

# ROBERT MARTIN BELL

**Born:** 27<sup>th</sup> May 1913, Wood Norton<sup>1</sup>

**Enlisted:** 1<sup>st</sup> Battalion, Royal Norfolk Regiment  
(Warrant Officer Class II CSM 5771779)<sup>2</sup>



**Died:** 4th July 1944 – killed in action, France (Normandy)<sup>3</sup>

**Age:** 32

**Memorial:** La Delivrande War Cemetery, Douvres (France) – Plot VIII, Row C, Grave 2<sup>4</sup>

**Medals:** India General Service Medal;<sup>5</sup> France and Germany Star; 1939-1945 Star; War Medal 1939-1945<sup>6</sup>



**Residence:** At the outbreak of war, Robert was probably serving with the Royal Norfolk Regiment in India.<sup>7</sup> Robert's parents were living at Lyng Hall Farm, Wood Norton<sup>8</sup>

Robert Martin Bell was born on the 27<sup>th</sup> May 1913, the eldest son of Robert and Margaret Bell, and baptised on the 13<sup>th</sup> July 1913 in Wood Norton parish church (see Figure 1).

<sup>1</sup> Baptisms Register, 1913, Wood Norton ([www.ancestry.co.uk](http://www.ancestry.co.uk)); FreeBMD, Quarter to September 1913, Aylsham, Vol 4b, p157 ([www.freebmd.org.uk](http://www.freebmd.org.uk)).

<sup>2</sup> CWGC commemoration ([www.cwgc.org](http://www.cwgc.org)).

<sup>3</sup> CWGC, Graves Concentration Report Form, 5<sup>th</sup> June 1945 ([www.cwgc.org](http://www.cwgc.org)).

<sup>4</sup> CWGC, Graves Registration Report Form, 12<sup>th</sup> November 1954 ([www.cwgc.org](http://www.cwgc.org)).

<sup>5</sup> UK, Military Campaign Medals and Award Rolls, 1739-1949 ([www.ancestry.co.uk](http://www.ancestry.co.uk)). Robert Martin Bell was awarded the India General Service Medal with NWF (North West Frontier) 1936-1937 clasp in January 1939.

<sup>6</sup> Robert is likely to be awarded the France and Germany Star, 1939-1945 Star and the War Medal 1939-1945 due to his qualifying service (See: <https://www.gov.uk/guidance/medals-campaigns-descriptions-and-eligibility#world-war-2-medals>).

<sup>7</sup> It seems likely that Robert was still serving with the Royal Norfolk Regiment when war was declared, as he appears to have enlisted with the Regiment prior to, or in, 1936.

<sup>8</sup> 1939 England and Wales Register, Walsingham RD, Enumeration District TSBD, Schedule 39 ([www.ancestry.co.uk](http://www.ancestry.co.uk)).

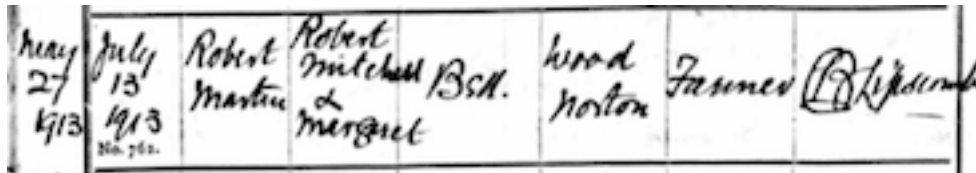


Figure 1: Extract from the Wood Norton Baptisms, 1913

In 1936 the 1<sup>st</sup> Battalion, Royal Norfolk Regiment,<sup>9</sup> was serving in India, and they were still in India when war was declared in 1939. The Battalion returned to England in July 1940 where they were initially allotted to home defence, but the Battalion took part in the D-Day invasion of France on the 6<sup>th</sup> June 1944.<sup>10</sup> They were part of the 185<sup>th</sup> Infantry Brigade of the 3<sup>rd</sup> Division, and would be one of the first British units to land at Sword Beach. This beach was nearly 5 miles long and stretched from Ouistreham on the mouth of the River Orne to Saint-Aubin-sur-Mer, and would be the eastern flank of the landings, with the beach divided into four zones (Oboe, Peter, Queen and Roger) (see Figure 2).<sup>11</sup> Their task would be to capture Caen, situated just over 9 miles away and secure the important airfield at Carpiquet.

