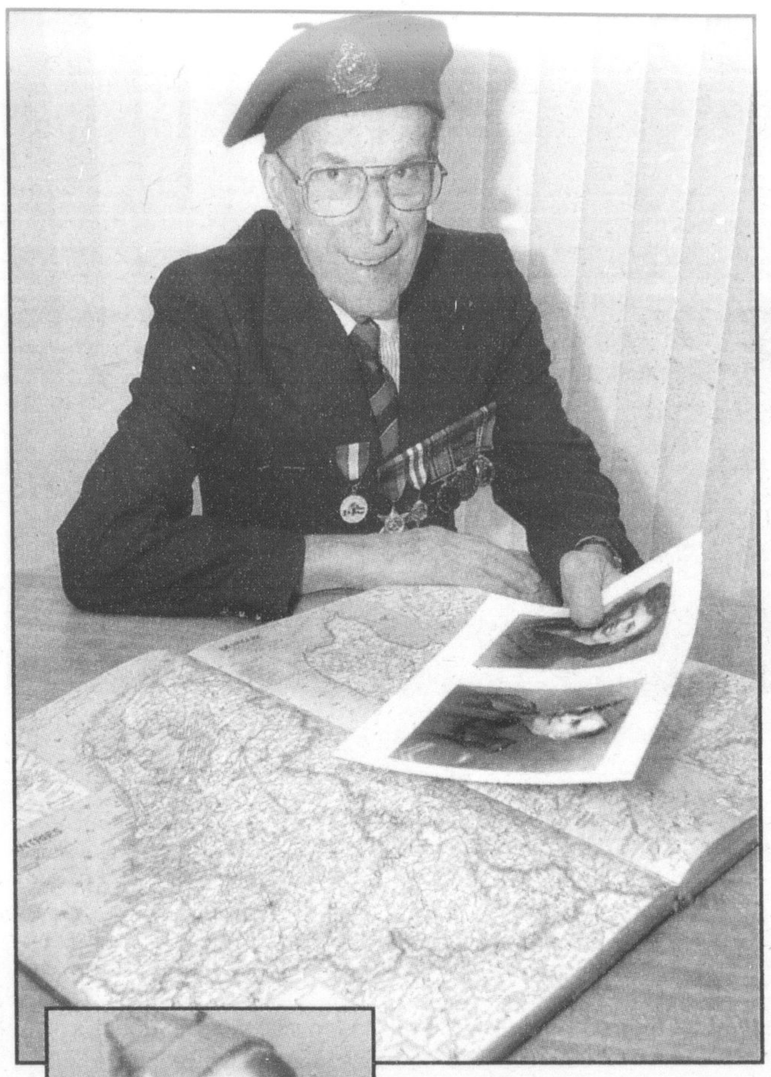
Veteran headed for emotional journey to Holland



Second World War veteran Bert Folco of Milton looks at a photo of himself taken in England in 1942 as he prepares to journey back to Holland for the 60th anniversary of VE-Day.

Photo by GRAHAM PAINE

By STEPHANIE THIESSEN
The Champion

Bert Folco is a man of few words.

Sitting at his kitchen table wearing his navy blue uniform jingling with war medals, the 86-year-old veteran talks briefly about his upcoming trip to Holland for VE-Day, and then stops. He's done, there's nothing left to say, or so he thinks.

His wife, 83-year-old Margery Folco, doesn't agree. She prods him with questions and urges him — frustration apparent — to expand on the trip and how he feels about it.

A few more short sentences and he's finished. Sometimes it looks as though he wants to say more — maybe even has a duty to say more — and yet he doesn't, not really.

Ms Folco — his wife of 59 years — jumps in, asking questions of her own in an effort to draw more out. And the process repeats itself.

"He's more excited and much more impressed and carried away than he'd ever show," Ms Folco says almost apologetically. "There's a lot of emotions there. I have to keep guessing at them."

And then — for a fleeting moment — after being asked about the cemeteries he'll visit, it's as if Mr. Folco has been taken back to a different time, a different life.

"They're big cemeteries. You can't imagine," he says quietly. "All you do is cry in those places."

The life he's remembering is one where best friends are there one minute and gone the next; where tragedy's a daily part of life, and grief is a luxury not afforded.

Once again, he's a brave young man in his prime fighting in the Second World War. He's a lad smitten with the loveliest of ladies, but must wait for the war to end to claim her hand in marriage.

He's a son returning to his mom after years of uncertainty overseas — the reunion that was always hoped for but never assumed had finally arrived.

And then, as soon as it came, it's gone.

• see DUTCH on page 4

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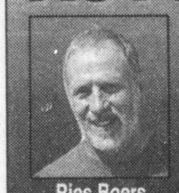

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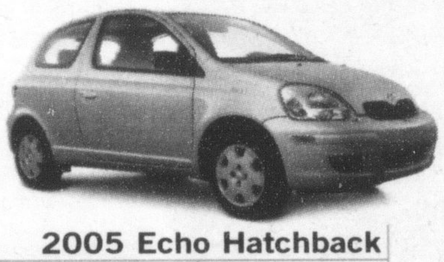

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