

Duncan Henry Hibbs SINCLAIR (1874-1927)

Australian Town and Country Journal 17 Feb 1900

The following is the list of men who have been attested for service with the Bushmen's Contingent in South Africa... "D Squadron"... Duncan Sinclair, N.Z.

AngloBoerWar.com Name Search

Trooper Duncan Sinclair, No.395, New South Wales Citizen's Bushmen – Source: OZ-Boer database

Australian Town and Country Journal 24 Feb 1900 Photograph of the men of "D Squadron"

<https://trove.nla.gov.au/newspaper/page/5324820> Duncan Sinclair #73

Feilding Star 12 Jun 1900 The Rhodesian Field Force

Mr D. Sinclair, Pohangina County Engineer, has received a letter from his son, Duncan, who is a trooper in the Imperial Bushmen's Contingent from New South Wales, and who were landed at Beira for the defence of Rhodesia. Trooper Sinclair applied for and was refused a place in the second New Zealand Contingent, and being keen on serving as a "Soldier of the Queen," went to Sydney, where he joined the Bushmen's Contingent. The first part of the letter is dated April 10, just prior to the disembarkation and the latter two days later. He says:- "I think we are going to work the northern part of the Transvaal frontier and then on to Mafeking; part of the work is to stop ammunition and stores being taken to the Boers along the railway from Beira. There are other troops going with us, and in all we will be about 1700 strong. The bushmen are intended for scouts; two have been picked out from each of our troops – that is eight from D squadron, for special scouting, and the same from the other three squadrons. I was one of the two selected from our squad, the other fellow, named "Duffy," being reckoned the best rider in the contingent. The officers give us special scouts lectures at night on scouting duties. The rifles we are to use are Magazine Lee-Enfield's which take ten shots in the magazine and one in the barrel; they are a bit heavy, 9lb 2oz without the bayonet, which is 4oz extra, but they are very true to shoot with, and are suited at 2800 yards. The coast from the Cape for two or three hundred miles is very barren – either great cliffs and rocks or, more often, long stretches of white sand. Up towards East London and on to Durban it looks really good country, big patches of what, through the glass, look like grass with here and there clumps of scrub about 10 feet high and as thick as the taramea on the ranges at Pohangina. From Durban north it is all sand; something like the Rangitikei beach. We will be the first troops that have gone this route, so the feed for the horses will be good." The troops here referred to included Queenslanders, Victorians, and Canadians, and some of them, if not all, assisted at the relief of Mafeking.

Sydney Morning Herald 14 Aug 1900 The Australian Bushmen

Lieutenant Westgarth, 1st Regiment Australian Bushmen, writes from Zeerust on July 10 as follows:... (July 11, 1900) Colonel Baden-Powell's despatches today mention the names of three of my squadron as being conspicuous for their gallantry – Sergeant Airey, Trooper Allison, Trooper Sinclair.

Manawatu Standard 24 Aug 1900 A Distinguished Palmerstonian

The friends of Mr Duncan Sinclair, junr., who is now serving with the Australian Bushmen in South Africa, have received news by the last mail that he had been specially mentioned in Lieut-General Baden Powell's despatches for conspicuous gallantry at Zeerust. The particulars of the engagement in which Trooper Sinclair distinguished himself are not yet to hand, but it is highly gratifying to the residents of Palmerston to know that one of their townsmen has proved himself such a worthy son of the Empire; and it also shows the absurdity of the redtapism which governed the selection of our contingents, for it will be remembered that Trooper Sinclair's services were rejected in New Zealand because he had not been a member of a volunteer corps, and rather than be denied he went to Sydney and joined the Australian Bushmen. Thus, while we rejoice in the knowledge that one of our own men has received the commendation of so gallant a soldier as Baden-Powell, we regret that through the cast iron methods of our officials the credit will be lost to New Zealand.

Manawatu Standard 31 Aug 1900

According to the latest files of Sydney papers, Trooper Duncan Sinclair, of Palmerston North, who is now serving with the Australian Bushmen in South Africa, has been promoted to the rank of Lieutenant. It will be remembered that a few days ago we stated that he had been specially mentioned in Lieut-General Baden-Powell's despatches, and doubtless the promotion is the result of that General's recommendation.

