

# ✓ Milton veteran one of three Canadian independent marchers in Netherlands

By IRENE GENTLE

The Champion

When Milton resident Joe Lilko got his marching orders earlier this year, he was more than happy to take them.

So he became one of only three Canadians — picked from 500 names — to take part in the recent Nijmegen Marches in the Netherlands as an independent walker.

That's a grueling four-day, 40 km-a-day military hike undertaken by thousands of soldiers and cadets from around the world.

This year's event fell on the 55th anniversary of the liberation of Holland from German occupancy by Canadian troops.

And it was the first time Mr. Lilko had returned to Holland since helping deliver it in 1944 as a member of the 17th Duke of York Regiment.

At that time he was serving in the armoured cars corps, which had been steadily moving toward Germany.

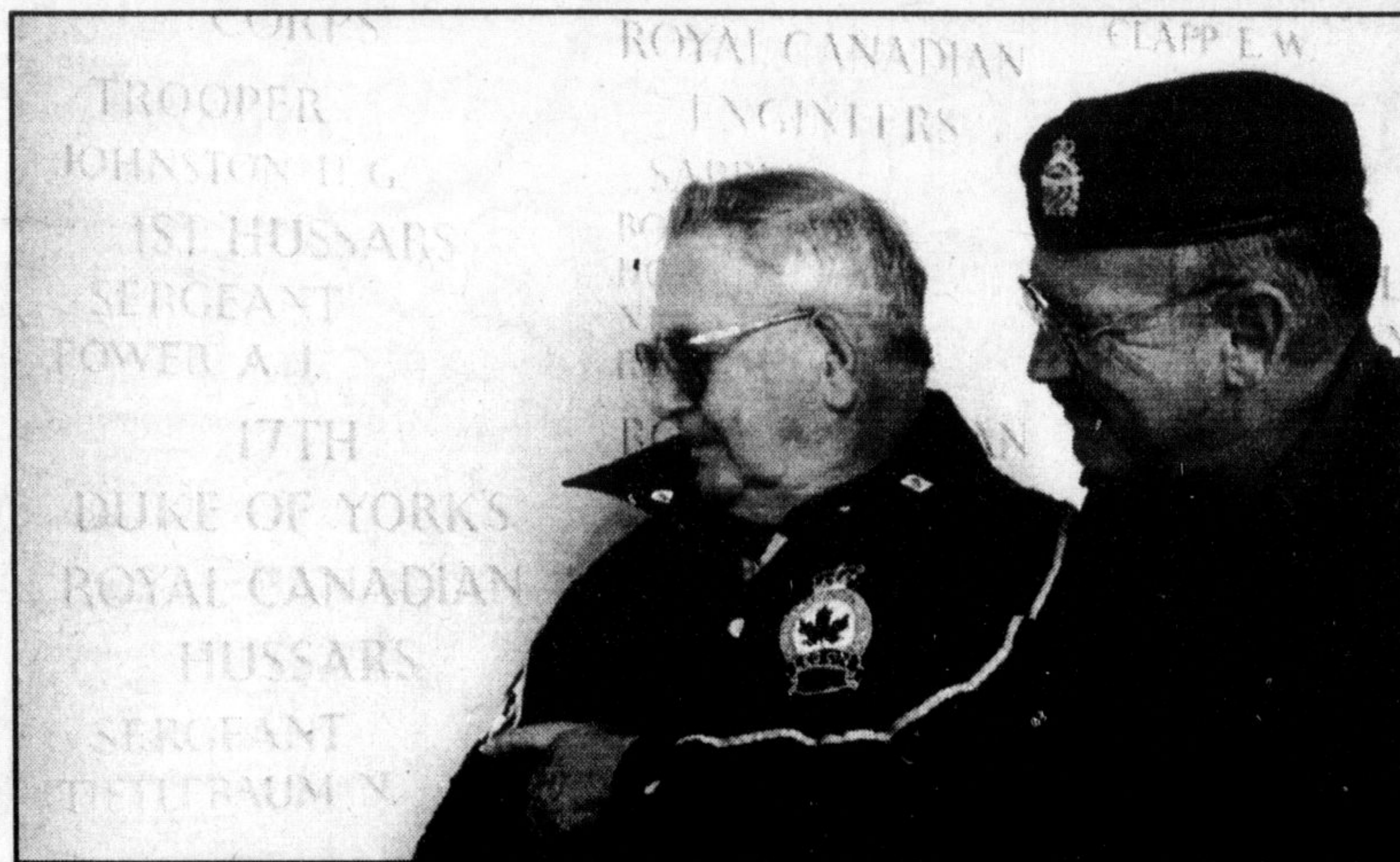
But when they reached it, the fighting had stopped.

