Leonard Eric Barber

5th Battalion, Suffolk Regiment



Leonard Eric Barber was born in Haverhill on 14th April, 1914, the son of James William Barber and his wife Emily Sparke formerly Foster.

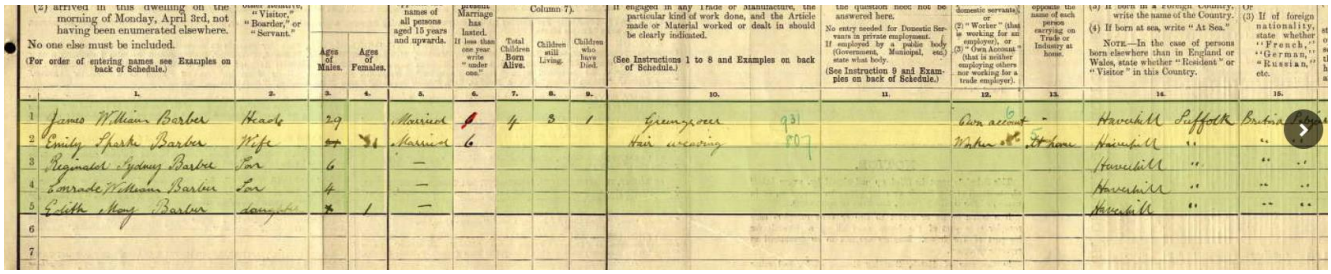
Parents Emily and James Barber were married in 1905. They were to have seven children, one of who did not survive infancy. Their only daughter was called Edith May (known as May). Len's brothers were Reginald, Conrad, Isaac who died as a baby, Frederick and Golden (known as Ron).





James and Emily Barber

In 1911, before Len was born, the family were living at 15 Clements Lane, Haverhill and father, James, was employed as a greengrocer.



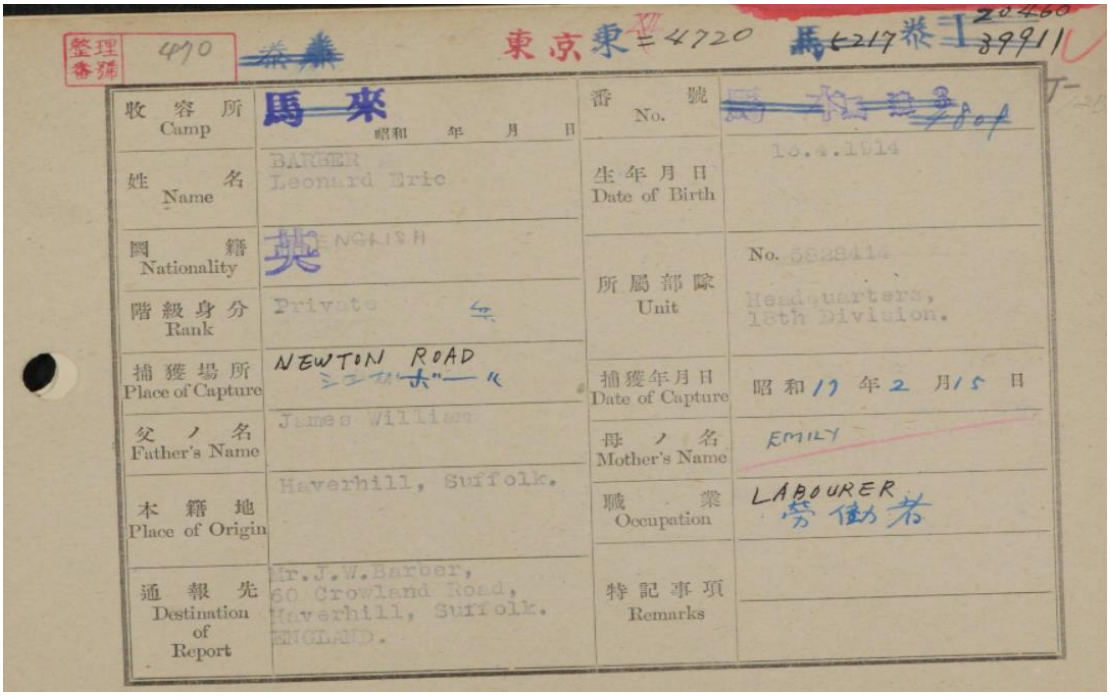
	1.	2.	3.	4.	5.	6.	7.	8.	9.	10.	11.	12.	13.	14.	15.
1	James William Barber	Head	29		Married	1	4	3	1	Greengrocer 931		Own account 6	-	Haverhill Suffolk	British
2	Emily Sparks Barber	Wife	[illegible]	31	Married	6				Hair weaving 807		Worker	At home	Haverhill "	"
3	Reginald Sydney Barber	Son	6		—									Haverhill "	"
4	Conrade William Barber	Son	4		—									Haverhill "	"
5	Edith Mary Barber	daughter	[illegible]	1	—									Haverhill "	"
6															
7															

Len's mother Emily died in 1939. By this time, his sister May was married to George A Stratton and they were living at 60 Crowland Road with their two children. It seems she took on a responsibility for her younger brothers. Indeed, in 1939, her brother Fred was living with her and her family and Len also lived with them after the war.

