Fallujah, the Black Watch's mission is to cut off insurgent lines of communication from the southeast of the city and to police terrorist runs out of Baghdad. It is not a role the unit is prepared to perform, having received little time to assess the situation and develop appropriate tactics. Additionally, because of the regiment's famed history, the media makes a spectacle out of its movements—which makes it an immediate target.

Cammy and his squadron—Private “Fraz” Frazer, Rossco, Stewarty, Granty, and newbies Nabsy, Kenzie, and Macca—have been deployed for a six-month stint at Camp Dogwood in the Babil province, where they live out of their armored wagons (“Warriors”) while mortars fall around them. Cammy joined the Black Watch as an 18-year-old seven years ago after seeing Granty leave the recruiting office with his papers. They trained together at the Catterick Garrison in Northern England before going to Germany, where they met Rossco, who had joined the Black Watch straight after high school. Rossco is the first in his family to join the regiment; Cammy’s family, on the other hand, has been attached to the Black Watch for four generations, starting with his grandfather in World War I.

Cammy and his men face the constant bombings and endless boredom with gallows humor, games (both innocent and bawdy), and by reading books and letters, singing, swearing, fighting, and watching porn. The tedium is occasionally interrupted by their Sergeant, who half-heartedly reprimands them, and the sporadic, violent missions that feel more like “bullying than fighting.”

Public opinion back home is intensely negative towards the Black Watch's involvement in the war, and in the middle of this divisive controversy, the government begins reorganizing regiments, officially disbanding the Black Watch even though it is out in the field. Some of the troops find this change discouraging, but not as unsettling as the new breed of attackers they are facing: the suicide bomber.

Cammy’s unit is about to raid the village from which the mortars have been launching when the front wagon of their caravan is immobilized by an IED (improvised explosive device). The second wagon is nearly hit as well, and Granty drives it into a ditch, where the vehicle gets stuck. They are waiting for backup when a car approaches. Having never dealt with a suicide bomber before, Fraz, Kenzie, and the Sergeant go to speak to the driver. The car explodes, and all three are killed.

Cammy helps the eight wounded men. Later, his commanding Officer says that Cammy is due for a promotion, but Cammy, like the rest of the men in his unit, is done. They’ve seen enough—none of them will sign up for another tour. But before they return home, they go out on one last mission.
Writer’s Notes

By Gregory Burke

Gregory Burke’s Original Writer’s Note for the 2006 Production of Black Watch

There is a pride in Scotland, romanticized perhaps, but a pride nonetheless, about our military traditions. Scotland has always provided a percentage of the British Army that is disproportionate to its population’s size. Where does this martial culture sit alongside the shortbread tin version of the Highlands, or the socialist glory of the former industrial areas? What is the enduring appeal of regiments like the Black Watch?

Young men around the world are often limited to narrow, predetermined roles that prove more fragile and less sustainable under the pressures of growing up. Many of them find that the identities they would choose for themselves aren’t available when they reach adulthood. If the environment does not offer an alternative when this change confronts them, then sometimes they turn to those organizations that are adept at exploiting this need for identity.

During the rehearsals for the original 2006 production, a former regimental sergeant major of the Black Watch gave the actors the benefit of both 267 years of parade ground insults and of the particular attention the regiment pays to what a layman might find trivial. The exact way to wear your uniform, for example. The impulse to turn as much of the world as possible into an acronym. But mostly what he taught them about was pride. To take a pride in yourself. To take a pride in what you are doing. To take a pride in your appearance. To take a pride in what you represent. When the actors first mastered a piece of marching, he took them outside and made them march in the street: he was proud of them and he wanted other people to see what they could do. To me this was indicative of the seductive nature of surrendering yourself to an institution that has refined its appeal to the male psyche’s yearning for a strong identity.

Like any military unit, the Black Watch has to carve out its own identity. It has to see itself and its members as special. It has several tactics for achieving this. Its history is drummed into recruits from the day they enter basic training. Then there are the uniforms: the kilts, and the red hackle that they wear on their tam-o’-shanters. There are the Pipes and Drums, who played at John F. Kennedy’s funeral and tour the world.

There is a cachet to be had from serving in the Black Watch, the oldest Highland regiment. They call it the “Golden Thread”: the connection that has run through the
history of the regiment since its formation. Even today, in our supposedly fractured society, the regiment exists on a different plane. In Iraq, there were lads serving alongside their fathers. There were groups of friends from even the smallest communities: the army does best in those areas of the country the U.K. Ministry of Defense describes as having “settled communities.” The army does not recruit well in London or any other big city; fighting units tend to be more at home with homogeneity than with metropolitanism or multiculturalism. The central core of the regiment has always been the heartland of Perthshire, Fife, Dundee, and Angus.

When the clans of Scotland used to fight, they would have people who stood in front of the soldiers and recited the names of their ancestors. In the end, our soldiers don’t fight for Britain or for the government or for Scotland. They fight for their regiment. Their company. Their platoon. And for their mates.

Gregory Burke’s Author’s Note from the 2010 Publication of Black Watch

When Black Watch was first produced, it tapped into a prevailing mood of disquiet, on both sides of the Atlantic, about the conduct of the invasion and occupation of Iraq and the political mendacity, on both sides of the Atlantic, that led us to that point. Four years later, and seven years after the first troops from the Black Watch began operations there, the play is being revived.

What has changed in the meantime? Well, for one thing both countries have different governments. The Democrats and the Conservatives who replaced that odd alliance of Republican and New Labour leaders who made up the “coalition of the willing” are consumed with domestic realities to a much greater degree, while still managing the wars they inherited from their predecessors. Another crucial change is that the British Army is now bursting at the seams. A recession of genuinely historical proportions has gifted the military an unemployment rate that means recruits are now having to be turned away.

The points that were made in the play the first time round about the institution that was the Black Watch—about how an unpopular war combined with the treatment of the soldiers and the fear that the regiment’s distinct identity was under threat from amalgamation—have largely disappeared. The focus of military operations has also switched to the other flank of Persian civilization and the war in Afghanistan. Instead of fighting with the Iraqi army the West trained to fight Iran, we’re fighting the mujahedeen the West trained to fight the Soviet Union. However, soldiers are still dying for unclear military objectives. We are still occupying other countries and, as a character in the play most eloquently puts it, “f***ing their day up.”

This new production of Black Watch has an all-new cast. In an unintentional echo of the actual recruiting policy of the real British Army, one of them is the younger brother of one of the original cast members. Indeed, in a further echo, some of them were still at school when the original production of Black Watch was staged, just like many of the soldiers now serving in Afghanistan were probably at school when John Reid, the then
defense minister, made his famous comment that British troops in the country would probably never have to fire a shot.

These new recruits will at least carry with them the goodwill of the population at home. The informal public mourning which takes place every week in the High Street of Wootton Bassett to honor the repatriation of fallen soldiers is just the most visible manifestation of the public mood. A mood that has changed from opposition to the invasion of Iraq—even if it didn't extend to the removal of the government that sanctioned our participation—to an acceptance that supporting the people who fight is more important than questioning the reasons for them fighting.

Our government at the moment, which, at first glance, perhaps resembles another “coalition of the willing,” have indicated that they would like to have British combat troops out of Afghanistan by 2014. If nothing else, they at least know, with the cuts to public spending they intend to make, that there will be plenty of willing young recruits to the armed forces preparing to risk their lives to earn a living denied to them at home.

Chris Starkie (left) and Robert Jack in Black Watch. Jack plays the Writer who interviews the soldiers of the Black Watch unit that served in Iraq in 2003 and 2004. Although he conducted the interviews of the Black Watch veterans himself as he was developing Black Watch, author Gregory Burke (who objects to being called a playwright on this project) did not model the character of the Writer after himself. Having grown up in working-class Fife, Burke hit it off quickly with the soldiers, many of whom were recruited from his community; to create conflict in Black Watch, however, the Writer is a middle-class, liberal fellow who does not fare as well with the veterans as Burke did. (photo by Scott Suchman)
Director’s Note

By John Tiffany

In August 2005, a couple of months after I started working at the National Theatre of Scotland, I attended a cycle of plays at the King’s Theatre in Edinburgh as part of the International Festival. The cycle was produced by the Galway-based Druid Theatre Company and consisted of all six of J. M. Synge’s plays performed by the same company of actors over nine hours with breaks for sustenance. It was a truly amazing experience to sit and watch the entire dramatic output of one brilliant playwright. As a celebration of the achievements of Irish theater, it felt truly national.

I started thinking about the role of the National Theatre of Scotland in relation to the history of Scottish theater and how we could honor and rouse its traditions. There have been, and continue to be, many great dramatists producing great plays over the years. Major revivals of Scottish classics along with world premieres will always have a strong presence in our program. But the plays are not the whole story.

Fueled by variety, visual art, music, and a deep love of storytelling, Scotland’s artists have created a form of theater that is as significant and vital as its written drama. It features narration, song, movement, stand-up comedy, film, politics, and, above all, an urgent need to connect with its audience. It is often contemporary with world events and issues, although never dry and academic, and therefore deeply relevant and bound to the time in which it is created. It is a distinct form of theater of which Scotland can be very proud.

It is a tradition that has been fired by, and has found expression in, the work of a great number of theater companies and artists: John McGrath and 7:84 changed the face of Scottish theater with The Cheviot, the Stag and the Black, Black Oil, which encompassed 200 years of Scottish history from the Clearances in the eighteenth century to the discovery of North Sea oil in the 1970s; Gerry Mulgrew and Communicado collaborated with Liz Lochhead and Edwin Morgan to create visceral and riotous shows such as Mary Queen of Scots Got Her Head Chopped Off and Cyrano de Bergerac; Bill Bryden told the story of dying industry with a great demotic energy in The Ship, performed in the former Harland & Wolff engine shed in Govan. All these pieces of theater used cabaret, spectacle, passion, and honesty to communicate with their audiences. It is these productions, among others, that were the inspiration behind the ambition of Black Watch.

This ambition resulted in a development period and rehearsal process that was unfamiliar to me, writer Greg Burke, and the creative team. For the most part we were
making it up as we went along. At the end of 2004, in one of the first things she did as the artistic director of the National Theatre of Scotland, Vicky Featherstone asked Greg to keep an eye on the story of the Black Watch regiment, who had just returned to Scotland from Camp Dogwood. When I joined the company in April 2005, Greg had discovered some fascinating stories with real dramatic potential, so we decided to program the piece in our inaugural year as a “highly physical piece of political theater.” I asked Greg not to write a fictional drama set in Iraq, but that instead we should try and tell the “real” stories of the soldiers in their own words. This led to Greg interviewing a group of Black Watch lads in a Fife pub over a couple of months (thanks to our researcher Sophie Johnston), all of whom had just left the regiment. I knew that I wanted to perform the piece in a space in which we could create our own version of the Edinburgh Military Tattoo, with seating banks down either side of an esplanade. This we found in Edinburgh, in an old drill hall near the castle that was being used as a car park by the university. For the first time as a director, and through nobody’s fault but my own, I was going into rehearsals without a script. All we had were the interviews, some traditional Black Watch songs, and the dimensions of the drill hall.

Luckily, Greg had been secretly writing some fictional scenes set in Dogwood and these made a powerful contrast with the pub interviews. We soon had material from Steven Hoggett, associate director (movement), who was working with the actors on a “letters from home” sequence and brought in a regimental sergeant major to teach us parade marches and Davey Anderson, associate director (music), who was creating radical new arrangements of the Black Watch songs. We also had fantastic support from Sarah Alford-Smith, our stage manager, who created a twenty-first-century rehearsal environment with internet access, DVD players, and video cameras and who, along with the actors, collated a goldmine of news reports, radio extracts, documentaries, political speeches, statistics, and visual references. Even with all this material, it still wasn’t clear to us whether we had a piece of theater that would communicate anything to an audience. We continued not to know up until the first night in Edinburgh. Then it became apparent that there was a real connection being made and that we were telling a story that the audience desperately wanted to hear.

