

# 'Lots tried to escape but there was nowhere to go'

Continued from pg. 1

That one night, more than 1,500 artillery shells passed over the British troops.

"It was unbelievable, the noise," said Wemyss, "I'd never seen anything like it before."

The Gordons and the 4th Black Watch had to retreat, as the German firepower was too great for them.

"We were at the Somme, when the war actually started, and we went to Dunkirk, but had to retreat and finished at St. Valery," said Wemyss. "We fought there for two weeks, then we were all taken prisoner."

Wemyss said it was almost a relief to be taken prisoner—everyone was so battle weary from days of non-stop combat. They physically had nothing left when the Germans surrounded them.

"We were all mixed up," said Wemyss. "There were troops from all over there, and we were marched from Dunkirk right back through France."

"The French civilians would stand along the side of the roads and hand us sandwiches," he said. "We were assembled in columns of about 1,000 men, and we were marched to Belgium and Holland and boarded a train which took us to the Rhine (River)."

Loaded onto barges, three days later they landed at Achan in Germany, and they were given some dried bread.

"You couldn't eat it, it smelled so bad," said Wemyss.

The group stayed there for about a week, then were loaded onto cattle cars on a train, 50 men to a car, and were forced to spend three days on that car

with no food or water.

Their final destination would be a POW camp at Marienburg, in East Prussia, now known as Malbork, in Poland.

Prisoner of war camp Stalag XXB was to be home base for Wemyss and his comrades for the next five years as they endured constant hunger, cold and the cruelty of their German captors. They were sent out on work details under armed guard.

"We had to work at a sugar beet factory," said Wemyss. "It wasn't as bad as some of the other jobs they had. We'd smuggle sugar back to the camp so we weren't as hungry as some."

Wemyss said the times were hard and maintains that 'esprit de corps' or the camaraderie of the troops was often all that kept them alive most days.

"If one prisoner wanted to try to escape, we'd back him, and help cover for him," said Wemyss, "Lots tried to escape, but it was pointless, because if you escaped, you were a long way from any help—there was no where to go."

Escaping also cost those left behind said Wemyss, since they were usually called out on parade, usually in the blazing sun, and forced to remain there until most of them had collapsed from the heat and exhaustion.

"If you escaped and were lucky, you might get to Holland or Belgium, and the resistance would take care of you," said Wemyss. "I heard of a few who were successful but never knew anyone personally who made it."

"Besides," he added, "Jerry (the Germans) wasn't too nice to anyone who escaped."

Food wasn't plentiful either. Each man was given a piece of bread every other day, and every third day, a bowl of watery soup.

Being hungry made the prisoners resourceful, and they found many different things to eat, simply to survive. Those working at the sugar beet factory and farms could smuggle back sugar, and they also made a form of porridge from corn or wheat if they could find any.

Time dragged on for Wemyss and his comrades as they did their various jobs, working on farms, building houses and working on the railroad tracks, as the war continued without them.

"We used to say that the Germans were mechanized, but we (the prisoners) were paralyzed," said Wemyss.

By the end of 1945, the Germans were feeling the effect of being attacked from both sides. With the Russians advancing from the east and the Allies from the west, it was time to move the POWs to avoid the incoming forces.

They were sent on what would later be referred to as a death march.

"We were marched out of Marienburg in December," said Wemyss, "And we arrived at Brunswick (Braunschweig, in northwest Germany) in April. We had to march from daylight until part way into the night, every day, without stopping."

"We lost quite a few (men) on that march," said Wemyss, "At night we were huddled in the middle of a field, right on the ground, in the middle of winter."

The march zigzagged through East Prussia, Poland and Germany, always veering away from the incoming troops, either the Allies or the Russians.

"We picked up whatever we could to



Georgetown resident John Wemyss as a young 19-year-old soldier in 1938. Photo courtesy John Wemyss

eat along the way, but there wasn't much," said Wemyss, "Some of the fellows ate meat from horses that had been hit by shell fire, but I didn't touch it. They often got dysentery or diarrhea from it which could be very serious. We lost a lot of men from dysentery."