Evening Post 18 Sep 1900

According to the latest files of Sydney papers, Trooper Duncan Sinclair, of Palmerston North, who is serving with the Australian Bushmen in South Africa, has been promoted to the rank of lieutenant. It will be remembered (says the Manawatu Standard) that a few days ago we stated that he had been specially mentioned in Lieut.-General Baden-Powell's despatches, and doubtless the promotion is the result of that General's recommendation.

Manawatu Standard 26 Sep 1900 Trooper Sinclair

Some time ago we announced that Trooper Duncan Sinclair, at present in South Africa with the Australian Bushmen, had been specially mentioned by Baden-Powell for bravery. The recent Sydney papers give brief particulars of the incident, the following being B.P.'s dispatch on the subject. Rustenburg, July 10. "For gallantry in action. The general officer commanding has much pleasure in placing on record the following instances of gallantry in action by non-commissioned officers and men of the New South Wales contingent. Sergt Airy, and Troopers Allison and Sinclair, in the attack on the 7th inst., displayed conspicuous coolness and readiness in bringing a wounded comrade out of action under hot fire." It appears that in the engagement in question one of the men at the Maxim gun was wounded seriously, and left on the field; and upon the position of the Maxim being changed, Sergeant Airey asked if he might be allowed to go and carry the wounded man out of fire. He was allowed to do so, and with the aid of troopers Allison and Sinclair he went, and together they improvised a stretcher by lashing rifles together and carried him out under a very heavy fire.

Manawatu Standard 26 Sep 1900 Trooper Sinclair

Some time ago we announced that Trooper Duncan Sinclair, at present in South Africa with the Australian Bushmen, had been specially mentioned by Baden-Powell for bravery. The recent Sydney papers give brief particulars of the incident, the following being B-P's despatch on the subject. Rustenburg, July 10. "For gallantry in action. The general officer commanding has much pleasure in placing on record the following instances of gallantry in action by non-commissioned officers and men of the New South Wales contingent. Sergt Airy, and Troopers Allison and Sinclair, in the attack on the 7th inst., displayed conspicuous coolness and readiness in bringing a wounded comrade out of action under hot fire." It appears that in the engagement in question one of the men at the Maxim gun was wounded seriously, and left on the field; and upon the position of the Maxim being changed, Sergeant Airy asked if he might be allowed to go and carry the wounded man out of fire. He was allowed to do so, and with the aid of troopers Allison and Sinclair he went, and together they improvised a stretcher by lashing rifles together and carried him out under a very heavy fire.

Manawatu Standard 17 Nov 1900

We learn that Corporal Duncan Sinclair, who was with the N.S.W. Bushmen, and has been six weeks in Rustenberg with enteric fever, is returning to the colony invalided, and will probably be on board the *Harlech Castle*.

Manawatu Standard 19 Nov 1900 Boer War – A Letter from Corporal Sinclair

Mrs Duncan Sinclair, of Terrace End, received by last mail an interesting letter from her son "Duncan," who has been invalided home from South Africa, and is now believed to be on his way, along with several other New Zealanders, in the *Harlech Castle*, which sailed from Capetown on November 3rd. Trooper Sinclair mentions in his letter that in consequence of services rendered by him and a comrade in the first fight in which the Australian Bushmen were involved, they were promoted to the rank of corporals, and he also describes the operations in which they had been engaged since his last letter was written from Mafeking, which they left sometime in June for Zeerust, and where they stayed a day or two and then went on under Baden-Powell, to Rustenburg. Their arrival there was evidently as much a surprise to themselves as it was to the Boers, for the British had no idea that the town was occupied until they arrived within a mile of it, when the Boers opened fire on them and they had a good "go in" for about two hours, which resulted in the Boers being driven out, and the Bushmen taking possession of the town.

A camp was pitched in a Nek, and from this point they were sent out in small companies every day to commandeer all in the shape of supplies that they could lay their hands on, the sport being varied occasionally by a shot or two from the Boers who were always prowling about on chance of "sniping" some of the forage parties, a game at which they were sometimes rather successful.