Not long into that three-week run at the 2006 Festival Fringe, we realized there was an appetite for Black Watch to tour. Due to the traverse staging and size of floor space needed, conventional theaters were not an option so we started the long and arduous task of searching for possible spaces for the production. As a result of the hard graft of everyone at the National Theatre of Scotland, we have been able to take Black Watch to audiences all over Scotland and beyond, performing in venues as diverse as a disused hydroelectric laboratory in Pitlochry, a warehouse underneath Brooklyn Bridge in New York, a converted train factory in Sydney, and an ice rink in Toronto. I couldn’t be more honored that the journey continues.
Culture Shock
A Brief Biography of Writer Gregory Burke

By Cait Robinson

To hear Gregory Burke tell it, he became a playwright by default. “I don’t know why I wrote a stage play, other than I just found it very natural and very easy,” he confesses of his first play, Gagarin Way. “I wanted to write something, and it was never going to be a novel because I can’t be bothered to describe things. A cup is a cup. Why describe it? An actor can just pick it up.” He started to write a screenplay, but upon realizing the entire piece would be set in a single room and, as he claims, “densely written and wordy,” he instead submitted Gagarin Way—a caustic comedy about a botched political kidnapping—to Edinburgh’s Traverse Theatre in 1998.

To his great surprise, the Traverse agreed to workshop the play. Its world premiere, directed by Black Watch’s John Tiffany, followed in 2001. The production moved to the Edinburgh Festival Fringe in August of that year and to London’s National Theatre the following month; in March 2002, it opened on the West End. The Guardian described the piece as a “blistering, brilliant, crazily confident first play,” and it was not alone in its assessment. Suddenly, newspapers all over the country were hailing Burke as both a beacon of hope for the Scottish theater and the new darling of the British arts world.

Burke was undeniably out of place in this coveted new role. His résumé listed minimum wage jobs as a dishwasher, a hospital porter, and an inkjet factory worker—not readings or workshop productions of his plays. Indeed, he had no previous plays to produce. Born to a military family in Dunfermline (a town in the council area of Fife), Burke had never attended the theater at all before writing Gagarin Way. Instead, he spent his childhood at the local library, where he devoured the works of Tennessee Williams and Harold Pinter. “I’d read loads of plays,” he says. “[But] there’s no theater in Dunfermline . . . we don’t even have a bookshop.”

Burke spent most of his teenage years in Gibraltar, at the southern tip of the Iberian Peninsula at the entrance of the Mediterranean Sea, after his father was stationed at the naval dockyards there. Upon his return, his peers deemed his expat speech and mannerisms “too English” for their ranks, and Burke adopted a tough demeanor and a working-class Scottish vernacular to protect himself. “The kids were all: ‘He’s English and he’s got a tan—let’s kill him.’ Within three days, I had the broadest Fife accent,” he recalls, adding, “We were not wild, not criminal, but we were brought up in that culture.
If somebody was wide with you, you fought them.” This approach was less acceptable at the University of Stirling, which banned the 20-year-old Burke from campus after he beat a younger student so severely that the boy spent three days in the intensive care unit. Burke, who remains less than contrite about the episode, chalks it up to cultural difference. “Coming from Dunfermline, if someone looked at you squint, you went across and battered them. That was it,” he says. “University was one of the first places where I encountered people who weren’t like that. . . . It was a culture shock.”

The same might be said of the established theater community’s reaction to Burke’s success. “He should be warned,” wrote Theatrenow’s Paul Webb of Gagarin Way’s transfer to the National, “that the London literary scene is far more vicious than anything [Burke] may have experienced in the backstreets of Fife.” Burke acknowledged that his inexperience and lack of formal education made waves: “When I talk to other writers, they give me a look like it’s not fair, and I feel terrible. There are people who’ve been slogging away writing for years and then I just swan in. But they didn’t wash dishes for years—that’s how I look at it.”

Perhaps because he’d never aspired to be a playwright in the first place, Burke was unshaken by the prickly reception. “I know it’s downhill from here—that’s my motto!” he joked after Gagarin Way.

But it wasn’t downhill. His hotly anticipated second play, The Straits, opened at the Traverse in 2003, also under Tiffany’s direction. Set in Gibraltar’s British expat community during the 1982 Falklands War, The Straits grapples with issues of nationalism, masculinity, and identity via a group of young military brats who hunt octopuses in Rosia Bay. “After the huge success of his first play . . . Gregory Burke had a hard act to follow,” wrote BBC News reviewer Amber Hemshaw. “The Straits
is a fantastic piece of theater. It is definitely worth going out of your way to see.” The Guardian concurred: “While [Burke’s] second play is less showy, it is no less thrilling in a powerful way.”

A slew of new work followed: Debt (2004) at the National’s National Headlines, a series of current-events-themed monologues authored by British playwrights; On Tour (2005), about British petty criminals following soccer teams abroad; Liar (2006), a comedy about British teenagers; Black Watch (2006); Hoors (2009), a black comedy about a Scottish groom who fails to make it to his wedding after a bachelor party in Amsterdam; Battery Farm (2010), an apocalyptic comedy about the future of elder care; and the radio plays Occy Eyes and Shellsbocked. Burke has begun to work in television and film as well, but in his typically self-deprecating fashion, he insists he will avoid academia: “What if I go along and train some young Scottish kid . . . and a couple of years from now it turns out that he can write better plays about Scottish people shouting at each other than I can?” he jokes. “Where does that leave me?”

The general consensus, however, is that Burke’s work is about a lot more than loudmouthed Scots. Looking unflinchingly at socialism, war, globalization, and working-class identity, his plays are widely considered political dramas, a label Burke isn’t entirely comfortable with. “When politics are attached to your name as a writer, audiences will have certain expectations as to what your views will be. . . . I have tended to disappoint people with the fact that I reflect my noncommitted generation,” he says. Instead of partisanship (he is a staunch critic of both ends of the political spectrum) and soapbox statements, Burke prefers explorations of identity, community, and working-class institutions.

Burke’s way of handling tough issues with humor has also ruffled feathers. After the Polish premiere of Gagarin Way, Burke recalls finding himself part of a discussion panel on globalization. “I didn’t really have a leg to stand on: I was wearing a Prada Sport jacket and a pair of trainers made in Vietnam. So I told jokes,” he says. His serious audience was not amused. More gaffes followed in Leipzig, Germany, where Burke donned an old East German soccer track suit, “in the mistaken belief that my irony would be applauded.” Despite the occasional misunderstanding, Burke says his jokes won’t end until his writing career does: “When I’m asked to write a hard-hitting drama, I can’t do it, because when I’m writing about the hard-hitting aspect I just think, ‘This guy would be having a laugh and making a joke of it.’ That’s the natural instinct of people in those situations.”

The Making of Black Watch

By Cait Robinson

Writer Gregory Burke is characteristically wry when asked how he wrote Black Watch: “I started off by buying some paper. About 100 pages usually does it.”

In actuality, Black Watch’s birth was somewhat more complicated, and its story was written years before Burke ever put his pen to any of those pages. In early November 2004, Scotland’s legendary Black Watch infantry regiment moved from its outpost in Basra, Iraq, to the highly unstable “Triangle of Death” in Babil Governorate. A month later, the U.K. Ministry of Defense announced the Highland regiment’s official dissolution: along with the four other Scottish regiments, the Black Watch would be merged into a single Royal Regiment of Scotland.

In Glasgow, another story was unfolding that would be equally essential to Black Watch. Vicky Featherstone had just been appointed founding artistic director of the brand-new National Theatre of Scotland, the brainchild of the Scottish government’s National Cultural Strategy. While the Black Watch was transferring to Babil, Featherstone was planning her first season, slated to begin in 2006. She had three requirements: first, her productions would be performed in diverse spaces all over Scotland, rather than in Glasgow alone. They would also be uniquely Scottish, departing from traditional English forms and traditions. Finally, they would be risky, relevant, and provocative, positioning Scotland on the cutting edge of artistic innovation.

Black Watch director John Tiffany recalls Featherstone was “very keen to do a piece about the Iraq War, but didn’t really know the way in.” A chance encounter with a Glasgow newspaper, however, changed all that. Featherstone was fascinated by the controversy surrounding the Black Watch, and like many people, Tiffany remembers, “She saw a great irony in that whilst they were out in Iraq they were being dissolved.” The artistic director contacted rising playwright Gregory Burke (who, like many Black Watch soldiers, is a native of Fife) and Tiffany, who had workshopped and directed the premieres of Burke’s Gagarin Way and The Straits, and asked them to turn the regiment’s story into a play.

The writer and director had only a vague idea of what this play might look like. Like Featherstone, they wanted to avoid replicating English dramas, and turned instead to Scottish traditions like vaudeville and music-hall revues for inspiration. “We knew we wanted to create a piece of theater that was different to anything we’d done before,” explains Tiffany. “We decided not to write a play as such, but we wanted to create an
experience for an audience.” Tiffany recruited his former classmate Steven Hoggett, who had choreographed the London production of Burke’s *The Straits* in 2003. Tiffany and Hoggett had long discussed using physical theater to create and develop new plays—as Tiffany put it, “to make [movement] part of the DNA of the project.” *Black Watch* was their chance.

The team was acutely aware that creating a lasting play about the Iraq War would require them to transcend their own antiwar bias. “We didn’t want it to be a piece of theater which said we were wrong to invade Iraq,” Tiffany says. “You preach to a liberal Edinburgh Fringe audience, telling them that George Bush and Tony Blair were wrong, and then we all go and have a gin and tonic and pat ourselves on the back. We knew we wanted to try and find a story which would be more challenging to that audience.” *Black Watch*, they decided, would not examine the wisdom of the post-9/11 wars themselves; it would attempt to capture the experience of the Scottish soldiers who served in them.

Tiffany suggested Burke pursue a documentary, rather than fictional, slant and interview recent Black Watch veterans. Finding his subjects less than enthusiastic about the project, Burke hired researcher Sophie Johnston to arrange a series of meetings in a Fife pub, hoping that the soldiers might prefer the company of a young woman to his own. The ploy worked. Johnston got them there; Burke interviewed them.

Though he lacked Johnston’s charms, Burke says his working-class background and boyhood in Fife gave the men an instant connection: “When I went to meet the soldiers, within two minutes I found out that one of them knew my cousin and that I knew another boy’s big sister.” He insists that while *Black Watch* depicts a hesitant, middle-class writer who relates poorly to his rough-and-ready subjects, the tension between the characters is pure artistic license. “It was like, ‘Imagine what would have happened if [English director, playwright, and screenwriter] David Hare had gone in that pub to meet with the ex-soldiers.’ Soldiers aren’t Hampstead liberals,” he says.

Burke’s interview transcripts, the dimensions of their performance space (a disused Edinburgh drill hall), and a handful of traditional Black Watch songs were the only materials Tiffany had in hand at the first rehearsal. He admits he was terrified. Soon, however, Burke introduced fictional scenes set in Iraq based on news articles and the veterans’ anecdotes. Hoggett arranged movement sequences with the actors. A former Black Watch regimental sergeant major was hired to teach the cast parade marches. Some members of the team felt Burke should include Iraqi characters in the script (a criticism that has followed the play), but Burke refused. “I can’t tell an Iraqi person’s version of the war, and to think that I could be to adopt the same attitude that made us invade their country in the first place,” he says. “That had to be kept out.”
The production, billed as the “unauthorized biography of the legendary Scottish regiment,” premiered at the 2006 Edinburgh Festival Fringe. Featherstone was modest in her aspirations: she hoped *Black Watch* would sell enough tickets to survive its scheduled three-week run. The press, however, was overwhelmingly positive, and the show sold out. “This should really be a six-star play,” began a five-star review by the online *British Theatre Guide*. “*Black Watch* is an astonishing artistic whirlwind that, despite its localized setting, is utterly international in its approach,” opined the especially prophetic Glasgow *Herald*. “The world must see this play. Immediately.”

