

Georgetown police officer makes a vacation rescue

By JANET BAINE
Staff writer

Two Halton Police officers on vacation in Algonquin Park rescued a man, but were unable to save the life of a woman after two canoes capsized while going over some rapids Friday.

Staff Sgt. Roy Smith, who works in Georgetown, said that he and Const. Pat Wood were about three-quarters of the way along a mile-long portage at about 3:15 p.m. when Smith heard a scream.

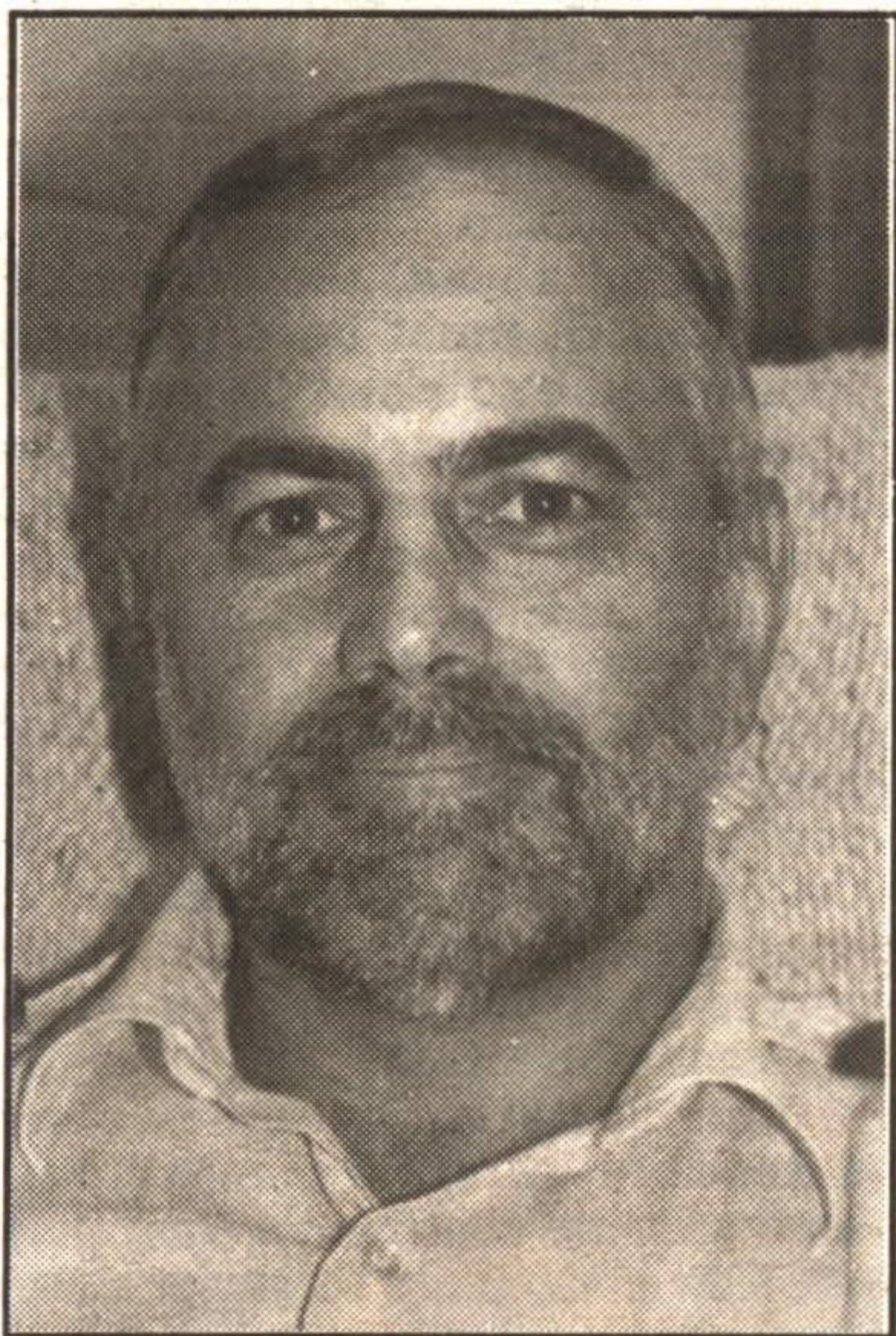
"I didn't think anything of it, I thought it was my imagination," Smith said. But after seeing a canoe overturned at the bottom of a small waterfall, they dropped their gear and ran to see what had happened. They saw a man on shore who didn't seem too upset, and they thought he may have decided to shoot the rapids in a canoe solo, but didn't make it.

