Sculpting Soldiers and Reclaiming the Maimed: R. Tait McKenzie’s Work in the First World War Period

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Abstract. This article examines the work of Canadian physician and physical educator Dr. Robert Tait McKenzie. It argues that during and after World War I, McKenzie made a unique contribution in military and medical history, spanning physical training, rehabilitation and commemoration via sculpture. McKenzie returned veterans to better physical function either directly by his hand, through devices and techniques of rehabilitation developed by him, or through advice given in his publications. In doing so, McKenzie helped lay a sound basis for modern physical therapy. In addition McKenzie’s sculpture offered healing and consolation in its time.

Keywords. military medicine, rehabilitation, commemorative sculpture, World War I


Mots-clés. médecine militaire, réhabilitation, sculpture commémorative, Première Guerre mondiale

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During World War I, Canadian physician and physical educator Dr. Robert Tait McKenzie assumed much of the responsibility for the physical training and medical treatment of men in the British armies. After promotion to Major in the Royal Army Medical Corps, McKenzie helped reorganize and supervise a series of Home Command Depots where men received training to be physically fit for service, or medical treatment after suffering injury or disability. Through McKenzie’s military service, his medical writings during the war, and his postwar work in North America, he trained and rehabilitated thousands of men, and helped lay a sound basis for modern physiotherapy. In addition, McKenzie put his background as a sculptor of athletes to the service of commemorative sculpture after the war, crafting a number of works that constituted the primary war memorial in a number of locations in Canada, the United States, and the United Kingdom. A man of many talents and passions, McKenzie brought them all to bear on his own personal war effort during and shortly after the First World War.

McKenzie established prominent careers in each of the areas of physical education, medicine, and sculpture some time before his involvement in the War. On occasion, retrospective references to his work surfaces in medical writing and art circles.\(^1\) The field of physical education/kinesiology probably remembers him best, both for his athletic sculpture and as a “founding father” of the discipline and the writer of key textbooks in the early 20th century.\(^2\) It seems, however, that his significant work during the World War I period often gets overshadowed by the rest of his career. None of the three biographies written about McKenzie pursues the war years in any great depth, despite this being the period where his work impacted most directly on the largest number of people.\(^3\) Even his earliest biographer Christopher Hussey, who does focus on McKenzie’s commemorative art from the War, does not capture well the totality of McKenzie’s contributions during the war years.

Furthermore, McKenzie wrote prolifically about both physical training and rehabilitation during the War, but this writing remains largely underanalyzed.\(^4\) This paper addresses McKenzie’s war efforts as a whole, considering his work in physical training, rehabilitation, and memorial sculpture, grounding the first two areas in his scholarly writing on them. The first section of the paper contextualizes McKenzie’s professional career prior to the War. The following sections break McKenzie’s World War I service down into the areas of physical training and rehabilitation, using his pertinent academic writings of the time. Following brief details on his post-discharge efforts in rehabilitating veterans in Canada and the United States, the final section considers the impact of McKenzie’s war-related commemorative sculpture, which took the place of his medical career after the War.
McKenzie was born in Almonte, Ontario, in 1863, the son of a Scottish minister who had immigrated to Canada. His Scottish heritage took a significant place in his later artistic career. His professional career began in 1885, when he enrolled at McGill University to pursue a medical degree. Even before his graduation in 1892, he worked at McGill in a number of positions, such as Assistant Instructor and Instructor in Gymnastics. In 1894, McKenzie submitted a proposal to the University senate to create the position of Medical Examiner, a position he himself assumed. In this capacity, he conducted physical examinations of all incoming undergraduates, and prescribed any remedial physical activities necessary to “combat incipient disease and deformity.” Before leaving McGill in 1904, he added faculty duties such as Demonstrator in Anatomy, established a private medical practice in which he achieved some renown for the treatment of scoliosis, wrote extensively on matters pertaining to physical education and medicine, and began his artistic career as a sculptor.

McKenzie’s anatomical training influenced the directions he took as a sculptor. His first attempts at sculpture sprang from a study of facial expressions under athletic effort; he portrayed his observations in a series of three-dimensional plaster masks entitled Fatigue, Breathlessness, Violent Effort, and Exhaustion. From this, McKenzie moved onto sculpture in the round, creating statuettes of athletes based on observations and measurements recorded from athletes at McGill. McKenzie developed a style reminiscent of ancient Greece, with muscular athletes in nude poses, either during athletic exertion or poised for the effort. Throughout his early artistic career, and for good or bad, depending on the perspective, McKenzie worked with anthropomorphic measurements of athletes taken by him and Dudley Allen Sargent of Harvard University. By the time he moved to Philadelphia in 1904, McKenzie had achieved some notice as an artist, with work accepted in the 1902 Society for American Artists exhibit in New York, the 1903 Royal Academy in London, and the 1904 Paris Salon.

