



Monthly Article

April 2013

Cape Breton Highlanders History

“And how can man die better, than facing fearful odds,
For the ashes of his fathers and the temples of his gods.”

Excerpt from “Horatio at the Bridge” by Lord Babbington Macaulay

The Battalion was organized on October 13, 1871 as The Victoria Provisional Battalion of Infantry from four independent companies. Headquarters of this new unit was established at Baddeck, Victoria County, Cape Breton-hence the name. The ranks were filled predominantly by Highlanders, the descendants of Scots who had emigrated from the Duke of Argyll's estates. After a slight change in re-designation the unit officially became a Highland battalion on December 12, 1879. A few months later, on April 9, 1880, a further re-designation bound the unit to its Argyll ancestry by bearing The Victoria Provisional

Battalion of Infantry "Argyll Highlanders" and in 1890, it was numbered "94" in the list of Canadian Militia Units.

The subsequent years, the original four companies were expanded. New companies were raised in 1882, 1894, and 1902. This strong establishment was retained until the outbreak of the First World War.

The 94th Victoria Regiment "Argyll Highlanders" was placed on active service on August 6, 1914, for protective duties of the Cape Breton coast and remained so for the duration of the war. The Regiment recruited upwards of 2,400 men for the Canadian Expeditionary Force most of whom were channeled into The 85th Battalion (Nova Scotia Highlanders) and The 185th Battalion (Cape Breton Highlanders) which, with the 193rd and 219th Battalions, formed The Nova Scotia Highland Brigade. The Brigade sailed for England October 1916 and the 85th Battalion served in France and Flanders with The 12th Infantry Brigade, 4th Canadian Division, from February 10, 1917 until the Armistice. The remaining Battalions provided reinforcements for the Canadian Corps in the field. The 85th Battalion (Nova Scotia Highlanders) participated in every battle in which 4 Division engaged and forged an enviable reputation as a first class fighting unit which included the taking of hill 145 on Vimy Ridge. All together, some 174 officers and 3,249 other ranks were absorbed into the Battalion. Casualties were heavy, but only one man was captured by the enemy.

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Following the First World War, the Militia was reorganized and on April 1, 1920 the Unit was re-designated "The Cape Breton Highlanders" which was to perpetuate the 94th Regiment, 85th and 185th Battalions. On April 1, 1932, following a request from the Regiment, permission was granted The Cape Breton Highlanders to adopt the uniform, with the exception of the regimental badge of the Argyll and Sutherland Highlanders (Princess Louise's), thus cementing the 94th's earlier relationship with that famous British regiment.

On August 26, 1939, The Cape Breton Highlanders were called out to supply protective guards at vital installations in the industrial areas of Cape Breton. The unit left Cape Breton for other duties on January 1, 1941 and in June of the year was designated as the infantry support battalion for the 5th Canadian Armoured Division being formed at Camp Borden, Ontario. The Regiment embarked for England on November 13, 1941 where two years were spent training for battle. The Cape Breton Highlanders landed in Italy on November 10, 1943, as part of The 11th Infantry Brigade, 5th Armoured Division. The unit's first task was to relieve The West Nova Scotia Regiment at Ortona. From there, the unit moved forward.

While in Italy, The Regiment served with various formations of the British 8th Army and the American 5th Army. They took part in the breaching of the Hitler Line which opened the road to Rome and the Gothic Line which included the Cape Breton Highlanders taking Coriano Ridge. The Highlanders continued fighting their way north through Italy to the Banks of the Reno River on January 5, 1945. After the "D" Day invasion of France, priorities switched to North West Europe. In January 1945, the 5th Canadian Armoured Division left Italy and moved into France where they joined to the 1st Canadian Army.

Cape Breton Highlanders moved into the line in Holland where they relieved The Essex Regiment in the area of Nijmegen. The Highlanders again went on the offensive working their way to Dokkum Area and on April 21st the unit relieved the North Nova Scotia Highlanders. The last action of the Cape Breton Highlanders was the capture of the port of Delfzijl, Holland on April 27-28, 1945. The last operation proved highly successful, all objectives were taken and approximately 1700 prisoners of war were captured. This engagement cost the unit 21 killed and 54 wounded; the Cease-Fire came one week later, on May 5, 1945.

Following the Second World War, the unit resumed its militia status. In 1954, along with Nova Scotia's two other Highland Regiments were amalgamated to form a single unit. On September 15th, the Cape Breton Highlanders Battalion was thus designated "2nd Battalion, The Nova Scotia Highlanders" and on June 21, 1955 "2nd Battalion, The Nova Scotia Highlanders (Cape Breton)".

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On 16 January, 2011, the Minister of National Defence, the Honourable Peter McKay, announced at the Gaelic College of Cape Breton, near the village of Baddeck where the Regiment was founded, that the Unit will officially revert back to its former moniker and from thence be known as the Cape Breton Highlanders. A formal re-badging ceremony was held at Victoria Park in Sydney N.S. hosted by the MND on 10 September, 2011.

A chronological evolution of the history of the Cape Breton Highlanders follows. Following is a list of the 56 Battle Honours won by the Regiment, 21 of which are emblazoned on the Regimental Colours:

South Africa 1899-1901* First World War 1914-1918

Ypres 1915-1917*
Festubert 1915
Mount Sorrel*
Somme 1916,1918
Fiers – Courcellette
Thiepval
Ancre Heights
Arras 1917,1918*
Vimy 1917*
Arleux

Hill 70
Passchendaele*
Amiens*
Drocourt – Queant*
Hindenburg Line*
Canal Du Nord*
Cambrai 1918
Valenciennes
Sambre
France & Flanders 1915-1918*

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Second World War 1939-1945

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| Liri Valley | Falaise |
| Malfa Crossing | The Laison |
| Ceprano | Chambois* |
| Gothic Line* | Boulogne 1944* |
| Montecchio | Calais 1944 |
| Coriano* | The Scheldt |
| Lamone Crossing* | Savojaar ds Plaat* |
| Fosso Munio | Breskens Pocket* |
| Conventello-Comacchio | The Rhineland |
| Italy 1944-1945* | Waal Flats |
| Normandy Landing | The Hochwald |
| Aughie | The Rhine* |
| Caen | Zutphen |
| The Orne | Ijsselmeer |
| Bourguebus Ridge | Leer |
| Faubourg De Vaucelles | Delfzijl Pocket |
| Verriers Ridge-Tilly-La-Campagne | North-West Europe 1944-1945* |

Note: “*” Emblazed on CBH regimental colour!

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