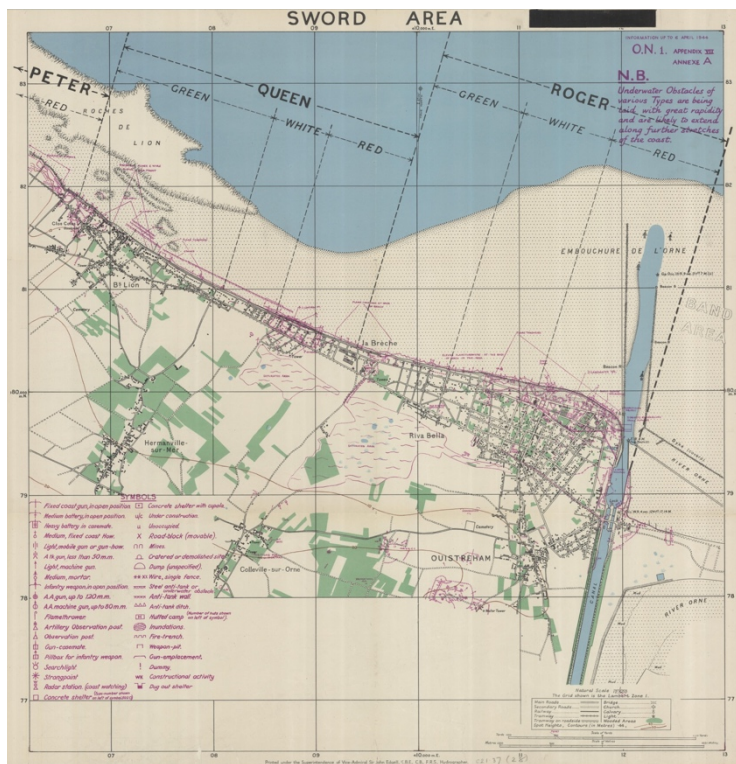


Figure 2: Map of Sword Beach

The 1<sup>st</sup> Battalion, Royal Norfolk Regiment, landed at 09:50hrs on D-Day coming in on Queen Beach, situated between Lion and La Breche. Their role was to move further inland where they would relieve the 1<sup>st</sup> Battalion, Suffolk Regiment, which they did at 12:00hrs, under heavy shell and mortar fire.<sup>12</sup>

<sup>9</sup> The Regiment was awarded the Royal title in 1935 as part of the Silver Jubilee celebrations for King George V, and become the Royal Norfolk Regiment (<https://www.forces-war-records.co.uk/units/3645/royal-norfolk-regiment/>).

<sup>10</sup> Royal Norfolk Regiment Museum, The Second World War ([http://www.nrm.org.uk/history/history\\_ww2.html](http://www.nrm.org.uk/history/history_ww2.html)).

<sup>11</sup> See: <https://blogs.bodleian.ox.ac.uk/maps/2014/06/06/d-day/>.

<sup>12</sup> Great War Britain Norfolk (<https://stevesmith1944.wordpress.com/2019/06/06/private-6206710-john-francis-t-caudwell/>).

Robert was killed in action on the 4<sup>th</sup> July 1944, and the Commonwealth War Grave Commission records indicate that he was originally buried at Colleville-sur-Orne (which had been liberated on the 6<sup>th</sup> June 1944). He was reinterred in La Delivrande War Cemetery, Douvres, on the 17<sup>th</sup> May 1945<sup>13</sup> (see Figure 3). The inscription on his headstone reads: *Deep in our hearts a memory is kept of one we loved and will never forget.*



**Figure 3: Headstone of Robert Martin Bell**

Whilst serving in India, Robert was awarded the India General Service Medal with the North West Frontier 1936/1937 clasp, and the records show that at this time he held the rank of Private.<sup>14</sup> By the time of his death in 1944, Robert had reached the rank of Warrant Officer Class II CSM (Company Sergeant Major). It is likely that he would have been awarded the France and Germany Star, 1939-1945 Star, and the War Medal 1939-1945 due to his qualifying war service.

