



RESEARCH ENQUIRY REPLY

Our Ref: 579/17

12th December 2017

Mr Jim McGillivray, (e-mail: jimmcg@piping.on.ca)
McGillivray Piping Inc., Canada

Dear Jim,

2211039 Drum Major Robert Bruce – 2nd Battalion Gordon Highlanders



I refer to your enquiry to the Museum and thank you for making the payment of the £25 research fee to the Gordon Highlanders Museum, which is greatly appreciated. All of this goes towards maintaining the history and traditions of the Regiment and to commemorate the men, such as Drum Major Robert Bruce, who served. You asked for any information we had on Robert Bruce and, as I explained earlier, the Museum does not hold the records for individual soldiers but I am pleased to say that I have been able to discover a lot information about his time with the Regiment.

The first item from the Museum's collection referring to Robert Bruce is illustrated below:

NAME (in full) (Surname first)		Attestation or Transfer			Place of Birth		Full Name and Nationality of Woman to whom married, and Name of each Child (if any) (in ink); if unmarried, name and address of next-of-kin stating relationship (in pencil)		
Date of Attestation	Age on Attestation	Place of Attestation	Transfer to or from Regiment or Corps and Date	Trade on Enlistment	Parish	Town		County	
2211039	R Bruce	Robert	6.10.25	1943	Aberdeen	Low Miller	Highland	Highland	Highland

Place of Marriage, and of Birth of each Child	Date of Marriage, and of Birth of each Child	Campaigns, Wounds, Medals or Rewards of any kind	Discharge or becoming Non-Effective				Remarks
			Date	Place	Cause	Rank and Character on Discharge	

2501 to Commission
P.C. 98-46 Personal
No. 382005 Serial No 60/4

2211039 1st 10th Regt

Extract from record originally from the Infantry Records Office, Perth – Enlistment & Discharge

This is the original record which was held by the Army Infantry Record Office in Perth. The extract is over two pages, shown below, one above the other.

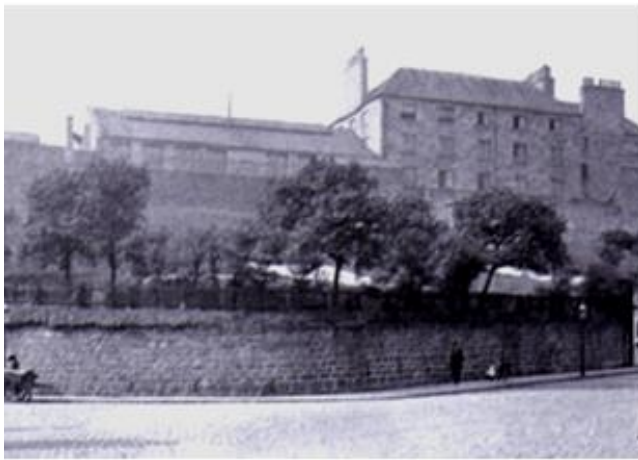
I appreciate parts of this may be difficult to read but it does provide a great deal of personal information about him. It confirms his Army number (2211039) and that he enlisted (attested) into The Gordon Highlanders as a Regular Army soldier (signified by the "R" in column 2) in Aberdeen, on the 6th of October 1925. He was aged 19 years and 284 days old, making his date of birth the 26th December 1905. He was born in the parish of Nigg, Kincardine, and his next of kin, given at the time of his enlistment, was his father, J. Bruce, 40 Menzies Road, Torry, Aberdeen. Torry and Nigg are now suburbs on the south side of Aberdeen. Also indicated on this page is that his civilian occupation, before he joined the Regular Army, was a sawmiller.



Map showing positions of Torry and Nigg in relation to Aberdeen Harbour

Page 2 of this document shows he originally enlisted into the Territorial Army (TA) with the Royal Engineers TA and had served with them for 1 year and 153 days. At this time each regiment had its own series of service numbers which was allocated to a soldier when he enlisted. Robert Bruce's Army Service Number of 2211039 is a number in the Royal Engineers series as, once allocated, the soldier kept his number no matter which regiment he subsequently served with. (At this time a Gordon Highlander would have had a seven figure service number beginning with 28724xx. The other soldier's entries on this same page have been cropped out for data protection reasons.)

His basic training would have been carried out at Castlehill Barracks, Aberdeen, (known as "The Depot" which has long since been demolished as the Regimental HQ moved to new barracks, on the northern side of the city, in 1935.