Featherstone decided to oblige, and a five-stop national tour was scheduled to begin in March 2007. Arranging the tour was a unique challenge; *Black Watch* was written for performance in a drill hall, not a proscenium stage. The National Theatre of Scotland secured a diverse handful of nontraditional spaces scattered around the Scottish countryside, including a former hydraulic laboratory, a school, a market hall, and a community center. Designer Laura Hopkins’s spare metal set was designed to be portable—it could be disassembled and packed into a standard shipping container along with all the necessary props and costume pieces.

By the time the national tour ended in May, word of *Black Watch’s* success had spread abroad, and the National Theatre of Scotland was besieged with requests for
an international tour. A short, two-stop U.S. visit was scheduled for the fall of 2007, beginning with the UCLA Live Festival at Los Angeles’s Freud Playhouse and closing at St. Ann’s Warehouse in New York City. In preparation, the actors toned down their thick accents slightly, and Burke changed a handful of references likely to be lost on audiences outside of Scotland. Despite the urging of some critics, he and Tiffany refused to clean up the characters’ coarse and expletive-laden speech. “You object to their language, but you don’t object to them being shipped over to die?” Tiffany demanded. “What should they be saying as they’re being blown up? ‘Gosh golly?’”

While confident in their work, the National Theatre of Scotland and the Black Watch creative team wondered if it would resonate outside the regiment’s homeland. Perhaps the story was too specific to be accessible elsewhere. But Ben Brantley of the New York Times was moved to tears by the production, and his adulatory review assured a sold-out run in New York. “Black Watch . . . arrives like a blazing redeemer in the grayness of the current New York theater season,” Brantley wrote. “The means through which [its] breadth of vision is achieved are varied and seamlessly integrated. . . . Every moment in Black Watch seems to bleed from the previous one in an uninterrupted river of sensations.” After the review was published, the box office sold $60,000 worth of tickets in a matter of hours. A return engagement was already in the works for next year.

In January 2008, Australia became the third country to host Black Watch. The cast performed in a converted train factory as part of the annual Sydney Festival. “Sydney, Australia, was fantastic, because it’s a real working-class city with a real demotic culture,” remembers Tiffany. “It’s a fine and rare thing for a play such as this to live up to the hype that precedes it to our shores and our festival, but then Black Watch is indeed a fine and rare thing,” wrote Simon Ferguson in Australia’s Daily Telegraph. The show also visited eight venues around the United Kingdom, including Glenrothes, Scotland, where the parents of two of the soldiers whose deaths are portrayed in Black Watch were in attendance. “That was a real honor,” says Tiffany. It also made stops in Wellington, New Zealand; Norfolk, Virginia; and Toronto, Canada, closing with the promised second visit to St. Ann’s Warehouse.

If Black Watch’s creators thought that the 2008 tour would satisfy those clamoring to see it, they were mistaken. A third international tour was announced for 2010–11. It would stop at a number of schools around Scotland and new locations in the United States. “Black Watch is coming back again for lots of reasons,” explained Tiffany at the time. “The main reason being that people want to see it, and they haven’t, and they need an opportunity to.” The director elected to begin the tour with an entirely new cast. “Apparently, it’s every young Scottish actor’s dream to be in Black Watch, so we had our pick,” he says. “We knew what we wanted this time; it’s the ‘triple threat’ thing of being brilliant actors who can also be soldiers, who can also sing and move fantastically.” Rehearsing the show from the beginning with a new cast “is a fresh start for everybody,” Hoggett added. “It means that we go back to the origins of why we made the work in the way that we did. . . . You’re held to account for the choices that you’ve made.”
In September 2012, the production’s fourth international tour kicked off at the Shakespeare Theatre Company in Washington, D.C. After performing in Chicago, the cast and crew continued on to Seoul, South Korea. The Seoul performance marked the National Theatre of Scotland’s first visit to Asia, and the recent South Korean debate over the military draft made the debut especially timely. “Korea has established a conscription system which will see almost all young men serve in the military and some troops have already been dispatched to Iraq, as their fellows have been in Black Watch,” explained National Theater of Korea President Ahn Ho-sang. “Korean audiences will deeply empathize with seeing a play about young men who volunteer to serve in the military.”

Everywhere Black Watch goes, audiences are moved by its frank portrayal of soldiers in combat. The amalgamation of the Black Watch into a larger regiment and the withdrawal from Iraq have not diminished the effect. If anything, Tiffany feels, “With distance, people seem to have found an even greater emotional connection with it.” Perhaps that distance is what makes Black Watch especially popular in the United States, where it has toured most extensively. The perspective of a Scottish soldier is a rare reprieve from America’s intensely partisan debate over the war, and it serves as a lens for reflection.

“We’d heard from the politicians. We’d heard from the pundits asking if we should be there. But not from soldiers who were actually there,” Tiffany says. It’s a timely reminder, as U.S. troops withdraw from Afghanistan and the postwar assessment begins in earnest, that those who experienced the post–9/11 conflicts firsthand are also part of its history.

**SOURCES**

“Three Hundred Years ay Being in the Shite”

The Golden Thread of the Black Watch

By Dan Rubin

In moments of crisis there is strength to be derived from a history, a tune, or a hackle, which is beyond price. If the Black Watch remains a little more tribal than most regiments, a little more feudal, and a little more punctilious about formalities of dress and behavior, it is because that strength grows best round some ritual, and in its long life that inward preparation has enabled it to overcome all the crises of war and peace.

—Andro Linklater, The Black Watch: The History of the Royal Highland Regiment

Baptism of Fire

Before it became a symbol of Scotland’s national identity, before it became known throughout the military world for the unrivaled gallantry and discipline of its soldiers, the Black Watch was essentially a specialized police force, keeping order in Scotland’s North Highlands when no one else could.

In the early eighteenth century, 400 years after Robert the Bruce first secured Scotland’s independence from English rule, the Scottish government was still trying to tame the rebellious inhabitants of the Highland’s mountain ranges: Gaelic-speaking clans that subsisted, without roads or industry, on basic husbandry and cottage crafts, whose exports consisted almost entirely of fish, cattle, and mercenaries.

In addition to the violence of centuries-old intraclan vendettas, for much of the second half of the 1600s, Highland clans were at odds with Scottish authority on religious grounds. To monitor the area, the government enlisted, organized, and armed small native companies. There are no consecutive records of the initial duties of these patrols or when exactly they began; it was not until 1725 that these men were officially commissioned by North Britain General George Wade under the name for which they became known: The Highland Watch.

According to a report written by Wade at the time, these companies were charged with “disarming the Highlanders, preventing depredations, bringing criminals to justice,
and hindering rebels and attainted persons from inhabiting that part of the kingdom.” They became known locally as *Am Freiceadan Dubh*: the Black Watch. The origin of this name is unclear, but many assume it was the dark “government” tartan (the plaid textile designs that define traditional clan attire) the men wore as their uniform. Some have suggested the name came from the Watch’s employment combating the protection rackets that freebooting clan chieftains ran against peasants. These were known as “black mail”: “black” meaning “evil” and “mail” coming from the Middle English word “male” meaning “rent” or “tribute.” Others have theorized that the kinsmen the Highland Watch betrayed called the souls of the militiamen “black” for doing so.

The Black Watch was initially comprised of six independent companies made up of gentlemen sons of well-regarded Highland clans (the Campbells, Grants, Frasers, and Munros)—540 men in total. As Wade’s report suggests, their responsibilities kept them near home, distributed at strategic points throughout their own region. In 1739, however, Great Britain declared war on Spain, and the range of the Black Watch irrevocably expanded. The companies were united as the 43rd Regiment of Foot, and in 1743 they were ordered to London to be reviewed by King George II on Finchley Common. As the soldiers marched through Scotland, the *Edinburgh Evening Courant* reported they were “certainly the best-looked Foot Regiment in the service, being generally tall, well-bodied men, and very stout.”

When the Watch arrived in London, the regiment learned that King George had left for Flanders, leaving Wade behind to review them. Thus cheated of royal attention (and suspicious that the review was a ruse masking the true intention to send them abroad, despite the terms of their initial engagement), more than a hundred men set out for home. Their desertion was immediately discovered, and, having covered 70 miles, the men were brought back to London. Three were condemned to death; the remainder were drafted into regiments stationed around the world.

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**Highland Religiousness and Rebellion**

During the Glorious Revolution of 1688—when the Protestant Prince William of Orange and his wife, Mary II, overthrew the Catholic King James II of England (also known as King James VII of Scotland)—the Roman Catholic and Episcopalian Highland clans led a series of uprisings against William and Mary. These rebellions ended in 1692 with the Massacre of Glencoe, when 38 members of the Clan MacDonald of Glencoe were killed for refusing to pledge allegiance to their new monarchs.

The Jacobite movement (as this show of support for King James was called) was rekindled in 1707 when Scotland and England united to form Great Britain and the deposed king’s son, James Francis Edward Stuart, made a move to invade Scotland from France. In 1715, during the First Jacobite Rebellion, the Highland clans overtook Perth in the middle of Scotland and fought their way down into north England, where they were stopped at the Battle of Sheriffmuir.
Despite this early indignity, Lieutenant-Colonel Robert Munro Foulis quickly fashioned the Black Watch—which was to be deployed against the French in the War of Austrian Succession, a fight in which the Highlanders had no ideological stake—into a force defined by regimental pride.

During their inaugural offensive in 1745, the Watch was the first to attack (with musket, bayonet, and broadsword) the important Low Country town of Fontenoy, in what is now Belgium. After the allied British/Dutch army lost thousands of men, it retreated; the Watch was one of only two regiments still physically capable of executing “that most difficult of martial exercises,” according to historian Andro Linklater, “a fighting withdrawal.” Linklater writes, “They showed so aggressive a temper, and fired to such good effect, that the French were unable to interfere with the retirement and perhaps had no great wish to do so.” The Battle of Fontenoy was a famous French victory, but the Parisian pamphlet that followed it made special note of the Black Watch’s performance: “The British behaved well, and could be exceeded in ardor by none but our own officers, who animated the troops by their example when the Highland furies rushed in upon us with more violence than ever did the sea driven by tempest.”

It was the beginning of a reputation for bravery, valor, and passion that would never tarnish. Back in London, William Pitt, Earl of Chantham, told Parliament that the “hardy and intrepid men” of the Black Watch would conquer “every part of the world.” It was renamed the Royal Highland Regiment, “as a testimony of His Majesty’s satisfaction and approbation of its extraordinary courage, loyalty, and exemplary conduct.”

The Gallant Forty-Twa

In 1749, the reduction of a different regiment moved the Highlanders up the numerical roll call into the position that would become synonymous with the Black Watch: the 42nd Foot. They did not return home after Fontenoy. Instead, with 900 men fit for service, they were ordered to keep peace in Ireland—a role for which they were uniquely well suited given their initial policing duties in Scotland, their ability to speak the Irish native Gaelic tongue, and the Highlanders’ history of being persecuted on religious grounds.
They established friendly relationships with the locals and were commended for their “sobriety”; it is rumored that if a man in their ranks was found to be a troublemaker, the men in the company would pool their wages to buy his discharge.