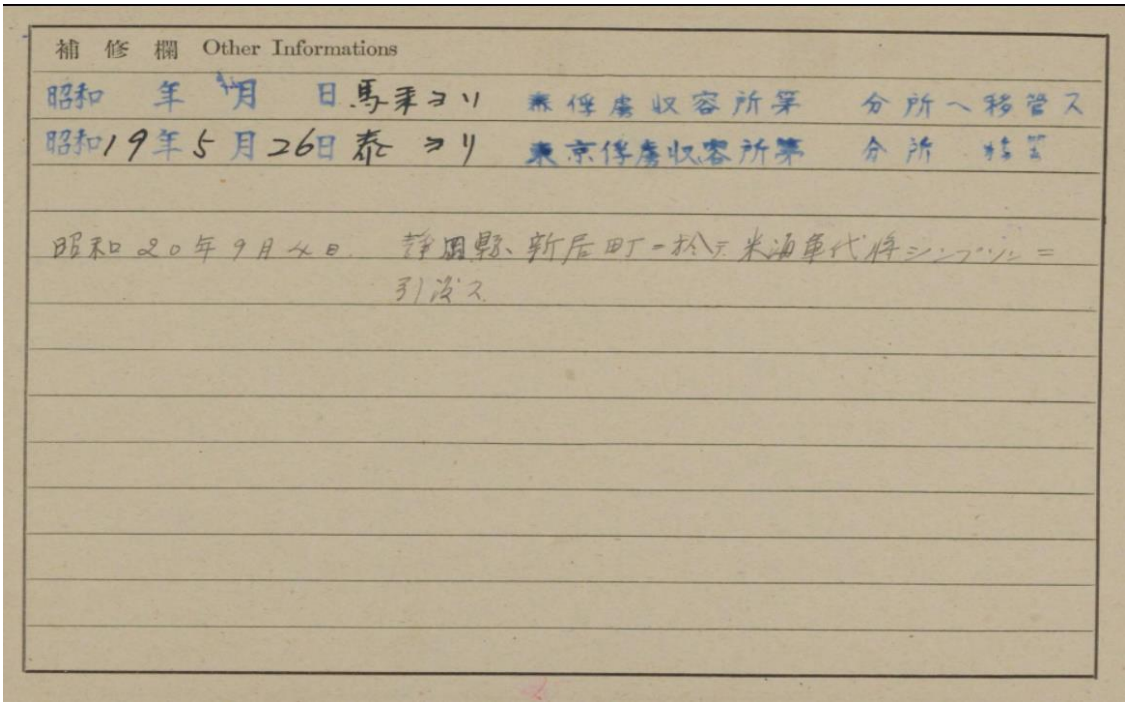
Before the war, Len worked as a market gardener. The regimental records for the 5th Suffolk Regiment tell us that Len served with them as Private 5828514. His religion was noted as Church of England.

The 5th Battalion, Suffolk Regiment, as part of the 18th East Anglian Division, was to find itself in the Far East following the attack on Pearl Harbour. When they arrived in Singapore on the 29th January 1942, Len was posted to the 18th Division HQ at Newton Road as batman.

After the fall of Singapore on 15th February 1942, about 620 'Suffolks' from the 4th and 5th Regiments became POWs. Many, like Len, were transported to work on the Burma-Thailand Railway.



整理番號	470	東京東 4720	馬 6217
收容所 Camp	馬來 昭和 年 月 日	番號 No.	
姓名 Name	BARBER Leonard Eric	生年月日 Date of Birth	16.4.1914
國籍 Nationality	英 ENGLISH	所屬部隊 Unit	No. 5828414 Headquarters, 18th Division.
階級身分 Rank	Private 兵		
捕獲場所 Place of Capture	NEWTON ROAD シンガポール	捕獲年月日 Date of Capture	昭和 17 年 2 月 15 日
父ノ名 Father's Name	James William	母ノ名 Mother's Name	EMILY
本籍地 Place of Origin	Haverhill, Suffolk.	職業 Occupation	LABOURER 労働者
通報先 Destination of Report	Mr. J. W. Barber, 60 Crowland Road, Haverhill, Suffolk. ENGLAND.	特記事項 Remarks	


補修欄 Other Informations
昭和 年 月 日馬来ヨリ 東條俘虜収容所第 分所ヘ移管ス
昭和19年5月26日泰 ヨリ 東京俘虜収容所第 分所 特筆
昭和20年9月4日 静岡縣、新居町ニ於テ米海軍代将シンプソン＝引渡ス

Len's Japanese POW card

In May 1943, Len, along with other POWs, was transported on a 'hell ship' to Japan to build a dam. He was incarcerated at the Hiraoka (Mitsushima) Branch Camp (Tokyo 12-B) in the Nagano Prefecture. This camp was established on November 18, 1942.