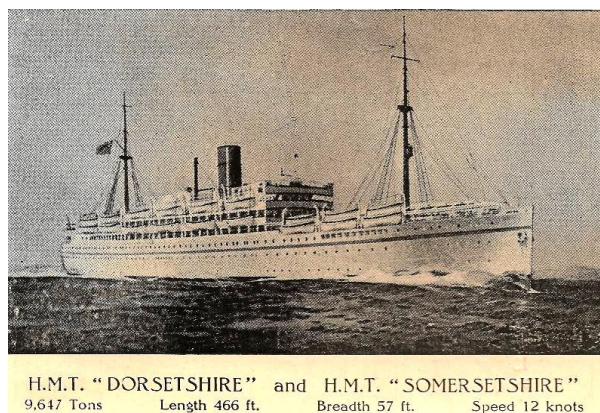


Castle Hill Barracks, Aberdeen

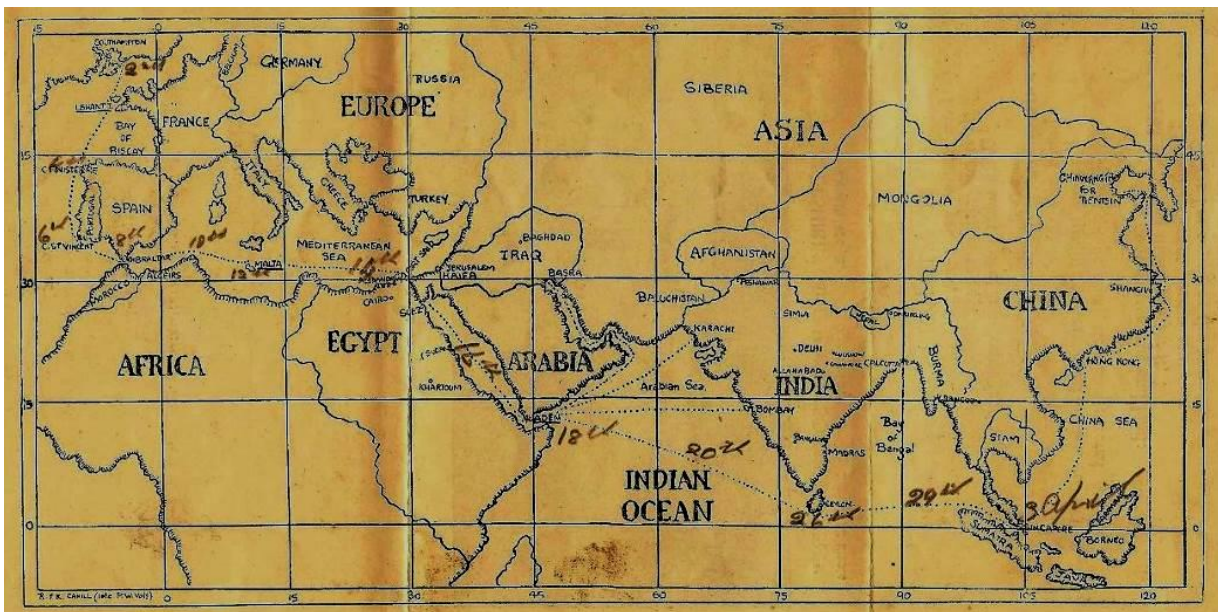
During this time he gained 3rd Class Certificate of Education on the 26th November 1925 and his 2nd Class Certificate of Education on the 3rd of February 1926. After his basic training he was posted the 2nd Battalion, which at that time was in Bordon, Hampshire. Subsequent postings for the Battalion were to Ballykinlar, Northern Ireland, in 1928, and Aldershot, in 1932. In 1934, the Battalion was posted overseas to Gibraltar, arriving there in mid-October. The two Regular battalions had not met since the Boer War so, as the 1st Battalion were returning from India, the opportunity was taken for the two units to meet in Gibraltar. This was a great celebration and pageant when the two Battalions paraded together on the 5th January 1935, watched by a large crowd of spectators and the Governor General. Robert Bruce would have taken part in this.

The 2nd Battalion stayed in Gibraltar for just over two years with a short posting to Egypt in the summer of 1936. This short posting was very hurried and the Battalion, were given only twelve hours' notice that they were being rushed to Egypt, as a reserve force to contain unrest in the British Mandated Territory of Palestine. The first leg of the journey, through the Mediterranean to Malta, was aboard the battle-cruiser HMS Repulse. The emergency situation in Palestine subsided fairly quickly with the result that only thirty-four days after their arrival the Battalion were back aboard HMS "Repulse", bound for Gibraltar.

