

## Ashtead War Memorials - WWI - Cadet Thomas Meredith Allen Australian Flying Corps

Thomas was one of six brothers born to EF Allen, Managing Director of The Samoa Shipping and Trading Company, 273 George Street, Sydney, NSW, Australia. He signed up from Apia, Samoa, Samoa County (having already been a Territorial for 5 years in Auckland, New Zealand,) on 28 November 1914, aged 21 years and 1 month, and was enrolled at Liverpool Camp, NSW. Described as 5 feet 7 inches in height; dark complexioned with brown eyes and dark brown hair, he had previously worked for two years as a seaman with the Company run by his father.

As a Private 1313 in 2nd Reinforcements, 2nd Battalion, AIF, he embarked for the Dardanelles, 11 February 1915, after the Gallipoli landings only to be invalided in action between 25 and 30 April 1915 with a bullet wound to his left thigh. Evacuated on HMS *Goorkha* on 3 May 1915, he was brought to England, initially for treatment at No.1 Southern General Hospital, then Harefield Australian Auxiliary Hospital.

He stayed at Woodcote Park, Epsom, from 26 July to 17 September 1915, and, later, passed through Monte Video, on the Wyke Regis side of Weymouth, to Perham Downs, Salisbury. Although made up to T/Corporal, he went AWOL and was reverted to Private, 23 July 1916, before being returned to his unit in France on 10 August 1916.

In December 1916 he again became a Lance Corporal and joined the Royal Flying Corps School of Instruction of Military Aeronautics at Reading as a cadet (pilot/acting 2nd Lieutenant). Unfortunately, on 17 April 1917 whilst flying a Farman aircraft, he crashed at Norwich Aerodrome and died in Thorpe War Hospital, Norfolk. A Court of Enquiry, convened the same day, opined that "The accident which resulted in the death of 2nd Lieut. Allen was entirely due to his error in not flattening out soon enough."

Arrangements for his funeral, with Military Honours, were made by a brother, Lieut. Frederick Allen of HMS *Cricket*, using Ashtead's undertaker at that time, JJ De'Ath.

The choice of location appears to have been determined by a friendship which had developed, presumably over the time spent in camp at Epsom, between Thomas and a local businessman William R Mellish of Woodfield Bakery. The cortege started from Woodfield House, at 3 pm on 30 April 1917, for a memorial service at St. Giles followed by interment in the churchyard. The coffin, of "English Oak with Brass Mountings", was draped with the Australian flag; a firing party was in attendance and four buglers sounded the "Last Post". The burial report gives the deceased's substantive rank as "Privatè".

Since the earlier part of this piece was written, contact has been made with **Stuart Tucker** who had identified and researched the grave in St Giles' churchyard before publishing an article in the Ashtead Parish Magazine *A New Zealander at St Giles*. He has explained how he engaged in correspondence with members of the Allen family: -

"Sylvia Allen, the widow of Frederick Allen, Tom's eldest brother, who lived in Auckland ... wrote detailing all the points that had puzzled me for so long.

Tom had been one of six brothers, of whom four had served in the 1914-18 war. He had been wounded at Gallipoli but had been posted as being killed. When his brother, Fred, wounded some time later, was in a Birmingham hospital, a chance remark by a nurse that another Allen had been there two weeks earlier made him do some checking. It was indeed his brother, Tom, and he traced him to a convalescent home in Ashtead and then got himself transferred there as well. One of the visitors to this home was 23 year old Violet Mellish, a daughter of the local baker and the Mellish household on Ashtead Common became a home-

from home for both of the Allen boys. Recovering from his wounds, Tom had then done a brief spell of duty in France before transferring to the Flying Corps and returning to England where he also became engaged to Violet Mellish.

