



by John Price

MacTavish, A Scottie

I loved that little dog. He was feisty, stubborn, devoted, aloof, loving, funny, proud, noisy, loyal, greedy, annoying, frustrating and totally Scottie. He was black, long backed, short headed, straight stifled, round hocked, with an undershot jaw and a deformed tail. He was beautiful! He was scruffy and smelly and he preferred it that way. He chased (and sometimes caught) any small, furry animal that moved within his range of vision and excavated huge holes in lawns and flower gardens. He loved to roll in the foulest smelling things he could find and then insisted on sleeping on the bed. He was something else! But he was all Scottie.

These little stories are about MacTavish, a black Scottish Terrier, and the life he lead for thirteen and one half years. It was a somewhat unusual existence but one which he thoroughly enjoyed and in which he distinguished himself, first and always as a friend and companion, but variously as a hunter, a protector, a lover and a father, a clown, a mentor and finally an elder statesman whose passing signalled, to a surprising number of people, the end of a phase of life.

MacTavish was born Chelslade's Border Boy in August of 1966. He was purchased from Fred Fraser, of Ottawa, Ontario, for the princely sum of \$100 - a discounted price because of a deformed tail. As soon as he was old enough he joined the Army with me and followed the drum for the rest of his life. He adapted to the military with ease and though he made the usual mistakes of the young and inexperienced, he rapidly learned that the Army was exactly the right place for him to be.

I came to the same conclusion. I was commissioned as a Second Lieutenant in The Royal Canadian Dragoons, Canada's oldest Regular Force Armoured Regiment, at the ridiculously young age of twenty. I descended upon Camp Gagetown, New Brunswick in the fall of 1966, driving an Austen Healy Sprite and accompanied by a three month old Scottie puppy. It was the first posting for both of us and, as is usual in such circumstances, everything was brand new and exciting. We learned fast, we two. We learned about the Army and Army discipline (occasionally from the wrong end), the fun of the social life of the Officer's Mess and the hardship of living in a 56 ton Centurion tank in the

wintertime. In joining the Regiment we had really joined a large, strong and incredibly supportive family and we made friendships which last lifetimes. We matured, became both independent as individuals and more dependent upon each other, and gradually turned ourselves into professional soldiers.

I came to my life-long love of Scotties honestly - it may even have been a genetic imperative. My Grandmother bred Scotties in the 1930s and for most of my early life, there was a Scottie in the house. Grandmother Laura bred and exhibited her Scotties, and my Aunt Judy and Uncle Grenville were often pictured in the social pages of the Toronto Star at shows looking after a couple of dogs while Grandmother was in the ring. As a young girl and a young wife, my Mother owned Chips, a dog who was "mostly" Scottie (his legs were a little long) but who guarded my crib and carriage with the determination and loyalty of one. I am told that "Thy Servant A Dog" was one of my favourite stories as a young child (it still is) so when I left home and joined the Army, I knew that I had to own a Scottie.

Not that I could afford one. The pay of a 2nd Lieutenant was not really sufficient to allow for the full purchase price at one time, particularly as I had just undergone one of the rights of passage of a young man, the negotiating of a bank loan so that I could borrow the immense sum of \$500 to buy the Sprite. I had just completed another right of passage. The final phase of armoured (tank) training was over, a period spent mostly in the Georgian Bay tank training area of Camp Meaford in the company of the good and lasting friends a young man, in his twentieth year, makes as he starts his own life. We worked and played hard

all summer and the graduation parade, highlighted by formal acceptance into our respective Regiments, was a formal transition from the school and training environment to the real Army. The tradition and ceremony of that parade was marvellous but did not mask the fact that I was now a soldier, with all the commitments and responsibilities that go along with the commission.

That real Army made a direct impact early as my request for two weeks of leave before joining my Regiment was summarily denied. The Regiment was leaving for the annual Brigade field concentration but I

was allowed a weekend off on the trip down to New Brunswick. It was during that weekend in Ottawa that I first met MacTavish.

Once there I telephoned a man with the appropriately Scottish name of Fred Fraser and asked if he bred Scottish Terriers. He said that he had been known, on occasion, to breed Scotties and even admitted that he had a litter, just born and that not all of the puppies were sold. I told Fred that I would be out to see the pups and later that evening and, after filling the Sprite with gas, picked up my girlfriend and headed for the wilds of the Conroy Road

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and the Ben Braggie Kennels.

One of the reasons I was in Ottawa on my pass (other than to see my family, of course) was that my girlfriend, Karen, was also in Ottawa visiting her parents. Karen and I had dated during our final year in high school and we had "plans" once we both finished our training, me for the Army and she as a nurse. We only had one evening together on this particular weekend, a much anticipated evening, and there we were, in Fred Fraser's kennel, looking at a litter of week old Scottie puppies. It is hard to get more romantic than that.

Fred welcomed us and disappeared into the rear of his kennel, asking us to make ourselves comfortable. There certainly were comfortable chairs but as the reception area was a showcase of Fred's success in breeding and showing Scotties we spent the time wandering around and admiring his accomplishments. One whole end of the reception room was floor to ceiling shelving bulging with silver trophies and huge red, white and blue rosettes while both side walls were covered, literally covered, with pictures of Fred and his dogs in winning poses or of Fred, as a judge, awarding ribbons, rosettes and trophies. There was a huge black and white photo of Fred and one of his dogs winning Best in the Show of Shows and a framed advertisement, obviously quite old, depicting the Heather Scottish Terriers of the Brothers Chapman. While the magnitude of the success Fred's walls represented was not really appreciated by Karen and I at the time, we were quite certain that "he had been known, on occasion, to breed Scotties".

