

THE CENOTAPH PARADE IN LONDON 2014

Watching the Cenotaph Parade on TV in 2013, it was very noticeable that there were no Blue Hackles on parade and no mention of the Queen's Own Highlanders on the BBC commentary. Indeed, it turns out that there has never been a Queen's Own Highlanders contingent for this parade in London – time to put this anomaly right so that we were there to honour and remember the 15 Queen's Own Highlanders who died on operations, as well as the thousands of Seaforth and Cameron Highlanders who died in the Great Wars. The 100th Anniversary of the outbreak of WWI was an appropriate time to start.

So after an initial expression of interest to march from over 80 people, the Regimental Association applied for tickets from the Royal British Legion (who organise this parade) and we were awarded 48. These places were quickly filled and arrangements made to make a big weekend of events for those attending, many of whom came a long way to be there – many coming from Scotland and even one from the Philippines – great effort John Fraser-Ross

This included accommodation in a Premier Inn on the night before the parade which was important for a number of reasons, including making it as easy as possible for everyone to have somewhere affordable to stay and using a private bus to get to the parade without getting lost on the underground in London! But above all it was great to have everyone together and to enjoy some good craic. By a stroke of luck, lunch was arranged in a pub called the Adam and Eve near Westminster which is run by a lady whose father (Pte Donald MacIsaac) was a Queen's Own Cameron Highlander – quite some coincidence, and she opened her pub exclusively for us that day and looked after us magnificently.

We had a few people having to pull out just prior to the parade, but fortunately we had some names in reserve and those people were great in making arrangements to join us at such short notice. In particular, it was very special that Albert Duffus was able to join us both from a Queen's Own Highlander perspective and a personal one – he was able to plant a cross in memory of his son, Mark Duffus who was killed in Afghanistan in 2013.

Fortunately, everything worked pretty much according to plan and the weekend was a huge success. There were many highlights :-

- * Sizing off at 0730 hrs at the hotel with Albert Duffus - classic, but what a stramash and how we laughed! In reality, most of us would have ended up the Cabar Feidh Hotel for that effort!
- * Our team photo on the steps of St Martin in the Fields - great picture, and Glen Lawson was clearly wasted in the Milan Platoon – should have been the Battalion photographer!
- * Brigadier Hughie Monro leading us down the road in Trafalgar Sq and holding up the traffic.
- * Marching past the Cenotaph as Queen's Own Highlanders with the sun in our eyes and the crowds cheering and clapping - a special experience.
- * Mick Bird carrying our wreath to be placed by the Cenotaph which our inscription including "Stand Easy – Your Duty is Done"
- * Marching past Horse Guards Parade when someone called out "the Queen's Own Highlanders" and we all gave her a huge cheer - must have really surprised her, but the spontaneity and spirit of it was typical of the weekend
- * Marching up to Westminster Abbey from the Adam and Eve - by God we marched well then with a beer under our belts!
- * The Gordons who have had a contingent in London for many years, kindly invited us to join them at their private Service of Remembrance in the Field of Remembrance next to Westminster Abbey and this added a lovely extra more personal dimension to the day and the Gordons were most generous in their welcome. Considering the recent history of our Regiments, this was a very good thing to have done and it will continue.

- * Watching Gregor MacIennon planting our cross in the Field of Remembrance
- * Brigadier Hughie Monro's table thumping speeches in the hotel and pub!
- * Being together in the hotel and pub and seeing the unique bond that will always exist between us as Queen's Own Highlanders.
- * Having the support of so many wives and other family members who are very much a part of our Regimental family.

Above all, though, it was a weekend when we were all proud to have been Queen's Own Highlanders representing our Regiment in remembrance of all those who were killed on active service. Apart from the great spirit of those attending this was shown by the immaculate turnout and bearing of our contingent – everyone went to huge effort (and expensive) to be there and to be so well kitted out and we certainly added a great deal of panache, style and colour to the parade!

With luck and a bit of effort, having a Queen's Own Highlanders contingent will hopefully become a tradition that will continue for many years to come – the parade itself was a great experience and it was excellent for so many Queen's Own Highlanders to meet up, sometimes for the first time since leaving the Regiment. Certainly this year's contingent have set the bar high for all those who march in London on Remembrance Sunday in the years to come the ball is now rolling!

Cabar Feidh gu Brath