

In memory of Jim Chapman (1919-1943)



1928 – Jim, Rosie, Teddy and Dolly Chapman

This block contains three separate vintage photographs. The first is a full-length black and white photo of a man in a military uniform standing in front of a wooden building. The second is a black and white portrait of a woman with short, wavy hair, wearing a dark, high-collared dress. The third is a black and white portrait of a woman with dark hair styled in an updo, wearing a light-colored dress with a dark floral pattern.

Irene Walsh

(22925)

MEMORANDUM

London County Council

Name and Postal Address of School
WILLIAM PEARSON SCHOOL, WINDHOLM
BRIGHTON ROAD, E.S.

22-12-1933

James Chapman after two years attendance at this school, is leaving having reached the age of 14 and just entered Standard 7. His Handwork is good. He can follow instructions and works steadily, not waiting to be told every little thing. He has been regular and punctual in attendance, is honest and truthful, cheerful and polite. He can be thoroughly recommended and I shall be pleased to hear of his success or to answer any enquiries concerning him.

C.A. Willison
Head Master

Like many men of his age, James joined the Army. He joined the 4th Battalion of the Royal Norfolk Regiment.

In July 1940, following the evacuation of the British Expeditionary Force in Dunkirk in June 1940 the Regiment had its first intake of conscripted men. It is likely that this is when Jim joined the Regiment.

For the first three years of the war his battalion, a Territorial battalion, was based at home, undertaking home defence roles. Following his training he would have been involved in things like wiring the beaches of Norfolk, laying minefields, digging anti tank ditches and manning pill boxes, measures primarily aimed to protect Great Yarmouth and its surrounding adjacent coast line.

no. 5573494
6 Officers Mess
4th Royal Norfolk Regt.
Hawick
Scotland.
Wed. 29th Jan.
Dear Dolly.
just a short letter to let you
know I arrived back safe at
the camp about half past ten
this morning ~~but~~ but I can't
say that I'm glad to be back
I had a very nice leave in
and was very glad to see you
all again. It don't seem so cold
here now but its still not warm
but the snow has gone from
the hills. Hope you Florrie and Mary
arrived home safe after you
saw me off. That's very much for
comming in. I hope Florrie was not
too upset when I left. Say Dolly
When you send my pipe and bag
will you please send my little

Jim and his
Battalion moved
from the Yarmouth
area to Cambridge
in November, 1940.
The Battalion had a
strength of about
1,000 men.

In December 1940
the Battalion
received the order
to mobilise, which
meant that they
had to step up their
training. In order to
do that in January
1941 they moved
from Cambridge to
Hawick in Scotland.
The weather in
January 1941 was
quite harsh with a
lot of the roads
covered in deep
snow or ice. They
were based at Stobs
Camp, which
previously had been
used in WW1 as a
Prisoner of War
camp.

This first letter was sent to his sister Dolly (Chapman / Sinclair) in the January of 1941. The address states 'Officers Mess', that is because his role in the Army was that of a batman, a personal assistant

to senior officers in the Regiment. He must have taken a night train to Scotland as he thanks Dolly and Florrie (probably a Restell) for seeing him off and hoping that they got home safely. Whilst the intensity of the Blitz in London had eased, London was still being attacked, so he must have been worried about his sister and family getting home safely.

In April 1941 the battalion moved again to Blackburn. Irene Walsh who was Jim's girlfriend came from Blackburn, so it is probable that this is when they met. The training and preparation were very heavily focused on what to do in the event of an invasion. They also trained the Home guard, so very much became part of the community.

They stayed in Blackburn until July 1941 when they moved again, this time to Ross-on-Wye in Herefordshire.



In June 1941 Harriet and Rose Chapman (Hamer) were staying in Hertford, it is not confirmed whether it was a formal evacuation or not. Jim must have been given some unscheduled leave as he sent this telegram to Harriet. Harriet and Rosie were staying with the Barbrook family at 17 Gashouse Lane, Hertford.

In September 1941, whilst his Battalion were in Herefordshire the Battalion was brought up to full establishment, men deemed unfit for deployment overseas were stood down and replaced and vehicles were prepared for shipment. They still had no idea where they were heading. Whilst in Ross-on-Wye the Battalion was inspected by King George VI.

On October 23 Jim writes to Harriet to tell her that he will be unable to come home for Harry and Ethel's wedding. He sounds a bit down and asks her to wish Harry and Ethel all the best for the future. Hertford is still having air raid warnings and he hopes that there have not been any air raids recently. He tells her that he can go to the cinema to lift his mood and he is glad that she and Rosie do the same. He is pleased that she and Dolly write to his girlfriend Irene Walsh.

Home. Address.
7 Nov. 6. 23rd

Dear Mum.

Was very glad to receive your very welcome letter today and was very happy to hear from you again, and to know that both Rosie and yourself are quite well and getting along okay at Hertford. I am quite well myself thanks Dear. I always rather feel up with everything, as we have had a pretty hard time there last few weeks. Yes Dear I bet you are looking forward to going home for the weekend. I wish I were but I'm afraid I will not be able to manage it Mum. So I will have to send Harry and Ethel all my best wishes. Sorry to hear you get warnings at Hertford Mum, and I do hope that you have not had any raids. Yes Mum I'm able to go to the pictures now and again and I must say it makes a change I am glad that Rosie and yourself are able to go Mum, as it helps to pass the evenings away about it. I have heard from home as well Dear they all seem to be getting along alright about they. I am glad that you have written to Irene Mum, as I know she looks forward to getting your and Dolly's letters. How's the weather at home Mum

The letter continues with him breaking the news that he is about to be deployed abroad. At the time of writing he did not know which day they were leaving, and assures her not to worry. He asks her to do him a favour and send him some fags, soap and boot polish. He signs off with 'All my love. Your loving son Jim xxxxxxx'

I hope it's as nice as it is here, which is grand for October. Well Dear now I have some rather bad news for you but I guess it must come sooner or later. Well Dear, we are off abroad sometime next week, but am not sure what day it is, but don't worry too much will you Mum, make it will not be for long and will Jim know how to look after himself now. Mum could you do me a favour and try to get me some fags, and a few tablets of soap and if possible some boot polish, as it is a bit of a job to get them here and I shall need them. If you can Mum you must post them as soon as you can in that or else I may not get them. Get that boot polish will you try and get some dark tan as well as black chocolate I want. Well Dear I guess I shall miss you a lot and with forward very much to seeing you again. but I guess we're got to go to win this war, no it's best to go with a good heart, so I must say goodbye for now and will write again in a few days.

I love you Dear sending you and Mavis
all My Love

Your Loving Son Jim xxxxxxx

A few days later, on October 28, 1941, he writes again. In this letter he opens with 'Dearest Mum' rather than just 'Dear Mum'. He asks how she and Rosie are getting on in Hertford and how Harry and Ethel's wedding went. He was sad that he could not get to the wedding but did manage to spend some time with Irene, probably at her home in Lancashire.

no 5573444.
4th Royal Norfolk Regt.
C. Coy.
8/0 Army Post Office
1635.
Tuesday Oct. 28th.

Dearest Mum.

I hope that you and Rosie are both well and in the very best of health, and getting along very well at Hertford. I am quite well myself thanks Dear, and feeling along as well as can be expected, though a bit browned-off. Well Mum how did the wedding go, I hope everything went smoothly and the weather was fine for Harry and Ethel. I wish I could have got home Mum as I should have liked to have done so. But I had a very nice weekend at home with Irene even though it were only for a short while. As I had to leave her there on Sunday. Irene is well Mum and is a lot better now. I'm afraid I

He tells Harriet that he cannot say where he is currently stationed, but that he will be moving off the next day. He once again tells her not to worry and it will not be long before he is home again. He lets her know that it might be a while before he can write again, and not to worry.

