

They Lived with Death and Dined with Disease in a Place Called Gallipoli: In Commemoration of the Ultimate Sacrifice of Walter Douglas McCall (1889-1915) of the 10th Otago Infantry Regiment, New Zealand Expeditionary Forces

World War I Centennial

By His Distant Fourth Cousin, Michael T. Tracy

Imagine spending eight months in a trench dug under some cliffs and you are under constant risk from sniper fire from the cliffs above. 'Hourly in all that time,' wrote John Masefield in his account of Gallipoli, 'the soldier has seen his friends blown to pieces at his side, or dismembered, or drowned, or driven mad, or stabbed, or sniped by some unseen stalker.'¹ This is what a 26 year old Private named Walter McCall of the 10th Otago Infantry Regiment of the New Zealand Expeditionary Forces faced daily along with his fellow comrades as they lived with death and dined with disease at a place called Gallipoli during the First World War. In Commemoration of the one-hundredth anniversary of the Battle of Gallipoli, this is an account of the life of a Scotsman who fell here in the summer of 1915. The Anzac (Australian and New Zealand Army Corps) troops that landed on the beaches of Gallipoli showed their steadfast bravery and unity as they first struggled onto this foreign soil which would help forge the Anzac bond and reputation that endures to this day. Walter D. McCall was a part of the struggle for freedom and deserves to be remembered in this centennial year of the Battle of Gallipoli.

Early years

Walter Douglas McCall was born on Wednesday, 31 July 1889 at Kirkland, Glencairn, Dumfriesshire, Scotland.²



*Fig.1. Kirkland, Glencairn, Dumfriesshire, Scotland, Photograph Courtesy of Michael T. Tracy © 2003
Michael T. Tracy*

¹ Masefield, John. Gallipoli. New York: The MacMillan Company, 1916

² Birth Record of Walter Douglas McCall, 31 July 1889, Glencairn Parish Records, Statutory Births 826/00 0035

He was the fourth son of Walter McCall, a blacksmith and Janet Haig of Kirkland, Glencairn.

85	Walter Douglas McCall	1889	Walter McCall Blacksmith	Janet Haig (Present)	1889 August 17 th At Moniaive John Crimmon Registrar.
		Birth - Girl			
		4 Blane St. N.	David McCall		
		Richland	1874 1874 1874		

Fig.2. Birth Record of Walter Douglas McCall, 31 July 1889, Glencairn Parish Records, Crown Copyright

McCall was educated at Moniaive Public School during his formative years.³ After leaving school he worked for Walter Neilson, merchant in Moniaive, Glencairn, Dumfries.⁴ In about 1906 young Walter McCall along with his younger brother James, relocated to Glasgow where they worked in a grocery store.⁵ According to the 1911 Scotland Census for Glasgow Partick, Lanarkshire Walter McCall was listed as being 21 years of age and working as a grocer's assistant.⁶ The McCall brothers were lodgers residing on Downhill Street.⁷

Emigration to New Zealand

Walter McCall sometime in October of 1911 emigrated to New Zealand.⁸ He arrived in Port Chalmers, Dunedin, Otago, New Zealand on Friday, 1 December 1911.⁹ He began working as a grocer's assistant in Dunedin, before moving to Lowburn to work as a ploughman for Fred Partridge.¹⁰

McCall was listed in the 1914 New Zealand Electoral Rolls as residing in Lowburn as a farm hand.¹¹ Sometime later he went to work as a ploughman for Mr. W.A. Scaife of Mt. Pisa Station, Cromwell, Otago.¹² He was a secretary of the Lowburn Football Club, of which he was a playing member.¹³

Enlistment: Otago Infantry Regiment, 10th Platoon

Five months after New Zealand entered World War I, Walter Douglas McCall enlisted in the Otago Infantry Regiment on Friday, 15 January 1915 at the age of 25.¹⁴ He was working as a ploughman in Mt.

³ *Dumfries & Galloway Standard & Advertiser Newspaper*, 15 September 1915

⁴ *Dumfries & Galloway Standard & Advertiser Newspaper*, 15 September 1915

⁵ *Dumfries & Galloway Standard & Advertiser Newspaper*, 15 September 1915

⁶ 1911 Scotland Census for Glasgow Partick, Lanarkshire, Scotland; Enumeration District Number 17, Page Number 6, Line Number 35

⁷ 1911 Scotland Census for Glasgow Partick, Lanarkshire, Scotland; Enumeration District Number 17, Page Number 6, Line Number 35

⁸ *Dumfries & Galloway Standard & Advertiser Newspaper*, 15 September 1915

⁹ New Zealand Archives, Passenger Lists, 1839-1973. Index & Images, Family Search, 2014

