

James Allen

Born

May 5, 1843, Ireland

Entered Service

May 15, 1861

Potsdam, St. Lawrence County, New York

Co. F. 16th New York Infantry

Civil War

Died

August 31, 1913, Carthage, Jefferson County, New York



JAMES ALLEN.

Early Years

Mr. James Allen was born in Ireland on May 5, 1843. As a child his parents immigrated to the United States settling in New York sometime around 1850 according to information on Federal census records in 1900 and 1910. Information regarding his family is sparse. It is known he had at least one brother, Henry, and other siblings.ⁱ

The War Years

On May 15, 1861 in Potsdam, St. Lawrence County, New York, nineteen year old James Allen enlisted in the service. He entered as a private in the United States Army serving in the F Company 16th New York Infantry. During his time of service Mr. Allen “participated in all the battles in which the Army of the Potomac was engaged, from the first Bull Run to Chancellorsville.”ⁱⁱ While we have limited information on Mr. Allen years prior to his military service, we have the great fortune of having Mr. Allen give his own recollection of his heroic act. In 1897 a book was published titled, “The Story of American Heroism” described as “thrilling narratives of personal adventures during the Great Civil War as told by the Medal Winners and Roll of Honor Men.”ⁱⁱⁱ Mr. Allen received a letter from the commander of the Garfield Post #8 of St. Paul requesting his written response to describe the events that took place on September 14, 1862 at South Mountain, Maryland against the 16th Georgia regiment.^{iv} Here, in his own words, is what Mr. James wrote:

“I won a medal of honor at the battle of Crampton's Pass, when our division made a charge. My regiment was in the 2nd brigade, 1st division, sixth corps, which was composed of the 16th and 27th New York, 5th Maine, and 96th Pennsylvania. The charge was conducted by General J. J. Bartlett.

The charge was made through a cornfield of large growth, and ongoing in our color-sergeant was killed by a bullet in the forehead. After entering the corn a comrade and myself by mistake became detached from the company, and when near a stone wall at the base of the mountain we learned that we were alone with a large squad of the enemy directly in our front. Turning to me my comrade said with a grimace: “Now what have we to do, Jim?”
“Charge the wall, I reckon. That was what we came for.”

He was willing, and the two of us represented the Second Brigade at this particular point, being so fortunate as to drive the enemy from cover. After gaining a few rods beyond the wall, my comrade had his left leg broken above the knee by a bullet, from which wound he afterward died. I helped the poor boy to a tree which would shelter him somewhat, and continued the charge alone up the rugged side of the mountain only a few rods behind the enemy, until they reached the road which led through the pass, where was a wall about seven feet high on the lower side, over which they went, leaping down into the highway. Then one of them turned and fired at me, cutting my coat and shirt, and grazing the skin under my right arm. I stopped to load my gun, and while doing so came to the conclusion that it wasn't safe to stay there alone, when only about five rods separated me from the squad, so I did my level best to get under cover of the wall. Once there, I was at a loss to decide what would be the next best move. To beat a retreat now would simply be to invite death, for the Confederates evidently thought there were more behind me, otherwise they never would have run from one man, and it seemed as if my wisest course was to let them continue in the same train of thought.

I made a sudden dash over the wall, and landed in the road in the midst of fourteen members of the 16th Georgia Regiment, one of whom was the color-sergeant, and seeing the flag I made up my mind to get it if possible. I ordered them to surrender as boldly as if the entire division was at my back, and after some little hesitation, induced by my threats of what might happen, they complied. I took the colors from the sergeant, ordered the men to stack their arms, hang the cartridge boxes on the guns, and you can fancy I got between them and the weapons without loss of time. I was having quite an interesting conversation with them when my colonel rode up the road, for I had gained a position far in advance of the regiment, and I told him he had better take charge of the prisoners; but he ordered me to hold on until he sent a detachment to carry them to the rear.

In a few moments I was relieved of what might have proved a troublesome charge if they had taken it into their heads to overpower me before the colonel came, and, retaining the colors, proceeded up the mountain. On reaching the summit I rejoined my company and reported to the captain, showing the flag as proof of what I had done. A detail was sent out for my wounded comrade, and he was cared for as well as possible under the circumstances. In this engagement my company lost one third of its members, and it was a small party of us that marched to Antietam next day to take part in that action.”^v

On the 22nd of May in 1863 in Albany, Albany County, New York after expiration of his enlistment, Mr. Allen is honorably discharged.^{vi} Mr. Allen added in his account that he “served in the military railroad service from September, 1863, until October 1, 1865, always at the front.”^{vii} Completing his military service, Mr. Allen had achieved the rank of Corporal.

