

# Local photographer spent war career shooting with camera

By MARG HAYLOCK  
Staff Reporter

PICTON - Nationally recognized portrait photographer Lloyd E. Thompson is widely known for his striking shots of poets, politicians and celebrities but, in the early days of his career, he focused on much different subjects.

A war-time photographer with the Royal Canadian Air Force, Thompson, this week, shared his recollections with members of the Picton Kiwanis Club.

In the Second War, there were two mobile field photographic sections - Number Five and Number Six units, he said and he served in the latter.

Each unit consisted of 80 men, 40 of them photographers and the balance, support staff.

Early in 1944, a number of RCAF photographers, including Thompson, were sent to Number One Photographic Establishment at Rockcliffe, in Ottawa, to learn how to handle new, rapid photographic processing machines. "They were far in advance of anything we had ever seen and still on the secret list," Thompson said.

He and fellow photographers were then sent to England for further training and, just before D-Day, joined the invasion convoy at Portsmouth Harbor.

The giant, photographic machines were placed in huge trucks and trailers and loaded onto a landing barge, which broke down in the middle of the English Channel. "There we were, left adrift, while the rest of the convoy proceeded to Normandy," said Thompson.

"We were later towed to the beach by a tug sent from England."

Thompson recalled that battleships were firing over their heads,

## 'Lost his head'

PICTON - The narrowest escape Lloyd Thompson recalls, as a war-time photographer, came during an air raid in Bournemouth, England, when he almost "lost his head" in the confusion.

Thompson said, during final training, airmen were told that, in the event of an air raid, they should jump into slit trenches and lie on the bottom.

When an air raid took place, he followed instructions, assuming the trench was about two feet deep. That was his first mistake.

In fact, the trench was six feet deep and to add insult to injury he was nearly decapitated by his tin hat (steel helmet).

The rim of the hat caught on the edge of the slit trench and the intrepid photographer was nearly strangled.

On another occasion, Thompson was startled by a rustling in the bushes and picked up his gun to investigate. He was somewhat taken aback when he discovered that he was preparing to jam the weapon into the side of a cow.

to enemy lines and "as very inexperienced servicemen, we were awed by the number of troops and supplies being landed."

The first night was quiet, but in the following weeks, the ground shook, each night with heavy gunfire and the beach was either bombed or strafed.

"From one location, we watched the destruction of Caen, during a thousand-plane air raid. The sight was unforgettable."

Thompson said the unit followed the army through the breakthrough at Falaise Gap and it was difficult to get photographs processed and back to the army, because of the rapid pace.

The aircraft were taking photographs and landing the film for processing in the trailers. Prints were made and rushed to the front lines so that the army could be made aware of what was ahead.

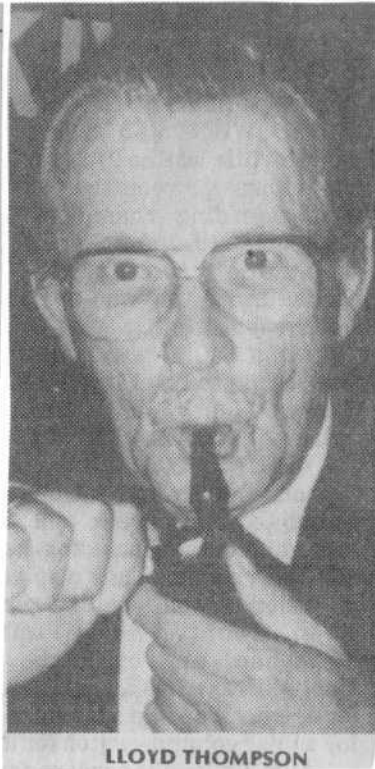
The unit arrived in Holland and spent the winter outside Eindhoven, billeted in a school formerly occupied by the Germans.

"We spent Christmas and New Year's there and at nine o'clock on New Year's morning, 50 German Messerschmitts attacked the airfield. It was a complete surprise and many personnel and aircraft were lost."

On March 30, Thompson's unit was among the first air force personnel to cross the Rhine.

Thompson returned to Canada to pursue a highly successful career as a portrait photographer, working with Malek Karsh and later operating his own studios.

He sold his Picton studio, approximately eight years ago and retired in Belleville, with his wife, Hilda.



LLOYD THOMPSON