

**BARRY JOHN HARFORD**

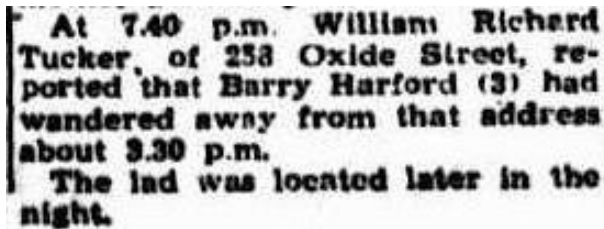
Initial Upload 17 April 2012

Barry was the second child of Fred and Hazel. He was born on 28 April 1944.

Barry's father Fred and mother Hazel separated very early and he has little recollection of him. Fred had enlisted in the Army on three occasions from three weeks after he and Hazel were married the first two occasions for very short periods and the last from 10 February 1943 until he was discharged on 1 November 1945.


Hazel worked to support herself and her family. She ran the dining rooms or restaurant at various hotels including the Globe Hotel. Others she was involved with were the Grand and the Central.

Jim and Barry were placed with either relatives or at orphanages. Their grandfather and grandmother Flora Tucker was particularly involved. At a very young age Barry was not happy with these arrangements and on two occasions we have identified that he was lost or missing. He admitted he *"did that all the time."*



At 7.40 p.m. William Richard Tucker, of 253 Oxide Street, reported that Barry Harford (3) had wandered away from that address about 3.30 p.m. The lad was located later in the night.

Barrier Miner 18 February 1948



**MISSING BOY FOUND**  
Barry John Harford, aged 4½ years, who had been missing since Saturday morning, was recovered about 11.50 o'clock last night. He had been staying with relatives.

Barrier Miner 23 January 1950

Despite the above report Barry could not recall being placed with his uncle Bill Tucker and his grandmother my well have contacted Bill when Barry went missing.

In 1949 and 1950 Barry was placed in an Orphanage at Wilcannia some 195 kilometres to the east of Broken Hill. His bother Jim attended in 1948 and 1949.

Barry attended a number of primary schools in Broken Hill. He was at North Primary School, St John's and Central Primary School. He did not like school and he *"used to wag it all the time."* We have one report of his progress in 1952 at St. John's where he had successfully completed Grade 3 and was moving to Grade 4.<sup>1</sup>

In 1953 and 1954 Barry went to Croagh Patrick Boy's Home at Orange in the Central West region of NSW. The home had opened in 1928 and it cared for boys to the age of twelve years. It was operated by the Daughters of Charity for the Diocese of Bathurst. Upon completion of their primary education many of the boys were transferred to St Vincent's Boys' Home at Westmead. In 1969 responsibility for the operation of the Home was transferred to the Sisters of Mercy. At this time that the Home commenced accepting girls aged from 3 to 16.

---

<sup>1</sup> Barrier Miner 15 December 1952.



**Croagh Patrick Boys Home Orange, NSW**

In 1955 Barry went to St Vincent's Boys Home at Westmead in the west of Sydney near Parramatta. This was a home run by the Marist Brothers. The home was established in 1891 by the St Vincent de Paul Society as a refuge for homeless children in Surry Hills. During these early days, it was known as St Aloysius Home. Having moved to Redfern and then Five Dock, it was re-established at Westmead, in 1896 where St Vincent's became a joint venture with the Marist Brothers.

At Westmead initially the boys were able to learn farming and gain knowledge of a trade. However, by the late nineteen forties the trade training had ceased and the Home operated on what was effectively a boarding school interacting with other Marist schools in Sydney, especially in inter-school sport. By the mid 1950s, St Vincent's offered boarding school facilities for boys considered to be disadvantaged.<sup>2</sup>

Barry was at Westmead from 1955 to 1959 and left at the end of that year having completed his Intermediate Certificate or Year 10 in today's terminology. He played Rugby League as a school sport.

---

<sup>2</sup> <http://www.maristyc.com.au/stvincents.htm>



1948 Photo St Vincent's Boys Home<sup>3</sup>

Barry returned to Broken Hill and obtained a job on a farm at Ivanhoe. He lasted only a month. He joined a mining company and worked at the North Mine as an apprentice carpenter. He stayed in this job for two years.



