

Pte. OSWALD ALLEN # 543  
2<sup>nd</sup> NZ Battalion Hotchkiss Detachment

10 Jan 1900

**Gisborne, Tuesday.**

**Oswald Allen, of Motu, volunteered for the New Zealand contingent, but was excluded owing to the contingent being complete. He intends leaving for South Africa by the Waiwera, if possible, and there joining one of the volunteer regiments on active service.**

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8935, 29 August 1900, Page 4

**LETTER FROM TROOPER ALLEN.**

The following letter has been received from Trooper Oswald Allen, of the Second Contingent, dated "The Veldt, South Africa," May 22nd:—I am keeping very well, and but for a slight accident have been free from sickness of any kind. I have been getting on very well, as I am now Corporal and Quartermaster Sergeant to the Battery. The latter is only honorary, as the strength will not warrant the pay, but nevertheless it does not in any way reduce the work.

At present, as I write, I am in bivouac on the march; in front is a battery of R.A., to the right a pom-pom battery, and to the left a Maxim battery; behind a Canadian Maxim battery, hospital, convoy, etc., the whole surrounded by mounted infantry, New Zealanders, Queenslanders, West Australians, New South Welshmen, and Canadians. Away to the left front General French's column and to the right front the Boers. We are now fairly underweight, and have come 42 miles north of Kroonstadt in three days, which is slow, but it is good for the horses, and allows food supplies to keep up with us. We have now really commenced the rough side of war, and have dispensed with all luxuries such as tents, change of uniform, etc., although we carry a change of shirt, etc., in our wallets, tobacco, matches, and soap (which is nearly useless, as sometimes we can get barely enough water to drink). I have been sleeping now for the last ten days with the sky for my roof, and my waterproof sheet, two blankets (sometimes one), and my coat, with my saddle for a pillow. One or two nights sleep has been nearly impossible owing to the intense cold. The climate here is peculiar, as during the day the heat is intense—greater even than New Zealand—and at night it is just the reverse. At times it is absolutely impossible to keep your feet warm. We were all very disgusted at the Battery having to remain for nine weeks at the Cape, but it was good training, and we did not lose much by it, as there was not much doing, except to chase rebels, which the others did not appreciate. We

entrained from Capetown on Monday (30th April) in the evening. We marched from camp at 4 p.m., and commenced entraining the horses (76) and baggage, which kept us going till 8 p.m. Tuesday, Wednesday and Thursday were spent in the train, passing first of all through rugged and picturesque country, fearfully poor, but gradually improving, however, as we journeyed further north. We had a very fair time in the train, as we were only six in second-class compartments, and only fed and watered the horses three times a day. Sometime during Thursday night we reached the picturesque little capital of the Orange Free State, but we did not disembark till about 8 a.m., and then waited till 2.30 p.m. for our orders to move out three miles to camp, which we proceeded to do, and were not long before we were comfortably housed in our little white homes—eight in each. Saturday was spent for me in sorting all my stores, also Sunday morning; and in the afternoon we received our orders to march at 6 a.m. next morning. Everything was then a rush to make the final preparations, and I had to go into town. When I came back the major gave me my orders to stay behind and fix up stores, etc., and follow on by train on Tuesday. All Sunday night I spent in packing the waggons, and just finished when the others got up. Great was the rush, but at 5.30 they all marched off in their marching order, which consists of wallet, coat and blankets. In their haste they left all kinds of things lying about, and I had to sort all the things over and put what was necessary into the carts and the rest into store. About eleven I had all things put away and sent the wagons off, going into town with the stuff for store. In the afternoon I saw Stacy Langford and the rest of the Gisborne boys, which was a great treat. All were looking well and certainly as if they had seen hard work. Tuesday morning I had the luck to be thrown from a horse and sprained my wrist rather severely, which necessitated my spending five days in hospital, where I was exceptionally well treated. Monday 31st I got my discharge and left at 2.45 to rejoin. From Bloemfontein they run no carriages, so I managed to get a seat in a coal truck and we continued our journey towards Pretoria. Night soon came on and we had only made about 30 miles, as trains have to go so slow on account of the damage done to the permanent way by the Boers, and which has only been temporarily repaired. The night was very cold and I could only obtain a small amount of sleep, as my blankets, etc., had gone forward with the troop. I made some coffee with water from the exhaust pipe of the engine, and was very glad to

see the day again. About 12 we reached the furthest point (67 miles) to which the train could then go (Welgelegen). The bridge here was blown up, but the Engineers were at work and in two days would have a temporary one open.