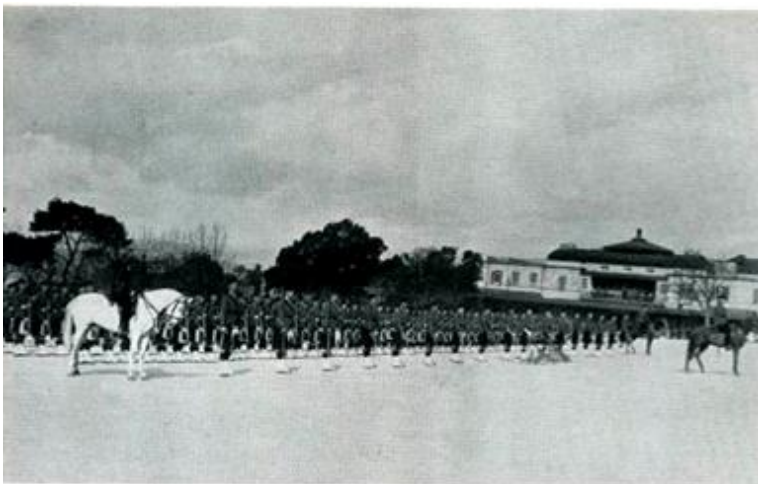
The Battalion relocated to Singapore in 1937, travelling from Gibraltar aboard HMS Dorsetshire.



Their route was via Port Said, Aden & Colombo and this is shown below together with the dates :-



The Gordon Highlanders were stationed at The Selarang Barracks, Singapore, which were modern and considered comfortable.



FAREWELL PARADE OF THE 2ND BATTALION AT GIBRALTAR.



2nd Battalion Disembarking at Singapore 1937

During this time Robert Bruce was rising steadily through the ranks.:-

- Promoted to Corporal 3rd August 1930
- Promoted to Lance Sergeant 14th December 1933
- Promoted to Sergeant (Drum Major) 6th April 1935
- Promoted to CSM - date unknown
- Posted to 2nd Battalion Malay Regiment 7th Nov 1941 as Acting RSM

Robert Bruce is mentioned in the Regimental Magazine, "The Tiger & Sphinx", several times as he was a good sportsman, being Captain of the HQ Company football team in 1931-33 and he won a bronze medal in the 2nd Battalion Rifle shooting competition in 1933. There were several references to his marriage in Gibraltar which are shown below:

Tiger & Sphinx - March 1937 Edition

Drummers Section

By the time these notes appear in print we shall be on the "big boat" for the Far East.

"Badger" Keith (Mk. II), who is now on leave in the United Kingdom, will be back and telling us all his experiences.

"Rubio" Stuart will have left the Boys' Room for the room of the "grown-ups"; we wish his stay with the Drummers will be enjoyable.

We have been hearing some strong rumours about the Drum-Major's forthcoming marriage, and by the time these notes are printed we shall know that "Dame Rumour" is for once correct, so we will take this opportunity of wishing him happiness throughout his wedded life.

The Drums and Pipes managed to take the Copenhagen Cup off the Band this year by a win of 4 goals to 0. "Tiddler" did the "hat trick" in the scoring line, but we also make a special mention of "Topper" Brown, who did some wonderful work in goal.

We take this opportunity of congratulating Cpl. Arnum on his promotion. To Pipe-Major Dickie we extend a hearty welcome, and trust that his stay with us will be a pleasant one.

Sergeant Mess Section

We have sad news to impart: the Drum-Major has decided to achieve wedded bliss, and his marriage takes place on 1st March. Poor chap—and he had nearly qualified as an "uncatchable." The remainder wish him and the future Mrs. Bruce every happiness during their married life, and to Buckie our heartfelt sympathies.

Don, "R. R." and Harry have returned once again from the United Kingdom, and despite hopeful rumours from the married men they still serve as dining members. Remember Bruce's fate and the terrible result of breaking away from our visiting party at the New Year.

(Note, his nickname appears to have been "Buckie". "Drummie" which was used in the June edition shown below, was the familiar title given to all Drum Majors with the Gordon Highlanders.)

PROGRAMME OF SERGEANTS' MESS ST. ANDREW'S NIGHT.

Toast—"The King" (R.S.M. W. E. Main, M.M.).

Pipes.—Pipe-Major C. Turnbull.

Slow Air.—"Echo Bank."

March.—"Lochrosque."

Strathspey.—"The Piper's Bonnet."

