Capt William Vinter Gurteen, O.B.E.

1st Battalion, The Cambridgeshire Regiment



William Vinter Gurteen (known as Bill) was born into one of Haverhill's most prominent families on 20th September 1908, the eldest child of Frank William Gurteen and Mabel Winifred Gurteen formerly Vinter. In 1911 the family were living at Riverside House, Sturmer but were later to move to back to Frank's childhood home, The Coupals. No longer standing following a fire this was the family home of Frank's parents, Jabez (1843 – 1924) and Angelina Gurteen, a large house located in Coupals Road between what is now Haverhill Golf Course and the East Town Park.

Bill attended Caldicott Preparatory School from 1917-1922 which at this time was in Hitchin, moving on to Brighton College, the first public school to be founded in Sussex where he completed his secondary education and was a member of the Cadet Force.

On completing his education, Bill joined the family firm D Gurteen and Sons Ltd, a company which is still based at Chauntry Mills. He was, in time, to become Chairman before retiring aged 70 in 1978.

On 11th July 1935, Bill married Mary Adeline Ethel Cooper at Ashstead, St Giles, Surrey. She was the daughter of architect, George Alfred Cooper and his wife Ethel May Cooper. They made Littlecourt, Wratting Road, Haverhill their home and when a daughter, Sally, was born in 1938 followed by a son, Christopher, in 1940 their family was complete.



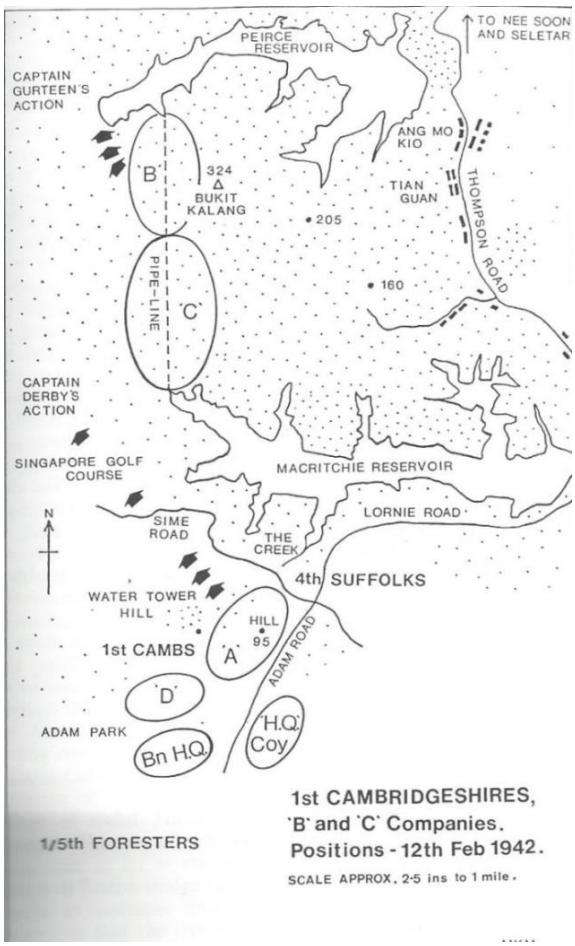
In March 1939, Bill enlisted, joining the 1st Battalion Cambridgeshire Regiment. The London Gazette of 2 June 1939 noted that William Vinter GURTEEN (late Cadet Lce.-Corpl., Brighton Coll. Contgt., Jun. Div., O.T.C.) was a 2nd Lieutenant. *Photo right: Whittington Barracks Lichfield in 1941*

In 1941, the 1st Cambridgeshire Regiment, as part of the 18th Division, was mobilised ready for overseas service bound for the Middle East in an attempt to stabilise the deteriorating

situation in North Africa. The Division consisted mainly of East Anglian Territorial battalions with very little experience or equipment. Troops were immediately prepared by taking part in training exercises in Scotland, England and Wales. This training focused on the theory of desert warfare which made an interesting change to their previous duties of coastal defence.

In October 1941 the 18th Division moved to the ports of Liverpool and Gourock. The 1st Battalion Cambridgeshire Regiment were among the first to arrive and boarded the Orcades.

