

Sergeant David Henry Allan MM



By Jordan Moss

Full Name: David Henry Allan

Family: Son of Joseph and Sarah Jane Allan. Brother to Edith Marion, Thelma Elizabeth and Stephen James Allan.

Rank: Private and Sergeant

Service Number: 185

Date of Enlistment: 20 August 1914, Brighton, Tasmania

Division, Battalion Number: 12th Australian Infantry Battalion and 52nd Australian Infantry Battalion

Date and Location of Embarkation: 20 October 1914, Hobart

Name of Ship: HMAS Geelong A2

Areas of Service: Western Front, Middle East

Records of Battles: Dardanelles Campaign (Gallipoli), Broodseinde Ridge, Mouquet Farm.

Awards/ decorations: Military Medal in 1917 for "Bravery on the field"

Records of wounding: 25-18 April 1915, Gallipoli (Gunshot, Abdomen). Discharged from hospital on 14 June 1915. Wounded again in France, 3 September 1916.

Details if died on active service: Killed in action on 26 April 1918, Villers-Bretonneux/ Mouquet Farm, France

Other:

David's name is located at panel 154 in the Commemorative Area at the Australian War Memorial.

David's older brother Joseph became a Mine Manager and eventually lived in the family home. He and his wife Annie had 6 children and they named their 5th child David after his brother.

David served in cadets for 2 years before enlistment.

He attended Beaconsfield Primary School

Former Occupation was goldminer at Beaconsfield, Tasmania.

The family lived at Hospital Road Beaconsfield

Buried at British Adelaide Cemetery at Villers-Bretonneux.

Some of David's effects and belongings were lost at sea; the cargo boat carrying his items, ready to be returned to his family, was downed by an enemy.



Pte. D. F. Allen,
12th Bt. N.S.W.—Wounded.

Appearance: Height was 5 feet, 7 and a half inches. Chest measurement was 32 – 36 inches. Complexion listed as “dark” and eyes “yellowish”. Hair was brown.

Why he was recommended for the military medal:

“Near Broodseinde (Flanders), Sgt Allan displayed great gallantry during heavy bombardment on the night of 16/17 October 1917, when he and a number of men of his Platoon were buried as a result of hostile shell fire. On being dug out he immediately commenced to dig out his men and bandage and carry wounded men out of the line; whenever casualties were occurring he would be found, cheering up and holding his platoon together by his own personal courage.”

Where and How he died:

Dave was killed at Mouquet Farm, Pozieres on 26 April, 1918. Him and his mate, Roly, were both hit by a stray shell. They are buried side-by-side. Mates to the end.

LF.

Mack

J. ALLEN
BEACONSFIELD TAS.

NOW REPORTED SON PRIVATE DAVID H. ALLEN WOUNDED 2nd OCCASION
WILL PROMPTLY ADVISE IF ANYTHING FURTHER RECEIVED.

BASE RECORDS.

28/9/16

Report to David's father, Joseph Allan, about his 2nd wound

Sergeant David Henry Allan and his War-Time Story

Note: Like many other soldiers who died during The Great War, David Henry Allan's story is obscure. Allan's effects and belongings were lost at sea when the boat carrying the cargo was sunk by an enemy. I have chosen to share Allan's story based on the research I have collected and a few carefully made assumptions in an effort to piece together a somewhat accurate account of his journey from enlistment to death. The obscure amount of Primary Sources associated with Allan is unfortunate, but nonetheless, his story needs to be shared.

On the 21st of August, 1914, former miner David Henry Allan, aged 21, made the decision to send in his enlistment form for the Great War. Accompanying him in this was his faithful mate Roland "Rowly" Dennis. Neither knew what was in store for them on the foreign fields; they expected adventure – what followed was only hard work, peril and the bond of mateship. Before we explore these fateful events, let's start by detailing who David Henry Allan was before the war. He was born in 1893, Beaconsfield, and never knew any place outside of Tasmania - perhaps this is why he yearned to enlist as soon as possible.

Joseph Allan, his father, was the Beaconsfield mine manager, content with work. It was he who introduced young David Allan into the trade as a miner. Perhaps it was this line of work that led him to meet Roland Dennis, from Perth, Tasmania. The two became best mates, deciding together to enlist.