While stationed at Rustenburg the Bushmen were joined by other British companies, and on July 21st a force of about 300 strong started on the road to Zeerust to meet a convoy which was making its way to Rustenburg. The Boers, who were still hanging about the outskirts of the town, were evidently aware of the movement, but they allowed the column to proceed unmolested until about one o'clock in the morning, when the advance guard was fired on. Orders were at once given to dismount, and proceed in open order, but no enemy was seen and nothing further occurred, and so when daylight came they mounted again and rode into some hilly country where the Boers were quietly waiting for them. No sooner had they got well amongst the kopjes than a furious rifle fire was opened upon them, apparently from all sides, and neither advance or retreat were possible. All bands at once went down amongst the rocks for cover and lay there throughout the day with fully 500 Boers peppering away at them.

Their fusillade was, however, heard in Rustenburg, and a relief column came out; but upon its approach the Boers discreetly retired, and the expedition returned, taking back with it 7 killed and 19 wounded. A few days afterwards Corporal Sinclair was down with enteric fever, and his career on the field came to an end. Four days were spent in the field hospital at the Nek, and the General Baden-Powell broke up his camp at Rustenburg, and started for Pretoria; but as "Dune" and three of his comrades were too ill to be removed, they had to remain in town where a Hospital had been arranged in one of the halls, presided over by an English doctor and an Afrikaner nurse, who volunteered to look after the invalids. The food for the patients was provided by the English ladies of the town, of whose kindness and consideration Corporal Sinclair speaks in unbounded praise. They were most untiring in their efforts to alleviate the sufferings of the sick, and although food was scarce in the place, they, by some means, always continued to have a dainty dish for the patients, and in this respect both Boer and Briton were treated exactly alike, although Corporal Sinclair thinks their benefactors must have often gone hungry themselves.

When Lord Kitchener and General Mahon passed through the town "Dune" was still too ill to move, but he wrote a few cheerful lines to his mother, scribbled on the leaf of a pocket book, and gave it to one of Kitchener's troopers to post for him when they reached Pretoria, a commission which was faithfully fulfilled, for the little messenger arrived safely in Palmerston a few weeks ago.

After that Rustenburg seemed to be of no interest to the British for some weeks, and even if Corporal Sinclair had been well enough to get away, the opportunity did not present itself, and so he had to spend his time in getting convalescent. This was no simple matter, for they were strictly forbidden by the Boer authorities of the town to go further than a chain or so from the hospital door. This confinement was too severe for "Dunc," and so one day he went for a short drive into the country with the doctor, for which he was promptly clapped in gaol for a week by the Landrost, and he might have been there yet but for the solicitations of the residents, who prevailed upon "the old heathen" to set him at liberty, which he did with no very good grace, and Corporal Sinclair returned to the hospital, where, at the time of writing, he was impatiently waiting for the British troops to come along and take him away.

Hawke's Bay Herald 23 Jul 1901 At The Front – Sergeant Peddie's Experiences

... I met Duncan Sinclair, of Palmerston North, the other day. He was in the New South Wales Bushmen, but has signed on in another corps for another six months. He has been made a King's corporal for gallantry in the field. He and another Bushman, under heavy fire, brought out a Maxim from the Boers – one they had collared from us – and also a wounded man. He should have had a V.C. for his plucky act...

Manawatu Standard 15 Jan 1902 South Africa

Mr Duncan Sinclair has received a letter from his son, Duncan, stating that he does not intend to return from South Africa for some time yet. He has severed his connection with the military, and, together with a Canadian friend, has accepted a billet to purchase cattle for a cold storage company. He has also decided to purchase landed property in Johannesburg, and following suit with the prevailing ideas, has been dabbling in mining stock, which at the time of writing was showing a very fair profit on the purchasing price. Reference is made to the depletion of cattle throughout the various states and his impression that the quest for suitable stock may take them into Swaziland. Altogether the writer appears to be enamoured of his chance of success in the country.