The convoy arrived in Halifax, Nova Scotia, on 8th November and the 1st Battalion disembarked the Orcades to join the USS West Point (formerly the luxury liner America). On 10th November the new convoy put to sea heading south towards the Carribbean. After a two day lay over for refuelling and provisioning, they set course for South Africa arriving on 8th December. While in South Africa the troops were able to enjoy some shore leave. It was while they were here that the Japanese attacked Pearl Harbour and so instead of the Middle East being their final destination the men of the 18th Division found themselves diverted to the humidity of Malaya and Singapore via India. The USS West Point arrived in Singapore on 29th January 1942. On 30th January the 1st Cambridgeshires began their move to battle positions south of Selatar Airfield.



On 12th February the battalion began to move to new positions around Adam Park, a small housing estate lying off Adam Road. B Company took up positions from the Pierce Reservoir to approximately half way along the pipeline. A reconnaissance group spotted a large party of Japanese to the west of the reservoir. Capt. Gurteen decided to see if it would be possible to carry out a surprise attack on the enemy. When he reached the area he was astonished to see between four and five hundred Japanese troops by the water's edge. He immediately ordered up 10 Platoon and requested additional bren guns and 2-inch mortars. Shortly after daybreak the attack began with mortars. The Platoon opened fire when only 400 yards from the enemy. The action lasted ten minutes and scores of Japanese were killed.

Note Captain Gurteen's action near the Peirce Reservoir top left of map.

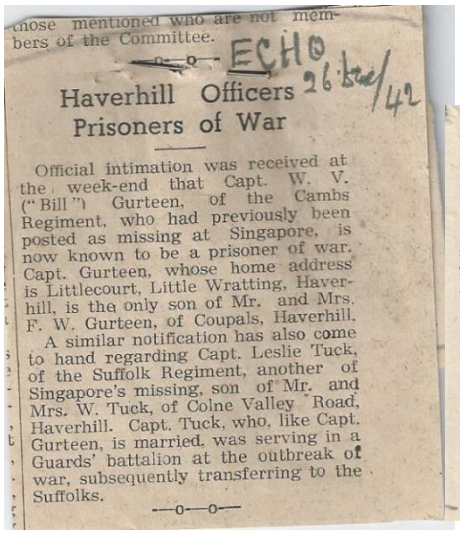
At dawn on 13th February, Capt. Gurteen reported that B and C Companies were returning to Adam Road to rejoin the Battalion. On their way back they were attacked by low flying aircraft and suffered a number of losses. As they neared Hellfire Corner (the junction of Adam Road and Lornie Road) they discovered that the Japanese had infiltrated almost up to the crossroads and B company was forced to use the bayonet before the enemy was cleared from the area.

Adam Park was coming under increasing sniper fire. The Japanese used snipers extensively and sniper's camouflage was very effective and they were almost impossible to detect. They established themselves in trees that overlooked the defences. There was also mortar fire, high explosive and incendiary bombs and finally tanks to contend with.

In the early hours of 15th Feb 1942, after just 17 days of action, Capt. Gurteen was wounded, shot through the neck. Fellow officer Lt Bigmore, also from Haverhill and attached to A Coy, was killed by a sniper with a shot to the head.

The Battle of Adam Park continued until 1600 hours, when instructions to cease fire were received. Then, the commanding officer and his adjutant "walked out onto Adam Road to meet the enemy". The British had surrendered Singapore to the Japanese.

Capt. Gurteen along with other Allied troops in Singapore found himself a Prisoner of War. The Cambridgeshires were held in the tennis court for four nights before making the 15 mile march to Changi. They had only the clothes they stood up in. What followed were three and a half torturous years as POWs at the hands of the Japanese. Being wounded, Capt. Gurteen was spared the march as he was taken to Roberts Hospital, Changi on 17th February. He remained a patient until his discharge on 3rd March. He was hospitalised again on 26th October 1942 and discharged on the 2nd November. While in Singapore he was assigned the POW number 9699 but on 6th November, four days after his discharge from hospital, he was transported overland with the 'L' Letter Party in the 29th train from Singapore to Thailand. Here he became POW III 652.



those mentioned who are not members of the Committee.

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ECHO 26 Dec/42

Haverhill Officers Prisoners of War

Official intimation was received at the week-end that Capt. W. V. ("Bill") Gurteen, of the Cambs Regiment, who had previously been posted as missing at Singapore, is now known to be a prisoner of war. Capt. Gurteen, whose home address is Littlecourt, Little Wratting, Haverhill, is the only son of Mr. and Mrs. F. W. Gurteen, of Coupals, Haverhill.

