Guardsman Frederick Leonard 'Len' HOWLETT

Service number 2627715
Grenadier Guards
1st Battalion
Killed in action on 30 April 1948, aged 20

Although listed amongst those who died in the Second World War, Len died in Palestine fighting in another conflict. Born in Wells, he joined the Grenadier Guards near the end of the war. After a time in Germany, including taking part in the British Victory Parade in Berlin, he went to Palestine just before the British mandate ended.

Len
Photograph courtesy of Mrs R. Trebble, Len's sister

Len was born in Wells in 1927 to William Leonard John Howlett and Eva L. née Haney. He had a brother and two sisters. His younger sister describes him as "quiet and bookish".

The family lived off St Thomas Street, but by September 1939 they were at 27, Barley Close, Wells. His father joined the Wells City Fire Brigade in 1928 and during the war was a full-time member of the National Fire Service and fought blitz fires in many parts of the country. Len's sister remembers their father coming home with his clothes still smelling of smoke after the Liverpool Blitz. Len began an apprenticeship as a mechanic at a garage in Coxley.

At the end of the war, Len was serving with the 1st Battalion of the Grenadier Guards, but he was killed in action in Palestine in 1948. His death was reported in the *Wells Journal* on 7 May 1948:

> The first intimation the parents received was on Sunday when they were informed that their son was missing, and this was followed by another communication that he was officially reported dead. The following day a communication was received from the Commanding Officer officially informing Mr. and Mrs. Howlett of their son's tragic death and stating that the cause of death was a fractured skull and gunshot wound in the chest …

Leonard Howlett was an old Central School boy, and on leaving school was employed at Keward Garage. He joined the Forces just before the end of the war and for about 18 months saw service with the Grenadiers in Germany. He was transferred with his Regiment to Palestine about six weeks ago. He was home on leave at Christmas and on embarkation leave at the end of February. He was 20 years of age.

Mr. and Mrs. Howlett's other son is serving with the Royal Navy … A memorial service will be held at St. Cuthbert's Church, this Sunday, May 9th, at 3.30 p.m.

When the war ended, the 1st Battalion was at Stade near Hamburg. In late June it moved to Brunswick, and then on 4 July, after passing through Russian occupied Germany, it entered Berlin. On the 21st, the battalion took part in the British Victory Parade in front of Churchill, Atlee and Montgomery. In August it moved to Bonn, and in late 1946 returned to the UK, first to London and then in September 1947 to Windsor.

After the Second World War, Palestine was still under British control. In late 1945, in response to full-scale riots in Jerusalem and Tel Aviv, a state of emergency was declared and more troops were sent to Palestine. In 1947, the British government referred the Palestine question to the newly created United Nations, but violence continued, leading to the introduction of martial law and stricter curfews. The UN resolved to partition Palestine and on 29 November 1947, the British government announced that its mandate would end on 15 May 1948.

Len's funeral in Haifa
A set of four photos sent to his parents
Photographs courtesy of Mrs R. Trebble, Len's sister

In January 1948, the 1st Battalion was sent to Palestine to replace the 3rd Battalion, Grenadier Guards, who were based at Nathanya near Haifa. The handover was done a company at a time over a three-month period and was completed by 4 April 1948. The battalion then moved to Haifa to protect the route to the docks, so that the army would be able withdraw safely out of Haifa. What it was like for Len is described by Oliver Lindsay in Once a Grenadier, 1945-1995 (Barnsley, 1996):

The situation was approaching conventional warfare. British Comet tanks smashed Jewish and Arab road blocks; houses of both sides were blown up, batteries of Royal Artillery opened fire if necessary, while rifle companies tried to impose a curfew in Haifa. L/Sgt PR Clarke and Gdsm F Howlett were killed in action.

Len's sister tells how, on the day of his death, he had carried out his duty in the morning, escorting Jewish settlers to work. One of the soldiers detailed to escort them back in the afternoon fell ill, and so Len took his place: Poignantly, this is when he was killed.

Len is buried near Haifa in Israel in the Khayat Beach War Cemetery in Plot F Row A Grave 13. He is also remembered on the rolls of honour at Wells Town Hall and Wells Cemetery.

"There is happiness in remembrance"
Len's grave in Haifa
Photograph courtesy of Mrs R. Trebble, Len's sister

After leaving the navy, Len's brother David served with the Admiralty Constabulary at H.M. Dockyard, Portsmouth, and in 1967 was awarded the Queen's Commendation for Brave Conduct for "services when a mentally unstable man, armed with a knife and a hand grenade, attempted to evade arrest".[1]

We would like to thank Mrs R. Trebble, Len's sister, and Mrs P. D'Amore, Len's niece, for their help in writing this article. We would also like to thank Mrs Jan Stubbins for putting us in touch.

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[1] *Supplement to The London Gazette*, 3rd October 1967.