

PORTSOY SOLDIERS AT THE WESTERN FRONT



6th Gordon Highlander officers in France

Courtesy of The Gordon Highlanders Museum

The majority of recruits from Portsoy joined the 6th Gordon Highlanders and fought at the Western Front

The first trenches were made there in the autumn of 1914 and, as winter set in, the opposing armies had dug-in along a line which eventually stretched 440 miles, from the North Sea to Switzerland. All hope of an early victory had gone. This had become a war of attrition: the wearing down of the enemy to the point of collapse, through continuous losses in battle. The Gordon Highlanders eventually lost 9,000 men on the Western Front, from 21 battalions. Inevitably, this loss was felt in Portsoy.



6th Gordon Highlanders digging trenches in France

Courtesy of The Gordon Highlanders Museum

CHARLES RIDDOCH'S STORY

Surname (Block letters): RIDDOCH

Christian name: Charles

Date & Place of birth: 1893, Portsoy

Occupation before enlisting: with Messrs. Wordie & Co., carting contractors

Name and address of next of kin: Mr. Charles Riddoch, 30 Church Street, Portsoy

Enlistment date: September 1914

Rank: Private

Regiment or Corps: The 6th Gordon Highlanders

Date and place of death: 22nd May 1918, King George's Hospital, London, from wounds to the head

Where buried and/or commemorated: Portsoy Cemetery

Awards: Private Riddoch was honoured with a military funeral in Portsoy

Summary of service in WWI

Charles Riddoch was one of the first to respond to the call for recruits in Portsoy in 1914. He went to France with the 6th Gordons in January 1915 and saw considerable action. Charles was wounded on two previous occasions, including at the battle of Neuve Chapelle.

His remains were taken from London to Portsoy by train. The following day the coffin, covered by a Union Jack, was escorted to the cemetery by 80 members of the Banffshire Regiment of Volunteers, a pipe band and a large number of the public. Hundreds of spectators watched the procession as it passed along to the Cemetery, where a large crowd had gathered.

"The scene was picturesque, yet most pathetic, and brought home forcibly to all the true meaning of the great world war now being waged."

The Banffshire Reporter

One of Charles' brothers was also lost in the war. A third brother served in The Royal Naval Reserve and survived.



Charles' funeral procession heading towards Portsoy cemetery

Portsoy Men Killed in Action.



Corporal MORRISON. Private McWILLIAM.

Corporal Morrison and Private John McWilliam, of A Company 6th Gordon Highlanders, who died while fighting for King and country in France, were both natives of Portsoy.

Many soldiers were buried on the battle fields



Men of the 6th Gordon Highlanders having a rest, France. Trench warfare often meant periods of inactivity and boredom

Courtesy of The Gordon Highlanders Museum

In June 1916 the 6th Gordons joined the 51st (Highland) Division. They were in action in the Battles of the Somme, The Battle of Pilkem Ridge and The Battle of Menin Road Ridge, as well as the Cambrai Operations. They took part in the Christmas Truce of 1914, when British and German soldiers at the Front sang carols together, and buried their dead during the unofficial ceasefire.

The following Special Order by the Brigadier-General Commanding, 20th Infantry Brigade, will be communicated to all ranks.

The Brigadier-General Commanding desires to congratulate all ranks of his brigade of the part they have taken in the successful operations of the last five days round NEUVE CHAPELLE. The heroism and devotion to duty of the Regimental Officers, non-commissioned officers, and men have been beyond all praise - share all have done well it is difficult to pick out any one individual Battalion but the Brigadier was more than pleased to note the gallant conduct displayed by all ranks of the 6th (Territorial) Battalion Gordon Highlanders in the action of the 13th instant. Although joining the Brigade who were already seasoned to fighting, they showed themselves fully qualified to keep up the high standard which the 20th Brigade had justly earned for itself and the Brigade is proud to have them with them. Although deeply deploring the loss of many gallant comrades, the Brigadier knows that all ranks must feel elated at their victory over the Germans, and he feels certain that the troops will do as well in the future as they have done in the past.

Special Order mentioning the bravery of the 6th Gordon Highlanders.

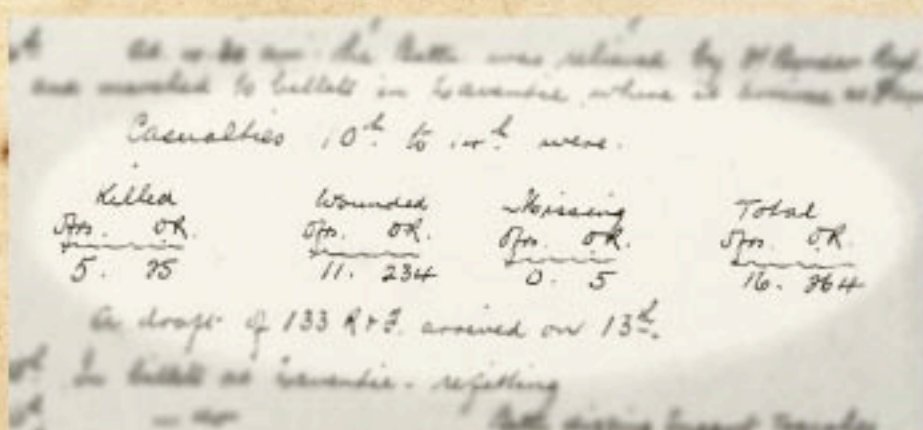
National Archives WO/95/1657

The 6th Gordon Highlanders earned praise for their "gallant conduct" at the battle of Neuve Chapelle in March 1915 which resulted in limited British gains (300 yards on a front of half a mile). However, an estimated 12,500 British men were killed, wounded or missing after the battle.



6th Gordon Highlanders at the start of the Battle of Cambrai, November 20th 1917

Courtesy of The Gordon Highlanders Museum



Extract from the diary of the commander of the 6th Gordon Highlanders, showing 280 casualties over a 4-day period

National Archives WO/95/1657