His fatal accident had occurred when his aeroplane had stalled after taking off and striking rough ground on a practice flight. It had been Violet Mellish's wish that he be buried at St Giles'. As well as his eldest brother being there, Tom's youngest brother, Ernest, aged 18 and in the Flying Corps, was also present at the funeral. Because his flying training had been completed and all examinations passed for his wings and commission, the family had felt that the reference to the rank of lieutenant on his headstone was correct though his death had precluded completion of the formalities. Tom Allen's grave is but a few yards from the Mellish family grave though at that time only one of this large family had been interred there.

Sylvia Allen proved to be the historian of the family. English herself, she had lived at Stamford in Lincolnshire and had met Fred Allen whilst he was serving in the gunboat, H.M.S. *Crickett* based in the Wash to protect King George V from the attentions of Zeppelins while he was at Sandringham. After the war she had married Fred Allen and went back to New Zealand with him. She had last heard of Violet Mellish in the late 1920's - she was married and in Liverpool. I was fortunate to obtain so much information freely given because Sylvia Allen died a year later in 1973.

A Mrs. Warland, who though living in Banstead still attended church services at St Giles, phoned to say that she used to live near one of Violet Mellish's brothers and knew his son who lived at Harrow. There were no descendants of the family now living in Ashtead. Furthermore she said that Violet Mellish, then 82, lived alone at Malaga on the southern coast of Spain. Her husband had died in 1973 and her married name was Violet Spowart. I felt that it would be best for her Harrow nephew to decide whether to send a copy of the magazine to her. This he did and I then received some most interesting letters from this elderly lady while correspondence also commenced between her and Tom's family in Auckland, both overjoyed to have made contact after a gap of some fifty years or thereabouts.

Violet Spowart was one of nine children and the only one of that generation still living. She recalled clearly the many episodes of her youth - trips by horse-drawn carriage to dances in Leatherhead, the Mafeking celebrations of 1900 in Ashtead, the erection of the lych gate at St Giles' in 1902. She well remembered the Rector of those days, the Rev. F. G. L. Lucas and his successor, the Rev. Richard Waddilove, who officiated at Tom's funeral. Every year she had sent the required sum of money to Longhurst in Epsom so that the headstone and surround could be cleaned although this maintenance did not include keeping the area tidy. This explained why the stone stood out among all the others as being so clean when I found it in 1970. Also remembered were the names of the regiments and battalions which a number of her brothers and other relatives had joined."

A letter from Violet Spowart related how: -

"On the day ["Tommy"] was injured, we were to have met in London to celebrate Anzac day, instead the fatal telegram arrived and immediately my dear mother and I journeyed to Thorpe, Norwich, to see him. There was no hope, the brain had been lacerated and he never regained consciousness. His brother, Fred, joined us at his bedside and we just sat there and watched Tommy's passing. He and I wanted [him] to be buried near our family grave. It was a military funeral and the *Last Post* was sounded. Since, I have cared for the grave as well as possible, a little difficult as I have lived abroad for the last 30 years, first in Ireland and

for the last 14 years in Spain - here my husband, Lieut Colonel W Spowart OBE, died on October 2nd 1973 after a long and very happy married life. His name though William was Tommy to his family and to me."

Violet moved to the Isle of Man and finally to a residential home in Gloucester where she died, peacefully, on 12 January 1984, a few weeks short of her 91st birthday.

From Errol Martin's book *FOR YOUR TOMORROW, Vol I: A record of New Zealanders who have died while serving with the RNZAF and Allied Air Services since 1915*: via Stuart Tucker

