

PRESS RELEASE

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SOMME STORY: UIST'S FIRST WORLD WAR SOLDIER REMEMBERED

"In a heavy bombardment with death and desolation around you, your heart pounding like a piston, thinking the next shell would be yours, you thought the end of the world had come and when the shelling stopped, the brave little skylark rose high above us with her sweet song of hope and courage, you felt there is a God."

Donald MacDonald recollections of the Battle of the Somme

100 years since the Battle of the Somme, the memoirs of one of South Uist's First World War soldiers, Donald MacDonald, are to be released. Published in a new book "From Small Lochs to Great Lakes", are the stories of a sailor, soldier, crofter and laterly, single-father of six. The book will be launched on 9 July 2016 at the Kildonan Museum, South Uist, as his family and community pay tribute to him.

Born in 1897, Donald was one of 10 children from a humble crofting and fishing family in South Uist. His story spans almost nine decades during the most turbulent times in modern history. Enlisted at 16 years of age into the Cameron Highlanders, MacDonald fought and was wounded at Givenchy, at the Battle of the Somme and at Arras. His memories recall with candor the horrendous conditions of the trenches and battlefields.

After training as a diamond cutter, Donald's inter War years saw him traverse the Atlantic to find work in farming in Canada, in the car factories of America and as a sailor on the Great Lakes until the profound impact of the Great Depression forced him home. During the Second World War Donald served in the Merchant Navy and as a rigger on the Clyde shipyards. The book charts momentous moments in island life from 'salvaging' whisky from the SS Politian and the introduction of road access. It also deals plainly with the struggles of setting up house in Locheynort in appalling conditions of isolation, on very poor land.

“You cannot hold time or season back. Although you are supposed to be your own master on a croft, in reality you are not. You must conform with the season at hand, in order to obtain the benefit you are looking for. Your master is the season, disregarding it and you need not expect a pay packet.”

When widowed at 57 years of age with six children all below the age of 10 years old, MacDonald persevered to keep the family unified. Thanks to the help of the children’s aunt looking after the youngest, the six children were able to grow up together on the island.

“Bringing up five children on your own was a hard task. People were kind and help in looking after them was offered many times but I felt it was important that they stayed with me and that I reared them myself. Although those times were hard, we got through them.”

MacDonald wrote his memoirs whilst in his 80’s before his death in 1985. The original handwritten manuscript was painstakingly transcribed and typed by a family friend in the late 80’s but only digitised a few years ago which allowed it to be edited by his daughter Peggy to form this unique record of a remarkable life. To find out more about MacDonald’s life, published by an Inverness based publisher, go to www.ftrr.co.uk. To order the new book, or for further information, contacts etc, please visit: <http://www.lochstolakes.co.uk>

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