A similar notification has also come to hand regarding Capt. Leslie Tuck, of the Suffolk Regiment, another of Singapore's missing, son of Mr. and Mrs. W. Tuck, of Colne Valley Road, Haverhill. Capt. Tuck, who, like Capt. Gurteen, is married, was serving in a Guards' battalion at the outbreak of war, subsequently transferring to the Suffolks.

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GRAND news about Capt. W. V. Gurteen, of the Cambridgeshire Regiment, son of Mr. F. W. Gurteen, and a director of the famous Haverhill firm. He was reported missing at Singapore, and is now stated to

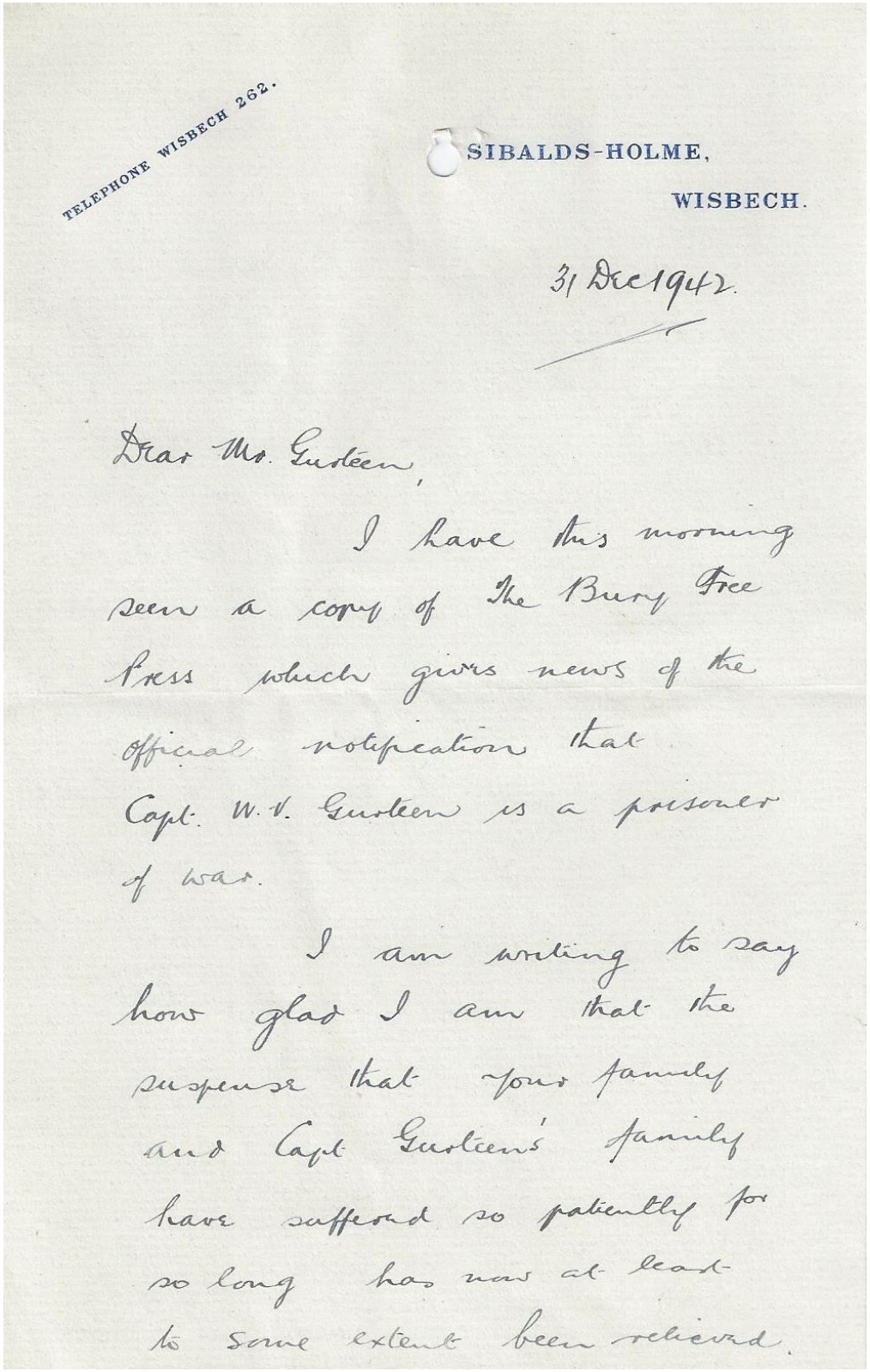
The Editor and Staff of "The Outfitter" extend to readers and advertisers, good wishes for Christmas and the coming year

be a prisoner-of-war. Hope we'll be seeing him soon!

