

WAR STORY OF CAPTAIN MALCOLM PATRICK MCKECHNIE

Army No: 13/2399 – Served and Wounded in World War 1 (WW1)

Personal Background:

Malcolm was born in Scotland on 23rd February 1884, and he lived on the Isle of Islay. He was known as Patrick Malcolm, or Malcolm Patrick McKechnie. His parents, John Allan McKechnie and Jessie McKechnie (nee, Ferguson) also lived on the Isle of Islay, and Malcolm's father John, was employed as an Engineer and Contractor.

At some point Malcolm immigrated to Australia and then to New Zealand (NZ), however the exact dates of his arrival in each country, are still unknown.

Patrick Malcolm McKechnie was married in Auckland, NZ on the 27th May 1913 to his wife Martha Mabel McMurtrie (nee Anderson), who had been a widow. Martha, his wife, was an excellent seamstress and would volunteer her time to many a worthy cause, e.g. the Blind Institute.

As husband and wife, they resided at 17 Railway Street, Newmarket in Auckland. They had three children, named; Denis, Roy and Jean. Malcolm worked hard as a Carter, he also worked as a Foreman Stevedore, at what was then known as Auckland's Queen Street Wharf, where he was employed by a company named Leonard and Dingley. Through the generations, the family's recollection of Malcolm, was that he was a kind and gentle man.

According to Malcolm's military records provided by (Archives New Zealand [ANZ], 2023), his personal physical attributes were described as follows; height 5 foot 5 ½ inches, weight 144 lb, chest measurement 33-36 inches, eyes coloured blue, sight 6/6 with glasses, hair was brown to grey and he had a clear complexion, although his teeth were stated as "not good". His wife Martha, was also recorded as being his next of kin (ANZ, 2023).

Military Career in NZ and Abroad:

Malcolm had already gained previous military experience from overseas before he joined the NZ Army. His military experience included two years in the 93rd Argyle and Sutherland Highlanders Regiment, based in Scotland, and four years as Sergeant, serving with the St. George's English Rifles Regiment, based in Sydney, New South Wales, Australia (ANZ, 2023).

Although the family are unsure of the actual date Malcolm immigrated to New Zealand, it can be narrowed down to an estimated time of arrival, as being 1909. This is due to the military records indicating that he did serve as a Private, in the Auckland Highland Rifles from the 15th June 1909, until 28th February 1911 (ANZ, 2023). He then also served as a Private, in the 3rd (Auckland) Regiment (Countess of Ranfurly's Own), from the 1st March 1911 to 23rd May 1911 (ANZ, 2023).

Furthermore, on the 24th May 1911, and with Malcolm now holding the rank of 2nd Lieutenant, he was then transferred to the Unattached List of the (b) 4th Coy, (Eden), Senior Cadets, and he spent a further four years in service with this Auckland Regiment (Cadet) Battalion, until the 17th August 1915 (ANZ, 2023).

However, on the 18th August 1915, and with WW1 progressing, Malcolm then became a commissioned officer of the New Zealand Expeditionary Force (NZEF), first based in NZ, and then in early October 1915, after being appointed as 2nd Lieutenant of the Auckland Mounted Rifles (AMR), Unattached List (b), Auckland District, 7th Reinforcements, he became part of the (NZEF Abroad), to be based overseas (ANZ, 2023).

A digital photograph of Malcolm, with the other soldiers in his unit, (no: 2 Troops, 7th Reinforcements, E Squadron) has been uploaded by the family, and can be viewed on the Auckland War Memorial Museum Online Cenotaph website.

Military records state that Malcolm McKechnie, 2nd Lieutenant, a commissioned officer of the (NZEF Abroad), was ready for Active Service, hence he departed NZ shores on the 9th October 1915, bound for Suez in Egypt (ANZ, 2023). Malcolm embarked on either one of two troop ships, the; Navua, HMNZT 33 or the Warrimoo, HMNZT 34, which both sailed on that date, and took the 7th Reinforcements and the 1st and 2nd NZ Rifle Brigades to their overseas destination (National Museum of the Royal New Zealand Navy, n.d.).

Malcolm arrived in Egypt, and his Theatre of Operation was recorded in his military records as; Egyptian 1915-1916, and Egyptian Expeditionary Force (EEF), 1916 (ANZ, 2023).

