Capt. Leslie Tuck

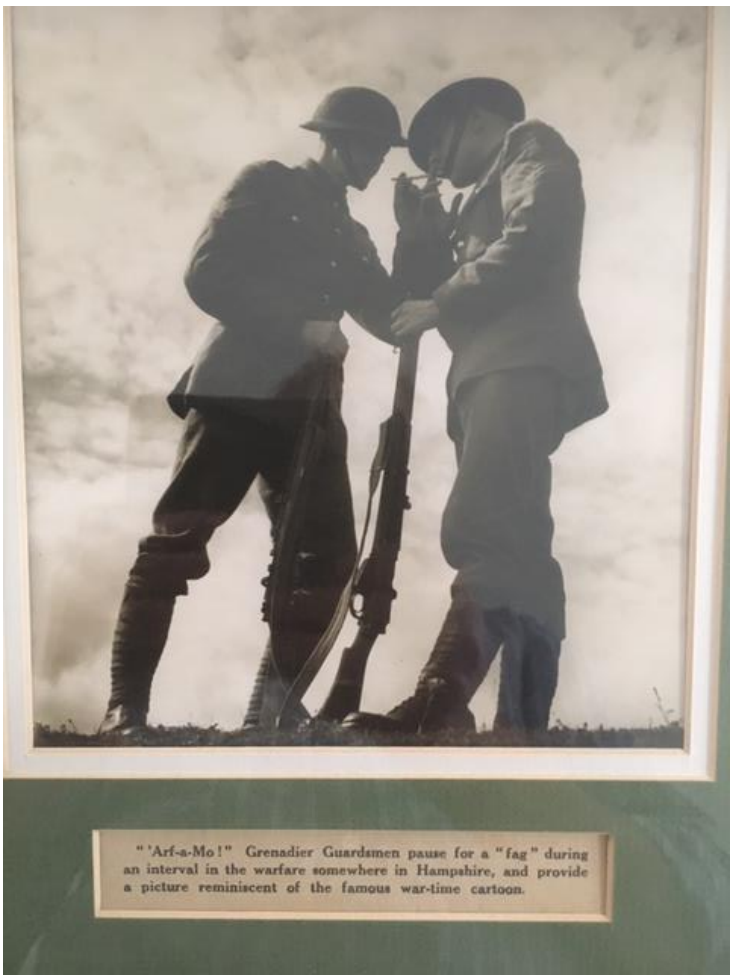
4th Battalion, Suffolk Regiment



This tribute has been written by Clive Tuck, son of Capt Leslie Tuck. **For his father and friends!**

My father followed his elder brother [Bill] into the Grenadier Guards in 1933 – as he was born on 24th Dec 1916 he must have lied about his age to join!

I have photos of my father in his Grenadier Guards uniform, also one at the Aldershot Tattoo 1934 and this one posing to replicate the famous "'Arf a Mo" first world war cartoon while on manoeuvres on Salisbury Plain in the 30's. Dad is on the right.


"'Arf-a-Mo!" Grenadier Guardsmen pause for a "fag" during an interval in the warfare somewhere in Hampshire, and provide a picture reminiscent of the famous war-time cartoon.

My sister Greta was born in 1935 when we believe Dad was stationed in Chelsea (it would account for him being an Arsenal fan later in life!).

Dad was a member of the BEF and fought in France in 1939/40 – he always told me that the Grenadiers were part of the rear guard and that by the time he reached Dunkirk everyone else had been evacuated. I'd like to think that he was being detained by a French lady who'd

fallen for his charms but I have no grounds for believing this to be true! When he arrived at a deserted Dunkirk they marched up the Belgium coast and were picked up by a destroyer outside La Panne – we went on a family holiday to Ostend in 1958 and Dad took us for a trip up the coast to show us where he was picked up (by the destroyer not the French lady).

Dad told me that when they got back to England someone pointed out he still had his rifle and that this would be difficult to clean because it had been contaminated by sea water. Dad apparently threw it out of the railway carriage window during the night when they were travelling up North so they gave him a new one.