"I went right into Germany, but the war ended," said Mr. Lilko.

"They came and told us the war ended yesterday."



Joe Lilko



Canadian Second World War vet Joe Lilko points out his former regiment at the Groesbeek Canadian War Cemetery during his participation in the recent annual Nijmegen Marches in the Netherlands.

That led to a more unusual type of war story being passed through the Lilko line.

"I told my grandson that when I got there, they all quit," he joked.

The war may have wrapped up, but Mr. Lilko stayed in Germany for a while, returning to Canada in March, 1946.

"I was single, and single guys spent eight months as the army of occupation," he said.

"We collected weapons and took out mines. We escorted 500 teams of horses back to Holland, which the Germans took."

And Holland is still grateful. As independent walkers, the three

Canadian veterans — part of a team of 26 independents from around the globe — marched about 10 kms a day.

In their off hours, they were asked to wear their medals, even out of uniform.

A waitress who discovered Mr. Lilko was Canadian expressed her appreciation as he went to pay the bill.

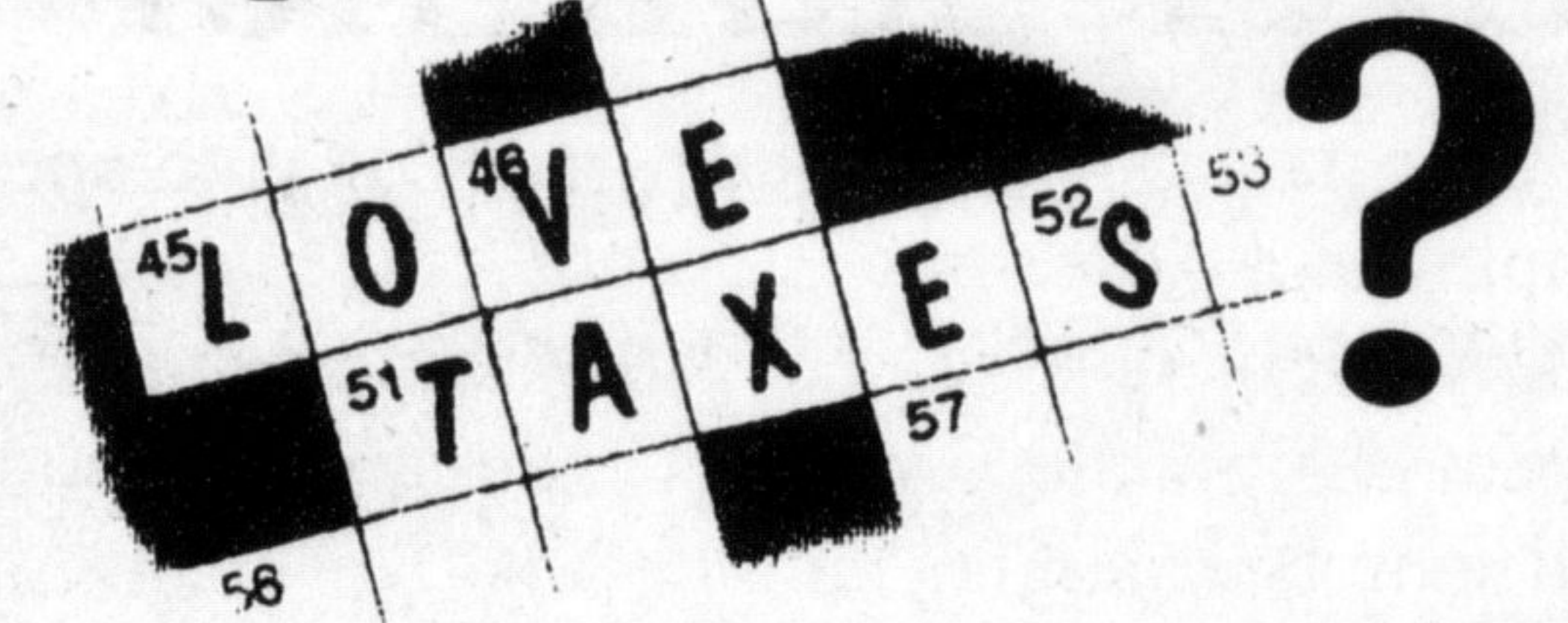
"She said, 'You don't pay. Thank you, Canada,'" said Mr. Lilko.

The veterans also received a thank you medal from Holland.

"I was honoured to go there," said Mr. Lilko, who in Milton acts as the youth and education chair through the Royal Canadian Legion.

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