Here was a sight you would only see in time of war; hundreds of cases of biscuits, meat, coffee, etc., just thrown out of the trucks by scores of Kaffirs, and being arranged and stacked by others. Transport wagons, both mule and oxen, and troops *galore*.

The Third Contingent turned up here, and thanks to Lieutenant Lawin, I was provided with a horse and saddle, and attached, *pro tem*, to a draft of the Second, going up with them. That night we marched ten miles to Virginia, and bivouacked for the night. Next morning I was in charge of the rearguard, and we had a monotonous march to Wintersberg Weg, about twenty miles. You would have laughed if you had seen of what wood our fire was composed, for I had to find the wood that night. I got into a store (empty, of course) and secured a counter, three hickory wheel rims, six or seven blue gum spokes, and part of a churn frame—all new. The next day I was in charge of the right flank scouting party, and we did scout, too. I managed to obtain some fowls, fruit, and vegetables for our larder. That evening we camped two miles from Kroonstad, and next day marched in. During the afternoon I reported to my major, and resumed my Battery duties.

There had been great chaos in the Battery, owing to a lot of the horses knocking up with their packs, and five or six men sick, that the result was when on Saturday we received orders to march two of the guns had to be left, and two of the sergeants who had riled the Major, also some eight or ten men, thus reducing us to three officers, thirty non-commissioned officers and men, two guns, two carts and a wagon, attached to the 3rd Mounted Infantry (General Hutton).

At 6.30 a.m. Sunday, after an address by Lord Roberts we started on what I suppose will be a historical march on Pretoria. The country all the way up to the Vaal is gradual undulating hills with no trees and only an occasional shrub. Nothing of any interest occurred till we reached the Vaal, there the Boers only fired about thirty rounds of pom-poms and retreated. Here, too, I was in charge of the wagon but on entering the Transvaal, I resumed my position on the gun, having a fairly tough time doing my quartermaster's work as well. The country here is different again, being more like New Zealand in formation excepting absence of water. It was on the 25th we crossed the Vaal and daily expected a shell to come, but none came. The morning of the 23th we heard

the big guns, and about 9 we came to the top of a kopje from which we saw a thrilling sight. On the opposite side a kopje dotted with gold mines round Johannesburg, down on the flat the Queenslanders deploying in the skirmishing order, and the shells dropping amongst them very thickly but fortunately doing no harm. We advanced down the hill with the R.H.A. and at the foot they trotted into action returning the Boer's fire with interest, and in about half an hour had silenced three of their guns. We then all advanced on to a big kopje under fairly heavy heavy fire and as the first one screeched over my head, I for the moment regretted the day I left New Zealand, but only for the moment as we all then became keen for action; but it was not our turn that day and there we lay on the kopje for three and a half hours, under what General Hutton afterwards said was the heaviest shell fire of the war. We also had plenty of bullets flying unpleasantly close and one piece of shell buried itself at my feet, another struck me on the leg, but fortunately it was spent and did not draw blood. We had one horse shot and one wounded. We retired for the night to an adjoining kopje which we had to hold until further orders, the Queensland Mounted Rifles and ourselves.

Nothing happened during the night, and next morning we stood ready to move, until about eleven we got orders to take up our position about two hundred yards along the shoulder of the kopje. I did not think any Boers were about, and was leisurely carrying up some ammunition to the gun, when ping, ping, and about a dozen bullets went by. I can tell you it was not long before I had the stuff in place and was lying down with my carbine ready for a go. By and by I saw them, and had a shot or two, but as to what success I could not say, although two or three dead and some wounded were picked up. The rest soon retreated. On Wednesday we advanced by a circular route to about ten miles off Johannesburg. Yesterday we had another very heavy shelling, but no damage, and circled round to about five miles off, and to-day went round the other side the same distance off, where we are now awaiting supplies. This morning General Hutton complimented us on our gallantry, and he especially complimented the New Zealanders.

