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# Champion COMMUNITY Page

## In the thick of gruesome battle, he prevailed

By IRENE GENTLE  
The Champion

Nine medals, shrapnel scars and long memories are what Milton's George Avery has to show for his war years.

He was an unemployed 19-year-old from Bristol, England when he joined the armed forces amid swirling whispers of war in 1938.

He was young and bored, in need of something to do. So he joined the Gloucestershire Unit, trading in his deadly boredom for something just plain deadly.

It didn't appear that way at first. Mr. Avery was an infantryman when then British Prime Minister Neville Chamberlain had his historic tete-a-tete with Adolf Hitler.

He came back promising peace in our time. Mr. Avery, among many others, believed him.

They were all wrong. "A year after that Hitler invaded Poland," recalled Mr. Avery, a small man with nicotine-stained fingers, resplendent at 78-years-old in his medal-strewn scarlet jacket.

At first, the war machine was a slow one. Mr. Avery was sent to France. There he and his unit just waited.

"They call it the phony war. No one was fighting against anyone but war had been declared," he said.

### Unit shattered

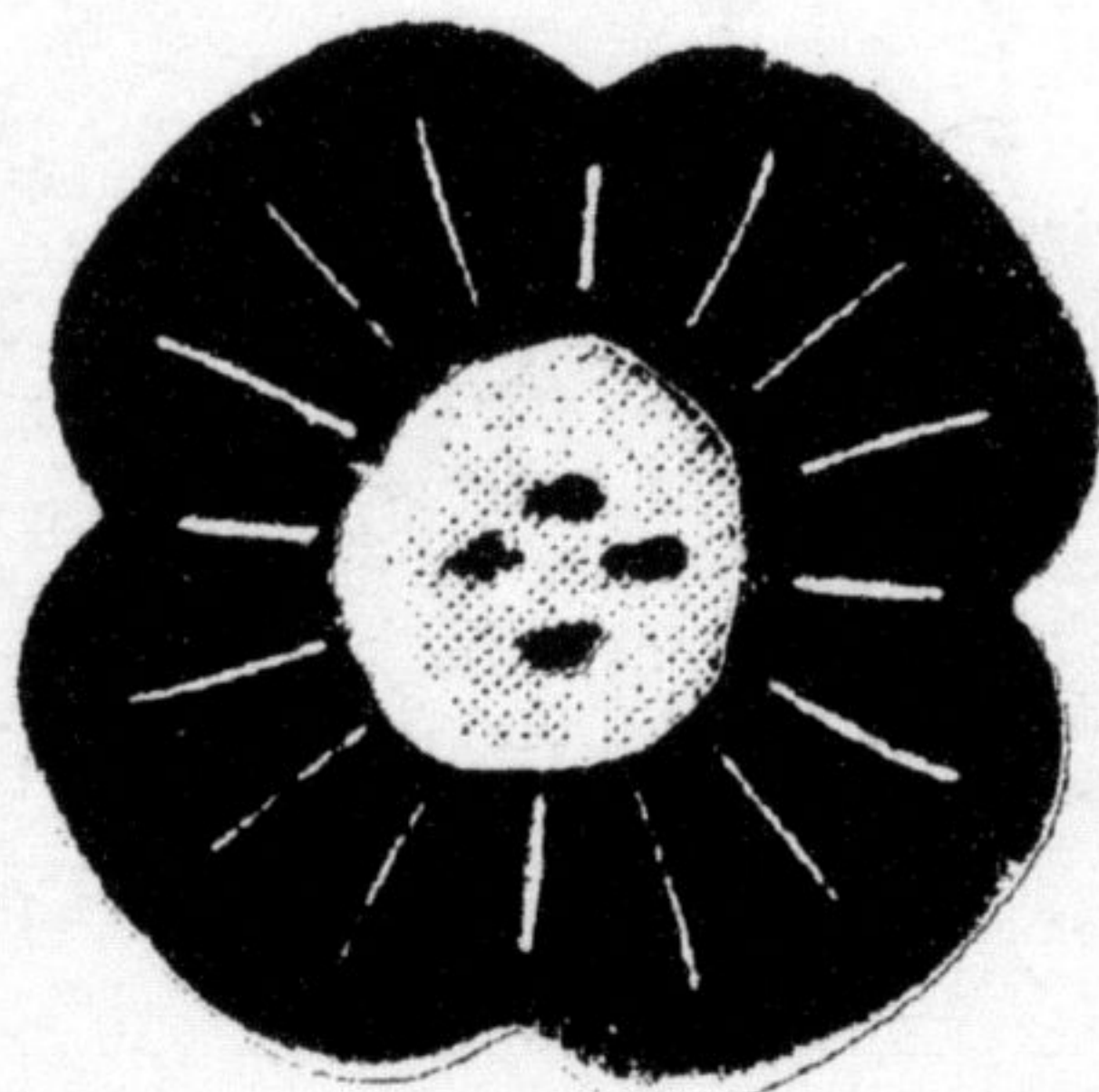
Combat found them soon enough. By the spring of 1940 the Germans had stormed into France. Mr. Avery's unit was shattered.

"We were overrun there. We were pushed back to Dunkirk, to the beaches there," he said. "We got on barges, boats, any way we could to get back to England."

Mr. Avery himself spent 10 hours freezing on a barge to return to his homeland. He was one of the lucky ones.

"We left a lot of people behind. They were taken as prisoners," he said. "Before we left we destroyed all our own equipment so he couldn't have it."

The 'he' is Hitler. Mr. Avery sprinkled that simple reference throughout his speech, never for a moment forgetting the name of the enemy leader he fought.



Back in England, peace for Mr. Avery was a short absence from the battlefield as the war raged on. It was ruptured by Mr. Avery himself, when he answered a call for volunteer paratroopers.

