

Stories from the Honour Boards

Stories of those who served and are remembered on the Honour Boards in the Merrington Anzac Memorial Peace Chapel at Saint Andrew's Uniting Church

Booklet Number 75

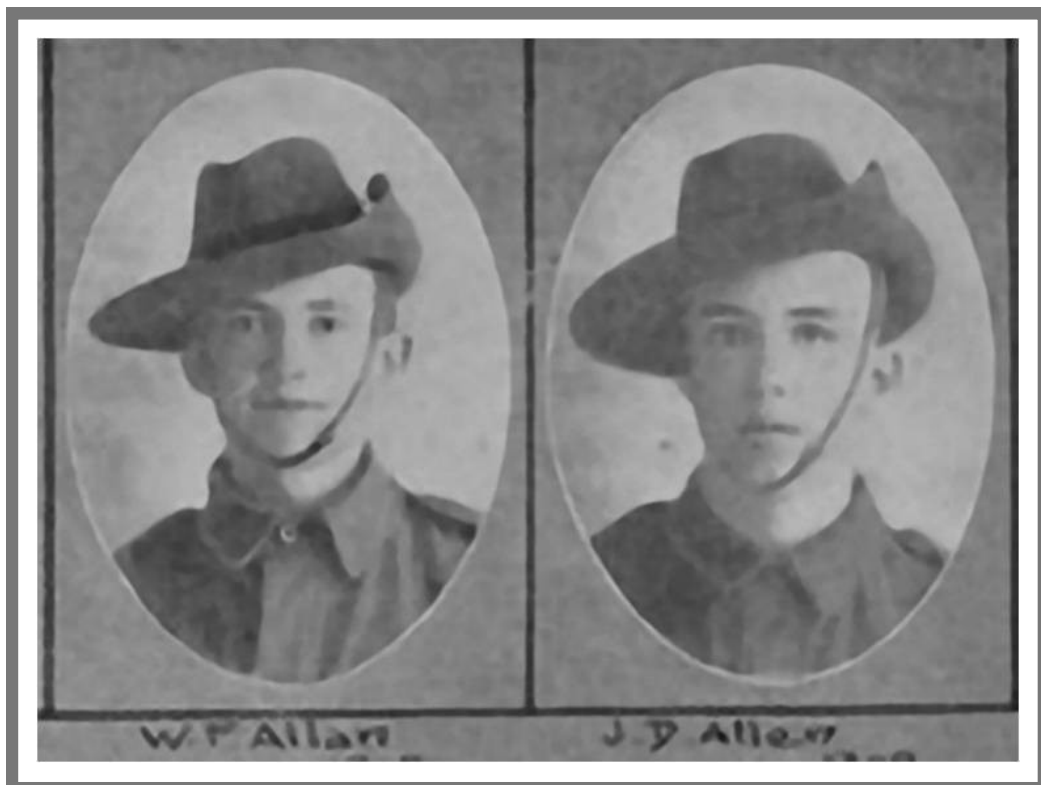
ALLAN BROTHERS

WILLIAM FIFE

1892 - 1967

JAMES DOUGLAS

1895 - 1980



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Lance Corporal William Fife Allan MM and Sergeant James Douglas Allan MM

On 13 August 1915, as the Anzacs continued to struggle fiercely to try and gain ground on the Gallipoli Peninsula, the two Allan brothers from Chelmer in Brisbane who were of an age to enlist – William ('Bill') Fife Allan and James ('Doug') Douglas Allan – did so together in the 13th reinforcement for the 9th Battalion.

Their lives had very similar trajectories, including that both were awarded the Military Medal for bravery during their war service, both were wounded, and both went on to have significant public service careers after demobilisation.

Their parents were James Fife and Catherine ('Kate') Isabella (nee McIntosh) Allan. James was born in Inverurie, Scotland in 1859 and he came to Australia when the family migrated in 1865. James started working as a teacher, but changed to the Queensland customs service in 1886. Prior to Federation, duties were imposed at State borders, and James spent time at Betoota near the border with South Australia, a point where camel trains would cross. In 1891 he was posted to the border town of Wallangarra, a key point where goods arriving by NSW rail would have to be transferred to the Queensland trains (which ran on tracks with a narrower gauge).

In July 1891 James married Kate McIntosh, who had been born near Warwick in 1861 to a family well known in the district. At that time Kate's father ran Blinkbonnie Station. Son Bill was born on 14 October 1892, followed by a daughter Florence in 1894, Doug on 3 November 1895, and then another daughter Ethel in 1897.

James was subsequently posted to Cairns and then Townsville. While the Allan family was in Townsville Bill attended the Grammar School, and a third son joined the family – Ronald McIntosh was born in 1903.

In October 1908 James was posted to Brisbane, with the family settling in the Brisbane suburb of Chelmer and joining the congregation of Saint Andrew's Church in Ann Street in the city. In 1922 James was an Inspector of excise and he retired in 1924.

