

Sapper Charles Alexander McKinlay[©]

Regimental number: 1039757

3rd Battalion, Canadian Railway Troops

born: 16 February 1875 - died: 8 June 1918

Sapper Charles Alexander McKinlay was born on 16 February 1875 in Orillia, Ontario.¹ Both his parents were born in Ontario—his father, Duncan, the son of Duncan and Sarah McKinlay,² in June 1838,³ and his mother, Mary (nee Millard), daughter of Mordecai and Martha Millard,⁴ in about 1844.⁵ On 29 April 1861, Duncan married Mary in Newmarket, East Gwillimsbury Township, just over 50 kilometres north of Toronto, Ontario.⁶ They had nine children: Duncan E. (born on 6 October 1862),⁷ Emily Ann (born in 1865),⁸ Nelson (born in 1867),⁹ Janet (born in 1868, but died in 1870 and was buried in Saint Andrews and Saint James Cemetery, Orillia),¹⁰ Colin (born on 28 March 1870, but died at the age of 19 and was buried with his sister),¹¹ James (born in 1873),¹² Charles, Mordecai (born on 15 July 1876)¹³ and Mary (born in 1879).¹⁴

In 1881, this Presbyterian family was living in Orillia, where Duncan was a wagon maker.¹⁵ Ten years later, Charles and the family were still in Orillia¹⁶ but no information was found to indicate where Charles was living after that. His mother had probably moved to the United States in the early part of the 20th century because, in 1903, she was living at 25 Beulah Street in San Francisco, California.¹⁷ She is shown as being a widow; however, his father Duncan was still alive. In 1911, his father was living with his niece, Mary, and her husband, Nelson Irwin,¹⁸ in Warminster, just a few miles from Orillia.¹⁹

By 1915, Mary had moved to 2628 Santa Clara Avenue in Alameda, near Oakland, California²⁰ and she was living there when Charles enlisted in the Canadian Expeditionary Force on 28 September 1916 in Vancouver.²¹ At the time, he was a trainman, living in Fulton Rooms in Vancouver. He was 5' 8¼" tall and had a dark complexion with brown eyes and hair. He had perhaps had a hard life as a trainman because when he enlisted, at the age of 40, he had scars on right thigh and right foot, both his knee caps were scarred and his left index finger was missing.

Charles sailed from Halifax on 15 December 1915, arriving in Liverpool on 28 December. He went to France on 22 March 1917 with the 3rd Battalion of the Canadian Railway Troops. In mid-April 1917, he had some minor health issues—an infected toe and inflamed bunions—but he rejoined his unit on 29 April. On 24 October 1917, he was admonished for being “absent without leave from 12.15 p.m. 24.10.17 until 8.15 p.m. 24.10.17” while on active service. For this infraction, he forfeited one day’s pay.

In March 1918, he had two weeks leave in the United Kingdom, returning to his unit on 30 March. At the end of May 1918, the 3rd Battalion was in Barlin, about 25 kilometres from Lens, in northern France. In the first five months of the year, the battalion maintained over 645 miles of track for the troops. Each month, an average of 215 Other Ranks (ORs) were involved in rail construction and over 520 in maintenance.²²

The 3rd Battalion’s “C” Company had reported heavy shelling on their lines on 31 May. The following day, one OR from that company was dangerously wounded at La Bourse. Perhaps this was Charles. Only one OR in the battalion died of his wounds in June.²³ Charles was admitted to No. 1 Canadian Casualty Clearing Station on 1 June with gunshot wounds to his back. On 3 June, he was listed as “dangerously ill.” By 6 June his condition had worsened. He died on 8 June and was buried

the same day in Pernes Military Cemetery (Plot 2, Row F, Grave No. 33) with the Canadian chaplain R. K. Lambert presiding.²⁴

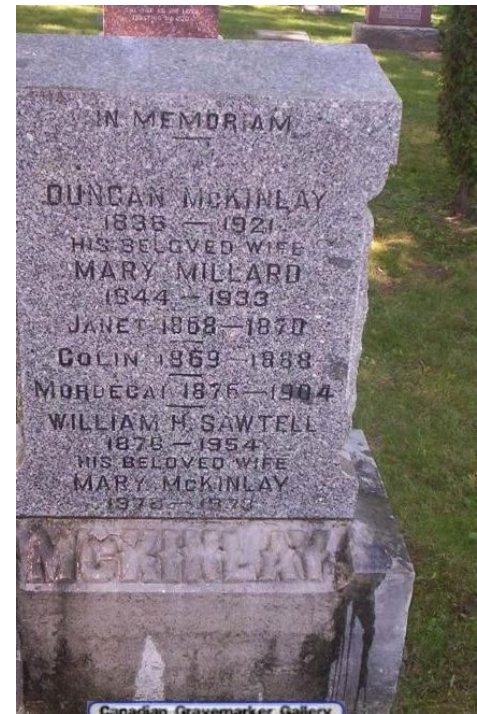
The Pernes British Military Cemetery was only set up in April 1918 when No. 1 and No. 4 CCCSs came to Pernes, driven back by the German advance.²⁵ In June 1918, over 4,000 soldiers were admitted to No. 1 CCCS.²⁶ There were 82 deaths that month.

