

Beat: Sports

Sporting Battalion Honoured

Scottish Football Hall of Fame

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USPA NEWS - McCrae's Battalion was the affectionate name given by the people of Edinburgh to the 16th (Service) Battalion of the Royal Scots, raised from volunteers in 1914 as part of the New Armies called to the Colours by Lord Kitchener. Largely composed of professional and amateur sportsmen.

McCrae's Battalion 1914

Team nomination; The 16th (Service) Battalion of the Royal Scots was raised by Sir George McCrae a few months after the outbreak of the First World War in 1914 and was the first of the so-called "Footballer's" or "Sporting" battalions. During this early period of the war 16 players connected to Heart of Midlothian FC enlisted in the army with many of them joining "McCrae's Own". The battalion also received footballers from a number of other clubs including Raith Rovers, Falkirk, Dunfermline Athletic, Hibernian, St Bernards and East Fife. Hundreds of supporters particularly from Hearts and Hibs signed up as did notable players and athletes from other sports.

In France the battalion suffered high casualty rates during the opening days of the first Battle of the Somme in July 1916; the loss of 12 officers and 573 men accounted for more than three quarters of its attacking strength. A memorial cairn, erected in 2004, now sits at Contalmaison, where many members of the battalion lost their lives.

(Source: Scottish football hall of fame)

1. McCrae's Battalion

James Boyd Killed in action, 3 August 1916.
Alfred Briggs Wounded in action, 1 July 1916; discharged invalid.
Patrick Crossan Wounded in action twice; gassed; discharged invalid.
Duncan Currie Killed in action, 1 July 1916.
Ernest Ellis Killed in action, 1 July 1916.
Norman Findlay Discharged to trade, September 1916.
James Frew Transferred to 1st Lowland (City of Edinburgh) RGA.

* Thomas Gracie Died on service, 23 October 1915

James Hazeldean Wounded in action, 1 July 1916; discharged invalid.
James Low Commissioned 6th Seaforth Highlanders; wounded in action twice.
Edward McGuire Wounded in action, 1 July 1916; discharged invalid.
Annan Ness Twice wounded; commissioned 16th RS; Lt 9th RS.
Robert Preston Transferred to HLI; wounded in action.
Henry Wattie Killed in action, 1 July 1916.
William Wilson Transferred 13th RS; returned to 16th RS; wounded in action.

2. Other units

John Allan 9th Royal Scots. Killed in action, 22 April 1917.
Colin Blackhall 1st Lowland (City of Edinburgh) RGA.
James Gilbert 1st Lowland (City of Edinburgh) RGA.
Harry Graham Gloucester Regiment; transferred to RAMC.
Charles Hallwood Royal Engineers
James Macdonald 13th Royal Scots.
John Mackenzie 1st Lowland (City of Edinburgh) Royal Garrison Artillery.
Robert Malcolm Royal Scots; transferred to Machine Gun Corps.

John Martin 5th Royal Scots; twice wounded; discharged invalid.
Robert Mercer 1st Lowland (City of Edinburgh) RGA; gassed; discharged invalid.
George Miller 9th Royal Scots; wounded.
Neil Moreland 8th HLI; transferred to 7th Royal Scots; wounded three times.
George Sinclair Royal Field Artillery; injured on service; discharged 1915.
James Speedie 7th Cameron Highlanders; killed in action, 25 September 1915.
Philip Whyte City of Edinburgh Fortress Company, RE; Gloucester Regiment.
John Wilson 9th Royal Scots; wounded in action twice.

3. Roll of Dead

John Allan Killed in action on 22 April 1917.
James Boyd Killed in action on 3 August 1916.
Patrick Crossan Died on 24 April 1933.
Duncan Currie Killed in action on 1 July 1916.
James Duckworth Died on 25 August 1920.
Ernest Ellis Killed in action on 1 July 1916.
Thomas Gracie Died on 23 October 1915.
Alexander Lyon Died on 14 February 1915.
Robert Mercer Died on 23 April 1926.
James Speedie Killed in action on 25 September 1915.
Henry Wattie Killed in action on 1 July 1916.

* On March 1915 Tom Gracie (Heart of Midlothian F.C) was diagnosed with leukemia, a prognosis he had shared only with manager McCartney. Despite his illness and against medical recommendation he decided to continue to play with Hearts and train with his battalion, and scored 4 times during that month. He was still with the battalion when they were sent south to Ripon in June for further training but within weeks he had succumbed to fatigue and was committed to hospital in Leeds for treatment, before being transferred back to Scotland. Gracie died on 23 October 1915 in Stobhill Hospital in his hometown Glasgow and was buried at Craigton Cemetery.

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