Barry 16 February 1960

ORIGINAL

Nº 15441

DEPARTMENT OF LABOUR AND INDUSTRY  
BUREAU OF MEDICAL INSPECTION

Certificate No. 15441 Broken Hill 18 2 1960

This is to Certify that Barry John Norford  
whose signature appears on this certificate, was examined  
the Bureau on 16th February 1960, and  
as found fit for employment in and about the mines at  
Broken Hill.

[Signature]  
Medical Officer-in-Charge

Signature of Examinee B. Norford

**KEEP THIS CERTIFICATE CAREFULLY**

6693 10.56 A. H. Pettifer, Government Printer.

HAIRFORD  
BARRY  
10/11/2  
20197  
NORTH.

Medical Certificate

In 1962 Barry went to Adelaide and worked with a business engaged in sanding floors and laying tiles.

<sup>3</sup> <http://acms.sl.nsw.gov.au>

In July 1963 Barry enlisted in the Army in July 1963. He had previously been a member of the CMF. He served as part of an Australian force posted to Subah, Borneo from December 1964 to June 1965. Sabah was located in the north of Borneo.

The Indonesia-Malaysia confrontation was fought from 1962 to 1966 when Indonesia, under President Soekarno, sought to prevent the creation of the new Federation of Malaysia that emerged in 1963. The British Commonwealth sought to safeguard the security of the new state. Australia sent forces to Malaysia as part of the British Commonwealth mission. The war remained a limited one and was fought primarily on the island of Borneo.<sup>4</sup> However Barry did not see any action as the almost all of the fighting occurred in the south of the country.

After he returned to Australia in 1965, the Army called for volunteers for overseas service. Barry volunteered. The mission turned out to be in Vietnam and Barry served there from August 1965 until December 1966. This was very early in the war and these regular army troops played a leading role in uncovering Viet Cong activities in South Vietnam.

The exploits of some of the Australian diggers in Vietnam has been written about and Barry is quoted about some of his experiences:<sup>5</sup>

Barry Harford added:

"You always enter the shafts feet first. You'd like to have a look first but it's not possible to get your head down far enough to see. There is a three feet drop. It is easier to get out again if you go down feet first. Sapper Mason once got stuck going down head first.

"It looked as if they spent some time digging this tunnel. The sides were not really rough. There were good surfaces on it and they had really made a job of it. Some parts could have been made for a special reason. We found places which sloped up and down and one which was about 4ft high. Otherwise the average height was 2ft 6ins to 3ft.

"There were quite a few passing bays and on the main tunnel there were quite a few offshoots where you could slip in to let a man pass. These are about 15 inches across by 17 inches high.

"Most of the tunnel was in pretty hard clay. In a couple of places I tried to stick a bayonet into the walls and floor but it would not go in more than an inch or two. The soil packs as hard as cement. When crawling along the floor it takes skin off everywhere. I lost skin from my knees and elbows. The floor had packed down hard and it looked as if it has been used extensively. Some parts I crawled through and came out with mud all over everything. It is quite damp in spots.

"Up the far end near C Coy it was possible to work without masks. It was hot but much hotter where the smoke was."

No Need For Heroes p144

<sup>4</sup> Wikipedia.org

<sup>5</sup> No Need For Heroes by Sandy McGregor as told to Jimmy Thompson



The author also records that Barry was one of a number he had recommended for decorations for their immense bravery but these were not awarded.

Some soldiers gave exceptional service and showed immense bravery — I recommended them for decorations whilst serving with 1RAR and I'd like to name them for their outstanding contribution. The recommended decorations included the Military Medal (MM), Mentioned in Despatches (MID), and the Queen's Commendation.

Those I recommended include: Peter Ash, Tommy Mason, Barry Harford, Doug Sanderson, Les Colmer, and Bill Gallagher.

Unfortunately they weren't awarded and now the secret's out (military protocol demands secrecy).