¹⁰ *Cromwell & District News*, 20 August 2014, Issue 496

¹¹ New Zealand Electoral Rolls, 1853-1981. Ancestry.com. Provo, UT, USA: Ancestry.com Operations, Inc., 2010

¹² *Dumfries & Galloway Standard & Advertiser Newspaper*, 15 September 1915

¹³ *Cromwell & District News*, 20 August 2014, Issue 496

¹⁴ Military Personnel files for McCall, Walter Douglas. WWI. 8/1777-Army; Record Number: 0071455; R Number: R10922570; Series: 18805, National Library of New Zealand

Pisa Station at the time of his enlistment. McCall stood 5 feet 10 inches, had grey eyes, brown hair and his complexion was described as medium.¹⁵

On Saturday, 17 April 1915 Private McCall left Wellington Harbour for the final time. The Otago Infantry Regiment was bound for Suez, Egypt for further training and preparation. After a short while there, disembarkation practice would commence at Mudros before the assault on the Gallipoli Peninsula. Major Fred Waite in his account of the New Zealanders at Gallipoli stated: "Day by day the soldiers assembled on troop decks for disembarkation practice. The men with their loads seemed bulky enough, but the officers looked even worse. When trussed up with the bulging haversacks, two full water bottles, a heavy Webley [Standard issue revolver for armed forces of the United Kingdom] and ammunition, a big map case, field glasses, prismatic compass, a note book and message forms, not to mention the dozen and one small articles that they, in their innocence, considered necessary, is it any wonder that they stepped gingerly? For, once having fallen, they would have found it difficult, as did the knights of old, to rise again."¹⁶

Private McCall and the rest of the Otago Infantry Regiment would be landing at Anzac Cove. The Anzac Cove is a small cove on the Gallipoli peninsula which is bounded by the headlands of Ariburnu to the north and Little Ariburnu, known as Hell Spit to the south. On Saturday, 24 April 1915 the New Zealand troop transport ships left Mudros Harbour heading toward Gallipoli and Anzac Cove. With that Sir Ian Hamilton, Commander-in-chief of the Mediterranean Expeditionary Force issued his famous Force Order: "Soldiers of France and the King, before us lies an adventure unprecedented in modern war. Together with our comrades of the fleet we are about to force a landing upon an open beach in face of positions vaunted by our enemy as impregnable... 'Remember, once you set foot upon the Gallipoli Peninsula, you must fight the thing through to a finish.' The whole world will be watching your progress."¹⁷

Thusly, on Sunday, 25 April 1915 the Australia and New Zealand Army Corps landed at Anzac Cove on the Gallipoli peninsula. Private McCall was in the second wave of that day, as the Australians landed first. The objective of the Anzacs was to seize part of the Sari Bair range to cover their advance across the peninsula to cut the Turkish supply lines and threaten Turkish forces fighting further south at Cape Helles.¹⁸ The Otago Regiment was sent up to Plugge's Plateau as the Turkish gunners were punishing the Regiment severely. This position was a small triangular plateau on top of a very steep hill.

¹⁵ Military Personnel files for McCall, Walter Douglas. WWI. 8/1777-Army; Record Number: 0071455; R Number: R10922570; Series: 18805, National Library of New Zealand

¹⁶ Waite, Fred. The New Zealanders at Gallipoli. Whitcombe & Tombs Ltd: Auckland, Christchurch, Dunedin & Wellington, 1921

¹⁷ Waite, Fred. The New Zealanders at Gallipoli. Whitcombe & Tombs Ltd: Auckland, Christchurch, Dunedin & Wellington, 1921

¹⁸ Anzac.govt.na. Accessed at www.anzac.govt.nz/gallipoliguide/anzaccove.html



Fig.3. Plugge's Plateau, Gallipoli, April 1915, Photograph Courtesy Australian War Memorial, (P02463.005) © Australian War Memorial

The fighting was continuous and was becoming increasingly heavy. The Otago Regiment by early evening had suffered a considerable number of casualties from the massive fire of the Turkish guns. The Allied forces were suffering staggering casualties and had made little headway from their initial landing sites, even as the Turks gathered more troops on the peninsula in the days to come. Thus a stalemate resulted because of the indecision and delay of the Allied forces for many months to come. The Otago Regiment would be placed in general reserve days later.¹⁹ The Anzacs spent time consolidating their positions by digging trenches, unloading supplies and establishing lines of communication.

Helles

Private McCall and the rest of the Otago Infantry Regiment were ordered on Tuesday, 4 May 1915 for temporary transfer to Cape Helles, where a fresh advance had been planned. On Saturday, 8 May 1915 McCall and the men of Company D advanced forward to the right of Krithia Nullah. The advance was pushed back by Turkish forces and little was gained by this offensive.²⁰ Private McCall survived this offensive and was ordered back to Anzac on reports that Anzac was being attacked.

