

Pte Eric Thake

2nd Battalion, The Cambridgeshire Regiment

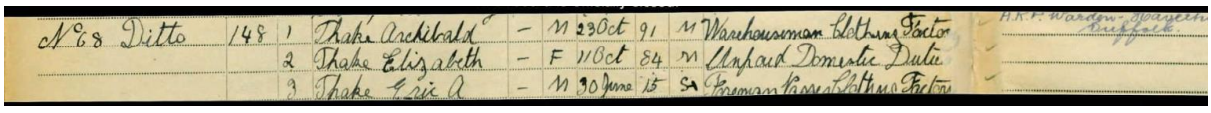


Eric Archibald Thake was born on 30th June 1915, the son of farm labourer Archibald Thake (23 Oct 1891 – 4 Dec 1978) and his wife Elizabeth nee Farrant (11 Oct 1884 – June 1969) a sewing machinist at Chauntry Mills who had married in 1912.



Eric had two siblings, Peggy Irene born in 1922 and Rita who was born in 1927. The family lived at 68 Primrose Hill, a few doors away from where his father had grown up at number 40.

The 1939 Register tells us that Archibald had found employment at the clothing factory (D Gurteen & Son, Chauntry Mills) as a warehouseman. Eric, now aged 19 had also found employment at Chauntry Mills as a Foreman Presser, although he had undoubtedly had experience in other departments too. *(below: extract from 1939 Register)*



68 Ditto	148	1	Thake Archibald	–	M	23 Oct	91	M	Warehousman Clothing Factor
		2	Thake Elizabeth	–	F	11 Oct	84	M	Unpaid Domestic Duties
		3	Thake Eric A	–	M	30 June	15	S	Foreman Presser Clothing Factory

Eric served with the 2nd Battalion Cambridgeshire Regiment during WW2. He arrived in Singapore Naval Dockyard on 13th January 1942 and proceeded to Camp at BUKIT TIMAH Racecourse. Within days they were in action defending the town of Batu Pahat in Jahore.

On 23rd January 1942, Eric was wounded at Batu Pahat. He sustained a gunshot wound to his left side and a shrapnel wound to his left elbow. The Battalion had to withdraw from the town and head for Singapore Island but reaching Senggarang on the 26th January, they came under heavy fire and with transport destroyed, the wounded who could not be evacuated, including Eric, were left behind under the care of Padre Noel Duckworth, two doctors and eleven orderlies. Those who volunteered to stay with the wounded were particularly brave as it was known that the Japanese had already killed several wounded men previously.



*It is worth learning more about **Padre Noel Duckworth** for, as it turned out, it was a stroke of luck that he was with the men when they were captured on 27th January 1942 and his presence was almost certainly instrumental in their survival.*

Noel Duckworth was born on 25 December 1912, the son of a clergyman. He and two brothers were all later ordained and all three became Canons.

Photo left: Padre Duckworth

In 1931, the 5 ft. 2 in. Noel went to Jesus College, Cambridge and was soon involved with the Boat Club. In 1934, he was selected to cox Cambridge in the Boat Race. It was perhaps the best crew of the era and they won easily, beating the course record by 26 seconds with a time of 18 minutes and 3 seconds.



CAMBRIDGE PRACTISING AT CHISWICK: (FROM LEFT TO RIGHT) DUCKWORTH (COX), LAURIE (STROKE), WILSON (7), BURNFORD (6), LONNON (5), KINGSFORD (4), LEWIS (3), MASON (2), AND CREE (BOW).

Cox (Cambridge): J. N. Duckworth (Lincoln and Jesus). | Stroke: W. G. R. M. Laurie (Monkton Combe and Selwyn). | No. 7: J. H. T. Wilson (Shrewsbury and Pembroke). | No. 6: D. W. Burnford (St. Paul's and Jesus). | No. 5: M. P. Lonnon (Westminster and Third Trinity). | No. 4: D. G. Kingsford (Uppingham and Pembroke). | No. 3: G. M. Lewis (Malvern and Pembroke). | No. 2: H. W. Mason (Clifton and Trinity Hall). | Bow: T. S. Cree (Geelong, Australia; and Jesus.

Noel was chosen to cox the British eight in the 1936 Berlin Olympics. In the final they were placed fourth behind the USA, Italy and Germany.

It is believed that it was his fame as a rowing man that saved the lives of those with him because a Japanese officer recognised who he was. A Japanese crew from Tokyo University had participated in the 1936 Berlin Olympics, as well as Henley prior to that, and it is entirely likely that Noel was known to them.

It was written by a POW that Noel flayed the Japanese with such a virulent tongue that they were sufficiently disconcerted to refrain from killing them instantly. They beat the Padre very cruelly for days, because they did not care for being verbally challenged but they did not kill the wounded men he had stayed behind to protect. They were all eventually brought to the comparative security of Padu Jail in Kuala Lumpur.

Now back to Eric who undoubtedly survived because of the men who refused to abandon those who could not be evacuated because of their wounds. His nephew, Jack Walker recalls Eric saying that their captors had their machine guns ready to shoot them all but that after lots of shouting they were not killed. They were all taken to Padu Jail before being transferred to Changi.