A lot of us compared notes on our feelings, and we all agreed that we felt more uncomfortable when the shells were flying over us than when they were dropping round us. It was a curious sight on the kopje, certainly—some of us smoking, others chewing biscuits, and all laughing and joking and poking fun at the poor markmanship of the Boers, and every now

and then running to pick up a bit of shell or a bullet buried in an ant heap. It is not altogether a very nice feeling, but you get accustomed to it and don't trouble much.

I have just been gazetted pay sergeant as well to the troop, which carries an extra one shilling per diem, to date from the 1st May.

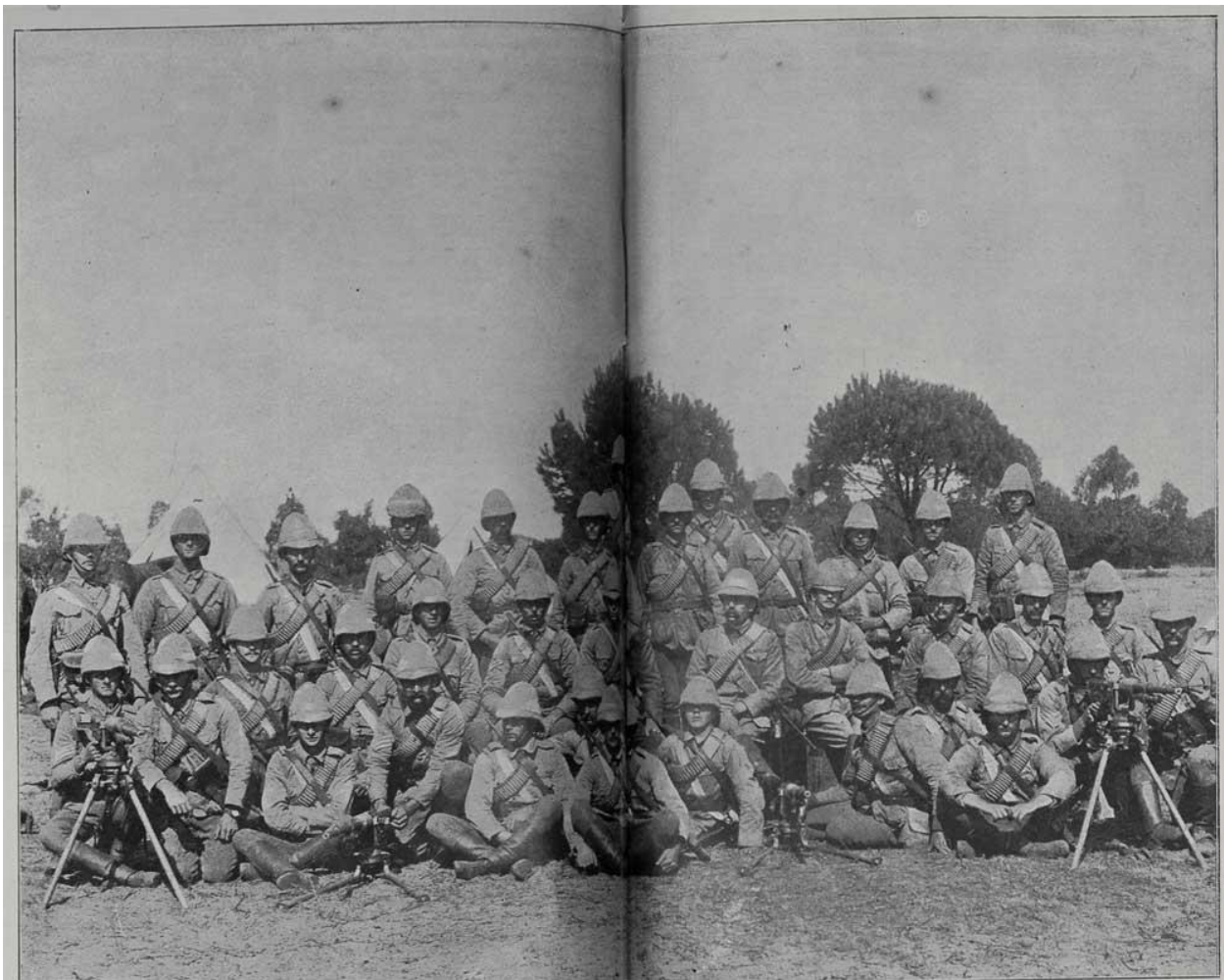
We manage fairly well as regards food, and have only on one occasion so far been absolutely stuck for food, and that for 24 hours. To-day has been a great day for us, as we only did about four miles, and have had the rest of the time to ourselves for washing, etc.