However, not much is known by the family of his time serving in Egypt, only that he had emphasized that the men he was in charge of, had been instructed that they must stay scrupulously clean and protect their private areas from potential infections!

Malcolm's operational battalions and regiments were re-organised by the (NZEF), in March 1916, in Ismailia, Egypt (ANZ, 2023). Hence, on the 11th March 1916, Malcolm was seconded from the Auckland Mounted Rifles (AMR) unit, and transferred, under list 12, to the 1st Infantry Battalion of the 1st Auckland Infantry Regiment (AIR). Furthermore, on the 1st April 1916 he also joined the 1st NZ Infantry Training Battalion. He was then promoted to 1st Lieutenant on 29th April 1916, in the field, where he was serving in the actual battle zone (ANZ, 2023).

Malcolm's next orders, under list no: 21, were received on the 19th May 1916 from (NZEF). He was ordered to cease his term with the NZ Training Battalion which was based in Ismailia, and now he was being posted to France (ANZ, 2023). Malcolm was listed on the embarkation roll, and was to leave Egypt on the 20th May 1916.

His new Theatre of Operation was described in (NZEF) terms as; Western European 1916 (ANZ, 2023). This meant now he was going to be journeying to France, however at this point in time, and unbeknown to him, he was heading straight towards becoming a casualty in the Battle of the Somme.

One of Malcolm's stories that he passed down through the family generations, described how he, and other soldiers, were ordered to shoot their horses around this stage of their journey, as the horses could not be taken further, or left behind. Malcolm stated it was one of the most hardest and heart breaking orders to follow, to shoot your beloved horse, a horse that had been loyal and served its master.

Malcolm then boarded his ship, a ship named SS Ivernia, which left from Alexandria in Egypt, destined for Marseille in the south of France (ANZ, 2023). Approximately eight months after Malcolm sailed on the SS Ivernia, it was torpedoed and sunk within the Mediterranean Sea, with many allied soldiers losing their lives that day (SS Ivernia, 2022).

Once Malcolm arrived in Marseille, it is unknown how he travelled to his next post, but according to the archived military records, he arrived at the New Zealand Infantry General Base Depot in Etaples, Northern France, on the 28th May 1916 (ANZ, 2023).

After some weeks at the New Zealand Infantry General Base Depot, and Malcolm having been recorded as being in full strength, he left the base in Etaples, and headed for Armentieres (ANZ, 2023). Malcolm arrived in Armentieres on the 17th June 1916, when he joined his unit, which was the 1st Infantry Battalion of the 1st Auckland Infantry Regiment, 6th Coy (ANZ, 2023).

In Armentieres, the soldier's continued to upskill in the muddy trench warfare, gas mask use, and tactics for patrolling within no-mans-land (New Zealand Ministry for Culture and Heritage, 2022a). This training was essential, as the NZ soldiers were placed in the front line trenches, which were only 180 metres away from the enemy (New Zealand Ministry for Culture and Heritage, 2022a). Digital maps can be viewed on the New Zealand History website, showing just how close that front line was, to the Armentieres Township, and to Malcolm, as the Battle of the Somme raged on (New Zealand Ministry for Culture and Heritage, 2022b).

Although Malcolm had previous combat experience, he eventually was wounded in action on the 17th July 1916, when he sustained a gunshot wound to his chest while fighting within the Armentieres sector (ANZ, 2023). One can only imagine what Malcolm must have thought when the bullet penetrated through his chest. However I suggest, he must have thought it was going to be his last day on Earth.

According to Malcolm's casualty record after he was shot, he was admitted to the No: 1 NZ field ambulance, (sometimes known as field hospital), which was based in Armentieres (ANZ, 2023). It is not documented if he had to walk, be stretchered out, or was taken on a vehicle but the next entry states that on the 23rd of July 1916, he was admitted to No: 7 stationary hospital in Boulogne, France. Finally after a week, and on the 25th July 1916, he boarded a hospital ship, named the H.S. St. Denis, destined for England (ANZ, 2023).

The family always wondered why Malcolm stated his first son must be named Denis, and it must be spelt only with one letter n. Although it is only conjecture, and we cannot ask Malcolm now, but it does seem to be a bit of a coincidence that the hospital ship named St. Denis that transported Malcolm to safety, ended up being his first son's name!

Malcolm left the H.S. St. Denis, and on the 26th July 1916, he was then admitted to the convalescent camp at Kitchener Hospital, situated in Brighton, England (ANZ, 2023).