Charles' brother James, who was living in the Sunnyside Apartments at 2420 Central Avenue in Alameda, was his next of kin and was notified of his death by letter from the chaplain.²⁷

Charles was awarded posthumously the British War Medal (for service overseas between 1914 and 1918) and the Victory Medal (for service in an operational theatre). He is remembered on the Canadian Virtual War Memorial and in the Canadian *First World War Book of Remembrance* housed in the Peace Tower on Parliament Hill in Ottawa.²⁸

Immediately after the war, Charles' mother was living at 3855 Clark Street in Alameda with her daughter Mary and Mary's husband, William Sawtell.²⁹ Sometime after that, she moved to 3453 Balch Avenue in Fresno, California.³⁰ In 1930, she was living at 625 Palm Avenue in Fresno, still with Mary and her family.³¹

Charles' father Duncan died of senile decay at the age of 83. He died on 31 July 1921, at the House of Refuge in Orillia.³² Houses of Refuge were established in Ontario after 1903 to house the "destitute, feeble-minded, paupers, aged and infirm."³³ Duncan was probably buried in Saint Andrews and Saint James Cemetery in Orillia—the same cemetery in which his two children, Janet and Colin, were buried.³⁴ It is not known where Charles's mother died, but she died in 1933 and was remembered on the same gravestone as her husband and children in Saint Andrews and Saint James Cemetery.³⁵



McKinlay gravestone, Saint Andrews and Saint James Cemetery, Orillia

Source: *Findagrave*

Two of Charles' siblings moved to the United States. His eldest brother Duncan married Nannie V. Hendley in 1885 in Sonoma, California,³⁶ and led an illustrious life in the States.

[He] moved to California in the 1880's. In 1892 he became a lawyer and by 1905 was appointed a United States attorney in San Francisco. In 1905, he was elected to the United States House of Representatives representing California's 2nd District until 1911. Also in 1905, the newly elected congressman would be part of then Secretary of War William Taft's trip to Japan. A close supporter of later President Taft, he was appointed surveyor of customs in San Francisco by the president in 1911.³⁷

He died on 30 December 1914 in Alameda.³⁸

Little is known about Charles' other brothers. Nelson died in 1915.³⁹ It is not known when James died. His younger brother Mordecai died in Warminster on 17 January 1904, at the age of 28, of accidental poisoning.⁴⁰

At the age of 19, Charles' eldest sister Emily married George Paton, a machinist on 19 September 1883 in Orillia.⁴¹ In 1921, she and George were living in Hamilton, Ontario, with their daughter Marion.⁴² Emily died on 6 March 1931 in Toronto at the age of 66.⁴³

Charles' younger sister Mary married William H. Sawtell in December 1899⁴⁴ and, in 1901, she was living with her husband and her sister's son, James Paton,⁴⁵ in Toronto.⁴⁶ The following year, she and William, a paint manufacturer, went to Fresno, California. They returned to Canada in 1933.⁴⁷ Mary died in 1973 in Orillia.⁴⁸

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¹ "Service Files of the First World War, 1914–1918 - CEF," *Library and Archives Canada* (<http://www.bac-lac.gc.ca/eng/discover/military-heritage/first-world-war/first-world-war-1914-1918-cef/Pages/search.aspx>; accessed 17 February 2017) entry for Mckinlay, Alexander Charles, Reference: RG 150 Accession 1992-93/166, Box 6993 - 23, Item number: 160802, Digitized service file - PDF format: B6993-S023

² "Ontario, Canada, County Marriage Registers, 1858–1869," *Ancestry* (www.ancestry.co.uk; accessed 4 December 2017), entry for Mary Millard

³ "Canada, Find a Grave Index, 1600s–Current," *Ancestry* (www.ancestry.co.uk; accessed 30 December 2017), entry for Duncan McKinlay

⁴ "Ontario, Canada, County Marriage Registers, 1858–1869," *Ancestry* (www.ancestry.co.uk; accessed 4 December 2017), entry for Mary Millard

⁵ "1871 Census of Canada," *Ancestry* (www.ancestry.co.uk; accessed 28 December 2017), entry for Duncan McKinlay, Province: Ontario, District: Simcoe North, District number: 42, Sub-district: Orillia, Sub-district OK number: 1

