

Sergeant Harold Stephen Sidney HOWELL

Service number 5185687
Royal Electrical and Mechanical Engineers
3 Base Workshop
Died on 8 March 1945, aged 28

At the start of the war, Bristol-born Harold served with the 66th (Gloucesters) Searchlight Regiment, Royal Artillery, and most likely belonged to its 449 Battery which was headquartered in Wookey Hole. In December 1940, in Glasgow, he married Audrey Stroud from Wells. He then went to Malta to serve with the Royal Electrical and Mechanical Engineers. In late 1944 Harold was sent to an Officer Cadet Training Unit in Egypt where he died in an accident.



Harold, based on a photo in the *Wells Journal*, 6 April 1945
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Harold was born in Bristol to Joseph Clifford Howell and Winifred Ethel née Ford. His father was a pattern maker and they lived at 30, Belle Vue Road, Easton, Bristol. He was baptised on 13 May 1917 at St Thomas' Church in Eastville. He seems to have been known as Stephen.

On 27 December 1940, Stephen married Audrey Olive Stroud, aged 20, daughter of Mr and Mrs A. E. Stroud of 36, St Thomas Street, Wells, at the Cathcart Road Methodist Church in Glasgow. He was then a Lance-Bombardier in the Royal Artillery. Both of his witnesses were officers in the Royal Artillery and soldiers from his regiment formed a guard of honour. According to the marriage registration record, both of Stephen's parents were dead and his pre-war employment was that of an electrical appliance salesman, whilst Audrey was employed as a general store saleswoman.

The rest of Stephen's story is told in the *Wells Journal* of 30 March 1945:

On Thursday last Mrs. Audrey Howell, of 36 St. Thomas' Street, Wells received official confirmation of the tragic death of her husband Sgt. G.[sic] Stephen Howell on March 8th

near Cairo. Details concerning the actual cause of his death are not yet available but it is believed that he was involved in a fatal accident whilst upon an officer course.

Sgt Howell, formerly of Queens Drive, Hanham, Bristol was 27. He joined the Gloucester Regiment at the outbreak of war and was stationed in the Wells area for thirteen months. In December 1940 he married Audrey ... shortly after which he was sent to Malta, where he served with the R.E.M.E. until October of last year, when he was selected for pre O.C.T.U. [Officer Cadet Training Unit] course and went to Egypt.

The news came as a great shock as Sgt. Howell was expected to arrive home within a few weeks.

The fatal accident took place at Trayia in Egypt.

It seems likely that Stephen was part of the 66th (Gloucesters) Searchlight Regiment, Royal Artillery, which until August 1939 had been the 4th (City of Bristol) Battalion, Gloucestershire Regiment (66th Searchlight Regiment). This regiment was part of the anti-aircraft defences for Bristol. In 1940, its 449 Battery had its headquarters in Wookey Hole. Apparently they kept their equipment in the Caves Car Park, commandeered the Chapel's School Rooms and shared the use of the Wookey Hole Club.

At the time of his marriage Stephen was living in Glasgow at 56, Prospecthill Road, Cathcart. This was the site of the Glasgow Institute for the Deaf and Dumb, which must have been requisitioned during the war to billet troops. The 66th Regiment did not serve in Glasgow and so Stephen had presumably been posted to another Royal Artillery unit in Glasgow, possibly the 57th (Glasgow) Searchlight Regiment.

Harold is buried in Egypt at the Fayid War Cemetery in grave 5.D.5. He is also remembered on the rolls of honour at Wells Town Hall and Wells Cemetery.

On 1 December 1945, at St Thomas' Church, Audrey married Robert Barnard from Kelty, Fife.

We would like to thank David Hudsmith for his help with this article.