

Pioneer Allan Herbert Birkett[©]

Regimental number: 155095

1st Canadian Pioneers Battalion

born: 22 March 1890–died: 26 March 1916

Private Allan Herbert Birkett was born on 22 March 1890 in London, England,¹ the third child of Thomas Birkett and his wife, the former Louisa Smith. His father was born in Kimberley, Nottinghamshire, in 1856² and his mother in Bethnal Green, London,³ on 13 April 1859.⁴ Thomas and Louisa married on 28 March 1883 at St Philip's church in Hackney, London,⁵ and would have four children:

- Evelyn Maud, born on 22 June 1885,⁶ but died at the age of 7 in December 1892⁷
- Gertrude Elsie, born on 25 February 1887⁸
- Allan Herbert
- Frank Eric, born on 13 August 1896

A year after Allan's birth, the family was living at 45 Tudor Road with Thomas' mother and his brother, James, and sister, Alice, where Thomas was a baker.⁹

On 28 June 1897 Allan enrolled at Gayhurst Road School just a couple of blocks from where they were then living at 25 (London Fields) West Side.¹⁰ In 1901, they had moved to 95 Lavender Grove, which was just a few minutes walk from their former house. Thomas was now a bread and biscuit maker and confectioner and had employees.¹¹

Ten years later, Thomas had retired and moved out of London. The family was living in Minster, just on the outskirts of Ramsgate, a seaside town on the English Channel. By then, their eldest daughter, Gertrude, was a teacher with the Kent Education Committee. Allan was not with the family. His whereabouts in 1911 are not known but, on 17 April 1913 at the age of 23, he sailed from London, heading to Quebec City and then Montreal. He intended to be a farmer in Canada—perhaps an interesting choice, given that there is no evidence that he had ever lived on a farm.

However, when he enlisted in the Canadian Expeditionary Force on 8 November 1915 in Edmonton, Alberta, he was working as a machinist. He was 5'10" and had a clear complexion, blue eyes and fair hair.

He went straight to England, arriving on 30 November 1915. Just over a month later, he was hospitalized at the Cherry Hinton Military Hospital in Aldershot, Cambridgeshire, with a venereal disease. He was discharged five weeks later and embarked for France on 9 March. His time in France was exceptionally short. He received gunshot wounds to his abdomen 18 days after arriving. He was sent to No. 1 Canadian Field Ambulance and from there to No. 1 Canadian Casualty Clearing Station, where he died on 26 March at 8 a.m.

A casualty clearing station was a military medical unit behind the front lines, usually located near transportation. Casualties who did not soon die or could not be adequately treated in the clearing station were stabilized before being transported to a field or military hospital.¹² No. 1 CCCS had only arrived at Fort Gassion, near Aire-sur-le-Lys, on the morning of 6 March. This would be the station's first installation in France, and after two days staff had cleaned up the fort and were prepared to receive the first patients.¹³

Allan was awarded posthumously the British War Medal (for service overseas between 1914 and 1918), the Victory Medal (for service in an operational theatre) and the 1914–15 Star (for service in the war against Germany between 5 August 1914 and 31 December 1915).

During the war, his parents were living at 63 Southwood Road in Ramsgate.¹⁴ By the end of the war, they had moved to 38 Hadlow Road in Tonbridge, Kent, where they remained until at least 1921.¹⁵ They next moved to Dover, where his father died just before Christmas in 1924.¹⁶ In 1939, his mother was living with Allan's sister Gertrude and her family in Birmingham, Warwickshire.¹⁷ Louisa died there at the age of 88 in 1947. Of their four children, only two remained.

Frank Eric served in the Great War. He was a bank clerk when he enlisted on 13 September 1915 at the age of 19. He transferred as a corporal to the Royal Flying Corps in February 1918 and then to the Royal Air Force when it was created on 1 April 1918. He became a flight cadet in July 1918 but was a 2nd Lieutenant (service number 317027) when he was discharged in November of that year.¹⁸ He married Miriem M. Richwood in Dover in 1921.¹⁹ At some point, probably after the war, he was in the woodworking and engineering business with Wallace Ernest Carter and William Sydney Blackburn. The partnership was dissolved in October 1922.²⁰ In 1939, he was a bank manager and living at the Westminster Bank House on High Street in Esher, Surrey.²¹ He probably died on 27 May 1979 in Oxford.²²

Gertrude Elsie married Charles A. Carter in 1914²³ and, in 1939, they were living at 105 Westley Road, Solihull, Birmingham, in Warwickshire.²⁴ Charles was the managing director of a laundry and they had two children living with them. One, named Allan, was born on 9 April 1915, just two weeks after the death of his uncle. Could he have been named for him? Gertrude's mother died eight years later at the age of 88 in Lichfield, Staffordshire.²⁵

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¹ "Personnel Records of the First World War," *Library and Archives Canada* (<http://www.bac-lac.gc.ca/>: accessed 8 April 2022), entry for Birkett, Allen H., Reference: RG 150, Accession 1992-93/166, Box 749-19, Item number: 44666, Digitized service file - PDF format: B0749-S019. Unless otherwise noted, all information about Alan's military service comes from this source.