2

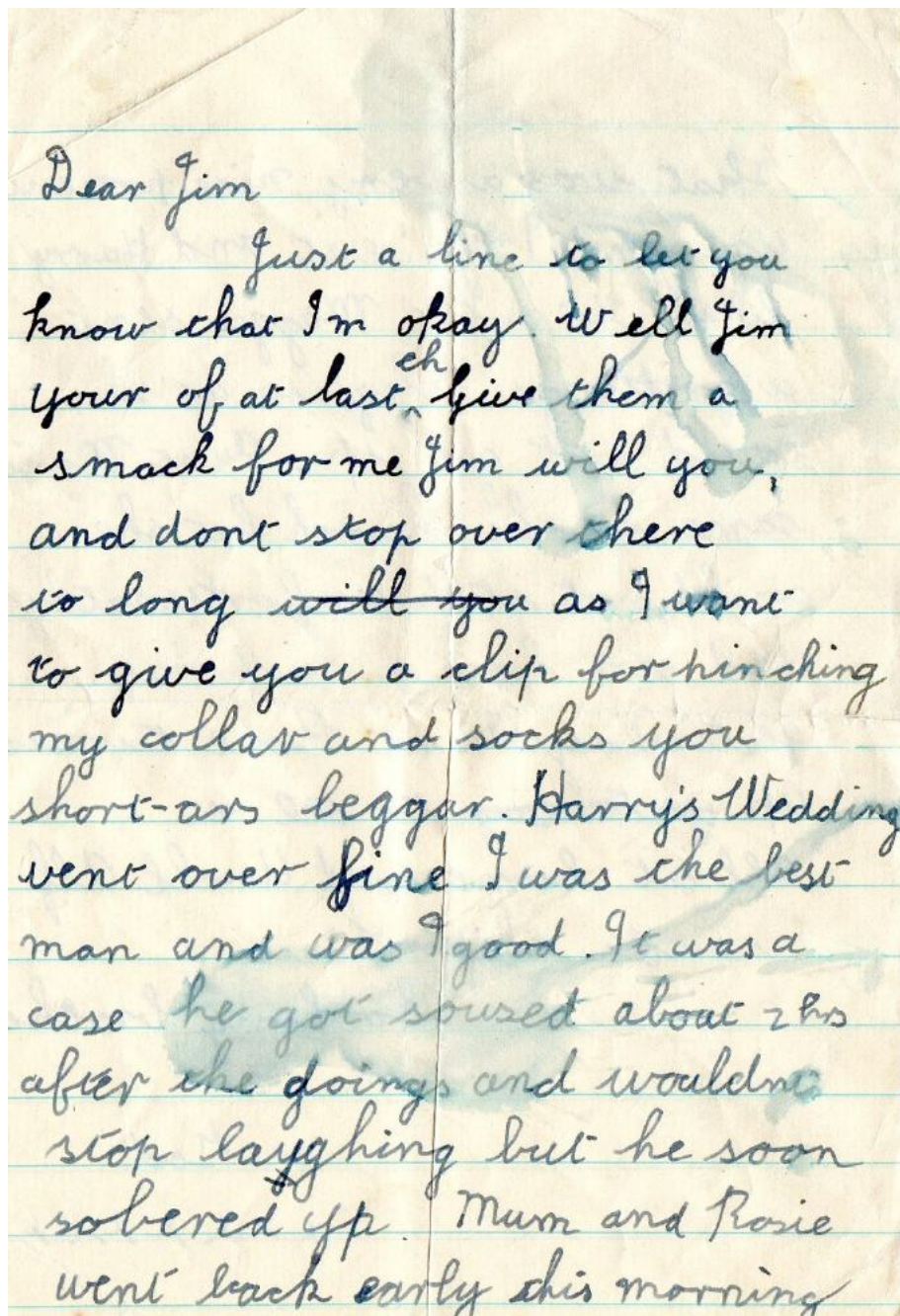
can't tell you where I am stationed Mum, but
anyway we shall not be here tomorrow, as we
are moving off. Please Mum don't worry too much
as I shall be alright, and write it want to very
long before I shall be home again. Don't worry about
sending that stuff I asked for Dear as I don't suppose
I will get it yet - write, and have enough now, with
what Dolly sent. I hope the weather is fine for you
at Hartford Mum it is not too bad here, though a
little on the chilly side. I shall not be able to write
a long letter Mum as we are not allowed out after
eight tonight and I want to get this letter posted,
as it will be the last chance I will get for a
while. Don't worry if I don't hear from me for a
while Dear, and I will write to you as soon as I
can. Well Mum this is all I can manage for
now as I must catch the boat and also have a lot
of work to do. Give my best to the Harbours Mum
I send you and Rosie all my love
Linn x x x x x x x x.

We now know that on October 28, 1941 his Battalion was heading for Liverpool.

He never came home again.

This next letter was from his brother Ted, or Teddy as he was often called. This letter was sent just after the wedding of Harry and Ethel and the brotherly love shown in it is almost tangible. Ted asks Jim to "give them a smack for me", 'them' being those Jim was being sent to fight. It was not known which theatre of war Jim was entering at that point. Ted jokes about Jim coming home soon so he can give him a clip too for "pinching my collar and socks".

He tells Jim about the wedding and that he was Best Man, and that Harry got a bit drunk but soon sobered up, and that Harry and Ethel liked the present that Jim and Irene had bought him.



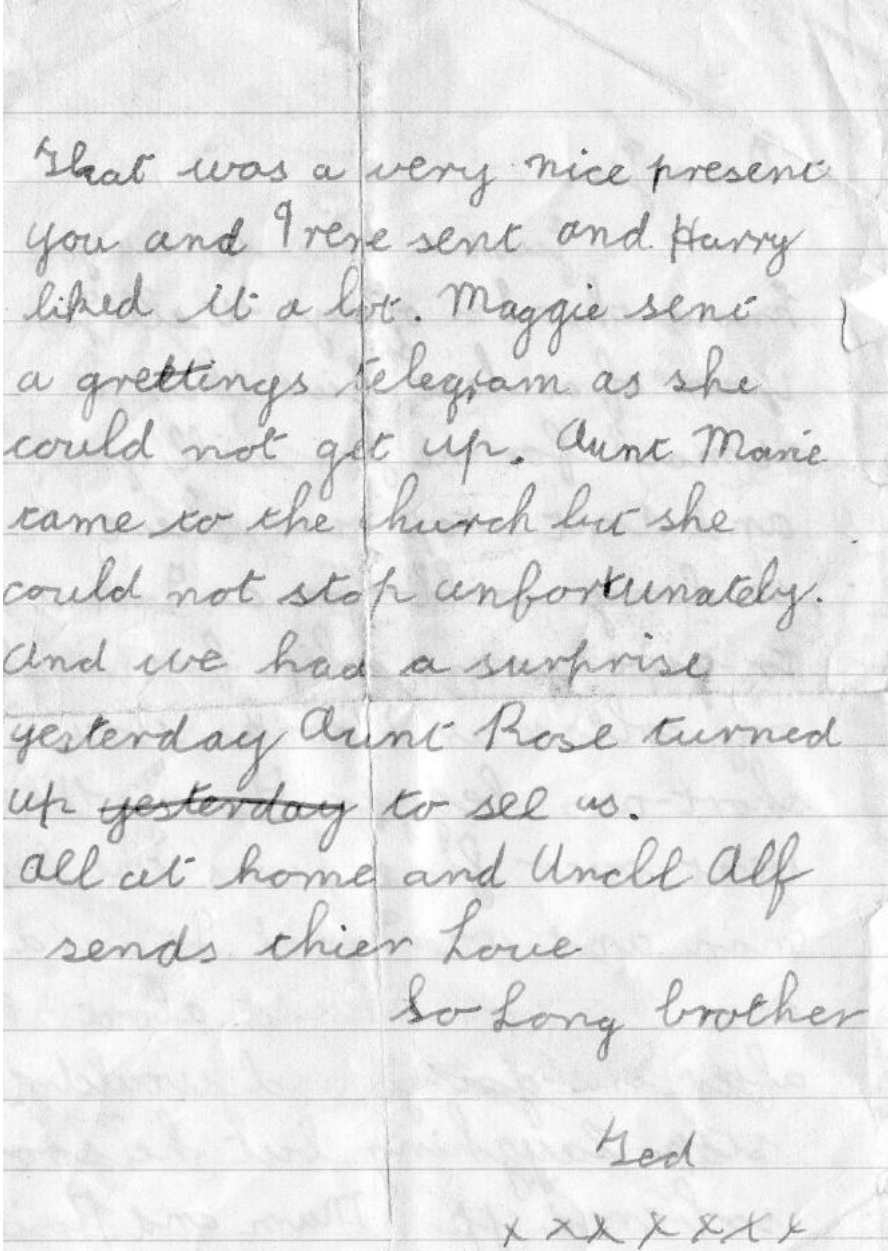
Dear Jim

Just a line to let you know that I'm okay. Well Jim your of at last, ^{eh} give them a smack for me Jim will you, and dont stop over chere so long will you as I want to give you a clip for pinching my collar and socks you short-ars beggar. Harry's Wedding went over fine I was the best man and was I good. It was a case he got soused about 2 hrs after the doings and wouldn't stop layghing but he soon sobered up. Mum and Rosie went back early this morning

The letter also mentions that Maggie sent a telegram to the happy couple. Maggie was probably Maggie Brotherton who was briefly married to Harriet's eldest son, Walter. Walter married Maggie in 1941 but soon separated and divorced. Walter married Jean Witchell in 1947. Incidentally, the

Brotherton family lived at 66 Maplin Street, so were the Chapmans' neighbours. The Chapman family lived firstly at number 64 before moving across the road to number 55 during the war.