MacTavish, at seven days old, didn't look much like the Scotties in the photos. Fred reappeared bearing a small cardboard box which he carefully placed on his grooming table. Faint squeaks were coming from the box and Fred started handing out puppies. The pups were warm and wriggling and when touched, twisted around looking for Mom. We had a lovely time cuddling them all (there were five) while Fred talked about their pedigree and showed us pictures of their parents. At some point he mentioned that one of them had a malformed tail and that he would take a little something off the price of that particular pup, a considerable concession for a Scotsman. That pup, of course, was MacTavish. Fred did demand payment on the spot and \$100 was very hard to part with but, when we said goodbye that evening I was the proud owner of a Scottish Terrier. I gave MacTavish a farewell pat but he was only interested in returning to his mother for another feed. This preoccupation with his dinner, in whatever form, was never to end.

It would be almost three months before MacTavish and I really began our life together. I made arrangements for him to come home to my parents when he was ready to leave the litter but the stage was set for our arrival at the Regiment and the start of adult life. We moved into the "adult" part in sometimes jerky steps, but progress was steady. The future would see us add to our family numbers, move to and live in foreign countries, return to a comparatively placid existence in Canada, see the growth of the family and, before the end of the era, look back with a considerable degree of complacency, on an active and fascinating period.

It used to be, in the Canadian Army, that a short period of leave in the summer was followed in the fall by a much longer "concentration", where the soldiers, vehicles and equipment of the Brigades moved out to the training areas and lived under canvas while various levels of training and war games were conducted, free from the distractions of running water, flushing toilets, solid rooves (or any roof) and loving wives and girlfriends. These concentrations were the bread and butter of the Army, where individual fighting skills were honed and put to the test and where the units of the army learned to work together, infantry with armour, armour with artillery, in preparation for the defence

of our country. It was hard work and long hours in whatever weather happened by at the time and while it is true that the soldiers complained constantly about the food and the weather and everything in-between, it is also true that a soldier who is not complaining is not happy, so a good time was had by all.

It was some three months after meeting MacTavish for the first time, after the fall concentration was complete, after the Regiment had returned to garrison and cleaned up the tanks and ourselves (in that order) that I was granted the leave I desperately needed and I abandoned the Maritimes for Upper Canada to pick up my Scottie. MacT, unseen since he was a week old, had left the shelter of Fred Fraser's Ben Braggie Kennels and was leading my parents the merry chase that only a Scottie puppy can do. My Father, during one of our infrequent telephone conversations, had mentioned that the puppy had by then caused enough damage in the ancestral home and that it was high time that he did the same in mine. I was anxious to come and pick up the little fellow, and to become reacquainted with my girlfriend Karen, so I arranged to drive to Ottawa with one of my fellow officers. Karen had managed a weekend off from the Kingston hospital but the reunion was less than a romantic success as I was insensitive enough to try and include the puppy in all of our activities. As a result, Karen's Sunday evening return to her nursing training was a bit of a relief.

MacTavish, however, was a delight. He was hell on wheels and his seemingly endless energy would be suddenly interrupted by brief naps wherever he started to wind down, usually underfoot. He had been tormenting my Mother's two older dogs, a German Shorthair Pointer and a Miniature Wirehaired Dachshund, and he seemed to run their household. He was, of course, seriously cute and it was hard not to forgive his transgressions when they were punctuated by a happy bark, a head cocked to the side and a little tail which started straight up but took a sharp turn to the rear at about midpoint and another down and left near the tip. My Father nicknamed him the Carpenter, as he did the odd job around the house, so trying to learn a little discipline was the order of the next week. It was a good leave and at the end MacTavish and I reboarded my friend's Maritime express and we three headed east once again .

Regimental life, during the Winter of the training year is spent mainly in garrison and features the conduct of individual training courses for the soldiers, the endless administration which follows a long period of training and a very active social life. The social activities for the Officers centred around the Regimental Officers Mess and it was to this Mess and the attached Officers Quarters to which MacTavish was introduced upon our arrival. The quarters, in particular became the focus of his life as he lived in my room, used the extensive lawns as his exercise area and was quickly adopted by my friends as the Single Officer's mascot.

A Regimental Officer's Mess, alas now a thing of the past, was a very special place. Through the paintings which decorated the



walls, the silver trophies and mementos in display cases and the crested and engraved furniture, crystal and silverware, it reflected the Regiment's history, traditions and honours the men and women of the Regiment had earned in the wars in which they had fought and died as part of Canada's Army. The Mess was the focal point of the social life of all of the Regimental Officers, married or single. The Commanding Officer presided over the formal events and the informal parties of the Regiment and the single officers "lived-in", taking all of our meals and entertaining our guests in the various rooms of the building. It proved to be an interesting place to house train a puppy (and there were the odd banishments for transgressions) but he became as much a part of the Mess as any other "single rat". He learned to respect the traditions and the ways of life and became, if not a voting member, at least a considerate one. There are many stories to tell of his early life in the Regiment but they will have to await a later telling. 🐾

John Price is a retired Army officer who, with his wife Libby, has been breeding and showing Scottish Terriers under the MacTavish prefix for 15 years. John came by his love of Scotties through his Grandmother, who bred Scotties in the 1930s and his Mother, who had an almost Scottie named Chips when he was a baby. John and Libby own and operate MacTavish Kennels in North Gower, Ontario.

Drawings by Shannon Darch