### No Need For heroes Page 288

Les Colmer mentioned above was also from Broken Hill and he died of Leukaemia in 2006 probably related to his Vietnam experiences and perhaps the United States' use of the herbicide Agent Orange. The newspaper report of his death relates:

*"Friend and fellow Tunnel Rat Barry Harford says "Les showed true comradeship to all".*

*The Vietnam War has had a harsh effect on Mr Harford but Les phoned him religiously to make sure he was alright, Colmer's family say he was just a caring and bloke. He was fantastic."*<sup>6</sup>



The depths of war: Broken Hill local, Barry Harford fighting in the jungles of Vietnam.



Barrier Miner 16 August 2006

The above photographs accompanied an article about Jean Lamensdorf a journalist and a volunteer with the Red Cross. Jean took a liking to Barry and an article about him and other Tunnel Rats was published in the Barrier Miner on 16 August 2006.<sup>7</sup>

<sup>6</sup> Barrier Miner 28 April 2006

The article is reproduced in full below because it gives an excellent account of the consequences of Barry's Vietnam experience which is indeed typical of many others:

Jean Debelles Lamensdorf arrived in Saigon forty years and two months ago. On her first day, at the Army Public Relations Office, a photo of an Australian soldier caught her eye – it was of Sapper Barry Harford.

About the photograph, Jean wrote:

He was dog tired; rivulets of sweat carved paths down his dirt-smearred face; exhausted eyes focused on nothing. His dog tags were tapered over to prevent a glint of sunlight from making him a target. His rugged masculinity, combined with the image of sheer exhaustion, sweat and dirt represented every Digger to me.

The soldier was unknown to her but his face intrigued her. "Barry was a really good looking guy," she said. "I didn't know how old he was; I was attracted to an unknown man."

It was not a romantic relationship, nor was it one Jean drew inspiration on during her 12 months in Vietnam. To her the photo was a representation of every Australian soldier – one that engrossed her attention.

Mrs Lamensdorf, 66, left Australia as Jean Debelles, a 26 year old journalist for the women's pages of the Adelaide Advertiser.

Wanting to go to Vietnam to write about the war but too nervous to ask if she could report for the paper, Jean decided to sign as a volunteer with the Red Cross.

"I thought I would be laughed out of the office if I had asked to go over there," she said. "And I was too cowardly to go as a freelance because I don't think I

would have known where to start. I just really wanted to go.

"I had been talking to someone about the Red Cross – all they did was play cards with and hand out newspapers to the soldiers...I thought, 'that sounds easy' and I applied to go over.

"I had been taught how to play cards by my grandmother and was pretty good at it; and handing out newspapers...well..."

Jean was stationed at the Vung Tau logistics support base and the photo was pinned to the wall of her bedroom – she said she looked at it every day and night.

"He was a big part of my life in Vietnam. I would say, 'Goodnight, whoever you are.' And I would pray that he and all the soldiers would be safe. Thankfully, my prayers were answered with Barry."

The first time she had an inkling of her unknown man's identity was after a night out with someone who recognised him.

"I had been in Vietnam about nine months when an engineer with whom I was having dinner stopped by my room. 'What's Barry Harford doing on your wall?' he asked.

"You know him? I gasped, astonished.

"Yeah, Sapper Barry Harford. Comes from Broken Hill."

"I had never looked at the photograph of Barry and thought, 'are you an artist?' or 'are you

<sup>7</sup> The article was written by Daniel MacDonald

something else'...to me it wasn't anything personal," she said. "I didn't think I would ever meet the man in the photo.

"And somehow, though, when that guy told me who it was I never believed him."

Barry Harford was a Tunnel Rat during the war with his good friend, the late, Les Colmer.

Jean describes the life of the Tunnel Rat as horrific. She explains that they would drop through Viet Cong built tunnels armed with a torch and bayonet. She explains their roles as gallant

in that they would need moments before plunging into the 'death traps' to psych themselves up.

They would contend with booby traps, poisoned bamboo spikes and strategically placed reptiles within the tunnels and were at constant risk of confronting a barrage of enemy fire if they found the wrong tunnel.

"When we weren't in the tunnels, we would just lay around and read magazines," said Baz, the name Barry's fellow Tunnel Rats gave him.

Barry returned to Australia in September 1966 having suffered asphyxiation in an enemy tunnel. "I just completely blacked out," he said.