Further research into Robert's family reveals that his father, Robert Mitchell Bell, was born on the 18<sup>th</sup> May 1881 in Little Ryburgh,<sup>15</sup> the son of Robert Martin (a farmer) and Ann Bell. Robert Mitchell Bell was baptised on the 15<sup>th</sup> June 1881 in Great Ryburgh parish church. Robert Mitchell married Margaret Want (variously spelt *Whant* or *Whaut* in other records) in 1909.<sup>16</sup> He died in 1958, aged 78, and is buried in Wood Norton. Margaret (*Minnie*) died in 1968, aged 88, and is buried in Wood Norton. She gave her place of birth as Great Hockham in the 1911 census.<sup>17</sup> The records note that they were both living at Lyng Hall Farm at the time of their deaths; Robert Mitchell's parents, Robert Martin (born in Stibbard) and Ann Bell (born in Little Ryburgh), are recorded as living at Lyng Hall Farm in the 1911 census for Wood Norton,

<sup>13</sup> CWGC, Graves Concentration Report Form, 5<sup>th</sup> June 1945 ([www.cwgc.org](http://www.cwgc.org)).

<sup>14</sup> UK, Military Campaign Medals and Award Rolls, 1739-1949 ([www.ancestry.co.uk](http://www.ancestry.co.uk)).

<sup>15</sup> Baptism Register, 1881, Ryburgh Magna (Great Ryburgh) ([www.ancestry.co.uk](http://www.ancestry.co.uk)); 1911 census, Wood Norton (Schedule 165) ([www.ancestry.co.uk](http://www.ancestry.co.uk)); FreeBMD, *Quarter to June 1881, Walsingham Vol.4b, p.301* ([www.freebmd.org.uk](http://www.freebmd.org.uk)).

<sup>16</sup> FreeBMD, *Quarter to March 1909, Mitford, Vol.4b, p.399* ([www.freebmd.org.uk](http://www.freebmd.org.uk)).

<sup>17</sup> 1911 census, Wood Norton (Schedule 165) ([www.ancestry.co.uk](http://www.ancestry.co.uk)).

aged 71 and 66 respectively.<sup>18</sup> The 1911 census records that Robert Mitchell (a farmer's son, working on the farm) and Margaret Bell were living in The Street, Wood Norton, and had two children:<sup>19</sup>

Name	Born	Died
Margaret Josephine	1 <sup>st</sup> April 1909, in Wood Norton. <sup>20</sup> She married Walter William Bunkall in 1933. <sup>21</sup>	1986, aged 76. <sup>22</sup>
Carola Mary	14 <sup>th</sup> June 1910 in Wood Norton (baptised 10 <sup>th</sup> July 1910). <sup>23</sup> In 1939, she is single and a hospital nurse at the Sutton Training Centre. <sup>24</sup> She married Leslie G. Walley in 1969. <sup>25</sup>	

They went on to have at least eight more children:

Name	Born	Died
Violet Agnes Ann	10 November 1911, in Wood Norton (baptised 28 January 1912). <sup>26</sup> She married William Charles Buckingham on the 26 <sup>th</sup> October 1940. <sup>27</sup>	
<i>Robert Martin</i>	<i>27<sup>th</sup> May 1913, in Wood Norton.</i>	<i>4<sup>th</sup> July 1944, Normandy (France)</i>
Evelyn Patricia Maria	8 <sup>th</sup> February 1915, in Wood Norton. <sup>28</sup> She married Charles William Nudd on the 25 <sup>th</sup> September 1937. <sup>29</sup>	1997, aged 82. <sup>30</sup>
Patience Christian Faith	25 <sup>th</sup> December 1916, in Wood Norton. <sup>31</sup> She married Harry Flaxman Davison on the 7 <sup>th</sup> September 1939. <sup>32</sup>	2008, aged 91. <sup>33</sup>

<sup>18</sup> 1911 census, Wood Norton (Schedule 187) ([www.ancestry.co.uk](http://www.ancestry.co.uk)).

