Bagpipes and tartans: The Coast Guard pipers

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The Coast Guard has submitted a great article on the history of bagpipes and thier use in the US Coast Guard Read More at the Coast Guard website Bagpipes and tartans: The Coast Guard pipers ANCHORAGE, Alaska - The history of the bagpipe is unclear. There are references to bagpipes as far back as the Roman Empire. The highland bagpipe, which are well known today, were developed in Scotland and Ireland. There are references to bagpipes in Ireland from the Dark Ages. In Scotland, Robert the Bruce's troops are said to have marched to bagpipes at the battle of Bannockburn in 1314. Today bagpipes are often used at the memorials of high ranking military and public officials. Many services have pipe bands most commonly police and fire departments across the country. The Coast Guard pipe band was developed in 2001 by Chief Warrant Officer Kevin Gilheany. Through several methods Gilheany was able to contact other accomplished bagpipe players throughout the Coast Guard and on August 2, 2001 the group met at Coast Guard Group Grand Haven, Mich., and played for the first time together. Their first tune was Semper Paratus. To join you need a Coast Guard affiliation that allows you to wear the uniform (active, retired, reserve, auxiliary and combat veteran) and some competency on pipes or drums. There are Coast Guardsman from all over America who play the bagpipes and make themselves available for events. Capt. Bruce McQueen in Juneau is the only piper in Alaska. He started piping in 1995 in Juneau with the local pipe band, Stroller White Pipes and Drums. McQueen joined the Coast Guard Pipe Band and played with them in Grand Haven in 2003, the first year they actually had the Coast Guard Tartan. He received initial instruction in Juneau from the local pipe major and also traveled to one and two week clinics in Tacoma and Port Townsend, Wash. and British Columbia. For the last several years he has studied with a solo instructor. While the Coast Guard Pipe Band does take some 'pipers and drummers in training', the band is made up primarily of Coast Guardsmen who can already play. Many of the other players have affiliations with non-Coast Guard bands where they live, just like McQueen. McQueen has played several retirements and change-of-command ceremonies for Coast Guard Officials in Alaska. You may have heard him last year if you attended the Coast Guard Foundation Dinner in Anchorage or the Coast Guard Day Picnic in Juneau. He has played at several civilian events such as weddings and memorials. Since McQueen is the only Coast Guard piper in Alaska the majority of his Coast Guard performances have been solo. I think the Coast Guard pipe band and individual solo pipers from the band provide a unique touch to special Coast Guard events, particularly if the event is too small to hire a full band,â€? McQueen said. â€œEven when there is another band, the piper can provide a unique addition. The word tartan refers to the plaid of the kilt. Each tartan is different and represents the family name of the wearer. The Coast Guard tartan came about in 2002. The design of the United States Coast Guard Tartan was inspired by the family tartan of Alexander Hamilton, the founder of the Revenue Cutter Service which later became the Coast Guard. Each color of the Coast Guard tartan signifies the following: Red: Symbolizes the courage and sacrifice of the men and women of the Coast Guard and its predecessor services, and their families, in war and peace for more than 200 years. White: There are 10 threads of white representative of the original 10 Revenue Cutters commissioned by Secretary of the Treasury, Alexander Hamilton in 1790. They were: the Massachusetts, Scammel, Active, Eagle, Diligence, Argus, Vigilant, Virginia, South Carolina and General Greene. Blue: Symbolizes the seas and skies plied by cutters and aircraft of the Coast Guard as they carry out their missions to serve and protect. McQueen wears one of three kilts in three different tartans for his performances. During civilian solo performances he wears his clan tartan MacQueen. When playing with Stroller White Pipes and Drums he wears the band's tartan, and when playing a Coast Guard function he sports the Coast Guard tartan. A member doesn't need Scottish heritage to wear a kilt, and even if you have a clan tartan it's appropriate to wear another one that is the official tartan of a band. McQueen greeted guests to Capt. Ron Morris' retirement with a medley of 6/8 marches. The normal march lasts two to three minutes and McQueen played for about 20 minutes. "The Green Hills of Tyrol", a retreat march and oneof McQueen's favorites, was played when Capt. Morris and his wife left the stage following his retirement. Pipes have been used for centuries on the battle field and in military ceremonies. Different tunes that are used for different purposes like reveille, mustering troops for meals, signaling advance, right flank, retreat etc. Piping and pipe bands are enjoying a revival of sorts the last several years in North America, added McQueen. Further details of the Coast Guard Pipe Band, tartan and a piper contact list can be found at http://www.uscgpipeband.org. ANCHORAGE, Alaska - Capt. Bruce McQueen in full Coast Guard tartan greeted guests to the combined Change of Command/ Retirement Ceremony at the Alaska Native Heritage Center here June 15. Capt. Mark DeVries replaced Capt. Ron Morris as Commanding Officer of Marine Safety Office Anchorage. (Official Coast Guard photo by Petty Officer Sara Francis.)

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