The letter also mentions that Aunt Marie (Restell) came to the wedding. Aunt Rose (Restell) and Uncle Alf (probably Restell or possibly Hart) had also sent Jim their love. Ted signs off with 'So long brother'.



That was a very nice present
you and Irene sent and Harry
liked it a lot. Maggie sent
a greetings telegram as she
could not get up. Aunt Marie
came to the church but she
could not stop unfortunately.
And we had a surprise
yesterday Aunt Rose turned
up yesterday to see us.
all at home and Uncle Alf
sends chier love
So long brother
Ted
x x x x x x



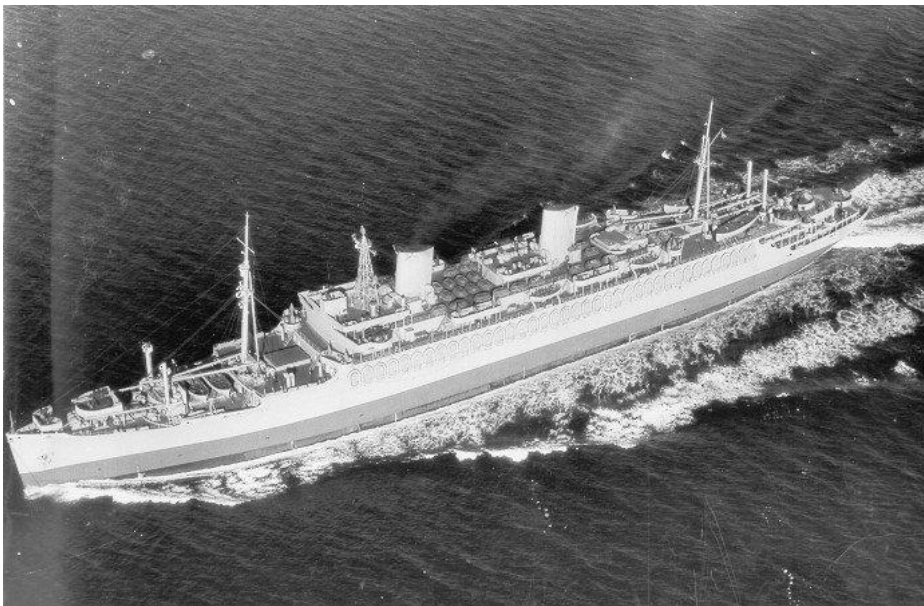
On October 29, 1941, they sailed from Liverpool on RMS Andes, the destination of the Battalion was still unknown at the time.

Having being built in 1939, the Andes was a relatively new ship. The soldiers slept in hammocks, the food was good and there

was room on the decks for PT (Physical Training) sessions.

Mid-way across the North Atlantic, in November 1941 the Andes and its British convoy was met by American ships who took over the convoy of 8 troop ships. It must have been quite a sight for Jim and his comrades to see the Royal Navy destroyers that had safely escorted them across the dangerous waters of the Atlantic Ocean turn and head back to Britain, while they under the care of the US Navy were being taken in the opposite direction to a destination as yet still unknown.

The Andes arrived in Halifax, Nova Scotia on November 8, 1941. The battalion transferred from the



Andes to a US troop ship, the USS Wakefield. There were about 6,000 men on board. At this stage in WW2 the USA was still a neutral country, although tension was building between the US and Japan. The RMS Andes returned to Britain, bringing Canadian troops and much needed supplies.

The Wakefield left Nova Scotia on or about November 10, 1941, so this letter would have been written before the Wakefield stopped to re-fuel and take on provisions in Trinidad.

On November 12, 1941 Jim writes to let Harriet know he is okay and so far they have "good grub".. He asks after Rosie and says that she must be leaving school soon and hopes that she gets a good job. He enclosed letters for Dolly and Irene that he asked Harriet to send on for him as he was only allowed to send one letter.

Mr. 5573444.
C. Coy.
4th Royal Norfolk Regt.
G.O. Army Post Office.
1635.
Wed. Nov. 12th.

Dear Mum.

Just a short letter hoping that both Rosie and yourself are well and in the very best of health. I'm quite well myself. Dear and getting along okay. We are having a good trip. Mum and so far have good grub, so have nothing to grumble about so far. I hope the family are well, and are able to get down and see you now and again. Well Mum our little Rosie will so be leaving school next she. I hope she will be able to get a good job. Mum. How's thing in London. Mum still quiet? Mum I am putting a letter in with this for Irene and one for Dolly as we are only allowed to send an envelope at a time. Please send the for me dear. Hope the weather nice at home Mum and you are

The Wakefield stopped en-route to India at Trinidad on November 17, 1941. A few weeks later he writes again to Harriet who is still living in Gashouse Lane. Jim is in C Company of the 4th Battalion of

the Royal Norfolk Regiment. He tells of the experience of his journey and that entertainment, such as concerts and boxing, is laid on for the troops. He says that a 'Royal Court' was held as they crossed the equator. This letter would have been written on the leg of the journey from Trinidad to Cape Town. The 'Court' was for those who were crossing the equator for the first time. These men were 'punished' by having their hair cut, ducked in a pond and then they had to slide down a chute into more water.

22.5573444.

C. Coy.

4th Royal Norfolk Regt.

C/O. Army. Port. Office.

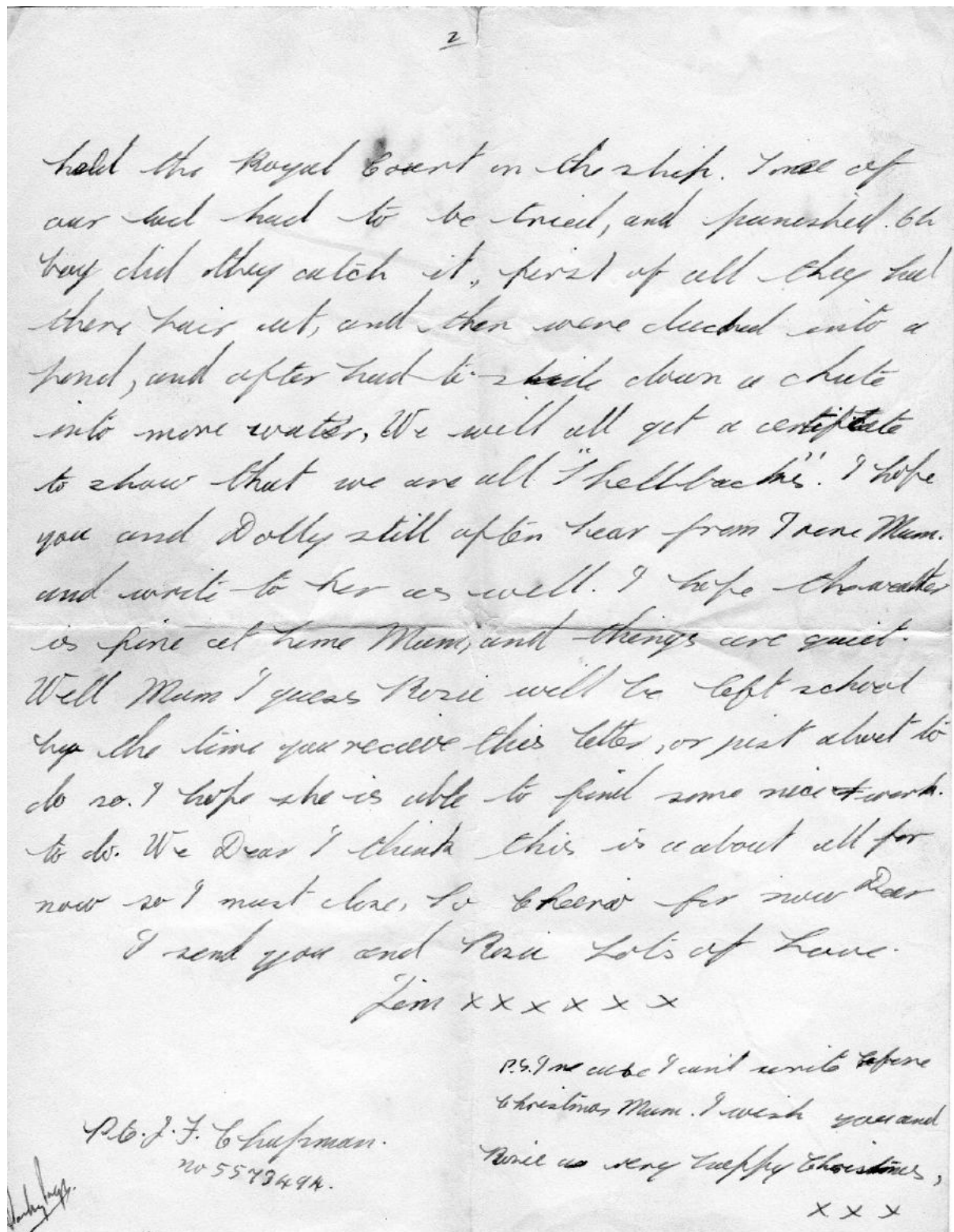
1635.