In peacetime, the men of the Black Watch could be patient; in battle, they were anything but. In 1756, they were sent to the New World, again to pursue the French. They were trained in bush-fighting and sharpshooting, techniques necessary for warfare in the American wilderness, “a species of warfare for which they were well fitted,” but “their ardor and impatience often hurried them from cover when they ought to have remained concealed,” writes Linklater. They were kept in reserve during the battle for the French fort at Ticonderoga in what is now upstate New York, but when the forward battalions were waylaid, the Highlanders attacked (apparently without receiving orders to do so), attempting to conquer what turned out to be an impregnable position. They were commanded three times to retreat before they withdrew; they left half their men (and two-thirds of their officers) on the field. Stewart of Garth, an officer in the Watch, wrote about the Highland temperament:

This impetuosity of Highland soldiers, and the difficulty of controlling them, in the most important part of a soldier’s duty, has been frequently noticed and reprobated. To forget necessary discretion, and break loose from command, is certainly an unmilitary characteristic; but as it proceeds from a very honorable principle, it deserves serious consideration, how far any attempt to allay this ardor may be prudent or advantageous to the service. . . . It is easier to restrain than to animate.

The Black Watch stayed in North America, fighting the French (and the Spanish and Native Americans) in minor battles from Canada to the West Indies. On the field, they were known as furies; off, they were recognized for their “abstemious habits.” American colonists regarded them highly. In a 1767 printing of the Virginia Gazette, the journalist writes:

Since its arrival in America, [the Black Watch] has been distinguished for having undergone amazing fatigues, made long and frequent marches through an inhospitable county, bearing excessive heat and severe cold with alacrity and cheerfulness. . . . It has ensured to us peace and security; and along with our blessings for those benefits it has our thanks for that decorum in behavior which it minted here, giving an example that the most amiable conduct in civil life is in no way inconsistent with the character of the good soldier.

A decade later in the American War of Independence, however, the Black Watch took up arms against the colonists it had recently protected; most notably, they helped run George Washington out of New York City. During this time, the British Army officially dropped the use of pistols and broadswords, unsuitable weaponry for fighting in American forests, but many of the Black Watch still carried both. It was also during these skirmishes that the regiment added a red plume to their bonnets to
It is believed that the Black Watch was awarded official approval to wear the red hackle in honor of their performance at Geldermalsen, Flanders, where they recovered two field guns from the French in 1795. In the early 1800s, other regiments started to incorporate red feathers into their uniform. To ensure this honor was enjoyed only by the Black Watch, the adjutant-general declared on August 20, 1822, “The Red Vulture feather prescribed by the recent regulations for Highland regiments is intended to be worn exclusively by the 42nd Regiment.”

Women of the Watch

In the early years of the Black Watch, Linklater writes, for every 100 men with the 42nd, six wives were authorized to follow the regiment, but unofficially many more joined their husbands. They received half rations (half a pound of beef and biscuits), while their children received one-third rations. If they had remained at home, they would have received nothing and might not have seen their husbands for a decade. They washed and mended their husbands’ clothes and acted as nurses.

As in the rest of the British Army, today women serve in the Black Watch as technicians, engineers, medics, and all other noncombat roles.

distinguish itself from other units. This symbol was officially adopted by the Royal Highland Regiment in 1795, when its commanding officer formally gave his men red feathers (the red hackle) as an award for their gallantry.

A Change in Character

A shift occurred in 1795, when several other Highland regiments were disbanded and their men were drafted into the 42nd Foot. Black Watch Colonel David Stewart commented, “Although these drafts furnished many good and serviceable men, they were, in many respects, very inferior to former recruits. This difference of character was more particularly marked in their habits and manners in quarters, than in their conduct in the field, which was always unexceptionable.” For the first time, drinking became a popular off-duty activity for the Black Watch. This had long been the common pastime for the rest of the British Army, but Linklater notes that “for the first half-century of the regiment’s existence, [the soldiers of the 42nd] could scarcely be prevailed upon to drink their daily rum ration.” With the new class of 1795 began the regiment’s reputation for a level of carousing equal to the excessiveness of its courage.

In battle, however, the new recruits quickly proved themselves when they landed in Aboukir Bay, Egypt (11 miles from Alexandria), in 1801 to battle the army of Napoleon Bonaparte. “The finest performance of the day was that of the 42nd Highlanders,” wrote Sir John Fortescue in his twentieth-century History of the British Army, “who, after suffering heavily in the boats, were so steady and so perfectly formed upon landing that they beat off the attack of the French cavalry.” If passion defined the fighting
style of the Black Watch of the 1700s, the Watch of the 1800s would be known for its steadiness under pressure.

In the late 1600s, well-born sons had been eager for the opportunity to join the only club in the realm that allowed them to carry weapons; a century later, however, if a wealthy man was drafted into the Black Watch, he often paid a substitute to take his place. Volunteers were wooed with the promise of adventure—and whiskey. (Apparently, Linklater writes, “The veterans of Egypt suffered from a monstrous, desert-begotten thirst.”) In 1802, a reduced 1st Battalion of the Black Watch brought its strength up to 900 with transfers from the 2nd: 230 soldiers were Lowlanders (“Jocks”), another sign of the changing times. By the start of the Crimean War against Russia in 1854, only 13 percent of the 944-man regiment came from the Highlands. In 1881, the Black Watch’s recruiting area was the Lowland county of Fife and the counties of Forfarshire (now Angus) and Perthshire along the Highland/Lowland boundary. The mid 1800s saw another shift in the demographic of the Watch: advances in technology put many skilled Scots out of work, and the 42nd enlisted a high ratio of craftsmen and artisans; unskilled laborers only comprised 37 percent of the regiment in the 1840s.

Whether they were craftsmen-turned-soldiers or substitutes for drafted rich men, a lineage soldier from the Highlands or an eager Jock from the Lowlands, the men of the 42nd were shaped by a powerful regimental identity that was drilled into them from their first day of basic training. About their service in the Crimean War, Commander Sir Colin Campbell reported, “I never saw officers and men, one and all, exhibit greater steadiness and gallantry, giving evidence of their instruction and discipline, and of the noble spirit with which they are animated.” In the 1860s, an inspecting brigadier burst into tears when he watched the Black Watch on parade in India, reporting, “A more orderly and respectfully well-behaved body of men cannot be found in any army in the world”; the soldiers were often commended for their intelligence and marksmanship in skirmishes against the Indian rebellion.

**Battling Boredom with Books**

“Peace is war, and war is peace,” a Black Watch soldier once said to describe the endless parades, inspections, and punishments of peacetime. For the more than 40 conflict-free years that followed the defeat of Napoleon at Waterloo, the Black Watch maintained its standards and reputation. As the rest of the British Army succumbed to laxity, the Black Watch used the time for self-improvement. Stationed in Gibraltar in 1825 with nothing to do, the men of the 42nd engaged in the traditional remedy for boredom: they drank. But when Sir Charles Gordon became colonel in 1828, he restricted the sale of liquor; more importantly, he started a regimental library. Opened in 1830, within the first few hours it had 224 subscribers, who each paid six days’ wages to join. In 1859, in addition to the library, amateur theatrical productions and concerts were organized as ways to break the tedium.
The Black Watch in the Twentieth Century

On August 4, 1914, Britain honored its obligation to neutral Belgium and declared war on Germany. The 1st Battalion of the Black Watch landed in France that same day and spent the next four years on the Western Front, along which the Germans rapidly raised siege defenses: barbed wire, sandbags, and trenches, defended with bombs, mines, machine guns, and gas. Linklater writes:

The scale of that offense on the Western Front was monstrous, out of all proportion to what had come before. Neither soldier nor general could in any way have been prepared for what was to become the pattern of their days. Slowly and late the craft of generalship developed, but from the very start, the soldier practiced his skill in conditions which would have broken the mind and will of an individual if he were not supported. The ground, weapons, and men themselves varied wildly, but in their high spirits, responsiveness to sight and sound, and confidence in their own ability, there is an unmistakable common stamp on the Battalions of the Black Watch.

A report of a 1915 attack illustrates the Black Watch’s continued ability to function under pressure. As the 9th Battalion of the Black Watch advanced toward the German line, “it seemed impossible that these lines of disciplined soldiers had been almost all civilians 12 months before. There was no shouting or hurry. The men moved in quick time, picking up their dressing as if on a ceremonial parade.” Even after the harshest battles with the highest casualties, the Black Watch would return to camp “singing lustily . . . and with spirit unsubdued.” By the end of the Great War, 30,000 men had joined the Black Watch’s expanded battalions. (In addition to the regular 1st and 2nd Battalions and the 3rd Special Reserve Battalion, the Black Watch began World War I with four Territorial Battalions: the 4th from Dundee, the 5th from Angus, the 6th from Perthshire, and the 7th from Fife. The 8th and 9th Service Battalions were added during the war.) Over the four-year engagement, 7,993 were killed, and about 20,000 were wounded.

After Armistice, military concerns became politically unpopular in Great Britain, and the army’s budget were slashed. In 1925, army wages were cut, and they were cut again in 1931. During this time of cutbacks, however, recruitment for the Black Watch increased due to the economic depression that hit the regiment’s recruiting areas hard. This was also a time of military evolution. The Black Watch finally witnessed the end of the equine era in 1937. New specialty divisions were commissioned: the Motor Transport section, the Machine Gun company, Signals and Intelligence, and others. Officers taking training courses spent more time away from their battalions, but as allegiance
to individual leaders suffered, an overriding loyalty to divisions deepened.

Historian Charles Grant writes, “The Second World War was as different from the First as was the First from any previous wars. No longer were troops employed in the field in enormous masses; many more were required to maintain the sinews of war, and the relatively new element of the air became almost paramount.”

When war broke out with Nazi Germany in September 1939, the 2nd Battalion of the Black Watch was already active in Palestine and was deployed in a successful rearguard action against overwhelming Italian forces in British Somaliland (present-day Somalia) in July 1940. Later that year, the battalion was sent to Crete, where, in May 1941, they fought off a massive two-hour airborne attack over Heraklion. A captured major of a German parachute battalion later described that day: “I had never experienced such bitter fighting. Had it been any other regiment but the Black Watch—any other—all would have been well. I had 80 men left out of 800, little ammunition, no food—the Jocks were eating our food.”

Germans infiltrated another part of Crete, however, and the 2nd Battalion was ordered to leave. It was sent to Tobruk, Libya, where it lost more than 400 of their 632 men, and then on to Burma to stop the Japanese advance. It spent five months operating behind the Japanese lines, disrupting communications, supplies, and the flow of reinforcements. In the final days of the war, they were training as a parachute unit for a planned invasion of Malaya.

In a move reminiscent of 1914, the 1st, 4th, and 6th Battalions of the Black Watch began World War II dispatched to France, where they faced a massive armored assault they were ill-equipped to handle and were forced to retreat. In 1942, the 1st, 5th, and 7th (together as the 51st Highland Division) were in North Africa taking part in the momentous battle of El Alamein, Egypt. The 51st landed in Normandy shortly after D Day (June 6, 1944), and Black Watch battalions were employed in operations to stem the last German offensive in the Ardennes in January 1945. They fought in the Reichswald Forest on the Dutch-German border, and the 1st Battalion was the first of the Allied troops to cross into German territory. On March 23, 1945, the regiment played a key role in the Crossing of the Rhine and overcoming the final German resistance.

Following World War II, the 1st Battalion remained in Germany for a time. In 1952 it sailed to Korea as part of the Commonwealth Division of the United Nations force sent to contain the Chinese invasion of South Korea. It took over a vital position known
as “The Hook” from American troops. On November 19, 1952, The Hook was subjected to waves of Chinese attacks. After stiff hand-to-hand fighting, the battalion held its position. The Hook became the regiment’s 151st battle honor.

Over three centuries, the characteristics that distinguished the Black Watch have softened, mirroring the smoothing out of Scottish regional culture in general. Linklater, however, contends, “The original Highland character left a tribal imprint which the years have, if anything deepened . . . [giving] several hundred soldiers cohesion, pride, and a standard of conduct which no amount of training could inculcate.” For the second half of the twentieth century, the regiment was involved in peacekeeping in various parts of the world, the same function it served when it was first established in the North Highlands of Scotland 300 years ago.

