

PIPE-MAJORS IN THE MAKING

At Castle School

On St. Andrews' Day it is interesting to note that scattered throughout the world today are hundreds of pipers, among them Canadians, Australians, New Zealanders, and even two Americans, who owe something of their skill to a Scotsman who has probably taught more pipers than any other man in the world.

He is Pipe-Major William Ross, doyen of Scottish pipers and instructor at the Edinburgh Castle School of Piping. Born in Glenstrathfarrar, which he describes as "the loneliest glen in Scotland", young Willie Ross began to play the bagpipes when he was eight years old.

His father was a piper and so he progressed quickly but even more important — and unusual — his mother, too, was a piper. When she was 87 she surprised the broadcasting world by sending a broadcast over the air from the Edinburgh studios of the B. B. C.

Young Willie joined the Scots Guards in 1906 and served with them through both the Boer War and the First World War. His

(Continued in column 8)



Six of the Scottish regiments are represented in this group of pipers making their way from their billets in Edinburgh Castle past Mons Meg and St. Margaret's Chapel to the School of Piping. In the present course are pipers from the Royal Scots, Royal Scots Fusiliers, King's Own Scottish Borderers, Highland Light Infantry, Gordon Highlanders and Argyll and Sutherland Highlanders.



Corporal Donald MacKinnon, 1st Battalion, King's Own Scottish Borderers, was born not far from Dunvegan Castle, Skye, where the famous MacCrimmon pipers practised their art. He has been playing since he was a boy, but during the war abandoned his career as an Army piper to become a fighter pilot in the R.A.F. After the war he returned to the Army. "I couldn't stay away from the pipes," he says.

(Continued from column 8)

Queen's Medal of the South African War carries eight bars.

His Life's Work

Then in 1919 he settled down to what has become his life's work, the making of pipe-majors for the regiments of Scotland and for many another organization, some overseas. In that year he took over the school in Crown Square, Edinburgh Castle, and in the 30 years that have followed a stream of pipers, numbered in hundreds, has passed through the school.

Normally "pupils" spend six months at the school, learning the theory and practice of piping, but during the war years special courses lasting only one month were organised, and in this way 713 pipers received tuition.

With the return of peace, the six-monthly courses — with six pipers in each course — were begun again. Pipers come to the school as advanced players who may some day become pipe-majors. At the end of their six-months' tuition they undergo a two-day examination. Part of their test is the writing in manuscript form of an air on the pipes.

The standard of piping today is fairly good, says Pipe-Major Ross, and the popularity of the pipes is growing all the time. Modestly he eschews any personal credit for the job that is being done and gives most of the praise to the Pibalachd Society of Scotland. "They are doing a great service to the piping world by financing this school," he says.

Of his own part he will only add: "Music is a gift, and if I hadn't been given it, it is breaking stones at the side of the road that I would be doing today."



Teacher at the School for 30 years, Pipe-Major William Ross is known to pipers the world over.



Pipe-Major G. Stoddart, Royal Scots Fusiliers, interrupts his playing of the music on the blackboard while Pipe-Major Ross clarifies a point for the rest of the class. On the walls are Pipe-Major Ross's photographs and cuttings, collected by him since 1919.



Pipe-Major W. Anderson, Gordon Highlanders, was among the men who went forward with the 51st Division at El Alamein. Here he is memorising a pibroch from music.



Corporal MacKinnon, and Lance-Corporal J. Burns of the Royal Scots, write in manuscript the music of an air which has just been played on the chanter.



ABOVE — Piper Donald MacLeod, Glen William, P.E.I., who is a wartime product of the Edinburgh Castle School of Piping.

Piper MacLeod was a member of the North Nova Scotia Highlanders of the 9th Highland Brigade of the Canadian Third Division. He joined the unit in 1940 and served with it until the end of the war.

A regimental piper, on D-Day, June 6, 1944, Piper MacLeod piped "D" Company (P.E.I.) onto the beaches of Normandy at Bernières-sur-Mer to the tune of "The 42nd" — the company March Past. While deep in water he also played "The Pibroch of Donald Dhu" the March Past of the Pictou "A" Company — some of whose personnel were aboard the landing craft.

The pipes and drums of the 9th Brigade also echoed in the Reichswald Forest when the Brigade prepared to join the 51st Highland Division for the crossing of the Rhine.

Piper MacLeod will be a guest piper at St. Andrew's dinner tomorrow night.

Pictures, courtesy "Weekly Scotsman", Edinburgh.