Figure 2: Miners at Beaconsfield Mine, Tasmania

They both joined and became apart of the 12 Battalion's 3rd Brigade and embarked on the HMAA A2 "Geelong" on route to Egypt. They were one of the first Australians to leave the war; those dreamy, innocent fledglings.



Figure 2: HMAA Geelong leaving Hobart, October 1914

On 2nd March, 1915, after some long and hard 5 months of Egypt training, David Allan and Roly Dennis, along with the rest of their brigade, left Alexandria. Heads held high, trigger fingers prompt but awfully apprehensive. They had been training, their moments of war were even closer than the shores of the Dardanelles, but deep down there was bitter uncertainty in all. From the 25th to the 28th of April, Allan and his brigade experienced a taste of the Gallipoli campaign: the Turks were prepared, and their gunfire was ample down the slopes of the beach, some never even touched the sand and died in the shallow waters. On the first day, 2000 dead – on the last day, 6500 dead.

On the home front, the Australian eagerness for war was wounded, as was the soldiers' faith; but mateship thrived on. David was not one of those unfortunate soldiers who lost their lives.

He took a bullet to the chest on the 2nd May and was admitted to the Valetta Military Hospital, Malta on 5 May, where he was listed as dangerously ill. He was then transferred to the Imtarfa Military Hospital; however he survived. By 19 June he was discharged and 8 days later on the 27th of June, he rejoined his unit at Gallipoli. Rowly Dennis welcomed him back, and their Gallipoli campaign resumed.

His father was notified that his son had been wounded.

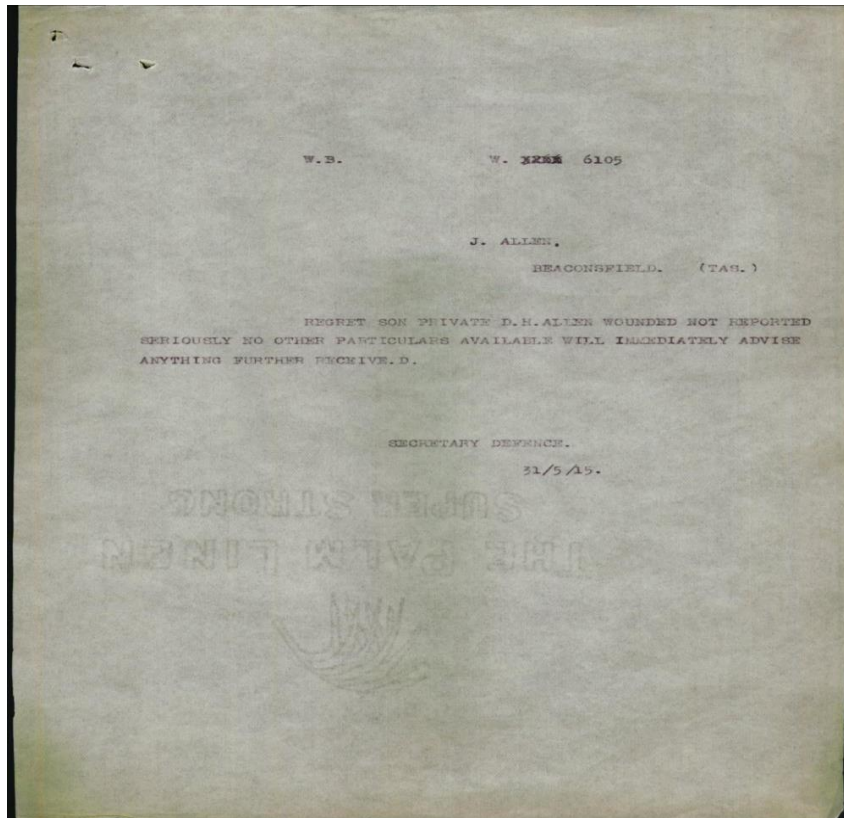


Figure 3: Letter to Josph Allan regarding David Allan's wounding

It was only two 2 months later that Allan fell "dangerously ill" - reports say he suffered from diarrhoea and pyrexia. From the 15th of August to the 5th of September, Allan was admitted to casualty clearing station at Mudros and hospital on three different occasions, for two different illnesses. By the end, we can only assume that Allan was over these hospital spells. He recovered and had rejoined his unit by the 26th of September.