Hearts and Minds
The Black Watch in Iraq

By Cait Robinson

As the 1990s drew to a close, Scotland’s Black Watch was growing increasingly dissatisfied with its role in Great Britain’s army. Over the course of the previous decade, its soldiers’ role as armed infantrymen had been gradually replaced by civilian responsibilities scattered throughout the United Kingdom. They had been excluded from the Falklands War, the first Gulf War, and the Bosnian War. The low casualty rate of civilian operations offered no consolation; the soldiers of the Watch had joined the military to see combat, and they spent the latter half of the decade campaigning heavily to be sent where the action was.

In 1999, their suit was successful. The Black Watch was assigned to the 7th Armoured Brigade (the Desert Rats) and shipped to the British military base in Bad Fallingbostel, Germany, for training. In July 2001, it was deployed to Kosovo on a NATO peacekeeping mission. The mission was labor-intensive and dangerous, but the Black Watch excelled at both military and humanitarian assignments: conducting property and vehicle searches, guarding public buses, patrolling the capital city of Pristina, and rebuilding an orphanage. The Black Watch returned to Bad Fallingbostel in November 2001, unaware that it was about to embark on one of the most controversial chapters of the regiment’s history.

Every year, one British brigade was selected as the nation’s Standby High Readiness Brigade (SHIRBRIG), part of a now-defunct U.N. peacekeeping initiative created in the wake of the Rwandan genocide to keep a rapidly deployable, multinational force at the ready in the event of a crisis. Fate would have it that in 2003 the responsibility fell to the Desert Rats, meaning they would spend 2002 in intensive training. As the brigade’s lead Armoured Battle Group, the Black Watch would be the first deployed in the event of an emergency.

The timing was not insignificant. British Prime Minister Tony Blair had positioned himself as the main supporter of U.S. President George W. Bush’s campaign for U.N. authorization to invade Iraq. In October 2002, without waiting for the United Nations’s decision, the U.S. Congress passed the Iraq War Resolution, authorizing the president to use force against Iraq. Along with Australia and Poland, the United Kingdom was one of three nations that had pledged to contribute troops to the U.S.–led invasion.
In mid February 2003, even as U.N. Monitoring, Verification, and Inspection Unit Chair Hans Blix announced that Iraq did not have weapons of mass destruction, the Desert Rats received orders to begin deployment to Kuwait, bringing with them 28 Challenger 2 tanks and 50 armored Warrior Infantry Fighting Vehicles—all freshly camouflaged for desert warfare. By early March, the final regiments arrived in country.

The last arrivals had little time to adjust to the extreme desert environment before the shooting began. A shortage of toilet facilities, air conditioning units, and structural protection from the desert’s torrential rains exacerbated a general sense of unpreparedness. “The Kuwaiti desert came as quite a shock,” admits Black Watch Operations Officer Captain N. E. Ord. “Simply living in the desert was a challenge.”

On top of the harsh conditions, the British National Audit Office confessed that a great deal of the nation’s essential military equipment had somehow been “misappropriated.” With conflict fast approaching, the Desert Rats and other British brigades in Iraq were short everything from nuclear, biological, and chemical protective filters and vapor detectors to desert uniforms and protective gear. After the first British soldier killed in Iraq fell victim to friendly fire, it was revealed he was not wearing body armor. Without enough suits to go around, he had lent his to a friend.

British morale was already low when fighting began on March 20. The Black Watch and their fellow Desert Rats left Kuwait and headed north, guarded from above by the U.S. and Royal Air Forces. Their destination was Az Zubayr, a town on the outskirts of Iraq’s second-largest city, Basra. Their first order of business was to take over for the U.S. Marines there. “At 0102 hours D Company were called forward to become the first Black Watch company in 50 years to cross the line of departure [a line designated to coordinate the beginning of an attack] in general war,” noted the battle report. “A real feeling of achievement and fulfillment emanated from the whole platoon.” After the initial exhilaration wore off, however, the seriousness of the situation set in. On March 24, the Black Watch suffered its first fatality in Iraq when 31-year-old Lance Corporal Barry Stephen of Perth died in combat.

Resistance in Az Zubayr was lighter than expected, and within two days, the Desert Rats had established a foothold inside the town. Black Watch soldiers immediately began distributing food and water to eager residents, despite attacks from enemy snipers. Whenever possible, they adopted a “soft posture,” appearing in their signature tam-o’-shanters (red-hackled caps) instead of helmets or body armor. Their approach paid off: by April 5, the town was deemed secure.

The Desert Rats were now free to attack Basra. The city was still well defended by both Iraqi troops and Fedayeen militias loyal to Saddam Hussein. A limited raid was planned for April 6, but by mid afternoon, the Black Watch soldiers had advanced deep into the city, far surpassing their original objectives. The decision was made to press ahead and by the end of the day, the brigade had taken Basra.

Unfortunately, according to Desert Rat Brigadier Graham Binns, the brigade was—like the majority of the invading forces—“inadequately prepared, mentally and physically, for post-conflict stabilization.” Anarchy ensued and looting became a constant thorn in
the Desert Rats’s side. Organizing and training a new Iraqi police force for the city was of paramount importance, but the civilian population needed a more immediate measure of civil structure and humanitarian assistance than the Desert Rats were ready to provide. The Black Watch, which had already proven itself skilled at winning hearts and minds in Az Zubayr, took on a special importance in establishing a rapport with the people of Basra, who were increasingly likely to see the British as “an army of occupation rather than liberation,” Binns recalls. Again donning tam-o’-shanters instead of helmets, they made themselves seen distributing food and water, repairing roads and public buildings, and even staging soccer matches with local teams.

By the time their tour of active service ended in July 2003, Basra was a model of relative calm, thanks in no small part to the Black Watch’s efforts. The Desert Rats handed over control of the area to another brigade, and the Black Watch retired to the Warminster Garrison in Wiltshire, England, for both training and much-needed R & R. But its successes in Basra put it in high demand. Shortly before the new year, a second six-month tour was announced for 2004.

In July 2004, the Black Watch returned to Basra to continue their previous stabilization work. To the north, American troops were struggling to capture the insurgency strongholds surrounding Baghdad: Babil Governorate to the south and the city of Fallujah to the west. As the Black Watch entered the second half of its scheduled tour, rumors surfaced that its stay would be extended—the Americans were asking for the Scottish regiment’s help in an area of Babil known as the “Triangle of Death.”

When Blair addressed the House of Commons on October 19, he announced that the Black Watch’s tour would be extended if British military commanders deemed it necessary, but refused to confirm the regiment would replace the U.S. Marines stationed in Babil. The Black Watch would be home by Christmas, he said. The promise did little to pacify the members of Parliament, who were skeptical as to why 850 British soldiers were suddenly indispensible when there were nearly 140,000 U.S. troops already in Iraq. Black Watch Lance Corporal Scott MacKinnon had the same question. “It does seem unlikely the Americans would need a battle group from us,” he told a reporter.

Public support for the war had never been high in the United Kingdom and was at 43 percent in March 2004; the recent kidnappings and murders of British citizens Margaret Hassan and Kenneth Bigley (an aid worker and a civil engineer working in Iraq) added to the growing doubt over the invasion’s purpose and value. In the three months preceding Blair’s announcement, the Triangle of Death had seen nine U.S. Marines killed and 197 injured, and many British suspected the sudden change of plans was political and not strategic: the swell of U.S. fatalities was sure to disadvantage Bush in the upcoming presidential election. Blair’s critics in the House of Commons and the media accused him of sacrificing the Black Watch on the altar of Bush’s reelection hopes.

The families of Black Watch soldiers derided Blair’s promise to bring the troops home for the holidays. “What Christmas did he mean—this year, or next?” scoffed one father. Scottish National Party Leader Alex Salmond, backed by more than 45 Labour Party MPs, fought vainly to have the matter put to a Commons vote. “If we are going to
Despite the protestations at home, the Black Watch soldiers set off on the two-day journey to Camp Dogwood in Babil Governate at the end of October. Their task was to support the upcoming U.S. assault on Fallujah by securing the maze of roads on both sides of the Euphrates River and intercepting insurgents traveling in and out of the city. They were joined by 100 Welsh reconnaissance soldiers from the Queen’s Dragoon Guards, 100 Royal Marines, 50 soldiers from the Corps of Royal Engineers, and 100 soldiers from other support units. The trip itself was dangerous: though most of the soldiers were flown to Baghdad so they could make the comparatively safer journey south, those charged with bringing the battle group’s equipment and vehicles north from Basra were vulnerable to attack. Four separate roadside bombings waylaid them en route.

Camp Dogwood was a grim place. A former chemical and fuel dump, it was briefly used as a base by the U.S. Army, but was abandoned to looters and vandals several months before the Black Watch arrived. It boasted none of the features of a traditional military base: no surrounding wall or fence, no watchtowers, not even glass in the

The Warriors were not without their flaws, however. Each one was equipped with an L94 chain gun, which a 2001 official report called “the worst automatic weapon ever introduced to the British Army.” The L94s had a reputation for being unreliable because they had a tendency to fire on their own, without so much as a touch from a gunner. In 2003, Black Watch Sergeant Albert Thompson lost a leg to a malfunctioning L94; the following year, one killed an Iraqi civilian and seriously injured another. Despite the accidents, the British Army continued to use Warriors and tanks equipped with the faulty guns in the conflict in Afghanistan.
windows. In fact, situated 20 miles from the nearest major town, its low beige buildings were hardly distinguishable from the desert at all, save for the dud insurgent bombs and rockets that littered the surrounding mud. Still, its isolation from civilian settlements and proximity to major roads leading into Fallujah made it instrumental to the success of the American attack.

Before they had even begun to unpack, the new arrivals were showered with an onslaught of mortar and rockets. The Black Watch was forced into immediate action, barricading themselves indoors with sandbags to deflect the constant shrapnel. In place of a wall, they ringed the premises with their armored Warriors. The Black Watch soldiers nicknamed their new home “Camp Incoming.”

The Royal Engineers, protected by the Black Watch, constructed a bridge (which soon garnered a nickname of its own—“IED Bridge”—after being repeatedly blown up by insurgents) over one of the tributaries of the Euphrates, enabling armored vehicles to move easily to and from Camp Dogwood. The Black Watch patroled nearby roads in their Warriors, establishing vehicle checkpoints and using their familiar “hearts-and-minds” tactics. They distributed fliers that showed a smiling Black Watch soldier and two Iraqi children. “Please allow me to introduce myself,” the fliers read in Arabic. “I am a Scottish soldier of the Black Watch regiment. We ask you to ignore those who would reject our presence. . . . What have they ever done for you but take away your sons and bring sadness and despair to your area?” The U.K. flag was conspicuously absent; the Black Watch hoped to distance itself from the prevailing negative attitudes towards British and American forces. “When people see the Union flag, they think of it as English, and we want to emphasize that we’re Scottish,” a Black Watch officer told British reporters.

Despite its track record, capturing and stabilizing Basra in 2003 did little to prepare the Black Watch for the volatile Triangle of Death. Pre-war Babil had been stable, even prosperous; a year and a half after the invasion, its people were suffering more than ever before. “In the south around Basra, the insurgency is born of poverty and long-term exclusion,” a Black Watch senior officer explained. “Up here, it’s the loss of power and wealth. They had it all and they’ve lost it all.” What was more, the American and British presence made Babil a destination for terrorists, angering the civilians who were often caught in the crossfire. Suicide bombers, virtually unheard of in the south, were a constant threat in the north, especially to those working at vehicle checkpoints; to avoid them, the U.S. Marines had adopted a “stop no one and stop for no one” policy. In response, the Black Watch closed down a number of roads to siphon traffic through the few they controlled, monitoring vehicles from 200 meters away before they were allowed to approach.