Wed. Nov. 26th.

Dear Mum

I hope that both you and Rosie are well and in the very best of health, and are getting along alright at Hertford. Well Dear I am quite well myself and getting along so so. We are still having a fairly good trip, and manage to find plenty of amusement, though we have to make a lot of it ourselves. There are a few concerts during the week and sometimes chess boxing so we don't do to bad do we. I hope the family are well Mum and manage to get down to see you often, as I know it must cheer you and Rosie up a lot. We had quite a time on Tuesday Mum, we crossed the Equator, and they

He closes his letter by saying that if he doesn't get the chance to write again before Christmas, he wishes his mum and Rosie a very happy Christmas.



It was as the ship approached Cape Town that the Japanese attacked Pearl Harbor which brought the US formally into WW2. It is hard to imagine the atmosphere onboard when the American crew of USS Wakefield heard the news of Pearl Harbor. They arrive in Cape Town on December 9, 1941.

They left Cape Town on December 13 and reached Bombay (Mumbai) on December 27, 1941.

His next letter to his mum is in January 1942 and is from India. He is now in B Company.

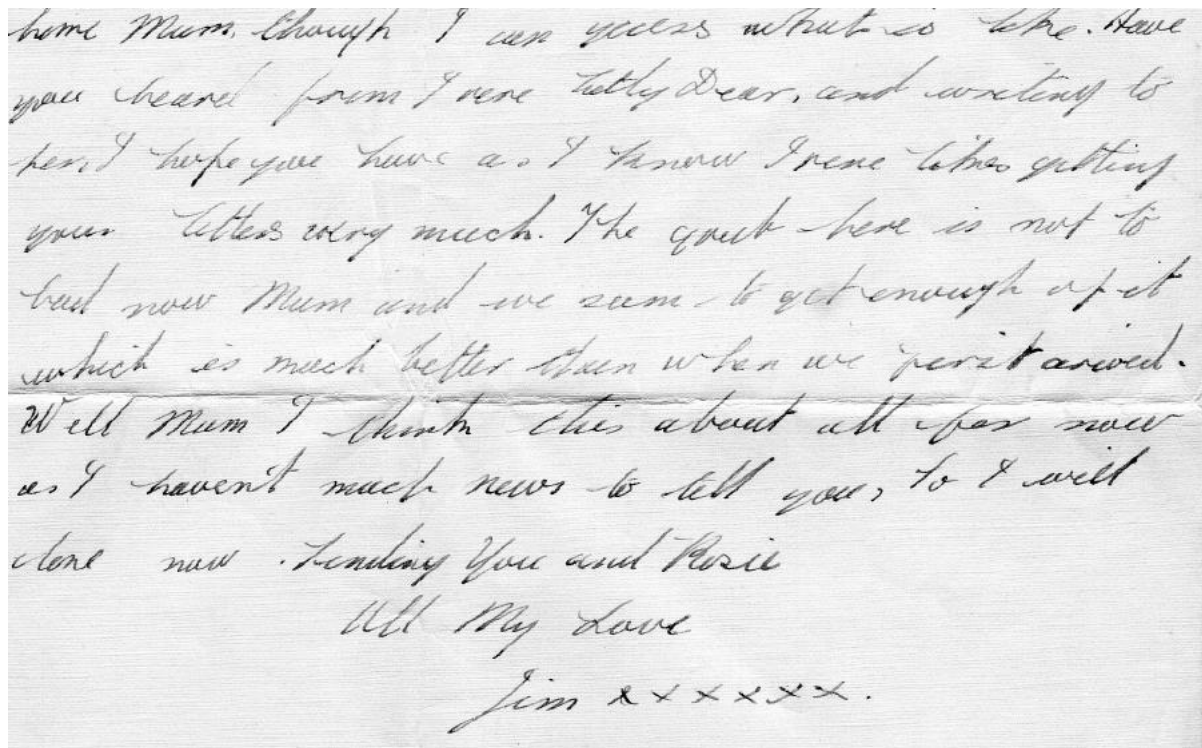
120. 55134946.
Rt. J. F. & Hapson
B. Coy
4th Royal Norfolk Regt.
c/o. Port Mester.
Bombay Barr. India.
Sat. Jan 10th.

Dear Mums.

Just a few lines hoping you are well and in the very best of health and that Rosie is the same. I hope you are getting along alright at Westford. Well dear I am getting along okay myself and settling down in India, though I must say I would much sooner be home. The weather is still very hot here Mum and if anything it gets hotter as time goes by. I have not been out since the last time I wrote Mums as I don't feel like it much this weekend and didn't have the necessary clothing the week.

By the way Mum when you write to Dolly will you give her my love and also to Dad and the boys as I will not be able to write to her this week but will do so next. Give all my best to Mr. Barbrook and family Mum and I hope they are all well and I hope that Mr. Barbrook is getting along okay in the army. I have not had any mail yet Dear, and you can guess that I look forward to receiving some very much as it's such a long while since I last heard from you all. I hope the weather is fine for you all

He says he is getting along okay and coping with the heat in India. He is missing home and asks her to send Dolly, his dad and the boys his love. He asks after Mrs Barbrook and hopes her husband is getting on in the Army too. He mentions that he is not getting any letters and hope that they come through soon as he misses hearing from them all. It is the last letter from Jim to home that we have.



home Mum, though I can guess what is like. Have
you heard from Irene lately Dear, and writing to
her, I hope you have a. I know Irene likes getting
your letters very much. The work here is not to
bad now Mum and we seem to get enough of it
which is much better than when we first arrived.
Well Mum I think this about all for now
as I haven't much news to tell you, so I will
close now. Sending you and Rosie
All My Love
Jim x x x x x.

Harriett writes back, this being the last letter that we have. It is undated and comes from Gashouse Lane, Hertford. Harriet mentions Rosie and Irene and tells Jim what a nice girl Irene is. She tells him that Rosie is now at work, so that puts the date of the letter being early January or February 1942. The firm is closing down and Harriet and Rosie will be going back home to Maplin Street soon. Harriet is missing home. She mentions Teddy being down for the weekend.

She tells Jim that they had a visit from Auntie Florrie's Joyce and Joan. Florrie was Florence Restell, Harriet's sister. She married John Calnan and they had two daughters Joyce and Joan (pictured).



Florrie is staying in London with another of Harriet's sisters, Rose Restell (Rawlings).

She makes reference to Ray's (Sinclair) brother coming to see the family whilst on leave. She states that he is a 'proper lad' and Walter Chapman (Jim's dad) thinks he is a 'nice chap'. It reads as if these references were about Ray's brother, but might have been about Ray. Harriet also tells Jim that Dolly and Ray got engaged at Christmas.

Harriet also says "to see you all happy is all I want".