The Post War Years

A carpenter by trade, by 1870 Mr. Allen had travelled west and is now living in McGregor, Clayton County, Iowa with a wife, Susan and a son Burton E. born November 26, 1866 in Iowa.^{viii} Susan Blanchard Morgan Allen was born in Vermont on January 22 1844.^{ix} Where she met James or when and where she married him is unknown. From Iowa the family moves north settling in Minnesota. By 1880 the Federal Census lists Mr. Allen as living in Farmington, Dakota County, Minnesota with another son joining the family. Benton O. was born in Iowa on August 18, 1876.^x In 1885 the family is living in Mankato, Blue Earth County, Minnesota. The family moves once again this time to St. Paul, Ramsey County, Minnesota by 1900. On October 23, 1912, Susan Allen died.^{xi} She was survived by her husband and her two sons, one child dying in infancy. Less than a year later, Mr. Allen would pass away, not at the Soldiers’ Home in St. Paul where he had been living, but back east while on a trip.^{xii} Mr. Allen had traveled to Gettysburg to attend a reunion and on to New York to meet siblings he had never met.^{xiii} James Allen died at 12:30 AM on August 31, 1913 at the home of his brother Henry in Carthage, New York.^{xiv} Burton Allen, a Ramsey County Sherriff, would pass away in St. Paul on January 23, 1937 without issue.^{xv} Benton Allen would die February 6, 1942 in Ramsey County, a Veteran of the Spanish American War also without descendants.^{xvi} James Allen and his wife are both buried at Oakland Cemetery in St Paul, Minnesota.

On September 11, 1890 Mr. Allen was awarded his Congressional Medal of Honor for taking captive 14 members and the flag of the 16th Georgia Infantry.^{xvii} An interesting footnote to Mr. Allen’s story is that an article in the St. Paul Globe on September 4, 1896 stated that Mr. Allen had petitioned Congress for return of the captured flag from the color guard so that he may pass it on to his heirs.^{xviii}

Compiled by Laura Gallup
Anoka Chapter DAR



Photo of grave marker courtesy of Don Morfe. www.findagrave.com
Oakland Cemetery in St Paul, Minnesota

SOURCES

Allen, H. Merian, America's Victoria Cross, *The Bellman*, January 6, 1917, Minneapolis, Minnesota, Volume XXII, Number 547 p. 691.

"Badges of Daring," *St. Paul Globe*, St. Paul, Minnesota, September 4, 1896. p5.

James Allen Grave Marker courtesy of Don Morfe, www.findagrave.com.

James Allen Portrait found in the *Story of American Heroism*, Springfield, Ohio, J.W. Jones, 1897, p 138.

Minnesota Historical Society, Death Certificate Index, Certificate Number: 1912-MN-020616, Susan Blanchard Morgan Allen.

Minnesota Historical Society, Death Certificate Index, Certificate Number: 1937-MN-023956, Burton E. Allen.

Minnesota Historical Society, Death Certificate Index, Certificate Number: 1942-MN-023434, Benton O. Allen.

Minnesota Historical Society, Soldiers'Home Record, 06 E 11 2 F-1, James Allen.

Story of American Heroism, Springfield, Ohio, J.W. Jones, 1897, p 137-139.

United States Federal census records and Minnesota State census records.

Wilna, Watertown Re-Union The, September 6, 1913, Column 4.

NOTES

ⁱ Wilna, Watertown Re-Union The, September 6, 1913, Column 4.

ⁱⁱ *Story of American Heroism*, Springfield, Ohio, J.W. Jones, 1897, p 137-139.

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^{iv} *Story of American Heroism*, Springfield, Ohio, J.W. Jones, 1897, p 137-139.

^v *Story of American Heroism*, Springfield, Ohio, J.W. Jones, 1897, p 137-139.

^{vi} Minnesota Historical Society, Soldiers'Home Record, 06 E 11 2 F-1, James Allen.

^{vii} *Story of American Heroism*, Springfield, Ohio, J.W. Jones, 1897, p 137-139.

^{viii} Minnesota Historical Society, Death Certificate Index, Certificate Number: 1937-MN-023956, Burton E. Allen.

^{ix} Minnesota Historical Society, Death Certificate Index, Certificate Number: 1912-MN-020616, Susan Blanchard Morgan Allen.

^x Minnesota Historical Society, Death Certificate Index, Certificate Number: 1942-MN-023434, Benton O. Allen.

^{xi} Minnesota Historical Society, Death Certificate Index, Certificate Number: 1912-MN-020616, Susan Blanchard Morgan Allen.

^{xii} Minnesota Historical Society, Soldiers'Home Record, 06 E 11 2 F-1, James Allen.

^{xiii} Wilna, Watertown Re-Union The, September 6, 1913, Column 4.

^{xiv} Minnesota Historical Society, Soldiers'Home Record, 06 E 11 2 F-1, James Allen.

^{xv} Minnesota Historical Society, Death Certificate Index, Certificate Number: 1937-MN-023956, Burton E. Allen.

^{xvi} Minnesota Historical Society, Death Certificate Index, Certificate Number: 1942-MN-023434, Benton O. Allen.

^{xvii} Allen, H. Merian, America's Victoria Cross, *The Bellman*, January 6, 1917, Minneapolis, Minnesota, Volume XXII, Number 547 p. 691.

^{xviii} "Badges of Daring," *St. Paul Globe*, St. Paul, Minnesota, September 4, 1896. p5.