The POWs were used by Kumagai-gumi Construction Company and engaged in the construction of Hiraoka Electricity Generation and Dam. In total, there were 308 POWs (215 British and 93 American) who were imprisoned there at the end of the war. Fifty-nine POWs died while held captive. Following the war the US held War Crimes Trials. Severe sentences were given to the camp staff. Six Japanese guards were executed by hanging, and six were imprisoned.

Following the Japanese surrender, Australian Forces liberated him from Japan. On 15th September 1945, the South West Suffolk Echo reported that Len was well in Melbourne, Australia. Before returning to England he spent some time recuperating in Australia and New Zealand. On his return he found employment at Chauntry Mills.

Len decided to return to the southern hemisphere and on 30th November 1948 he made the journey to Wellington, New Zealand onboard the Atlantis under an emigration scheme. He gave his occupation as Labourer and his address as 60 Crowland Road – the home of his sister. On 4th January 1949 he travelled to Freemantle, Western Australia, this time giving his occupation as a woodworker. Later in 1949 he had returned to Miramar, Wellington where he was on the electoral roll at the Fort Dorset Hotel where he was employed as a labourer.



It's grand in Australia—

SO HE'S OFF AGAIN SOON

ALTHOUGH he has only been back in this country a few weeks after spending the last five years in New Zealand and Australia, a Haverhill man is already planning to return to the other end of the earth.

He is Mr. Len Barber who is now staying with his sister, Mrs. Stratton, at 60, Crowland Road, Haverhill.

In 1949 Mr. Barber, a single man, went to New Zealand under an emigration scheme for five years. He found there was plenty of work on the North Island where he settled, and states that conditions and opportunities for the working man were far better than in this country.

Five years later, on 23rd July 1954 Len returned to England, traveling from Melbourne, Australia to Southampton on the ship Fairsea. Once again he stayed with his sister, May Stratton in Crowland Road.

During the following months, Len made the decision to live permanently in Australia. On 11th July 1955 he sailed from Liverpool back to Melbourne, travelling first class on the Royal Star.

Bury Free Press 10th Sept 1954



IN AUSTRALIA

Before coming back to England, he spent a few months in Australia, visiting a fellow Haverhill native, Mr. [redacted] Turner, who lives in Sydney. In Australia Mr. [redacted] found working conditions equally as attractive as in New Zealand, and it is to Australia he plans to return in the near future.

He was a prisoner of war in the Far East during the 1939-45 war, and on returning home worked in the factory of D. Gurteen & Sons, Haverhill.

By 1968 Len had settled in Hillston, Riverina, New South Wales. He was employed as a groomsman at the Royal Mail Hotel, Goolgowi.

