

A haunting bellow reverberates from the hills and moors of the Scottish highlands. A chill runs up the spines of the enemies of the Scots. This unearthly noise, this blast of war, comes from a sheepskin bag with twin wooden appendages. As the only instrument to be declared a weapon of war, the bagpipes remain a Scottish-associated tradition that has found a home in the hearts of people from many backgrounds over the years.

The United States Marine Corps boasts the slogan, "The Few, the Proud." Bagpipers can claim a similar title. In the Corps today serve some of these special few and proud who cling to an ancient warrior tradition and blast their challenges to the enemies abroad. These men and women remain proud to claim their titles as they belt out "The Marines' Hymn"—bagpipe style.

One such Marine is Captain Justin B. Stodghill, Marine Corps Base Hawaii at Kaneohe Bay.

Capt Stodghill joined the USMC on April 10, 1995. Since that time, every letter or e-mail Stodghill sends ends with "Yours Aye and Semper Fidelis," bearing witness to his two loves: his Scottish ancestry—"Yours Aye" ("Yours Always") and his Corps—"Semper Fidelis."

Stodghill understands the life of a Marine piper from both the enlisted side and the officer's side. When then-Corporal Stodghill was stationed in Okinawa, Japan, he founded and served as Pipe Major for the Okinawa Highlanders, a pipe band made up of active-duty Marines as well as representatives from the Army, Navy and Air Force. As if this were not time-consuming enough, Stodghill played all over the island, performed for every branch of the armed forces, traveled to Hong Kong and Iwo Jima and ended with more than 300 official engagements. As an officer, Stodghill has stacked his resume with engagements in such places as Iwakuni, Japan; Hawaii; and the National Cathedral in Washington, D.C. In 2000, Stodghill began the Marines' Own Highlanders Pipe Band in Hawaii and maintained the band for about a year.

Birthday balls, dinings in/dinings out, mess nights, changes of command, cake-cutting ceremonies, funerals and other events make up the spare time of a Marine piper. Even retired Marine pipers continue to serve.

Master Sergeant Phillip Plessinger, USMC (Ret) epitomizes the saying "Once a Marine, Always a Marine." Plessinger learned the art of bagpiping in 1996 from Stodghill while both men were stationed in Okinawa.

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Above: Marines of the Quantico Highlanders performed during the Quantico, Va., Christmas Parade in December 2002: (front row, left to right) Major Fred Woodaman, Maj Greg Trevarthen, Cpl Jason Gowdy and (back row, left to right) Maj Pat Carroll, Col Barry Cronin, Capt George D. "Donnie" Hasseltine.

Opposite page: Capt Justin B. "Piper" Stodghill sported the USMC Leatherneck tartan as the lone bagpiper at Honolulu's Twilight Military Tattoo in March 2002. (Photo digitally enhanced)

Plessinger said, "My mission now is to still play for the Marine Corps when requested and, as a veteran, be able to provide my services to honor those who have gone before us. It is sad to hear and see that the support isn't there or it is getting harder to find someone to send those on before us. You hear stories that there was no trumpeter available, not enough people to do the rifle volleys, or 'Taps' had to be played off a record or tape."

Despite a rich piping background, Headquarters, U.S. Marine Corps never has recognized officially any piper or pipe band composed of Marines.

Pipers serve the Corps in a silent, mostly unnoticed way. Now with the organization of the Marine Pipers Network (www.marinepipers.com), these few and proud men and women are finding a way to show the important role they play in everyday life in the Corps.

Begun in September 2002, the Marine Pipers Network's goal is "to achieve official recognition for Marine pipers." The network provides a "unifying support network for Marine pipers around the globe" and "strives to unite Marine pipers who serve 'in every clime and place.'" Already the network has helped in the

formation of the Quantico Highlanders Pipe Band.

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Corporal Dain W. Cole, a Marine musician who has played the pipes for nearly two years, said, "It has been my great pleasure to be affiliated with Captain Stodghill at various ceremonies where he has played the pipes both solo and accompanied by the Marine Corps Forces Pacific Band.

"At these ceremonies I've witnessed much intrigue from the fellow Marines at the pipe playing. However, I think due to the lack of knowledge of the history of pipes in the Marine Corps, the full respect for them is not given. I feel they pass on a fine heritage of tradition that is not widely known about that has been part of our Corps since its inception.

"As ceremonial units, we are the keepers of many traditions; as Marines, we are obligated never to forget those who went before us and to continue those traditions into the future."

Marines stationed at the Barracks in Londonderry, Northern Ireland, in 1943 began the first organized Marine pipe band, which lasted about three years and played for such dignitaries as the Queen of England and President Franklin D. Roosevelt.

In 1948 a Marine officer stationed at