News about those men captured after the Fall of Singapore was heartbreakingly slow to get back to families. Most had been informed that their loved ones were missing in action and had to endure months, and in some cases years, of anxiety not knowing if they had been killed.

Capt. Gurteen's family were not to receive confirmation that he was still alive until just before Christmas 1942, some 10 months after capture. This was much sooner than many families heard about their loved ones.

The Gurteen family received many letters from family, friends and business acquaintances expressing their happiness at hearing the news that he was alive.



TELEPHONE WISBECH 262.

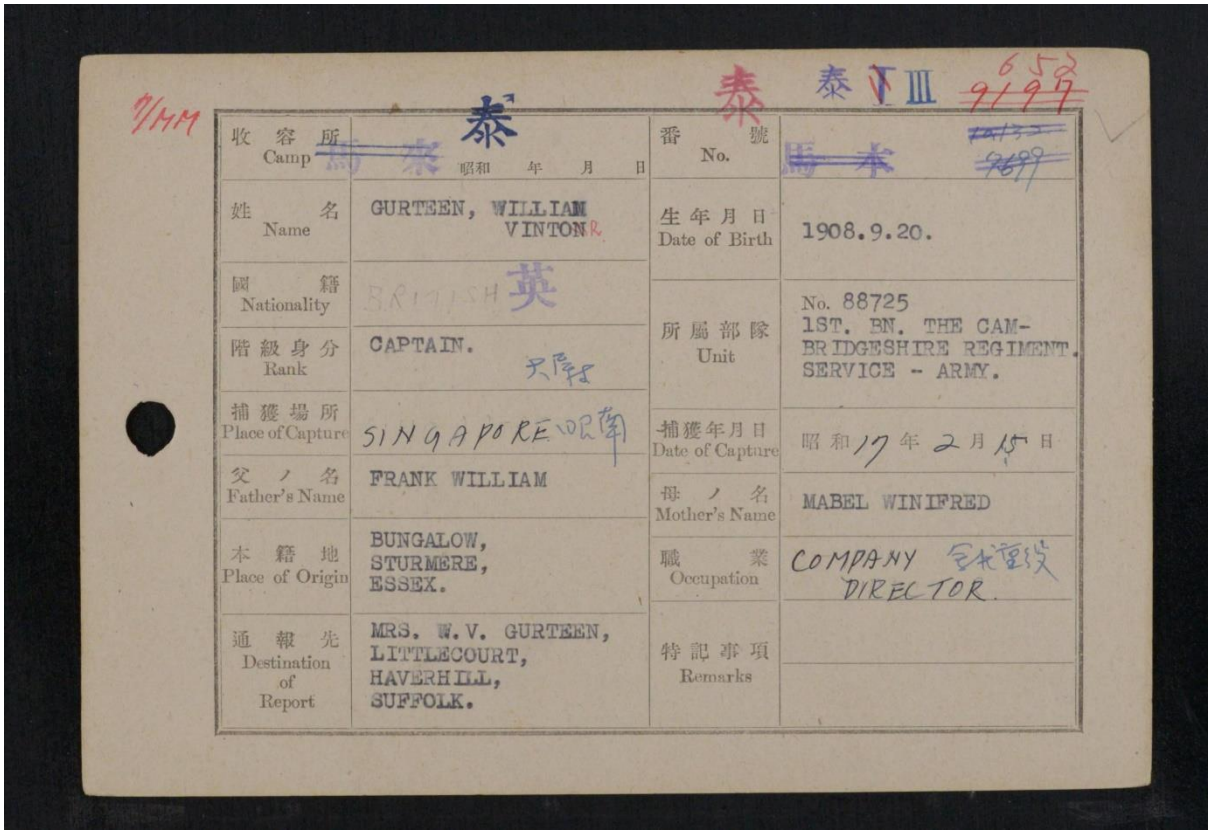
SIBALDS-HOLME,
WISBECH.