17 Gashouse Lane
Hertford
Herts

My Dear Jimmy

Just a line from Mum, I hope my letters are reaching you. I hope you are well & are getting Dolly & Irene's letters too. I hear from Irene & write to her she is a nice girl Jimmy. Well Son we are joggling along much the same here. Rosie is at work, but my firm will soon be closing down & we will be going back Home. Mrs Barbrook has been good to me & Rosie & I shall be sorry to leave her, but I feel I want to go Home so much. Teddy is down for the week-end. Dear Jimmy I had a surprise when Auntie Florence's Joyce & Joan came to see me & Rosie. Auntie is at Auntie's Rosie in London until she gets a place for her & the kiddies. Uncle John is now working at Hendon. All at Home are O.K. Ray's Brother came Home on leave & went to see them all. Teddy says he is a proper lad. Dad says he is a nice chap. I expect Dolly has written & told you she & Ray were engaged X mas, well we all wish them happiness don't we, to see you all happy is all I want, hope you will

On the second page of this final letter Harriet says she hopes he will be home soon, asks him to look after himself, that she always thinks of him and that Rosie sends her fondest love. Rosie is working at a printing works. Harriet talks fondly of the Barbrook family that she and Rosie have been staying with. Harriet tells Jim that Dad (Walter) and Teddy will be coming up the next weekend to start moving their stuff back to Mile End. She closes this, which is the last letter we have of hers and she

signs off with 'Your Loving Mum' and a postscript saying that she hopes his letters arrive soon as she is longing to hear from him.

(2)

soon be Home with us all, take care of yourself, Mum thinks of you always dear. I hope you got a cable I sent X mas dear, we all miss you. Rosie sends her fondest love. Mr Barbrook is G.K. & is now in Leeds. I am hoping I will see him before we go Home. Well Son, we have had some very cold weather here, plenty of snow & frost & me & old Rose get up early for work & do we shiver. Rosie works quite near in a printing works, so she is able to get Home to her dinner with Mrs Barbrook, Sylvia & Bobby are getting on lovely we will miss them. Dad is coming next week-end, him & Teddy are helping to get our things Home. Well Dear Mums love & kisses & Rosie's.

From Your loving Mum

XXXXXXX

P.S. Hope your letters will soon reach us
we are all longing to hear from you X

The battalion left India on January 19, 1942 and landed at Keppel Harbour in Singapore on January 29, 1942. At the time of docking, Singapore was already under heavy bombardment by the Japanese.

On February 15th 1942, unbeknown to Harriet and his family, Jim along with the other Allied troops were taken as Prisoners of War, later to become referred to as Fepows (Far East Prisoners Of War) when Singapore fell into Japanese hands. At the fall of Singapore the British troops were ill-equipped, poorly prepared and inexperienced. Jim Chapman and his battalion (between 500 – 1,000 soldiers) had left British shores in early November 1941, just three months before. The 6,000 British soldiers who had arrived on the Wakefield in Singapore via Nova Scotia, Trinidad and India were now Prisoners of War. This particular group of brave men had been engaged in an active theatre of war for just 17 days.

The next correspondence is to alert Harriet and Walter that Jim is missing, both letters came from the Infantry Records Office in Warwick. The only information they provide is that his unit was in Singapore when it fell into Japanese hands on February 15, 1942. There were close on 85,000 British, Indian and Commonwealth soldiers captured in Singapore.

Army Form B. 104—83

RECORD OFFICE
3 APR 1942
WARWICK

Record Office,
19 .

SIR OR MADAM,

I regret to have to inform you that a report has been received from the War Office to the effect that (No.) 5573494 (Rank) PTE (Name) CHAPMAN James (Regiment) The Royal Norfolk Regiment was posted as "missing" on the 15 FEB 1942 at Singapore.

The report that he is missing does not necessarily mean that he has been killed, as he may be a prisoner of war or temporarily separated from his regiment.

Official reports that men are prisoners of war take some time to reach this country, and if he has been captured by the enemy it is probable that unofficial news will reach you first. In that case I am to ask you to forward any postcard or letter received at once to this Office, and it will be returned to you as soon as possible.

Should any further official information be received it will be at once communicated to you.

I am,
SIR OR MADAM,
Your obedient Servant,

L. Lewis
for COLON

Officer in charge of Records.

IMPORTANT.
Any change of your address should be immediately notified to this Office.

Wt. 30051/1249 400,000 (16) 9/39 KJL/8812 Gp 698/3 Forms/B.104—83/9

Infantry Record Office
WARWICK
3/4/42.

Dear Sir / Madam,

According to the records of this office No.....5573494.....
The Royal Norfolk Regiment.
Pte. CHAPMAN, J.....was serving in Malaya when the garrison of
Singapore capitulated on the 15th February, 1942. Every endeavour is being
made through diplomatic and other channels to obtain information concerning him.
It is hoped that he is safe and although he may be a prisoner of war, it is
necessary to post him as "Missing" pending receipt of some definite information.
Immediately any information is obtained it will be sent to you.

Yours faithfully,
Elw Butler Lt
Colonel
i/c Infantry Record Office.

A few weeks later they hear from the Red Cross, but there is no news only that they will do all they can to try and find his whereabouts.

WAR ORGANISATION
OF THE R.L.I.

BRITISH RED CROSS SOCIETY and ORDER OF ST. JOHN OF JERUSALEM

President: HER MAJESTY THE QUEEN. | Grand Prior: H.R.H. THE DUKE OF GLOUCESTER, K.G.

WOUNDED, MISSING AND RELATIVES DEPARTMENT

Chairman: THE DOWAGER LADY AMPHILL, C.I., G.B.E.

7 BELGRAVE SQUARE
LONDON, S.W.1
1.5.42.

TELEPHONE NO.: SLOANE 9696
TELEGRAPHIC ADDRESS: "WOMIREL, KNIGHTS, LONDON"

Dear Mr. Chapman,

We are very sorry to hear that your son Pte. J. F. Chapman
5573494 Royal Norfolk Regiment has been reported
missing. We will do everything in our power to trace him, but you will understand
that it may be some time before any definite information is forthcoming.

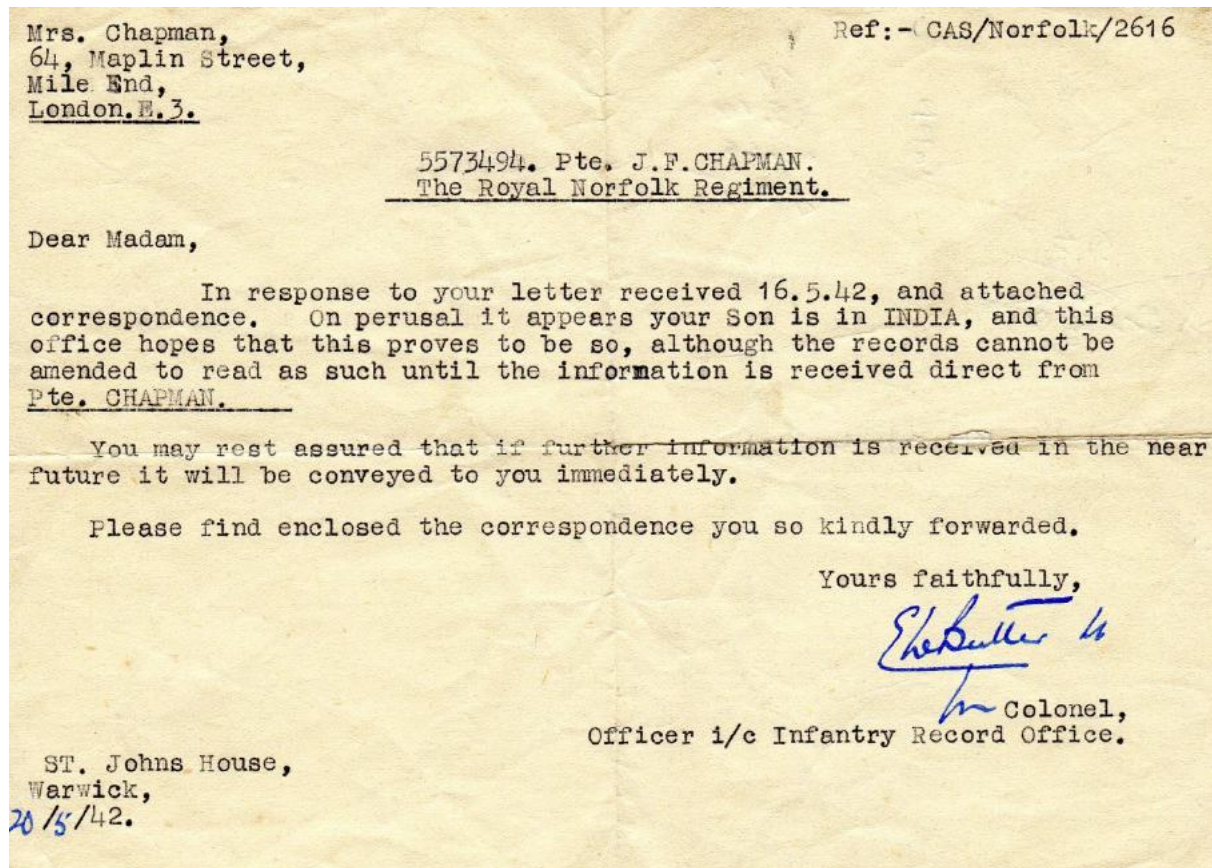
Will you kindly give us the following particulars which are of great
assistance to the International Red Cross Committee in making their enquiries:

~~Date and year of birth:~~
Christian names in full:
Registered home address:

If we are able to obtain any news, we will let you know at once, as we
fully realise how anxious you must be.