Three months later, on 6 January 1916, aboard HMT Lake Michigan, Allan's Brigade stopped in Alexandria to prepare themselves for whatever battle they participated in next. On the 4th March, 1916, Allan was promoted to Lance Corporal and was transferred to the 52nd Battalion, along with many others of the 12th Battalion. Rumour was also spreading that the Western Front was their next location. Dave Allan and Rowly Dennis had each other, and that was what they cherished; mateship would prove useful for many soldiers during the war.

Allan's life was spared on the Dardanelles, with only a few victorious battles along the Western Front, the war could be won... or so they hoped. While in Tel-el-kebir, on 7th of April, Allan was promoted from Lance Corporal to Corporal. On the 5th June, they finally embarked for Marseilles, France aboard the HMT Ivernia to fight alongside the British and defend the Western Front; arriving on 12 June.

Unfortunately for Allan, this did not begin so well, as he was again reported wounded on the 3rd September: a gunshot wound to the abdomen. In the following days, he was treated at Warloy and Boulogne. He was sent to England on the 12th aboard the HS Newhaven with a wound known by many as a '*Blighty*'. After stays at 1st Base General Hospital, Cambridge and the 2nd Auxiliary Hospital, Southall over a 55-day period, he was discharged to Wareham on 8 November 1916.

He was finally recorded as re-joining his unit on 1st September 1917, after various spells in hospitals, mostly for being 'sick'.

On 13th October, Allan was promoted to Sergeant and soon after on 12th November, he was awarded a Military Medal for his efforts in the war. Here is an extract from the London Gazette, Supplement No. 30507, 4/2/18:

"Near Broodseinde (Flanders), Sgt Allan displayed great gallantry during heavy bombardment on the night of 16/17 October 1917, when he and a number of men of his Platoon were buried as a result of hostile shell fire. On being dug out he immediately commenced to dig out his men and bandage and carry wounded men out of the line; whenever casualties were occurring he would be found, cheering up and holding his platoon together by his own personal courage."



Figure 4: Military Medal

Allan continued through late 1917 and into 1918 in the field. By early March 1918 he was detached to the Corps Bomb School for one month's training. He returned to the field on 13 April.

14 days later, Sergeant David Henry Allan was killed on the 27th April, 1918, Mouquet Farm. He was killed alongside his very best mate, Company Sergeant Major Roland 'Roly' Dennis, as a stray shell had caught them off-guard. David Allan died courageously and did all he could for the war efforts.

His family was notified and his Death Certificate was forwarded.

W. M.
53621

29th October, 1918.

Dear Madam,

It is with feelings of admiration at the gallantry of a brave Australian soldier who has nobly laid down his life in the service of our King and Country, that I am directed by the Honourable The Minister to forward to you, as the legatee of the late No. 135 Sergeant D.H. Allen, M.M., 52nd Battalion, Australian Imperial Force the Military Medal which His Majesty The King has been graciously pleased to award to that gallant soldier for conspicuous bravery and devotion to duty while serving with the Australian Imperial Expeditionary Force.

I am also to ask you to accept his deep personal sympathy in the loss which, not only you, but the Australian Army has sustained by the death of Sergeant Allen, whose magnificent conduct on the field of battle has helped to earn for our Australian soldiers a fame which will endure as long as memory lasts.

I shall be obliged if you will kindly let me know whether it comes safely to hand by signing and returning the attached receipt slip.

Yours faithfully,

Major.
Officer i/c Base Records.

Mrs. S. Allen,
Hospital Road,
Beaconsfield,
TASMANIA.