Manawatu Standard 17 Apr 1902 No Use for Ex-Soldiers

The glamour of romance which is cast round those New Zealanders who go to South Africa to “fight for the Empire” sometimes gives way to prosaic disappointments of hard fact, and the experience of a Palmerstonian in the Transvaal recently proves this to a remarkable extent. Most residents of this district know young Mr Duncan Sinclair, whose personal popularity was as great as his experience as a contractor and hard grafter proved him to be a settler or more than ordinary merit. Soon after the third New Zealand contingent had been sent to South Africa, Mr Sinclair went to New South Wales and joined the Bushmen’s contingent, seeing considerable service. He then took charge of a Government cattle farm in the Transvaal and carried out his duties to the satisfaction of the authorities. Hearing of the big cheques the Cattle Rangers were making, he joined them, but never succeeded in making his pile. He struck up an acquaintance with a Canadian named Gunn, a splendid specimen of a colonial, and they were mates for eighteen months. They could not get work for two weeks after they left the Cattle Rangers, when they got an engagement with the Cold Storage Company to purchase cattle from the Kaffirs. It was while they were looking for work that the experiences alluded to were obtained. We give the particulars in Mr Sinclair’s own words:-

“The authorities were going to put us over the border en route for the Cape as undesirables, like they do most overseas colonials, although when we got this job we battled and got permission to stay, but most of the best men in our section were sent over the border and are at home in Queensland. I cannot say much in a letter about this “putting over the border” practice, as all these letters have to pass the censor, but I may say that we were told that we had seven days in which to join another fighting corps or go.

I saw a letter from the authorities here, informing people not to engage colonials, especially Cattle Rangers, as they knew “too much” about stock. Well, Gunn and I went to the officer and asked him who issued the order, and if he included us two, as it was nothing more nor less than branding us as thieves, as our discharges had to be produced in applying for civil employment, and people could see what corps we belonged to. After a lot of threatening on our part to the effect that we would go to Lord Alfred Milner and write home about our treatment, they gave us a letter to say that we were not included in the condemnatory order, and as we had first-class discharges we could take employment.

So we escaped being kicked out of the country by a narrow shave. Most of the other fellows were not so lucky, and they got on the train to the Cape in disgust to think that after serving twenty months in the field they were put over the border like rebels. It is hard luck when you look at it, especially when you see surrendered burghers who had been fighting against us getting good billets at fifteen shillings and a pound a day and laughing at our fellows.” It is very evident that romance and reality do not always agree, and if the information contained in the above had come from a less trustworthy source we could not have credited it.

Manawatu Standard 26 Feb 1903 Terrace End School Tablet

The tablet erected by the Terrace End School committee in honour of boys from the school who served in the South African war is now an accomplished fact, and has been placed in position in the head masters' room. The board is of varnished rimu, with two panels in black, the head one containing the words: "Terrace End School, South African War, 1899-1902." The centre panel, also in black, contains the names of the following "old boys," who went to the front: E. J. Spencer, 2nd Contingent; W. Anderson, 3rd; Cecil Blaremborg, 3rd; Cecil R. Isherwood, 4th; H. Anderson, 6th; Percy Mowlem, 6th; A. Bolstad, 6th; F. Hanlon, 6th; E. Wylds, 7th; W. C. Rorkstrow, 8th; Harold Sinclair, 8th; G. Hamer, 8th; C. Guy, 10th; W. Vincent, 10th; A. Wyld's 10th; W. Bolstad, St Alfred M. J.; **Duncan Sinclair, Australian Bushmen**; A. Anderson and E. Anderson, Johannesburg Rifles; James Mowlem, Brabant's Horse. On the sides of the tablet there is a framework of moulded rimu, which completes the handsome effect of the board, the joint work of Messrs Robbie and J. Y. Oliver. The school committee intend placing framed photographs of the King and Queen in their Coronation robes on each side of the panel, and have expressed themselves well pleased with the arrangements made by the sub-committee, Messrs Fairbrother, Robbie and W. H. Collingwood.

Evening Post 13 Dec 1909

Mr Duncan Sinclair, son of Mr D. Sinclair, of Terrace End, is expected to return to the Dominion after an absence of ten years by the *Tongariro*, due in Wellington to-morrow. Mr Sinclair went through the South African campaign. His father and mother are in Wellington to meet him and his wife.

Evening Post 23 Dec 1909

Mr Duncan Sinclair, son of Mr Donald Sinclair, of Palmerston North, who has been eight years in South Africa, returned by the *Manuka* yesterday. He was in the New South Wales Bushmen's Contingent, and was decorated for bravery in the war. He has since been engaged in the farming and pastoral industry in South Africa.

