

Lest We Forget

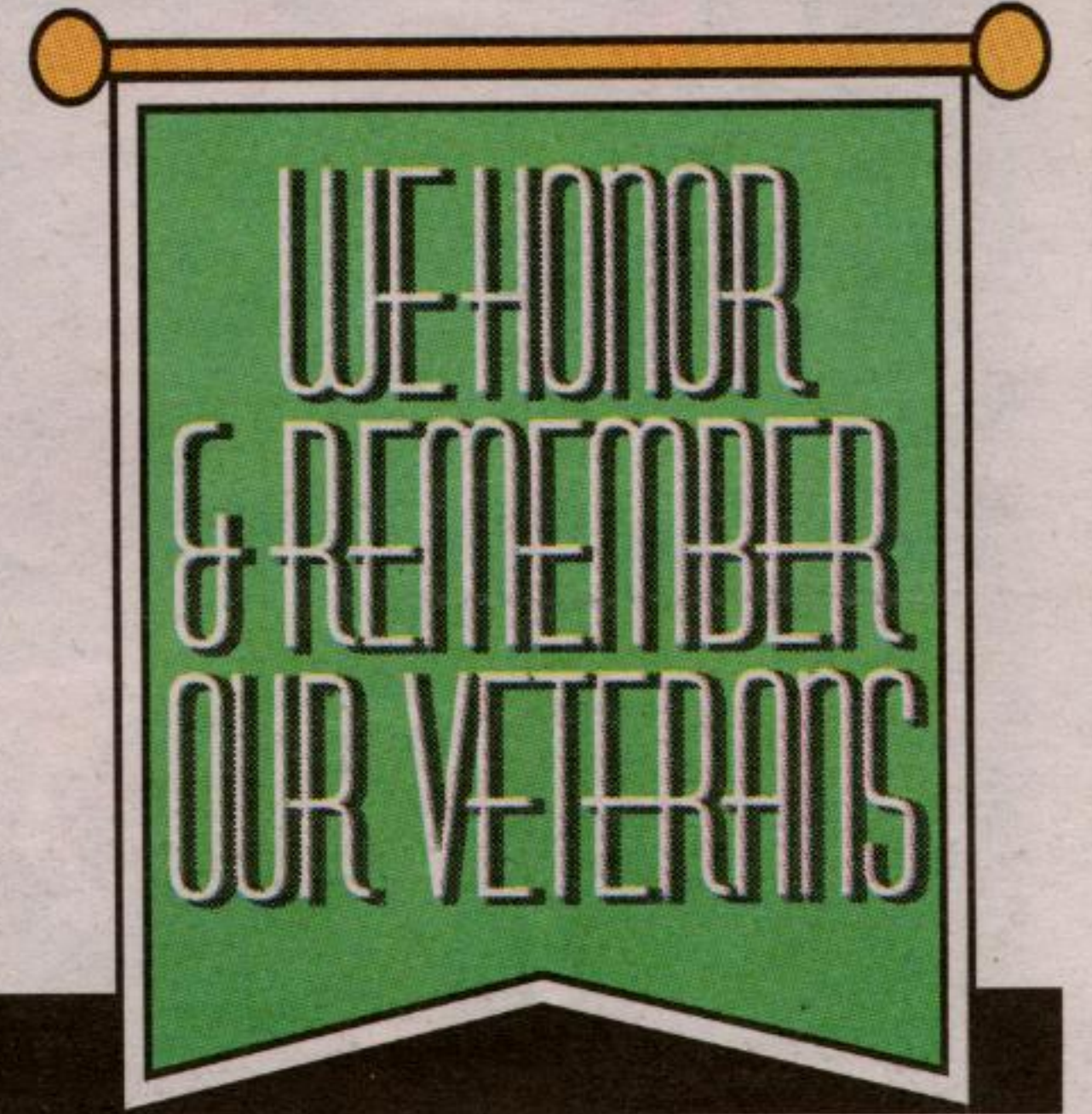


Lest We Forget

REMEMBRANCE DAY



N O V E M B E R 1 1



12 pages

Friday, November 9, 2001

The Independent & Free Press



Corporal Walter 'Red' Asseltine of Georgetown leans against a carrier in Holland in 1945. Asseltine received the Distinguished Conduct Medal after saving his regiment from attacking German troops.

The Reluctant Hero

The year was 1945.

Fighting had been fierce in Europe as the German army mounted what would ultimately become its last stand before being forced to surrender later that spring.

In the town of Otterloo in Holland, the Irish Regiment of Canada was responsible for the town's defence, a key point of advance for the 5th Canadian Armoured Division and the location of the Divisional Headquarters.

It was an important piece of real estate in Holland at that moment.

During the night of April 16, and into the early hours of the 17th, a force of about 1,000 German troops, supported by self-propelled guns, attacked the town.

As the night progressed, about 300 of the enemy worked their way into a vital sector of the town and were dug-in along the road.

It was not a good situation—the Irish Regiment was in an extremely precarious position.

A young corporal who hailed from Cabbagetown (Toronto), was ordered to clear the enemy troops from the area.

Only 25 years of age, he was a member of the carrier platoon, an outfit of 10 men responsible for transporting and fighting with flame-throwing carriers, commonly referred to as WASPs. They were also armed with deadly Bren machine guns.

According to regimental records, three carriers moved into the area, with the young corporal leading the way. In seconds, all three were hit with intense small arms fire coming in from three sides, often at point-blank range of four to five yards.

The corporal ignored the enemy fire, and opened fire with the flamethrower, spraying the ditches and the trenches on both sides of the road.

It wasn't a pretty sight as the flames cut through the darkness, leaving devastation and carnage in their wake.

Thirty yards up the road, a concealed enemy bazooka position opened fire on the carrier platoon—the second carrier was knocked out of action.

The corporal saw the situation had become very serious—his colleagues were in extreme danger if that bazooka continued firing.

Grabbing a Bren gun, he rushed the position, and as the .303 calibre rounds poured out of the barrel of the small gun, he emptied the clip into the crew of the bazooka, killing all of them in one deadly burst.

It was foggy—visibility was limited to 50 yards—yet he continued with the carrier, completely disregarding his own welfare, continuing up the road for another 300 yards, until the fuel of the flame thrower ran out.

He returned, picked up the crew of the disabled carrier, and returned to headquarters to refuel.

As a result of that attack, the enemy was thrown into a state of panic. The key position had been swept clean, and returned to the Irish Regiment. By the time the early light of dawn seeped through the fog, 70 enemy troops lay dead along that road, and many others lay wounded.

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