

HAROLD LYTH, Sapper 1864049, Royal Engineers, 23rd April 1941, Age 34

Harold Lyth was born in 1906 and married Edith Mary Appleton in 1927 in Bedale.

Harold enlisted in the Royal Engineers, but it seems that he volunteered for bomb disposal. The men of the Bomb Disposal Companies were all volunteers, and once enlisted, they had to serve a minimum of 6 months before they could opt for transfer.

The first unexploded bombs were encountered in the autumn of 1939 and were for the most part easily dealt with, mostly by Royal Air Force or Air Raid Precautions personnel. In the spring of 1940, when bombing became far more regular, the British government realized that they were going to need professionals in numbers to deal with the coming problem. 25 sections were authorized for the Royal Engineers in May 1940, another 109 in June, and 220 by August. Organization was needed, and as the Blitz began, 25 "Bomb Disposal Companies" were created between August 1940 and January 1941. Each company had ten sections, each section having a bomb disposal officer and 14 other ranks to assist.

As far as I can tell, Harold served with the 19th Bomb Disposal Company, 185th Bomb Disposal section, Royal Engineers. At least that's what the Commonwealth War Graves Commission records show. The 19th Bomb Disposal Company was formed in October 1940 in Bedford under the command of Major LP Hodgkinson. It remained there until 1944 when it was allocated for the invasion of Europe.



Gravestone of Harold and Edith Lyth, Brompton-on-Swale Cemetery

I eventually discovered the relevant unit War History that recorded the details of how Harold died, although it's listed under the 7th Bomb Disposal Company.

The records show that Harold died in Plymouth, with records indicating that his place of residence at the time was Leeds.

Plymouth was a major target for German bombing and suffered a serious raid by German bombers on 22nd April 1941 and it's likely that Harold and his Bomb Disposal unit colleagues were dealing with delayed action bombs from that raid.

It was during this raid that a communal air raid shelter at Portland Square in Plymouth took a direct hit which killed 72 men, women and children.



Corner of Old Town Street, Plymouth 1941

The War Diary for the 7th Bomb Disposal Company gives the details of Harold's death on the 23rd April stating that he was killed in Plymouth whilst trying to defuse a delayed action bomb along with two colleagues (L/Sgt Stanley Edward Gray and Sapper William James Gibson).

"Killed by delayed action bomb 1864049 L/Sgt Gray, S.E. 186049 Spr. Lyth. H, 3311879 Spr, Gibson W.J. of No. 185 H.D. Section."

WAR DIARY INTELLIGENCE SUMMARY			Unit No. 7 Bomb Disposal Coy. R.E.
Month and Year April, 1941.			Commanding Officer Major G.N. BRADBURY, R.E.
Place	Date	Hour	Summary of Events and Information
PLYMOUTH	21		Heavy Air Raid on Plymouth.
	22		do. do.
	23		do. do.
	23		Killed by delayed action bomb 1854045 1/Sgt. Gray S.E., 185049 Sapper Lyth E.
	23		311899 Sapper Gibson J.J. of No. 188 H.D. Section.
Bristol	23		Killed by delayed action bomb 2129059 Sapper Smith J., 2127226 Sapper Madhame F. of No. 189 S.D. Section.
	23		Lt. A.C. Allen posted from No. 3 Coy. P. Troops Engineers. Auth. P/187173 (A.G.7(c))
Bristol	26		Lt. C.A. Nash, posted from No. 2 R.I.C. Derby, Auth. P/181653 (A.G.7(c))
PLYMOUTH	26		188 & 189 S.D. Sections moved from BRISTOL to PLYMOUTH.
Bristol	26		Reinforcements No. 100 & 101 R.E. Baseline from No. 3 R.D. Coy. R.E.
Bristol	26		Capt. A.S. Smith assumed command of Company during absence of Major J.H. Bradbury on privilege leave.
PLYMOUTH	26		Heavy Air Raid.

War Diary Extract for death of Harold Lyth

The same day two more bomb disposal personnel were killed by a delayed action bomb – Sapper J Smith and Sapper McShane of 189 Section.

It just shows how incredibly dangerous bomb disposal activities were and how brave the men of the Bomb Disposal units were.

Harold's name is recorded on the Royal Engineers Association Bomb Disposal Branch Roll of Honour.

Sources

- (1) The Plymouth Blitz
https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Plymouth_Blitz
- (2) Bomb Disposal Web Site
<https://www.royalengineersbombdisposal-eod.org.uk/individual/lyth-h/>
https://www.royalengineersbombdisposal-eod.org.uk/23_april_1941.html
- (3) Bomb Disposal Unit Overall History
<https://www.bombdisposalclub.org.uk/bomb-disposal-history/>
- (4) CWGC Grave Ref 226 **BROMPTON-ON-SWALE CEMETERY**, England
<https://www.cwgc.org/find-records/find-war-dead/casualty-details/2407123>