Bill and Doug attended Brisbane Grammar School (Bill in 1909 and Doug 1909-11) and both entered the Queensland Public Service – Doug in the Department of Public Lands in 1912 and Bill initially in the Agricultural Bank (within the Agriculture portfolio) in 1913. By 1915 Bill was also in the Department of Public Lands.

The 9th Battalion was in the first wave ashore at Gallipoli in April 1915 and suffered very heavy casualties during the landing and subsequent fighting. Reinforcements were essential and on 13 August 1915 Bill (aged 23) and Doug (aged 19) enlisted together. Parental approval was given in respect of Doug because he was under 21 years of age. The two brothers had similar physiques - Bill was 5'9" (175cm) tall with a dark complexion, brown eyes and hair, and weighed 8st 9lbs (54kg); while Doug was 5'8" (173cm) tall with a fair complexion, brown hair and grey eyes, and weighed 8st 10lbs (55kg).

In camp at Enoggera in Brisbane they made friends with a young farmer from Lismore, Albert Hugh Larsson, who after the War would marry their sister Ethel.

On 3 January 1916 the three were among the reinforcements who embarked on HMAT A55 *Kyarra* in Brisbane, disembarking in Alexandria, and then travelling to Marseilles. They were taken on strength with the 9th Battalion in France on 14 May 1916.

The 9th Battalion's first major action in France was in the attack at Pozieres in the Somme Valley and Australian casualties were horrendously high. Doug was wounded on 23 July 1916. Future brother-in-law Albert Larsson won the Military Medal for bravery on 25 July.

Doug was wounded for a second time on 20 September 1917 during the Battle of Menin Road, with a severe shell wound to the right side of his head and a fractured skull. After an operation he made a good recovery.



AWM G01534I

Main street, Pozieres, August 1914.



AWM EZ0097

The main street of Pozieres after the German bombardments of July–August 1916.

Interestingly Bill was made a Lance Corporal in October 1917 but after a week he chose to return, at his own request, to the rank of Private. The official records don't indicate why, but family papers suggest that rather than going on training courses he preferred to fight it out in the trenches to expedite victory.

At Meteren on the night of 10-11 May 1918 Bill's actions led to the award of the Military Medal. The recommendation for the award said that he 'displayed marked initiative and devotion to duty. He went forward to examine posts in a hop-field and was personally responsible for the capture of three Germans. Later he displayed great courage as one of a party...who went out on a daylight raid and brought in 11 prisoners.'

An earlier draft of the recommendation also said that he did 'valuable patrol work during the Battalion's tour in the line and gained much useful information'.



A Military Medal

These events are included in volume vi of Bean's *Official History*. When providing some biographical information to Bean in 1937, Bill commented that he was reading the volumes of the *Official History* and was getting 'a glimmering of the trials and tribulations of those staff officers who were endowed with our gratuitous curses', although he was 'sorry your printer used that damned Americanism 'connexion''.

Bill's curses may have been particularly applicable on 30 May 1918, when he was wounded in the line at Strazeele Ridge, in the Meteren sector. His service record refers to wounds to his left hand and scalp, and in later years when enlisting in the Volunteer Defence Corps Bill wrote that he was buried by a shell in 1918. Also, family records say that he was buried unconscious in a dugout which had collapsed following a nearby shell explosion. He spent a lengthy period in hospital, and it took some time before he could walk properly again.

While Bill was in hospital he was promoted to Lance Corporal (on 5 June 1918), as was Doug on the same day, although Doug was then made a temporary Corporal the following month, and was confirmed in that rank in August 1918.

Doug earned his Military Medal for conspicuous devotion to duty during the period 16 September to 11 November 1918, and especially for his actions at Villaret on 18 September 1918, when he 'observed an enemy Machine Gun inflicting casualties on the troops on his right. Using very good judgement he worked round to a flank and caused the enemy to flee. This allowed the line to advance without any opposition and resulted in killing two of the enemy machine gun crew. Again during the advance he engaged another enemy machine gun, by charging the crew and causing them to flee in terror. The boldness displayed by this N.C.O., and lack of hesitation was a means of overcoming the enemy and making good our advance'.



9th Battalion NCOs
Doug Allan, back row third from left

Reference is also made in the papers that 'his conduct out of the line has contributed towards increased efficiency in his company'. In October 1918 he was made a temporary Sergeant and this was confirmed in February 1919.

Bill arrived back in Australia on the *Orvosa* in March 1919, while Doug came back on the *Port Napier*, arriving in Australia in July 1919.

Both brothers returned to the Queensland Public Service. The personnel file for Doug is still held by the Queensland State Archives and so we know more of the detail of his career than that of Bill, whose file has been culled (in line with general practice).

