

Trooper Leslie Sidney Donald DOWELL

Service number 14368896

13th/18th Royal Hussars

Killed in action on 29 August 1944, aged 20

Born in Wells, Leslie was a day chorister at the Cathedral School who went on to become an apprentice stonemason at the Cathedral. He joined the army in 1941. On D-Day his regiment's tanks swam ashore, the first tanks to reach France. They then took part in the battles for Caen and the Falaise Gap. On 28 August, they crossed the Seine and Leslie was killed in fighting the next day.



D-Day, tanks of 13th/18th Royal Hussars in fighting as they enter Ouistreham

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Leslie's birth was registered in the first quarter of 1923. His parents were William Harold Dowell and Elsie Emily née Hallett. In 1939, his father worked in a paper mill and his mother at a steam laundry.

Leslie attended the Wesleyan Church Sunday School and Wells Cathedral School. The story of his life was told in the Michaelmas 1944 edition of the *The Wellensian*:

Leslie Dowell, who joined the School as a Day Chorister in October, 1933, resided with his parents, Mr. and Mrs. W. H. Dowell, at 90, Southover. His interests lay chiefly with the Choir and the Cathedral, and he was best known to his fellow choristers, with whom he was very popular. He followed the advice of the late Dean Armitage Robinson in eschewing a black coat, and was apprenticed to W. A. Wheeler (O.W.) in the mason's yard of the Cathedral. He left school in December, 1939, and had not much time for his chosen work before he was old enough to fight ... [He was] killed in a tank action near the River Seine, August 29th, 1944, aged 20 years.

The *Wells Journal* of 15 September 1944 reported that he was called up just before Christmas 1941.

On 3 June 1944, the 13th/18th Royal Hussars were loaded onto landing craft at Portsmouth. Two of the four squadrons were equipped with Sherman Duplex-Drive amphibious tanks. On 6 June, D-Day, these tanks were launched from their landing craft 5000 yards from Sword Beach and they swam ashore – the first tanks to land in France. The rest of the regiment were taken to the beach and waded ashore. They then supported the infantry in their advance off the beach.

In the following weeks the regiment took part in the fighting to capture Caen and in the battle of the Falaise Gap. On 28 August 1944, the regiment crossed the Seine. The next day, in the face of stiff opposition, they advanced eastwards. The whole regiment saw action that day and it was then that Leslie died.

Leslie was originally buried near Aveny, about 10 miles east of the Seine, but after the war he was moved to St. Desir War Cemetery, grave IV.A.2. He is also remembered on the rolls of honour at Wells Cathedral School, Wells Town Hall and Wells Cemetery. His brother Ronald also served in the forces.

The Roll of Honour published in the *Wells Journal* of 24 August 1945 records that Leslie was “ever remembered by his Mum, Dad and his Sweetheart Lizzie”.

We would like to thank George Bunting (Chairman, The Wellensian Association) for his help with this article.