

**THE REAY FENCIBLES,
OR, LORD REAY'S
HIGHLANDERS**

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The Reay Fencibles, Or, Lord Reay's Highlanders by John Mackay

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JOHN MACKAY

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COMPILED FROM DOCUMENTS SUPPLIED BY THE WAR OFFICE;
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(UNDER WHOSE AUSPICES THIS ACCOUNT OF THE SERVICES RENDERED
TO THEIR COUNTRY BY THE REAY FENCIBLES IS PUBLISHED).

THE REAY FENCIBLES

OR

LORD REAY'S HIGHLANDERS.

THE Highlands of Scotland from remote times have been noted for the warlike qualities of their inhabitants. At no time in the history of Scotland did the martial spirit of Highlanders shine forth more heroically than from Fontenoy to Waterloo, and from the Alma to the siege and capture of Lucknow. Whenever Highlanders were embodied in regular regiments they proved themselves to be, as soldiers, irresistible.

In the thirty years' war in Germany, they earned for themselves and their country immortal renown. In the Dutch service, under the Princes of Orange, they withstood the best veteran soldiers of France. In the seven years' war, under the command of Prince Ferdinand, they acquired fresh laurels. On the field of Fontenoy they carried off the honours of the day—the first in attack, the last in retreat. The "Highland furies" of the Black Watch scared the French officers. The mode of attack practised by the "Forty Twa," by the permission of the Duke of Cumberland at Fontenoy, has recently been adopted as the

"new mode of attack" in all the armies of Europe. It was on that disastrous day that the soldierly qualities of Highlanders became recognised by the Government. Shortly afterwards, regiment after regiment was raised in the Highlands. From 1740, when the "Black Watch" was first embodied, to 1800, a period of sixty years, no less than twenty-five regiments, from 1000 men to 1200 men strong, were raised in the Highlands, north of the Clyde and the Tay, for permanent or limited service at home and abroad, besides twenty-six regiments of similar strength, called "Fencibles," for home service only. It has been computed that from 1760 to 1814 upwards of 80,000 men were enrolled in the Highlands for military service, and true soldiers they proved themselves to be—men of stature, men of vigour and endurance. They assisted in wresting Canada from the French, and were the first to scale the battlemented heights of Quebec, and by their impetuous charge decided the defeat of the French, and the fall of that fortress. In the American wars they everywhere distinguished themselves, as much by their endurance of privations and fatigue, as by their prowess in the presence of the enemy. The intrepid conduct of the "Black Watch" at the siege of Ticonderoga was the topic of universal panegyric in Great Britain. The public prints teemed with honourable testimony to their bravery. On the arrival of the news of this affair, the King issued a warrant conferring upon the regiment the title of "Royal," so that ever after it was known as the 42nd

Royal Highlanders. They contributed greatly to the success of the expedition sent to the West Indies, to capture those islands from the French and Spaniards. In Hindostan, Highlanders were the best troops of Coote, Lake, and Wellesley, annihilating the power of Hyder Ali, the Mahrattas, and Tippoo, in the battlefields of Porto Novo, Mangalore, Seringapatam, Assaye, Argaum, Delhi, Laswaree. In Europe and Egypt, the prestige acquired by the Highland regiments in the wars with Napoleon is still an heirloom.

Scotland is justly proud of her national regiments, and gives them the heartiest and warmest reception when permitted to visit their native land. The reception given by Edinburgh to the "Black Watch," on its return from France in 1818, is an instance of how Scotland welcomes her brave soldiers. It is thus described by the eminent engineer, James Nasmyth, an eye-witness:—"The 'Black Watch' returned to England in the beginning of the year, and set out on their march towards Edinburgh. They were everywhere received with enthusiasm, crowds turned out to meet them and to cheer them. When the first division of the regiment approached Edinburgh, almost the entire population turned out to welcome them. At Musselburgh, six miles off, the road was so crowded and thronged with people as to be impassable. When the soldiers reached Piershill, two miles off, the road was so thronged that it took them two hours to reach the Castle. I was on a balcony in the

upper part of the High Street, and my father, mother, and sisters were with me. We had waited very long, but at last we heard the distant sound of the cheers, which came on and on, louder and louder. The High Street was wedged with people, excited and anxious. There seemed scarcely room for a regiment to march through them. The house tops and windows were crowded with spectators. It was a grand sight, the high gabled houses reaching as far as the eye could see, St. Giles with its mural crown, the Tron-Kirk in the distance and the picturesque details of the buildings, all added to the effectiveness of the scene. At last the head of the gallant band appeared, the red coats gradually wedged their way through the crowd, amidst the ringing of bells and the cheers of the spectators. Every window was in a wave of gladness, and every house top was in a fever of excitement. As the red line passed our balcony, with Colonel Dick at its head, we saw a sight that can never be forgotten. The red and white plumes, the tattered colours riddled with bullets, the glittering bayonets, were seen amidst the crowd that thronged around the gallant heroes, amidst tears and cheers, and handshakings and shouts of excitement. The mass of men appeared to be like a solid body moving slowly along, the soldiers being almost hidden amongst the crowd. At last they passed, the pipers and drums playing a Highland march, and the 'Forty Twa' slowly entered the Castle. It was perhaps the most extraordinary scene ever witnessed in Edinburgh."

No part of the Highlands sent forth more gallant soldiers, in proportion to the population, than that part of Sutherland called "Duthaich Mhic Aoidh." The martial spirit actuating the population of this territory has often been remarked upon by historians and statisticians, especially the parishes of Farr and Tongue. These parishes supplied the most and the best men. The periodical depletion of the population by the several regiments raised in those years was commented upon by the bards in song, and by none more comically than by Rob Donn on various occasions. When a district like the Mackay territory sent forth one-eighth of its population, the martial spirit of the clan, their affection for their chiefs and chieftains, and the consideration of duty they owed to them and the Sovereign, must have been of a high order. At no time since the thirty-years' war in Germany were that spirit and relative duty so well evinced as in the latter part of the eighteenth century, when wars with France were frequent, and the ambition of Napoleon threatened to overwhelm every country in Europe, and reduce them to the domination of France. Then it was that Highlanders proved to the world their Caledonian prowess.

In this dread turmoil, when the regular army of the country was sent abroad to fight its battles, it became necessary for internal defence to raise regiments to serve for a limited period within the bounds of the country. The Government of the day looked to the Highlanders, and made appeals