31 Dec 1942.

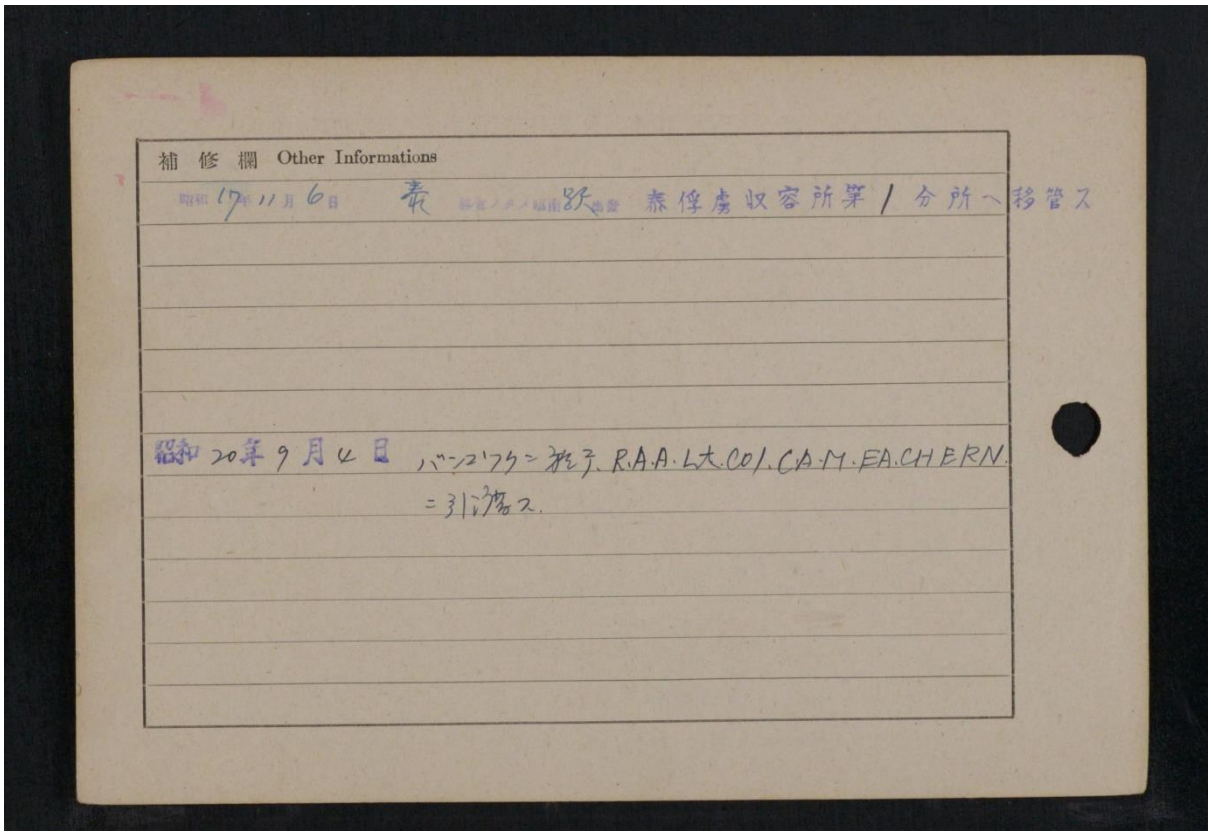
Dear Mrs. Gurteen,

I have this morning seen a copy of The Bury Free Press which gives news of the offical notification that Capt. W.V. Gurteen is a prisoner of war.

I am writing to say how glad I am that the suspense that your family and Capt Gurteen's family have suffered so patiently for so long has now at least to some extent been relieved.



收容所 Camp	泰 昭和 年 月 日	番號 No.	泰 III 6552 9199 ~~馬來~~ ~~9699~~
姓名 Name	GURTEEN, WILLIAM VINTON R.	生年月日 Date of Birth	1908.9.20.
國籍 Nationality	~~BRITISH~~ 英	所屬部隊 Unit	No. 88725 1ST. BN. THE CAM-BRIDGESHIRE REGIMENT. SERVICE - ARMY.
階級身分 Rank	CAPTAIN. 大尉		
捕獲場所 Place of Capture	SINGAPORE 昭南	捕獲年月日 Date of Capture	昭和17年2月15日
父ノ名 Father's Name	FRANK WILLIAM	母ノ名 Mother's Name	MABEL WINIFRED
本籍地 Place of Origin	BUNGALOW, STURMERE, ESSEX.	職業 Occupation	COMPANY 会社重役 DIRECTOR.
通報先 Destination of Report	MRS. W.V. GURTEEN, LITTLECOURT, HAVERHILL, SUFFOLK.	特記事項 Remarks	



補修欄 Other Informations

昭和17年11月6日 泰 移管ノタメ昭南発 泰俘虜収容所第1分所ヘ移管ス

昭和20年9月4日 バンコクニ於テ R.A.A. 大佐 COL. C.A.M. EACHERN ニ引渡ス.