In 1904, the University of Pennsylvania recruited McKenzie to become the Director of their new Physical Education Department. In Philadelphia, McKenzie continued with the medical examination of undergraduates and his academic writing. His sculpting career blossomed in this stage of his life, with the production of many of his more famous athletic sculptures, such as The Relay (1909), The Onslaught (1911), a football piece, and The Joy of Effort. This last project, a 46-inch diameter bronze relief of three hurdlers, took a prize in the Olympic Art competition of 1912 and the Stockholm Organizing Committee set it into the outside wall of the Olympic stadium for the Games.
McKenzie wrote one of his most enduring contributions during this time, his 1909 text book *Exercise in Education and Medicine*,\textsuperscript{10} significant as the first text that attempted to completely cover the fields of physical education and exercise science. It included basic sections on anatomy and exercise physiology, overviews of the many systems of gymnastics in use at the time, and sections on physical activity as a means of therapy for people with a range of disabilities.

Due to popular demand and rapid advances in the field, McKenzie completed a revised version of the text in 1913, although it did not come off the presses until 1917. In many ways, this second edition of *Exercise in Education and Medicine* proved an unknowing transition into McKenzie’s war service—the material in new sections on nerve pain and exhaustion, and rising means of physical therapy like hydrotherapy and radiant heat and light, quickly went to the test on an unimaginable scale.

**WAR SERVICE, 1915-1918**

McKenzie’s World War I military service encompassed only three short years, but they constitute the period in his life in which he had the most direct impact upon the greatest number of people. McKenzie volunteered for the medical service at the outbreak of war.\textsuperscript{11} He requested a leave of absence from the University, was granted the maximum allowable 18 months, and sailed with his wife for England in May, 1915. McKenzie did not realize his original plans of enlisting in the Canadian Army Medical Service, as application for the Canadian Expeditionary Force (CEF) could only be made through Ottawa. Unable to enter the Canadian Army, McKenzie instead enrolled in the British Royal Army Medical Corps.

Upon enlistment, Lieutenant McKenzie took a post at the Connaught Hospital in Aldershot.\textsuperscript{12} Unable to get his desired appointment to the Physical Training Headquarters, as there was no opening, McKenzie enrolled in a basic Physical Training and Bayonet Fighting course at Aldershot, “in order to familiarize himself with every detail of the system in use.”\textsuperscript{13} During this course, the Army discovered he was a prominent physical educator and writer of text books. Towards the end of the course, the commanding officer asked McKenzie if he knew of the “American McKenzie fellow” who wrote the book *Exercise in Education and Medicine* (the unit kept a copy in the mess as a reference). McKenzie had to admit to being the author of the book himself.\textsuperscript{14}

Upon discovery of his identity, Sir Thomas Galway, the Director General of Aldershot, sent McKenzie on an inspection tour of the south coast English training camps. On the tour, he identified two major problems in the camps: first, men in such poor physical condition that they could not
undertake basic physical training, and second, injured men lingering in the hospitals, for whom remedial physical training could expedite recovery. McKenzie developed programs to address both of these problems, which he then advanced to other Allied nations through his publications in medical and physical education journals.

**PHYSICAL TRAINING OF THE NEW BRITISH ARMIES**

McKenzie’s first plan for the physical training of soldiers, much like his work at the university, involved three or four camps of men parading before him individually, with him assigning appropriate remedial exercises. This idea brought him to the attention of Sir Alfred Keough, Director-General of the Medical Service, who attached McKenzie to his War Office staff. In an article in the *American Physical Education Review* in 1915, McKenzie noted that the mass recruitment of the new British Armies had caused many problems in terms of physical training. The armies, he wrote:

are composed of men from all walks of life—lawyers, doctors, clerks, bookkeepers, brokers and students unaccustomed to the fatigue of marching and heavy manual labour of digging. Miners, masons, bricklayers, carpenters, ploughmen and ironworkers, often bent and stiffened by long hours of hard, slow labour, all must be strengthened, quickened and made supple and agile if they are to fill the role of the modern soldier.

In addition to the varied backgrounds of the soldiery, the Royal Army only had infrastructure to train 100,000 men at the start of the War, and over three million had been recruited by 1915. For the small Physical Training and Gymnasia staff to train all these men would have been logistically impossible, so Headquarters staff developed a 21-day physical training course for select officers and senior NCO’s, who then returned to their units and trained the ranks in mass groups.

