

## **Able Seaman Dennis Vincent FREEGARD**

Service number D/JX 420047

Royal Navy

HM LCF 22

Died on 23 May 1946, aged 21

Dennis was raised in Wells, and before the war worked for Mr. Pope the builder. Around Christmas 1943, Dennis joined the Royal Navy and served in a Landing Craft Flak based at Dartmouth. From there he took part in the D-Day invasion. On the evening before he was to be demobilised, Dennis slipped off a path along the side of the River Dart, struck his head on a rock, and drowned.



Dennis gave this photo of himself to his friend and shipmate Bill Surplice  
Photograph courtesy of Bill Surplice's son David

Dennis was born in Chippenham on 30 October 1924, to Cyril Ralph Freegard and Margaret Lizzie née Cole. The family moved to Wells in about 1927. In September 1939, they were living at 61, Burcott Road. Both of Dennis' parents worked at the Wiltshire United Dairies and his father was a member of the Royal Antediluvian Order of Buffaloes and of the Civil Defence Corps.

At the time of his death Dennis was serving on HM Landing Craft Flak 22. This was a tank landing craft modified to carry a range of anti-aircraft guns, for example, eight QF 2 pounders (pom-pom guns) and four 20 mm Oerlikon guns. Such boats provided air defence during landings. The operation of these boats was the responsibility of RN crew and the guns were manned by Royal Marines.



A Landing Craft Flak similar to the one that Dennis served on

Photograph by a Royal Navy official photographer © IWM FL 5979

<https://www.iwm.org.uk/collections/item/object/205120515>

The story of Dennis' life and the circumstances of his death were reported in the *Wells Journal* on 31 May 1946:

Able Seaman Freegard was a member of a Landing Craft moored on the River Dart south of Dittisham. On Thursday night with others he was returning from Dittisham to get aboard his craft and while walking along a path through some woods alongside the river he apparently slipped and fell down some rocks sustaining severe head injuries. His body was later recovered from the water.

It is a pathetic coincidence that Freegard was due for demobilisation the following day.

Dennis, who was an only son, had been serving in the Royal Navy for the past 3½ years and had spent a considerable part of his service life at Dartmouth, from which port he sailed on Saturday, June 3rd, 1944 with the armada for the invasion of Normandy.

Before joining up he was employed at the Wilts United Dairies and later for Mr. J. A. Pope, builder of Wells.

Mr. and Mrs. Freegard's only daughter [Valda] recently sailed for America to join her husband [Staff Sergeant Hayden Ward, US Army] ...

The body was brought back to Wells and the funeral took place at Wells Cemetery on Wednesday afternoon, many sympathisers attending. The coffin was covered with the Union Jack, and the bearers were members of the crew of the ship on which he had served. His C.O., Sub-Lieut. J. C. Opperman, was also present.

Dennis is buried in Wells Cemetery in Section H. Row e/ee. Grave 2. He is also remembered on the rolls of honour at Wells Town Hall and Wells Cemetery.

Bill Surplice's son, David, said that "From talking to my late Father in his later year I think that as a good friend he may have attended Dennis's Funeral and may even have been one of the pall bearers? My Father referred to Dennis as Denny and I believe that my father was referred to as Bill even though his name was Wilfred."