**ALLEN, Oswald**  
RANK & NUMBER **Gunner 543,**  
CONTINGENT **Hotchkiss detachment**  
**sailed with 2nd**  
ADDRESS **Motu, Gisborne**  
NEXT OF KIN **father, John Sandeman**  
**Allen,** Rock Ferry, Cheshire, England,  
now of Christchurch

John Sandeman ALLEN married to Amy nee' SPENCER in 1888 in England were the parents of Oswald Allen.

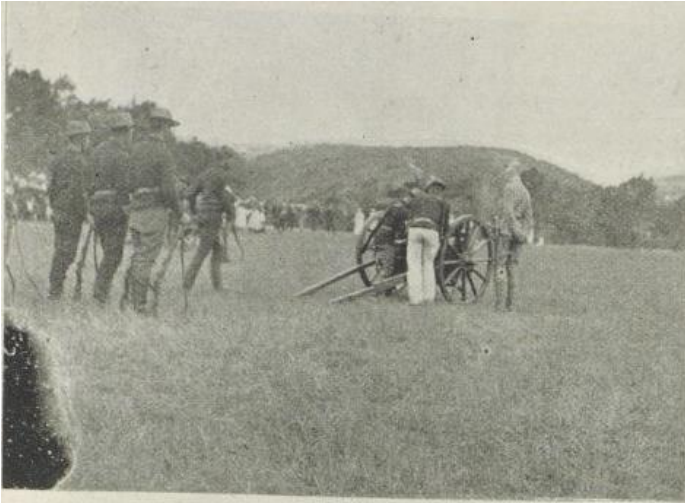
18 Nov 1913 - Dominion

A silver wedding notice in last week's "Times" read:—"On October 3, 1888, at Chester, Mr. J. Sandeman Allen, eldest son of Mr. John S. Allen, of Woodlands, Rock Ferry, Cheshire, to Amy, youngest daughter of the late Mr. John Hallfield Spencer, of Christchurch, New Zealand, and formerly of Aberdeen Park, London, and Winkfield, Eastbourne."

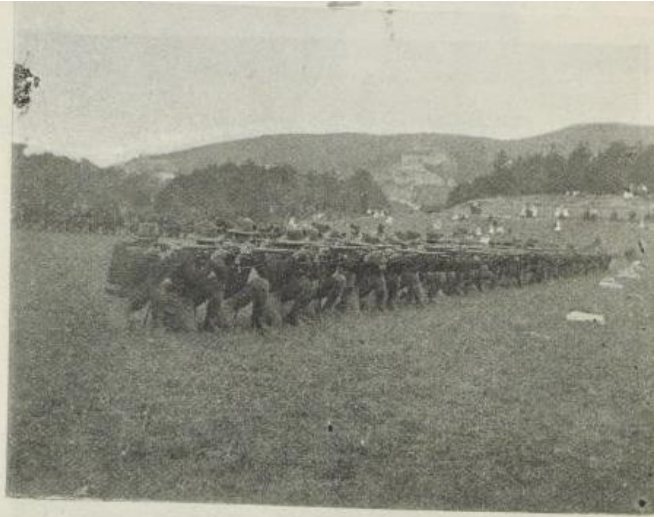


THE NEW ZEALAND HOTCHKISS BATTERY AT THE FRONT IN SOUTH AFRICA.





