WEBB, George Thomas,



Private, 5778554,
5th Batt., Royal Norfolk Regiment
Place of Birth: Haverhill
Date of Death: Monday 31st January 1944
Died of Illness in Captivity
Cemetery: Chungkai War Cemetery
Aged 24 years

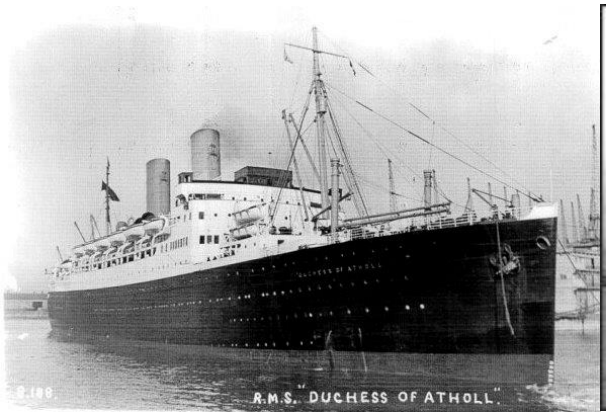
George Thomas Webb was born on 10th January 1920 at 74 Primrose Hill, Haverhill, the oldest son of George Cater Webb, a packer in a clothing factory who was born in 1886 and Teresa Webb nee Whybrow, born 1893. Both families were of long standing in the town going back to early 1800s.

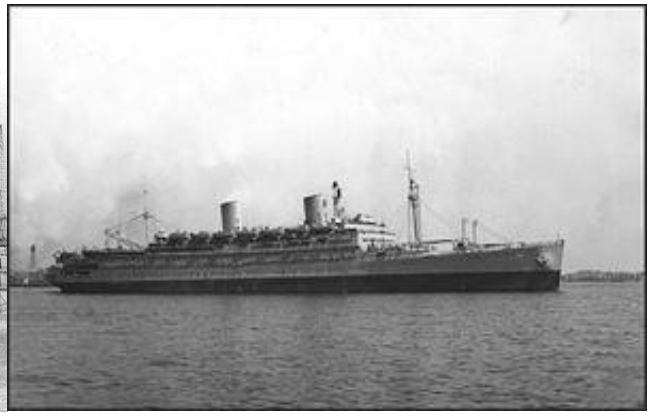
George attended the Cangle School and also the Methodist Church where he was a member of the choir and the church tennis club. He had several employments with various local firms, the last being with the Co-op in the grocery department.

He was enlisted in 1939, joining the Norfolk Regiment and completing his army training in England and Scotland and carrying out defensive duties on the Norfolk coast.

During September 1941 he was given embarkation leave prior to being sent overseas. His brother Roy, who was at the time 14 years old and still at school, recalls helping George to carry his kit to Haverhill Railway Station.

The 5th and 6th battalions, Royal Norfolk Regiment embarked on the Duchess of Atholl at Gourock on 9th October 1941 and sailed for Halifax, Nova Scotia, Canada, in convoy with other ships carrying the rest of the 18th Division. In Canada they left the Duchess of Atholl to join the USS Mount Vernon, formerly the luxury liner SS Washington, which took them via Trinidad to Cape Town where they arrived on 9th December.