McKenzie had some input into the evolution of this course as a member of the War Office Staff, helping to modify the 1908 training manual still in use at the time. McKenzie’s familiarity with various systems of gymnastics from writing *Exercise in Education and Medicine* must have proved helpful. The newly developed system of basic training had roots in Swedish gymnastics movements and military drill, with special focus on bayonet work. Involving eight “tables” or series of movements, “Swedish in character,” and divided into three sections, the system moved recruits through introductory exercises, general exercises (bending, balancing, jumping, and marching), and “finishing exercises,” akin to the modern day “cool-down.” The plan had every soldier spending an hour each day in training, equally split between physical training of this sort, and work with the bayonet.
McKenzie lamented that other training demands often cut into the hour to be spent on physical training. He argued that “while shooting and digging are taught elsewhere … the Headquarters gymnasia is the source of all knowledge on the fundamental exercises that train in accuracy, balance and speed, without which the musketry instructor instructs in vain, and the drill sergeant’s shouts are futile.”

Bayonet training fascinated McKenzie. A student of martial arts such as fencing and ju-jitsu, he wrote that the: old and picturesque bayonet exercise that was an attractive display has been replaced by a less beautiful, but more practical method. The drill movements have been abolished except those of “on guard” and “point” … the four simple parries he [the soldier] learns are considered not so much a means of defence as the clearing of an obstacle for his attack. There is no sparring for an opening. It is either a thrust, or parry and thrust, and then on to the next.

The new tactics of trench warfare and the bayonet charge required new methodologies, and practice in their specifics. The men trained over obstacle courses, thrusting at sacks on gallows and other targets, and as McKenzie described it, demonstrated their accuracy by frequently coming away with paper rings stuck on their weapons. McKenzie made many of his observations from a physical educator’s point of view, suggesting that “it requires a sound heart, good lungs and strong arm to make the sprint, and hard accurate thrust of a bayonet charge,” and that this “could only be got through physical training.”

**REHABILITATION OF THE WOUNDED**

To address the second major problem, the neglected rehabilitation of the wounded, McKenzie helped reorganize the system of convalescent camps in England, revamping the Home Command Depot system. Promoted to Major, McKenzie took the Commanding Officer’s post at the Heaton Park Command Depot, the largest of the convalescent camps, capable of serving some 5000 men.

At Heaton Park, McKenzie adapted or developed many forms of physical therapy. He achieved high success rates—in the first four months of his command at Heaton Park, some 1200 wounded men returned to Class A (firing line) service, and during his full tenure there (until early 1917), nearly 50% of the Depot’s charges returned to some form of service. As a military medical officer, McKenzie’s primary goal was returning men to the front. He noted that:

The object of these depots were to [sic] return every available man to active service by treatment; to return men fit for light service abroad who could replace fit men in light duties upon the lines of communication; to fill positions
requiring light duties at home by men who were unable to do anything more than release a better man for active service, and to discharge from the army those for whom no treatment could be expected to give further results.26

To determine the level of treatment needed, camp staff divided cases into three classes, with designation as follows:

The First Class Matter is distributed to regular military hospitals ... where an operation or a short course of treatment gets them right, and after ten days’ leave, they go back to the fighting line. The second class matter requires an additional stay at a convalescent hospital...in which they receive treatment by physical means, including exercise, in addition to the usual hospital treatment, and a large proportion of these men again find their way to the front. The Third class matter, however—the cases too tedious for the hospital and convalescent camp—are more difficult to provide for and dispose of.27

McKenzie frequently described in his writings the nine types of injuries commonly seen in home front convalescent camps. These included healed wounds with dense scar tissue, physical wounds of the nerve, old wounds with protruding parts, joint injuries, functional heart cases, exhaustion, shell-shock, “hysterical” stiffness, and general weakness.28 Many of the non-acute problems he blamed on the initial poor physical condition of recruits. Somewhat unusually for a World War I physician, McKenzie considered cases of shell shock, hysterical stiffness, and other functional neuroses to be “very real conditions, beyond the patient’s control in most cases”29 and advocated they be treated with light forms of physical activity.

Treatments used in the Depots included standard ones like physical activity, massage, and passive movement, and other more unusual, but no less useful treatments, such as electrotherapy, the application of dry heat, and hydrotherapy as practised by fellow Canadian, Dr. Robert Fortsecue Fox (who later wrote a book on physical therapy to which McKenzie contributed a chapter).30 McKenzie himself designed and implemented many of the machines used for active and passive movements. For example, one physiotherapy device, known as the “arm-table,” had work stations for all parts of the arm, including shoulders, elbows, wrists, and fingers. A person using the device started on one end and rotated through, exercising specific areas needing individual attention.31

McKenzie tailored individual exercises to each soldier’s needs, with treatments as sophisticated as getting below-the-knee amputees to walk across a low balance beam, both for the benefits of movement and the development of co-ordination.32 Groups of soldiers also undertook exercise therapies at Heaton Park and the other camps. Men with similar cases performed gymnastics and drill movements by “squads,” sequential movements done on the commands of an instructor.33
By 1916, the Medical Service had established 16 Home Command Depots, each with the capacity to handle up to 4000 men. Major McKenzie assumed a supervisory role over these depots, later split into training camps, dealing solely with the physical training of healthy soldiers, and orthopaedic camps aimed at the treatment of the ill and wounded.34