After nine weeks of training, Mr. Avery was a proud member of the 4th Battalion Parachute Unit, 2nd Brigade, 1st Airborne Division.

"We were assault troops," he said.

From there Mr. Avery commenced his world tour, beginning in Africa. Then it was off to Italy.

"We dropped in Sicily," he said, as casually as if he meant for tea rather than via parachute.

In Italy he helped chase the Germans into hiding in a large abbey called Monte Cassino.

"We got held up a little there," he said. "Bad weather, mud. There was a stalemate. But we were firing at one another all the time, of course."

The stalemate ended when Mr. Avery's unit, and others, finally combined to overrun the abbey. "It was

totally obliterated and it was a pretty big place," he recalled, still sounding a little awed at the memory.

"That made it harder for us because then we had no place to hide. They could see us and shoot down at us."

Mr. Avery talked about swatting Germans out of areas all over Europe the way others speak of shooing flies.

"We dropped into Megarra in Greece in 1943. From there we moved into Athens and cleaned out the Germans there," he said.

"We were stopped at Yugoslavia by Tito. He wouldn't let us in because he wanted to kill them for himself. He wanted to chase the rats out on his own."

### Somber burials

Death was never far away. Neither were the somber army burials.

"You'd have four or five guys digging a hole and a padre nearby. There'd be six guys firing off three rounds a piece," he recalled. "This was on the side of the road, in ditches, anywhere. The burials were marked with a cross. They put all the particulars of how they were killed in a cigarette tin and buried that, too."

The tins were for the graves commission

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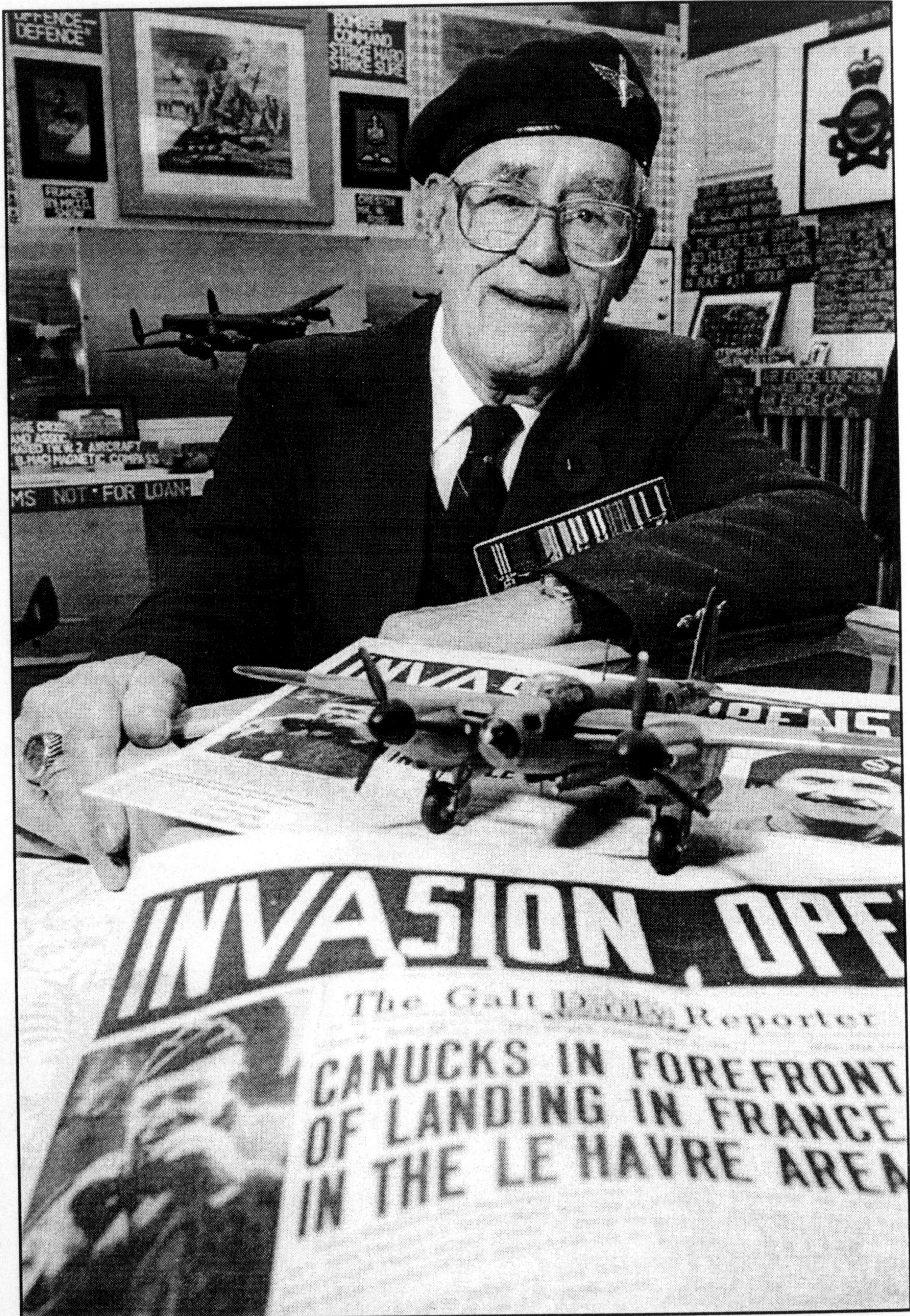


Photo by GRAHAM PAINE

After nine weeks of training, George Avery of Milton was a proud member of the 4th Battalion Parachute Unit, 2nd Brigade, 1st Airborne Division, in the Second World War.

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