Yours sincerely, *Margaret Amphill*
M. H.C.P.
Chairman.

Soon after, on May 25, 1942 they receive this letter from the Army Records Office stating that they understood that Jim may be in India. The letter is sent to 64 Maplin Street, so it looks like they have yet to move into 55. Given the uncertainty of whether he was dead, wounded or held as a Prisoner of War, this letter must have raised some hope for Harriet and the family. Who knows what was going through their minds other than clinging onto the hope that Jim was alive and well?



Harriet writes to Mrs B Page, the wife of Lieutenant Page who was the Officer that Jim was batman to. This next letter is the reply from Mrs Page. Mrs Page is sorry that Harriet has yet to hear whether Jim is safe or not, and tells her that a lot of the other families of soldiers in the battalion have yet to hear.

Mrs Page asks Harriet whether Jim ever mentioned another batman in the Battalion by the name of Robbins and that Robbins was an accomplished accordion player. Sadly, the soldier mentioned, a Frank Reginald Robins was killed in action on February 2, 1942, more than a year before this letter from Mrs Page was written. Frank Robins was just 21.

It did sound like the names of Officers held as Prisoners Of War were being released but none of the lower ranks, so there were close on 85,000 other families sharing the anxiety that Mrs Page and Harriet were feeling.

The Thatch,
Windmill Hill,
Stoulton
NR Worcester.
21. 2. 43.

Dear Mrs Chapman,

I'm afraid that
up to now you have not had
official news of your son's
safety — I do so wish you
could hear. Don't think it
is bad news, that you haven't
heard though, as the
men's names in our
battalion, haven't been coming
through. One of the officer's
wives that I know well,
has a brother who was a
Sergeant, & she hasn't heard
yet — She is living in
New York & several of the men's
wives are near her, & none
seem to have had news yet.
Do you remember your son
speaking of Robbins? He was

Mrs Page talks fondly of Jim. She mentions sending Harriet a photograph of Jim. Jim took a photograph of Mr and Mrs Page on their wedding anniversary and they took a photograph of him. This may well be the photograph of Jim in his uniform.

another of the batman, the
one who played the accordion
so well — his father lives at
New Bockenhams where I often
stay when in Norfolk, & he
has had no news. In fact I
know of none other than
officers who have yet heard.
It seems a terrible time for
you to wait, & I do so
hope you won't have to
wait much longer.
I'm afraid I've been
rather a long while sending
the photograph — but I was
having an enlargement
done for myself, & I thought
I would see if the one of
your son would enlarge up
as well. I think it has
come out very well, & is a
very good one of him. I can
remember the day so well,
it was our wedding &

There was camaraderie between the families, as Mrs Page mentions Irene and also tells Harriet that she will send the negative of the photograph so Harriet could get further copies made. She also knew of Harriet's youngest son (Edward/Teddy) joining the Army. She mentions that she stayed in Wanstead over the Christmas of 1942 and when travelling into London one day was tempted to get off the bus and visit Harriet in Maplin Street.

anniversary, & your son took
a photograph of us first, & then
we took one of him. I will
also send the negative of
the photograph along, as
Irene might also like one.
I had it done at Kodaks,
in London, but it has
taken about four weeks.
I do hope you are
all keeping well, & that
your youngest son has
settled down to his army
life - you must miss him
terribly, I know. I stayed
at Wanstead in the Christmas
holidays, & going up to
London on the 96 bus, I
saw I passed through
Nile End, & I felt tempted,
once or twice to get off
the bus, & see if I could
see you - but I did not

It is only when she reaches the final page of her letter that she mentions that her husband is held in a Prisoner of War camp in Malaya, although she has yet to hear from him directly. She says that her Father-in-law went to a Prisoner of War meeting and that from November 1942 soldiers in the Malaya camps had been allowed to write letters, so was hopeful she would hear something soon.

know if I am or was
far from the bus route or
not - The nurse I should
have called & seen you.
I have had no further
news of my husband, except
a notice from the War Office
to say that he is interned
in the Malaya Camps - I
should love a letter, to
know that he is well.
My father-in-law went
to a prisoner-of-war meeting
and they said that the
men in the Malaya Camps
were allowed to write
letters last November - if
that is so there is a chance
that mail might be
coming through in the
fairly near future - that
would be wonderful. The Red X
haven't yet been allowed in
Malaya though.
With best wishes to all your
family - I do so hope you will have
news soon, yours sincerely, B. Page

Almost 6 months after the letter from Mrs Page, that devastating news came through in July 1943 that Jim was a Prisoner of War.

Army Form B. 104—83A.

No. cas/Nov/2616
(If replying, please quote
above No.)

Infantry Record Office,
Warwick Station.
27 July 1943.

SIR OR MADAM,

I have to inform you that a report has been received
~~from the War Office~~ to the effect that (No.) 5573494
(Rank) PTE. (Name) CHAPMAN. J.
(Regiment) ROYAL NORFOLK REGT.
is a Prisoner of War in Japanese hands
at a camp not stated.

Should any other information be received concerning him, such
information will be at once communicated to you.

Instructions as to the method of communicating with Prisoners of
War can be obtained at any Post Office, by applying for
leaflet P327B.

I am,
SIR OR MADAM,
Your obedient Servant,
Ernest Major
Colonel
Officer in charge of Records.

IMPORTANT.—Any change of your address should be immediately notified to this
Office. It should also be notified, if you receive information from the soldier above, that
his address has been changed.

Wt.30241/1250 500M. 9/39. KJL/8818 Gp.698/3 Forms/B.104—83A/6

A further letter is received from Mrs Page. There had been contact between Harriet and Mrs Page as Harriet had informed her that she had heard from Jim. It sounds like the message Jim had sent home was positive and comforting and that Harriet must have been relieved at receiving it.

The Thatch,
Windmill Hill
Stoulton
NR Worcester.
Soh.

Dear Mrs Chapman,

I was so very very
glad to hear from you,
that you have at last
heard from your son. I
know just how relieved you
must be feeling — & what a
comforting message it was,
too. I don't think he could
have found a nicer way of
wording it. I had heard
the postcards were coming
through, & several of the
Officers' wives I know, have
had them during the
last week — so my eyes are

Mrs Page tells Harriet that she had yet to hear from her husband. She is hopeful that the war will be over soon and 'we will all be happy again'. She also says that if the prisoners are being well treated they are at least out of the fighting.

on the postman, & each day
I wonder if I shall have
something. Perhaps I shall
be lucky next week. But I
am especially pleased
that yours has come
through, as you had not
had the official notice from
the War Office. The news
is more hopeful now, perhaps
the end isn't so far off,
after all - & then we
shall all be happy again.
There is one consolation - if
they are being well-treated,
they are at least out of
the fighting, & there will
be plenty of that before the
end, I'm afraid.

She closes her letter by sending her best wishes to Harriet's family and that they would all be rejoicing at the good news.

Give my best wishes to
your family, please, they
will all be rejoicing with
you at your good news,
I know.
Yours Sincerely,
B. Page.

Incidentally, Mrs Page's husband, Lieutenant Alfred Stanley Page was also taken prisoner by the Japanese in Singapore on February 15, 1942. Unlike Jim, Lieutenant Page made it home and died in 1984 at the age of 70. Mrs Page, Barbara also survived the war and died in 1973.

Harriet did not know for sure that Jim was a Prisoner of War until July 1943, so it is not clear when the following POW cards were sent. It is likely that these postcards would have been sent when he was already working on the Burma Railway.