Newspaper article about the homecoming printed during the week following Sunday, 7 October 1945

NOTES AND COMMENTS

Uppermost in the minds of many of our readers this week will be a sense of thanksgiving that so many of the "forgotten men" of the Far East are now safely on their way home. The S.S. "Corfu," which berthed at Southhampton on Sunday, was the first of a long procession of ships returning these soldiers to their native land. Among the passengers were Capt. W. V. Gurteen and Capt. L. Tuck, some of whose experiences we are able to record in another column. Much of what they told us was "not for publication," but sufficient appears in print to show the almost unbelievable sufferings through which they have passed. It seems incredible that, in the twentieth century, such actions as these men have recounted could be perpetrated by human beings. There is little wonder that they find it hard to believe that they are home again.

Other passengers on this ship included Capt. R. R.. Fewell, who, prior to the war, was employed by the Prudential Assurance Co., and who lived at 25, Withersfield Road, and Cpl. N. Harrison, of Steeple Bumpstead. Others who are due to arrive shortly include :—Pte. A. J. Harding, Steeple Bumpstead, on the S.S. "Tegelburg," due at Liverpool to-day (Friday) ; Pte. E. W. Brett and Pte. L. Buckle, both of Great Wratting, on the "Empire Pride," due at the same port on the following day · Pte. C. Medcalfe, of Haverhill, on the "New Holland," due on October 15th ; L/Cpl. G. M. Orbell, of Clare, Pte. B. T. Frost, of Great Bradley, Pte. H. Mayes, Great Wratting, Pte. R. Metcalf, of Withersfield, on the M.S. "Boiissevain" due on October 16th ; Pte. J. Darking, of Haverhill, and Dvr. L. V. Tarling, of Steeple Bumpstead, on the S.S. "Worcestershire," which is also due at Liverpool on the 16th ; Pte. F. Baker and Pte. F. Marsh, both of Haverhill, Pte. F. J. Smith, of Steeple Bumpstead, and Pte. L. G. Cuthbert, of Stoke-by-Clare, on M.S. "Indrapoera," and Cpl. A. Pannell, of Haverhill, Pte. H. Bruty, of Clare, L/Cpl. W. Crisswell, of Withersfield, and Pte. P. Cresswell, of Steeple Bumpstead, on the "Ordmonde."

It was still months until Capt Gurteen was to be repatriated following the Japanese Unconditional Surrender.

He was on the first shipload of Far East POWs to arrive home. The P & O Liner 'Corfu' docked in Southampton on 7 October 1945. With him were several other Haverhill men.

Newspaper article printed 7 October 1945

Generals gree back from

BIGGEST WELCOME

From Daily Mail Reporter

SOUTHAMPTON, Sunday.

THE 14,170-ton former P. and O. liner Corfu tied up at berth 105 here at 1.30 p.m. today. She had on board the most welcome party she has ever carried—1,554 men who have been in Japanese prison camps for three and a half years.

They were the first ex-prisoners from the Far East to land in this country. Among them were men from 35 British regiments.

And in the reception camp on Southampton Common tonight scores of mothers, wives, and sweethearts met their menfolk for the first time after their long separation.

The first man to step ashore from the Corfu was the only R.A.F. man in the party—Corporal Percy Toms, aged 27, of Ewell, Surrey. He jumped on the ground to make sure that it was real.

He had the biggest welcome an R.A.F. man ever had. There were five Generals, a Group Captain, and an Admiral waiting to shake hands.

King's message

There were also Lord Nathan, Under-Secretary of War, General Sir Ronald Adam, Adjutant-General to the Forces, the deputy-Mayor of Southampton, and other civic leaders to welcome them.

And each man was handed a copy of the King's letter of welcome, a bar of chocolate, and 20 cigarettes as he stepped off the gangway.

In the vast Customs shed tables and chairs were laid out and members of the W.V.S. served tea, bread and butter, tomatoes, and cake.

Baskets of pears, apples, and oranges were everywhere.

It seemed to take hours for the men to come ashore. They were pale and thin, but cheerful.

