

# Westbury Remembers - Part 7

Gallipoli — Cornelius Allen

Written by Di Landon

and sponsored by

Westbury-on-Severn Parish Council



Cornelius was 36 years old and was the second member of his family to die in the Great War, his nephew Frank having been killed at the Second Battle of Ypres in May 1915.

Cornelius's battalion remained at Suvla Bay and must have sustained many more casualties when a huge blizzard struck the peninsula in December, causing 15,000 casualties amongst the British contingent. A fortnight after Cornelius died, Allied forces began a full retreat from the shores of Gallipoli and by 8th January the last troops had been withdrawn. It had been a disastrous invasion and although casualty figures vary, it is likely that in total around half a million men from both sides died or were wounded as a result of the campaign.

Cornelius was awarded the Victory Medal, British Medal, and 15 Star,



*Pip, Squeak and Wilfred*

which were collectively and affectionately known as Pip, Squeak and Wilfred, after the characters

in a Daily Mirror comic strip.

His 77 year old mother was only able to make her mark when she collected his medals in 1921. His possessions - listed as 2 discs, a

pair of scissors, a pair of clippers, a razor, a broken watch and a belt purse - had been returned to her in 1916.

Raising ten children to adulthood at this time must have been quite a struggle and sadly Elizabeth Allen was unable, in her old age, to enjoy the rewards of family life that she so richly deserved. Her second son, Ernest, had died in 1908 at the age of 32, her husband had died in 1911, and the war had taken her 21 year old grandson Frank, as well as Cornelius, her fourth son.

However, she had a total of 28 grandchildren and although one son and three daughters moved out of the area, her sons Alfred and Philip remained in Westbury, as did Ernest's widow, Leana, and their children. No doubt some of her descendants are still in the area. Philip's daughter, Elizabeth, married Archie Ayland, who died in 1982, and who many will remember, and Cornelius's sister, Alice, married farm labourer Albert Davies, and lived with their children at Peglars Farm in Flaxley. Marion, the youngest of Cornelius's large family, married Frederick Phillips in 1917, and died at the Dilke Hospital in 1968.

For further copies of this leaflet or if you have any information to add, please contact Di Landon on 01452 760531

Cornelius Allen was born in Westbury in August 1879, and was the son of the village builder and stonemason, Jesse Allen, and his wife Elizabeth (née Freeman). The family lived in the High Street and Cornelius

was their eighth child and was soon joined by a younger brother and sister. By this time, his eldest sister, Julia, was 17 and

had left home and entered service in the household of Frederick Wherrett, the local Relieving Officer and Registrar of Births and Deaths.

Cornelius was mentioned in the Parish Magazine of July 1890 in a report of a recent examination of Westbury's National School by Her Majesty's Inspectors. At that time, children remained at Westbury School until they were 14 and 165 children were registered to attend. However, the report

showed that on average only 115 children were present each day and the school had one of the worst attendance records in the district. To encourage them to come more regularly, the children



*Huntley Rectory, where Cornelius Allen worked as a groom, coachman and chauffeur.*

were to be given a printed certificate if they attended every day for a month and Cornelius

and his brother, Philip, were two of 22 children who gained these certificates for June.

We know little of what Cornelius did when he first left school but in 1901, when he was 21 years old, he was working as a gardener and was still living at home with his parents. By 1911, he had moved to Huntley and was living at the Rectory and was employed as a groom, coachman and chauffeur by the Reverend George Baker.

The large household also employed a cook, laundry maid, parlour maid, kitchen maid and gardener.

Cornelius does not seem to have followed the same path as his brothers, all of whom had gone into the family trade as bricklayers or stonemasons. They had also married young and started families, but Cornelius, at the age of 31, had remained single.