POST-DISCHARGE REHABILITATIVE WORK

McKenzie returned to Pennsylvania in early 1917 when his 18 months of leave expired. That spring at the request of the Military Hospitals Commission, he undertook an inspection tour of the Canadian Military Convalescent Hospitals, helping them with plans for rehabilitative equipment. During this time, McKenzie worked closely with Dr. Edward A. Bott of Hart House at the University of Toronto, designing standard equipment for “reéducation, massage, hydro-therapy, electro-therapy, mechano-therapy, and physiotherapy.”35

By the middle of 1917, the US entered the war, and McKenzie received an invitation to Washington to consult at the Walter Reed Hospital, where he made recommendations on the lay-out of therapeutic equipment. McKenzie also spoke at the opening of the Clinic for the Functional Reeducation of Soldiers, Sailors, and Civilians in New York in July of 1918, a clinic largely modelled on his own design plans.36

McKenzie used his wide experience in the theories and methods of treating and rehabilitating soldiers throughout the war as the basis for volumes of academic writing during the war period. These he re-wrote into the influential book, Reclaiming the Maimed: A Handbook of Physical Therapy. While McKenzie directly helped thousands of men in the camps of England, many more received assistance from other physicians employing the methods outlined in this book, arguably the definitive work in the area. Both the United States’ departments of the Army and the Navy adopted Reclaiming the Maimed as their official rehabilitation manual, the Surgeon-General’s Department advocated its use, and the government of France utilized it in the effort to rebuild its nation’s youth.37 The times required massive amounts of rehabilitation, and McKenzie’s book filled a need for instructions in how to go about it. In the introduction to the book, he wrote:

The calamity of war has been necessary to startle the profession into a realization of the wide field that should be occupied by physical methods in the treatment of disease. The sporadic wounds that peaceful life produced have been multiplied in our military hospitals into groups, the exception has become the ordinary; torn and mangled bodies have had to be patched and remade, and functions lost or weakened gradually coaxed back toward the normal, by means hitherto despised, or ignored by too many physicians and surgeons.38
These “despised and ignored” methods, proven at Heaton Park and elsewhere throughout the war, would form the basis of modern physiotherapy.

One of the more unusual types of postwar work described in *Reclaiming the Maimed* involved McKenzie’s sculpting talents. In a number of cases where explosions had disfigured people’s faces, McKenzie fashioned a bronze mask that replicated the patients’ missing features, with details even down to wrinkles and moles. Affixed to the face by wire spectacles, the wearer blended the mask into the remaining features through the use of make-up. McKenzie considered this difficult work to be amongst the most satisfying of all his rehabilitative efforts.39

COMMEMORATIVE SCULPTURE AFTER THE WAR

After the war, McKenzie withdrew from the medical field somewhat. He gave up his private practice, and his subsequent writing focused more on physical education than medicine. He maintained his involvement with medical associations like the new American Physiotherapy Association, but otherwise moved away from medicine. His biographers suggest that he saw so much destruction of human bodies during the war that he no longer wanted to work in the area.40 Another alternative is that he felt he had said and done his piece on physical therapy. However, his heavy involvement with major works of commemorative art seems the most plausible reason. At war’s end, McKenzie received commissions to do a number of commemorative statues, and put so much determination into his work that he likely had little time for anything other than his duties at the University.

McKenzie actually completed his first piece of major commemorative work in 1914, an eight-foot high bronze statue in Philadelphia entitled *the Youthful Franklin*, which depicted Benjamin Franklin walking into Philadelphia as a young man. Commissioned by the University of Pennsylvania, which owes its founding to Franklin, it stands on the University’s campus.41 The unusual choice to render Franklin as a youth likely matched well with McKenzie’s experience of modelling young athletes, and demonstrates youthful spirit as a theme that attracted McKenzie even before the War.

During the War, McKenzie only worked on one piece of sculpture, a small statuette entitled *Blighty*, which represented a uniformed Seaforth Highlander (McKenzie’s ancestral clan) on leave. Finished in 1919, the seated statue “embodies the chief elements of McKenzie’s commemorative work: the spirit of the young men.”42 This early work offered a glimpse of the themes that would permeate McKenzie’s war-related commemorative works—spirit, duty, youthfulness, determination, vic-
tory, and bodily wholeness. Even though the title suggests that the subject is wounded, he shows no signs of injury.

McKenzie completed four smaller works dedicated to individuals in the two years immediately after the War. He completed four smaller works dedicated to individuals in the two years immediately after the War. Three of the four commemorated individuals had been McKenzie’s students at either McGill or the University of Pennsylvania. These include the half-size statue Captain Guy Drummond (1919), another half-life-sized work known as The Aviator (monument to Hubert Norton Downs, 1920), and a work in an unusual material for the artist, a white marble frieze entitled Altar of Dedication to Howard C. McCall (1920), located in the Church of the Saviour in Philadelphia. His fourth individually dedicated work, the Lieut.-Col. George Howard Baker, M.P., Memorial (1923), resides in the lobby of the Canadian House of Commons in Ottawa.

