

LANCE CORPORAL FREDERICK HAROLD HOWKINS

Service Number: 4861140

Enlisted: 1st Battalion Leicestershire Regiment

Born: 25th March 1917

Died: 23rd August 1944, Aged 27

Memorials: St. Desir War Cemetery, Calvados, France

Plot 5 Row D Grave10

Burbage War Memorial

Wesleyan War Memorial

St Catherine's Church War Memorial

Bulkington Church War Memorial.



Frederick, known as Harold was the eldest child of Kate and Herbert Howkins. Born in Burbage and educated at the Wesleyan Day School, the family lived at Rye Nook on the Coty, Lutterworth Road. Harold enlisted in the autumn of 1939 after leaving his job as a tailor's presser at Sketchley Dye Works.



Sketchley Dye Works

After basic training he was selected for further training in signals and communications skills which commenced in May 1940. Over the next four years he was posted to various places throughout the UK and rose to the rank of Lance Corporal.

Probably through their work he met Joan Marguerite Loveitt of Ryton, Bulkington. Joan was employed as a laundry ironer and lived with her widowed mother Elsie and younger brother Elson at 7 Wolvey Road, Ryton. Whilst on weekend leave from his current posting in October 1940 they were married at Ryton Methodist Church.

Joan continued working and living with her mother, Harold visiting his wife and family in Burbage when possible. Prior to embarkation for France, Harold visited his pregnant wife and they decided if the child was a girl to name her Ann.

Fortunately, Harold missed the initial D Day invasion of June 1944 and would have known of the success of this, however the battle for France continued until the end of August.

The Leicester Regiment records show that Harold's 1st Battalion Leicestershire Regiment landed in Normandy on the 3rd July 1944 and came under the command of the 147 Brigade of the 49th Division. The final stages of the campaign were hard fought, forces towards the Seine, in mid-August the advance toward St Desir a small village 4km North West of Lisieux in the Calvados region of Normandy began. The village population of some 1,500 was finally liberated on the 23rd August. Sadly, for the Leicestershire Regiment it was to be one of the highest death tolls of the Normandy campaign with the loss of 22 men including Harold Howkins.

Harold had obeyed his instructions that he had first written at the start of his training to be a signaller in 1940. 'The main job of a signaller is to obtain and maintain communications at all times and at all cost.'

His parents were the first to hear the news of his death and had to travel to Ryton to break the news to his wife.

Harold's daughter Ann was born some seven weeks later on 17th October 1944.

He is buried at St Desir War Cemetery, Calvados, France.

At the end of the war in 1945 some people who lived in the Lisieux region adopted the new graves at St Desir Cemetery until the War Commission were able to take full control. The Collet family adopted Harold's grave and contacted his wife, Joan. This started a life long friendship with both families and their descendants, Joan first visited in 1947 and then took their daughter Ann at the age of six in 1950.

This first visit made a lasting impression on Ann and she made regular visits with Joan and May up to Joans death in 1984.

Every Remembrance Day up to the death of his sister May in 2004 (the last surviving sibling), the family would always place a vase of dahlias, Fred's favourite flowers, on the Burbage Memorial after the formal wreath laying ceremonies.

The most recent memorial to the Normandy Campaign was constructed in 2021 to commemorate the 22,442 British who fell. This is the British Normandy Memorial at Ver-sur-Mer overlooking Gold Beach in Normandy.

Harolds name can be found on column 319 along with the 21 who fell at St Desir on the 23rd August.1944.

The Allied offensive in north-western Europe began with the Normandy landings of 6 June 1944. St Desir War Cemetery is the most easterly of the Normandy Cemeteries. For the most part, those buried here died in the final stages of the campaign, in pursuit of the German forces towards the Seine.



BURBAGE L.-CPL. DIES IN FRANCE
The death has occurred, on active service in France, of L.-Cpl. Harold Howkins, elder son of Mr. and Mrs. H. Howkins, of Lutterworth Road, Burbage.
L.-Cpl. Howkins had been in the Forces 4½ years and went out to France shortly after D-Day.
His wife lives at Ryton, near Nuneaton, and his younger brother is serving with the Home Forces.
Before the war L.-Cpl. Howkins was employed at Sketchley Dye Works.

Hinckley Times 15th September 1944

The cemetery contains 598 Commonwealth burials of the Second World War. 78 of these graves were brought in from Chartres (St Cheron) Communal Cemetery after the war, together with the four First World War burials now at St Desir.



St Desir War Cemetery, Calvados

KILLED IN ACTION WHILE DOING A SPLENDID JOB
Corporal J. Hall, of the British Army of Liberation, referring to the death of Lance-Corporal Howkins, of Burbage, says he was killed in action while carrying out his duty—a job of signalling to keep open communications to enable the troops to speed on to their objective, which thanks to the splendid work of the signals, was taken according to schedule. "As a regular reader of the 'Hinckley Times and Guardian,' the contents of which I greatly enjoy," he adds that he desires L.-Cpl. Howkins to get his just recognition of dying as a soldier on the battlefield.

Hinckley Times 27th October 1944



Wedding Joan Marguerite Loveitt and Frederick Howkins, October 1940



1970's Visit to St Desir Cemetery



Joan & Ann Howkins 1951