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Vet Art Ford remembers

BY MAGGIE PETRUSHEVSKY
 The New Tanner

Crescent Street resident Art Ford drove the first ammunition truck onto the beach at Courselles for his regiment when they landed in France on D-Day, June 6, 1944.

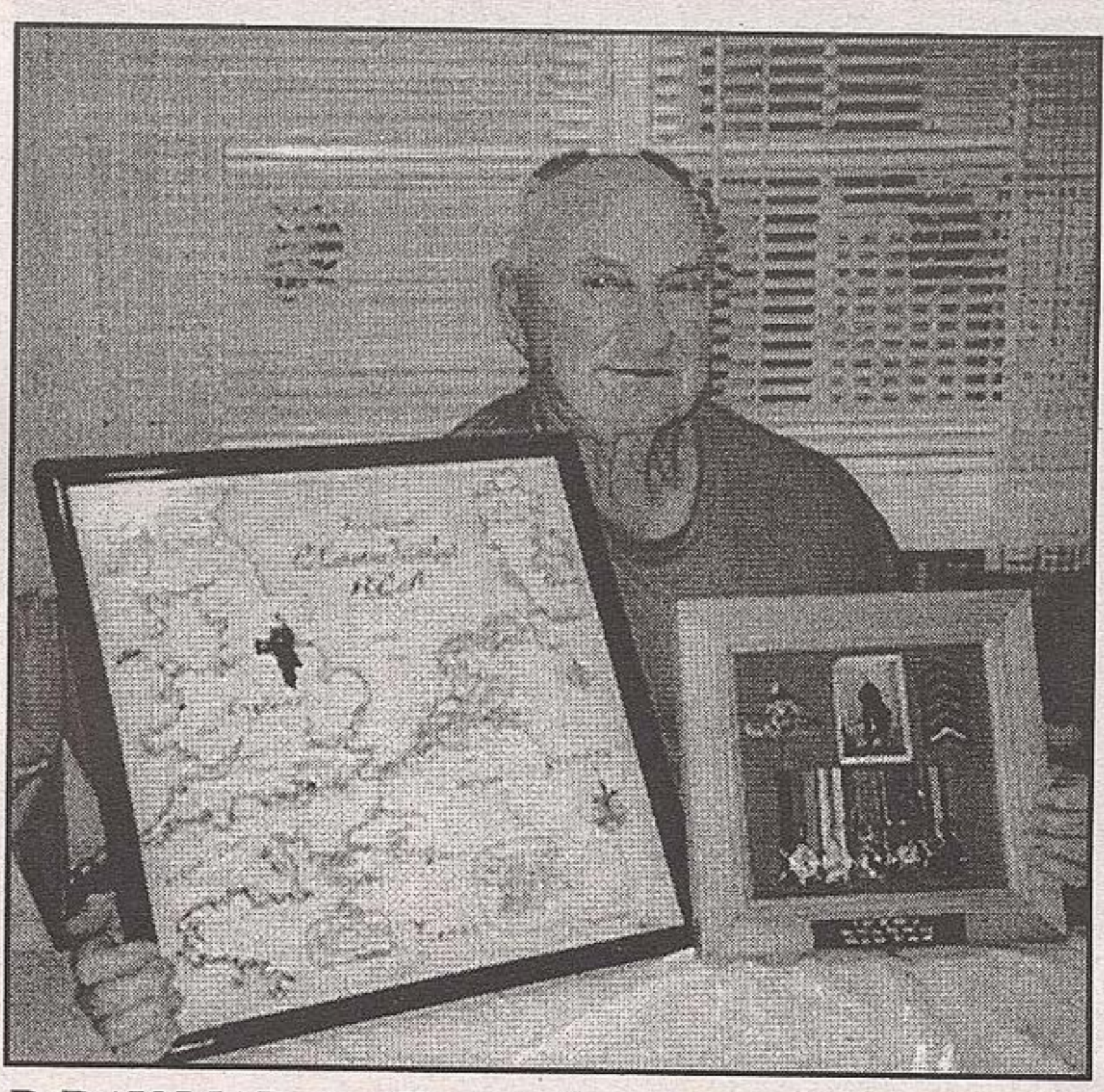
"It was just breaking day when I drove onto the beach," Ford recalls. "The guns had just landed and the infantry behind them. We left our 2 IC (second in command) for the regiment on the beach. We went about five miles that first day."

An Acton resident from a very early age, Ford enlisted in the 12th Field Regiment, 43rd battery in Guelph the day he turned 18. Norm Price joined the same day.