<sup>19</sup> 1911 census, Wood Norton (Schedule 165) ([www.ancestry.co.uk](http://www.ancestry.co.uk)).

<sup>20</sup> FreeBMD, *Quarter to June 1909, Aylsham, Vol.4b, p.79* ([www.freebmd.org.uk](http://www.freebmd.org.uk)). Her date of birth is given on her death record (England & Wales, Civil Registration Death Index, 1916-2007 ([www.ancestry.co.uk](http://www.ancestry.co.uk))).

<sup>21</sup> FreeBMD, *Quarter to June 1933, Downham, Vol.4b, p.753* ([www.freebmd.org.uk](http://www.freebmd.org.uk)).

<sup>22</sup> England & Wales, Civil Registration Death Index, 1916-2007 (*March 1986, Kings Lynn*) ([www.ancestry.co.uk](http://www.ancestry.co.uk)).

<sup>23</sup> *Transcript and Index to Wood Norton, Norfolk, Parish Registers*, compiled by Keith and Shirley Howell (February 2000), Baptisms, 1910 (p.41).

<sup>24</sup> 1939 England and Wales Register, Sutton & Cheam RD, Enumeration District CCNV, Schedule 197 ([www.ancestry.co.uk](http://www.ancestry.co.uk)).

<sup>25</sup> FreeBMD, *Quarter to December 1969, Norwich Outer, Vol.4b, p.1969* ([www.freebmd.org.uk](http://www.freebmd.org.uk)).

<sup>26</sup> FreeBMD, *Quarter to December 1911, Aylsham, Vol. 4b, p.154* ([www.freebmd.org.uk](http://www.freebmd.org.uk)) (to note that the FreeBMD records her mother's maiden name as *Whant*); *Transcript and Index to Wood Norton, Norfolk, Parish Registers*, compiled by Keith and Shirley Howell (February 2000), Baptisms, 1911 (p.41).

<sup>27</sup> *Transcript and Index to Wood Norton, Norfolk, Parish Registers*, compiled by Keith and Shirley Howell (February 2000), Marriages, 1940 (p.106).

<sup>28</sup> FreeBMD, *Quarter to March 1915, Aylsham, Vol.4b, p.151* ([www.freebmd.org.uk](http://www.freebmd.org.uk)); 1939 England and Wales Register, Smallburgh RD, Enumeration District TRXC, Schedule 106 ([www.ancestry.co.uk](http://www.ancestry.co.uk)).

<sup>29</sup> *Transcript and Index to Wood Norton, Norfolk, Parish Registers*, compiled by Keith and Shirley Howell (February 2000), Marriages, 1937 (p.105).

<sup>30</sup> England and Wales, Civil Registration Death Index, 1916-2017 (*October 1997, North Walsham*) ([www.ancestry.co.uk](http://www.ancestry.co.uk)).

<sup>31</sup> FreeBMD, *Quarter to March 1917, Aylsham, Vol.4b, p.116* ([www.freebmd.org.uk](http://www.freebmd.org.uk)); 1939 England and Wales Register, Walsingham RD, Enumeration District TSBC, Schedule 66 ([www.ancestry.co.uk](http://www.ancestry.co.uk)).

<sup>32</sup> *Transcript and Index to Wood Norton, Norfolk, Parish Registers*, compiled by Keith and Shirley Howell (February 2000), Marriages, 1939 (p.107).

<sup>33</sup> Global, Gravestone Photograph Index, 1265-2014 ([www.ancestry.co.uk](http://www.ancestry.co.uk)). She is buried in St. George's, Hindolveston.

