

Lance Sergeant Francis (Frank) William POPLE

Service number 2654924
Coldstream Guards
5th Battalion
Died on 14 March 1942, aged 33

Born in St Georges near Banwell, Frank joined the Coldstream Guards in 1930, and married a Wells girl a year later. In 1939, Frank was an army reservist living in Wells with his wife and daughter. When war was declared he was recalled to the Coldstream Guards. Frank served with the 1st Battalion in France, and on 1 June 1940, on one of the Dunkirk beaches, he was wounded in action. Back in England, he was transferred to the 5th Battalion, and on the night of 12 March 1942, he was hit by a car in the black-out and died two days later.



Frank in his Coldstream Guards uniform
Photograph courtesy of Mrs Jan Stubbins, Frank's daughter

Frank was born in St Georges, near Banwell, on 28 May 1908 to Frank Pople and Georgina née Hembury, and was baptised on 11 February 1909 in Banwell. Frank was the first of their six children, and his father was a shepherd.

Frank's early life is told by his daughter, Mrs Jan Stubbins:

He left school at 13 and became a farm labourer. He met his future wife in 1929 on a Saturday evening in the Recreation Ground in Wells. Edith Maud Kate Hatcher and Francis became engaged in 1930. He joined the Coldstream Guards in 1930 to "better himself" as farm labourers' wages and their accommodation were very poor. They married on 17 October 1931. Edith stayed in Wells with her parents at 6, Muriel Terrace. I was born in May 1934 with a twin brother (Frank Harold). Sadly my brother died at 6 days old. My mother then moved to be with him in Aldershot. (When my father met my mother he was living at Brewery Farm, Oakhill.)

After joining the Guards, within 3 months he went from a farm labourer to being on guard at Buckingham Palace. He was on guard of honour at the celebration of George V's Silver Jubilee, at the funeral procession of George V and at the coronation of George VI.

There was a show on the London Stage called "All the Kings Men". They wanted 10 of the smartest guardsmen (Coldstream of course). Sergeant Major Ronald Britten chose my father and nine others. My father trained at Perbriht. In the Guards he was known as Pop and became a master cook preparing meals for the officers' mess.

On 1 October 1936, Lance Corporal Pople arrived in Palestine with the 3rd Battalion on board the SS Laurentic. It was there to help maintain the peace, but after three uneventful months it returned to Aldershot on New Year's Eve. While in Palestine he narrowly avoided being killed when the lorry he should have been in was blown up by terrorists on the way to Haifa.



Edith and Frank on their wedding day
Photograph courtesy of Mrs Jan Stubbins, Frank's daughter

On 2 November 1937, Frank's term of enlistment ended and he was transferred to the reserves. He, Edith and Janet returned to Wells, and he started to look for a job. Frank saw an advert for a watchman's job in Bristol which said that they wanted an ex-guardsman. So he cycled over to Bristol, but when Frank got there it turned out that they only wanted an ex-**Grenadier** guard! So instead he worked as a plasterer's mate in Wells.

In 1939, the family were living at 35, Everett Close, Wells. On 1 September, the reservists were called up and Frank rejoined the Coldstream Guards and went with the 1st Battalion to France, arriving on 30 September.

The 1st Battalion spent the winter constructing defences, and then, on 5 May 1940, advanced into Belgium to meet the invading Germans. On 1 June 1940 at 03.00, the 1st Battalion was on the beach at La Panne, Dunkirk, and was evacuated back to England that day. While on the beach, or on the tug boat that took him off, Frank was wounded by shrapnel.

Mrs Stubbins continues the story:

They landed at Ramsgate where the Salvation Army waited with blankets, hot drinks and a stamped postcard to send to their next of kin. Then he went to Shenley Military Hospital [in Hertfordshire] to treat his spinal injuries. After leave he was passed A1 to join his regiment!

In October 1941, the 5th Battalion was raised and Frank was transferred to it. He was then a lance sergeant.

On 20 March 1942, the *Wells Journal* reported his death:

[He] met with a fatal accident on Thursday last. He was knocked down by a car in the black-out, and was conveyed to Shenley (Herts) Military Hospital where he died on Saturday.

Jan writes that he had gone out “to post a letter to my mother Edith”. On 27 March 1942, the *Journal* added:

The funeral of the late Lance/Sergt. Frank Pople ... took place at Wells Cemetery on Saturday. The body was brought to Wells by train and rested overnight in the Methodist Church, where a service was held on Saturday ... The coffin was covered with the Union Jack and a detachment of the Coldstream Guards acted as bearers and escort.

Frank is buried in Wells Cemetery in Section H. Row L. Grave 5. He is also remembered on the rolls of honour at Wells Town Hall and Wells Cemetery. When his wife died, she was buried with him.

We would like to thank Mrs Jan Stubbins, Frank’s daughter, for her invaluable contribution to this article.