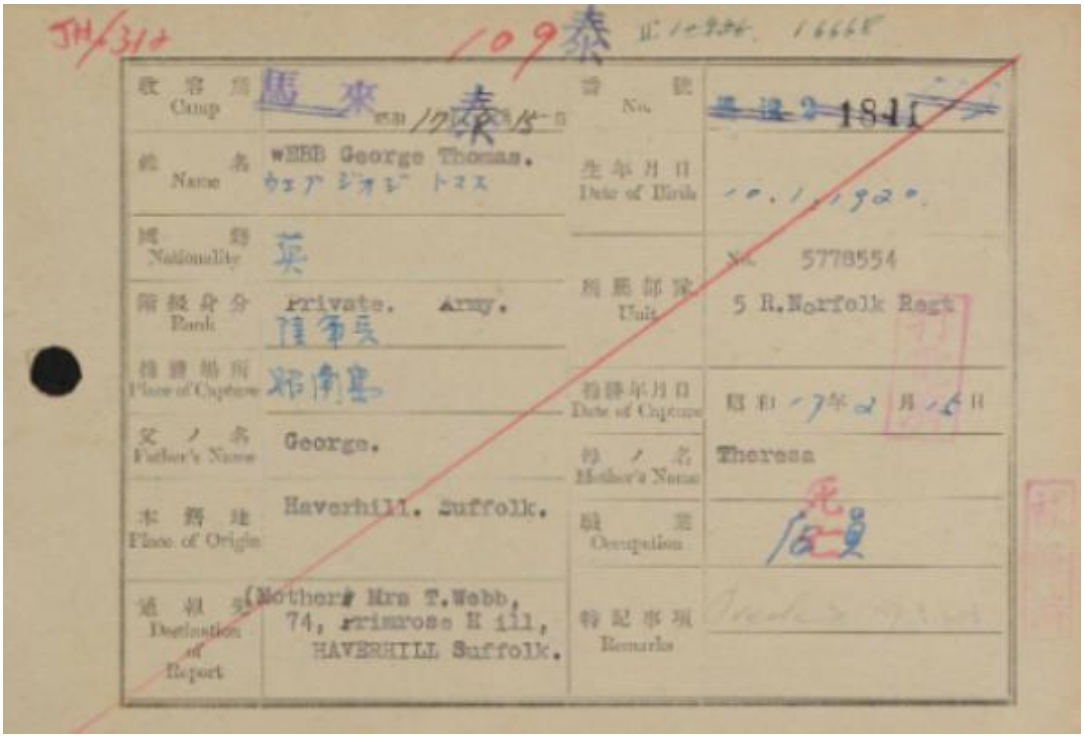




The convoy with the rest of the 18th Division sailed for Bombay on 13 December but the USS Mount Vernon proceeded to Mombasa, arriving on Christmas Day when shore leave was granted. On 28th December they set sail again for their final destination, Singapore where the 40 Officers and 917 Other Ranks comprising the 5th Battalion Royal Norfolk Regiment disembarked on 13th January 1942. On arrival, lectures in Japanese tactics were given to all ranks.

On 15th February 1942, with no naval or air support the Allied Forces surrendered to the Japanese Imperial Army and those captured spent the next three and a half years as POWs. At this time the strength of the 5th Battalion Norfolk Regiment was 30 Officers and approximately 600 Other Ranks. They had lost 10 Officers and approximately 300 Other Ranks during the intense fighting of the previous four weeks.

For many of the POWs the time was spent in Thailand constructing a railway which the Japanese hoped to use in their advancement to India. Conditions were extremely harsh, food was scarce, malnutrition was widespread and many died of disease.



The Haverhill Echo reported on 17 July 1943 that Mr and Mrs Webb, of 74 Primrose Hill, received a postcard from their son saying he was a Prisoner of War. This was the first news they had received from him since January 1942. On 1st January 1944, the Haverhill Echo reported that they had received further news from their son. The postcard was dated 21st February 1943 and stated that he was safe and well. They were to

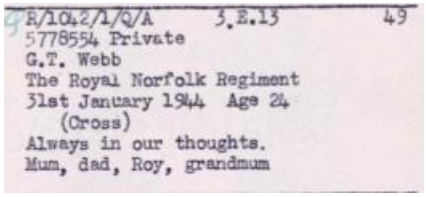
receive two further postcards by July 1944, both undated, saying that he was interned in Thailand.

In truth, George died from Beri Beri and Malaria on 31st January 1944, before the last postcards were received by his parents. He is buried in Chungkai War Cemetery.



Died While Prisoner of War.—The sad news of the death of Pte. George Webb, of the Norfolk Regiment, which was conveyed to his parents at 74, Primrose Hill, by a letter written by his friend Pte. Jack Darking, immediately on his release, has now been officially confirmed The official notification states that his death occurred on January 31st, 1944, at Thailand, as the result of beri-beri and malaria. Since his return, Pte. Darking reports that he was able to visit the grave of his friend, and gives the assurance that it was well-cared for and easy to identify.

As soon as George's friend, Jack Darking, was released he wrote to Mr and Mrs Webb to tell them that their son had died. They later received official notification. It must have been a comfort to hear from their son's friend on his return that George's grave was well cared for.



R/104/2/1/Q/A 3.E.13 49
5778554 Private
G.T. Webb
The Royal Norfolk Regiment
31st January 1944 Age 24
(Cross)
Always in our thoughts.
Mum, dad, Roy, grandmum



His family had the following inscription added to his grave marker.

ALWAYS IN OUR THOUGHTS.
MUM, DAD, ROY, GRANDMUM



On the 3rd November 1945 the South West Suffolk Echo reported that '*the residents of Primrose Hill, desiring to commemorate the passing of Pte George Webb in Thailand have collected a substantial sum and presented it to Mr and Mrs Webb, with which to buy a souvenir of remembrance of their son. Their touching act of kindness has been greatly appreciated.'*

A Gift of Remembrance.—The residents of Primrose Hill, desiring to commemorate the passing of Pte Geo. Webb in Thailand, have collected a substantial sum and presented it to Mr. and Mrs. Webb, with which to buy a souvenir in remembrance of their son. This touching act of kindness has been greatly appreciated by the recipients.