However, from other records we know that in July 1924 Bill was an assessor clerk in the unemployment insurance claims section of the Department of Public Works. This unemployment insurance scheme had been introduced in Queensland in 1923, after the Queensland Government had become impatient with the limited progress by the Commonwealth and the other States in deliberating on what should be done in this area. By 1930 Bill was a senior assessor clerk in the same area, although it was by then within the Department of Labour and Industry.

On 24 April 1925 in Saint Andrew's Church Bill married Glasgow-born clerk Janet ('Jenny') Hiddleston. Jenny was an accomplished pianist and organist. They lived at Terrapax (peace on earth) in Swann Road, Taringa in Brisbane and had one son in 1927, Blair Fife Allan.

In February 1940 Bill was promoted in the Department of Labour and Industry from Senior Clerk, State Development Tax to State Development Tax Officer. Queensland had introduced a State Development Tax in 1938, primarily as a means of funding public works to be undertaken by those among the unemployed who did not have rights under the unemployment insurance scheme.

In 1945 the Commonwealth Government commenced making unemployment payments to job seekers (not an insurance scheme) and the following year brought a Commonwealth Employment Service into full operation, effectively taking on this area of administration from the States. Bill moved to the Commonwealth Public Service in May 1946 to the position of Chief Employment Officer in the Queensland Branch of the Department of Labour and National Service. When he retired 11 years later he was Deputy Director of Employment in Queensland.

At his farewell from the Department, speakers 'praised Mr Allan's happiness, application to his job, and the help he had given to many sections of the community, including Diggers, the blind, and Boy Scouts'. The Diggers he helped included returning World War 2 servicemen who needed vocational guidance and related services, as well as rehabilitation services for those who had been wounded.

As for Doug, in 1919 he returned to the Rents Section in the Department of Public Lands - where he had been for six months before enlisting - and rose up the ranks of that Department until retirement in November 1961.

In the 1920s Doug worked in the Soldier Settlement Branch for one year but spent most of his time in the Land Settlement Branch. He was noted by the Departmental Head as 'a highly capable officer who does not spare himself' and who had given 'entire satisfaction in carrying out work of an important nature'.

Doug married Phyllis May Jackson, a Gympie-born civil servant, in Saint Andrew's Church on 1 August 1927. They had two sons – John Douglas and David Fife Allan – and lived in Rome Street, Yeronga in Brisbane.

In 1929 Doug was Secretary to the Land Administration Board for the purpose of an inquiry into sound settlement areas in south-west Queensland. He must have given 'entire satisfaction' in that work because in 1931 he was appointed Secretary to a Royal Commission that inquired into certain matters (particularly land settlement and forestry) relating to the development of North Queensland. In their report the Commissioners noted that the work required of the Secretary had been 'exacting and strenuous, and the manner of its performance deserves our commendation'.

The following year Doug performed the secretarial work for the Special Committee that reported on the Eungella lands near Mackay, and then in 1937 he assisted and advised the Land Commissioners at Cunnamulla and Charleville with the organisation for large ballots for land in those localities.

In March 1938 Doug was promoted to Assistant Secretary, Land Administration Board, and had significant periods acting as Secretary to the Board.

Doug became Officer-in-charge of the Land Openings Branch in September 1944, and from 1949, under delegation from the Board, he made decisions for leasing land under forest grazing lease, special lease, perpetual town and suburban lease, and agricultural selection. He retired in 1961, having had over 49 years' service in the Queensland Public Service.

Both Bill and Doug joined the Volunteer Defence Corps (VDC) when it was established in mid 1940 by the Returned Sailors', Soldiers' and Airmen's Imperial League of Australia. The VDC came under the control of the Australian Army in 1941, and then became part of the Citizen Military Forces (CMF) in 1942. Most service in the VDC was part-time, and much of the time was spent in training for activities such as the construction of road blocks, demolition of bridges and piers, protection of infrastructure, searchlight operations and guerrilla warfare.

Doug was initially in the 4th Queensland Battalion, but on graduating from Officer training in September 1942 he was appointed an acting Captain in the 3rd Queensland Battalion. Bill followed soon after in becoming an acting Captain in the 1st Queensland Battalion in October 1942. Doug later spent some of his service in the VDC with coastal artillery batteries. The two brothers were placed on the reserve list in October 1945.

Doug was also seconded from the Department of Public Lands to the Civil Defence Organisation in a full-time capacity for one year from 5 February 1942. On his return to the Department of Public Lands in February 1943 it was recorded that 'he rendered most valuable and effective service'. The return was also 'on the understanding that should the necessity arise, his service could at any time be availed of by the Civil Defence Organisation'.



Bill died on 16 January 1967 in Brisbane at the age of 74 years. His ashes were interred at the Mt Thompson Memorial Gardens in Brisbane.

Doug and Phyllis retired initially to the coastal town of Caloundra, but later moved to Cairns where Doug died on 18 January 1980. His remains were interred in the Cairns (Martyn Street) Cemetery.

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Family information

Compiled by Ian Carnell AM

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Lest we forget