Figure 5: A letter of sympathy to David's mother after his death

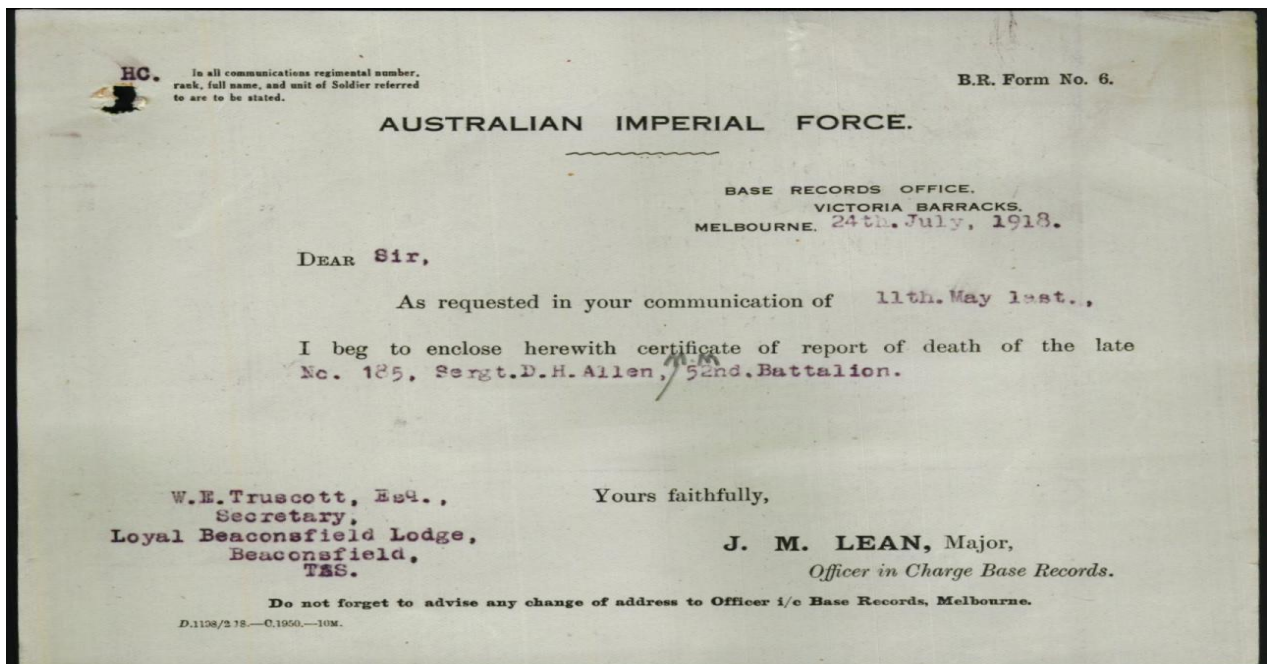


Figure 6: Death Certificate Sergeant David Allan

His effects were sunk on a cargo ship, and his family never received his personal belongings. After years of asking for his belongings, his mother Sarah was informed of those by letter in 1920. As Allan's father Joseph had died in 1919, Sarah also received his Military Medal.

