

Lest We Forget

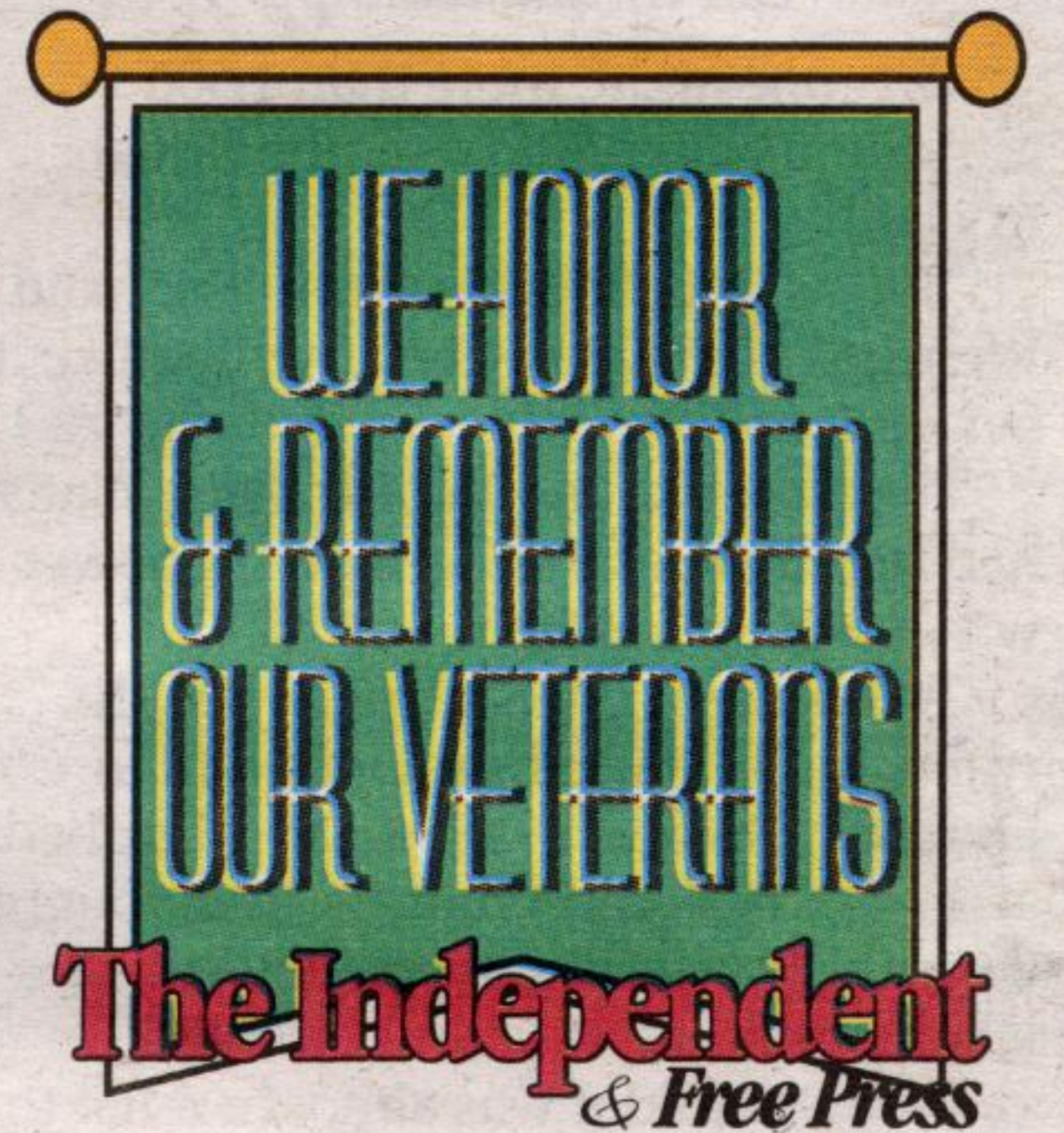


Lest We Forget

REMEMBRANCE DAY



N O V E M B E R 1 1



8 pages

Wednesday, November 10, 2004

Serving Halton Hills

Veteran recalls life as a prisoner of war

Most people are familiar with the miracle of Dunkirk, when more than 300,000 stranded British troops were rescued from the French seaport by civilian boats of all sizes from across the English Channel in England, in May of 1940.

But few people are aware of the action that was going on to the east, at a small seaside village called St Valery en Caux.

As the rescue operation was progressing at Dunkirk, British troops from the 51st Highland Division were engaged at St. Valery, making their last stand fighting alongside the French army to hold back the German army led by General Rommel, and give their troops at Dunkirk a fighting chance to get back to Britain. The 51st Highland Division was practically wiped out in the process, with most of its 10,000 members being taken prisoner.

John Wemyss, a private with the 5th Battalion of the Gordon Highlanders was at St Valery, and was also one of the 10,000 soldiers who were taken prisoner so early in the war.

As he and his comrades were surrounded by Rommel's army, little did he know he'd spend the next five years as a prisoner of war (POW).

From his home in Georgetown, Wemyss reminisced about his experiences during the Second World War.

Wemyss was already in the army in Scotland in 1938, a year before war broke out in Europe. Growing up in depression-wrought Fraserburgh, near Aberdeenshire, Scotland in the 1930s, Wemyss said joining the army was one way of 'putting some bread on the table,' and the thought of marching off to war was secondary.