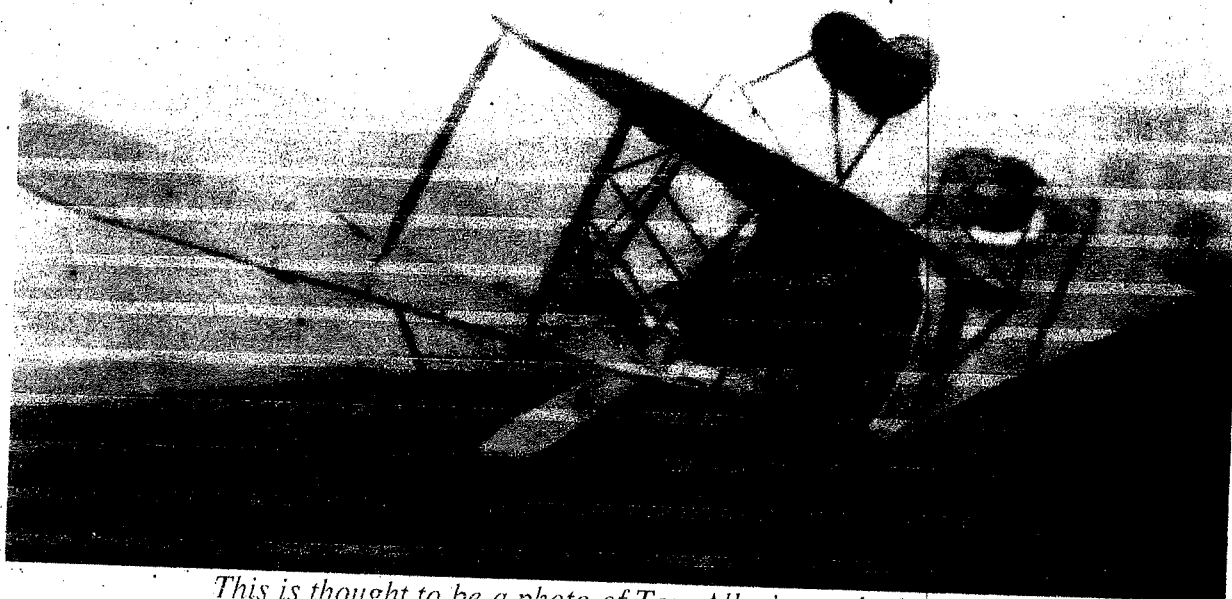
Tue 24 April 1917

Training

9 Reserve Squadron, RFC (Norwich, Norfolk - 7th Wing, Eastern Group Command, Training Brigade)  
Henry Farman F20 A1214 - crashed on failing to flatten out properly during a landing in the evening, the pilot being thrown out and suffering head injuries. He died on the morning of the 27th at the Norfolk War Hospital, Norwich, and was buried at 1500 on the 30th at Ashtead, Surrey.

*Pilot: 1313 Cdt Thomas Meredith ALLEN, 2nd Infantry Bn AIF & Australian Flying Corps  
Age 23. 2hrs 25min solo on Henry Farman.*

*Allen was born at Apia in Samoa but spent eight or nine years in New Zealand to complete his education and gain early work experience. He returned to the islands a few years prior to the war to work for his New Zealand father's trading company. Allen and one of his five brothers arrived in Sydney on board a company vessel shortly after the outbreak of war, whereupon both enlisted with the Australian Imperial Force. Thomas, who had been wounded serving on Gallipoli, later transferred to the Australian Flying Corps. His tombstone states that he 'died of injuries sustained whilst flying at Norwich, April 26th', while the CWGC register and official records give the 27th as date of death. According to a brother who was at his side when he died, death occurred 52 hours after the accident. It would appear therefore that Allen died very close to midnight 26/27 April.*



*This is thought to be a photo of Tom Allen's crashed Farman  
via Stuart Tucker*

**Links**

Roll of Honour, Australian Flying Corps: [http://www.camriley.com/2004\\_2002/rollofhonour.html](http://www.camriley.com/2004_2002/rollofhonour.html)  
National Archives of Australia: Attestation paper: <http://naa12.naa.gov.au/scripts/ima.asp?B=3030752&I=1&SE=1>

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text: Brian Bouchard: if you can add to this page please contact the editor  
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*Tom Allen and Miss Violet Mellish  
via Stuart Tucker*



L-R: Stuart Tucker with Tom Allen's nephew  
Maurice Allen  
at Tom's grave at St Giles' Ashted, 1976



Stuart Tucker with Mrs Violet Spowart  
(née Mellish)  
21st August 1976  
*both images via Stuart Tucker*

*north-east suburbs of Leatherhead.*