

THE STEVENS FAMILY STORY

Arthur Harold Stevens (1886-1974) was born in Wimbledon. His father Edwin Downer Stevens (1852-1916) owned a cabinet making business. Following education at St. Pauls School and Eastbourne College, he trained to become a gold mining engineer.

In 1914 at the outset of WW1 he volunteered and after Officer Training at the HAC in Finsbury Park, joined the 5th London FAB Royal Field Artillery, 7th London Brigade. Severely wounded he was evacuated from the front by train and ended up in hospital in Edinburgh. Where he was nursed by Clarinda Napier Harrower (1890-1978) the daughter of a prosperous family in the pit-prop & timber business from Bo'ness. They were married in Edinburgh in September 1916. Whereupon he returned to his unit and the Battle of the Somme. Where on November 14th 1916 the London Gazette records that he was awarded the Military Cross. The citation reads: "For conspicuous gallantry in action. On many occasions as Observation Officer, he carried out his work under intense fire with great courage and determination."

His gallantry and this MC were a great motivating factors for his two sons in WW2.

Following WW1, Harold's new wife Clara was not keen on becoming a gold miners' wife, so he joined a small family floristry business in London that he later acquired and greatly expanded to become Moyses Stevens Ltd. A hard worker and ahead of his time, in the pre-war years, he installed a dedicated phone line taking orders for flowers 24 hours a day – for immediate delivery anywhere in London. He was awarded The Royal Warrant. The business, under new ownership, was still trading in 2026. They lived in a substantial property, Holmwood on Kingston Hill in Surrey. With a 2nd home at Sandrock, Seaview on the Isle of Wight, where the children all enjoyed sailing & water sports.

They had 4 children:

Raymond Harold (1/11/1917 - 24/9/1944)

Edwin Mackenzie (17/8/1919 - 5/9/1944)

Helen Audrey (1922-2016) later Holbrook

Clarinda Monica (1924-2016) later Simonds

Edwin Stevens:

Followed his elder brother Raymond to St Andrews prep school, then Stowe and the family floristry business. On the outbreak of war in 1939 Edwin volunteered for the army. He joined the 11th (HAC) Regiment RHA in September 1939 and was sent to 138th officers training unit, Salisbury Plain, joining 359 Battery R.A. On passing out, he was posted to 272/120 Field Regiment R.A. in Bedford under Major Greenaway, awaiting embarkation. They departed Liverpool for Cairo on July 15th 1942. On arrival in the Egyptian desert his Company became "A" Battery 11th (Honourable Artillery Co.) Regiment, Royal Horse Artillery, Central Mediterranean, 1st British Armoured Division.

Until the Battle of Knightsbridge in June 1942 the 11th (HAC) Regiments of the Royal Horse Artillery fought with 25 pounder guns. After that they were equipped with the far superior American M7 Priest self-propelled gun in time for the second and decisive battle of El Alamein in October 1942. They fought on across North Africa to Sfax in Tunisia in April 1943, where he took the surrender of a German officer in an armoured car and kept his wartime maps. Then on to Tunis, which they entered on May 8th, where he became ill from contracting both dysentery and later

malaria. Nonetheless in July 1943 he joined the invasion of Sicily, after which he was hospitalised in Syracuse with recurring malaria. Followed by a long period of rest & re-equipping near Tunis.

In February 1944 he became ADC to Major General Alexander Galloway CBE, DSO, MC. in the 1st British Armoured Division. After much waste of life and gallantry, Cassino was taken on May 18th. In July he was 'volunteered' for a secret mission, which turned out to be as an Embarkation Officer based in Naples. Where for a month he was involved in managing the embarkation of the Free French Forces and Americans going to invade southern France in Operation Dragoon. But he also found time to relax, join a local sailing club and do some sailing!

Galloway was taken ill and flown back to hospital in the UK on August 4th. At this point Edwin was serving with the 8th army as a Staff Captain 1 British Armd Div HQ RA. So on 5th September 1944 Edwin joined a new Commander, Brigadier E.P.N. Jones on a hilltop vantage point, to explain the lie of the land for 'Operation Olive' (also known as the 'Battle of Rimini'). They were observed and shells landed mortally wounding Edwin with a piece of shell shrapnel in his chest, aged just 25. (for more details see online 'Edwin's War' [HERE](#))

Edwin was 1st buried outside the Field hospital where he died, in a Royal Artillery cemetery near the village of Morciano. Then in June 1945 at the Gradara Military Cemetery, about 17 miles south of Rimini, in grave 1.B.30. The cemetery holds the 1188 graves of Allied forces killed during the advance from Ancona to Rimini and from the heavy fighting around Rimini, which was taken by the Allies on 21st September 1944.

On the death of his son Edwin, Harold wrote a poignant letter to the War Office asking for a 'safe occupation' for Raymond, his remaining son. It was received on the same day that Raymond took off for Arnhem [HERE](#). It is hard to comprehend the lifelong impact upon the family of losing both their sons and brothers in a period of less than 3 weeks.

Service Number: 117219

11th (Honourable Artillery Coy.) Regt. Royal Horse Artillery
Gradara Military Cemetery, Pesaro, Italy. Ref: I, B, 30.

