



Allan Ives Denny

J/45497 Boy 1st Class, Training Ship H.M.S. Ganges, Royal Navy

He died on 5th August 1916, age just 16

Killed by a Zeppelin raid on H.M.S. Ganges training base at Shotley, Harwich

Allan is buried at Shotley (St. Mary) Churchyard, Suffolk. Royal Navy Plot 98

According to the 1901 census, Allan Ives Denny was the 6th child and 5th son of parents Frederick George (from Swefland now known as Sweffling) and Elizabeth Denny (originally from Kent). At the time, the family were living at the North Lodge of the Gawdy Hall Estate and Allan was only 11 months old. By 1911 the family had moved to a small, probably two up, two down house, in Alburgh; Allan's father and older brothers were agricultural labourers. It is this census that reveals Allan would originally have had 8 siblings, 3 of whom had already died.

The origins of this family are shrouded in confusion and vagueness, no-one seems entirely sure of where they were born and whilst Dennys were to be found in the Swefland area, not to any great extent and not the ones I was trying to hunt down!

It is enough to say that going way back to 1881, we can find the then 15 years old Frederick Denny, from Rendham (adjacent to Swefland), on a Suffolk fishing boat, The Hearts of Oak, all the way down in Falmouth, Cornwall. If this is indeed Allan's father, doubtless he had many tales to spin of life on the sea which must have seemed thrilling to a lad in the rural hinterland between Norfolk and Suffolk. Another lad Alfred Denny, 22 was also on the boat – a brother perhaps? In 1891, a William Denny, 6 years older than Frederick George was raising a family in Alburgh – wonder if he was another older brother?

Boy 1st Class Denny was indeed nothing more than a boy when he died 'on board' H.M.S. Ganges in the middle of World War 1. Born on the 13th of April 1900 he must have joined the Navy more or less on the day of his 16th birthday, 2 years younger than legally obliged to enlist. Doubtless he was full of patriotic vigour and well aware of the workers on the Gawdy Estate who had already enlisted. Indeed, the family living in the other half of the North Lodge in 1901, the Fleggs, lost a son in August 1915, almost exactly a year before young Allan died.

Many local residents will be aware that H.M.S. Ganges was not a ship you would ever find afloat, instead this was the name given to a shore-based training base at Shotley, Harwich.

The original Training Ships were actual ships or at least the hulks of them, no longer sea worthy for Naval purposes but a good environment for training young lads on. Conditions were notoriously harsh at various periods but following a crisis in 1866, reforms were made. Saying which 53 boys still died in training between 1866 and 1899, their deaths are marked on a memorial in Mylor Churchyard.



H.M.S. Ganges became a 'stone frigate' in Harwich in 1899 whilst the hulks alternated between there and Cornwall until becoming permanently based in Shotley in 1905. Whilst hulks featured as part of the training establishment, with the opening of Shotley, training became more land based.



Boys at H.M.S.Ganges in 1916



The Military Forces were deemed good destinations for various waifs and strays, the Mansfield Board of Guardians being one of, presumably many, who sent lads off to HMS Ganges and other training ships. For many of the lads this would have been their first time away from home and many accents would have rung through the dormitories of the training base.

HMS Ganges 1916

According to the Norfolk Roll of Honour's listing of the Hale & Heckingham memorial, Allan was not one of the lads who died from accident, mis-adventure or illness, instead his death was a direct result of enemy action. He would have known the risks afloat, boys died on ships at sea just as easily as their adult shipmates but at the start of the war no-one was expecting the raids from the skies that became a feature of the war on the East Coast from 1916 onwards. According to the Roll of Honour



'Allan Ives Denny, Boy 1st. Class J/45497. HMS Ganges, Royal Navy. Killed by a Zeppelin raid on H.M.S. Ganges on 5th August 1916. Buried: Shotley (St. Mary) Churchyard, Suffolk. Royal Navy Plot 98. Special Note: HMS Ganges was bombed by a German Zeppelin airship. One bomb hit the parade ground, one between 19 & 21 messes, one alongside the old swimming pool and one on the foreshore.'

Now, I have to insert a note of caution here, I have found no other source for this claim and it may well have been purely co-incidence that Denny died concurrently with the raids. A surprising number of boys just died at H.M.S. Ganges during WW1. This was a large establishment with literally thousands of lads passing through the doors annually. Hygiene was not amazing, conditions were tough, medicine basic compared with today and rats were a real and recurring issue

Mid Sussex Times
14 Nov 1916

BURGESS HILL.

ROYAL NAVY.

D. Agate, Signal Boy, No. 7498, H.M.S. Diamond
W. H. Barnard, Reservist
H. Paxton Baylis, Lieutenant, Royal
J. Berry [Naval Division
J. Bird, 1st Class Stoker, H.M.S. Glory
H. Brown, Gunner, H.M.S. Achilles
Harold Brown
R. Burnett, Royal Naval Air Service
E. G. Carr, Sto. P.O., H.M.S. Victory
Percy Carr, Leading Seaman, H.M.S. Barham [H.M.S. Calgarry
A. E. Cherry, Chief Petty Officer,
Frederick Comber, R.M.L.I.
Thomas Comber, R.N.A.S.
Charles Edward Down, Leading
Stoker, H.M.S. Inflexible
J. Edwards, A.B., H.M.S. Queen Mary
W. Goddard, Reservist [Oisris
William Haines, H.M.S. Ganges

(died of wounds August 12th, 1915)
Waller, Arthur M., 1st Class Boy, H.M.S. Ganges
(died March 13th, 1916)
Royal Sussex Regt. T.F.

