

## The Piping MacLennans

### *an abbreviated history of four generations of MacLennans*

Without going WAY BACK, I have put together a small section of the recent history of four generations of pipers worthy of note.

The MacLennan pipers go back centuries, according to my father, Duncan MacLennan, he told of the days when the Clan supplied Standard Bearers to Scottish Kings. He also told of how the name LEWIS was introduced. It is recorded that Duncan's great, great, grandfather was rescued from drowning off the Scottish coast in the 18<sup>th</sup> century after his boat sank. His life was saved by a Frenchman whose name was LOUIS. My great, great grandfather called his next son LOUIS, the name has been in each generation since, although it has become LEWIS. One of the MacLennans must have changed the spelling, however it is pronounced LOUIS.

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**LEWIS MacLENNAN;** born in the Glasgow area in 1871, he ran away from home at the tender age of 14 as his father would not teach him to play the bagpipes without music. So young Lewis joined the SEAFORTH HIGHLANDERS. He became known as, "the little chanter" as he was never seen without his practice chanter.

He served for 10 years, during much of this time he was in INDIA. Due to his talent and devotion to the bagpipes he was promoted to Pipe Major of the Regiment, a position he held until he joined the GOVAN Police Force on his return to Scotland.

During his service with the Seaforth Highlanders and serving under, Lord Roberts, Sir George White and Sir Robert Low, passing through the Black Mountains and Chitral campaigns, for which he was awarded two medals.

Lewis was very much sought after as a tutor of the bagpipes, so much so that he had to turn away many young would-be pupils.

He was also an accomplished highland dancer, and together with his other attributes gained the admiration of all who knew him.

During his time, about 11 years, with the Govan Police, and reaching the rank of pipe sergeant, he took up a position of pipe sergeant and drill instructor with the Royal Caledonian Asylum, Bushey, Herts.

Lewis was presented with a beautiful practice chanter, mounted with ivory, it was inscribed on a silver shield with the following; Presented to pipe sergeant MacLennan of the Govan Police by members of the pipe band, October, 1907.

Lewis migrated to AUSTRALIA in about 1907 and settled in the Elsternwick area in Melbourne. Here he continued his legendary love of the bagpipes, he became the Pipe Major of the South and Port Melbourne pipe band. During the First World War, 1914-1918, he was engaged in training men in the military arts of pipers for military bands.



Lewis, Snr. with Govan Police

During this long period of time he raised to a very high standard the Melbourne Highland Pipe Band, and to this day they wear the MacLENNAN TARTAN kilt. He was also their Pipe Major for some time.

His association with pipe bands included the formation of the Victorian Police Pipe Band and assisted in the training of many junior bands.

He was, from 1928, the pipe major of the Victorian Scottish Regiment until the outbreak of war in 1939, when he retired.



Melbourne Highland Pipe Band after winning the Pipe Band Championship of Australasia for the fourth successive year. 1920-21-22-23.



Lewis, Sr, at home in Sunshine, Melbn, mid 30s

So after a lifetime of playing and teaching many the art of playing the bagpipes he left behind a great number of fine bagpipe players, including my father Duncan and his brother Lewis.

Old Mac, as he was called, died, in 1946 at age 77.

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**LEWIS MacLENNAN, Jnr.** Was the nephew of Lewis Snr; born in Glasgow, Lewis came to AUSTRALIA as a boy of 8yrs, he grew up in Melbourne and he obtained his piping instruction from his Uncle Lewis.

After many years as a piper in the Melbourne Highland pipe band and the Victorian Scottish Regiment, Lew as he was called, became Pipe Sergeant in the 5<sup>th</sup> Battalion Australian Infantry Forces, Victorian Scottish Regiment, he served during the Second World War in the Middle East and the Pacific zones of warfare. Lewis, Jnr, had an association with the 5th Battalion all through the war years, He returned to Melbourne and continued to play the pipes in the band at the various functions and training locations.

He was posted to the Pacific Islands area and continued with the bagpipes and the band when able. He was in charge of flame-throwers during his time in the jungle, and pipe major of the band. They claim that in the evening the band would serenade the Japanese; a newspaper claimed it was Australias secret weapon.