They began retrieving gear from the water when they saw a woman's body. They got in their canoe and towed 58-year-old Janet Johnson who was not wearing a life jacket, to shore, trying to perform CPR and keep her head out of the water.

Smith said they realized they had arrived too late and their efforts were fruitless when the body was on shore.

Then they saw another woman was on the opposite shore.

"She said her husband was trapped on a rock in the middle of the chute," Smith said. So the two



STAFF SGT. ROY SMITH

officers went onto the rocks to get as close as possible to the man and threw him a throw bag, a piece of rescue equipment containing 75 ft. of non-tangling rope. They tied the rope to a tree, so that if the man lost his footing, he wouldn't go over the falls. This man was wearing a life jacket and was rescued by the officers.

But this was only the beginning of the ordeal for Wood and Smith who have gone on an extended canoe trip each year for the past 15 years. They found an empty ranger cabin, and ferried the survivors and the body across the water to it. They left them there

along with enough supplies, like matches, food and sleeping gear, for them to survive the night.

Wood and Smith then continued on the canoe route five kms, where they met the only other people in the area, who agreed to go back and give the survivors some moral support.

The pair camped out that night, and got up at dawn the next day to canoe 30 kms to Sand Lake Gate, where they told the warden about the mishap and the OPP were called in to bring the survivors out of the park.

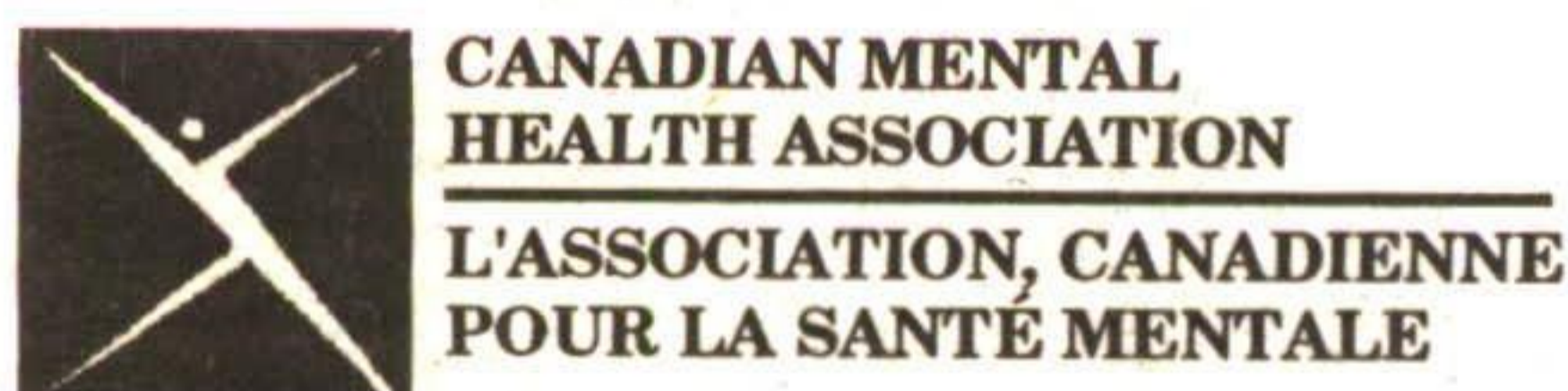
The two couples, both from Spencerville about 75 kms south of Ottawa, had somehow missed the three put-in points where they could begin portaging and avoid the rapids. They apparently didn't realize rapids were in the area and it wasn't until 4 p.m. the next day that they were found by OPP.

"I have mixed emotions (about the experience). I feel sadness for the Johnson family, and I'm pleased that we were able to assist the other three. It also gave me some more appreciation for white water," Smith said.

"If you keep your wits about you, it's still a good holiday," he said of canoeing. "We've been canoeing over several years. You watch the bright campers and try to pick up their techniques and adopt them." Even though they are experienced canoeists, Smith and Wood always bring two throw bags along on a trip and wear life jackets.

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