

Gordon Lloyd McDONALD

1-7-1984 to 9-6-1917

Biography as published in 1985 & 1995

Gordon Lloyd was the ninth child, sixth son, of Flora and Joseph McDonald, and was born at Nurrabiel. His first cousin, George Wallace McDonald, was born two weeks before at West Wail. These boys grew up with close ties as the result of a family joke - that they had been mixed as babies and now belonged to the wrong families.

His grandparents were Rachel and Ewen McDonald and great-grandparents were Christina and Donald McLean.

World events of 1894 included the wrongful arrest of a Jewish French Army officer, Alfred Dreyfus, on a charge of spying for Germany; Rudyard Kipling published *The Jungle Book*. In Australia, Ethel Turner published *Seven Little Australians*.

Gordon attended Nurrabiel State School, transferring to the Dollin school when the family moved to Mockinya. He and his sister Ollie had a 3¹/₂ mile walk to Dollin. After leaving school he worked on the family farm with his father and brothers. He played football for the Nurrabiel team and one year was awarded a watch-chain medal for his prowess. He was also a crack rifle shot. Early in 1916 the depleted units of the Australian Expeditionary Force had been transferred from Gallipoli to the trench warfare in France. England asked the Dominions to replenish their forces. Australia went further, deciding to not only maintain a flow of reinforcements to the fighting troops but form a new division — the Third. Once again volunteers were sought from town and country recruiting centres for service abroad. Gordon and his brother Ted enlisted on February 18, 1916. Gordon became Number 943 Private G. L. McDonald, C Company, 38th Battalion, 10th Infantry Brigade, 3rd Australian Division. On March 10, they both left Horsham for the training camp of the 38th Battalion at Bendigo. The officer in charge was Major R. O. Henderson. Gordon wrote regular letters home describing his new life.

March 18. Bendigo. We had a concert or two this week and they were very good. Plenty of sport at night. There are about thirteen hundred soldiers here now, some pretty hard faces among them. It gets dusty about the camp at times. We are going into Bendigo on Sunday to have a good time. Don't eat all the grapes and watermelons, leave some. Write soon some of you.

May 7. Bendigo. We had a march through the city last Monday. About five thousand soldiers marched. My word there was a crowd. They were even up on the roofs of houses, and every window for miles had heads poked through them. There were two special trains to take the Bendigo lot down. We were up at 5 in the morning and arrived home about half past eight that night for supper. I can tell you I was ready for it too. We were all vaccinated last Wednesday and some of them are beginning to feel the effects, mine is starting to be a bit sore.

May 20. Bendigo. Ted is out of hospital and doing well again. We marched through Bendigo last Wednesday and there was a good crowd looking on. There were two cases of meningitis in A Company, one of them died and the other was pretty bad. I am on orderly duty at the battalion head-quarters tonight. I saw them fetch Tom Ballinger across on a stretcher into the Red Cross motor ambulance and took him to Bendigo Hospital because his temperature was rising. We gargle our throats out every morning with some stuff in water. Then we get some bread with eucalyptus on it to eat, to stop the meningitis. Bendigo is getting pretty stale now.

May 25. Bendigo. We are having a football match on Saturday. There is a boxing contest on this week for a belt that has been given for the best boxer. I had a letter from Olive on Tuesday, but we have not got the socks that were sent. Good weather lately, getting fat and lazy. Must ring off.

June 6. Campbellfield. We have shifted camp to-day to Campbellfield, it is cold and bare. We have had a big day. just about fagged. All of 9 section was on guard last night, 32 of us. Had no sleep much and it was light rain in the early hours of the morning. We had breakfast at 6 o'clock and all our throats were examined to see if we were meningitis carriers. The ground at Bendigo was just like porridge and we had to carry our packs. 2 kit bags and our rifle to the station. The train left at 10 o'clock in the morning. We got off at Fawkner siding to go

to Campbellfield Camp and had about 2 miles to march. They fetched our kit bags on wagons and lorries.. We had a dixie of food between 20 of us so we did not get much. We had to get our kit bags after tea in the dark; they were just thrown down in a heap and we had to find them. It is a B of a game shifting camp, it knocks hell out of you. We are 9 miles from Melbourne and can see the lights plain tonight. We are not here for long they tell us.

Between enlisting and embarking on the troopship for England Gordon had three short periods of home leave. On board ship he kept a brief diary.

Tuesday June 20, 1916 — Embarked. There was a great crowd of people at Melbourne port to see their brave soldiers off and to say goodbye to them. Great excitement seeing the people throwing parcels to their friends. Many parcels and notes dropped in the sea. There was a great noise when the boat started off with a lot of red white and blue paper flying about. We soon got out of sight.