PRISONER OF WAR POST
SERVICE DES PRISONNIERS DE GUERRE

BY AIR MAIL
PAR AVION

FROM: HARRIET CHAPMAN
ADDRESS: 55 MAPLIN ST
MILE ENDE 3
LONDON
ENGLAND

TO: JAMES FRANK CHAPMAN
C/O HURYO JOHOKYON
TOKYO JAPAN

5573494 PRIVATE

UNDELIVERED
RETURN TO
TO

BRITISH PRISONER OF WAR
Camp: C/O HURYO JOHOKYON
(including No. if any)
Country: TOKYO JAPAN

NOTE: The particulars inserted on the address side and the message in the space below, must be TYPED or written clearly in BLOCK LETTERS. MESSAGES MUST NOT BE LONGER THAN 25 WORDS.

DEAR JIMMY
ALLS WELL HOME. HAD
LETTER FROM MRS PAGE AND
THERE, HOPE YOU ARE WELL.
KEEP CHEERFUL, LOVING THOUGH
GOD BLESS YOU
MUMS LOVE

PRISONER OF WAR POST
SERVICE DES PRISONNIERS DE GUERRE

BY AIR MAIL
PAR AVION

FROM: MRS H CHAPMAN
ADDRESS: 55 MAPLIN ST
MILE ENDE 3
LONDON
ENGLAND

TO: JAMES FRANK CHAPMAN
C/O HURYO JOHOKYON
TOKYO JAPAN

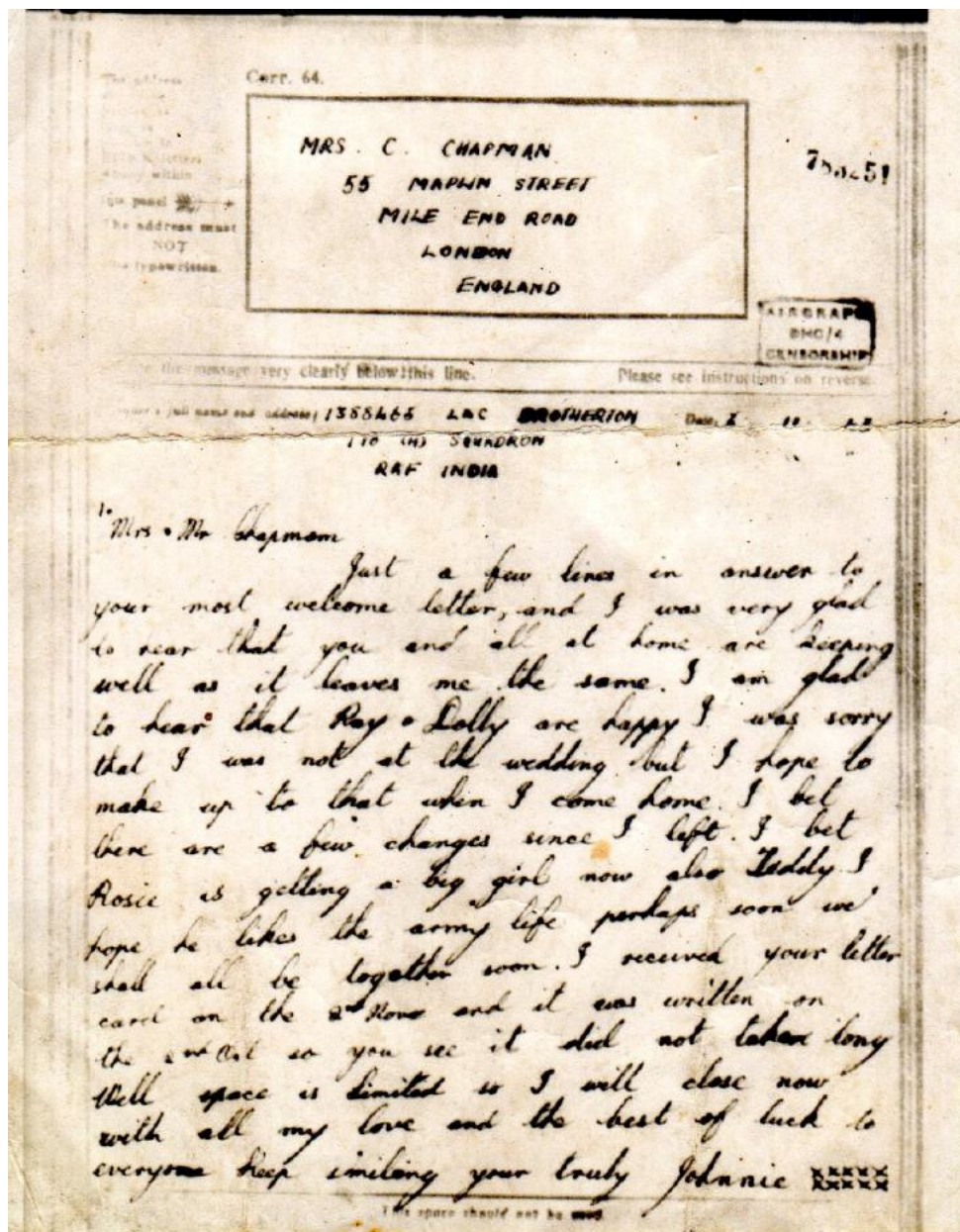
5573494 PRIVATE

UNDELIVERED
RETURN TO
TO

BRITISH PRISONER OF WAR
Camp: C/O HURYO JOHOKYON
(including No. if any)
Country: TOKYO JAPAN

NOTE: The particulars inserted on the address side and the message in the space below, must be TYPED or written clearly in BLOCK LETTERS. MESSAGES MUST NOT BE LONGER THAN 25 WORDS.

DEAR JIMMY
HOPE YOU ARE WELL
LOVING THOUGHTS FROM
ALL. TRENE JUST GONE HOME
AND FRIEND MYRA. KEEP
CHEERFUL. GOD BLESS YOU
LOVING MUM DAD



In October 1943 a letter is received from Johnnie Brotherton. John was the brother of Maggie (the first wife of Wally Chapman). The Brotherton family were next door neighbours of the Chapman family in Maplin Street. John was the same age as Jim Chapman.

Johnnie was in the RAF and he sent the letter from India where he was based. Both were young men,

both the same age and both were engaged in the same theatre of war.

He asks after Rosie and Teddy and was sorry that he could not be home for the wedding of Dolly and Ray.



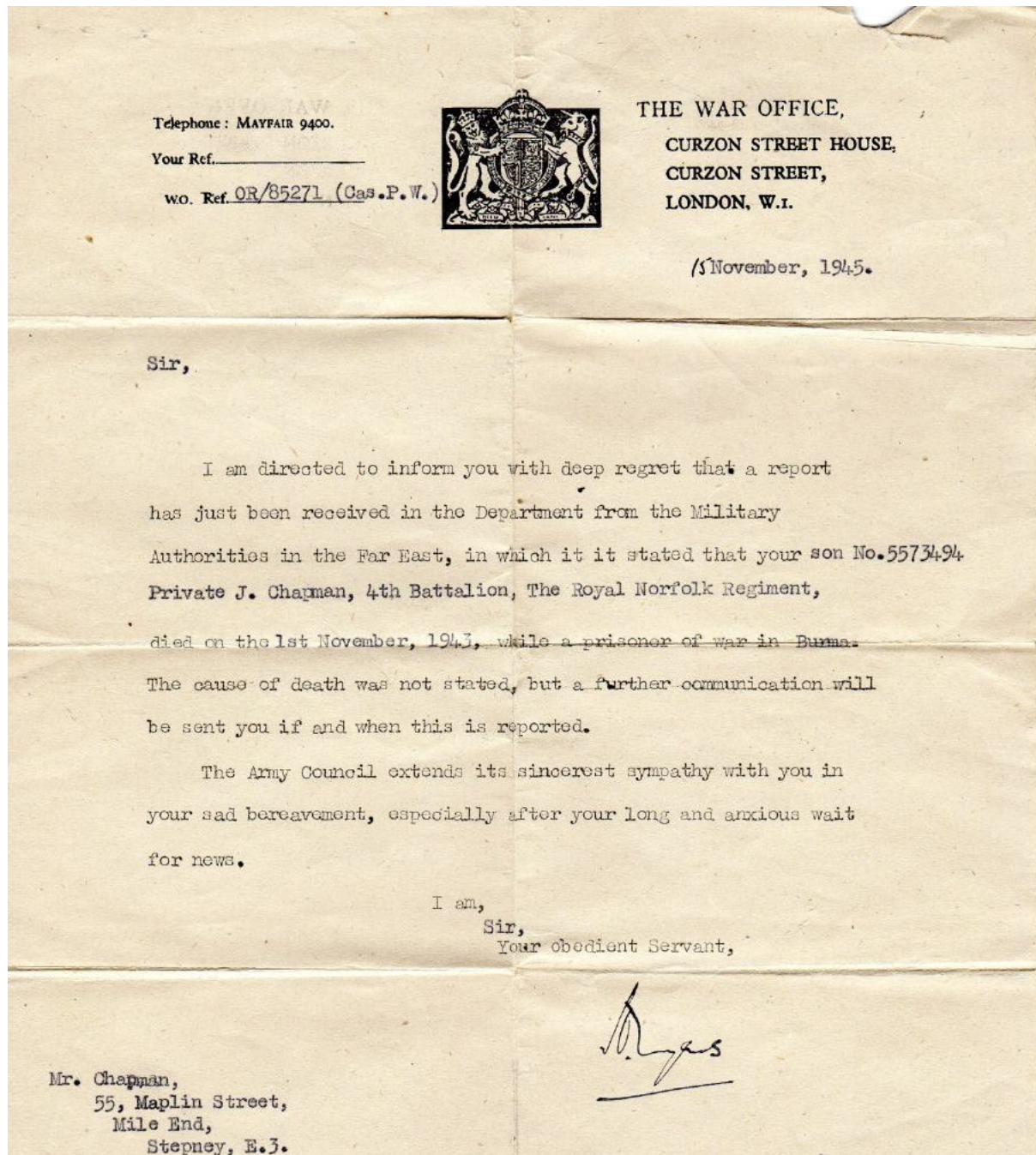
June 1945 and victory in Europe is declared. Maplin Street, like thousands of streets across the UK, celebrate VE Day.

