

Mervyn Richard William Allen

2nd Lieutenant 3483, 7th Battalion, Norfolk Regiment

Mervyn Richard William Allen was born on 6 January 1895. When Mervyn was born his parents, William Hannaford Allen and Emily Allen, lived in the village of Chulmleigh, near South Molton, Devon. His father married Emily Westaway Denton in the spring of 1884 in Plymouth, Devon. Emily was born in Plymouth. William's birth was registered in Pembroke Dock, Wales, in the autumn of 1859. During his working life William gave his profession as an Inland Revenue Officer or a Customs and Excise Officer, which probably explains why they lived in different places around the British Isles.



Edinville School 1902, Courtesy Edinville Hall Committee

In the 1901 Census the family were living in the village of Edinville near Aberlour, right in the centre of the Scottish whisky-producing area where there would be a need for an Excise Officer. They lived next door but one to the Edinville schoolhouse, run by Mr MacKay. Mervyn probably attended the school as he is listed as a scholar aged six in the Census. By 1911 the family had moved south and William became the Supervisor at the Customs and Excise Office at 10 Temple Square, Aylesbury, and the family moved into 'Devonia', 129 Tring Road, Aylesbury.

Mervyn initially attended Aylesbury Grammar School, but in September 1908 transferred to Berkhamsted School where he was a boarder. His school record shows that he was a good all-rounder academically. He sang in the school choir in several concerts and acquitted himself very well on the cricket pitch in 1910. He left school at the end of the spring term of 1912.¹ After a promising academic start Mervyn worked for the Capital and Counties Bank² at 55 High Street, Amersham and probably lodged in the town. The bank was absorbed by Lloyds Bank in 1918.³ His name appears on the Lloyds Bank Memorial. Mervyn maintained his close ties to Aylesbury and was a well known and popular club tennis player.

He enlisted on 15 March 1915 as a private in the 28th Battalion of The London Regiment (Artists Rifles).⁴ His attestation papers, signed in London, show that he was 5 foot 9 inches tall and his physical development was fair.⁵ He embarked on a ship at Southampton on 11 August 1915 and joined his unit in Northern France on 16 August 1915. The Artists Rifles were stationed in St Omer, France and they were mainly a training unit and engaged in guard duties.⁶ Mervyn obtained his commission on 28 November 1915 and transferred to the 7th Battalion of the Norfolk Regiment. The photograph on the right was provided by his parents to the *Bucks Advertiser and Aylesbury News* to accompany an obituary dated 18 August 1917, copies of which are held at the Centre for Buckinghamshire Studies.



¹ *Berkhamsted School Archive*

² See also Bunce, J F, and Grist, R, who worked for the Capital and Counties Bank

³ *Lloyds Bank Archive*

⁴ For more information on the Artists Rifles, see Horne, J A

⁵ *Service Record*, The National Archives, Kew Ref. WO339/505000

⁶ *War Diary 1/28 Battalion London Regiment (Artists Rifles)* The National Archives, Kew Ref. WO 95/128

The Norfolk Regiment had left Aldershot by train on 29 May 1915 with 16 equipment carts, four field kitchens and 66 horses to support three officers and 105 other ranks. They joined up with other units and became the 7th Battalion Norfolk Regiment at Pont de Briques when the strength had grown to 30 officers and 954 other ranks. In July the battalion took over the trenches at Ploegsteert Wood and came under enemy fire for the first time, sustaining casualties. During the summer and autumn of 1915 the battalion spent about two weeks in the trenches and two weeks further back, alternating with the Essex Regiment. By the end of November the battalion was down to 24 officers and 863 other ranks. During December four new officers joined the regiment and one of these was probably 2nd Lieutenant Allen. In the midst of all the mud and fighting they found time to beat the Essex Regiment 3 – 0 at football! Throughout December the trenches were flooded and pumps were used every day. In February 1916 German aircraft were noticed for the first time; and it snowed and became much colder.

The allied forces were preparing an offensive due to begin on 29 June, but the attack was delayed due to the very wet weather, which would have prevented the heavy guns from moving. On 1 July the offensive started and lasted for six days. Things were so busy that the *War Diary* was written retrospectively on 6 July. At 3.00 am on that day one shell landed in the bay where “D” Company HQ was located, killing one officer and injuring two others. One of the injured was 2nd Lieutenant Allen, who sustained a wound to his right cheek and suffered concussion, deafness and shell shock. He was evacuated to England for treatment and recovery.

His service papers show that he was passed fit for service by a medical board held at Dovercourt on 6 April 1917 and he returned to France in May to join the 7th Battalion Norfolk Regiment at Arras where the battalion was under heavy enemy fire in the midst of a major offensive. On 1 August they moved into the trenches in the left Sub-Section at Monchy and 2nd Lieutenant Allen was in “D” Company defending Tool Trench. The enemy mounted what was to be referred to afterwards as an organised attack on a fairly large scale. The *War Diary* states:

“...Second Lieutenant MRW Allen on the left moved his men out of the trench and met the enemy with the bayonet. By so doing he succeeded in preventing a single German from obtaining a footing in his sector of the line. This officer, who had behaved with great coolness and gallantry throughout, was then shot in the head and killed”.⁷

His superiors were full of praise for him. In a letter to his parents his Company Officer says:

“...I can honestly say I could not wish for a better officer. He was always so cheerful and cool and reliable in the trenches, and when off parade one of the nicest companies imaginable. We were such a merry party in our mess before; we all feel the loss so much...”⁸

The battalion commander, Lieut. Colonel F. E. Walter, wrote:

“...He had done even better on this visit to France than he did on the previous one and some of his patrol work was excellent. He was always so cheerful and ready for any work, and seemed honestly to prefer it when it was a bit dangerous...”⁹

He was awarded The Allied Victory Medal, The British War Medal, 1914-18 and The 1914-15 Star.

⁷ *War Diary 7th Battalion Norfolk Regiment*, The National Archive, Kew, Ref. WO95/1853

⁸ *The Bucks Advertiser and Aylesbury News 18 August 1917*, Centre for Buckinghamshire Studies

⁹ *The Bucks Herald 4 August 1917*, Centre for Buckinghamshire Studies

Mervyn Richard William Allen is remembered with Honour at
Monchy British Cemetery,
Monchy-le-Preux, Pas de Calais, France
Grave Reference I.J.22