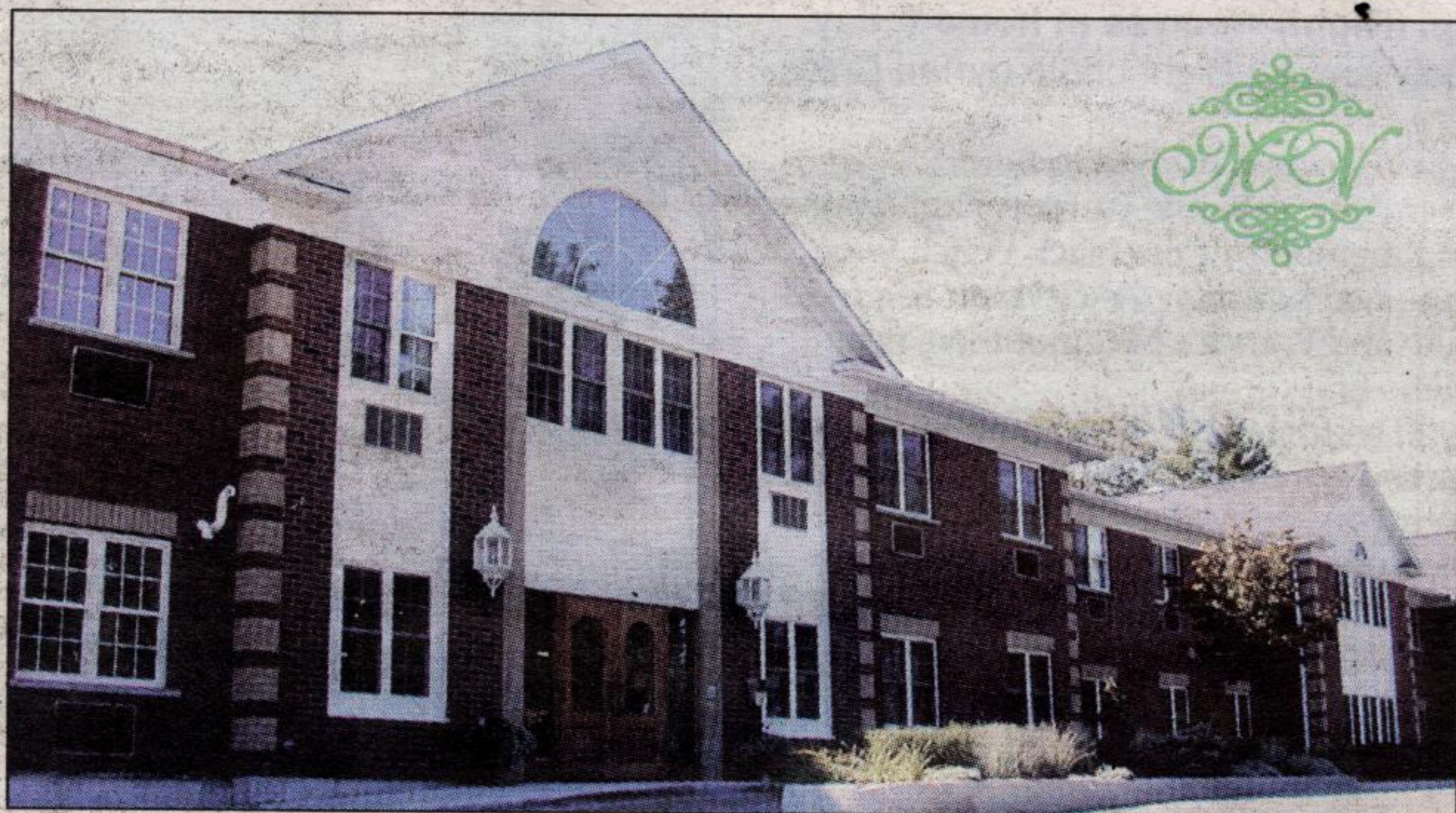
Hunger wasn't the only life threatening part of the march. Occasionally, the POWs would be shelled by artillery or strafed by aircraft fire as they marched down the roads.

See 'THOSE', pg. 3

## Mountainview Residence

222 Mountainview Rd. N., Georgetown

Come by our house ... It's Open All The Time!!



This 82 Suite Retirement Residence offers planned social activities, home-cooked meals served in their lovely dining room, housekeeping and laundry services. Nursing staff on site that provide healthcare and assistance to enable residents to enjoy a more carefree lifestyle round the clock. Come by and view one of our many rooms available including over a dozen suites for couples. Nestled on our 5.6 acre beautifully landscaped site on the outskirts of the village of Glen Williams!

With a variety of private suites to choose from, your monthly all-inclusive fee starts from as low as \$2420.00

For more information or to enjoy a personal tour – simply call



905-877-1800.

www.mountainviewresidence.com

**WE WILL ALWAYS REMEMBER**



## The Bennett Health Care Centre

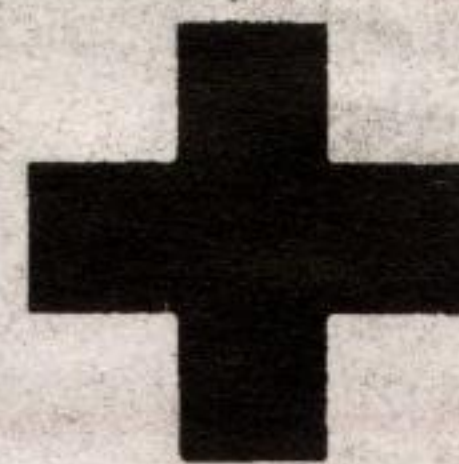
A long-term care facility that feels just like home.

For more information or to arrange a tour please contact:

Walter Sguazzin,  
Administrator

(905) 873-0115 ext. 47185

1 Princess Anne Drive  
Georgetown L7G 2B8



Anywhere.  
Anytime.  
Red Cross

In support of  
the many  
veterans that  
granted us the  
opportunity to  
live in Freedom.

(905) 875-1459

Georgetown

## DENTURE CLINIC

Alexander Trenton, D.D.

(905) 877-2359

18 Church St., Georgetown



We Will Always Remember

Halton  
COMMERCIAL  
Printers

"Where service is  
always in stock"

53 Armstrong Ave.,  
Georgetown

905-877-1278

Fax 905-877-1255