Since Ford already had considerable training with the Lorne Scots before enlisting for active duty he was put in charge of the machine guns when he joined the artillery.

The regiment went to a camp at Sussex, New Brunswick when they finished training locally. Ford was part of the advance guard for that move. They arrived November 5 and were billeted in tents.

"We forgot how to shave in a hurry," he says. "The water froze up in the basin so you just didn't bother."



D-DAY MAP: Art Ford, a former member of the 12th Field Regiment of Guelph, holds a map showing where the regiment went as it fought its way across Europe. - Maggie Petrushevsky photo

That was the camp where they encountered the Chaudières from Quebec.

Ford says they were such brawlers and rabble-rousers the store windows were barred and everyone in town was afraid of them. When a group returned from leave, the camp commander sent a company of soldiers with loaded rifles to escort them back to camp. That way they all stayed out of trouble and they didn't tangle with the 12th Field Regiment.

In July 1941 they crossed the Atlantic on the Duchess of York, or the Drunken Duchess as she was known because of her tendency to roll from side to side - even in calm seas.

They were sent to Eastbourne, near London, when they first arrived and wound up on coastal duty for most of their stay.

It was while he was in England that Ford asked for

REMEMBER

and received his transfer to driving an ammunition truck. He wanted the switch because it was less responsibility. As a non-commissioned officer he got trouble from the soldiers under him as well as his superior officers. As a driver he only had to worry about himself and follow orders. Not that sleeping in the back of a truck on top of 300 rounds of ammunition was without its tense moments. But he preferred it to being a bombardier.

Ford's closest brush with injury came in Europe when a provost stopped his truck at an intersection for some unimportant reason. While they were stationary a shell came through their windshield.

"Two pieces of shrapnel just missed my ear," Ford says.

Ernie Gray, who was with Ford, got a couple of pieces of the shrapnel in his leg.

D-Day was scary, Ford says, at times. Other times they were too busy to be scared.

Ford returned to Britain in July 1945 and got home in September.

Art and Joan Ford always used to march in Acton's Remembrance Day Parade, then grab a couple of flags and join the services at Rockwood and Haltonville too. Now that his eyesight is failing, Ford only attends the Legion church parade.

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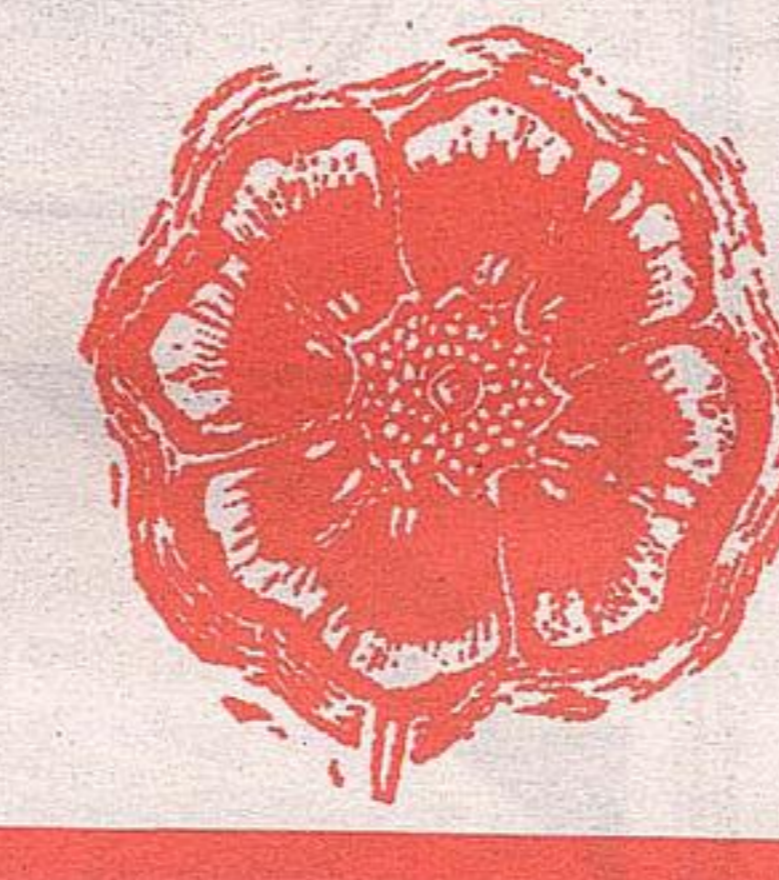
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