

Sapper Albert Henry Allen[©]
Regimental number: 152352
4th Wireless Company, Royal Engineers

born: 1887–died: 7 July 1917

Albert Henry Allen, known as Henry or Harry, was born in Aston, an area of Birmingham,¹ in the summer of 1887.² He was the eldest son of Henry Allen and the former Deborah Gear Stubbs, who were married on 26 December 1886 in St. Mary's Church; both were 21 at the time. Henry was described as a gem setter while his father, another Henry Allen, was listed in the parish record as a jeweller.³ Henry and Deborah had four more children after Harry: Ernest (b. 4 May 1888),⁴ Gertrude (b. 9 April 1891),⁵ Maud (b. 22 August 1897),⁶ and Herbert (b. 1900).⁷

In 1911 Harry was living with his mother and his siblings at 26 Norfolk Road, Erdington,⁸ a suburb of Birmingham. Harry and his brother Ernest were working as gem setters and his sister Gertrude was a typist for a jewellery manufacturer.⁹ It appears that Deborah and Henry were living apart, because in 1912 Ernest travelled to the United States to visit his father, who was living in Brooklyn, New York.¹⁰

Unfortunately, Harry's service record seems to be one of the many destroyed by bombing in World War II. Nevertheless, based on the amount of the war gratuity paid out on his death, it appears that he enlisted in July 1916.¹¹ He was a sapper, the equivalent of a private, with the 4th Wireless Company, Royal Engineers.

Though at the time of his death Harry was assigned to a wireless training centre,¹² the memoirs of B. Neyland, who served with the Royal Engineers Wireless Section in France in 1917, describe a wireless sapper's experience during an offensive attack, something that Harry likely experienced at some time:

"(T)he infantry waves were to advance under cover of a formidable barrage, and each wave was to be provided with a wireless station. The Roclin-court station was to go over with the first infantry wave. . . . That was Hewitt and I and an officer. Four infantrymen were to assist us in carrying our weighty apparatus, the set, accumulators, dry cells, coils of wire, earth mats, ropes, and other details. . . . At a particular tree stump far over the enemy's Blue Line we were to erect a station as rapidly as possible and transmit any messages handed in by officers engaged in the attack. . . . Over the top we clambered, over the stricken wilderness we stumbled. We wireless "merchants" mixed with the infantry, hoping for some protection. We carried no bayonets, our unloaded rifles were strapped across our backs and our only means of defence was apparently fists. Why wireless operators were not allowed to load their rifles we never learned. . . . Through the hours we continued stumbling, sinking, slipping, into old trenches, shell holes, all the time in the midst of a scattered but advancing infantry. . . . Hewitt and I immediately set about erecting a 60-yard aerial on 18-foot masts. It was an uneasy task erecting this fully exposed to the vicious enemy fire. . . . I continued sending messages at intervals (but listening-in at all times) until 8 p.m., when our work died down, land-line communications having been established."¹³

Harry died at No. 1 Canadian Casualty Clearing Station on Saturday, 7 July 1917 of nephritis,¹⁴ inflammation of the kidneys, and was buried in Plot 826 of the Adinkerke Churchyard Military Cemetery.¹⁵

Harry's mother, **Deborah**, passed away in Birmingham in the summer of 1944;¹⁶ she was living there with her daughter Maud in 1939.¹⁷ Exactly when Harry's father, **Henry**, died is unknown, except that it was likely before 1939, when his wife described herself as a widow.

Ernest, Harry's immediately younger brother, continued his career in the jewellery trade; in 1939 he was described as a master diamond setter living in Sutton Coldfield, a suburb of Birmingham.¹⁸ According to this same record he was a widower.

The eldest Allen daughter, **Gertrude**, married Albert Brown in 1912¹⁹ and had three children: a daughter, Lilian,²⁰ and twin sons, Albert²¹ and Benjamin.²²

Harry's sister **Maud** never married. She died in Birmingham in 1964.²³

Unfortunately, no conclusive information was found about the life of the youngest Allen sibling, **Herbert**.