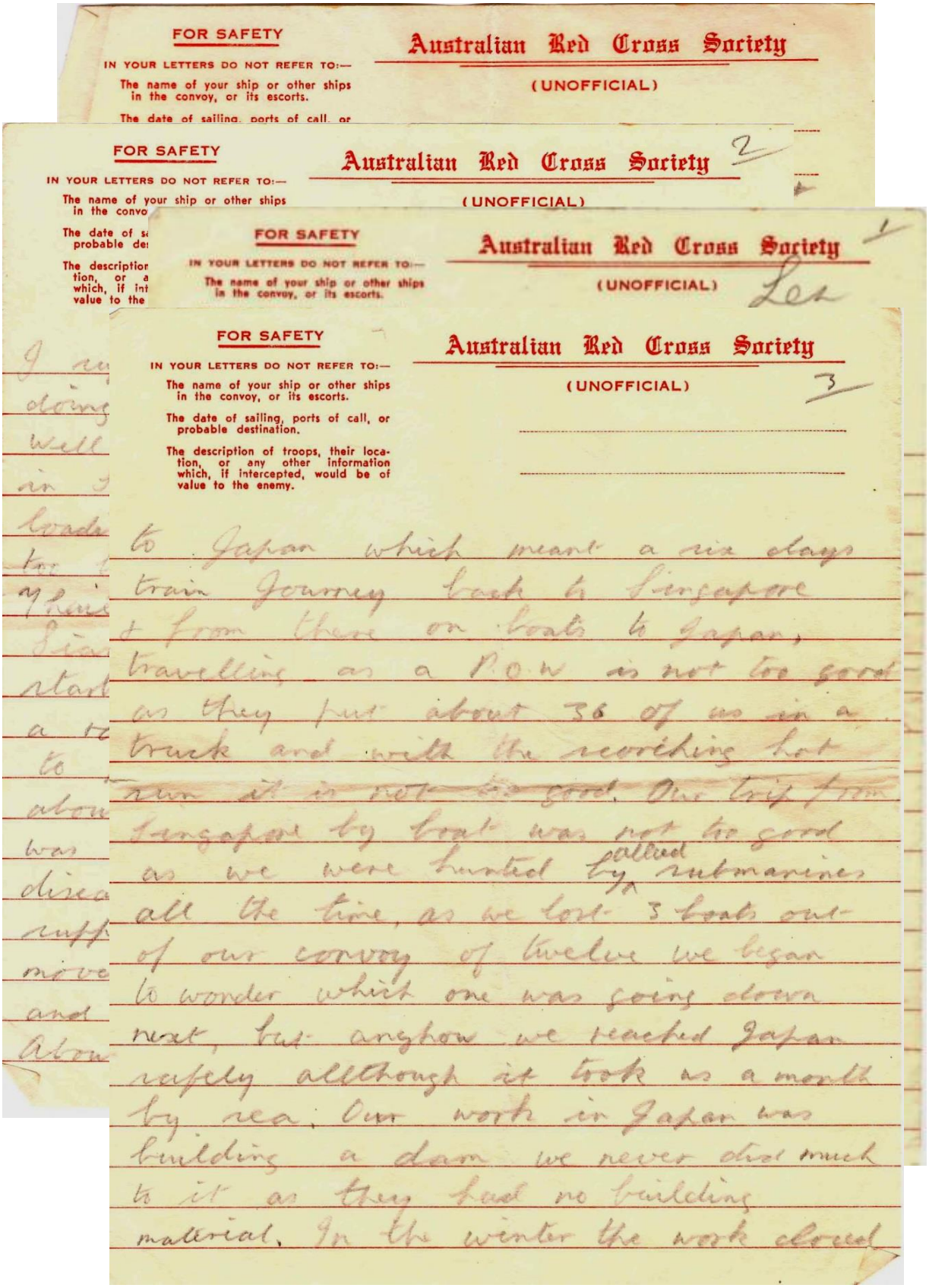


Len died in hospital at Goulburn, 120 miles south-west of Sydney, on 7th November 1977. It is rumoured that he left money to hospital staff to have a party. Here in Haverhill his siblings added a memorial plaque to their parents final resting place.



Len's nephew, Peter Stratton, has kindly allowed us to use a treasured photograph of his uncle and also to use extracts from a letter that Len wrote on 3rd October 1945 to his sister May (Peter's mother) after his liberation.

> *'I suppose you often wonder what I was doing during my 3½ years as a POW. Well the first six months I spent in Singapore working on the docks mostly loading and unloading boats, that wasn't too bad. Next we moved up into Thailand that is where the trouble really started as you know we had to build a railway. It took about a year to finish but sorry to say we lost about a third of the boys which was due to lack of food, hard work, disease, illness and lack of medical supplies. After it was completed we moved down country to base camp and stopped there till May '43. About a thousand of us then went to Japan which meant a six day journey back to Singapore and from there on boats to Japan, travelling as a POW is not good as they put about 36 of us in a truck and with the scorching hot sun it is not too good. Our trip from Singapore by boat was not too good as we were hunted by Allied submarines all the time as we lost three boats out of our convoy of twelve we began to wonder which one was going down next, but anyhow we reached Japan safely although it took a month by sea. Our work in Japan was building a dam. We never did much to it as they had no building material…..I cannot thank you for any mail received as I have not received any letters at all (thanks to the Japs) so I don't know how things are at home….'.*



FOR SAFETY

IN YOUR LETTERS DO NOT REFER TO:—

The name of your ship or other ships in the convoy, or its escorts.

The date of sailing, ports of call, or probable destination.

The description of troops, their location, or any other information which, if intercepted, would be of value to the enemy.

Australian Red Cross Society

(UNOFFICIAL)

3

to Japan which meant a six days train Journey back to Singapore & from there on boats to Japan, travelling as a P.O.W is not too good as they put about 36 of us in a truck and with the scorching hot sun it is not too good. Our trip from Singapore by boat was not too good as we were hunted by allied submarines all the time, as we lost 3 boats out of our convoy of twelve we began to wonder which one was going down next, but anyhow we reached Japan safely although it took us a month by sea. Our work in Japan was building a dam we never did much to it as they had no building material. In the winter the work closed

With grateful thanks to Peter Stratton for information, photographs and treasured letters.