

Private George McDonald[©]
Regimental Number: 24973¹
13th Canadian Battalion

born: 24 May 1887 – died: 12 March 1918

George McDonald was born 24 May 1887² at Glasgow, Scotland, to Alexander and Elizabeth McDonald.³ We know little about George's ancestors, but it is possible that his father Alexander E. McDonald was born 30 December 1856 to Alexander McDonald and Elizabeth McCulloch.⁴ George's father Alexander was a wood sawer,⁵ and he and Elizabeth had eight children: John, born about 1875; James, born about 1877; Agnes, born about 1879, Alexander, born about 1880;⁶ Elizabeth, born about 1884; George; Cathrine (Kate), born about 1889;⁷ and David, born about 1895.⁸

Due to the common names, very little evidence associated with the family was found, except for George and David. Both sons fought in the Great War, but not for the United Kingdom. Interestingly, George fought with the Canadian Expeditionary Force⁹ and David with the Australian Imperial Force.¹⁰ David was 21 and an engineer when he enlisted on 5 September 1914. He identified his father, A. E. McDonald of Glasgow, Scotland, as his next of kin. He was a private with the 1st Battalion, C Company, and embarked from Sydney, Australia, on 18 October 1914. David survived the Great War and returned to Australia, leaving Europe on 14 December 1918.¹¹

George enlisted with the 5th Battalion, Royal Highlanders of Canada, on 23 September 1914 at Valcartier, Quebec. He was then 27, 5'7" tall with a slim build. He identified his occupation as grocer.¹² The 5th then became the 13th Battalion, which was formed mainly from volunteers from the Royal Highland Regiment of Canada (The Black Watch), based in Montreal. They were sent to England as part of the First Contingent on 26 September 1914, and became part of the 3rd Brigade of the 1st Canadian Division in France and Flanders.¹³ A book about The Royal Highlanders of Canada was written by Stuart Martin.¹⁴ While the story ends before George was killed in action, the book does describe his mobilization:

“BEFORE the war the Fifth Royal Highlanders of Canada were affiliated with the Black Watch. On the outbreak of hostilities a battalion of the Fifth was mobilised at Montreal in August, 1914. By the 25th of the month 1,004 recruits had been accepted, and on that day the battalion entrained for Valcartier. Here, when a division for overseas was being organised, the battalion became the 13th Canadian Battalion, Royal Highlanders of Canada.

On the 25th of September the battalion moved to Quebec and sailed for England on the troopship *Alaunia*, arriving there on October 16th. The winter months were spent in more training, and on the 10th of February, 1915, baggage was packed once more and the journey to France resumed. St. Nazaire was reached on the 16th. Four days later the battalion was inspected by Field-Marshal Lord French, after which a march was made to Armentieres. On the 24th the battalion companies went into the trenches for the first time, relieving the Buffs.”¹⁵

Wikipedia briefly described the roll of this Division in the Great War:

“The 1st Canadian Division served on the Western Front from April, 1915 until the armistice in November, 1918. Its baptism of fire occurred at the Second Battle of Ypres in April, 1915, when the German Army used chlorine gas for the first time in war. Neighbouring French

divisions fled in terror from the new weapon, but the Canadians held the line at tremendous cost.

The 1st Canadian Division fought in every major engagement involving the Canadian Corps, including the Second Battle of Ypres in 1915, the Somme in 1916, Vimy Ridge and Passchendaele in 1917, and the Pursuit to Mons in 1918.”¹⁶

George was admitted to No. 1 Canadian Casualty Clearing Station on 12 March 1918 at the age of 30, and died the same day of shrapnel wounds on his face and a fractured skull.¹⁷ Just days after George died, No. 1 Canadian Casualty Clearing Station was evacuated and moved further behind the lines.¹⁸ It is therefore likely that George was killed during a harsh attack of the advancing enemy during the “First Battles of the Somme.”¹⁹

George was buried on 13 March 1918 at the Barlin Communal Cemetery Extension, Barlin, France, at Plot II, Row E, Grave 25. The extension was commenced by French troops in October 1914, but was taken over by Commonwealth forces in March 1916. In November 1917, Barlin began to be shelled and the hospital was moved back to Ruitz, but the extension was used again in March and April 1918 during the German advance on this front. The extension contains 1,095 Commonwealth burials of the Great War.²⁰