Where the inscription reads:

**IN UNDYING AND DEVOTED MEMORY OF OUR DEAR SON.
HE DIED THAT WE MIGHT LIVE**

Raymond Stevens:

Educated at St Andrews Prep School, then Cobham House, Stowe 1932-36. An extroverted and sporty character, he flourished in all three of their major sports. He then spent two terms at Trinity College, Cambridge studying economics, before joining the family floristry business, Moyses Stevens in Victoria, London in 1937. soon after the Munich Crisis of 1939 and with war looming Raymond joined the Honourable Artillery Company, Finsbury Pavement, for his initial army training, which took place after a long day's work, from where he joined the Territorial Army (Artists Rifles)

In January 1940 he passed out from the Officers Cadet Training Unit in Aldershot, was commissioned 2nd Lieutenant to No5 Co. 92 Field Regiment R.A. BEF. On

February 6th 1940 they embarked at Southampton for France and on to Belgium by train where his regiment fought in the rear-guard action from the Albert Canal in Belgium to Dunkirk, where he remained commanding artillery to defend the northern flank of Dunkirk until the final evacuation in May 1940. Only able to notify his family by telegram on June 3rd.

The regiment spent the next months regrouping and training, starting in Bulford Camp on Salisbury Plain from where he complained that they were accommodated under canvas. Then on to Newton Stewart in County Tyrone and Bankfoot camp near Perth, again under canvas and on to Rochdale, Lancashire. Promoted Lieutenant in July 1941. In January 1942 they left UK by a converted White Star Line troopship. On February 6th after three weeks at sea, they arrived off Johannesburg. After a few days delay they changed ships and headed north to Egypt and joined the 4th Royal Horse Artillery, 7th Armoured Division (Desert Rats). Just 4 months later, on April 25th 1942, he was severely wounded by shell shrapnel, severing an artery and nerves in his right thigh. Following emergency surgery in a field hospital, he was placed on the 'Seriously ill list' and evacuated first to MEH3 at El Busali, then MEH19 in Alexandria for several more operations. He eventually left Egypt in August and was shipped for more treatment to Baragwanath Hospital in Johannesburg, South Africa, weighing only 9 stone and having largely lost the use of his right foot. He remained there for 7 months till December 1942. Shipped home to the Queen Alexandra Hospital, Millbank [like his father before him] where he was given 2 months leave just in time for Christmas.

However, he wanted to rejoin his regiment at the front, so after a few months of determined rehab, he volunteered again and, partly recovered, he was posted to 81/9 Medium Regiment Southern Command in Felixstowe, Suffolk and promoted Captain in December 1943.

On April 4th 1944 he became engaged to L. Patsy Kneeshaw from Southsea, Hampshire, they never married.

In 1944 and despite his lingering injury, he successfully re-applied for active service and went on to complete parachute training at RAF Ringway in Cheshire on course 111, 10 to 17 April 1944 and on June 5th he was attached to HQ 156 Parachute Regiment, 1st Airborne Division, as his artillery regiment FOO (Forward Observation Officer).

They prepared for several secret missions, but each one was stood down at the last minute until September 18th 1944, day 2 of Operation Market Garden, 603 men of his battalion took off by DC3 from Sysonby airfield then dropped onto zone DZ Y Ginkel Heath, Holland into the 'Battle of Arnhem'. A doomed attempt at capturing an essential bridge over the river Rhine. Where, after they had suffered huge casualties, about 80 survivors reached the enclave in Oosterbeek, he was placed under Major Geoffrey Powell who split the men into two infantry platoons – one commanded by Raymond and the other by Lieutenant Piers St Aubyn, made up of anybody who had survived, in the awful defence of the northern perimeter of the enclave, awaiting evacuation across the Rhine which bordered its southern side.

He was never able to contact his regiment to send in supporting artillery fire, partly because of faulty radios issued and partly because they never managed to get their guns in range.

Fatally wounded by machinegun fire whilst leading a futile counterattack across Paul Krugerstraat close to Crums bakery. He waited till nightfall then crawled about 150 yards to shelter in the house of Mr & Mrs Valkenburg, at 13 De La Reyweg, who with their young daughter Rieke and at huge personal risk, nursed him hidden in their basement. Major Powell visited him during the night but decided that given the nature of his injuries and the terrible situation of the defenders, they could do nothing for him save administer morphine. He died next morning on 24th September 1944. Several days later the family, having removed his personal effects for safekeeping, were able to bury him in their garden with two of his colleagues from the para regiment and where there now stands a personal memorial. On 2nd October he was initially re-buried by the Dutch Red Cross in the grounds of the Hemeldal Sanatorium, near Oranjeweg, then on the 13th of August 1945 finally in the Oosterbeek Military Cemetery with over 1,700 other casualties of this operation. Grave ref: 29.A.2. Where the inscription reads:

IN AFFECTIONATE REMEMBRANCE

Service Number: 117204

After the war, his parents Harold and Clara Stevens became lifelong friends and supporters of the Valkenburg family. Their daughter Riecky went to convalesce with the Stevens family in Kingston, before becoming the nanny to Raymond Simonds, Captain Raymond's namesake & nephew.

His life and death in Arnhem & Oosterbeek is covered in a booklet written in 2022 on the memorial pages of the family history website, along with his brother Edwin's story. <https://simondsfamily.me.uk/family/in-memoriam/>

Raymond Simonds, December 2025

Descendant Chart for Arthur Harold "Dodie" STEVENS M.C.