Undated - The second day was the roughest day we had the first week and many of us were feeding the fish. Three or four albatrosses followed the boat and we saw porpoises, a whale or two and different kinds of birds.

Saturday July 8 — Had a shot at a box in the water today. There were twenty men a side and C Company 1st team won, B Company 1st team came second, and C Company 2nd team came third. It was good sport.

Friday July 14 — Arrived at Cape Town at 5 o'clock. Went to theatre at night. Great sights to see in the streets. some bonzer gardens, some tricks of people in the town.

Sunday July 16 — Had a great trip around to Camp Bay and through the hills, very pretty sight. The others had a route march. They have about 5,000 tons of coal on the boat, they use 100 tons a day.

Monday July 17 — We pulled out of the harbour about 5 in the evening.

Wednesday July 19 — We set sail today after being anchored since Monday. It was annoying not to be able to get off the boat. Some of the lads caught a little shark or two.

Friday July 28 — Crossed the equator at 2 o'clock in the morning.

Wednesday August 2 - Called at Cape Verde Islands.

Saturday August 5 — Came out of hospital today, went in with measles on July 24. Two men thrown overboard last Monday.

Thursday August 10 — Landed at Port Plymouth, England at 2 pm. Landed in camp about 3 o'clock at night. Had to march 2 miles or more from station to camp.

Saturday August 26 — Inoculated today. Had 4 days leave from August 14 to 17, and we went to London.

Monday September 4 — Went for a route march. Camped out one night at Chitterne. Went through Shrewton and spent the weekend in the trenches.

Wednesday September 20 — We had General Monash out to inspect us today. Reinforcements went on September 11.

Wednesday September 27 — Had the King out to have a look at us. From 50 to 60 thousand men on the march. Three or four thousand looking on.

Sunday November 12 — Larkhill, Salisbury Plain - Cold and wet and rain every day. We heard a ship was sunk about a week ago carrying Australian mail. We have been practising bomb throwing, rifle shooting, bayonet fighting, gas helmets. A good few cases of mumps.

Friday November 17 - Came back from leave in London.

No date - Left Salisbury Plain on November 21 and arrived in Southampton about 3 o'clock.

The 3rd Division was formed of twelve infantry battalions. Four battalions made up the 10th Brigade. the 37th from Seymour, the 38th from Bendigo, the 39th from Ballarat. and the 40th from Tasmania. They were distinguished by colour patches worn on the sleeves of the tunics of the men, about 1¹/₂ inches below each shoulder. The patches of the 10th Brigade battalions were elliptical with the foundation colour, red, being common to each unit. The 38th Battalion had purple over red.

Major-General John Monash was the commander of the Third Division, and he encouraged self pride in the troops. As a mark of distinction he insisted they should wear their hat brims flat and not looped as in the rest of the AIF. He would not permit the use of rough and ready methods of training or treatment. Nothing was too small to escape his attention for he was a master of organisation. Staff duties and office work were well and carefully

done, and officers and NCOs took special care of their men. However the reputation of the Third was not high with the four veteran divisions in France. They had heard so much about it and felt it was the pampered pet of the Defence Department. Being specially raised at home, carefully trained on Salisbury Plain, paraded before the King, sent to a quiet corner of the British front at Armentieres, and late entry into the war, gave them a grievance. They nicknamed the men the Neutrals, the Lark Hill Lancers and the Eggs-a-Cook, relating the oval colour patches to the cry of the Egyptian street sellers of boiled eggs. Their first experience of action was when the Germans raided the trenches of the 38th Battalion on the morning of December 9, 1916. Gordon recorded nothing more in his diary but continued writing to his mother.

December 11, 1916. Somewhere in France — I got the mumps just as we landed in France and was kept back a day or so from the firing line. It is pretty wet and cold.

January 14, 1917. France. To sister Jessie. We got the parcel all right but the cakes were no good, they went bad. So the parcel has been a long time somewhere, we only got it last night. I am having running shots at the Germans. There was a low part of the parapet and they used to duck past. It was great fun popping at them. The ice stops on the water all day over here so you can imagine how cold it is. Tell Aggie I got her card but I can't write just yet.