© 2017 BIFHSGO

¹ No. 1 Canadian Casualty Clearing Station records incorrectly recorded the regimental number as 24978. “No. 1 Canadian Casualty Clearing Station,” *British Isles Family History Society of Greater Ottawa* (www.bifhsgo.ca: accessed 6 January 2017), entry for McDonald, G

² “Canada, Soldiers of the First World War, 1914–1918,” *Ancestry* (www.ancestry.ca: accessed 6 January 2017), entry for McDonald, G

³ “1881 Scotland Census,” *Ancestry* (www.ancestry.ca: accessed 5 January 2017), entry for Alexander McDonald, Enumeration district: 4, Household schedule number: 32, LINE: 7, Roll: cssct1881_226

⁴ “Scotland Births and Baptisms, 1564–1950,” *FamilySearch* (www.familysearch.org: accessed 5 January 2017), entry for Alexander McDonald [sic], 30 Dec 1856; citing MIDDLE OR NEW PARISH, GREENOCK, RENFREW, SCOTLAND, reference ; FHL microfilm 6,035,516

⁵ “1881 Scotland Census,” *Ancestry* (www.ancestry.ca: accessed 5 January 2017), entry for Alexander McDonald, Enumeration district: 4, Household schedule number: 32, LINE: 7, Roll: cssct1881_226

⁶ *Ibid.*, for the first four children

⁷ “1891 Scotland Census,” *Ancestry* (www.ancestry.ca: accessed 5 January 2017), entry for Alexander McDonald, Enumeration district: 2, Household schedule number: 41, LINE: 14, Roll: cssct1881_248

⁸ “1901 Scotland Census,” *Ancestry* (www.ancestry.ca: accessed 5 January 2017), entry for Alexander McDonald, Enumeration district: 16, Household schedule number: 33, LINE: 7, Roll: cssct1881_314

⁹ “Canada, Soldiers of the First World War, 1914–1918,” *Ancestry* (www.ancestry.ca: accessed 6 January 2017), entry for McDonald, G

¹⁰ “The AIF Project,” *University of New South Wales, Australia* (<https://www.aif.adfa.edu.au/showPerson?pid=195844>: accessed 5 January 2017), entry for David McDonald

¹¹ *Ibid.*

¹² “Canada, Soldiers of the First World War, 1914–1918,” *Ancestry* (www.ancestry.ca: accessed 6 January 2017), entry for McDonald, G

¹³ *Wikipedia* ([https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/13th_Battalion_\(Royal_Highlanders_of_Canada\)](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/13th_Battalion_(Royal_Highlanders_of_Canada))). CEF: accessed 6 January 2017), entry for Royal Highlanders of Canada

¹⁴ "The Story of the Thirteenth Battalion The Royal Highlanders of Canada 1914–1917," by Stuart Martin, *The Canadian Great War Project* (<http://www.canadiangreatwarproject.com/dl/StoryOfThe13thBattalion.pdf>: accessed 5 January 2017)

¹⁵ Ibid.

¹⁶ *Wikipedia* ([https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/13th_Battalion_\(Royal_Highlanders_of_Canada\)](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/13th_Battalion_(Royal_Highlanders_of_Canada)), CEF: accessed 6 January 2017), entry for Royal Highlanders of Canada

¹⁷ "No. 1 Canadian Casualty Clearing Station," *British Isles Family History Society of Greater Ottawa* (www.bifhsgo.ca: accessed 4 January 2017), entry for McDonald, G.

¹⁸ "War Diaries of the First World War, 1st Canadian Casualty Clearing Station 1914/08/13-1919/03/31," *Library and Archives Canada* (http://data4.collectionscanada.gc.ca/netacgi/nph-brs?s1=casualty+clearing&s13=&s12=&l=20&s9=RG9&s7=9-52&Sect1=IMAGE&Sect2=THESOFF&Sect4=AND&Sect5=WARDPEN&Sect6=HITOFF&d=FINDD&p=1&u=http://www.collectionscanada.gc.ca/archivianet/02015202_e.html&r=1&f=G: accessed 5 January 2017)

¹⁹ "The First Battles of the Somme, 1918," *The Long, Long Trail, The British Army in the Great War of 1914–1918* (<http://www.longlongtrail.co.uk/battles/battles-of-the-western-front-in-france-and-flanders/the-first-battles-of-the-somme-1918/>: accessed 6 January 2017)

²⁰ *Commonwealth War Graves Commission* (www.cwgc.org/find-a-cemetery: accessed 5 January 2017), entry for Barlin Communal Cemetery Extension