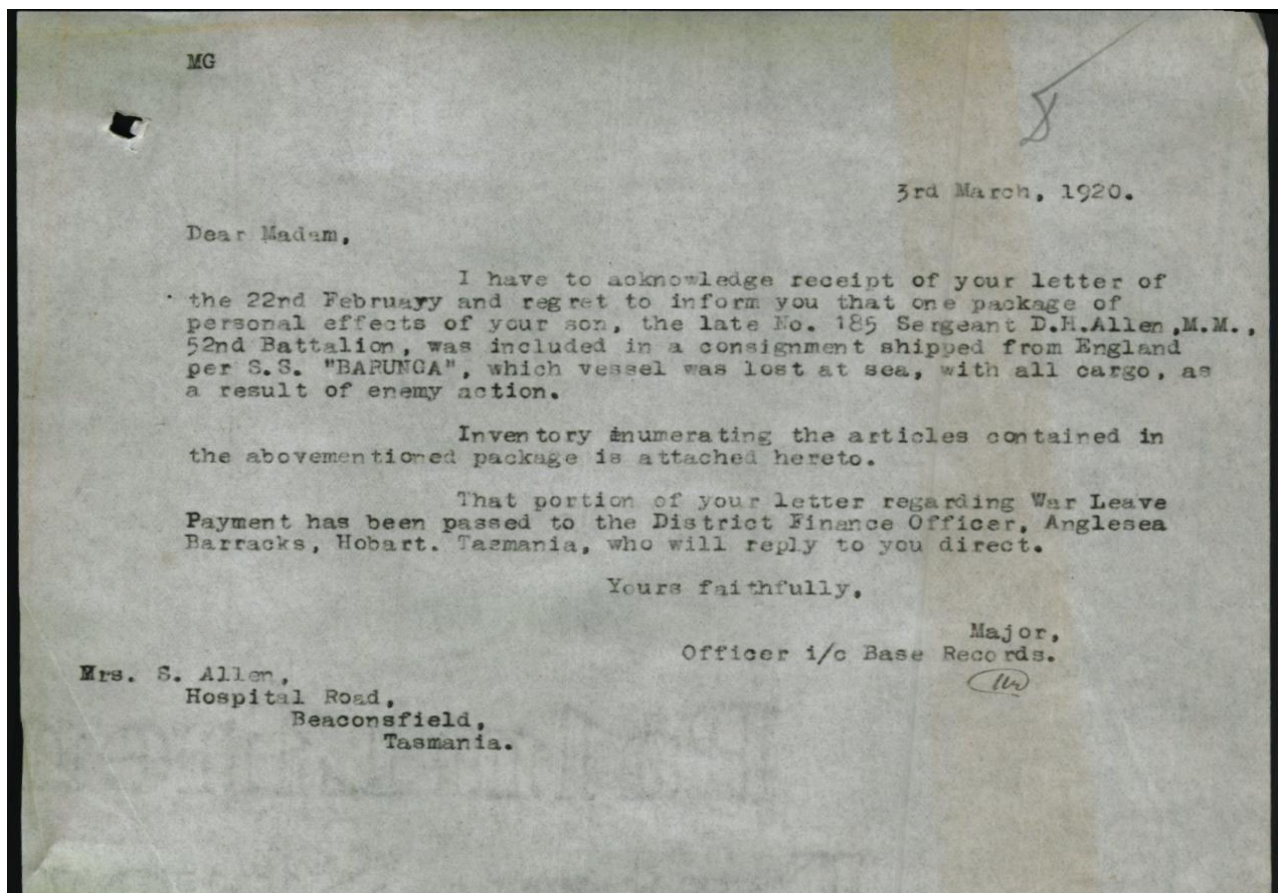
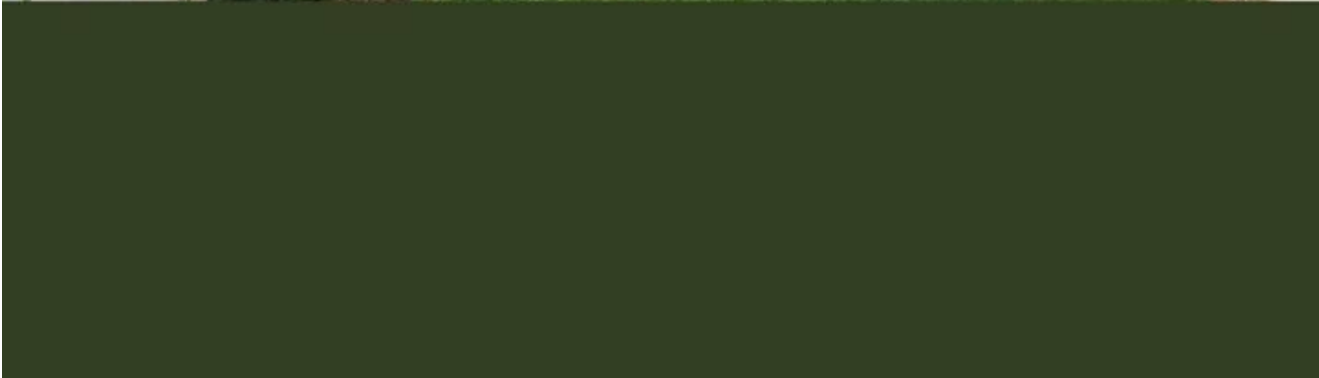
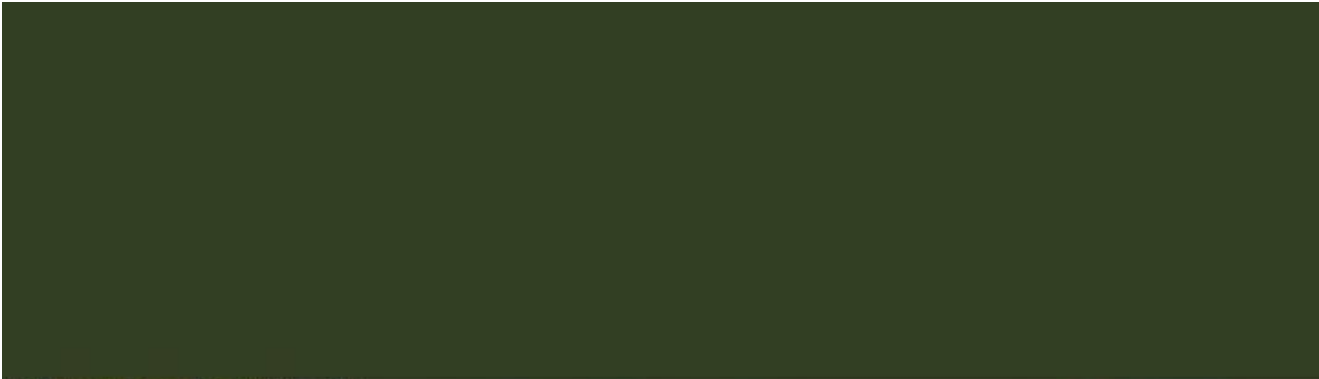