U.S. Marines handed over full control of the area to the Black Watch on November 3, 2004. The next day, a suicide bomber killed three Scottish soldiers and their civilian interpreter on a road northeast of Camp Dogwood. The news of the deaths sparked renewed outrage in the United Kingdom. Salmond was especially critical of the British
government, announcing, “The bravery of those soldiers in Iraq contrasts sharply with the chicanery of the politicians who sent them there in the first place.”

A month later, Defense Secretary Geoff Hoon made the ill-timed announcement that Scotland’s six infantry regiments—the Black Watch, the Highlanders, the Argyll and Sutherland Highlanders, the Royal Highland Fusiliers, the King’s Own Scottish Borderers, and the Royal Scots—would be merged into a single Royal Scottish Regiment due to cutbacks in military spending. Scotland’s Lieutenant General Sir Alistair Irwin promised that each unit would retain some of its distinguishing traditions (such as the colored hackles on its hats), but his mollifications fell on deaf ears in Scotland. Many people saw the amalgamation as a symbol of the government’s disregard for both the historical regiments’ distinct cultures and the morale of the already-imperiled Black Watch soldiers at Camp Dogwood. Civilian activist groups campaigned for their local battalions. “One of the reasons [the Scottish regiments] are so successful when they go to war is that the soldiers believe in their regiment,” argued Black Watch veteran and Chairman of the Black Watch Campaign Committee Garry Barnett. “The links to their home areas and their families contribute to their operational success.”

In the House of Commons, Hoon’s announcement drew immediate and harsh criticism. Scottish National Party MP Annabelle Ewing of Perth was removed from the
premises after calling Hoon a “backstabbing coward.” She was followed out by Salmond, who stated, “Annabelle Ewing has broken the rules, but Geoff Hoon has broken the hearts of Scottish soldiers.” Scottish Conservative Party members were no less critical. “This act of lunacy must be reversed, and it will be reversed by the Conservatives,” pledged MP Peter Duncan of Galloway and Upper Nithsdale.

But Duncan could not make good. The decision was already made, and it would go into full effect on March 28, 2006. If their uncertain future damaged morale during the Black Watch’s final days in Camp Dogwood, it did not diminish the soldiers’ effectiveness. Indeed, the amalgamation became a rallying cry. “This may be the last attack for the 1st Battalion, the Black Watch,” Lieutenant Colonel James Cowan told his officers before their final and largest raid in Babil, on November 25. “Let us make sure it goes as well as anything we have done in the past and is one that we can be proud of.” On December 5, they returned to Basra.

Blair kept his promise to bring the Black Watch home by Christmas; soldiers began arriving in Warminster on December 11, 2004, where a heroes’ welcome awaited them. The celebration was tinged with somberness, however; the Black Watch had lost five soldiers in Babil, and the return of the survivors underscored resentment of the amalgamation. To many, it felt like the end of an era.

In the Middle East, however, no end was in sight. The British were withdrawing from Iraq, but the war in Afghanistan raged on. In 2009, the Black Watch deployed to Kandahar and Helmand Provinces in an air assault role under its new title: 3rd Battalion The Royal Regiment of Scotland (The Black Watch), or 3 SCOTS. In 2011, 3 SCOTS returned to Helmand to help facilitate Afghanistan’s transition to self-governance.

**SOURCES**  
The Pipes and Drums

The Black Watch Bandsmen

By Dan Rubin

Music has been an integral part of the Black Watch since the beginning of the regiment: the sounds of the Pipes and Drums roused the soldiers’ spirits and put fear into the hearts of their enemies. “During our forced marches through Germany,” remembered Tom Morris, a nineteenth-century Black Watch soldier, of his 1813 experience in the Napoleonic Wars, “the most serviceable man we had was our old Scotch bagpiper, Hugh MacKay, who, when the men were fatigued, on receiving a hint from the Colonel would fall back to the rear, and striking up some lively tune on his pipes, and pushing forward at a brisk pace, would soon have the whole regiment about him like a cluster of bees.”

As the Black Watch came out from the Somme in World War I, it passed a fragment of a Royal Scots Dragoon Guards battalion, and its piper began to play “Highland Laddie.” Eric Linklater, a soldier in the regiment, remembered, “We were a tatterdemalion crew from the coal-mines of Fife and the back streets of Dundee, but we trod quick-stepping to the brawling tune, kilts swinging to answer the swagger of the Guards, and the Red Hackle in our bonnets like the monstrance of a bruised but resilient faith.”

In a 1941 World War II battle against German strongholds in Egypt, Pipe-Major Roy and Pipe-Sergeant McNicoll of the Black Watch played their men on, Andro Linklater explains in The Black Watch: The History of the Royal Highland Regiment, “with ‘Highland Laddie,’ the regimental march, ‘Lawson’s Men,’ commemorating the mutiny stand against overwhelming odds, and ‘The Black Bear,’ that tune, punctuated by shouts, which is played when the men are weary. An officer, lying wounded on the ground, later wrote, ‘I heard “Highland Laddie” as I lay, and it was the tune that got me on my feet, and advancing again.” Well entrenched in Burma in 1943, Piper Lark’s set of bagpipes was dropped to him by parachute.

The tunes were more than ceremonial: before high-tech battlefield communication systems, signaling on the field was the duty of musicians. Music was used to control troop movement. Originally drummers were key, but as the cacophonous use of cannons and muskets increased on the battlefield, drums became less and less efficient and the prominence of drummers gradually gave way to that of pipers.

The role of the bandsmen was no less important in camp. As Colin Dean, an authority on military music, writes in his “Short Introduction to the History of Military
Music”: “A soldier’s day was regulated by music telling him when to get up (‘Reveille’), when to eat (e.g., ‘Officers Dinner’), when to be on parade (‘Warning for Parade’), or when to retire to bed (‘Lights Out’).

The Pipes and Drums have always been essential peacekeeping tools for a regiment known for maintaining order in tumultuous environments. After World War II, the Black Watch was sent to supervise in Peshawar, where the people were to decide whether they wanted to be part of Muslim Pakistan or Hindu India. Andro Linklater writes, “The battalion had a potent weapon in the Pipes and Drums, which on several occasions defused an explosive scene, not least when protesters lying on the railway line came to their feet to hear their music.”

During peacetime, Black Watch musicians have been ambassadors independent of the movements of their regiment. Following the Pipes and Drums U.S. tour in the 1960s, national headlines exclaimed, “Black Watch Struts—10,000 Pulses Stir” and “Where Does an American Go to Enlist in the Black Watch?” In 1963, the Pipes and Drums played for President Kennedy just days before he was assassinated; at the special request of the First Lady, they played at the head of his funeral procession. The Pipes and Drums of the Black Watch have carried out 11 tours to North America in recent years.

The bandsmen are also fighting servicemen. Traditionally they were stretcher-bearers. The mine fields of World War II were particularly devastating for them: “An explosion was usually the signal for them to begin picking their way through the hidden menace to the injured man,” Linklater writes. Today the bandsmen of the Black Watch man the battalion’s medium machine guns.

A History of the Mission Armory

Excerpted and adapted from Page & Turnbull’s 2006 “Mission Street Armory San Francisco, California: Historic Resource Evaluation”

For 58 out of its 65-year existence, the Armory was home to the San Francisco National Guard units. Somewhat forbidding with its dark, fortress-like appearance, the building is entrenched four-square at the corner of Mission and 14th Street attempting, as it were, to convince the skeptic that its function at that intersection is of no less importance than Fort Point which guards the Golden Gate.

—Statement of Significance for San Francisco Landmark No. 108 (1980)

The original 2006 production of the National Theatre of Scotland’s Black Watch was presented at The University of Edinburgh Drill Hall, which was constructed in 1872 and originally occupied by the Queen’s City of Edinburgh Volunteer Rifle Brigade. As the show toured the United Kingdom and the United States, it found new homes in other unique venues, including other armories.

The Mission Armory is the largest building of architectural importance in San Francisco’s Mission District—containing approximately 190,300 square feet of space and 160 rooms. The building is divided into two sections: the 84,700-square-foot Administration Building and the 39,000-square-foot Drill Court. The exterior of the Mission Armory is designed to convey the impression of a heavily armored and forbidding Moorish fortress; inside, while many of the more utilitarian spaces have simple, durable finishes, the reception and stair lobbies, public/recreation rooms, and administration offices display high levels of design and finish materials, including marble, milled oak, and walnut paneling. Perhaps the most dramatic interior space is the exposed network of curved steel open-web trusses supporting the roof of the Drill Court, which is being converted by A.C.T. into a performance space for Black Watch. Like Scotland’s Black Watch regiment, the U.S. National Guard that occupied the Mission Armory from the time of its completion in 1914 until 1975 began as a group of militias before it was incorporated into the national army.
The U.S. National Guard, the nation's reserve army, is the oldest component of the U.S. Armed Forces. It is a direct descendent of the first colonial militia units raised by the Massachusetts Bay Colony to defend rural villages from Native American attacks. During the Revolutionary War, colonial militias formed the backbone of George Washington's Continental Army. Despite the federal government's attempts to organize and regulate state militias following the Revolutionary War, legislation was never enforced and the exact role of the “citizen soldier” remained undefined as each state continued to exercise responsibility over its own militia—with varying results.
In 1903, Congress passed the Dick Military Act, which made the National Guard (the combined state militia units) the official reserve force of the United States. Although each state continued to exercise control over its own units, the act sought to train and equip units in a consistent manner. The National Defense Act of 1916 increased federal oversight by putting the state National Guard units at the disposal of the president in addition to state governors.

According to the U.S. Constitution, the three primary responsibilities of state militias were to: “enforce the laws of the Union, repel invasions, and suppress insurrections.” By the mid nineteenth century, they increasingly functioned as domestic peacekeepers, because the federal government often found the local police unable to quell massive demonstrations or riots that stemmed from the transformation of the country’s rural frontier culture into an urban industrial society.

Before the Civil War, very few state militia units had permanent quarters of their own; most gathered in rented rooms in taverns or Masonic and Odd Fellows’ halls. When weather allowed, local militia units drilled on commons and parks. In inclement weather, they drilled inside public buildings. This ad hoc approach became increasingly untenable as the militias were more frequently asked to suppress civil disorder. Many felt that the only answer was to build a defensible armory that would serve as a place for citizen soldiers to assemble, train, and store uniforms, guns, ammunition, and supplies.

After the Railroad Strike of 1877, growing fear of domestic insurrection led states to accelerate the construction of armories. Despite opposition from organizations
concerned with the proliferation of these “Bastilles of Plutocracy,” scores of armories were built throughout the United States between 1880 and 1930, most of them in the Northeast and the Midwest. The typical urban armory consisted of a multistory administration building facing the street with a large vaulted drill court behind it. The administration building typically housed offices, classrooms, locker rooms, dormitories, workshops, and recreation halls such as billiards parlors, libraries, and reception rooms. The drill court (essentially a colossal auditorium with a vaulted roof) had a much narrower function: to provide a large covered space for year-round marching and riding drills. Often, a basement level beneath the armory provided space for arsenals, rifle ranges, gymnasiums, natatoriums, and storage.

Based on the functions of the armory as a place to store weapons, train guardsmen, and intimidate potential revolutionaries, designers of late-nineteenth- and early-twentieth-century armories developed a prototype now known as the “fortress-style” armory, designed to resemble medieval castles with thick-buttressed walls, crenellated parapets, corner towers, large barricaded doors, and narrow lancet windows. By 1900, the castellated style was still popular, although variations began to emerge, including exotic revival styles such as San Francisco’s Moorish Mission Armory.

The California National Guard and the Opening of the Mission Armory

The first militia unit in California was formed during the Gold Rush: 41 San Francisco citizens organized an artillery militia company on July 27, 1849. The prominent members of the First California Guard soon raised enough money to purchase a lot on the corner of Jackson Street and Dupont (now Grant) Avenue and erected San Francisco’s first armory: a two-and-a-half story wood-frame structure. It was destroyed by fire in September 1850, and its replacement was destroyed by fire in June 1851.