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¹ "Aston," *Wikipedia* (www.wikipedia.org: accessed 10 January 2023)

² "England & Wales, Civil Registration Birth Index, 1837–1915," *Ancestry* (www.ancestry.com: accessed 10 January 2023), entry for Albert Henry Allen, Registration place: Aston, Warwickshire, England, Volume: 6d, Page: 25

³ "Birmingham, England, Marriages and Banns, 1754–1937," *Ancestry* (www.ancestry.com: accessed 10 January 2023), entry for Deborah Gear Stubbs

⁴ "1939 England and Wales Register," *Ancestry* (www.ancestry.com: accessed 10 January 2023), entry for Ernest Allen, Schedule number: 108, Sub-schedule number: 1, Enumeration district: Qeol, Borough: Sutton Coldfield, Registration district: 385/1

⁵ "England, Select Births and Christenings, 1538–1975," *Ancestry* (www.ancestry.com: accessed 10 January 2023), entry for Gertrude Allen, FHL film number: 1545529

⁶ "1939 England and Wales Register," *Ancestry* (www.ancestry.com: accessed 10 January 2023), entry for Maud Allen, Schedule number: 191, Sub schedule number: 3, Enumeration district: Qagb, Borough: Birmingham, Registration district: 384/2

⁷ "Birmingham, England, Church of England Baptisms 1813-1819," (www.ancestry.com: accessed 10 January 2023), entry for Herbert Allen

⁸ "Erdington," *Wikipedia* (www.wikipedia.org: accessed 20 January 2023)

⁹ "1911 England Census," *Ancestry* (www.ancestry.com: accessed 10 January 2023), entry for Harry Allen, Registration district number: 385, Sub-registration district: Erdington (sic), Enumeration district, institution, or vessel: 09, Piece: 18328

¹⁰ "New York, U.S., Arriving Passengers and Crew Lists (including Castle Garden and Ellis Island), 1820–1957," *Ancestry* (www.ancestry.com: accessed 10 January 2023), entry for Ernest Allen, Arrival date: 12 October 1912, Ship name: SS *Adriatic*

¹¹ Based on "War Gratuity Calculator" (<https://wargratiuity.wordpress.com/2015/08/16/gratuity-calculator/>: accessed 8 February 2023)

¹² "No. 1 Canadian Casualty Clearing Station," *British Isles Family History Society of Greater Ottawa* (www.bifhsgo.ca: accessed 10 January 2023), entry for Allen, Henry

¹³ "A Wireless Operator," *firstworldwar.com* (<https://www.firstworldwar.com/diaries/awirelessoperator.htm>: accessed 8 February 2023)

¹⁴ "No. 1 Canadian Casualty Clearing Station," *British Isles Family History Society of Greater Ottawa*, entry for Allen, Henry

¹⁵ *Commonwealth War Graves Commission* (www.cwgc.org: accessed 8 February 2023), entry for Allen, Albert Henry, Service No: 152352

¹⁶ "England & Wales, Civil Registration Death Index, 1916–2007," *Ancestry* (www.ancestry.com: accessed 9 February 2023), entry for Deborah G Allen, Registration district: Birmingham, Inferred county: Warwickshire, Volume: 6d, Page: 37

¹⁷ "1939 England and Wales Register," *Ancestry* (www.ancestry.com: accessed 9 February 2023), entry for Deborah Allen, Schedule number: 191, Sub-schedule number: 1, Enumeration district: Qagb, Borough: Birmingham, Registration district: 384/2

¹⁸ "1939 England and Wales Register," *Ancestry* (www.ancestry.com: accessed 9 February 2023), entry for Ernest Allen, Schedule number: 108, Sub-schedule number: 1, Enumeration district: Qeol, Borough: Sutton Coldfield, Registration district: 385/1

¹⁹ "England & Wales, Civil Registration Marriage Index, 1837–1915," *Ancestry* (www.ancestry.com: accessed 9 February 2023), entry for Gertrude Allen, Registration district: Aston, Inferred county: Warwickshire, Volume: 6d, Page: 553

²⁰ "Birmingham, England, Church of England Baptisms 1813–1819," (www.ancestry.com: accessed 9 February 2023), entry for Lilian Gertrude Brown

²¹ "Birmingham, England, Church of England Baptisms 1813–1819," (www.ancestry.com: accessed 9 February 2023), entry for Albert James Brown

²² "Birmingham, England, Church of England Baptisms 1813–1819," (www.ancestry.com: accessed 9 February 2023), entry for Benjamin Frances Brown

²³ "England & Wales, Civil Registration Death Index, 1916–2007," *Ancestry* (www.ancestry.com: accessed 9 February 2023), entry for Maud Allen, Registration district: Birmingham, Inferred county: Warwickshire, Volume: 9c, Page: 60