Lewis, Jnr in New Guinea (centre)

On returning to Australia at the cessation of hostilities, free of injuries, except for a bad case of Malaria, that caused him and his wife Ellery plenty of concern for several years.

Lew, being a fine piper, soon, together with other likeminded ex-servicemen got busy and formed the PERTH HIGHLAND PIPE BAND. So in September 1946 their first public parade took place on the Anniversary of VJ day.

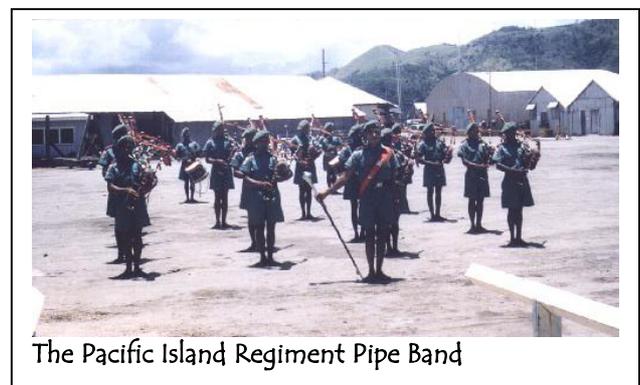
The Perth Highland pipe band, with Pipe Major LEWIS MacLENNAN, Jnr, and proudly wearing the MacLennan Tartan kilt became a very famous band, the standard of music was very high, consequently the Perth Highland Pipe Band was unbeaten for many years.

1947. As well as his work with the Perth band, Lew was engaged in the task of establishing a pipe band with Scotch College in Perth, at first it was instructing pupils on Saturday mornings.

The year 1951 was to become the start of a dismal period for the Perth Highland pipe band.

Lewis MacLennan had re-enlisted in the Australian Army and accepted a posting to New Guinea, and the proposed formation of the Pacific Island Regiment PIPE BAND. Lew was the sole instructor, teaching the Islanders the bagpipes as well as the drums.

The uniform worn by the band was, Green shirt and shorts, beret, and on the feet, sandals. He remained with the Regiment for six years.



The Pacific Island Regiment Pipe Band

The highlight of his service to the Regiment was the Bands visit to CANBERRA where the band was reviewed by HER MAJESTY THE QUEEN, during her tour in 1954.

For his outstanding work with the Pacific Island Regiment Lew was awarded the, British Empire Medal. B.E.M.



Lewis and Ellery,  
1972, in Perth

On his return to Perth in 1957, Lew took up his position at Scotch College, now full time, here he remained for the next 20 years, the College wear the Cameron tartan kilt, and have been a champion pipe band for many years. Lew retired from the College in 1978.

Lew took up again with the Perth Highland pipe band from 1958 as pipe major, and with help and a lot of hard work returned the band to top standard again, now with several pipers and drummers from Scotch College the band performed at various functions and many competitions.

Lew remained with the band as pipe major until 1970, 1972. Then in 1978 Lew and his wife Ellery returned to Victoria.

They settled in Terang where Lew tutored the Terang Highland Pipe Band.

After only 3 years of retired life together his wife died. They had no children.

Lew moved to Melbourne to live in Box Hill with his sister inlaw. Lew passed away in 1995, aged 85.

Another MacLennan who left behind a lifetime of bagpipe music memories.



Lewis, Jr about 1978

**DUNCAN MacLENNAN**, elder brother of Lewis Jnr, nephew of Lewis Snr. Duncan began learning the bagpipes at the tender age of nine years. Born in Glasgow Scotland in 1904, he was just sixteen when he ran away from home to join the Army. He wanted to be able to play the bagpipes any time he wanted, so he joined the HIGHLAND LIGHT INFANTRY. From 1920 to 1927, he saw service in India, and was able to play the bagpipes as much as he liked.

His early Military career came to an end in 1927; he chose to migrate to Australia to join his family.

At first he settled in Hamilton, Victoria. Soon after he joined the Hamilton Highland pipe band.