New Zealand Times 23 Dec 1909

Mr Duncan Sinclair, son of a well-known Palmerston resident, Mr Donald Sinclair, returned by the *Manuka* yesterday after an absence of eight years in South Africa, whither he went as a member of the New South Wales Bushmen's contingent. Mr Sinclair distinguished himself in the war, being decorated for bravery. When peace was declared he entered into farming pursuits, and has since been variously engaged in ranching and in shipping live stock from Montreal to Port Elizabeth.

Manawatu Standard 24 Dec 1909 Personal

Mr Duncan Sinclair, Jnr., son of Mr D. Sinclair, of Palmerston North, has returned to Palmerston after a long stay in South Africa, having arrived in Wellington on Wednesday by the *Manuka*. Mr Sinclair, who is looking well, hopes to remain here for about three months before returning to his adopted country. His many old friends will give him a cordial welcome home.

Manawatu Standard 01 Jun 1910 Birth

On May 30th, 1910, at Philippolis, South Africa, the wife of Duncan H. H. Sinclair, a son.

Walsall Advertiser 04 Jun 1910 Birth

Sinclair (*nee* Davies, of Walsall) – On May 30th, at Quinplaats, Philippolis, O. R. C., the wife of D. H. Sinclair, of a son.

Manawatu Standard 21 Dec 1911 Personal

Mr D. Sinclair, jnr., son of Mr D. Sinclair, of Terrace End, who returned from South Africa about two years ago, is about to pay another visit to his friends. He has with him this time his partner, Mr William Gunn. Having sold their farm in the Orange Free State, Messrs Sinclair and Gunn have come over to New Zealand on a business visit, and reached Palmerston by the Auckland express today. Friends will be pleased to see Mr Sinclair home again for a short time. On their way over they shipped from Melbourne 75 head of stock for the South African market.

Passenger List – Athenic 09 Sep 1912

Saloon – Mrs M. E. Sinclair, adult; Master J. (2yrs), child; Master N. (1 month), infant – all English; embarked London & destination Wellington

Manawatu Times 01 Jul 1927

At Te Puke, on June 30th, Duncan Henry, second son of Mrs Sinclair and the late Duncan Sinclair of Palmerston North.

The death occurred at Te Puke yesterday of Mr Duncan Henry Sinclair, second son of Mrs Sinclair, of Palmerston North, and the late Mr Duncan Sinclair. Deceased, who was born at Wainui-o-mata, 52 years ago, was well-known in Palmerston North in his younger days, and only a fortnight ago had paid a visit to this town. Death came after a very brief illness. A widow and four sons are left to mourn their loss. Deceased was a brother of Messrs N. and H. Sinclair, of Palmerston North, and of Mrs J. Louisson, of Wood Street.

Auckland Star 04 Jul 1927

Te Puke, Sunday. Mr Duncan H. H. Sinclair, a well-known resident of the district, is dead. He spent the early years of his life in Manawatu, and on the outbreak of the South African war he crossed to Australia and joined the first contingent of New South Wales bushmen. He fought throughout the war and was mentioned in dispatches. At the close of hostilities he took up farming in the Orange River Colony. In 1911 he returned to New Zealand and commenced sheep farming in the Taumaranui district. In 1919 Mr Sinclair settled in Tauranga and subsequently took up a farm in the neighbourhood of Rangiora, where he commenced dairying. He was a man of genial disposition and made many friends. He was a member of the Kaituna River Board. He is survived by a widow and four sons.

Waikato Independent 05 Jul 1927 Obituary

The death has occurred of Mr Duncan H. H. Sinclair, a well-known resident of the district. Mr Sinclair was a native of Wainui-o-Mata, Wellington. The early years of his life were spent in Manawatu. In 1919 Mr Sinclair settled in Te Puke. He is survived by a widow and four sons.

Cemetery Record – Old Te Puke Cemetery

No.1473 Duncan H. H. Sinclair, 02 Jul 1927. Grave No.32, Blk 9, Res 31.

Bay of Plenty Times 15 Jun 1948 Death

On June 15th at Tauranga, Mary Elizabeth, beloved wife of the late Duncan Henry and loved mother of Jim, Norman, Ken and Rod. In her 66th year. Private cremation at Auckland. No flowers.

Cemetery Record – Waikumete, Auckland

No. 7657 Mary Elizabeth Sinclair, widow, died 15 Jun 1948 at 98 Morris Street, Tauranga aged 65yrs; cremated Waikumete 16 Jun 1948; scattered 17 Jun 1948