

## Remembering the sacrifices of those with SC connections who served their country 100 years ago.

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### Lieutenant McKenzie GIBSON, 6/635

McKenzie Gibson, known among friends as Ken, was born on 13 May 1889 at Akaroa, the younger son of the Reverend Mackenzie Gibson and Mary Coates Alice née Gibson, of Hillbrow Cottage, Esher, Surrey, England. He started at Cust School in March 1896, transferring to Waimate School two months later when his father became the vicar of St Augustine's there. In March 1902 he was selected in the cricket team to represent the Waimate School in their match with Waitaki High School. In the same year at an entertainment in aid of the prize fund and new organ of the Waimate District High School, he took one of the principal parts – Rip Van Winkle – in the staging of the operetta *Rip Van Winkle*. He continued his education in 1903 and 1904 at Christ's College, Christchurch. There in 1903 McKenzie was awarded a Cathedral Choir prize for musical excellence and he finished in second place in the quarter-mile Cathedral Choir race at the 1904 annual sports.

On finishing his schooling McKenzie joined the staff of the Bank of New Zealand in Christchurch and was transferred to Waimate about 1909-1910. In late 1910 when he was stationed at Ashburton, he relieved for a staff member on the West Coast. He did a stint as bank teller at Rangiora in 1911, before being promoted to accountant at the Waimate Branch in October 1913. Ken Gibson on Shaughraun followed the hunt at the beginning of July 1909 at Bourndale in the vicinity of the Hunter Hills. Later in 1909 he was a member of the Christ College Old Boys' second eleven to play present pupils, while his older brother Noel played for the first eleven. In August 1912 he planned a musical recital in aid of the Waimate Public Library funds, and in April 1913 he voluntarily arranged a concert which added £3.3s.6d. to the funds of the Waimate Public Library, a cause very dear to his father.

By 1914 McKenzie had been transferred to Greymouth, where he again displayed his musical talent. In the evening of Easter Tuesday following he was one of the vocal soloists when the Greymouth Liedertafel Society gave a concert in connection with the unveiling of the Westland Pioneers' Memorial. In June, at a concert organised by the Ladies of Charity (a group working among the poor in the district) Mr McKenzie Gibson sang several numbers.

The year 1914 was soon to take McKenzie Gibson, a bank teller on the Bank of New Zealand staff at Greymouth, in a different direction. He enlisted at Greymouth on 13 August 1914, at the outbreak of war, and on 17 August his name appeared in the official list of the West Coast Contingent of the Canterbury Force. He was then 25 years 3 months old, Anglican, single and fit for field force, and residing at Bonningtons Hotel, Greymouth. He had served with the Mounted Rifles Studholme

and Ellesmere for three years, being discharged on removal. His next-of-kin was his brother, Noel Gibson Esq, of Epsom, Auckland; his father, of Esher, Surrey, England, was legal next-of-kin. The Reverend Mackenzie Gibson was vicar at Waimate from 1896 to 1914, vicar of Sumner, Christchurch in 1915, and from 1915 till 1919 he served as chaplain on the hospital ship Marama. In a letter written on 26 August from the camp at Addington, Lance Sergeant R. H. Wild writes that he had been put in among the Greymouth men. "I was extremely lucky in getting a good tent of all decent chaps and none of them loafers. It includes two very good singers – Bob Wilson ... and McKenzie Gibson, who was relieving in the Bank of New Zealand at Hokitika lately. I think it is one of the best tents as far as men go in our company."

He embarked as a private with the Canterbury Infantry Battalion of the Main Body, on 16 Oct 1914, from Lyttelton, destined for Suez, Egypt. Trooper Leslie Wylde, with the New Zealand Expeditionary Force, writing home from "out on the briny ocean" says that one comrade was in bed yesterday (October 18) pretty sick and "McKenzie Gibson was bad for a day or two".

His first fighting was in the engagements on the Suez Canal. He took part in the landing at Gallipoli and in the storming of Achi Baba. At Gallipoli he was promoted to sergeant for rescuing a wounded man under heavy fire. In July 1915 Sergeant McKenzie Gibson was among the slightly sick men of the Canterbury Battalion who disembarked at Malta from hospital ships. In September his mother received advice that after six weeks in hospital, he had been sent to England and admitted to the Southern General Hospital, Birmingham, to recuperate from dysentery. He wrote in glowing terms of the hospitality and kindness extended to the sick soldier in the Motherland. He treated his ailments lightly and by late November he had recovered sufficiently to return to active service – to the firing line on Gallipoli. It was on 1 March 1916 at Moascar Camp, Egypt that Sergeant-Major McKenzie Gibson obtained a lieutenancy, being promoted to 2nd Lieutenant. He had been through the whole of the Dardanelles campaign, except for the few weeks when he was invalided, and had returned to the Peninsula just two weeks before the evacuation, at which time he was in charge of a small band of men in the Cheshire Ridge section. In a letter he noted that of the 260 men of the Thirteenth Regiment (North Canterbury and West Coast), only 70 were left after the months of hard fighting, the others being either killed or wounded. From 29 March 1916 2nd Lieutenant McKenzie Gibson was temporary lieutenant whilst acting as adjutant, a rank he held at Tel el Kehir and Sling, and later at Etaples, France, where he was again engaged in training operations. On 15 March 1917, temporary Lieutenant McKenzie Gibson was promoted to be a first lieutenant in the NZEF. He rejoined his unit early in August.

The next word of this young officer came in mid October 1917 – Lieutenant McKenzie Gibson had fallen in action before Bellevue Spur on 12 October 1917, aged 28 years after distinguished service in Egypt, Gallipoli and France. He was a keen soldier and during the last six months he had made repeated application to be sent forward. On 8 August he was allowed to go forward to the firing line where he saw two months further fighting before his promising career was cut short. At this time his father, who had left for Trentham Camp in March 1915, was chaplain of the New Zealand hospital at Hornchurch, England, while his mother and sister were residing in Sumner, Christchurch.

His brother, Noel Mackenzie Gibson, was the headmaster of Dilworth Institute in Auckland. In 1918 the Auckland Military Service Board adjourned sine die the appeal of the Dilworth Trust Institute in respect of Noel McK. P. Gibson, a captain in the 16th Waikato Regiment and a volunteer. His father was on active service and his only brother had been killed in action. As he was essential to the operation of the school and the care of 90 boys, he was granted indefinite leave.

At the close of the October offensive Chaplain Mackenzie Gibson, at the New Zealand General Hospital, Walton on Thames, received a letter from General Braithwaite in France – “I am well aware that no words of mine can be of the slightest comfort to you and yours at such a time ... He was a great soldier, and he possessed the rare qualities of a disciplinarian ... If it is any consolation and comfort to you, you have the certain knowledge that he died fighting at the head of his men, within a few yards of the enemy, in the most desperate engagement that New Zealanders have faced during this war, and under conditions of hardship and suffering almost unparalleled in the history of war ... — With deepest sympathy, believe me, yours very sincerely, W. G. Braithwaite, Brig.-General, Commanding Second New Zealand Brigade.”

By his brief will drawn up on 14 August 1914, McKenzie bequeathed the whole of his estate to his sister, Mary Mowat Gibson, of Sumner. Mary died in 1937 while on missionary work in China. His mother died in 1934 at Esher, Surrey, England, where his parents resided after the war. His father, who took his discharge in England, died there in 1940. His brother lived on in New Zealand until his death in 1973.

*This is part of the SCRoll project. You can find SCRoll stories, hosted by the South Canterbury Museum, at [museum.timaru.govt.nz/scroll](http://museum.timaru.govt.nz/scroll)*