Reel.—"The Rejected Suitor."

Toast.—"The Regiment" (R.S.M. W. E. Main, M.M.).

Song.—Drum-Major R. Bruce.

Anecdotes.—A./S./Sergt. T. Irlam.

Piano Selection.—Bandmaster R. Ashton, A.R.C.M.

Wails.—"Dod Lawrie's Lament"—From the Wing.

Toast.—"Our Officers" (Bandmaster R. Ashton, A.R.C.M.).

Selection.—Pipe-Major C. Turnbull.

Antics.—From "A" Company.

Song.—C.S.M. C. Watt, M.M.

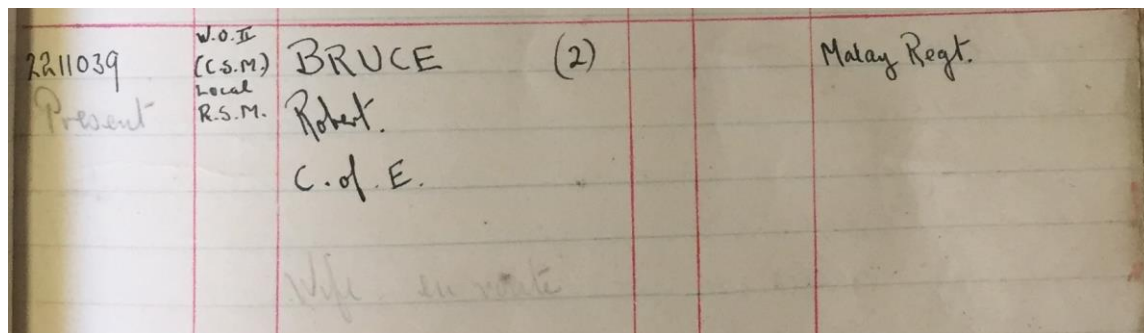
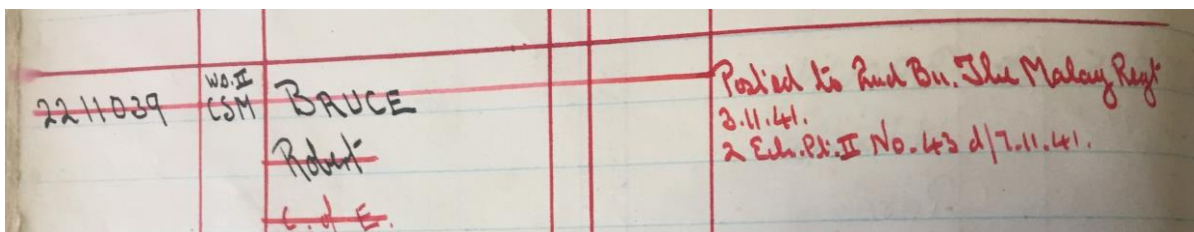
Stories (mild).—C.Q.M.S. W. Irvine.

Tiger & Sphinx - June 1937 Edition - 2nd Battalion Notes - Sergeant's Mess

We would also like to extend our congratulations to the "Drummie" on his marriage. A joyous evening was spent in the Mess after the ceremony. Prior to handing over the wedding presents from the Mess, the R.S.M. gave a few hints on married life in the Army which caused some amusement among the older members. The "Drummie" was looking rather worried by the time he had finished, but we hope he has not taken them too much to heart.

The war in the Pacific began with the Japanese attacking Pearl Harbour and invading Malaya almost simultaneously on 7th / 8th December 1941. The Gordons were involved in the fighting but the British Army and allies in Singapore surrendered to the Japanese on the 15th February 1942, which commenced the beginning of the men's time as prisoners of war (POWs). During the period from the outbreak of hostilities until the Japanese surrender, in August 1945, almost 400 men of the Battalion lost their lives (approximately 40%). The families of the Gordons were evacuated in January 1942 and Robert's wife and son were among them. She went to live at 46 Convener Street, Elgin, Moray, Scotland, where presumably she stayed with relatives, which was fairly common.

The men of the 2nd Battalion were all recorded by Sergeant Dick Pallant and, at great personal risk, he maintained this throughout his captivity. Thanks to this record we know a great deal about the men of the Battalion during the period just prior to the Japanese invasion of Malaya and their liberation. A part of this record is shown below, confirming Robert Bruce's secondment to the Malay Regiment.