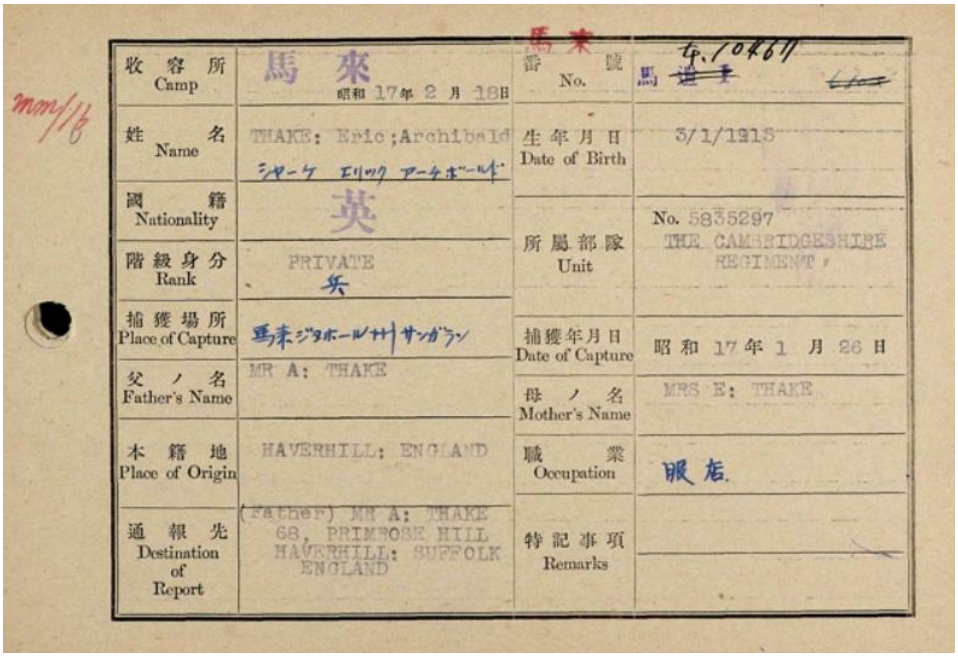
As far as Eric knew this was the first time that wounded soldiers had not been killed by their Japanese captors. Due to the severity of his wounds he remained in Changi which saved him the horror of the Railway. His experience at Chauntry Mills helped him too, for during his incarceration he carried out some tailoring work to Japanese uniforms.



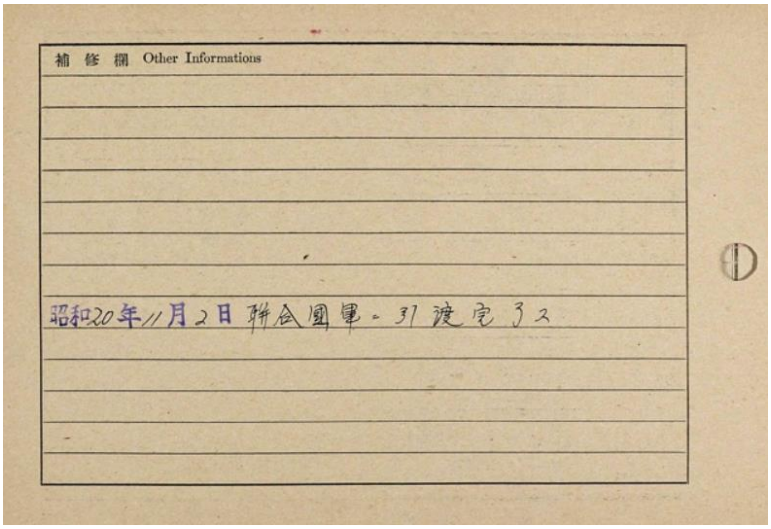
Whilst in Changi Jail, Eric also made a miniature Tropical Dress Uniform that made it back to England with him after his repatriation.

This can be seen in a cabinet at the IWM, Duxford.





収容所 Camp	馬來 昭和 17年 2 月 18日	番號 No.	馬 6.10461
姓名 Name	THAKE: Eric;Archibald シャーク エリック アーチボールド	生年月日 Date of Birth	3/1/1915
國籍 Nationality	英	所屬部隊 Unit	No. 5835297 THE CAMBRIDGESHIRE REGIMENT
階級身分 Rank	PRIVATE 兵		
捕獲場所 Place of Capture	馬來ジョホールバル サンガラン	捕獲年月日 Date of Capture	昭和 17年 1 月 26 日
父ノ名 Father's Name	MR A: THAKE	母ノ名 Mother's Name	MRS E: THAKE
本籍地 Place of Origin	HAVERHILL: ENGLAND	職業 Occupation	眼店.
通報先 Destination of Report	(Father) MR A: THAKE 68, PRIMROSE HILL HAVERHILL: SUFFOLK ENGLAND	特記事項 Remarks	



補修欄 Other Informations

昭和20年11月2日 聯合國軍ニ引渡完了ス

The South West Suffolk Echo of 27th October 1945 reported that Eric had arrived home.

Pte. Eric Thake, of the Cambs. Regiment, son of Mr. and Mrs. Archie Thake, 68, Primrose Hill, has been a prisoner in Malaya. During the battle of Malaya he sustained a bullet wound in the body, from which he declares himself fully recovered. Whether this may be looked upon as a blessing in diguise is a matter for conjecture but at least he was spared the horror of the Thailand railway labour.

On his return to Haverhill, Eric once again worked at D Gurteen and Son in Chauntry Mills.

On 27th May 1950, Eric married Joan Hart in the West End Congregational Church. Joan was a sewing machinist from Crowland Road.



Eric Archibald Thake died in 1985 aged 70 years.

After Eric's death his wife Joan moved in Shearman Court, a new development providing sheltered accommodation. This facility was named after a fellow Far East Prisoner of War, Percy Shearman, BEM.

2020: Eric's younger sister Rita who is aged 93 years also lives in Shearman Court.