

An Litir Bheag

le Ruairidh MacIlleathain

An Litir Bheag is a shortened and simplified version of Ruairidh's Litir do Luchd-ionnsachaidh (also available on the BBC website), designed for those who are at an earlier stage of learning Gaelic. The topic each week is the same as Litir do Luchd-ionnsachaidh so that, once the Litir Bheag is mastered, a student of the language might wish to try the full Litir. This is Litir Bheag 623 (which corresponds to Litir 927). Ruairidh can be contacted at rodny.maclean@bbc.co.uk.

We have been remembering the First [World] War over the past three years. A surprising link was made in the war between thousands of Highland soldiers and Bedford in England. The soldiers are remembered as 'The Bedford Highlanders'.

The soldiers belonged to the Highland Division. They were drawn from the Gordon Highlanders, the Seaforth Highlanders, the Argyll and Sutherland Highlanders and the Cameron Highlanders. They went there initially in August 1914.

They went to Bedford on more than sixty trains. Within two days, seventeen thousand men from the north of Scotland reached the town. Bedford had never seen the like. A woman asked a soldier where they were from. He replied, 'Ross-shire'. She wasn't familiar with his speech. She heard 'Russia'. And a rumour went around that they were from Russia!

But the uncertainty didn't last long. The soldiers wore kilts. Some were playing the Highland pipes. They were Scottish, for sure!

Many of the soldiers were

Tha sinn air a bhith a' cuimhneachadh a' Chiad Chogaidh thar nan trì bliadhna a dh'fhalbh. Chaidh ceangal iongantach a thogail anns a' chogadh eadar mìltean de shaighdearan Gàidhealach agus Bedford ann an Sasainn. Tha na saighdearan air an cuimhneachadh mar 'The Bedford Highlanders'.

Bhuineadh na saighdearan don Highland Division. Bha iad air an tarraing às na Gòrdanaich, na Sìophortaich, Rèisimeid Earra-Ghàidheal is Chataibh agus na Camshronaich. Chaidh iad ann an toiseach anns an Lùnastal naoi ceud deug is ceithir-deug (1914).

Chaidh iad a Bhedford air còrr is seasgad trèana. Taobh a-staigh dà latha, ràinig seachd mìle deug duine à ceann a tuath na h-Alba am baile. Chan fhaca Bedford a leithid riamh. Dh'fhaighnich boireannach de shaighdear cò às a bha iad. Fhreagair e, 'Ross-shire'. Cha robh i eòlach air a' chainnt aige. Chuala i 'Russia'. Agus chaidh fathann timcheall gun robh iad às an Ruis!

Ach cha do mhair a' mhì-chinnt fada. Bha fèilidhean air na saighdearan. Bha feadhainn a' seinn na pìoba mòire. Bha iad Albannach, le cinnt!

Bha cuid mhath de na saighdearan a'

billeted with families. And the two peoples got on well. The domestic facilities were new to some, however. Water – cold and hot – ran from taps. And there was gas for cooking. There was no sign of wells or peat fires!

The soldiers were training for the war. The parks were full of them. When Hogmanay came, the local people were full of dread about how the soldiers would behave. But everything was fine.

At Easter time 1915, Highland games were held. Fifteen hundred men took part in the competitions. Fourteen thousand spectators watched them.

And the soldiers weren't only from the north of Scotland. Some came from the local area, and from London, to join the Highland regiments. But one great difficulty arose. That was disease. I'll tell you about that in the next Litir.

fuireach còmhla ri teaghlaichean. Agus fhuair an dà shluagh air adhart gu math. Bha na goireasan dachaigh ùr do chuid, ge-tà. Bha uisge – fuar agus teth – a' ruith à tapaichean. Agus bha gas ann airson còcaireachd. Cha robh sgeul air tobraichean no teintean mònach!

Bha na saighdearan a' trèanadh airson a' chogaidh. Bha na pàircean làn dhiubh. Nuair a thàinig Oidhche Challainn, bha iomagain air muinntir a' bhaile mun dol a-mach aig na saighdearan. Ach bha a h-uile càil rianail gu leòr.

Aig àm na Càisge, naoi ceud deug is còig-deug (1915), bha geamannan Gàidhealach ann. Ghabh mìle gu leth duine àite sna farpaisean. Bha ceithir mìle deug neach-amhairc a' coimhead orra.

Agus chan ann a-mhàin à ceann a tuath na h-Alba a bha na saighdearan. Thàinig feadhainn às an sgìre fhèin, agus à Lunnainn, airson ballrachd a ghabhail anns na rèisimeidean Gàidhealach. Ach dh'èirich aon duilgheadas mòr. B' e sin galar. Innsidh mi dhuibh mu dheidhinn sin anns an ath Litir.