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Hi Friend,

In last month's newsletter I mentioned that I'd like to pay tribute to Jimmy McIntosh this month. However, because most of my records are at my home in Scotland and I am currently in Arizona, I'd like to hold this off until I am able to browse my records.

Recently, I received an email from a former regimental officer, Jamie Campbell, who also plays the pipes. He included in the email a photo of him playing the pipes in Crossmaglen, a village and townland in County Armagh, Northern Ireland, on the day of the IRA massacre at nearby Warrenpoint in County Down in August 1979.



We soldiers do not talk about the sad losses we encounter, and I did not mention this in January's newsletter. When the Battalion was in Northern Ireland, the Commanding Officer,

Lt Colonel David Blair and two other Queen's Own Highlanders (QOHldrs) were killed, along with 16 Paratroopers. Because Iain Morrison [pictured] and I were left behind in Scotland to compete around the Highland Games, I attended Col Blair's funeral in Edinburgh. Following Highland tradition with only one piper playing, Iain, of course, played at the funeral.



During the Gulf War from August 1990-February 1991, the Pipes and Drums were deployed in our active role as the machine gun platoon. I was the platoon commander and sustain fire coordinator. The British Army lost 17 men of whom three were Queen's Own Highlanders. After the ceasefire was declared, me and Alasdair Gillies were flown down in a C130 (the plane was laid on for just us) from Kuwait City to Al Jubail in Saudi Arabia to play as the coffins were carried onto a transport plane for their final journey home. There was an ad hoc church service held in an aircraft hangar with the 17 coffins taken by our padre, David Coulter (later to become Chaplain General). This allowed us who could attend to pay our respects before we piped them onto the plane. They were met in the UK by Pipe Major David Mackenzie (QOHlds) and, of course, had regimental pipers play at their burials.

After our return to Germany the Commanding Officer – Lt Col Seymour Monro – requested a tune needed to be composed. I instructed all the pipers to compose a tune by that Friday, which they did. We all then played our tunes, and it was decided to go with the melody composed by Gordon Mackenzie (38) of Lewis. It was named *The Sands of Kuwait*. The band played at a few memorial parades in Germany with me playing the lament. We then attended the national 'welcome home' parade held in London. A march through the streets of London with the band was so different from what we had just gone through. There was good reception after the parade held in the London City Guild Hall.

It was then back to Germany for a Regimental Colours Parade with our Colonel in Chief – HRH The Duke of Edinburgh – taking the salute. We then undertook a quick tour of the Highlands and Islands (KAPE = Keep the Army in the Public Eye) marching through many Highland towns before heading back to Germany to prepare for a three-month tour of the USA. In May, the national memorial service for the war was held in Glasgow Cathedral in recognition of the large percentage of Scottish troops who had taken part in the war. I was selected to be the lone piper

and played the lament *Flowers of the Forest* through the Cathedral. Her Majesty, the Queen wrote me a very nice letter of thanks.

The photograph, below, shows Calum MacKenzie piping on top of a tank at the end of the Gulf War.



It was 30 years ago in February this year that the actual war started, and we crossed over from Saudi Arabia into Iraq before heading to Kuwait City. On the day of the anniversary I played Gordon Mackenzie's *Sands of Kuwait* at the petroglyphs on our Arizona property to pay tribute to the

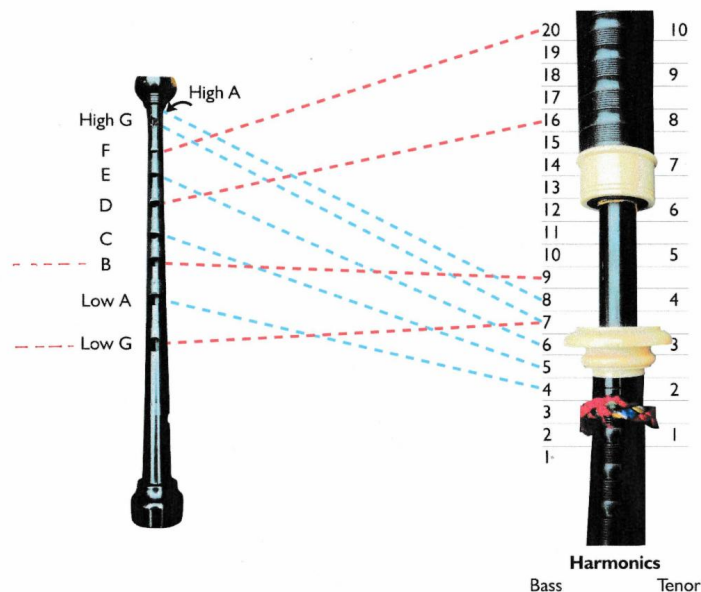
boys we lost. [You can see this on my website by clicking here.](#) (Apologies for the pipes, I did not intend to have it recorded.) At the end of the tune you can see a bald eagle flying overhead. Many believe the eagles carry the spirits. A dear friend of mine sent me this comment on seeing the video: "The eagle soars as the piper plays the pipes that can be heard for miles ... and the spirits smile."

There are far too many other sad occasions to write about but let us get back to the outstanding many happy occasions and celebrations we played at – and they are numerous but for another newsletter.

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I enjoy hearing from my customers each month. Last month, I received a query from one who resides in the Philippines: "As always I find your comments about playing in your latest newsletter enlightening and instructive in practical terms. In your last newsletter you comment on harmonics and the importance of the bass drone. With respect to the last-mentioned you state: 'Too many pipes these days don't have a proper bass fundamental.' What exactly do you mean by this? Do you mean not tuned correctly to the chanter (or other drones) OR do you mean that the bass drone is the reference to which the others should be tuned? Please keep up the good work with these commentaries on specific points of playing: they are most useful.

### Chanter to drone harmonics explained



Major scale – A, C, E, A – has both bass and tenor harmonics

Minor scale – G, B, D, F – G and B have only bass harmonics; D and F have both bass and tenor harmonics

In reply I wrote: "The bass drone is the bagpipe. All other harmonics must come from the bass as it has all the harmonics of the bagpipe. The drones are the instrument, the chanter is the add on. So, the bass needs to have the correct fundamental harmonics. The chanter must be set up to the bass harmonics, especially the Low G. When

the chanter is correctly balanced with the bass harmonics it is then easy to tune your drones to the chanter." The diagram, above, may help.

I also remarked to my correspondent that I visited Manila in 1981 with a small group of Queen's Own Highlanders pipers to play at the St Andrew's Ball. I was pleased to read that the ball still continues although not last year due to the severely enforced quarantine restrictions on gatherings that has been in place since March 17, 2020.

*[I have increased my prices for the first time in five years. A full explanation – and product range – can be found on my website.](#)*



As ever, enjoy your piping.

**Bruce Hitchings MBE BEM.**

As ever, please send me photos or videos you'd be willing to share at [bruce@highlandreeds.com](mailto:bruce@highlandreeds.com) including a caption of event and date. Please also leave a product review on the appropriate produce page of my website – or leave a comment or video clip of you playing on the ['Submit your comment/playing' page](#).

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