On Wednesday, 19 May 1915 the Turkish attack quickly developed and before long practically the whole line had become involved and were beaten off with heavy losses.²¹

Untolled Suffering

From the moment the Anzacs landed on the beaches of Gallipoli, they lived in a narrow strip of land with the sea behind them and surrounded on all other sides by the Turkish forces. They were at all times within rifle shot of the enemy and were constantly bombed by enemy guns and canons. Soldiers like Private Walter McCall had iron endurance to withstand the strain of the constant exposure to heat by day and cold by night, eating the same thing each day and the lack of fresh water. This place swarmed with flies and dysentery became rife because of the primitive sanitary arrangements. Thus was the daily toil and suffering of men like McCall.

¹⁹ Byrne, A.E. Official History of the Otago Regiment, N.Z.E.F. in the Great War 1914-1918. J.Wilkie & Co. Dunedin 1921 p.32

²⁰ Byrne, A.E. Official History of the Otago Regiment, N.Z.E.F. in the Great War 1914-1918. J.Wilkie & Co. Dunedin 1921 p.38

²¹ Byrne, A.E. Official History of the Otago Regiment, N.Z.E.F. in the Great War 1914-1918. J.Wilkie & Co. Dunedin 1921 p.39

Sari Bair

As the futile attacks to gain the offensive at Helles faltered, the Allies began looking at other strategies to break the deadlock. The Gallipoli Campaign had raged on two fronts, Anzac and Helles for three long months since the invasion. Sari Bair also known as the August Offensive was the final attempt made by the British in August of 1915 to seize control of the Gallipoli peninsula from the Ottoman Empire during the First World War.

The August Offensive opened on Friday, 6 August 1915. As night fell the Otago Regiment was ordered into action and “moved across the Chailak Dere to the assault of Bauchop’s Hill, a confusion of ridges and ravines and enemy entrenchments and shortly after one o’clock on the morning of the 7th this position was in our hands.”²² Private McCall and the rest of Company D of the Otago Infantry Regiment were ordered to assault Rhododendron Spur from the west, and then continue the assault to Chailak Dere.



Fig.4. Rhododendron Spur, Gallipoli, Photograph Courtesy of University of Wellington, Victoria © University of Wellington, Victoria

“A short distance beyond the entrance of Chailak Dere, Otago Battalion, which was leading came under fire from a concealed Turkish position on the right of the Dere... The Battalion then pushed on towards Big Table Top, some distance ahead; but there was direct evidence that there were still parties of Turks to the right who had been disposed of...”²³

On the afternoon of Saturday, 7 August 1915 the Otago Infantry Regiment were ordered to attack Chunuk Bair. The renewed assault was timed for 4:15 A.M. on Sunday, 8 August 1915.²⁴ The

²² Byrne, A.E. Official History of the Otago Regiment, N.Z.E.F. in the Great War 1914-1918. J.Wilkie & Co. Dunedin 1921 p.52

²³ Byrne, A.E. Official History of the Otago Regiment, N.Z.E.F. in the Great War 1914-1918. J.Wilkie & Co. Dunedin 1921 p.53

²⁴ Byrne, A.E. Official History of the Otago Regiment, N.Z.E.F. in the Great War 1914-1918. J.Wilkie & Co. Dunedin 1921 p.56

Otago Infantry Regiment would be in reserve at the head of Rhododendron Sup. They saw no fighting on the 8th of August.

On the early morning of Monday, 9 August 1915 the Otago Infantry Regiment along with the Wellington Mounted Rifles Regiment were ordered to relieve the Wellington Battalion at dusk in the forward trenches on Chunuk Bair.²⁵ It would be Private Walter McCall's last day alive and his last battle. The Otago Regiment moved forward under heavy fighting and reached the advance trenches on the slopes of Chunuk. These troops repulsed incessant Turkish attacks, it should be noted. It was a day remarkable for the fierceness of the struggle. "Considerable numbers of the enemy appeared to the right rear, and at the same time a determined attack, preceded by a storm of bombs, was delivered against our front. The enemy's apparent intention was to drive in front and then attack the garrison in the flank as it withdrew. The first line of trenches was entered, but the enemy was subsequently driven out, and the occupants of the rear trench, temporarily changing their front, dealt with the enemy threatening the flank. This attack was thus beaten off; at all other points the enemy was equally unsuccessful."²⁶ It is unclear exactly when Private McCall was killed during this intense day of heavy fighting. Once again, casualties were appalling. The New Zealand infantry and mounted brigades had effectively been destroyed as fighting forces on the Gallipoli peninsula. Private Walter McCall was 26 years old.



