



## About the Exhibition

**Highland Warriors** tells the story of an enduring military tradition, from its origins in local clan warfare, to its mobilization for national political influence, to its elevation as a potent symbol of British power and Canadian military prowess. Throughout the centuries, the Highland soldier has represented courage, skill, ferocity, discipline and toughness.

The Highlands — a sparsely populated, rugged, mountainous region in the northwest — is a distinct part of Scotland, with its own history and language. This has often put the region at odds with the rest of Scotland and Britain. But the warrior, always a vital and respected figure in Highland culture has, over time, been embraced around the world in many former parts of the British Empire — especially Canada, where this iconic military figure has influenced ideas of national identity.

## The Clan and the Warrior

In the Middle Ages, life in the Scottish Highlands was organized around clans, or extended families. Until the 18th century, the government's influence barely reached the Highlands, allowing clan chiefs to wield enormous power. The more successful clans amassed more land, leading to conflict with neighbouring clans and, by the 17th century, a handful of large and powerful clans dominated the Highlands.

Within the clan, military service was a duty owed to the chief in exchange for the right to hold land. Warriors — often wealthy men closely related to the chief — defended the clan's people, property and territory. They were valued for their bravery, fitness, strength, and skill in handling weapons, particularly the sword. The figure of the warrior, and his achievements in battle, were a favourite inspiration for the poetry and music of Gaelic culture.

This glorified image of the Highland warrior was sometimes exploited for political, diplomatic and financial reward. Many Highlanders hired themselves out as mercenaries, especially in Ireland where, in the 15th century, they were known as “redshanks” because of their bare legs. They also fought in the armies of France, Sweden, the Netherlands and German states, their recruitment often permitted as a tool of Scottish foreign policy.

The rest of Scotland feared the military potential of the Highlands — and rightly so. During the 17th century, as war raged between the Stuart king Charles I and his English Parliament, the Marquess of Montrose, leader of the Royalist cause, led a Highland army in a series of stunning victories over Parliament’s Scottish allies. After the last Stuart monarch — King James II of England (James VII of Scotland) — was forced into exile in 1688, Highlanders loyal to the Catholic king fought in the Jacobite rebellions. By the time they were decisively defeated at Culloden in 1746, they had cemented their reputation for ferocity and skill in battle.

Noteworthy artifacts in this part of the exhibition include 18th-century leather sporrans, historical paintings and publications — including a book by Robert Monro, one of thousands of Scottish soldiers who fought in Europe during the Thirty Years’ War (1618–1648). An array of typical Highland weapons features several broadswords with intricate basket hilts, including one thought to have been carried by William Boyd, 4th Earl of Kilmarnock, in the last Jacobite rebellion. Also on display are a simple Lochaber axe, dirks in a variety of materials and designs, embellished and inscribed pistols, long guns, and powder horns. Later in the exhibition, visitors have an opportunity to handle some replica weapons.

## Highland Regiments

Following the defeat of the Jacobite army, both the expanding British Empire and Highland elites saw opportunities to exploit and adapt the warrior tradition. The Empire needed soldiers to fight in overseas wars. These soldiers were often provided by Highland elites, who raised regiments for the government in order to provide income for their families, and to prove their loyalty to the Crown.

Early Highland regiments sometimes mirrored the old structure of the clans, with the chief as colonel and his closest relatives as senior officers. Junior officers were appointed based on how many recruits they could provide from amongst their tenants or clansmen. Service in Highland regiments became a mechanism for settlement in newly established British colonies — particularly in North America, where their military capacity could be re-harnessed when required.

Through their service in various wars against France and its allies, Highland regiments forged a reputation as a vital component of British military power, while establishing themselves as an elite unit distinct from the rest of the army in terms of discipline, cohesion and culture. At a time when Scotland itself was refashioning its sense of identity within Great Britain, the success of the Highland soldier made him a convenient and potent national symbol.

This image of the heroic warrior, untainted by modernity, fit perfectly with contemporary romantic ideals. Writers, artists and composers had already seized upon the landscape and history of the Highlands, and their soldiers were its living embodiment. The Highland regiments' exploits around the world were retold in the popular press, fuelling their reputation and binding them ever more tightly to the Scottish self-image, especially in expanding emigrant communities throughout the British Empire. Their bagpipes and traditional dress — two unique aspects of the Highland military tradition — were used to reinforce the reputation, status and appeal of the Highland soldier.

Exhibition highlights include a broadsword and dirk that belonged to James Thompson, a soldier of the 78th Fraser Highlanders, who served in North America during the Seven Years' War. Also featured are artifacts linked to Highland regiments active in Canada during the War of 1812. An unusual sword and a gold-inlaid pistol belonging to Lieutenant-General Sir Alan Cameron of Erracht — a veteran of the American War of Independence and commander of the 79th Cameron Highlanders — are outstanding examples of the increasingly extravagant design of Highland weapons. Oil paintings, early bagpipes, and uniforms round out this part of the exhibition.