⁶ "Ontario, Canada, County Marriage Registers, 1858–1869," *Ancestry* (www.ancestry.co.uk; accessed 4 December 2017), entry for Mary Millard

⁷ *Findagrave* (<https://www.findagrave.com/memorial/7098446>; accessed 30 December 2017, entry for Duncan E. McKinlay

⁸ "1881 Census of Canada," *Ancestry* (www.ancestry.co.uk; accessed 4 December 2017), entry for Charles McKonlay [*sic*], Province: Ontario, District number: 139, District: Simcoe North, Sub-district number: O, Sub-district: Orillia

⁹ *Ibid.*; "PATON, WILLIAM 1697," *Ancestry* (www.ancestry.co.uk; accessed 28 December 2017), entry for Nelson McKinlay

¹⁰ "Canada, Find a Grave Index, 1600s–Current," *Ancestry* (www.ancestry.co.uk; accessed 30 December 2017), entry for Janet McKinlay

¹¹ "Ontario, Canada, Births, 1869–1913," *Ancestry* (www.ancestry.co.uk; accessed 24 October 2017), entry for Colin McKinlay ; "Canada, Find a Grave Index, 1600s–Current," *Ancestry* (www.ancestry.co.uk; accessed 30 December 2017), entry for Colin McKinlay

¹² "1881 Census of Canada," *Ancestry* (www.ancestry.co.uk; accessed 4 December 2017), entry for Charles McKonlay [*sic*], Province: Ontario, District number: 139, District: Simcoe North, Sub-district number: O, Sub-district: Orillia

¹³ "Ontario, Canada, Births, 1869–1913," *Ancestry* (www.ancestry.co.uk; accessed 24 October 2017), entry for Mordecai Kinley [*sic*]

¹⁴ "1891 Census of Canada," *Ancestry* (www.ancestry.co.uk; accessed 4 December 2017), entry for Charles Mckinley [*sic*], Province: Ontario, District number: 116, District: Simcoe East, Sub-district: Orillia

¹⁵ "1881 Census of Canada," *Ancestry* (www.ancestry.co.uk; accessed 4 December 2017), entry for Charles McKonlay [*sic*], Province: Ontario, District number: 139, District: Simcoe North, Sub-district number: O, Sub-district: Orillia

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- ¹⁶ “1891 Census of Canada,” *Ancestry* (www.ancestry.co.uk: accessed 4 December 2017), entry for Charles Mckinley [sic], Province: Ontario, District number: 116, District: Simcoe East, Sub-district: Orillia
- ¹⁷ “U.S. City Directories, 1822–1995,” *Ancestry* (www.ancestry.co.uk: accessed 28 December 2017), entry for Mary McKinlay; Residence year : 1903
- ¹⁸ “Ontario, Canada, Marriages, 1801–1935,” *Ancestry* (www.ancestry.co.uk: accessed 31 December 2017), entry for Mary McKinlay
- ¹⁹ “1911 Census of Canada,” *Ancestry* (www.ancestry.co.uk: accessed 30 December 2017), entry for Duncan McKinlay, Province: Ontario, District: Simcoe East, District number: 119, Sub-district: 7 - Medonte, Sub-district number: 7
- ²⁰ “U.S. City Directories, 1822–1995,” *Ancestry* (www.ancestry.co.uk: accessed 28 December 2017), entry for Mary McKinlay; Residence year : 1915
- ²¹ “Service Files of the First World War, 1914–1918 - CEF,” *Library and Archives Canada* (<http://www.bac-lac.gc.ca/eng/discover/military-heritage/first-world-war/first-world-war-1914-1918-cef/Pages/search.aspx>: accessed 17 February 2017) entry for Mckinlay, Alexander Charles. Unless otherwise noted, all information about Charles’ military career comes from this source.
- ²² “War diaries - 3rd Battalion, Canadian Railway Troops,” *Library and Archives Canada* (http://collections.canada.gc.ca/pam_archives/index.php?fuseaction=genitem.displayItem&rec_nbr=2004961&lang=eng&rec_nbr_list=2004961,183413,183423: accessed 30 December 2017), 1917/03/07—1918/12/31, File: RG9-III-D-3, Volume/box number: 5012, File number: 733
- ²³ Ibid.
- ²⁴ “No. 1 Canadian Casualty Clearing Station,” *British Isles Family History Society of Greater Ottawa* (www.bifhsgo.ca: accessed 20 November 2017), entry for McKinlay, A.C.
- ²⁵ “Pernes British Military Cemetery,” *Commonwealth War Graves Commission* (<http://www.cwgc.org/find-a-cemetery/cemetery/11600/PERNES%20BRITISH%20CEMETERY>: accessed 13 January 2015)
- ²⁶ “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 15 December 2014)
- ²⁷ “No. 1 Canadian Casualty Clearing Station,” *British Isles Family History Society of Greater Ottawa* (www.bifhsgo.ca: accessed 20 November 2017), entry for McKinlay, A.C.
- ²⁸ “Canadian Virtual War Memorial,” Veterans Affairs Canada (<http://www.veterans.gc.ca/eng/remembrance/memorials/canadian-virtual-war-memorial/detail/119137>: accessed 30 December 2017), entry for Alexander Charles McKinlay
- ²⁹ “1920 United States Federal Census,” *Ancestry* (www.ancestry.co.uk: accessed 4 December 2017), entry for Mary Mckinley [sic]
- ³⁰ “Service Files of the First World War, 1914–1918 - CEF,” *Library and Archives Canada* (<http://www.bac-lac.gc.ca/eng/discover/military-heritage/first-world-war/first-world-war-1914-1918-cef/Pages/search.aspx>: accessed 17 February 2017) entry for Mckinlay [sic], Alexander Charles
- ³¹ “1930 United States Federal Census,” *Ancestry* (www.ancestry.co.uk: accessed 10 October 2017), entry for Mary Mckinley [sic]
- ³² “Ontario, Canada, Deaths, 1869–1938 and Deaths Overseas, 1939–1947,” *Ancestry* (www.ancestry.co.uk: accessed 4 December 2017), entry for Duncan McKinlay
- ³³ “Before 1876: Jails, Work-houses, Asylums,” Thelma Wheatley, writer, speaker, advocate (<http://www.thelmawheatley.com/before-1876-jails-work-houses-asylums/>: accessed 28 December 2017)
- ³⁴ “Canada, Find a Grave Index, 1600s–Current,” *Ancestry* (www.ancestry.co.uk: accessed 30 December 2017), entry for Duncan McKinlay
- ³⁵ “Canada, Find a Grave Index, 1600s–Current,” *Ancestry* (www.ancestry.co.uk: accessed 30 December 2017), entry for Mary McKinlay