After two years of the Guard not having a permanent home, civic leader Samuel Brannan erected Armory Hall on the northeast corner of Sacramento and Montgomery Streets. Armory Hall had a large drill hall on the top floor and meeting rooms for each
company on the floor below; the First California Guard was quartered there until the early 1870s. San Francisco’s next armory (a small, two-story brick building modeled after a Gothic castle) was constructed on Post Street, between Powell and Stockton, facing Union Square. In 1894, a more substantial armory (also in Gothic Revival style) was constructed on the southeast corner of Gough and Page Streets in the Western Addition; it was destroyed in the 1906 earthquake and fire.

In January 1909, California Governor James Norris Gillett signed a bill appropriating $420,000 to the construction of a modern armory that would consolidate the dispersed local companies of the Guard into one facility. In July 1910, he chose the site of the fallen Southern Pacific Hospital, which had been destroyed in the 1906 earthquake and fire. It was a half-block parcel on the northwest corner of 14th and Mission Streets in the Mission District, the city’s largest immigrant and working-class neighborhood and a hotbed of unionism—evident in the bloody 1907 Streetcar Strike. The event, which resulted in the death of scores of people and destruction of hundreds of thousands of dollars worth of property, took place largely in this neighborhood. With a fortified stronghold at the northern gateway to the Mission District, it would be much easier for Gillett to deploy troops for the purpose of quelling strikes and demonstrations before they reached nearby Civic Center and Downtown.

The design of the Mission Armory has traditionally been attributed to State Architect John W. Woollett. Although he was responsible for the design of the exterior, evidence suggests that State Engineer W. F. McClure had prepared plans for the building prior to appointing Woollett in late June 1912. Just how much Woollett’s design departed from McClure’s original is unknown.

The forbidding structure was constructed with thick concrete and brick-buttressed walls with only a handful of lancet openings at street level, designed to accommodate rifles and Gatling guns. The entrances were outfitted with heavy, reinforced doors that
could be barricaded from the inside. Most importantly, the corner towers projected beyond the walls, providing a clear line of fire along both Mission and 14th Streets.

Once the plans for the Mission Armory were unveiled, community and business leaders in the Mission District reacted with hostility. The most vehement criticism came from members of the Mission Promotion Association, who argued that the exterior of the structure looked too “warlike,” as if it were being designed “to protect the National Guard from assaults by the people of San Francisco”—which it was.

Woollett defended his design and blamed any deficiencies on the relatively low budget, but in the end he was forced to “tone down the martial façade” and, as the San Francisco Call sarcastically put it, to “make the building appear a little more frolicsome, as befits the rigorous service of the national guard of California.” By June 1914, the new California Armory and Arsenal, as it was called, was completed and occupied. The San Francisco Chronicle claimed, “San Francisco now has one of the finest armories in the United States, not only in point of cost and equipment, but in point of design.” It was only the third major urban armory on the West Coast, joining those in Seattle and Portland.

The new building would house ten companies of the consolidated Coast Artillery, two divisions of the Naval Militia, one Signal Corps, one Engineering Corps, and several other divisions of the California National Guard brought in from Oakland and San Mateo. Almost as important as its military purpose was its promised role as a social center for Guardsmen. It included a fully equipped gymnasium and pool, and performance and recreation spaces, such as a full-scale banquet hall, social lounges, and a theater. With these amenities, it was a prime recruiting tool.

The Mission Armory in Action

Training at the Mission Armory initially consisted of close-order drilling, marching, riding, rifle care, vehicle maintenance, and physical fitness. As the home of the 250th Coast Artillery (responsible for manning San Francisco’s extensive network of coastal batteries), the building was outfitted with three non-firing field guns on the east side of the Drill Court: a 12-inch mortar, a 10-inch disappearing gun, and a 3-inch rapid-fire rifle. Training on these guns consisted of practicing loading, positioning, and firing.
There was also a large firing range in the basement where Guardsmen could practice target shooting with rifles.

At its peak usage, the Mission Armory accommodated 700 men. The first National Guard units trained at the Mission Armory were called to service in World War I on August 5, 1917. Several units of the 250th Coast Artillery were shipped to France, where they were deployed as heavy artillerymen. In World War II, the Mission Armory trained and delivered the 3rd Battalion of the 159th Infantry. Later this unit was assigned to the 7th Division and served in Alaska and the Pacific theater. The 250th Coast Artillery, armed with tractor-driven 155-millimeter guns, was called to active duty September 16, 1940, also serving in Alaska. When hostilities broke out in Korea in 1950, the 250th was called again, one of the first National Guard units to be summoned to active duty. By 1952, the unit had evolved into an exclusively anti-aircraft outfit. In addition to the National Guard, all regular draftees from the Bay Area were inducted into service at the Mission Armory during the First and Second World Wars.

After the Korean War, the Mission Armory slowly lost its value as a military training facility. By the 1950s, close-order drilling was no longer a central part of the National Guard's training regimen. As an anti-aircraft unit the 250th Coast Artillery no longer needed the large non-firing field guns installed in the Drill Court; they were removed in 1947. Training became centered on classroom instruction, and by the late 1960s, the Mission Armory was deemed obsolete: the building was too large for modern training requirements, ammunition could not be stored securely there, there was insufficient parking for armored vehicles, and maintenance costs associated with the aging building were too high. By 1975, the National Guard had vacated the facilities.

The building was used sporadically over the next few years by various entities. The San Francisco Police Department established an after-school boxing program for neighborhood youths, but few other agencies or organizations stepped forward to claim the building for full-time use. In 1976, George Lucas used the Drill Court to film some scenes for *Star Wars*, but plans to convert the building into a full-time film studio did not come to fruition. In 2007, the pornography company Kink.com moved in. In 1978, the Mission Armory was listed in the National Register for three areas of significance: architecture, engineering and military, and for the period of significance 1900–12. A year later it became San Francisco City Landmark #108.

Az Zubayr (Al-Zubayr) is a suburban Iraqi city located eight miles south of the provincial capital, Basra. It was among the first cities captured by British forces during the 2003 invasion.

Babil Province (Governorate) lies in central Iraq along the Euphrates River. The home of the ancient city of Babylon, it is often referred to as the cradle of civilization. Its modern capital is Hillah.

Bannockburn: The Battle of Bannockburn on June 24, 1314, was one of the decisive battles of Robert the Bruce during the First War of Scottish Independence.

Basra is Iraq’s principal port city. Located in the southeastern corner of the country, it saw some of the heaviest fighting of the 2003 invasion. It was captured by British forces in April of that year. In 2007, control of the region was transferred to Iraqi authorities.

Camp Dogwood was a 2004 British military base in Babil Province made from a disused chemical and fuel dump. Its proximity to Fallujah and Baghdad allowed the Black Watch soldiers stationed there to control the roads leading to cities from the south.

Catterick: Catterick Garrison, located in Yorkshire, Northern England, is the largest British Army garrison in the world.

Culloden is a village near Inverness in the Scottish Highlands. Some people erroneously believe that the Black Watch was raised in 1745 to fight the Jacobite uprising in Scotland, but the regiment was raised before this date, and rather than have them fight the Jacobites (many of them Highlanders) at Culloden in 1746, the British Army wisely posted the Black Watch at Kent to repel any possible French invasion.

Dundee is where the 4th Battalion of the Black Watch Territorials was raised in 1908; the eastern-central Lowland city (Scotland’s fourth largest) is still recruiting ground for the regiment.
Bad Fallingbostel, Germany, is a town in the state of Lower Saxony that is home to the British Army base Fallingbostel Station, which houses military personnel, their families, and civilian workers.

Fallujah is an Iraqi city located in Al Anbar Governorate. Under Saddam Hussein, Fallujah was relatively prosperous and industrialized. Its population consisted primarily of Sunni Muslims, including many government figures and employees. During the 2003 invasion, the city offered U.S. and British troops relatively little resistance; by early 2004, however, it had become a hotbed of insurgent activity, including kidnappings and suicide bombings.

Forfarshire (now Angus), located along the Highland/Lowland boundary, has been a primary recruiting area for the Black Watch since 1881.

Helmand Province is a large province located in southern Afghanistan. British forces were deployed to Camp Bastion in Helmand in 2006. It continues to be a site of violent resistance from Taliban fighters.

Kandahar (Qandahar), in south central Afghanistan, is the country’s second-largest city and the region’s capital. Despite its capture in 2001, Kandahar has continued to be a Taliban stronghold and the site of numerous high-profile assassinations.

Kinghorn Beach is a Scottish seaside resort town in the Lowland county of Fife, a primary recruiting area for the Black Watch.

Somme Region: during World War I, the Black Watch was heavily involved in the 1916 Battle of the Somme in France.

Tayside is a region of Scotland created in 1975 in an attempt to replace the hodgepodge of local county, city, and district governments with a uniform system of councils. It is now divided into the council areas of Perth and Kinross, Angus, and Dundee City.

Triangle of Death was a nickname given by Coalition forces and the media to the area south of Baghdad. The three points of the triangle were the towns Mahmudiyah, Yusufiyah, and Iskandariyah. The towns inside the triangle saw a disproportionate amount of violence from 2004 to 2007.
General tip about understanding the Scottish dialect: embrace the “ay”:
In Black Watch, you will hear the sound “ay” (as in “pay”) often replacing “oo”:

- do
- doing
- to
- into
- going to

Likewise, the suffix nay often replaces “n’t” in contractions:

- aren’t
- can’t
- didn’t
- don’t
- haven’t
- isn’t
- shouldn’t
- wasn’t
- weren’t
- wouldn’t

Ay can also replace “uv” sounds:

- of
- have
- kind of

The word fay means “from,” as in, “Where are you fay?” Similarly, way can mean “with,” as in, “What has that got tay way anything?” and winday means “window.” Aye (rhymes with “pie”) is an affirmation similar to “yeah” or “right.”

Black Watch Terms

Aboon: Above
“Wi’ a feather in your bonnet, and a kilt aboon your knee.”

Arsed: Bothered or concerned
“I cannay be arsed way the pit anymair.”

Bairn: A small child or baby
“My bairns could day a better job.”

To Blank: To rudely ignore someone
“You blank her in the street?”

To Blether: To blather on, to chatter in an idle, long-winded manner
“Blether pish.”

Cunt: Though sometimes used as an insult, “cunt” is a general reference for another person and even a term of endearment.
“You kinday feel sorry for the cunts.”
Fanny: Equivalent to “pussy” in American English and can mean vagina and also a wimp
“Have you even telt him how much fanny he’s gonnay get when he gets home?”
“Lance Corporal Campbell here and Private Frazer are a pair ay fannies.”

Gaff: A place
“We watched them bombing the shite out ay the gaff for fucking ages.”

To Get Bugged Out: To be removed quickly, especially in a military context
“He’s got depression. He had to get bugged out ay.”

Jock: Originally slang for people from the Scottish Lowlands, “Jock” is a general reference for Scottish soldiers.
“The Jocks are well and are coming at it with their usual gallows humour.”

To Ken: To know
“D’you ken who’s got the other half?”

Kirk: Church in general or the Church of Scotland in particular
“An ilka* Sunday tae the kirk / Tae save me o’ a thrashin.” (*every)

Kit: Scottish slang for clothing; British military slang for equipment
“Get your kit squared away and we can hay a brew.”

Knackered: Worn out, broken, thwarted
“It’s knackered. Don’t you think [the war is] knackered, sir?”

Knob: An idiot or a “dick”
“Did you see that pair ay knobs?”

Paras: The Parachute Regiment of the British Army
“I had a cousin in the Paras.”

Patter: Banter or conversation skills
“His patter’s murder tay like.”

Pish: Rubbish
“This is pish.”