"Signing up was a way to make some money. It was a way of getting a job,"



John Wemyss (front row centre) and fellow prisoners at Stalag XXB in Marienburg, East Prussia pose for a photo between work details during their five-year stay in the prisoner of war camp. (Right) Wemyss at home today.

Top photo courtesy John Wemyss; Right photo by Ted Brown

said Wemyss. "Some fellows were joining up just to get a good pair of boots."

With the outbreak of war in 1939, the 'Gordons' were called up for service. Wemyss told how he reported to Aldershot and was shipped to France in January of 1940.

"We landed in Le Havre," said Wemyss, "and it was pouring bloody rain. We were only there a short time and were soon sent to the other side of France to wait for the war to actually begin."

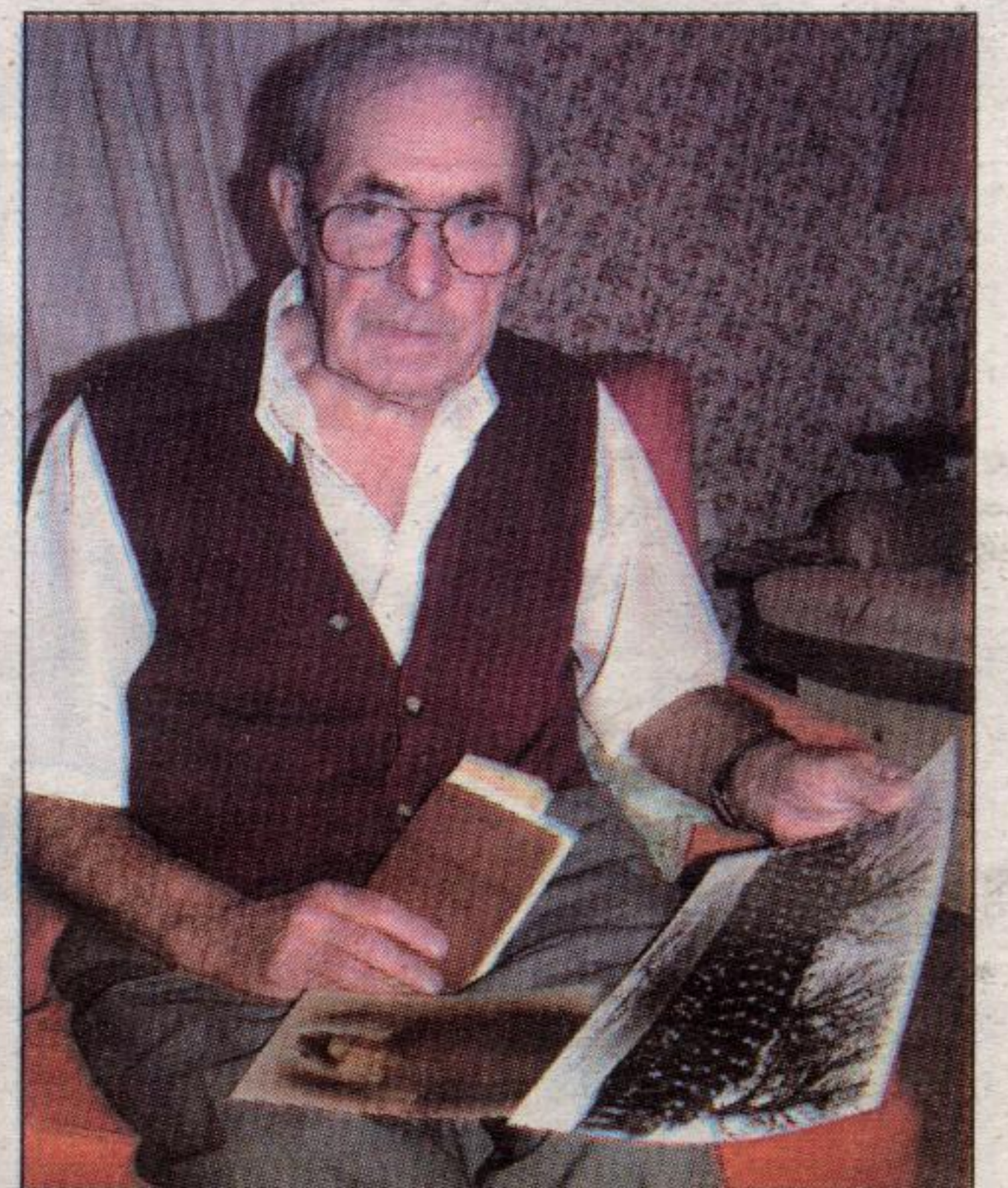
"The waiting was monotonous as hell," said Wemyss. "We were almost

relieved when we had to fight."

In May 1940, the Gordon Highlanders and members of the Black Watch were stationed between the German Siegfried Line and France's Maginot Line, near Metz, France.

"The first night there, they had barbed wire all around the camps," said Wemyss. "Jerry (the Germans) would send dogs out to get into the wire, but we were told to not shoot, because we'd be giving away where we were to the Germans."

See 'LOTS', pg. 2



They shall grow not old,
As we that are left grow old,
Age shall not weary them,
Nor the years condemn.
At the going down of the sun,
And in the morning
We will remember them.