Note the second entry refers to his wife being "en-route" meaning evacuated to the UK

Initially all of the men were held in Singapore, were held in the Changi area and required to work in clearing the aftermath of the battle, loading ships, etc. In October 1942, the Japanese began to move POWs up to Thailand to build the Thai-Burma Railway which was their strategic solution to get supplies to their forces fighting the British in Burma. Robert Bruce was forced to work on this railway and his movements were as follows:-

Left Changi, Singapore in May 1943 – He was part of the notorious "H" Force which was treated very badly in Thailand and suffered very heavy casualties.

Tonchan, Thailand - until November 1943

Sime Road, Singapore, – until May 1944

Changi, Singapore –until July 1944

Normanton, Singapore –until August 1945

Changi – August 1945 where he was liberated.

(A map of the Thai-Burma Railway is included in "Scattered Under The Rising Sun").

British Army PoWs would have been taken home to the UK by ship, probably landing at Liverpool at the end of October 1945 at which time his health was almost certainly poor,

having suffered years of malnutrition and probably the effects of malaria and other tropical diseases.

Robert Bruce would also have been awarded campaign and war medals which are illustrated below:-



I understand he would have been entitled to the Pacific Star, The 1939-45 Star, The Defence Medal and the War Medal, shown above in that order.

If we return to the enlistment document shown at the start of this report you will see that on part 2 he was discharged on the 9th of August 1946 when he was commissioned. (He was discharged as officers are subject to a different set of regulation from the enlisted men). This document gives his new officers number as 372045.

The extract below, from the London Gazette, dated 27th September 1946 (Publication date: 24 September 1946 - Supplement: 37739 Page: 4847), confirms his commission as a 2nd Lieutenant in the Pioneer Corps. (You can see from the entry that both his previous Army Service Number (2211039) and his new "Officers Number (372045) are included in the announcement.



THE
GAZETTE
OFFICIAL PUBLIC RECORD

SUPPLEMENT TO THE LONDON GAZETTE, 27 SEPTEMBER, 1946

4847

Capt. G. A. ROBERTS (225991) and is granted the hon. rank of Capt.

Lt. L. N. PORTER (31900) and is granted the hon. rank of Lt.

A.C.F. Section.

Lt. C. F. COLLINS (333862) relinquishes his commn. on account of disability, 26th Feb. 1946, and is granted the hon. rank of Lt.

ARMY EDUCATIONAL CORPS.

The notifn. regarding War Subs. Lt. R. E. PATTLE (315570) in Gazette (Supplement) dated 19th July 1946, is cancelled.

War Subs. Lt. G. JEFFREYS (288745) from R.A., to be War Subs. Lt., 4th Jan. 1946, retaining his present seniority.

PIONEER CORPS.

The undermentioned cadets to be 2nd Lts., 10th Aug. 1946:—

6139935 Frederick William SEARLES (370229).

2211039 Robert BRUCE (372045).

791604 Richard Arthur HEFFERNAN (370230).

14462540 George Henry MUSCROVE (370234).

The undermentioned War Subs. Lts. from R.A.S.C. (E.F.I.) to be War Subs. Lts., 15th July 1946, retaining their present seniority:—

S. H. MINCOFF (363297).

A. E. WATSON (363414).

1480410 War Subs. W.O. Cl. II (B.S.M.) Donald Arthur BUCKLE (371088) from R.A. to be Lt. (Qr.-Mr.), 8th July 1946.

The undermentioned are granted Immediate Emerg. Comms., from the ranks in the rank of 2nd Lt.:—

17th Aug. 1945:—

4447754 W.O. Cl. II Victor Charles GUNN (371050) from Durham L.I.

17th July 1946:—

2591579 Sergt. Alexander FARRAR BROWN (371166) from C.M.P.

James Gore ATHERTON, M.B.E. (366945) to be 2nd Lt. (without pay and alices. from Army Funds) 13th Aug. 1946.

The undermentioned relinquish their commns.:—

27th Feb. 1946:—

War Subs. Lt. R. D. P. KER (318182) and is

Since he had now left the Gordon Highlanders the Museum holds no other information on his career after this point, although I assume that he would have retired relatively soon after this as in 1946 he was 41 years old.

I trust the information provided above meets with your expectations with regard to the career of Drum Major Robert Bruce and you find it informative. Robert Bruce is listed in the Appendix of my book, entitled "Scattered Under The Rising Sun", which gives a great deal more detail of the lives of the men of the 2nd Battalion Gordon Highlanders from 1934 to 1945, including illustrations of parades and their daily lives, the nominal roll created by Sergeant Pallant, etc.

Best wishes,

Stewart

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