

## **FOCUS ON REMEMBRANCE ARMY**

The New Zealand Remembrance Army is a volunteer group established in 2018 by NZ Army Major Simon Strombom. It is dedicated to honouring the memory of New Zealand's servicemen and women, formed to ensure that no one who served is forgotten. NZRA restores and maintains the graves, headstones, and memorials of military personnel across the country, cleaning and repairing neglected sites, re-lettering inscriptions, and researching the stories of those they commemorate. Ceramic poppies, funded by RSA, are attached to headstones of those not in service or commonwealth sections.

1300 stones have been cleaned in Timaru and poppies added, and about 230 more have so far been identified. Volunteers have also finished Otaio, Esk Valley, Pareora West, Albury, and most of Pleasant Point.

### **Edward Archibald ALLCHURCH – No.15307**

Edward Archibald Allchurch is recorded on his parents' grave in Timaru cemetery. His father Harold died in 1951 and mother Diana Calder in 1954. The inscription reads:

**Also their loved son  
15307 Cpl E A Allchurch  
Buried Churchyard cemetery  
Busselben, Germany  
1917-1944**

Edward was born 24 Nov 1917 in Timaru, NZ to parents Harold Allchurch and Diana Calder nee Archibald. He was one of four children - two boys and two girls. He was educated at Waimataitai Primary School and then at Timaru Boys High School from 1931 to 1935. He belonged to the local scout troop and was a promising athlete. On leaving school, he worked as a gardener as shown on his enlistment record. He enlisted in 1940 and is shown on the nominal roll as a corporal in the 18<sup>th</sup> Auckland Battalion, 4<sup>th</sup> Infantry reinforcements.

The 18<sup>th</sup> Battalion was posted to Egypt and took part in the war in the desert. Edward was taken prisoner in 1942 and firstly spent time in a POW camp PG35 Padula, Italy and then transferred to Stalag VIII in Gorlitz, Germany.(now in Poland).

As war was neared its close, the camp was evacuated in February 1945 and all prisoners joined the march away from the invading Russians back towards Germany. According to an army letter in his file and with his will, he and two other prisoners escaped from the march to a village called Busselben. The local burger reported them to the SS and they were shot by SS soldiers from the nearby Buchenwald Concentration camp on 4 April 1945. Their bodies were buried in the village but later transferred to the Berlin 1939-45 War cemetery. The Buchenwald camp was subsequently liberated by the American army on 11 April 1945. There are many other stories of POWs being killed by the SS, as escaped POWs were classed as spies and so shot. At this time there were a lot of POWs and concentration camp inmates on the road in the well-known "death march".

Edward is now buried in the Berlin War Cemetery. According to the Commonwealth War Graves Commission: "Graves were brought to the cemetery from the Berlin area and from eastern Germany. The great majority were airmen who were lost in air raids over Berlin and the towns in eastern Germany. The remainder were men who died as prisoners of war, some of them in the forced march into Germany from camps in Poland, in front of the advancing Russians."

When Edward's parents' gravestone was prepared, they were probably unaware that his body had been moved from the local German cemetery. His date of death is also one year out, shown as 1944 not 1945. His parents grave has been cleaned and repainted by the Remembrance Army and a red poppy added to acknowledge Edward's WW2 service.

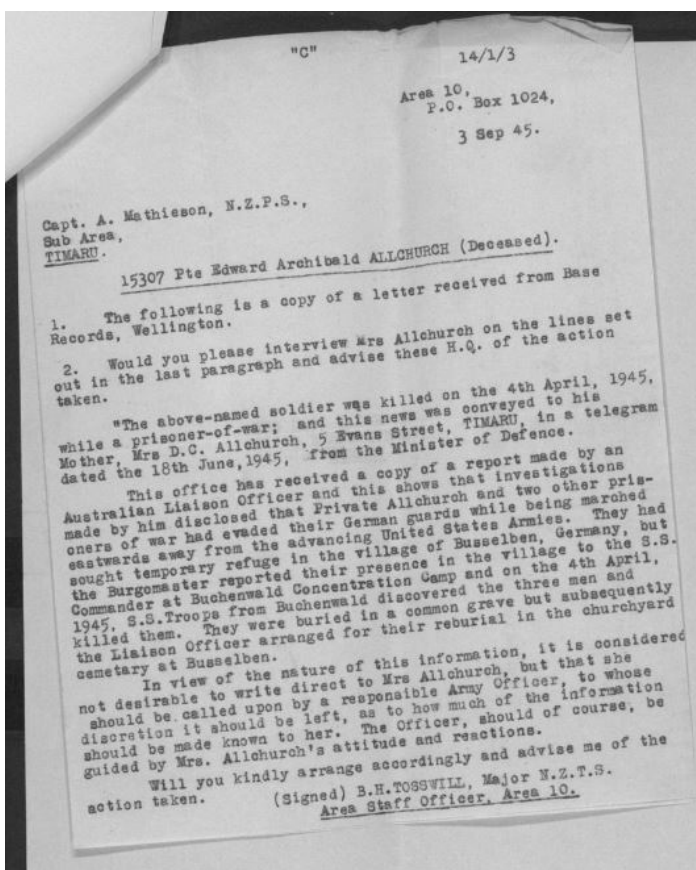
He is also remembered in the Timaru Boys High School memorial library with his name inscribed on the memorial wall and his photo beneath the stained glass windows. Every Anzac Day the school holds a memorial service for past-pupils who died in WW1 and WW2. The WW Cenotaph in Queen Street also records Edward with the other 496 men listed on the black granite panels. His name is also on the Chalmers Church (now Coptic Church) memorial plaque for those parishioners who died in WW2.



Allchurch grave, Timaru cemetery



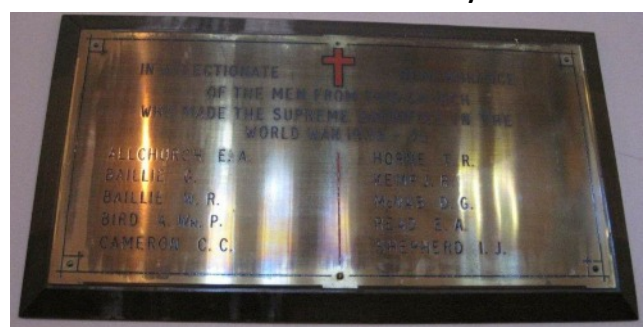
Allchurch grave, after restoration by the Remembrance Army



Letter advising cause of death



Berlin Cemetery



Chalmers Church (now Coptic)