

## **Letter to Jane Gibbs, Kindersley, Sask., on the history of "D" Company Pipe Band, S.L.I.**

Stuart Kolbinson  
Victoria, B.C.  
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Dear Jane:

The Band was founded due to a hockey game in Saskatoon! We were visiting my parents in that city when we decided to take in a Quaker-Edmonton game. In the intermission there was to be a presentation of a trophy to the Saskatoon Hilltops football team. The crowd remained seated for this, when suddenly there came a great burst of pipe music and out came the Saskatoon Pipe Band, about six pipers, two side and one mid-size drums and the big bass. The ice surface amplified the sound - it was wonderful! After we got home I said I would like to play in a band. My wife Mary was reading the paper and said "There is a set of pipes for sale, fifty dollars." If Mary hadn't seen that ad, there would have been no band!

Dad had an old Scotch friend who was a piper, so I took my pipes, the set I had bought from the ad, to him. They had been in the Boer War and looked it! He said they were no good and anyway, I had to learn on the chanter first. He recommended Pipe Major Peden as the best teacher in town. Collier's Music House had a chanter, so with it and Ross's book I called on Peden. He gave me lessons at various times when I could get to the city. We had tape recorders and I taped the lessons and worked at home. Since I had learned the piano while young my fingers were still supple enough to learn the difficult grace notes so important for good piping. One must train the fingers while young. Also, I could read the music.

By summer 1954 I got my new pipes and could play a few simple tunes. That fall Major Barber of the "D" Company S.L.I., suggested I start a military Band for his company, so I joined up and recruited enough enthusiasts to start. I wasn't that good myself but figured I could keep ahead of the recruits if I worked hard and practiced, while continuing lessons with Peden. The first recruits were Don McTaggart, Don McAngus, Lynn Moffat and myself as pipers. Bill Moffat on Bass Drum, and Ross Patterson and another young member of "D" Company, Bill Kucher, were on the side drums.

Meanwhile we had ordered our own kilts, sporrans and other accoutrements which make up the beautiful Highland Full Dress. That summer, 1955, we were able to take advantage of the Army's Band School in Winnipeg, where we learned a lot from the experts and worked hard at improving our playing as well as parade manners. We all passed our Army Group 1 test, and after harvest that year we worked hard to prepare for our "debut," Remembrance Day, Nov 11th, 1955. A piper from Rosetown, a Mr. Stewart and his son came to give us a hand. That morning there was no snow, but a 27 MPH wind and 20 below zero greeted us. We met and tuned up in the now-vanished Community Hall, the Legionnaires lined up outside, we in the front and away we went, down Main Street to

the cenotaph which was in a little park near the Railway Station. We made quite a showing for the few brave souls who came out despite the bitter cold. I believe the band sounded the best it ever did, that first parade to the Cenotaph. Alas, there was a two minute silence, then a hymn and a short sermon by the Padre which seemed long, as we were freezing. When we started back to the Hall, our poor pipes were frozen, all we could get was a few squeels and groans, so we had to give up and let the drums get us back. It was this and other experiences which led me to believe that the prairies should have been left to the Indians and their drums which could withstand the climate. Not the place for civilized dress, where in winter it froze your knees and summer the mosquitoes had banquets and picnics on your bare legs (and higher.)

We were attached to the Saskatoon Band under Pipe Major Hugh Fraser for ceremonies in Saskatoon, and while there were no more Band schools as such, there were opportunities to learn the proper procedures for Inspections, Retreats, etc. Also I was able to take the Group 2 test, and the next year the final Group 3 test for Pipe Major, which included being able to play Pibroch, the classical pipe music. Lynn Moffat, a hard worker as always, got his Group 2 and later his Group 3 at Military College. I continued my lessons with Peden and also made the acquaintance of Bill Murdoch, whose wonderful piping I had heard while playing with the Saskatoon band. We were friends as long as he lived, and he and his wife were frequent visitors to our farm. Bill's brother had been several times champion of Scotland, so I was able to learn a great deal from Bill, who was championship material himself, although very modest and not at all in good health. He took the place of Peden as my teacher, since Peden had been transferred to Vancouver.

We were young then, either in school or raising families. Thus the original group began to disintegrate, the three younger going off to get further training; Don McTaggart and Don McAngus both moved away to new careers. A few youngsters tried to learn, but I am afraid when they found how hard one must practice before going on parade, their attention turned to hockey or football. Vic Rea, one of our teachers in Eatonville, joined up as a tenor drummer. Eldon Johnson was conscripted and, as he was instructing at the University in winter, instruction was given him by my friend Jimmy Stewart. Eldon practiced faithfully and soon was able to join us in parade.

The CN roundhouse was a busy place in those days, caring for the big steam locomotives. The big boss was the Locomotive Foreman who was in charge of the whole deal and was an important personage in the town because so many made their livelihood on the railway. I heard that the new foreman played the drums in the Regina Shriners band and wasted no time in making his acquaintance. His name was Pete Donaldson and he became a tower of strength in the side drum section on whom we could rely. He took the place formerly occupied by Ross Patterson, who went to study Pharmacy at Sask U.

Vic Rea decided to abandon the drum and took to learning the pipes. Doug Bruce also joined at this time; they both became steadfast members and good friends. In the late sixties Jane Gibbs joined as a piper and became a regular. Several others attended for various times but the ones I have mentioned were the most enthusiastic and reliable.

We played at many events, both in Kindersley and the surrounding towns, Legion events, Sports days, Bongspiels, Dedications, and escorting Premiers or cabinet members of various parties at their meetings. I recall being asked to pipe in Tommy Douglas to his CCF meeting in Dobni's theatre. I stayed to hear what our Premier had to say. He began by making several cheap jokes about the pipes which were as old as the hills; I should have stalked out in protest...

For the great Highland pipe, the Piob Mohr, and the uniform we wear, have a long and illustrious history and are unique in all music. And they are loved by all races and everywhere on the globe. Played in a resonant building, the effect is stunning, as I discovered long ago. They are, like most instruments, very difficult to play well.

I left Kindersley for Vancouver in late 1970, so someone else will have to finish this history. I now live in Victoria as does Ross Patterson, who has a successful Pharmacy in town. I don't know where McTaggart and McAngus are living, not having seen them for many years. Lynn Moffat became an expert piper in the army and now lives in Calgary area. Eldon Johnson lives in Saskatoon, and I have lost track of Bill Kucher. Pete Donaldson and Vic Rea died years ago, Doug Bruce and Bill Moffat within the last two years.

A tragic note: when I first came to Vancouver, I took the bus to Calgary in order to catch a plane for the Coast. I had one evening in Calgary and spent a happy time with Bill Murdoch and his wife. We had a great supper, some whiskey and some good pipe music. I left about ten for my hotel, saying goodbye to my friends. I learned afterwards that Bill passed away from a heart attack later that night. I got a job in Vancouver and was glad to learn that Peden lived only three blocks away. But there would be no more lessons: I found him a very sick man, dying of bone cancer.

We had a wonderful time together, but nothing lasts forever. Jane Gibbs is the only one left in Kindersley as far as I know, there may be others who came after me.

And now I cannot hear the bands playing without bursting into tears.

Sincerely,  
Stuart Kolbinson