I believe that my father transferred to the Suffolk Regiment sometime in 1940 and was then part of the East Anglian Division that left for the Far East via Nova Scotia and Cape Town. During this trip Dad met John Clarke (nickname "Blondie") from Bury St Edmunds, also in the Suffolks, and they became lifelong friends. Full name was Bertram John Clarke (born in Bury St Edmunds on 18th June 1920) – he died earlier this month aged 100 and his funeral is next week. *(July 2020)*

Dad was captured at Singapore and we know little of the 3 years he spent as POW as he never spoke of those times – when I became aware that my Uncle (Mum's brother Eric Nunn who lived in Horseheath, near Haverhill) was also a POW I asked if he ever saw Uncle Eric during their time in captivity.

Dad said that he saw Eric just once – they were working on the railway track and had to step back to let a train through and in one of the open trucks was my Uncle Eric – they waved and that was it. Uncle Eric also survived.

My mother had to borrow a car from a friend in Haverhill to pick my Dad up at Cambridge railway station when he was repatriated – according to legend the first words he spoke to her were "My God you've got false teeth" – a true romantic, my Dad!

Dad and Mum lived in Haverhill after the war and I was born in 1947 and named Clive John after his two closest POW friends, John Clarke and Clive Cruddas.

Dad found it very difficult to settle and keep a job after the War, (he was invalided out with a bad back), but fortunately his best friend, John Clark, worked for Greene King and was able to help them find a pub in 1949. This was The Six Bells at Walsham-Le-Willows - where my mother could "keep an eye on him" – my Mum's words not mine. I have a photo of them standing outside the pub and this must be circa 1950.

The 1950's were a very busy time for Mum & Dad, as they had no previous experience of running a pub.

My brother Roger was born there in 1951 and they moved to manage a hotel in Newmarket in 1954 and then bought a guesthouse in Cambridge in 1957 which they ran until 1972.

Dad always kept in touch in his POW friends (especially John Clarke) and they enjoyed long phone calls every week until my father died in July 1993.

Dad also attended most FEPOW dinners - I can remember many at the University Arms in Cambridge where I met Father Monty Bebb, who had been a POW with Dad and then ordained as a Roman Catholic priest after the war. We got special dispensation for Father Bebb to officiate at my wedding in Cambridge 1972.

It's testimony to the special bond that my father must have felt given that his closest friends were all FEPOWs – they have all sadly passed away now.

I have two great pictures of five of them as a group taken in our garden in Cambridge at my sister's wedding in 1959.

One photo is taken of them lighting each other cigarettes, reminiscent of the "'Arf-a-Mo" posed picture from the 1930's, but this time an off-guard moment of them together.

From Left to Right:

John Cook
Clive Cruddas
B J "Blondie" Clarke
Les Tuck
Nick Nicholson

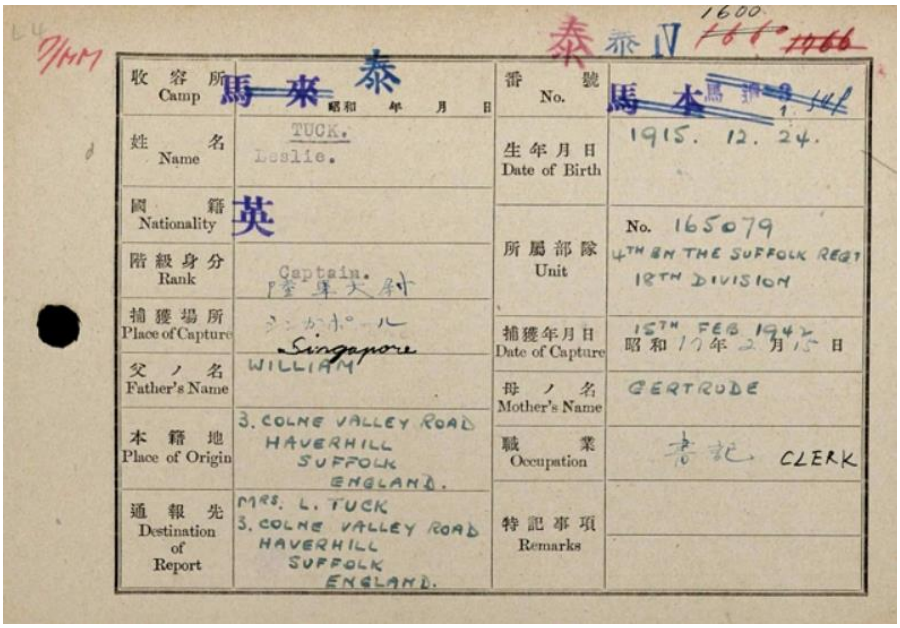


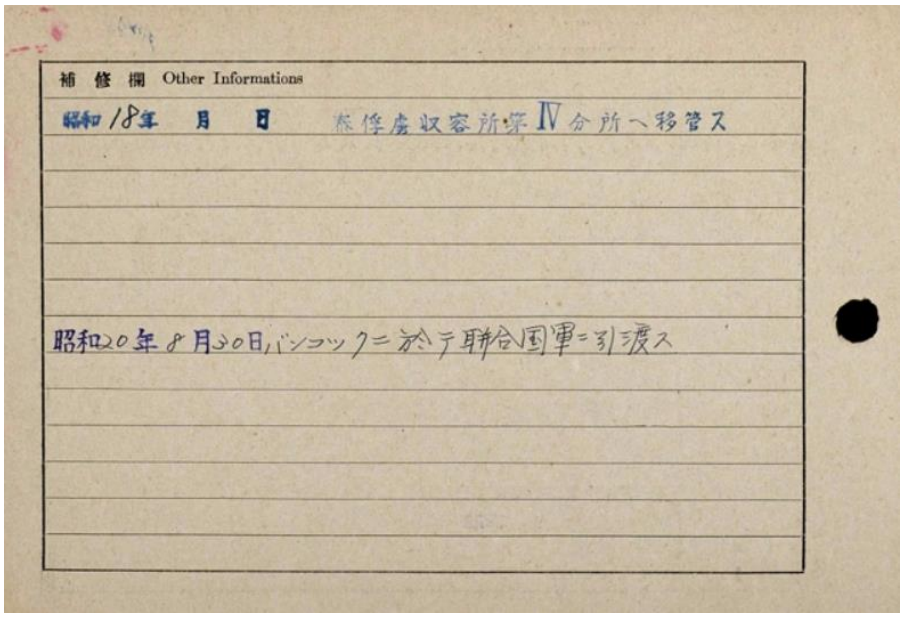


My father told me that he used to play bridge with John Cook during their time as prisoners of war. After we moved to Cambridge in 1957 they used to regularly meet and play bridge. When my parents sold up and moved to Cromer in 1972 I'm pleased to say I managed to get John Cook to partner me at bridge too.
Father never bore a grudge against the Japanese and always said they treated the Korean guards as badly as they did the prisoners.

I remember that he didn't think much to the film "Bridge of the River Kwai".

Captain Leslie Tuck's Japanese Index card provides information about his time as a POW. Captured after the Fall of Singapore on 15th February 1942 he was given the POW no. 1966. On 15th October 1942 he was transported overland in the 10th train from Singapore to Thailand and assigned a new POW no. 1600.





Haverhill Family History Group – Leslie Tuck (FEPOW)

Leslie Tuck was liberated from Thailand on 30th August 1945 and was one of the first two Haverhill men to arrive back home. His return was well documented in the local newspapers.

THE SOUTH-WEST SUFFOLK ECHO, SATURDAY, OCTOBER 13, 1945

Two Haverhill Men Home from the Far East

On Sunday afternoon the first contingent of repatriated prisoners from the Far East set foot upon English soil, after three-and-a-half years of hell in Japanese prison camps, when they stepped from the "Corfu" at Southhampton. Among them were Capt. W. V. Gurteen, of the Cambridgeshires son of Mr. and Mrs. F. W. Gurteen, of "Coupals," Haverhill, who lives at "Littlecount," Little Wratting, and Capt. Leslie Tuck, of the Suffolks, younger son of Mr. and Mrs. Wm. Tuck, of 3, Colne Valley Road, Haverhill. Some idea of the exciting homecoming can be glimpsed from the account which Lt.-Col. F. N. Drake Digby, a former commanding officer of the Cambridgeshires, gave in an interview, who, with Col. Clayton, went scurrying down the Solent in a borrowed U.S. motor cutter to be the first to welcome the men, a large proportion of whom served in the County Regiment. "I shall never forget the indescribable thrill of meeting the 'Corfu,'" he states, "with its deck crammed with soldiers who have endured so much for over three-and-a-half years. We circled the great liner and came close on its starboard side—so close that we could clearly distinguish faces. Were they pleased to see us? Ask them when they get home. High up on the tallest structure was Capt. Bill Gurteen, and standing side by side were two sergts. who had never been separated, even by illness. The 'Corfu" was well ahead of time—so much so that the Mayor only made it with seconds to spare. Our ambition to lead the ship into port was made by the speed of our cutter and the co-operation of the U.S. crew (who incidentally were nearly as excited as we were—and that is saying a lot). At the dock a great welcome awaited these men of the East Anglian 18th Division, who have suffered so much for their country."