## **Canada**

Highland regiments of the British Army introduced their military traditions to North America, while large-scale Scottish immigration helped establish permanent roots in Canada. By the 19th century, Highlanders constituted a significant group in Canada, forming Scottish associations as a way to maintain their identity, status and social cohesion.

Domestic political tension and international conflicts — including fighting in the Crimea and India, the Fenian crisis, and the threat of war with the United States — encouraged military recruiting, with Scottish communities forming volunteer Highland companies. Following Confederation in 1867, and the withdrawal of most of the British garrison in 1871, military service in Highland-themed militia units became much more conspicuous within Canadian society.

A snuffbox given to a member of the 71st Highland Light Infantry, and several objects presented to members of the 78th Highlanders — a silver egg warmer, carved wooden box and more — show how highly regarded the regiments were in Canadian society. Likewise the 19th-century portraits of officers and men of the 78th by renowned Scottish-Canadian photographer William Notman. Other artifacts in this section include 20th-century doublets, a soldier's sketchbook from the Crimea, and items related to the Upper Canada Rebellion in 1837–1838.

## World Wars

During the First and Second World Wars, the image of the Highland soldier was adapted and expanded to meet the demands of modern warfare in a new era of mass citizen armies. Three 1915 recruiting posters for the 73rd Battalion of the Canadian Expeditionary Force (CEF) — the last of the three kilted battalions raised in Montréal — show how that image, combined with appeals to comradeship, family responsibility and patriotism, served as a powerful recruitment tool. War bond and propaganda posters also exploited the image of the Highland soldier.

The individual stories of soldiers, and related artifacts, illustrate how the experience of war, and how battles were remembered, strengthened the bond between individual units and their Highland identity. One example from the First World War was Piper James Richardson, born in Scotland and raised in Canada, who joined the 16th Battalion (Canadian Scottish) CEF, a unit composed of volunteers from several militia units with Scottish affiliations. Both his pipes — recovered from the battlefield after his death — and the Victoria Cross awarded posthumously for his bravery in playing those pipes during an attack in 1916, are part of the exhibition.

Another story shows how both the Highland military tradition and the close ties between Canada and Scotland continued to be strengthened during the Second World War. Lieutenant James Ross LeMesurier was one of 673 Canadian junior officers who volunteered to serve with the British Army in 1943, when Britain was experiencing a severe shortage in its ranks. As a CANLOAN officer in 1945, LeMesurier earned the Military Cross for bravery when, having run out of ammunition, he attacked two of the enemy with nothing but a shovel.

Many more medals, pipes, uniforms, oil and watercolour paintings, sketches and other objects highlight individuals and military units that distinguished themselves, and underscore the close connection between Scotland and Canada. The individuals and units featured in this section include several Victoria Cross recipients, the 6th Cameron Highlanders of Scotland, the Cameron Highlanders of Ottawa at Juno Beach, the Lovat Scouts who trained in Canada, and the Seaforth Highlanders who fought in the British offensive at El Alamein in Egypt.

## A Global Tradition

The exhibition concludes with a look at Highland military tradition and its changing role from the Second World War to the 21st century, as well as how it continues to inspire military organizations around the world. Today, the Highland ethos transcends traditional ethnic, gender and national boundaries, while continuing to influence our concept of national identity in Scotland, Britain and Canada.

This section features the Second World War uniform of Pipe Major Lillian Grant, Canadian Women's Army Corps, illustrating changing attitudes. Grant's proposal in 1942 that her band wear traditional piper's dress was rejected as inappropriate for women; today, women serve in Highland units in Canada and British forces with no distinctions in either dress or role.

More recent conflicts are reflected in a desert camouflage combat shirt worn by Lieutenant-Colonel Nicholas Calder of the Royal Regiment of Scotland in Afghanistan's Helmand province in 2008. The shirt is displayed with the medals he earned for his gallantry and leadership, and shows the Highlanders' reach around the world, along with their enduring status.

Rounding out the exhibition, a Canadian flag carried by a Canadian-born officer while serving with the Royal Regiment of Scotland, together with his Balmoral bonnet, illustrate continuing relationship between Canada and Scotland. Also on view, a regimental signboard from Afghanistan, featuring an excerpt from Sir Walter Scott's 1804 poem "The Lay of the Last Minstrel," speaks to the enduring emotional connection between Scottish patriotism and the wild landscape of the Highlands.

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#HighlandWarriors

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