February 1, 1917. France — Very cold over here, plenty of snow about and the ice is about 5 or 6 inches thick. It is good to skate on but it is easy to get a fall. A few of the boys are going about with their heads tied up. We are doing a bit of drill and bayonet fighting lately to keep fit, and route marching. There are plenty of aeroplanes flying about but they don't seem to fetch many down. They do plenty of shooting at them. We were in the trenches up till lately and it was getting pretty lively. We got mail yesterday. Ted got two from home but I did not get any. But I have been getting one or two each mail. I am getting tired of this place for it is terrible cold and we only have two blankets.

April 4, 1917. Somewhere in France — Just a few lines to say I have received a mail from Aus. I got one from you and Olive. It snowed very heavy here last night and this morning we were playing about in it. Ted went into Saint Omer last Saturday with some mates but I did not go. I went up on the hill and had a look at the aeroplanes. They have a dozen or more there in big sheds. They are big things when you are close to them but look small when nearly out of sight. It is pretty hilly country about here and everything is dead looking, because the trees have not got their leaves yet. I think this summer will just about finish the war, if not tucker will be very scarce for we don't get too much now.

April 26, 1917. Somewhere in France — The French, Canadians and Australians have been taking a lot of prisoners lately. It will be a pretty lively time for old Fritz this summer if it keeps good weather. There are plenty of aeroplanes flying about of a clear day. Today they fetched one of the Germans down; it was on fire before it touched the ground. I have seen balloons come down on fire too. There has been heavy bombardment here lately and the guns have been roaring day and night. Old Fritz put a lot of shells back into the town and got a few of the chaps in the billets who took over from us. Some of the town has not been injured and the people are carrying on as before the war broke out. The town is full of spies. You ask if there are any women in France. There are any amount but it is a job to understand them. News is scarce, so good night all. Love from the dear old boys in the trenches.

Until June of 1917 the 3rd Division was kept busy raiding and harrying the German lines. On June 6 they were part of the big offensive against the German-held village of Messines in Belgium. This was only about twelve miles over the border from Armentieres. On Thursday, June 7 part of C Company, 38th Battalion, was being harassed by a German sniper. Gordon, the crack shot, said he would fix him, seized his rifle and peered over the trench. The sniper fired again and Gordon died instantly. His brother Ted was nearby. An urgent telegram, pink form in a pink envelope, was sent to the Reverend Thomas Gray, Horsham. It read:

'Officially reported 943 Private G. L. McDonald killed in action 7/6/17 kindly inform mother Mrs F. McDonald Mockinya Loose Bag Horsham of sad news and convey sympathy King Queen and Commonwealth and wire me reply paid. Colonel Hawker'

Later a letter came from H. A. Hayden, Church of England chaplain, 38th Battalion, AIF.

Dear Mr Macdonald You will have heard the sad news of your son's death (Pte Gordon Lloyd Macdonald) long before this note reaches you. He was killed in action in the Battle of Messines on 7/6/17 and died like so many of his comrades a brave and gallant gentleman there. Words of human sympathy can avail little to ease the aching heart but the knowledge of your son's noble death for God, King and Country will inspire the pride that should help alleviate your great sorrow. Our hearts go out to you mothers and fathers so far away in Australia and we pray that God in his mercy may give you the solace you need. We shall remember you and yours in our prayers.

Gordon was buried at Ypres in the Belgian province of West Flanders. His name is commemorated in the Menin Gate memorial register.

McDONALD, Pte. Gordon Lloyd, 943. 38th Bn. 7th/9th June, 1917. Age 22. Son of Joseph and Flora McDonald, of Mockinya, Victoria. Native of Nurrabiel, Victoria.

The Menin Gate memorial was constructed in 1927 in memory of the thousands of British Soldiers who perished in the great battles around Ypres. A total of a quarter of a million soldiers of all countries are buried under this battle-torn soil. The area includes other famous battlegrounds: Messines, Broodseinde, Passchendaele, and Ploegsteert Wood.

- SOURCE : This biography was from page 109 of "History of Ewen & Rachel McDonald & Descendants" by Jill McDonald which was originally published in 1985. It was republished as part of "The History of Donald & Christina McLean and Their Descendants" in 1995.
- ORIGINS : Christina and Donald McLean and their ten children migrated from Argyllshire to South Australia in 1837. This was in the earliest years of the colony. The McLeans initially settled near Adelaide where they grew the first wheat crop in SA. Then in about 1840 they pioneered the Strathalbyn area. There are now well over 20,000 descendants spread across Australia and elsewhere.
- CHANGES : Please contact us with additions, corrections or suggestions about any part of this family tree.
- CONTACT : Visit our website www.christinaanddonaldmclean.com or Strathalbyn Museum phone 08 8536 2656 to learn more about your family – or about privacy and copyright.