³⁶ "California, Select Marriages, 1850–1945," *Ancestry* (www.ancestry.co.uk: accessed 31 December 2017), entry for D. E. Mc Kinlay

³⁷ *Findagrave* (<https://www.findagrave.com/memorial/7098446>: accessed 30 December 2017, entry for Duncan E. McKinlay

³⁸ *Ibid.*

³⁹ "PATON, WILLIAM 1697," *Ancestry* (www.ancestry.co.uk: accessed 28 December 2017), entry for Nelson McKinlay

⁴⁰ "Ontario, Canada, Deaths, 1869–1938 and Deaths Overseas, 1939–1947," *Ancestry* (www.ancestry.co.uk: accessed 28 December 2017), entry for Mardicai McKinley [*sic*]

⁴¹ "Ontario, Canada, Marriages, 1801–1935," *Ancestry* (www.ancestry.co.uk: accessed 4 December 2017), entry for Emily Ann Mackinlay [*sic*]

⁴² "1921 Census of Canada," *Ancestry* (www.ancestry.co.uk: accessed 28 December 2017), entry for Emily Paton, Province or territory: Ontario, District: Hamilton East, District number: 87, Sub-district: Polling Division No 1, Sub-district number: 1, City, Town or Village: Hamilton

⁴³ "Ontario, Canada, Deaths, 1869–1938 and Deaths Overseas, 1939–1947," *Ancestry* (www.ancestry.co.uk: accessed 28 December 2017), entry for Emily Ann Paton

⁴⁴ "My wife's family," *Ancestry* (www.ancestry.co.uk: accessed 30 December 2017), entry for Mary McKinlay

⁴⁵ "1891 Census of Canada," *Ancestry* (www.ancestry.co.uk: accessed 30 December 2017), entry for George Paton, Province: Ontario, District number: 88, District: Lincoln and Niagara, Sub-district: Beamsville

⁴⁶ "1901 Census of Canada," *Ancestry* (www.ancestry.co.uk: accessed 28 December 2017), entry for Mary Sawtell, Province: Ontario, District: Toronto (east/est), District number: 117, Sub-district: Toronto (East/est), Sub-district number: B-42

⁴⁷ "Border Crossings: From U.S. to Canada, 1908–1935," *Ancestry* (www.ancestry.co.uk: accessed 31 December 2017), entry for Mary M Sawtell

⁴⁸ "My wife's family," *Ancestry* (www.ancestry.co.uk: accessed 30 December 2017), entry for Mary McKinlay