

WILLIAM (BILL) RAMSAY

Bill didn't start lessons on the pipes until his mid-thirties. His tutor was his uncle, Douglas Will. Bill progressed, in spite of part of a missing middle finger from an accident in his youth.

Bill eventually joined Uncle Doug's band, the St. John's Pipe Band and then moved on to the Queen's Own Cameron Highlanders. There he met some key people who would make an impact on him for the rest of his life. Hume Young and Bob Fraser were two of them. (Bill and Bob Fraser's lives would also become intertwined in their shared careers in the printing business.) Bill left the Cameron's when it became a little too time-consuming for someone who had three active teens at home. St. John's Pipe Band was not as demanding on his time, so he returned to them. Then the band became known as the ANAVETS 60 Pipes and Drums. To help their sound, Bill suggested they purchase new Warmac chanters. P/M Lyle Little was amazed at the improvement it made to the band, plus the setting of chanters became much easier.

Uncle Doug had taken on the responsibility as band director of the Heather Belle Ladies Pipe Band, and he enlisted Bill to help him out. After many years working with boys in the Boy Scout movement, being involved with females was a whole new experience for Bill! He enjoyed being a part of this organization. His main contribution to the band was in setting chanters and tuning drones. He attended various courses and seminars to learn about setting up a pipe band, and became quite skilled at it. For 25 years, Bill experienced many trips and adventures with the girls. There were two trips to Scotland, numerous competitions and a number of tours to places like Florida. The band consistently won competitions in Manitoba. They also won some medals in Scotland. In 1985 at the World's Pipe Band Competition they won the Rose Bowl for the best female band. Years later the Heather Belles put on a terrific anniversary banquet and Bill was there to help get their pipes in shape.

When P/M Little had to step down as Pipe Major of the ANAVET band due to ill health, Bill was named to take his place. Over the next ten years, Bill worked with the band on their sound and repertoire. Then it seemed time to turn the reins to a younger piper, Kirby Haines. However, Kirby's job moved him to the West coast, which pressed Bill back into service as pipe major once more!

Bill also spent a great amount of time teaching. Following the methods of Doug Will, he worked with a great number of people, young and old. Many of his students joined the band and became very valuable members.

Bill was very proud of the ANAVET Pipes and Drums. The camaraderie and good will that everyone experienced made it a pleasure to belong to the band. Over time, other bands have come and gone, but the ANAVETS continued to exist in harmony and were known to be friendly and easy to get along with. Some of the dearest friends he ever had were the members of ANAVETS. In 2004, Bill worked with Alf Mather to bring the band to the ANAVETS 303 Unit. The band has had a fulfilling experience being associated with Rockwood 303, and continues strong to this day. As Bill's health declined, he turned the reins over to Ian Conn, but Bill continued to play with the band at concerts and helped with the training of new pipers. In 2011, his friend Ian passed away with cancer, and the memorial was well attended by Bill and many other members of ANAVETS #303.

Bill poured his energies and vast knowledge into the writing and compiling of a book called "Through the Mists of Time – ANAVETS Unit 303 Pipes and Drums". This book not only documents the history of that band, but is also a treasure trove of information on many of Manitoba's key players in piping and drumming. This book has been a valuable source in providing biography information for the PPBAM's "Wall of Fame".

Full-time care for his dear wife Helen, followed by his own failing health has now made it impossible for Bill to come out to band events. He is held close in the hearts of his band mates, and visits to him find him as witty as ever.

Information compiled from Bill's own words and some editing by Robyn & Janet McCombe.