

the question came. "Sir," he is reputed to have said, "If we, your Regiment, are not allowed to retain our distinctive dress, may we, at least, wear an obvious emblem to show at a glance that we are Cameron Highlanders? May I suggest a hackle to be worn behind the cap badge in the balmoral?" "Yes," the King replied, "I like that idea. And what colour were you thinking the hackle should be?" "The most suitable colour would obviously be royal blue, Sir," replied the Colonel.

Lieut.-Col. Wimberley was delighted with the informal reply he had received. When the parade was over, letters were at once written to the Colonel of the Regiment (Major-General N. J. G. Cameron, C.B., C.M.G.), to spread the good news, to G.H.Q. in France, and to "Willie" Anderson's, who were told to produce 800 hackles for the 1st Battalion. This honour was to be no Battalion trophy, the hackle was to be worn by all wearers of the 79th tartan, who were to be deprived of the kilt by War Office orders.

The 1st Battalion records show that the officers and the pipe band wore the Blue Hackle for the first time on 11th February, 1940, at the Beating of Retreat in Arras. The Blue Hackle was not taken into general use by the 1st Battalion until the 14th March, 1940. The first mention of the Blue Hackle in the "79th News" does not appear until the October, 1940, number, when the following paragraph was part of the Editorial:—

#### "The Blue Hackle"

"A slow march entitled 'The Royal Blue Hackle' is printed elsewhere in this issue. This pipe tune was composed by L/C. J. Margach, the Queen's Own Cameron Highlanders, and dedicated to Lieut.-Col. D. N. Wimberley, M.C., who was in command of the Battalion which H.M. The King, Colonel-in-Chief, inspected in France in 1939. The wearing of the Royal Blue Hackle with the balmoral was then instituted to mark the first occasion on which His Majesty visited a Battalion in the field."

The reader now knows that there was more to it than that.

The 1st Battalion after the King's inspection returned to their daily digging.

The kilt, as usual, was the dress for all purposes, whether unloading trains, mixing concrete, or the more normal digging. The only trousered personnel who left the billet area were the M.T. drivers, and they, in most instances, wore tartan trews. Even the padre, Frank MacLauchlan (now minister of the Old High Church, Inverness), was to be seen taking the air dressed in his Cameron kilt. It was not until the end of February, 1940, that the threatened battle dress arrived in the QM's store—and there the trousers were to stay!

Lieut.-Col. Wimberley had now left the Battalion on promotion, and his place as C.O. had been taken by Lieut.-Col. Pat Miller (now Brig. G. P. Rose-Miller, D.S.O., M.C., retd.), who followed Lieut.-Col. Wimberley's lead in refusing to countenance the wearing of trousers by the 1st Battalion. In the back of everybody's mind was the hope that, as in the 1914 War, the War Office would still rescind their order. The Battalion was, therefore, determined to prove that the kilt was suitable for modern warfare. You never saw a member of the 1st Battalion either on or off duty dressed otherwise than in the kilt. Battle dress tops were starting to be issued and these all had the large square patch sewn on the sleeve. The writer's battle dress top had brass pips, brass Cameron shoulder buttons, and "collar dogs" — though officers did not normally in peace time wear "collar dogs," it was agreed that any embellishment that made the wearer more easily recognisable as a Cameron was all to the good.

The "phoney" war ended on 10th May, 1940, and the Battalion advanced into Belgium to take up positions East of Brussels, not very far from the Battlefield of Waterloo, where our forbears had fought 125 years before. It is not intended to write of the withdrawal to Dunkirk, except to touch on the wearing of the kilt. Various stories have been spread about the wearing of the kilt by the 1st Battalion, including one Press account of the 1st Battalion throwing away their trousers, donning the kilt, and attacking the Germans. This must be untrue because the 1st Battalion had no trousers to throw away. They advanced into Belgium in the kilt, they fought their way back to Dunkirk in the