Perhaps he was seeking adventure when he volunteered soon after war broke out, enlisting in the 5<sup>th</sup> Battalion of the Worcestershire Regiment on 9<sup>th</sup> Sept 1914. His service record, although damaged in places and rather indistinct, has survived and describes him as just over 5'6" tall, with a fresh complexion, brown eyes and brown hair. The 5<sup>th</sup> was a Special Reserve battalion which received recruits and trained them for the



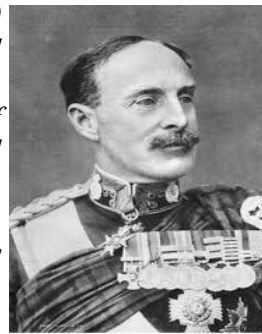
*Fort Tregantle in Plymouth*

field of combat. Cornelius would have been stationed at Fort Tregantle in Plymouth for this train-

ing, and he seems to have done well as on 24<sup>th</sup> Feb 1915 he was promoted to Corporal and transferred to the 12<sup>th</sup> Battalion, based at Fowey. The 12<sup>th</sup> was one of the additional battalions formed as a result of Kitchener's call for recruits and in April 1915 it became a Reserve Battalion responsible for the training of recruits and moved to Wareham in Dorset.

Just about a year after enlisting, Cornelius was transferred yet again, and on 15<sup>th</sup> October set sail for the Mediterranean to join his new battalion, the 9<sup>th</sup>, which had landed in Gallipoli in July. In August, they had been involved in the Battle of Sari Bair, in which another Westbury resident, Samuel Windridge, had died, and the intense fighting had continued as reinforcements landed.

*A final British attempt to resuscitate the offensive at Scimitar Hill and Hill 60 failed and the commander of the Allied Mediterranean Expeditionary Force, General Sir Ian Hamilton, requested*



*General Hamilton*

*95,000 more troops. But by this time an autumn offensive was being planned in France and only*

*25,000 troops could be spared. The strategy for Gallipoli became a defensive one and the situation worsened as Bulgaria entered the war, allowing the Germans to re-arm the Turkish forces. At the end of September, Kitchener demanded that two British divisions be moved from Gallipoli to Salonika in Greece and this marked the beginning of the end of the Allied campaign in Gallipoli, and Hamilton was recalled to London.*

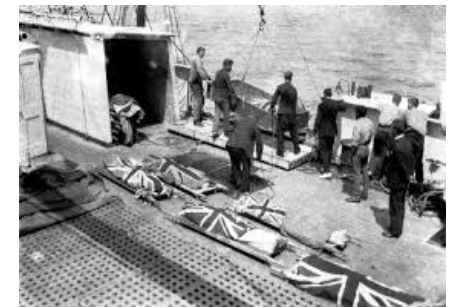
*Conditions at Gallipoli had grown worse for the soldiers on both sides, as the large number of unburied putrefying corpses, the heat and the poor sanitation created favorable conditions for a huge increase in the fly population. Of the 213,000 Allied casualties on Gallipoli, 145,000 were due to sickness – mainly dysentery, diarrhoea and enteric fever. The precarious Allied bases were also poorly situated, which caused supply and shelter problems.*

Cornelius landed in the Balkans in October 1915, by which time the winter storms were causing further damage and hardship. His service record says that he died of dysentery around six weeks later, on 1<sup>st</sup> December, in Alexandria in Egypt. He is listed on the Chatby Memorial there, which commemorates many who had been buried at sea after dying of wounds or sickness while aboard hospital ships or transports in the Mediterranean.



*The Chatby Memorial in Alexandria*

Alexandria had become a hospital centre for Commonwealth and French troops and was used as a base for transport ships bringing in reinforcements as well as carrying the sick and wounded out of the theatres of war. However, the Worcestershire Regiment Roll of Honour says that Cornelius died in Gallipoli, so it seems likely that he had reached Gallipoli but had become ill and was being shipped back to Alexandria when he died.



*Union Jacks drape the bodies of the dead being transferred from the hospital ship Gascon to trawler for burial at sea off Gallipoli, 1915*