After spending a few days there, and on the 28th July 1916, Malcolm was then transferred to the NZ convalescent camp hospital, based at Hornchurch, which was situated east of London (ANZ, 2023). However, there is no record of how he travelled to Hornchurch.

On the 25th August 1916, Malcolm was not recommended to return to active duty, due to ill health. Therefore, he was seconded from his unit and was placed on the NZ roll of soldiers to return to New Zealand (ANZ, 2023). On the 31st August 1916, as per the nominal roll, Malcolm boarded his hospital ship at Southampton, England, for his voyage home to New Zealand. Malcolm, along with many of his wounded comrades journeyed home on the Hospital Ship, named H.S. Marama (ANZ, 2023). Their port of arrival, was Port Chalmers in Dunedin, NZ, arriving on Sunday 22nd October 1916 (Gisborne Times, 1916). Although after such a long ordeal and finally arriving in NZ, Malcolm being a North Islander, meant his voyage home was not yet over. He then had to board another ship, named Maori, to be taken to Wellington, then from Wellington, he needed to get home to Auckland (Gisborne Times, 1916).

When Malcolm returned home from the war as a sick and injured man, he had bought a pistol home with him, containing live bullets, and he told the family that he had managed to get the pistol away from the enemy. The pistol was only ever discharged once, and that was by Malcolm's son Denis. Denis discharged the pistol on Victory Day, when World War Two (WW11) ended, which was many years after Malcolm had passed away.

After being wounded in France and returning to NZ, Malcolm was then promoted to Lieutenant on the 8th January 1917 (ANZ, 2023). The rank of Lieutenant was the highest rank that Malcolm had held, while serving as a commissioned officer in the (NZEF). Although Malcolm was considered fit for Active or Home Service, he did not ever return overseas, and therefore was discharged from the (NZEF), on the 31st May 1917, orders list 47, and also he was discharged from the Auckland Infantry Regiment (AIR) overseas deployment (ANZ, 2023). However, he did carry on serving as an officer, based in NZ. Malcolm returned to the Auckland Regiment, Unattached List (b), 3rd & 4th Coy Cadet Battalions, from where he had previously served prior to his overseas deployment. He continued to serve as a Lieutenant for two years, and then on the 24th May 1919, Malcolm was promoted to Captain, serving until 21st July 1921 (ANZ, 2023).

Then for the next seven years, from the 22nd July 1921 to the 18th August 1928, Captain McKechnie was the commanding officer of the 1st Battalion of the Auckland Regiment, (Countess of Ranfurly's Own) (ANZ, 2023). Archived military records also state he was Captain of the 6th (C), Battalion, Auckland Regiment, (Countess of Ranfurly's Own) (ANZ, 2023). Then from the 27th October 1928, and Malcolm being an officer of the Territorial Force, he transferred by application to the 7th (C), Battalion, Auckland Regiment, on account of the re-organisation of the Cadet Battalions, in the No: 1 Regimental District (ANZ, 2023). Finally, on the 11th February 1929, Captain McKechnie was then transferred to the Reserve of Officers, of the Auckland Regiment (Countess of Ranfurly's Own), and this was approved by the Auckland Regiment, No: 1 Regimental District, Northern Command (ANZ, 2023).

Roll of Honour:

Overall, Captain Malcolm McKechnie had a long and varied military career, he progressed through the ranks from Private to Captain. On his military journey, Malcolm received many accolades and obtained many medals and decorations, for his time spent serving his country within New Zealand and abroad (ANZ, 2023). Malcolm is now recorded on the Roll of Honour, Auckland Province, which can be viewed at the Auckland War Memorial Museum Online Cenotaph (n.d.).

Final Goodbye:

Captain Malcolm McKechnie died suddenly on the 29th November 1931, from thrombosis of the left coronary artery of the heart, his approximate age was 48. According to the Auckland Star (1931), Malcolm died at 143 Carlton Gore Road, Newmarket, Auckland, and his funeral left from Watney, Sibun & Sons' Chapel at Khyber Pass bound for the soldier's graves area at Waikumete Cemetery, and there he was finally laid to rest. Rest in Peace my dear great grandfather.

Author: Karen Bates

Authors note: This war story has been intertwined with memoirs of Malcolm McKechnie, which were verbally gathered from current and past generations, over the passage of time.

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