

Basic Detail Report

00055169

Title

Letter addressed to CERA Leonard Charles Allen's wife

Date

10 May 1915

Medium

Ink on paper

Dimensions

Overall: 300 × 205 mm

Name

Letter

History

Leonard Charles Allen was born in Reading, Berkshire in 1877, and attended St Stephen's School. His first job was as a fitter alongside his father at Huntley and Palmer's biscuit factory. He then worked for a London engineering firm and joined the Navy at Chatham in 1898, when he was 21. He was stationed at Harwich on the depot ship HMS Thames, and was promoted to Chief Engine Room Artificer in March 1913 after 15 years of service. In 1911, the Royal Australian Navy ordered two British E-class submarines to form the nucleus of a brand new Australian Submarine Service and the two vessels were commissioned at Portsmouth in February 1914. Allen was transferred from the Royal Navy to the Royal Australian Navy, and assigned to AE1, which, together with its sister AE2, sailed for Australia on 2 March 1914. Allen received his Long Service and Good Conduct Medal in 1914 whilst aboard HMAS Penguin, the Depot and Receiving Ship for AE1 and AE2. When war was declared in August 1914, both Australian submarines were refitting. At the end of the month they sailed to join the naval force tasked with capturing the German colonies of New Guinea and the Bismarck Archipelago. Shortly before their departure, Allen was transferred to AE2. He was incredibly lucky, for AE1 mysteriously disappeared with all hands off the Duke of York Islands on 14 September. In October, AE2 was sent to help defend Fiji against a possible raid by Admiral Maximilian von Spee's Asiatic Squadron. In November AE2 returned to Sydney. After the destruction of the German Asiatic Squadron, the Australian government offered AE2 for service in Europe. It was allocated to British naval squadrons operating along the Turkish coast and arrived in February 1915. On 10 March, the submarine ran aground off Mudros when returning from patrol and had to be towed to Malta for repairs. Allen was involved in an accident in Valletta Harbour when a small boat carrying six of the crew was rammed and stove in. He was injured and hospitalised for three days, and consequently missed AE2's historic mission into the Dardenelles and Sea of Marmara at the end of April 1915. With both Australian submarines lost in action, Allen was loaned back to the Royal Navy, and briefly served on a battleship before joining the crew of the British submarine E11, which was skippered by Lieutenant-Commander Martin Nasmith. E11 inflicted

a devastating toll on enemy shipping over three patrols in the period May-December 1915. It was not the first Allied submarine to pass through the heavily defended 'Narrows' in the Dardanelles, but all previous attempts save one (that of AE2) had ended in the loss of the vessel involved. After a harrowing but successful voyage through The Narrows, E11 surfaced and commenced operations in the Sea of Marmara. Nasmith made Constantinople the centre of his operations during the whole of E11's patrol, and attacked an Ottoman gunboat cruising near the port. One of the submarine's torpedoes struck the gunboat, which returned fire and scored a hit that went clean through the submarine's periscope. The shell carried away approximately four inches of the periscope's diameter a few feet above the base, but incredibly the periscope remained standing. E11's damaged periscope is currently on display at the Royal Navy Submarine Museum. E11 would conduct two more entries into the Dardanelles and Sea of Marmara, directly attack Constantinople, and sink numerous Ottoman vessels, including the battleship Barbarossa, a destroyer, a gunboat, six transports, 12 steamships, 23 dhows, and 11 sailing ships. In addition, the submarine bombarded enemy troops and other military objectives along the coast. It was during the second patrol that Leonard Allen performed an on-the-fly repair to E11's 12-inch deck gun and earned the Distinguished Service Medal. The submarine was bombarding a grounded Ottoman transport when the upper part of the 12-inch deck gun's mounting was fractured by recoil. Allen was able to cut away the upper part of the mounting, and drop the gun down into the lower part, returning it to service within 24 hours. On 23 August 1916, Allen was promoted to Warrant Engineer, and in March 1919 he was appointed to the Australian submarine J3, which had been gifted to Australia by the British Admiralty and was about to set out on the long voyage to Sydney. J3 left Portsmouth in April 1919 and did not arrive until 15 July, as J3 and its five sister-ships were plagued with major mechanical problems. Allen lived in Bondi with his family, but retired from the RAN in 1922 at age 45. His retirement was probably triggered by J3 being put into reserve in July 1922 due to Australia's deteriorating economy. Shortly thereafter, Allen and his family returned to England.