In the summer of 1920, McKenzie held an exhibit of 60 of his new and old athletic sculptures at the Fine Arts Society of London, on New Bond Street. The celebration of the young athlete so evident in McKenzie’s athletic sculptures must have had an impact on a number of viewers, including two sets of individuals in search of an artist to effect municipal memorials. Resulting directly from this exhibition, McKenzie received commissions to sculpt memorials for the city of Cambridge, England, and his own hometown of Almonte, Ontario.

Like many communities, Cambridge struggled over what sort of monument to erect and where to erect it. In the end, the community opted for two sets of lists: one at the University and one at the cathedral in the Borough of Ely, as well as a piece of memorial art. Sir Arthur Shipley and his memorial committee, described as men “of conservative tastes in art [who] wanted a monument to Victory in a style they construed of as realistic.” The committee approached McKenzie after his 1920 London exhibition to execute their design.

The unveiling of the memorial occurred on 3 July 1922, coinciding with the Royal Agricultural Fair, held that year in the town. With an honour guard from the Cambridgeshire regiment standing in the pouring rain, the Duke of York presided over the ceremony. The rain apparently broke as the Duke began his speech, fortuitous in that due to a slow boat from the United States, McKenzie did not have time to fire the actual statue and had to bronze the model. The bronze had begun to wash off in the rain.

At the unveiling, McKenzie told the local press that the “bronze represents a private returning home victorious”; the article further indicates that “the type represents the idea of an English youth on whom England must depend for her future.” K. S. Inglis, who has analyzed the establishment and continued reception of the monument, argues that “except that he is walking away from the station you might think he was going off to the war, eager for the great adventure, carrying the
poems of Rupert Brooke in his haversack, rather than returning from it … the inscription might more truly say WHO SERVED AND SURVIVED UNSCATHED IN MIND AND BODY.”

The memorial contains many markers of victory. The soldier on the pedestal is walking away from the station, helmet in hand, rifle slung over his shoulder. A captured German helmet and a laurel rest on his sack, while he has a rose in his hand and one thrown at his foot. His head turns to the side as if his attention has been caught by a shout from someone in a crowd. His stride is over-long, as if rushing somewhere, likely home. He is whole and hale, and shows no ill marks from his war experience. The idealization of wholeness, of youth, and of spirit demonstrated by this monument remained key attributes of the rest of McKenzie’s major commemorative work related to the war.

This monument also showed McKenzie’s desire to portray what Hussey has called “national types.” McKenzie drew upon his experience with the Royal Army Medical Corps to craft the face of the soldier to look as if he came from the East Anglia region. For his two other main monuments, at Woodbury, New Jersey, and Edinburgh, McKenzie would model the faces of groups of men he considered representative of the group being portrayed. This attention to detail likely contributed to the memorials’ emotional impact when unveiled.

The second commission from the 1920 London exhibition came from McKenzie’s hometown of Almonte, Ontario. In creating The Volunteer,
also known as the Rosamond Memorial after the family whose bequest established it, McKenzie attempted to capture the moment of dedication and determination to do one’s duty that he felt so many experienced during the war. As Hussey described it, “He [McKenzie] was haunted by the spiritual response of the youths who volunteered in 1914, the youth whose supple bodies he knew so well, and whose inextinguishable cheerfulness, buoyancy, and courage in the face of the event were the light of those dark days. He chose for Alec Rosamond’s memorial the moment that magnetized a million spirits, freeing them for the minute from material preoccupations.”

The memorial attempts to capture the moment of decision, with a seated figure looking into space and appearing as if to rise. The figure, a little older than the one in Cambridge, wears a Canadian junior officer’s uniform with forge cap, a single revolver, and a raincoat draped over his arm. As in other communities, the names of Almonte’s 46 fallen were inscribed on the adjoining wall. McKenzie would return to the ideas of determination and voluntary sacrifice in his largest work, *The Call*, completed in 1927. After the unveiling of *The Homecoming* in 1923, McKenzie received a request from the town of Woodbury, New Jersey, for a duplicate of the memorial. With his propensity for “national types,” McKenzie denied the request, instead substituting a companion piece entitled *The Victor* (1925).

For this work, McKenzie portrayed his perceptions of not only national features, but also of national character. Based on a series of models from the University of Pennsylvania, *The Victor* has a broad forehead, a square chin and high cheekbones, what McKenzie saw as “the American type.” Though similar to the figure of *The Homecoming*, this soldier marches with eyes fixed forward, since in the war, the French supposedly noted that Americans marched with all eyes facing front. This figure still has the slung rifle, but with an olive branch rather than a laurel. He is particularly solemn, and supposedly representative of the untiring resolve of American manhood, moving forward with eyes on the future. Like *The Volunteer*, one might read determination as a central theme, as important (or even more so) than the titled theme of victory.

