



Corporal David Lunam Whitehead had been part of the 8th Contingent which left Lyttleton on February 8, 1902, bound for Capetown and a fight with the Boers. Two months later on 12 April 1902 he was in a railway accident and died six days later.

David had answered the call to join the 8<sup>th</sup> Contingent with others from Otago, Canterbury and Southland. Pride in their country and the British Empire was very strong.

News of the accident was a bitter blow for the family back in Dunedin. His own father, Jack Whitehead, had been killed in a railway accident in 1884 at Lovells Flat, [between Milton and Balclutha] when he was just 34.

Jack was a guard on the New Years Eve train from Dunedin to Balclutha and was very crowded. He collected the tickets right along the train and was due to return through the train but wanted to avoid the crush so he walked along the carriage tops, forgetting about a low bridge coming up. He left a widow and three young children.

The only son of a widowed mother, Jack worked initially in the Lancashire cotton mills but then decided to try his luck in the colonies and arrived in the North Island at the peak of the land wars.

He joined the mounted constabulary, then when peace was secured he came to Dunedin and joined the New Zealand Railways, in their early stages of construction.

The 8<sup>th</sup> Contingent arrived in Durban on March 22 and went by rail north to Pinburg. However, on the journey, there was a dreadful train crash. The war traffic had severely overtaxed the lines and the staff trying to organize things. The Stationmaster at Machavie, believing that the line was clear, dispatched a goods train on the same rails towards Durban.

The trains met at a bend, about halfway between Machavie and Potchefstroom. The troop train had almost reached the top of an incline, while the goods train was just starting to ascend it.

The resulting collision could have been much worse if there had not been a new driver on the troop train who, not knowing the line well, had slowed to 12 miles per hour, considerably less than the usual 60 mph under the usual drivers.

The main loss of life was in the carriage behind the engine. Altogether, 13 men lost their lives immediately and three died later.

Whitehead was crushed internally and succumbed on 18 April 1902, aged 23 years, and is buried in Klerksdorf. Altogether in the Boer War 12,716 men died from sickness, and 8820 from the fighting.

David Lunam Whitehead is commemorated on a marble headstone in Dunedin's Southern cemetery, the same headstone which records his father rests here also.

<b>Burial Details</b>	
Surname	WHITEHEAD
Forename	JOHN WILLIAM
Age	Not recorded
Gender	Male
Date of Death	31 Dec 1884
Last Address	
Next of Kin	
Funeral Director	
Cemetery	<u>SOUTHERN</u>
Location	Block 14P . Plot 0038
Date of Burial	4 Jan 1885
Type	Burial
Notes	Original reference:- S18850104