

## Highland Broadsword in New Zealand

**Researched and compiled by Dr John Osborne MG DTT PhD FSG, October 2015 copyright**

The Basket Hilted Broadsword (Claidheamh Leathann) of various patterns was introduced in the 17th century and later was carried by the Black Watch (*Reicudan Dhu*) which was raised as a militia in 1725 to occupy and keep peace in the Scottish Highlands, members were recruited from local clans. The Regiment of the Line was formed officially in 1739 as the 42nd Highland Regiment of Foot & first mustered in 1740, by 1788 there were six "highland" infantry regiments in the British Army.

In 1798 an official pattern basket hilted broadsword was introduced for Highland Officers (& Non Commissioned Officers), with a gilt brass basket hilt, with a black leather scabbard with gilt brass fittings and a

frog catch. The blades normally with a single fuller were made by several swordsmiths including Gill, Osborne, Woolley and in Solingen Germany.

In 1821 - 1822, a major review was undertaken of British Military Swords but the Highland pattern remained similar to the 1798 pattern with either a gilt brass or iron basket hilt and a straight cut and thrust blade 33 inches long and 1 1/8" inch wide at the shoulder. The hard wood grip was fish-skin covered and wire bound. The scabbard was black leather with gilt steel mounts, and had some loose rings as well as a frog catch enabling the sword to be worn with either slings or a frog.



**C1745 broadsword with 35" blade made by Andrea Ferrara, the ribbon & hearts steel basket has a red velvet lining and fish skin grip**



**Ribbon & hearts iron basket hilt with a red velvet lining & fish skin grip.**

In 1828 a new pattern broadsword was introduced with a steel basket hilt, for greater strength but officers were permitted to continue wearing their gilt brass basket pattern until they "wore out". The basket lining was of thin buff leather, covered with British scarlet baize (a woollen cloth), edged with blue silk ribbon, and topped off with a red silk tassel. The lining was said to keep the hand warm and gave some protection to the fingers from cuts and thrusts, the tassel was originally to prevent chafing and attractiveness. The scabbard was still of black leather although with steel mounts, ending in a ball chape. By 1834, field officers (i.e. those of the rank of major and above as well as adjutants were also permitted to use a full steel scabbard with loose rings, still ending in a ball at the end of the chape. The blade length, grip and hilt size could vary to suit the officer. In 1868, the combined



**Pattern 1798 basket hilted broadsword**



**Donald McLean's Pattern 1828 Basket Hilted Broad Sword & black Leather Scabbard with steel mounts, chape missing.**

1828 pattern steel basket hilt broadsword and 1834 pattern full steel scabbard combination was confirmed as the dress pattern and brown leather scabbard for field use for all Highland officers,

Highland Officers and other Scots who settled and were commissioned in the New Zealand Colonial Forces frequently carried the broad sword. (Commissioned officers were required to buy their own sword of regulation pattern). Donald McLean was a Scottish Highlander, born in 1820, he came to New Zealand in 1840 and In March 1844, he was appointed a sub-protector in Taranaki, he had to mediate in a diverse range of conflicts between Maori and settler, and he acquired (mana) standing among Maori for his knowledge of their language and his respect for their customs. The Protectorate Department (1840-1846) was under missionary and teacher George Clarke, who held the title of Chief Protector. Its purpose was to protect the rights of Māori people guaranteed under the Treaty of Waitangi. When Governor George Grey abolished the Protectorate Department in 1846, he recognised McLean's skill and retained him as a police inspector in Taranaki. McLean and his troop of Maori police administered firm and fair justice. In 1853 McLean was appointed chief land purchase commissioner in Taranaki and Hawkes Bay. When the NZ Land Wars resumed in mid 1863 he was made a general government agent in the Self Governing (1858-77) Province of Hawke's Bay. He became fully involved in the East Coast wars and marshaled settler defence corps effectively, but he could not stop the incursions of the Hauhau from 1865. In 1866 he was elected to Parliament as the Member for Napier and realized that the renewed fighting in 1868 could threaten most North Island settlements. In 1869 McLean became Native and

Defence Minister in the Fox government which also involved him in the East Coast War. He was knighted in 1874, resigned ministerial office in December 1876 due to ill health and he died in Napier on 5 January 1877, aged 56.

On 20 June 1870 Governor G F Brown advised that Queen Victoria had sent six Swords of Honour to be presented to certain Maori chiefs distinguished for their loyalty and valour to the crown during the NZ Land Wars 1865-70. These Chiefs were Te Keepa Te Rangihwinui, Rapata Wahawaha, Mokena Kohere, Pokeha Te Taranui, Ihaka Whaanga, and Henare Tomoana.



**Major Kemp**

**Major Rapata**

In a ceremony at the Mount Cook Barracks in Wellington on 20 June 1870, special broadswords made by Wilkinson Sword in 1869 were presented to the six Chiefs for their service to the Crown. The inscription on the blade: 'Given by Queen Victoria to (name of Chief) for his unfailing loyalty and valour'.  
*See next page.*

Native and Defence Minister Sir Donald McLean, believed that the NZ Colonial Government should formally acknowledge Māori chiefs who with their followers fought on behalf of the Crown and that the broadsword would be a most suitable gift. The sword together with the special red Russian leather shoulder sword belt with silver plated steel buckle, slings and other silver plated steel fittings and the brown leather covered wooden scabbard with silver plated steel fittings with two rings and frog catch.