McKenzie crafted and unveiled his most ambitious piece in 1927. *The Call*, the Scottish American Memorial in Edinburgh, was commissioned by the Scottish American Association and received subscriptions throughout the country. By now a prominent sculptor of war art as well as a leading member and past president of the St. Andrew’s Society of Philadelphia, the choice of McKenzie as sculptor seemed nearly inevitable. He returned to the idea of dedication and duty for this memorial. It consists not only of a central figure, but also a 25-foot bronze frieze, with inscription, situated in Princes Street Gardens facing Edinburgh castle. The seated central figure wears a uniform shirt with no
identifying marks, and a kilt with the lion of Scotland on its sporran. His
gaze is fixed on Edinburgh castle, and the artist created the sense that he
is listening to something coming from the distance. The pedestal is
engraved with the notation:

THE CALL
1914
A Tribute
From Men and Women of Scottish Blood and Sympathies
in the United States of
AMERICA
TO
SCOTLAND

It also displays a quote from Judges v. 18—“A people that have jeop-
darded their lives unto death in the high places of the field.”

The frieze set in the wall in the background represents a pipe band
and a recruiting party, followed by new recruits from all walks of life.
McKenzie rendered an individualized visage for any of the faces visible
among the 15 lines of figures arrayed in marching order. To do this and
still match with his ideal of “national types,” McKenzie used a unit of the
King’s Own Scottish Borderers as his models. He rendered the back
end of the frieze so that it appears that the group of recruits goes on out
of the picture. The inscription running the length of the bottom of the
frieze was taken from poetry written by Alan MacKintosh, a Lieutenant of the 5th Seafords killed in 1916. It reads: “If it be life that waits, I shall live forever unconquered. If death, I shall die at last Strong in my pride and free.”

This monument, always listed by McKenzie as the favourite of all his works, is certainly the largest in size and effort required. It was his most sentimental work, attempting to communicate loyalty, honour, and dedication. Many sources suggest that his effort to make it relevant for the local area had a real impact. For example, current tourist literature describing the monument suggests that “after the unveiling in 1927 many a grieving mother saw in the honest features the likeness of a son lost in war.”

The Scottish American Memorial largely served as the capstone to all of McKenzie’s war-related efforts. After that, he only completed one other small war memorial, the Jane Delano Memorial, unveiled at Red Cross headquarters in Washington, D.C. in 1933. This six-foot marble statue dedicated to the 296 American nurses who died in the war, is of a robed and hooded woman reaching out with both hands open, as if to offer an embrace. In the abstract, it represents a theme of mercy. This departs from McKenzie’s earlier war sculpture, but by then the times had changed.

As a collective, McKenzie’s commemorative art shares a number of common themes. Youth, high spirits, determination, and dedication to a cause can all be read across McKenzie’s war-related commemorative sculptures. To the one, they suggest a very positive vision of the wartime experience. The central figure in each of the major memorials is whole in body and completely unscarred in spirit, either responding to the call to duty without hesitation, or marching home in victorious celebration. Barry Fair, the curator of a recent exhibit of McKenzie’s art, drew links from McKenzie’s athletic works to his war works, stating that “These again centred on his ideals of youth and beauty, and appeared to ignore entirely the horrific side of the wartime ideal.”

Part of the process of enabling people and communities to emotionally heal from the war was to ensure that it meant something, that good came from it. Many war artists like McKenzie, especially in the early years after the War, focused on themes such as heroism, valour, and victory in an attempt to help people come to grips with the sacrifices made. Such work lifted the public morale and offered consolation to the living.

Over time, the memory and meaning of World War I in the Western world shifted away from the “High Diction” of bravery, determination, and victory to frame the conflict in terms of sacrifice and loss. Canadian and British society, in general, began to develop a sense that peace-time did not live up to the mythologies of the War. The work of artists like
McKenzie fell out of fashion since they did not match these new sentiments. The meanings of existing memorials began to be rewritten in the public’s minds. Even one so clearly dedicated to victory as The Homecoming became, over the years, much more associated with sacrifice and death than any positive notions of the War.69

Like Great War memorials the world over, McKenzie’s commemorative statues have faded somewhat into obscurity in the public consciousness of the communities in which they are located. The world moved on around them, in some cases quite literally. The Homecoming in Cambridge now sits in the middle of a busy intersection with traffic flowing around it in six directions. It could be argued that this memorial is now almost as much a public nuisance as it is a site for public commemoration, although still invested with meaning for veteran’s groups.70

The Call in Edinburgh, McKenzie’s favourite of the group, seems to have endured reasonably well. Sitting in a quiet section of Princes Street Gardens, there are no worries for its immediate future. Visiting it on a chilly mid-June day with fog rolling around Edinburgh castle, the memorial still seems to communicate some of its original intentions. Other tourists and passers-by, noticing my interest in it, stopped to look and invariably had to look at the details in the frieze up close, and turn to see where the soldier’s gaze fell. Somehow, through both its form and its placement, this memorial still seems to be saying something across the decades.