² "1891 England Census," *Ancestry* (www.ancestry.co.uk: accessed 2 December 2022), entry for Allen Herbert Farnley [sic] Birkett, Registration district: Hackney, Sub-registration district: South Hackney, Enumeration district, institution, or vessel: 6, Piece: 205, Folio: 10

³ Ibid.

⁴ "1939 England and Wales Register," *Ancestry* (www.ancestry.co.uk: accessed 4 December 2022), entry for Gertrude E Carter, Schedule number: 57, Sub-schedule number: 2, Enumeration district: Qbrd, Registration district: 384/9

⁵ "London, England, Church of England Marriages and Banns, 1754–1938," *Ancestry* (www.ancestry.co.uk: accessed 2 December 2022), entry for Thomas Birkett

⁶ "London, England, School Admissions and Discharges, 1840–1911," *Ancestry* (www.ancestry.co.uk: accessed 2 December 2022), entry for Eveline [sic] Maud Birkett

⁷ "England & Wales, Civil Registration Death Index, 1837–1915," *Ancestry* (www.ancestry.co.uk: accessed 2 December 2022), entry for Evelyn Maud Birkett, Death registration place: Hackney, London, United Kingdom, Volume: 1b, Page: 373

⁸ "1939 England and Wales Register," *Ancestry*, entry for Gertrude E Carter

⁹ "1891 England Census," *Ancestry*, entry for Allen Herbert Farnley [sic] Birkett

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- ¹⁰ "London, England, School Admissions and Discharges, 1840–1911," *Ancestry* (www.ancestry.co.uk: accessed 2 December 2022), entry for Allan Birkett
- ¹¹ "1901 England Census," *Ancestry* (www.ancestry.co.uk: accessed 11 January 2022), entry for Allan H Birkett, Registration district: Hackney, Sub-registration district: South-West Hackney, Enumeration district, institution, or vessel: 18, Piece: 225, Folio: 117, Page: 18, Household schedule number: 118
- ¹² "Casualty Clearing Station," *Wikipedia* (https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Casualty_Clearing_Station: accessed 4 July 2022). A very comprehensive description of the casualty clearing stations is presented in the blog post "Casualty Clearing Stations During WW1" *Chiddicks Family Tree* (<https://chiddicksfamilytree.com/2021/05/09/casualty-clearing-stations-during-ww1/>: accessed 4 July 2022)
- ¹³ "War Diaries of the First World War: 1st Canadian Casualty Clearing Station 1914/08/13–1919/03/31," *Library and Archives Canada* (<http://www.collectionscanada.gc.ca/>: accessed 26 March 2022)
- ¹⁴ "Personnel Records of the First World War," *Library and Archives*, entry for Birkett, Allen [sic] H
- ¹⁵ Ibid.; "1921 Census of England & Wales index," *Findmypast* (www.findmypast.co.uk: accessed 3 December 2022), entry for Thomas Birkette [sic], Parish: Dover, Registration district: Dover, County: Kent
- ¹⁶ "England & Wales, National Probate Calendar (Index of Wills and Administrations), 1858–1995," *Ancestry* (www.ancestry.co.uk: accessed 4 December 2022), entry for Thomas Birkett
- ¹⁷ "1939 England and Wales Register," *Ancestry*, entry for Gertrude E Carter
- ¹⁸ "UK, Royal Air Force Airmen Records, 1918–1940," FOLD3, *Ancestry* (www.ancestry.co.uk: accessed 4 December 2022), entry for Frank Eric Birkett
- ¹⁹ "England & Wales, Civil Registration Marriage Index, 1837–1915," *Ancestry* (www.ancestry.co.uk: accessed 4 December 2022), entry for Frank E Birkett, Registration district: Dover, Inferred county: Kent, Volume: 2a, Page: 3696
- ²⁰ "London Gazette 1665–2018," *Findmypast* (www.findmypast.co.uk: accessed 4 December 2022), entry for Frank Eric Birkett, *London Gazette*, Issue date: 8 December 1922, Issue number: 32775
- ²¹ "1939 England and Wales Register," *Ancestry* (www.ancestry.co.uk: accessed 4 December 2022), entry for Frank E Birkett, Schedule number: 66, Sub-schedule number: 1, Enumeration district: Dmja, Registration district: 30-2
- ²² "England & Wales, National Probate Calendar (Index of Wills and Administrations), 1858–1995," *Ancestry* (www.ancestry.co.uk: accessed 4 December 2022), entry for Frank Eric Birkett
- ²³ "England & Wales, Civil Registration Marriage Index, 1837–1915," *Ancestry* (www.ancestry.co.uk: accessed 4 December 2022), entry for Gertrude E Birkett, Registration district: Thanet, Inferred county: Kent, Volume: 2a, Page: 2355
- ²⁴ "1939 England and Wales Register," *Ancestry*, entry for Gertrude E Carter
- ²⁵ "England & Wales, Civil Registration Death Index, 1916–2007," *Ancestry* (www.ancestry.co.uk: accessed 17 December 2022), entry for Gertrude Elsie Carter, Registration district: Lichfield, Inferred county: Staffordshire, Volume: 30, Page: 0700