The story was taken up by Capt. Tuck, who, in an interview, said "I feel completely dazed, and it seems impossible that I am home. But to be home is absolutely grand. Our reception all the way along was marvellous, in fact, overpowering in most places. It is just over a month that I was in a prison camp in the middle of Thailand, where at first conditions were indescribable, but which later improved somewhat. We were flown down from Bangkok to Rangoon, where we were placed in hospital and medically examined. Those who were fit enough were sent to a transit camp and on to the docks. I am one of the fortunate ones." Capt. Tuck went on to describe the unbelievable hardships suffered by the men, particularly in 1943, when they were forced to lay railway tracks through the jungle, working from daylight to dark in the most appalling conditions, and with very little food. "But the spirit of men was wonderful," he continued, "and my company of Suffolks, hung solidly together, and became known as the 'Swedes,' and remained cheerful even under the most extreme conditions." In Rangoon the men were fitted up with new kit and received parcels from the Red Cross authorities. In Colombo they had a wonderful time, "There were two Wrens to every prisoner" said Capt Tuck "who took charge of us and showed us the sights. The men could not adequately express the admiration they felt for the way they were received. It was the same at Port Suez, where we were fitted out with other clothing. The whole place was flooded with flags. I received six Red Cross parcels on the way home, and now possess six tooth brushes and four razors! Now I am home again, and it's wonderful!"

Capt. W. V. Gurteen, in an interview, had somewhat similar experiences to

recount. Following the fall of Singapore the food position was not too bad, but later it became appalling. It was in October, 1942, that the first and only "mercy" ship had arrived, with supplies of tinned meats, porridge, etc., which was just what the men needed, after having existed mainly on rice. In November the removal to Thailand commenced, and the men were herded, 35 in a truck, for their long and trying journey, to commence their ordeal on the building of the Thailand railway. Everything was done by manual labour, but at first the work was not too hard, and the food not too bad. Pay was received, and with it the men could buy eggs and other things from the natives. Later they were moved up country, where they were working until January of this year. Things were at their worst from May to September, 1943, when in addition to the beatings which were very plentiful, came the monsoons. The majority of the men could not even find shelter in which to sleep. Subsequently they were moved down to the base camp where they were engaged on maintenance work. In these camps enough could be bought to keep alive. The life was to rise at dawn and sleep at dusk; there were no amusements, practically no books, and very few clothes, but the weather down country was better than up country, and the men were very enterprising, they made pipes, chess men, washing buckets, etc., and even musical instruments. The "Nips" (Japs) could not break the men's spirits, though they tried extremely hard. "Even at the end of the worst days," continued Capt. Gurteen, "a chap would come into the hut and tell a particularly funny story, and the Nips could'nt understand why we were laughing. I never want to be with a finer set of fellows. We were allowed a concert once a week, and even with the scarity of clothing, the fellows managed to dress themselves up." Although it was known that to be in possession of a wireless set would mean the death penalty, two of the men did have a wireless set, and kept up a continuous news bulletin all the time, news being passed on over a very wide area. When the men were moved, the set was actually conveyed in the Japanese commander's car, having been hidden away in the vehicle. Following the capitulation the men were speedily got away, and they had the pleasure of flying right over the railway they had had to build. In Rangoon they had a marvellous time, having their first whisky, beer and cigarettes for nearly four years (having smoked grass through dried straws).

In Colombo, Major-Gen. Sparkes, G.O.C. Ceylon, who took over command of the Cambridgeshires in 1940, was there to meet them, and they had a royal time. The same reception was given them at Port Suez. The boat was a very comfortable one, and the food good. The captain went all out to see that the "Corfu" was the first home, and a wonderful reception was given the men at Southampton. "I was one of the lucky ones to get on this first boat," said Capt. Gurteen, "and now we're just waiting for the other lads to get home."

On the 27th October 1945, Pte Marsh returned home and in an interview he explained how Capt Tuck had helped him to overcome severe bouts of malaria.

Pte. Marsh has survived some severe attacks of malaria, and declares but for the help and attention given by their officer Captain Tuck, he would not have been alive to-day. The