

Henry Walter Edward Stone (Morris) (1875–1917)

*(Synopsis of the biography prepared from researches by Andrew Stone,
great-great-grandson of Edwin and Ellen Stone.)*

Henry Walter Edward Stone, son of Edwin and Ellen Stone, was born in Headington at the Royal Standard public house, or beer house as it was then, in 1875 and was baptised at St Andrew's Church, Old Headington on the 7th November 1875. He was seventeen years old when his father died in 1892 and his mother Ellen was left a widow with nine children and responsibility for Edwin's building business and the running of the Royal Standard. In 1895 Ellen married Mark Morris himself a widower with a number of children. They left the Royal Standard and with the younger children moved to the Anchor public house in Reading.

Henry, at about the time of his father's death, joined the 4th Battalion of the Oxford Light Infantry – Militia and in 1894 transferred to the Kings Own Scottish Borderers.

When his mother married Mark Morris, Henry chose to adopt the surname of Morris in place of Stone, possibly as a gesture of support for his mother. He was also using the name Harry instead of Henry. It is not known whether he served in the Boer War but by the turn of the century he had moved to Ireland. He married and had three daughters.

Shortly after the birth of his third daughter his wife died, he left the children in the care of his deceased wife's sister, Mary MacDonald, and departed for Canada. Once in Canada he was employed as an electrical engineer to work on the Canadian Trunk Railway.

Once settled in Montreal he sent for his sister-in-law Mary MacDonald and his three children. Henry and Mary married and had three more children, two daughters and a son. They named the son Edwin Francis Randall, a combination of his father's and older brother's names.

In 1913 Henry's second wife Mary died in Quebec leaving him with six children. The children were split amongst various foster parents, but despite

all these disruptions and sadness in the family, recorded memories of Henry speak of him with great affection.

In 1914 Canada was sliding into recession, the Canadian Pacific Railroad, for which Henry worked, was in trouble and on the 25th September 1914 Henry, perhaps forced to by economic circumstances, signed up and joined the 1st Canadian Contingent then being assembled to head for France in support of Britain in the First World War. On his attestation papers he lied about his age stating he was 33 years old whereas he was actually 40, beyond the age of 35 which was the limit in Canada at the start of the war to be eligible for military service.

Initially Henry was assigned to the Service Corps and literally within days was promoted to corporal, presumably due to his earlier military service. On the 1st October 1914 he departed for England, as part of the 1st Contingent of the Canadian Expeditionary Force, arriving in Devonport about two weeks later.

So in October 1914 Henry is back in his country of birth in a military camp on Salisbury Plain. His rapid promotion continues and he is made an acting armourer sergeant. On the 4th/5th February 1915 he embarked for France.

Whilst on leave in England Henry married Elizabeth Kirby on the 13th August 1915. She travelled over from Canada for the wedding. On the marriage certificate Henry states his father as Edwin Morris rather than the correct name of Stone. Nine months later they had a child, Henry's second son, Albert Francis.

In military records of March 1917 Henry was noted as Temporary Lieutenant and was posted to the Canadian Infantry. In May/June he was in the front line at Vimy Ridge and it is here that his heroism on the 8th June 1917 brought the award of the MC and the London Gazette of the 17th September 1917 records:-

“Lt. Henry Walter Morris, Infy

For conspicuous gallantry and devotion to duty during a raid upon enemy trenches. Although his platoon had suffered heavily by an unexpected and intense hostile bombardment, he reorganised them and led them forward at zero hour, when he was the first man over the top, and pushed forward under intense machine gun fire to his

final objective, which was reached entirely owing to his splendid personal example of fearlessness and determination.”

In this action Henry had engaged an enemy machine gun crew putting all except one man out of action, the latter having been captured.

His MC was presented on the 12th August 1917.

Henry continued at the forefront of the action. In the area of Avion on the 15th August 1917, three days after being presented with the MC, Henry was killed and he is now buried in the Loos British Cemetery.

Letters from Henry written during the war, and which survive, indicate he remained a concerned and loving father ever optimistic the war would soon be over and he would return to care for his family.

Bernard Stone
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