Harriet Chapman – on the left in the floral apron



Harriett Chapman, this time in the second row, first on the right. Next but one to the left of Harriet is a smiling Dolly (Chapman/Sinclair) standing behind her eldest son, an 18 month old, Raymond Sinclair.

On November 15, 1945, more than two years after the letter from the Infantry Record Office, word from the War Office comes through that Jim had died.



Eaton Hall.
Norwich

Sat Nov. 17th 1945

Dear Mr. Chapman.

Your letter to the Barracks asking for news of your son Pte J.F. Chapman has been handed to me so I will tell you what I know.

I am sorry to have to tell you that your son died on November 1st 1943 of Beri-Beri at F Force Hospital, Tambaya, Burma and his grave is No. 546.

I knew your son quite well as he was Batman to one of my officers for some time, until both the officer and he transferred to B Company.

During the fighting on the island your son was wounded in the right leg, but he made a good recovery and in about the middle of 1942 he went down to Singapore on a

A letter from Captain T.C. Eaton dated November 17, 1945 is received outlining a little more about James' service. Captain Eaton was also a Prisoner of War. He was interred in Changi, and like Lieutenant Page survived the war.

His letter is dated two days after the official notification from the War Office, but is written as if it were the Commanding Officer writing to notify the family of the loss of their son. He advises Harriet that Jim died of Beri-Beri on November 1, 1943. Captain Eaton states that Jim died in F Force Hospital, Tambaya. This was not a hospital, it was a 'hospital camp', a place where there were marginally better conditions than the camps en-route to it. However, it was still hell on earth. At the time Jim was in Tambaya, there were

approximately 1,700 men all of whom were very sick.

Prisoners of War who were deemed fit enough to work were transferred out of Changi prison in Singapore and put into Working Parties. After his capture Jim was in one of these working parties. This was from mid 1942 until December 1942. These working parties were used as slave labour and sent to work for the Japanese across occupied south east Asia.

Captain Eaton stated that Jim was wounded in his right leg when fighting in Singapore, and perhaps as a consequence of working in the first working party he became not fit enough to continue working.

and good tempered. He was an exceptionally good natured fellow and he will be missed by all his comrades.

I am so sorry that should you should have had to endure all these long and anxious years in vain and I should like to offer you my deepest sympathy on your sad loss.

Do not bother to reply to this letter, but let me know if there is anything further I can do.

Yours sincerely

T. C. Eaton Capt

Lt Col Br The Royal Norfolk Regt

Changi and the other prisons on Singapore were overcrowded and the Japanese authorities made the decision to move out those unfit for work. The Allied Officers in Changi were told by the Japanese that the Prisoners of War who were unfit for work were to be transferred to another camp where there were better facilities, food, etc. These soldiers of which there were about 7,000 of them became known as F-Force. There were approximately 3,400 British servicemen.

In reality these men despite being unfit were forced to work on the Burma railway.

It is possible that the injury which Jim sustained in the battle for Singapore may have been the reason that he was included with the other injured, ill or wounded servicemen in F-Force. Alternatively, it may

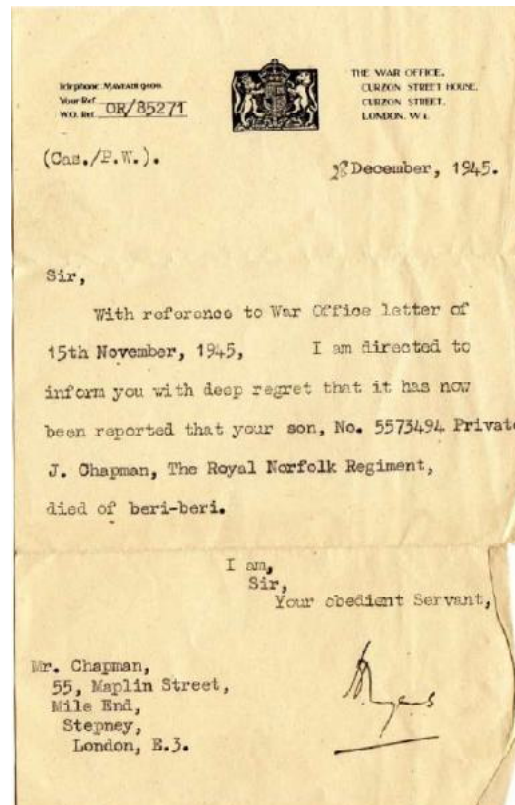
have been that his commanding officer, Lieutenant Page was sent in the capacity of a senior officer to lead the men, with Jim as his batman going with him.

In April 1943 Jim was moved out of Changi and taken by train north to Thailand. Captain Eaton remained in Changi. Captain Eaton had nothing further to add about Jim's time in Thailand and referred Harriet to Lieutenant Page.

Captain Eaton said that James' death was a sad blow to all of them, saying that he was a cheerful and good tempered soldier. He also said that he was sorry that Harriet had waited for so long for news, only to finally hear about the tragic death of her son.

A month after the first official notification, a further letter from the War Office arrives confirming what Captain Eaton had already informed them, that the cause of death was Beri-beri.

Due to the lack of sanitation and hygiene diarrhoea was also rife among the men. The soldiers had a diet of rice and dirty water. The combination of these factors meant that Beri-beri which is a deficiency of Vitamin B1, was rife.



Symptoms of it include a fast heart rate, shortness of breath, leg swelling, numbness in the hands and toes, confusion, trouble moving the legs and pain.

Some time after a letter of condolence from the King was received.



BUCKINGHAM PALACE

The Queen and I offer you
our heartfelt sympathy in your
great sorrow.

We pray that your country's
gratitude for a life so nobly
given in its service may bring
you some measure of consolation.

George R.I

In Memory of

Private

James Chapman

5573494, 4th Bn., Royal Norfolk Regiment who died on 01 November 1943 Age 23

Son of Walter William and Harriet Chapman, of Mile End, London.

Remembered with Honour
Thanbyuzayat War Cemetery



Commemorated in perpetuity by
the Commonwealth War Graves Commission

The Burma Railway was known as the Death Railway. It was 258 miles long. It is believed that Jim worked on the entire length. The appalling conditions endured by the POWs are well documented, but needless to say, their only clothing was a loin cloth and they would have been barefoot, starved and with little or no medical supplies. Jim is buried in Thanbyuzayat which was at the northern end of the railway.

The railway was completed on 17 October 1943. Soon after any surviving POWs fit enough to travel were gradually moved back to Concentration camps.

Jim Chapman died on November 1, 1943.

May he forever Rest In Peace.