The gaze of The Call’s soldier toward Edinburgh Castle.
POSTWAR LIFE

After the war, McKenzie returned to Philadelphia where he became absorbed by his sculpture and his duties for the physical education department. McKenzie continued to make a number of significant contributions to the field of physical education, such as drafting what became known as the “Gates Plan” (named after the university president) in 1931, a model for the relationship between athletics and physical education departments copied throughout the United States.\(^7^1\) Several times in the 1920s, McKenzie had threatened to retire because he felt athletics at the university took too much precedence. Kozar speculates that his heavy involvement with art in the late 1920s, with four exhibitions in five years and the memorial commissions, motivated his desire to reduce his administrative load as much as anything else.\(^7^2\) In 1931, the university granted him the William White Research professorship, essentially freeing him to work on his art.

Also in 1931, McKenzie purchased and renovated an old mill in his hometown of Almonte, turning it into a studio and summer residence. He dubbed the property “The Mill of Kintail” after a set of mountains in the Western Highlands of Scotland from where the MacKenzie clan originally came.\(^7^3\) The Mill became McKenzie’s refuge and seat of artistic production in his twilight years and is now a museum devoted to his work, open from spring to late fall each year.

McKenzie devoted much of his time throughout the 1920s and early 1930s to athletic sculpture again, producing several statues each year, plus dozens of medallions and assorted small pieces over the years. In addition, he took on a number of commissions for monuments to historical figures. Most of these reside in the Philadelphia area, but some stand as far afield as a statue of James Wolfe in Greenwich Royal Park in London. To manage the work load, McKenzie employed an assistant from 1919 on; first, Boris Blai and then Joe Brown, both sculptors who went on to productive careers themselves after their time with McKenzie.\(^7^4\)

McKenzie remained active with professional associations even though semi-retired from Pennsylvania with the White Professorship. He presided at the annual meeting of the American Academy of Physical Education and was re-elected president of the association the week before he died from a heart attack in April of 1938.\(^7^5\) Fitfully for a man who had combined medicine and physical education throughout his life, he also held the presidency of the American Academy of Physical Medicine at the time of his death.

As a last request, he asked that his heart be buried in the pedestal of his favourite work, the Scottish-American Memorial in Edinburgh. Local laws prohibited filling the request, but nearby St. Cuthbert’s Church accepted it and interred McKenzie’s heart within sight of *The Call.*\(^7^6\)
request demonstrates that the war years and his commemorative sculpture obviously had a great impact on McKenzie himself.

CONCLUSION

R. Tait McKenzie’s work during and after World War I stands as a unique contribution in military and medical history, spanning physical training, rehabilitation, and commemoration. Through the work of this Canadian doctor, who lived and worked primarily in the United States, Britain more effectively executed her war efforts in World War I with fitter men, and more soldiers who returned to the front after becoming casualties. McKenzie’s work in Heaton Park, in Britain’s other convalescent camps, and in North America, assisted in the Allied war effort, and the rebuilding of nations after the war.

McKenzie received recognition for his accomplishments in physical therapy towards the end of his life. Named a Fellow of the American Academy of Physical Medicine in 1934, McKenzie was elected President of the Academy in 1937. That he had not been directly involved in medical practice in the 15 years since the War and still received these accolades, testified to the great impact of his war work in medicine.

On both sides of the Atlantic, thousands of veterans disabled in the war owed a debt to McKenzie, for a return to better physical function either directly by his hand, through devices and techniques of rehabilitation developed by him, or through advice given in his publications. Similarly, McKenzie’s work in sculpture offered healing and consolation to those who came in contact with it in its time. His sculpture suggested that the sacrifices had been worth it after all, at least in that initial period in the 1920s. Through sculpting men in flesh and clay, and rebuilding bodies and spirits, McKenzie’s work truly made a difference to many people, communities and nations in need.

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4 McGill devotes five pages of her Joy of Effort to the story of McKenzie’s involvement in the War, but leaves his prolific war-related writing, some 11 articles, books or pamphlets, largely untapped.


7 McKenzie sometimes received criticism from art circles throughout his sculpture career for his knowledge in anatomy, which critics suggested did not allow for enough artistic interpretation. Kozar, R. Tait McKenzie, p. 18-20. This continued even though he largely abandoned the “science” of anthropometry and the use of tabulated measures after his move to Philadelphia in 1904. D. G. B. (Barry) Fair, Seeking the Ideal: The Athletic Sculptures of R. Tait McKenzie (London, Ont.: London Regional Art and Historical Museum, 2001), p. 15.