18 Apr 1916. *Mid Sussex Times*

Equally, all the press coverage at the time determinedly played down the effect of the Zeppelins, focussing on damage caused to the occasional bullock or horse and emphasising slightly comic explosions in turnip and mangold fields. This is quite understandable in light of the fear that this new form of warfare engendered in civilian populations, a foretaste of the blitz of WW2.

When a crew of 16 aeronauts from a crashed Zeppelin were buried in Potter's Bar, the coverage teetered on a very uncomfortable knife edge between emphasising that us jolly decent Brits gave a dignified and respectful burial to the dead whilst also reassuring their readers that the filthy Huns had not been glorified in any way. Unlike the post war attitude whereby all men were treated as equal in death, the dead, unknown, German Commander was treated with markedly more respect than his crew.

So, victim of a hush up or just another lad dying of illness? Either way Denny joined his nation's military forces at a time of war when he was no more than a lad, in the knowledge he would be expected to face the enemy in the hostile sea, however he died he will for ever be a hero. Looking via Genes Reunited at the Naval Records, they clearly state that Allan Ives Denny died of disease. After the war Allan Denny's medals were issued to his father who was the living at West Cottage Hales, thus explaining his presence on the Hales War Memorial not the Harleston Memorial, personally I would like to see him recorded on both as well as in the St Mary's Churchyard Shotley.

"H.M.S. Ganges II., Sept. 22, 1916.
Dear Sir,—Just a line thanking you very much for parcel I received quite safely. I was very pleased with its contents, as they are most useful, and as we only receive 2s. a week, it seemed as though it was pounds being sent. All the chaps in my mess said to me, "You must come from a good-hearted village." Most of them come from large towns, and they have never had anything sent them by any funds or committees, so thanking you very much,—I am, your sincere friend. (sd.) C. S. H. Devonshire."

Uxbridge & W. Drayton Gazette London, England
29 Sep 1916

Langley Village Residents gifts

IN MEMORIAM.—Roll of Honour.
SMITH.—In loving memory of our dear son, Wilfred, who died on December 4th, 1915, H.M.S. Ganges, Shotley Barracks, Harwich. Ever remembered by his father; mother, and all the family.

A GONDOLA FOUND.

A Zeppelin petrol tank was found on Monday morning in an East Anglian village. One of the returning airships was obviously working badly, and there is reason to believe the tank found was thrown overboard.

Part of a Zeppelin gondola, with wires and telephone attached, has been picked up in a village on the East Anglian coast. It is supposed to be part of a Zeppelin which retreated eastwards after Saturday night's engagement.

Diss Express Norfolk, England

8 Sep 1916

THE DEAD ZEPPELIN CREW.

The crew of the wrecked Zeppelin were buried on Wednesday afternoon at Potter's Bar with military honours. The funeral procession started from Ouffley, where the blazing Zeppelin fell. The sixteen coffins were placed in the little church of St. Andrew, which adjoins the plot. The coffins rested in pairs, one on top of another, and filled the greater part of one side of the building. Two were placed apart in the centre of the church, the uppermost being that of the commander. A black pall half covered it, leaving exposed a brass plate bearing the inscription, "An unknown German officer, killed while commanding Zeppelin L 21, 3rd September, 1916." This was the only coffin having an inscription. Like all the others, it was severely plain without ornaments of any description. There was no service in the church. A large motor transport wagon, with a low trailer attached was the hearse. Sixteen men of the Royal Flying Corps acted as pall bearers, and carried the coffins from the church. Twelve of the coffins were placed on the wagon and three on the trailer, and then tied down and covered with a large black pall. A smaller car in front was reserved for the coffin containing the remains of the commander.

The cortege started without ceremony the two cars leading. A crowd several deep lined the roadway for two or three hundred yards. They stood behind a barrier of police and special constables. The attitude of the crowd was one of purely passive curiosity. Any feeling of resentment at the dastardly exploits of Zeppelins was swallowed up in the presence of death. Colonel Holt, of the Flying Corps, was in command.

The bodies of the airmen were buried in a secluded portion of the cemetery at Potter's Bar. A grave, 25 feet long by 7 feet wide, had been dug in the north-east corner to receive the fifteen coffins, a single grave being reserved for the remains of the Zeppelin commander. There were no graves in the immediate vicinity. Admission to the cemetery was restricted to local parishioners. Visitors came from all parts. Simplicity marked the funeral service, which was conducted by the Rev. G. R. P. Proston, vicar of Potter's Bar, assisted by the Rev. M. Hancock, chaplain to his Majesty's forces. A shortened form of the Burial Service was read. The opening sentence, "I am the resurrection and the life," had scarcely been uttered when an aeroplane passed high over the cemetery, the droning of the engine being plainly heard. The Last Post was sounded over the graves by two buglers of the Grenadier Guards.