

LORD ASHCROFT'S "HERO OF THE MONTH"
Brigadier John Alexander Sinton



LORD ASHCROFT'S
"HERO OF
THE MONTH"

Brigadier John Alexander Sinton

VC, OBE, FRS



Sinton matriculated from the Royal College of Ireland and entered the Arts School of Queen's College, Belfast, before being accepted to the Medical School of Queen's College and, later, the Liverpool School of Tropical Medicine. He was incredibly bright and graduated with first class honours in medicine, surgery and obstetrics in 1908, aged twenty-three. In 1911, and by then having held several senior hospital positions, he entered the Indian Medical Service as a lieutenant having been top in the entrance exam.

At the outbreak of the Great War in August 1914, Sinton was already on active service in India as the regimental medical officer with the Movable Column, Kurram Valley, North-West Frontier. Later, he joined the Mesopotamia Expeditionary Force. He was

promoted to captain on 21 June 1915, serving as regimental medical officer to the 37th Dogras of the Indian Expeditionary Force.

In early 1916, Sinton, by now aged thirty-one, was in Mesopotamia (now Iraq) serving with the Dogras against the Turkish forces when he showed outstanding bravery on three separate occasions (not four as detailed in his citation). He was severely wounded in battle on 21 January while treating the wounded and his

actions led to the award of the VC on 21 June 1916 when his citation stated:

"For most conspicuous bravery and devotion to duty. Although shot through both arms and through the side, he refused to go to the hospital, and remained, as long as daylight lasted, attending to his duties under very heavy fire.

"In three previous actions Capt. Sinton displayed the utmost bravery.

Sinton was evacuated to India for medical treatment. After making a good recovery, he received his VC on 31 January 1918 from Lord Chelmsford, the Viceroy of India, in an investiture in New Delhi.

Sinton remained on active service in various theatres of war until 1920. During this period, he was Mentioned in Despatches more than once for services on the North-West Frontier and was decorated with other awards.



ASHCROFT'S "HERO OF THE MONTH"
er John Alexander Sinton

VICTORIA CROSS HEROES

Lord Ashcroft KCMG PC is a businessman, philanthropist, author and pollster. His five books on gallantry include *Victoria Cross Heroes*. For more information, please visit: www.victoriacrossheroes.com Lord Ashcroft's VC and GC collection is on public display at Imperial War Museum, London. For more information visit: www.iwm.org.uk/heroes. For details about his VC collection, visit: www.lordashcroftmedals.com For more information on Lord Ashcroft's work, visit: www.lordashcroft.com. Follow him on Twitter: @LordAshcroft



ENDURANCE

AGGRESSION • BOLDNESS
INITIATIVE • LEADERSHIP •
SACRIFICE • SKILL

The many Victoria Crosses and George Crosses in the Lord Ashcroft Gallery at the Imperial War Museum in London are displayed under one of seven different qualities of bravery. Whilst Brigadier John Alexander Sinton's award is not part of the collection, Lord Ashcroft feels that it falls within the category of endurance: "Endurance is the opposite of Aggression. It is all about 'cold courage', about knowing the cost and being prepared to pay it. It involves mental and physical resilience, not giving in and rising above the pain. It is almost infinite."

ABOVE RIGHT:
Brigadier John
Alexander
Sinton VC, OBE,
FRS.

BELOW RIGHT:
Two members
of the Dogras
during the First
World War. The
37th Dogras
could trace
its origins to
1887, when
the unit was
raised as the
37th (Dogra)
Bengal Infantry.
(COURTESY OF
THE AUSTRALIAN
WAR MEMORIAL;
B00709)

JOHN ALEXANDER Sinton was born in Victoria, British Columbia, Canada, on 2 December 1884. The third of seven children to his Ulster parents, Walter and Isabella Sinton, he and his family returned to Ulster from Canada in 1890, when John was just five years old. He was initially educated at Nicholson Memorial School in Lisburn and the Royal Belfast Academical Institution.



TOP LEFT:
British troops
"on the long
march through
torrid heat" in
Mesopotamia.
(HISTORIC MILITARY
PRESS)

BELOW:
Ottoman troops
mustering
before moving
forward to the
front during the
First World War.
(US LIBRARY OF
CONGRESS)

In 1919, he was promoted to brevet major and, in the same year, he was conferred the honorary degree of Doctor of Medicine by Queen's University in recognition of his treatment of the wounded in the field. He was promoted to temporary major in 1920 and received the OBE (Military).

At this point in his career, Sinton started specialising in the treatment of malaria and soon became recognised as the foremost authority on malarial and parasitical diseases. In 1923 he was made a full major and he also married Eadith Martin, the daughter of an indigo planter. The couple went on to have one daughter, Eleanor, born in December 1924.

In 1927, Sinton became the first Director of the Malarial Survey of India. Over the next decade, he held several senior positions and was promoted to lieutenant-colonel. He retired from the Indian Medical Services in August 1938 and was appointed Manson Fellow of the London School of Hygiene and Tropical Medicine, as well as an advisor on malaria to the Ministry of Health. However, after the outbreak of the Second World War, he was

recalled to India in 1939 and posted Quartermaster to a military hospital.

In 1940, he was demobbed, only to be recalled again and appointed Consultant Malariologist to the East African Forces, later extended to cover all Middle East Forces. His measures aimed at prevention and control meant that he was credited with ensuring that incidence of malaria in the Middle East was minimal.

Sinton was retired a second time in 1944, only to be once more recalled later the same year as Consultant Malariologist to the War Office after serious outbreaks of the disease as the troops moved to Sicily and Italy.

In late 1944, and by now an honorary brigadier and sixty years old, he finally succeeded in retiring to his estate near Cookstown, Co. Tyrone. During a distinguished military career, Sinton, in common with other officers who were awarded the VC during the Great War, had also been awarded the Russian Order of St George.

After his retirement, Sinton received many more prestigious medical decorations and accolades, including becoming a Fellow of the Royal Society for his research into the problems of malaria. In 1953, he became a

magistrate (JP), Deputy Lieutenant and High Sheriff of Tyrone. He was also a member of the National Arbitration Tribunal of Northern Ireland.

By now, however, Sinton's health was in decline. He died at his home at Slaughterfreedan Lodge, near Lough Fea, Cookstown, on 25 March 1956, aged seventy-one. He was buried with full military honours on 28 March at Creggan Presbyterian Church cemetery in Cookstown.

In an obituary in the *British Medical Journal*, Colonel H.W. Mulligan said of him: "Sinton had an exceptionally quick, receptive, and retentive brain, but his greatness sprang not so much from his unusual intellectual gifts as from the simple qualities of absolute integrity and tremendous industry."

He had left his mark on the world as an exceptional doctor, malariologist and soldier, combining great academic skills with outstanding courage. Sinton's widow, Eadith, died on 1 October 1978, some twenty-two years after her husband, and is buried in the same grave at Creggan Presbyterian Church.

Sinton's VC is not part of my medal collection. Instead, it is on display at the Army Medical Services Museum at Mytchett, Surrey. ☺