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January 1900 - 1. Hotchkiss Detachment at Firing practice with Maxim Gun. 2. Firing Drill. 3. Serving out milk in the lines. 4. Major Craddock receiving Reports. 5. "A Knotty Question"—Major Craddock and the "Auckland Star" correspondent discussing the rights and wrongs of the Contingent War Cry. 6. Major Sommerville instructs the Bugler.

# Poverty Bay Herald

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## HONOR TO WHOM HONOR IS DUE.

It is unfortunate that there should be occasion for so much controversy in connection with the Cook memorial, but since the Committee has decided to proceed with the inappropriate idea of plastering the sides of the memorial with the names of Gisborne's representatives in the South African war, there is a point in this connection which, to our mind, requires some ventilation. We refer to the decision of the Committee to limit the list of troopers to those officially sent away from Gisborne with the respective contingents. That appears to be quite as incongruous as the previous decision to which we have referred. Surely if a memorial is to be raised locally to those who did service for Queen and country in South Africa it should include the names of all our representatives at the front, irrespective of the manner in which they went into service. There is not a great number of those connected with the district who found their way to Africa outside the contingents and took up arms, and their names are easily ascertainable. Their services were quite as self-sacrificing as those who were despatched with the contingents, and are equally entitled to recognition. If the decision of the Committee is adhered to there will be excluded from the tablet, for instance, the name of one most entitled to recognition—the East Coast's first representative at the war, and who unhappily lost his life whilst in the service of his Sovereign. We refer to the late Mr Kirkman, of Waiomatatini. Fired with enthusiasm for the cause of his country, Mr Kirkman soon after the outbreak of hostilities threw up a lucrative position under the Education Department, with every promise of promotion, and proceeded at his own expense to South Africa. His departure from Gisborne was made unostentatiously, without any brass band accompaniment, and with few friends to see him off, but in leaving home he as truly laid down his life for the Empire as others who followed after,

amidst the sound of bugles and shouts of public acclamation. Upon arrival in South Africa Mr Kirkman promptly enlisted with Roberts' Horse, and he went with that regiment through the dreadful experience of the Koornspruit ambush. Escaping injury in that engagement, he shortly afterwards fell a victim to enteric at Bloemfontein and died in hospital. We leave it to our readers to say whether his name does not deserve to be engraved on the memorial stone. The decision of the Committee would also exclude Gisborne's sole representative in the First Contingent, Mr W. Pitt, who, though he left from Auckland, was in every sense a Gisborne boy, his home being here, where he was born and reared and spent the greater part of his life. Lieutenant Trotter and Mr Oswald Allen, of the Second Contingent, would be similarly deprived of due recognition simply because they were not sent away as contingents, but went of their own volition, enterprise and pluck, and secured places in the contingents in other towns. Similarly John Hurrey, who left from Wanganui, a Gisborne boy, and C. Nurse, who went from Tokomaru "on his own," and secured place in a contingent, would be left out; as also H. H. Fairlie and R. Johnstone, who, eager to get to the war and take up arms, worked their way across to Africa in charge of horses, and subsequently enlisted. Another omission would be the name of Colonel Porter, C.B., who, if anyone is entitled to have his name on the tablet, has surely a right to that honor. Colonel Porter was an officer of the Land Purchase Department, stationed at Gisborne, when he telegraphed to the Premier volunteering his services, and though he subsequently removed to Wellington for a few months and served there in Colonel Newall's place at the head of the Defence Department, his home and interests were in Gisborne when his services were accepted. Surely a Gisborne resident who has had command of two contingents and won distinction from the hands of the King should not be overlooked in a memorial of this sort—yet that would be the effect of the Committee's decision. If the memorial is to be worth anything as an historical record it should be complete and accurate.