It wasn't long before he was promoted to Pipe Major, and his ability was soon rewarded as the bands performance improved. These were difficult times, as the country was in depression, work was hard to find and Duncan had to work at some very difficult labouring jobs, however he managed.

It was here that he met and married Jean Young, and by 1935 they had two young boys, Duncan & Donald.

As war loomed the family moved to Melbourne and moved in with Duncan's parents in Sunshine (Melbourne). Duncan found work in the cement sheet factory, a very dirty and dusty job.

It was soon after that he decided to enlist in the regular Army, so this was the start of another Army stint. He signed up with the 2/5 Battalion A.I.F. This was the same Regiment that his brother Lewis was with, so they were together, and off to training and both were in the pipe band, naturally.

Soon they were off to war, he took his bagpipes with him. Duncan had worked his way up through the ranks and was the Company Sergeant Major, with Lewis, pipe Sergeant, they played in the band at Church parades in Jerusalem.

The war raged on. Duncan was wounded in Greece, he was captured in Crete after the ship taking them to Alexandria was bombed and ended up in Crete. Duncan spent four years as a prisoner of war in a German P.O.W. camp.

Prison life was very bad for this soldier, however, soon he had the Germans in a spin as he played his bagpipes as much as possible to avoid going on work duty.

During his time as a P.O.W. he was able to teach many other prisoners how to play the bagpipes, it helped the time to pass, and the years really dragged by. He was comforted as much as possible with letters from his family at home, and some photos of his two young sons. Red cross parcels were a real morale booster and helped them through hard times.

On his release from the prison camp at the surrender of the German Army he returned home to Australia and to his Family, now living in Ballarat (about an hour from Melbourne). After a period of re-settlement, and convalescence, he returned to the workforce. Duncan remained in the Army and took up the task of Cadet Instructor at Ballarat private schools, he also became a member of the



Duncan at a special function with Prime Minister, Sir Robert Menzies and others, early 60s

Ballarat Highland Pipe Band, this he tutored for several years and became it's Pipe Major. They were also a very successful competition pipe band.

He was transferred to Melbourne where he returned to the Victorian Scottish Regiment, this being his starting place prior to going to war. The wheel had turned full circle. His function was that during the day he was the W.O 2 in administration, and Pipe Major in the evening and weekend Parades.

Duncan soon had the band in good shape. It wasn't easy. Some of the stories he recounted about the early days could fill a book on their own.

He was in control of this band from 1952 until 1963 and was awarded the M.B.E. for outstanding work in the field of Bagpipe Bands and all that is associated with them.

Duncan retired from the Army after a long association and rewarding term.

Duncan then took up the position of piping instructor with HAILEYBURY COLLEGE, a position he held for eight years.



Duncan Munro MacLennan, at Kew, about 1960

He spent several years as a Piping Judge, and also was the founding member of the Pipers Club of Victoria.

Sadly- Pipe Major Duncan Munro MacLennan M.B.E. passed away on 30<sup>th</sup> November 1979, StAndrews day.

He too, like his Uncle Lewis Snr, and his brother Lewis Jnr, left many excellent bagpipe players behind. We will remember them always.

Of Duncan's two sons, Duncan Jnr, did learn to play the bagpipes, he served with the Victoria Police Force for many years and played in the Pipe Band for some time. Now being retired, and has taken up the pipes again, he wears the MacLennan Tartan Kilt when he plays at private functions. He is a member of the Gold Coast Tweed Pipes and Drums, they have had success at recent competitions.



Duncan, Jnr with son Lewis

His son, also Lewis, is the Pipe Major of the Pipe Band at the Royal Australian Air Force Base at Amberley in Queensland, this band he got started with the help of senior staff members at the Base and some Pipers from local Bands from the Brisbane area. The Band has shown good progress in the short time it has been formed, so Lewis has shown some of the attributes of his great uncle Lewis, and his Grandfather.

So the tradition continues.

Information collected by Donald MacLennan (also Son of Duncan). June 2003

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Lewis McLennan (“Snr”) 1869-1947 is Clan database ID number [i9854](#)

Lewis MacLennan (“Jnr”) 1912-1995 is [i64644](#)

Duncan Munro MacLennan 1904-1979 is [i64656](#)