Fig.5. Chunuk Bair, Photograph Courtesy of the Commonwealth War Graves Commission © Commonwealth War Graves Commission

²⁵ Byrne, A.E. Official History of the Otago Regiment, N.Z.E.F. in the Great War 1914-1918. J.Wilkie & Co. Dunedin 1921 p.58

²⁶ Byrne, A.E. Official History of the Otago Regiment, N.Z.E.F. in the Great War 1914-1918. J.Wilkie & Co. Dunedin 1921 p.59

On Wednesday, 15 September 1915 word of his death reached New Zealand. The *Auckland Star Newspaper* reported the following: "Heroes of the Dardanelles. One hundred and twenty more casualties reported. Killed in Action from the Otago Battalion. Walter Douglas McCall. August 9. Son of Walter McCall, Glencairn. Dumfriesshire, Scotland."²⁷

Private McCall was also commemorated on the Chunuk Bair New Zealand Memorial at Gallipoli, Turkey.

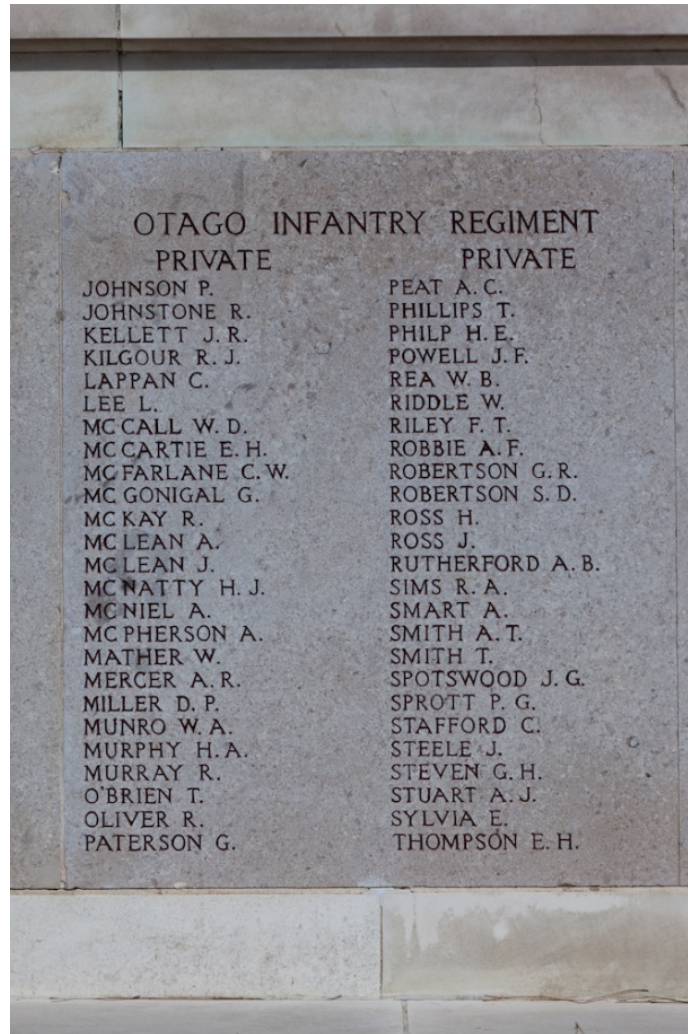


Fig.6. Chunuk Bair New Zealand Memorial, Gallipoli, Turkey, Panel 16, Photograph Courtesy of the Commonwealth War Graves Commission © Commonwealth War Graves Commission

For his gallantry and service during World War I, Walter Douglas McCall received the British War Medal and Victory Medal.²⁸

²⁷ *Auckland Star Newspaper*, 15 September 1915

²⁸ Military Personnel files for McCall, Walter Douglas. WWI. 8/1777-Army; Record Number: 0071455; R Number: R10922570; Series: 18805, National Library of New Zealand

These soldiers of Gallipoli will not be forgotten especially in this Centennial year of the battle. One hundred years ago these men splashed upon the shores of the beaches of the Gallipoli peninsula not knowing what fate held for them. Men like Private Walter Douglas McCall who answered the call of duty exemplified by the spirit of the Anzacs who, in fighting, living with death and dining with disease daily contributed to the proud sense of nationhood of Australia and New Zealand. The *Cromwell & District News* commemorated Private McCall by stating: "By his quiet, courteous and gentlemanly behaviour, he endeared himself to all who knew him."²⁹ That is how I believe this Scotsman from New Zealand would like to be remembered. This is the story and contribution of Private Walter Douglas McCall from Glencairn, Dumfriesshire. He is warmly commemorated in this Centennial year of World War I and the Battle of Gallipoli in grateful esteem and recognition by his distant cousin, Michael T. Tracy. Lest we forget. Because we called and they came. This work is dedicated to the Memory of Walter Douglas McCall.

Memoratus in aeternum (Forever Remembered)

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²⁹ *Cromwell & District News*, 20 August 2014, Issue 496