Figure 7: Letter to Sarah Allan outlining the non return of David's belongings

On the 27th of April, 2018, I visited David Allan and Roland Dennis' graves at Adelaide Cemetery, Villers-Bretonneux and presented a speech of the impact they had on me.



The Pilgrimage



Australia is well-known for its mateship; Australians are regarded as being friendly, loyal and enjoying themselves, other people and their country. Sometimes this mateship and easy-going attitude were recognized by the British as 'larrikinism', and the Aussies during the war were told off for their entertaining and humorous traits. The Australians were even told 'not to climb on the pyramids' in Egypt.

But where can the origins of this 'mateship' idiom be traced to? World War 1 and it's brave Australian soldiers, of course. To stand up and be proud of your country, to defend it at all costs, to recognize that it is a special place and different from the rest, is what David Allan and many other soldiers did during the outbreak of the Great War. They had a great desire, not a desire to shoot a gun, the desire to adventure and go to grand places with their mates and protect the county that they loved. This desire took hold of young Dave. Why? Because he wanted an experience with his mates, especially Roly - who was his mate all the way to death's door.

As Admiral Chester Nimitz put:

"They fought together as brothers-in-arms. They died together and now they sleep side-by-side. To them, we have a solemn obligation."

Dave died with Roly. His best and last mate.

Sometimes I sit and try to play out in my head how dreadful and horrific the battles were for the soldiers. Sometimes I'm observing the confusion and clutter of men rushing about in a tight-packed, soggy trench. Or I'm running across no man's land with a 5kg rifle, praying not to be hit as the shells thud against the earth and spit dirt high into the air. Either way, I always come to the same questions: how did these Australian men keep it together? What drove them to fight even when they knew their life could end at any minute? What kept them marching on when nothing but mud, heat, fatigue, and death paved their paths? All my questions of deep-thought were answered when I began to study Sergeant David Henry Allan.

His story made me realize that Australian soldiers had something when I thought they had lost everything. They had mateship. A bond tighter than any chain, a quality so rich

and limitless that it is hard to describe in one word. Mateship is made even stronger in the most perilous of times, as the Australian soldiers proved.

You could argue the reason why the soldiers fought so gallantly is that they knew they had to protect their country. Or as commonly said, “fighting for King and Country.” But I disagree. In the spur of the moment, even the bravest of knights can forget their vows. Something stronger than pride took hold of these Australian soldiers when the time came to fight. Mateship was the strongest quality in Aussie troops, it kept them fighting more than King George V ever could.

Mateship drove young Dave to enlist. Mateship helped him charge up the beach during Gallipoli. Mateship is why he dug out his men, buried by a shell during battle, and attended to their wounds.

Dave always, and I quote, “ *[could] be found, cheering up and holding his platoon together by his own personal courage.*” It is men like Dave who gave the soldiers a reason to fight, a reason to keep going.

We commonly talk about the ‘Aussie spirit’, and how the ANZAC’s shaped our nations most beloved traits, but we never go into much detail on the effect the Aussies and their mateship had during the war.

Dave’s astounding case of the effects of Australian mateship is one of many, but important nonetheless. He made me realize how the ANZAC spirit and mateship were evolved, and it’s deep impact on the brave soldiers of the Great War.