8 Fair, Seeking the Ideal, p. 11.


11 Unless otherwise noted, the information in the chronology of McKenzie’s war work comes from Hussey, Tait McKenzie, p. 54-56.

12 While living in England from 2004 to summer 2006, I attempted to confirm McKenzie’s military record through archival sources, but no trace of his official records could be found at the National Archives at Kew, the Imperial War Museum or the Royal Army Medical Corps Museum. It seems likely that McKenzie’s records were lost when the main series was destroyed by bombing in 1940. I found his campaign medal card, which shows him completing his service at the rank of Major in the
Royal Army Medical Corps, and entitled to the British War Medal, given essentially to all who served any time between 5 August 1914 and 11 November 1918. Someone annotated his card, by hand, with the note “From America.”

13 Hussey, Tait McKenzie, p. 54.

14 Slightly different variants of this anecdote are in Cosentino, Almonte’s Brothers of the Wind, p. 116; Hussey, Tait McKenzie, 54.


17 Hussey, Tait McKenzie, p. 54.


29 McKenzie, Reclaiming the Maimed: A Handbook of Physical Therapy, p. 5-6. The more general opinion at the time, especially in the early years of the war, was that the men with these conditions were “slackers.”

30 Robert Fortescue Fox, with chapters by R. Tait McKenzie, Francis Hernaman-Johnson, and James B. Mennell, Physical Remedies for Disabled Soldiers (Toronto: Macmillan Co. of Canada, 1917).

31 For descriptions and photographs of some of the devices that McKenzie invented, see his “Functional Re-education of the Wounded,” or Reclaiming the Maimed.


34 McGill, The Joy of Effort, p. 98.
36 McKenzie, “Clinic for Functional Reeducation” (Medicine in the Army and Navy Section), New York Medical Journal, 123 (19 October 1918): 687.
38 McKenzie, Reclaiming the Maimed, p. 1.
39 McKenzie, Reclaiming the Maimed, p. 128.
40 McGill, The Joy of Effort, p. 100-1; Cosentino, Almonte’s Brothers of the Wind, p. 125.
41 Hussey, Tait McKenzie, p. 50-53.
42 Hussey, Tait McKenzie, p. 56.
43 The complete list of McKenzie’s First World War-related commemorative art includes Over the Top, a sketch for a proposed but unfinished Canadian National War Memorial, 1918; Blighty, bronze statuette, 1919; Altar of Dedication to Howard C. McCall, Church of the Saviour, Philadelphia, white marble frieze, 30 x 72 inches, 1919; Captain Guy Drummond, half life-size statuette, 1919; The Aviator (monument to Hubert Norton Downs)—half life-size statue, 1920; Radnor Memorial—Over the Top, bronze relief panel, 44 x 65 inches, Radnor, Pennsylvania, 1922; Lt. Col. G.H. Baker, M.P. Memorial, Ottawa (Canadian parliament), bronze statue, 1923; The Homecoming, Cambridge, England, bronze statue, 1923; The Volunteer (Rosamond Memorial), Almonte, Ontario, bronze statue, 1923; The Victor, Woodbury, N.J., bronze statue, 1925; The Call—Scottish American Monument, Edinburgh, bronze statue and 25 foot frieze, 1927; and Jane Delano Memorial, Red Cross Headquarters, Washington, D.C., marble statue, 1933.
44 Baker was the only member of Canadian parliament to die in the War.
45 Kozar, R. Tait McKenzie, p. 18.
48 Inglis, “The Homecoming,” p. 597.
50 Hussey, Tait McKenzie, p. 66.
52 Inglis, “The Homecoming,” p. 583.
53 Hussey, Tait McKenzie, p. 64-69.
54 Recent scholarship has raised questions about McKenzie’s affection for anthropometry, his desire for perfect bodies and “racial types” as indicating a bias and fuelling anti-immigration in the United States. See Jennifer Wingate, “Over the Top: The Doughboy in World War One Memorials and Visual Culture,” American Art, 19, 2 (Summer 2005): 26-47.
55 Hussey, Tait McKenzie, p. 4. Hussey’s admiration for McKenzie and his work can clearly be read off this passage.
56 Hussey, Tait McKenzie, p. 68.
57 Hussey, Tait McKenzie, plate 64, between p. 68-69.
60 Hussey, Tait McKenzie, p. 71.
61 Hussey, Tait McKenzie, p. 74.
65 Fair, *Seeking the Ideal*, p. 22.
66 For a good analysis of literature, popular culture and artistic visions of the war and the change in meaning through them, see Jonathan Vance, *Death So Noble: Memory, Meaning and the First World War* (Vancouver: UBC Press, 1997).