Today, the terrors of war still haunt Barry and although he still lives in Broken Hill, he spends a lot of time at the Adelaide Repatriation General Hospital trying to escape his horrifying thoughts.

He can't remember being dragged out of the tunnel but he said he refused to be taken away in the helicopter and that the tunnel he was in was blown up the following day.

Jean and Barry never crossed paths and were only in Vietnam at the same time for three months.

When she returned, Jean put the photo of Barry Harford on the front of an album that housed a collection of images she collected during the war – Sapper Barry Harford was written beneath the familiar image, punctuated with a question mark.

"I did a Veteran's ID check through the Department of Veteran's Affairs and traced him to the Daw Park hospital in Adelaide," she said. "When I found out where he was I was sad for him. The nightmares that he had developed from Vietnam still haunt him to this day."

The pair wrote to each other and met for the first time in 40 years when the book was launched earlier this year.

"I was curious and when I found out he was suffering emotionally I wanted to see him in hospital. I rang him and told him there could be some press photographers with me and to look nice. He went and bought an orange shirt and a tie, and I thought, well this is nice.

"When I saw him I didn't know whether to hug him or just shake hands. Somehow, though, I instantly recognised him.

"I knew it was Barry right away because he had a sort of look of expectancy. I said, 'Lovely to meet you Barry' – I understood that he would be shy.

"But he didn't look disconcerted. We had a special relationship."

Barry's social worker, Louise Checkley facilitated the meeting and Jean said she was amazed how Barry managed to open up meeting the woman who had been captivated by a photo of him for 40 years.

"Louise warned me that he wouldn't talk, but we talked for hours because we talk the same language. I knew what he was going through over there and we just talked about the same sort of things.

**"Afterwards, Louise eventually said to me, 'Now I have found out things I have been trying to find out for years.' Louise told me that, since my visit with him, he walked around so confidently. It gave him an importance in life that hadn't been there."**

**Trying to stay as apolitical as possible, Jean said she was not sure whether war was a good thing. What she did say was that it brought out the best in a man.**

**For the dedication inside the cover of her book, Jean wrote:**

**For Barry Harford  
And for all the men and women  
who served in Vietnam**

**In the copy she gave Barry, she wrote below it:**

**"To Barry, A very brave warrior – a fine man. With Respect and affection. Jean DeBelle Lamensdorf."**

**The book is now an historical record and was reviewed in Wartime, a quarterly magazine, as a valuable addition to the story of the contribution made by Australian Women.**

**Of her relationship with Barry, Jean said, "It really is a weird story, but I am just so thrilled that, 40 years on, through my book, Barry is getting the recognition he deserves."**

After Barry returned to Australia he spent three more years in The Army. He was posted to the School of Military Engineering, Royal Australian Engineers, at Moorebank near Liverpool. Barry says there was a 'silly episode' over which he was charged and moved on. He went to the 23<sup>rd</sup> Construction Squadron where he was given a desk job a role which given his background and experience was entirely inappropriate. Subsequently, he volunteered for the reinforcement troops at the School of Military Engineering and he was accepted. He was promoted to the rank of Corporal again. He left the Army in 1969 after the end of the six year term for which he had enlisted.

Barry returned to Broken Hill and got a job in the mines with New Broken Hill Consolidated. He worked underground doing timber work.



Barry August 1969  
Department of Labour Medical Inspection



He left NBHC in 1971 and still only 37 years old found he could not get a job in Broken Hill. He left and found work on the land as a rouseabout in the shearing sheds. He later was involved in wool pressing. He did this work until 1996.

Barry's health suffered largely as a consequence of Vietnam and he had a number of breakdowns. He was sent to the Repatriation General Hospital in Daws Road Daw Park (Adelaide). Here he had more trouble and rebelled and he was ultimately moved on.

Barry has a TPI Pension and has not worked since 1996 and is aware that he needs psychiatric assistance. This either means going to Adelaide or waiting till a psychiatrist visits Broken Hill.

We, like Jean Lamensdorf, feel sad that Barry who fought bravely for his country is suffering from those experiences. Barry is very honest and candid about his own weaknesses but it is blindingly obvious that there should be more ready access to support him.