Pits: Scotland’s open-pit coal mines. Recent economic changes hit Scottish miners hard, causing workers to lose their jobs and seek employment with the army.
“The pits are fucked.”

Poof: Derogatory for homosexual man
“Are a lot ay actors poofs like?”

To Pull: To seduce or to kiss
“He’ll be trying tay pull some poor lassie.”

To Sack It: To quit
“They can have all the adverts they want, but if cunts like me are sacking it . . .”

Sound: An endorsement, similar to “okay” or “sorted”
“Sound, neebur.*” (*neighbor)

Tankie: A member of the Royal Tank Regiment of the British Army
“See, if you want sick stuff, you should interview a few tankies like.”

Tasty: Attractive
“I say she was pretty tasty.”

Toby: Penis

To Touch Cloth: To have an urgent need to defecate
“I’m touching cloth here!”
Scottish dialects are heavily influenced by Gaelic, Norse, Scots (a Germanic language still spoken in parts of the Scottish Lowlands and Ulster, Ireland), Old English, and German and are divided into five regional subsets. They are among the most difficult dialects for other English speakers to understand; even Apple’s famous Siri application is unable to understand Scottish.

Most Scots pronounce consonants just as speakers of standard British or American English do. Exceptions are *r*, which is rolled, and *ch*, which, at the end of a syllable, takes on a guttural German sound, as in “loch.” This guttural sound also surfaces in words like “daughter” or “night.” As in spoken American English, Scottish English often drops the final *g* on verbs: *walkin’* instead of “walking.” Adjectives ending in “ed” are pronounced with an “it,” as in *spottit* (“spotted”).

The real trouble begins with glottal stops, the trademark speech pattern of the Scottish. A non-vocal sound made by obstructing airflow in the back of the throat, the glottal stop is also common in American English: it is often used in place of a crisply articulated *t* in the middle of a word. (Say the words “curtain” or “important” quickly, and you will automatically make a glottal stop.) Scottish dialects, however, use glottal stops where Americans do not. A glottal stop can replace a *k* or *p* that is surrounded by vowels, as in “taken” (*ta’en*) or “paper” (*pa’er*). In many cases, it also replaces consonants at the end of a sentence when they are preceded by a vowel, as in “root” (*roo’*) or “call” (*ca’*).

Scottish English also interprets vowels differently from American and standard British English—with few consistent rules. The words “bone” and “stone” are pronounced *been* and *steen* in eastern Angus, but become *bane* and *stane* an hour’s drive south. The Scottish also do not distinguish between *oo* (as in “pool” and “fool”) and *u* (as in “pull” and “full”): they are homophones with regional variations. “Now” and “about” are *noo* and *aboot*. A liquid “u” (say “beautiful” aloud: the first syllable uses a liquid “u”) is used in words like “duke” (*dyook*) and “news” (*nyoos*).

Scottish English also has its own grammar. Irregular noun plurals, like *een* (the plural of “eye”) and *kye* (the plural of “cow), abound, as do irregular verb forms (like *gae* and *gaed* for “go” and “went”). Verbless subordinate clauses introduced with “and” are similarly common. For example, “She had to walk the whole length of the gate seven-months pregnant” becomes “She had tae walk the hale lenth o the gate an her seven-months pregnant.”

Six companies of Scottish Highlanders are commissioned to police their region’s clans; they are called the Highland Watch but are more widely known as the Black Watch.

The six companies of the Black Watch are organized into the 43rd Regiment of Foot.

Two privates of the 43rd are presented to King George II.

The regiment is ordered to London for royal review.

The regiment fights the French at Fontenoy, Flanders.

The regiment polices Ireland and serves uneventfully in Flanders.

The regiment becomes the 42nd Regiment of Foot.

The regiment fights the French (and the Spanish and the Native Americans) in North America.

The regiment returns to its policing duties in Ireland.

The regiment returns to North America to fight American rebels.

The regiment officially adopts the red hackle as part of its uniform.

The regiment fights the French in Alexandria.

The regiment fights the French in the Peninsular War, a series of campaigns to expel the French from the Iberian Peninsula.

The regiment continues to fight the French in the Low Countries, specifically the penultimate battle of Quatre Bras; they are not heavily engaged in the final battle of Waterloo.

The regiment spends an extended period of peace in Scotland, Gibraltar, Malta, and the Ionian Islands.

The regiment fights Russia in the Crimean War.

The regiment is sent to India to fight Indian rebels.
1861  Queen Victoria changes the official name of the regiment to 42nd Royal Highlanders (The Black Watch).

1874  The regiment fights the Ashantis on the Gold Coast of Africa.

1881  The regimental number system is abolished: the 42nd becomes 1st Battalion of the Black Watch (Royal Highlanders); the 73rd becomes 2nd Battalion of the Black Watch (Royal Highlanders). The regimental depot is located in Perth, and new recruits come primarily from Fife and Angus.

1882– 1899  The 2nd Battalion stays in Great Britain.

1882– 1884  The 1st Battalion fights Araby Pasha, the leader of the Egyptian revolt against Turkey, in Egypt and Sudan.

1884– 1887  The 1st Battalion is stationed in Malta.

1887– 1896  The 1st Battalion returns to Gibraltar.

1896– 1901  The 1st Battalion returns to their policing duties in India.

1899– 1901  The 2nd Battalion fights in the Boer War in South Africa; in 1901 the 1st Battalion joins the 2nd.

1914– 1918  The Black Watch fights Germany in World War I and continues to police India.

1937  The regiment’s name officially changes again: The Black Watch (the Royal Highland Regiment).

1939– 1945  The Black Watch fights Axis forces in World War II.

1952  As part of a United Nations mission, the 1st Battalion helps block the Chinese invasion of South Korea.

1953  The 1st Battalion is sent to Kenya to help suppress the Mau-Mau Rebellion.

1959  The 1st Battalion is sent to Cyprus to fight EOKA terrorists; they returned to Cyprus in 1964.

1970– 1971  The 1st Battalion is sent to police Northern Ireland; they return to Ireland in 1974 after a brief time in Hong Kong.

1979– 1984  The 1st Battalion is sent to Germany to train in mechanized and chemical warfare.

1993– 1994  The 1st Battalion is stationed in Hong Kong; it is selected to help organize and participate in the transfer of the colony back to Chinese rule in 1997.

2001  The 1st Battalion is sent to Kosovo on a NATO peacekeeping mission.

2003– 2006  In March, the 1st Battalion takes part in the U.S.–led invasion of Iraq. As an armored battle group it is at the forefront of the fighting to capture Al Zubayr and Basra. This quickly turns into a counterinsurgency and
peacekeeping operation. The battalion is withdrawn in June 2003. In July 2004 the battalion is recalled to Iraq, where the situation has deteriorated. The battalion moves to Baghdad to support U.S. forces involved in clearing Fallujah of resistance.

2006 The Black Watch is amalgamated with five other regiments to form the Royal Regiment of Scotland, a single regiment consisting of five regular and two territorial battalions. The Black Watch retains its name as its primary identifier and is now known as The Black Watch (3rd Battalion, Royal Regiment of Scotland), or 3 SCOTS.

2009 The Black Watch is deployed to the Middle East in an air assault role in Kandahar, Afghanistan. As part of Operation Panther's Claw, it seizes crossing points across the Nahr-e-Burgha canal and the Shamalan canal after a number of combat engagements.

2011 The Black Watch returns for another tour in Afghanistan, facing insurgents and training Afghan security forces.

2012 The Black Watch returns to Scotland in April, welcomed on the streets of Inverness (nine miles from Fort George, where 3 SCOTS is stationed) by a crowd of 2,500.
“The Gallant Forty-Twa”

A Black Watch Song Explained

By Dan Rubin

Oh, it’s yinced I wis a weaver
My name is Willie Brown
It’s yince I was a weaver
I dewlt in Maxwelltoon
But noo I’ve joined the sodgers
And tae Perth I’m going awa
For tae join that Helian regiment
The gallant forty-twa

CHORUS

Ye can talk aboot your first royals
Scottish fusiliers
Your aiberdeen militia
And your dandy volunteers
Your seaforts wi’ their streekit kilts
And your Gordons big and braw
But gae bring tae me the tartan
O’ the gallant forty-twa

Oh the verra first day on parade
Was wi’ a lot o’ young recruits
And the sergeant he got tae me
For aye lookin at my boots
He tapped me on the shouder
Says ye’ll hae tae come awa
For you’re going tae mak a hell o’ a mess
O’ the gallant forty-twa.

CHORUS
1. The epithet “gallant” has long been attached to the men of the Black Watch: the somewhat archaic term means possessing a blend of the high-spirited, dashing, and chivalrous and showing bravery, courageous fortitude, and ready resolution, especially in the face of defeat. The Black Watch earned this descriptor in 1745 when they executed a fighting withdrawal that protected the retreating allied British/Dutch army during the Battle of Fontenoy.

2. Although the Black Watch began as the 43rd Regiment of Foot, the 1749 dissolution of a different regiment moved the Highlanders up the numerical roll call to the 42nd Regiment of Foot. Officially they lost this name in 1881, when the 42nd became the 1st Battalion of the Black Watch (Royal Highlanders), but the number is still attached to the lore of the regiment.

3. In the mid 1800s, a large proportion of the Lowland “Jocks” that joined the Black Watch were weavers from Southwest Scotland who had been put out of work by the introduction of steam-powered looms.

4. Maxwelltown was located in southwest Scotland; in 1929 it merged with Dumfries.

5. Soldiers.

6. The recruiting depot for the Black Watch was in Perth.

7. Highland.

8. Raised in 1633, the Royal Scots (The Royal Regiment), once known as the Royal Regiment of Foot, was the oldest infantry regiment in the British Army.

9. The Scottish Fusiliers began as the Earl of Mar’s Regiment of Foot in 1678 against rebellious Covenanters. The regiment was converted to fusiliers—an artillery unit that used fusils, light flintlock muskets—in 1689.

10. Aberdeen is a small town between the Scottish Highlands and the North Sea; its militia was first raised in 1802 during anti-invasion preparations at the beginning of the Napoleonic Wars.

11. The Volunteer Force was a citizen army of part-time rifle, artillery, and engineer corps created in 1859. They became increasingly integrated into the British Army after 1881, forming part of the Territorial Force in 1908.

12. From the northern Highlands, the Seaforth Highlanders was the 1881 amalgamation of the 72nd Highlanders (raised in the 1770s) and the 78th Highlanders (raised in 1793).

13. Thatched.

14. Named after Clan Gordon, the Gordon Highlanders was an infantry regiment raised in 1881; it recruited principally from Northeast Scotland.

15. The tartan is the plaid textile design that defines traditional Scottish attire.

16. Until the end of the 1800s, soldiers fought in formations, which were drilled into them through marching exercises.

17. The Black Watch has been famously disciplined during parade since the 1700s, and their rigorousness served them well on the battlefield. That the new recruit in this song is reprimanded for his imperfection is not a surprise.
Questions to Consider

1. Writer Gregory Burke has objected to being called the “playwright” of Black Watch, which is based on a series of interviews he conducted. How is Black Watch a play? How is it not a play?

2. In what ways is Black Watch uniquely Scottish? In what ways is it universal? What would an American adaptation of Black Watch look like? What unit would it focus on? What military traditions would it incorporate?

3. In what ways is history explored in Black Watch?

4. The Black Watch regiment has a highly celebrated history. How do the characters in Black Watch fit into that narrative? How do their feelings about the Golden Thread that attaches them to the Black Watch’s history change over the course of their service?

5. How is the Scottish attitude toward the Black Watch different from Americans’ relationship to, say, the Navy SEALs? How is it the same?


7. The regiments of the British military are largely recruited from single geographical areas, which means that family members, neighbors, and close friends often fight alongside one another. How do you think this might affect strategy and morale in battle?

For Further Information . . .