Douglas Charles F.	10 <sup>th</sup> November 1918, in Wood Norton. <sup>34</sup> He married Elsie M. Kerrison in 1947. <sup>35</sup>	2000, aged 81. <sup>36</sup>
Lucy Winifred Edith	22 <sup>nd</sup> August 1922, in Wood Norton. <sup>37</sup> She married James Douglas Cox (Lance Corporal) on the 10 <sup>th</sup> December 1941. <sup>38</sup>	1986, aged 63. <sup>39</sup>
Mary E	1928, in Wood Norton. <sup>40</sup>	
Kenneth Joe	1920, in Wood Norton. <sup>41</sup>	1996, aged 76. <sup>42</sup>

Robert Martin Bell married Winifred Roach on the 3<sup>rd</sup> July 1943, in St. Hilda's parish church, Middlesbrough, aged 30 and 25 respectively. The marriage certificate lists Robert's profession as Sergeant in the Royal Norfolk Regiment.<sup>43</sup> Sadly, Robert was killed the day after his first wedding anniversary, and before the birth of their only child – a daughter, Mary Winifred, was born in Middlesbrough on the 13<sup>th</sup> October 1944.<sup>44</sup> Mary Winifred Bell married Bramwell Wymer in 1963<sup>45</sup> and went on to have a family.

A memorial to the men of the Royal Norfolk Regiment who died in the D-Day offensives has been erected on the Route de Colleville between Colleville-Montgomery and Biéville-Beuville.<sup>46</sup> It reads:

*THE ROYAL NORFOLK REGIMENT  
In memory  
of our 116 comrades who fell  
on D-Day 6th june to 9th july 1944  
May peace and freedom  
be their everlasting memorial*

<sup>34</sup> FreeBMD, *Quarter to March 1919, Aylsham, Vol.4b, p.106* ([www.freebmd.org.uk](http://www.freebmd.org.uk)); 1939 England and Wales Register, Walsingham RD, Enumeration District TSBD, Schedule 39 ([www.ancestry.co.uk](http://www.ancestry.co.uk)). The 1939 Register records him as *Charles D.F. Bell*.

<sup>35</sup> FreeBMD, *Quarter to September 1947, Norwich Outer, Vol.4b, p.1902* ([www.freebmd.org.uk](http://www.freebmd.org.uk)). The record gives his names as *Charles Douglas F. Bell*.

<sup>36</sup> England and Wales, Civil Registration Death Index, 1916-2017 (*May 2000, Norwich*) ([www.ancestry.co.uk](http://www.ancestry.co.uk)). The record gives his name as *Charles Douglas F. Bell*.

<sup>37</sup> FreeBMD, *Quarter to September 1922, Aylsham, Vol.4b, p.129* ([www.freebmd.org.uk](http://www.freebmd.org.uk)); 1939 England and Wales Register, Walsingham RD, Enumeration District TSBD, Schedule 39 ([www.ancestry.co.uk](http://www.ancestry.co.uk)).

<sup>38</sup> *Transcript and Index to Wood Norton, Norfolk, Parish Registers*, compiled by Keith and Shirley Howell (February 2000), Marriages, 1941 (p.107).

<sup>39</sup> England and Wales, Civil Registration Death Index, 1916-2017 (*January 1986, Grimsby*) ([www.ancestry.co.uk](http://www.ancestry.co.uk)).

<sup>40</sup> FreeBMD, *Quarter to March 1928, Aylsham, Vol.4b, p.108* ([www.freebmd.org.uk](http://www.freebmd.org.uk)).

<sup>41</sup> FreeBMD, *Quarter to June 1920, Aylsham, Vol.4b, p.168* ([www.freebmd.org.uk](http://www.freebmd.org.uk)).

<sup>42</sup> *Transcript and Index to Wood Norton, Norfolk, Parish Registers*, compiled by Keith and Shirley Howell (February 2000), Burials, 1996 (p.134).

<sup>43</sup> Copy marriage certificate, Robert Bell and Winifred Roach, 3<sup>rd</sup> July 1943, Entry No. 140.

<sup>44</sup> Copy birth certificate, Mary Winifred Bell, 13<sup>th</sup> October 1944, Entry No.267.

<sup>45</sup> FreeBMD, *Quarter to September 1963, Norwich Outer, Vol.4b, p.2096* ([www.freebmd.org.uk](http://www.freebmd.org.uk)).

<sup>46</sup> See <https://www.normandywarguide.com/place/the-royal-norfolk-regiment-memorial>.