14

Gordon MacDonald

The Timaru Main School memorial, on the corner of Grey Road and Arthur Street, circa 1925.
PHOTO: SOUTH CANTERBURY MUSEUM (4006)

Remembering the sacrifices of those with South Canterbury connections who served their country 100 years ago.

TERESA SCOTT

Gordon MacDonald, the son of James and Julia (née Lockwood) MacDonald, was born on 18 June 1892 at Timaru.

He was educated at Timaru Main and Waimataitai Schools. Gordon made his mark early at school, being awarded a certificate of merit, 1st class, when in Standard I in 1900 at Timaru Main School.

He repeated his school success in Standard IV in 1903. Moving to Waimataitai in 1904, Gordon kept up his good work, being rewarded for writing in Standard V.

At the Presbyterian Cullmanntown Sabbath School he received a prize in 1899 (a well bound volume "containing interesting accounts of travel, etc."), and he gained a 2nd Class prize in 1902.

Gordon took a very keen interest in the welfare of Waimataitai School and gave a great deal of his time to helping the sports of the school.

In December 1914, the headmaster thanked Gordon for the great assistance he had given. And at the 1914 prize-giving of Waimataitai School, Gordon presented a prize for the Most Improved Footballer.

He was one of many ex-pupils who had gone or were on their way to the front and whose names appeared on the Waimataitai School "Roll of Honour" drawn up in August 1915. Gordon was also a prominent member of the Pirates football club and was well known in athletics circles.

When he enlisted on 16 October 1914, Gordon was a clerk with Millar Bros, builders of Timaru.

He had previously been a law clerk in the office of Messrs Tripp and Rolleston, but wanting a more outdoor life for the good of his health he had changed employers.

He was already serving with the 2nd South Canterbury Regiment (Territorial Forces) prior to the war. He was living at home with his widowed mother, having never lived away from Timaru. He was young and fit, and had everything in life to look forward to.

Gordon left New Zealand for Egypt on 14 December 1914, just after he was promoted to Sergeant.

On 7 February 1915, ten days after reaching Egypt, he was attached to New Zealand Divisional Headquarters with the temporary rank and pay of sergeant.

On 12 April 1915 Sergeant Macdonald embarked at Alexandria for the Dardanelles.

There on 11 June 1915 he was admitted, ill, to the Base Hospital at Anzac and a month later he was transferred to the Convalescence Camp, before returning to action a few days later, only to be wounded at Gallipoli on 7 August.

But, it seems that the wounds were more severe than first reported.

In a letter to his father, dated 30 August 1915, Private James Lynch mentions that Gordon McDonald had evacuated to Malta a few days after him, and that he (Gordon) had "got a bad crack down the shin bone with shrapnel and apart from that he is not too well and will probably be sent to England."

He was. However, on 13 September 1915 Gordon was admitted to the Military Hospital at Devonport, suffering from malarial fever in addition to his wounds.

There, on 4 January 1916, Gordon was seriously ill; and it was recorded that there was no hope of recovery. He died at the hospital the following day, as a result of his wounds.

Gordon had had a rough time, punctuated with illness and wounds.

Yet in a letter written from the hospital to his mother shortly before his death he wrote in good spirits.

He is buried in the Plymouth (Weston Mill) Cemetery, Devon, England, and there is a memorial on his parents' headstone in the Timaru Cemetery.

Sergeant Gordon Macdonald is honoured by the Timaru Main School War Memorial and specifically mentioned on the Timaru War Memorial Wall and the Waimataitai School War Memorial.

∎ This is part of the SCRoll project. You can find SCRoll stories, hosted by the South Canterbury Museum, at museum.timaru.govt.nz/scroll