One man carried a banjo he had made, and another had the head of a doll peeping out of his overcoat pocket.

Tied to the kitbag of a third was a blue scooter. Many had somehow managed to get presents for their children.

A Colonel behind me shouted greetings to Captain Tony Burton from Henley, and Captain "Bill" Gurteen, 1st Cambridgeshires.



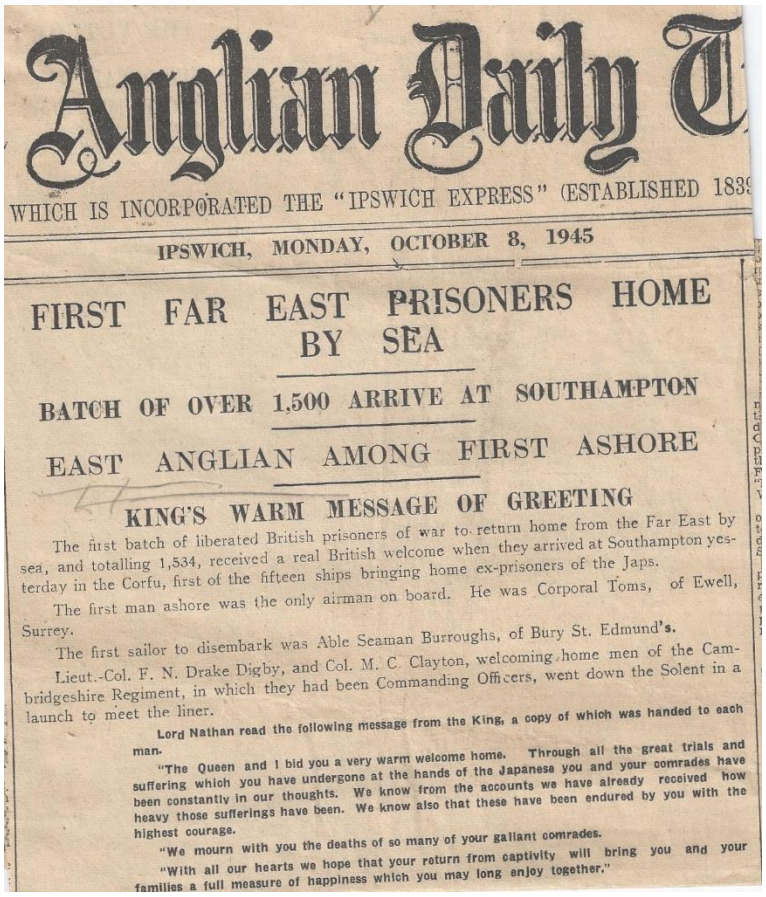
THE TIMES

HOME FROM THE FAR EAST

The scene at Southampton yesterday as the first prisoners of war from the Far East to reach England by sea disembarked from the P. & O. liner Corfu. There were 1,134 on board. After the ship berthed, General Sir Ronald Adam, Adjutant-General, went on board, and read them a message of welcome from the King and Queen, a signed copy of which was given to each of them.

Photograph showing the POWs disembarking from the P & O liner Corfu in Southampton.

The message from the King.



Anglian Daily T

WHICH IS INCORPORATED THE "IPSWICH EXPRESS" (ESTABLISHED 183

IPSWICH, MONDAY, OCTOBER 8, 1945

FIRST FAR EAST PRISONERS HOME BY SEA

BATCH OF OVER 1,500 ARRIVE AT SOUTHAMPTON

EAST ANGLIAN AMONG FIRST ASHORE

KING'S WARM MESSAGE OF GREETING

The first batch of liberated British prisoners of war to return home from the Far East by sea, and totalling 1,534, received a real British welcome when they arrived at Southampton yesterday in the Corfu, first of the fifteen ships bringing home ex-prisoners of the Japs.

The first man ashore was the only airman on board. He was Corporal Toms, of Ewell, Surrey.

The first sailor to disembark was Able Seaman Burroughs, of Bury St. Edmund's.

Lieut.-Col. F. N. Drake Digby, and Col. M. C. Clayton, welcoming home men of the Cambridgeshire Regiment, in which they had been Commanding Officers, went down the Solent in a launch to meet the liner.

Lord Nathan read the following message from the King, a copy of which was handed to each man.