As the famous poet of the 19th century, Walt Whitman, once said: “*I have learned that to be with those I like is enough.*”

So with all this, I can happily think that for Dave Allan to die with his most trusted companion, his best mate to the end, Roly, was enough for him. And I know that the legacy of Dave Allan’s heroic acts and friendly impact will always be remembered in my heart, and inspire the way I connect with people, whatever the situation.

Here is a poem I crafted for Dave and his remembrance:

David, that dainty, young miner,
paired with old Roly, the pair were a pair of adventure finders.
Through mateship and toil in the soil,
these mates had a bond nothing could spoil.

Charging up the Dardanelles in vain,
getting shot in the groin,
like a baby bird flying off and getting hit by a plane.

Death persuaded, hospital time serenaded,
Daves illness eventually faded,
as a fog fades from the forest floors,
clearly and calmly, he was ready.

That dainty Dave, made old by war,
sharpened his psyche, ready for more.
It was finally France for this one – Roly included.
They were to be in different divisions, ‘till destiny intruded.

A series of dodgy diarrhoea days in the sick bay, bordeom for hours,
determined Dave recovered soon from the damned river-rush down-under his
trousers.

Then the bird flew, once again,
careful this time for the plane,
but never truly the jet –
the battle of Villers-Brett.
It was that dreaded stray shell,

that stupified it surroundings with shock and stress,
making the battlefield a mess,
but that is not relevant right now,
and probably for the best.

Dave and Roly, brothers born of mateship,
marched through the trenches,
like sneaky insects in a tunnel,
and encountered trouble.

Entrenched in Brettoneux,
the boys were caught by the bastard Death once again,
though this time he wasn't convinced.

He took their livid lives like a vicious viper,
pouncing and squeezing the innocent leaving only blood.
Blood – the colour red.

Red – the poppy decorating these two brothers graves, ensuring their legacy.

And it all came down to that stray shell.

That one miscalculated, misfortunate, life-stealer of a stray shell.

Such is the impact of war, who stole many innocent brothers,
from their friends, fathers, the world and their mothers.

Dave, you showed me mateship. I am grateful.

Here are some photos of myself at David Allan’s grave and Adeliade Cemetery:







Gravestones of Roland Harris Dennis DCM and David Henry Allan MM



Rowland Harris Dennis DCM

Distinguished Conduct Medal

'For conspicuous gallantry and devotion to duty. During severe fighting, this warrant officer has displayed great gallantry and disregard of personal danger, inspirint and cheering all about him by his example. His devotion to duty on all occasions has been conspicuous, and he has been of the greatest assistance to his company commander.'

Source: 'Commonwealth Gazette' No. 31

Date: 4 March 1919

Brother: 168 Pte Archibald George DENNIS, 40th Bn, died of disease, 25 June 1916.

Killed in Action 26 April 1918

Age at death from cemetery records 23

Place of burial Adelaide Cemetery (Plot III, Row E, Grave No. 7), Villers-Bretonneux, France

Bibliography

David Henry Allan. (2018). Retrieved from <https://www.awm.gov.au/collection/R1666227>

David Henry Allan | Discovering Anzacs | National Archives of Australia and Archives NZ. (2018). Retrieved from <https://discoveringanzacs.naa.gov.au/browse/person/70499>

Memorial, T. (2018). Sergeant David Henry Allan. Retrieved from <https://www.awm.gov.au/collection/P10685937>

Military medal and WW1 service medals awarded to David Allan; 1918-1921; BMHC_13... on eHive. (2018). Retrieved from <https://ehive.com/collections/4899/objects/771079/military-medal-and-ww1-service-medals-awarded-to-david-allan>

Obituary - David Henry Allan - Obituaries Australia. (2018). Retrieved from <http://oa.anu.edu.au/obituary/allan-david-henry-17047>

Photograph of the final resting place of Allan, David Henry - The War Graves Photographic Project. (2018). Retrieved from <https://www.twgpp.org/photograph/view/1905281>

Sergeant David Henry Allan | Discovering Anzacs | National Archives of Australia and Archives NZ. (2018). Retrieved from <https://discoveringanzacs.naa.gov.au/browse/gallery/18035>