**Red Russian Leather shoulder belt and slings**



**Maori Chief Te Keepa Te Rangihwinui (Major Kemp) Sword of Honour, silver plated hilt with engraving on front and side panels**



**Sword of Honour with traditional ribbons and hearts gifted by Queen Victoria to the other five Maori Chiefs**



readjustment and a more neat appearance. Officers used to wear fancy gold and silver plates with elaborate

engravings. Soldiers wore brass plates, usually with numerical or other design indicative of their regiments. The Minister for Defence Donald McLean, being a highlander considered Maori chiefs as clan leaders and the basket hilted broadsword as the most appropriate sword of Honour for them. The six swords, scabbards, belts and slings cost 200 pounds.

A shoulder belt is a wide belt worn usually over the right shoulder and across the body. It was also used to carry cartridge boxes, a bayonet, or a sword with a frog for field use or slings for dress use, initially shoulder belts had buckles. In the second half of the 18th century the British army replaced buckles with shoulder belt plates. The latter ones were solid metal plates fixed with two studs to one end of the belt and used a hook to pass through one of several holes by the other end. This arrangement allowed for quick

readjustment and a more neat appearance. Officers used to wear fancy gold and silver plates with elaborate



**Pattern 1828 Non Commissioned Officer's basket hilted broadsword, single fuller 33" blade 1 1/8" wide at the shoulder.**



**Highland Combat broadsword**



**Naval broadsword**



**Acid etching on the naval broadsword c1880, Victoria Crown over fouled anchor**

From the 1870s a number of highland regiments adopted a cruciform hilt for use in "proper" combat, the full basket hilt was removable by unscrewing the pommel nut to allow the fitting of the cruciform hilt. Each highland regiment that adopted this cruciform hilt had quillons ending in differently shaped knobs. The reason for the adoption of this hilt was that the basket was considered too constrictive for the hand in battle. The sword above made by Wilkinson has a 33" blade, 1 1/8" wide at the shoulder.

On 17<sup>th</sup> April 1858 a New Zealand Naval Artillery Volunteer unit originally called "Coastguards" was formed in Auckland followed by 20 other units throughout New Zealand. Various cannon were acquired by the Colonial Government for coastal defence. Officers in NZ were part of the Royal Naval Reserve and carried the P1846 sword fitted with the Wilkinson pattern slightly curved flat back single fuller blade, however from the 1870s some Scottish / NZ naval officers preferred the straight twin grooved broadsword blade fitted to the regulation naval hilt, and had the sword and grip made to suit their size. The one above has a 29" blade 1 1/8" wide at shoulder.

On the 30<sup>th</sup> June 1885 the Commander of the NZ Colonial Forces, Commissioner (Major General) Whitmore, reported to the Colonial Government as follows: (extract) "There are now about 8,000 men of all ranks in the Colony serving in the various Corps. The apparent imminence of hostilities with Russia produced throughout New Zealand a demonstration of military enthusiasm. The Naval Artillery Volunteers at every port are a credit to the Colony. Henceforward I think the Naval Artillery will prove very valuable in carrying out our coast defences and can be used to reinforce the Permanent Force Batteries".

Some Scottish born, or with Scottish heritage, officers in the NZ Navals preferred broadsword bladed swords fitted with the regulation Naval gilt brass hilt and wire bound fish skin covered grip, black leather scabbard with gilt steel fittings.

The Dunedin Highland Rifles were formed in 1885, linked to the Black Watch and wearing the Black Watch Tartan and Sporrans originally with a strength of sixty-eight and Captain Alex McGregor in command. Armed with Snider Enfield Carbines and Yataghan sword bayonets, Officers with Dirks, Sgian



**P1828 brass basket hilt  
NCO's broadsword**



**Combat broadsword  
cruciform hilt**



**Naval hilt fitted with a  
broadsword blade**



**Napier Naval Artillery Volunteers with their swords, May 1894.**

In 1949 the NZ Scottish was reformed as the 1st Divisional Regiment (RNZAC), a mixed regular and territorial force unit and later 1st Armoured Car Regiment (NZ Scottish). First Colours were presented in 1963 to the New Zealand Scottish Regiment. The regiment is unique as the only armoured unit in NZ to carry Colours instead of a Guidon.

In 1979 the two squadrons were renamed 1 and 2 Scots, the former becoming an APC squadron equipped with M113A1 personnel carriers and the latter a composite squadron until it too became an APC squadron in 1975. In 1982 2 Scots became an anti-armour squadron and then in 1990 was retitled New Zealand Scottish. At the same time 1 Scots was disbanded and the regular force components amalgamated into Waikato/Wellington East Coast Squadron.



**Dunedin Highlanders, officers armed with Broadswords, Dirks and Sgian Dubh, All wearing the uniform and sporran of the Black Watch**

Dubh and Basket Hilted Broadswords. The Black Watch Uniform and Basket Hilted Broadsword was also adopted by the Auckland and Wellington Highland Rifles c1880s

The New Zealand Scottish Regiment (linked to the Black Watch - Royal Highland Regiment) was first raised 17 January 1939 as an infantry territorial unit where all members had to be of Scottish descent. The New Zealand Scottish Regiment Pipe Band was formed from the CMT 7<sup>th</sup> intake Pipers and Drummers from around New Zealand, all wearing the uniform and sporran of the Black Watch.

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