"The Queen and I bid you a very warm welcome home. Through all the great trials and suffering which you have undergone at the hands of the Japanese you and your comrades have been constantly in our thoughts. We know from the accounts we have already received how heavy those sufferings have been. We know also that these have been endured by you with the highest courage.

"We mourn with you the deaths of so many of your gallant comrades.

"With all our hearts we hope that your return from captivity will bring you and your families a full measure of happiness which you may long enjoy together."

The liberation questionnaire (see copy at end) that Capt. Gurteen completed following repatriation lists the camps he was held in.

Changi	Feb 42
Wang Lung? (written Wun Ren)	Nov 42
Tamuan? (written Tharmlin)	Jan 43
Nong Pluduc (written Non Plaqut)	Mar 43
Kanburi	Apr 43
Kinsayok (written Kynzyaok)	May 43
Kanburi Hospital	Aug 43
Kanburi main	Sept 43
Tamuan (written Tamua)	Feb 44
Kanburi	May 44



The Cambridgeshire Regiment march through Ely for the service of Thanksgiving and Remembrance.

Capt W V Gurteen is front left.

On his return to civilian life, Bill returned to work at D Gurteen & Sons Ltd becoming the Company Chairman. He was also the Chairman of the Clothing Manufacturers' Federation of Great Britain in 1952/3 and the Chairman of the International Men and Boys Wear Exhibitions (Olympia), a position he held for 8 years.

Locally he was a respected magistrate and until 1974 a leading figure on the Haverhill Urban District Council.

On 1st January 1971, the London Gazette reported that William Vinter GURTEEN, T.D., Chairman, D. Gurteen and Sons Ltd. had been awarded the OBE. This was in recognition of his services to export and the clothing industry and his involvement in local affairs.



Photo: Mr W V Gurteen outside Buckingham Palace after receiving his OBE from Her Majesty the Queen.

William Vinter Gurteen, OBE, died on 23 July 1988 aged 79, just missing his 80th birthday.

CONFIDENTIAL

BLOCK
Nº 3
B.A.

M.I. 9/JAP/ Nº 13661 A

WRITE IN BLOCK CAPITAL LETTERS IN PENCIL

No. [illegible] Rank CAPTAIN Surname GURTEEN

Christian Names WILLIAM VINTER Decorations

Ship (R.N., U.S.N. or Merchant Navy

Unit & Div. (Army) 2/18 GUN CAM. REGT. ROYAL ARTILLERY 18 DIVISION

Squadron and Command (R.A.F., A.A.F.)

Date of Birth SEPT 20 1908 Date of Enlistment MARCH 1939.

Private Address and Telephone No. LITTLE COURT. HAVERHILL. SUFFOLK. HAVERHILL 51.

Place and Date of Original Capture (Aircrew R.A.F. to give place and date of a/c crash). SINGAPORE FEBRUARY 15. 42.

1. What camps, detachments or hospitals were you in ? Give dates and names of the British Camp Leaders, Detachment (or Block) Leaders or, in the case of hospitals, the Senior British Medical Officers.

Camp or Hospital.	Dates.	Camp Leader.	Detachment or Block Leader (if any).
CHANGI	1942	LT COL HARRIS	
NON KON THAILAND	NOVEMBER 42	LT COL JOHNSTON.	
THANBYUZAYAT	JANUARY 43	"	LT. COL PLANNER
NON PLADUCK	MARCH 43	"	
KANCHANBURI	APRIL 43	MAJOR CULL.	
RYNDYAMA	MAY 43	CAPT. KENNICK	
KANCHANBURI HOSPITAL	AUGUST 43	MAJOR LAWRENCE	
" MAIN	SEPT 43	MAJOR REES RMO	
TAMUAN	FEB. 44	CAPT PENNICK.	
KANCHANBURI	MAY 44	COL DETMER.	MAJOR HARUE
NAKOMNAYOK	JUNE 45	COL TORLEY	

2. ESCAPES OR ATTEMPTED ESCAPES. (Additional paper will be supplied on request if required).

(a) Give full description and approx. date of each attempt you made to escape, showing how you left the camp, and from which camp each attempt was made. State whether there was an air-raid in progress at the time or not. If an escape was made from a train or vehicle the approx. speed and how it was guarded should be included.

NONE

(b) Were you physically fit when you made these attempts ?

(c) Give Regimental particulars of anyone who accompanied you on each attempt.

What happened to them ?

(d) Give briefly your experiences during periods of freedom.

(e) How were you recaptured and on what date ?

P.T.O.