# BARRETT, Ernest John




**Private, 5827897**
**4th Battalion, Suffolk Regiment**
**Place of Birth: Haverhill**
**Killed in Action: Sunday, 15th February 1942**
**Cemetery: Singapore Hospital Grave Memorial**
**Aged: 22 years**

Generations of **Ernest John Barrett's** family had lived in the villages of Great then Little Wratting earning a living by working on farms. This was still so when his father Ernest Edward was born in 1891, the only son of six children of Daniel & Hannah. However, Ernest Edward was not to follow his father, who was a stockman, and instead, it seems, became a regular soldier. At the outbreak of WW1 he was amongst the first to be sent to France and saw action in the First Battle of Ypres, serving as a private with the 18th Hussars.



*Ernest & Marie with Ernest John & Janet*

In 1917, whilst serving in France, Ernest Edward married Marie Helene Eimee Gambier, the daughter of Jean Baptiste, a brewery worker, at Longfosse, Pas de Calais, France. Trooper Barrett was badly wounded and discharged from the army. He was awarded the Silver War Badge in addition to the 1914 Star, British and Victory Medals.

Ernest and Marie set up home at 1 Waveney Terrace, Haverhill, where Ernest John was born on 8th July 1919. He was baptised at St Mary's church six months later when his father's occupation was recorded as Mechanic. Two further children followed, Janet Mary in 1921 and Herbert George in 1923. When they were baptised their father's occupation was recorded as Tailor then Clock & Watch Maker, which he continued to be for the rest of his working life.

Ernest John attended the local Board school and had many friends both there and afterwards when he worked for the Haverhill Co-operative Society. He was a devoted family member. The family was still living at Waveney Terrace, at the start of WW2 and would have seen John enlist in the army and join the 4th Battalion Suffolk Regiment.

A decision had been made in spring 1939 to double the Territorial Army which led to the formation of the 4th Battalion, based in the east of the county and the 5th Battalion based in the west. County recruiting meetings were held across the county, including Haverhill, and over 2000 men were recruited in just 2 months, among them Ernest John.

On 1st September the order was given to mobilise the Territorial Army. Ernest John was part of "C" Company who were based at Leiston then Lowestoft where they were responsible for coastal defences. Later in 1940, the 4th Battalion moved to St Neots, near Cambridge which would have been closer to home for Ernest John.



In December 1940, the 4th Battalion, as part of the 18th Division, had orders to mobilize ready to proceed overseas. It was expected that they would be sent to Egypt to complete their training, after preliminary training in Scotland. Embarkation leave was taken and Ernest John returned home to be with his family. This was a difficult time for him as he suffered badly from nervous depression and didn't want to fight.

He gave his sister and her fiancee Samuel Whitby his best wishes on their forthcoming marriage along with some money to buy a gift.

However a change of plan meant the 4th Battalion were to see a great deal more of England, on further training and defensive duties, before embarking on 29th October 1941 at Liverpool aboard S.S. 'Andes' as part of a large convoy.

They journeyed across the Atlantic to Halifax, Nova Scotia, where they re-embarked, together with the 5th Battalion, and no doubt Ernest John was reacquainted with friends from Haverhill, on the U.S.S. Wakefield, and they began the long voyage, via Trinidad, to Cape Town. Whilst in South Africa news arrived of the Japanese attack on Pearl Harbour, although many still believed their destination was Egypt some guessed

Singapore. They sailed across the Indian Ocean arriving at Bombay on the day after Boxing Day and spent 2 weeks ashore getting fit. After they were back at sea it was known that their destination was Singapore and pamphlets on jungle warfare were issued. The news was not encouraging but spirits were said to be high.

The U.S.S. Wakefield berthed at Singapore on 29th January, the same day as it was decided to evacuate the mainland for the defence of the Island. The 4th and 5th Battalions at once disembarked to defend the north-east of the Island, an extensive front of some open beach and long stretches of mangrove swamps. Ernest John's niece Jacqueline recalls:

> *"Unfortunately soon after landing he was badly injured, I believe it to have been a bullet wound, and he died of his injuries in hospital (on 15th February) leaving his family devastated, something his mother never got over."*

That same day, the battle for Singapore ended.

Ernest John is commemorated on the Singapore Hospital Grave Memorial and also on his parents' gravestone in Haverhill Cemetery (pictured).




