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Air force vet tells students of his war experiences

By Bill Rea

Howard Folliott saw a lot of action in the air during the Second World War, and he related some of his stories to students at Country Day School Nov. 8 at their annual Remembrance Day Assembly.

But for all his stories of training and action at the controls of bombers, he drew appreciative sighs from students when he related how, as VE-Day approached, he proposed to his wife and was accepted — by mail. He also described how he went shopping for the ring in London, and made arrangements with Birks in Toronto to see it was delivered Valentine's Day.

Folliott now resides in Willowdale, but he grew up on a farm in the area of what is now King Road and Dufferin Street, and attended Eversley School, which stood on what is now part of the Country Day School campus (he is an honorary alumnus of Country Day).

He told the students he

joined the Royal Canadian Air Force after finishing High School in Aurora. "At that time, it was the thing to do," he remarked.

He also knew he wanted to be a fighter pilot, and there were some 234 locations where they were being trained, at a total cost of about \$2 billion.

When he joined up, he was quartered at the

He ended up on a troop train to New York, then boarded the liner Queen Elizabeth for the trip overseas. He recalled it was a rough trip, with no convoy escort, and many of the troops on board were sea sick.

He eventually arrived on the southern coast of England, and was put up in a vacated luxury hotel.

himself in a school that trained pilots to be navigator, and then was posted in the south at an observer air training school for navigator training.

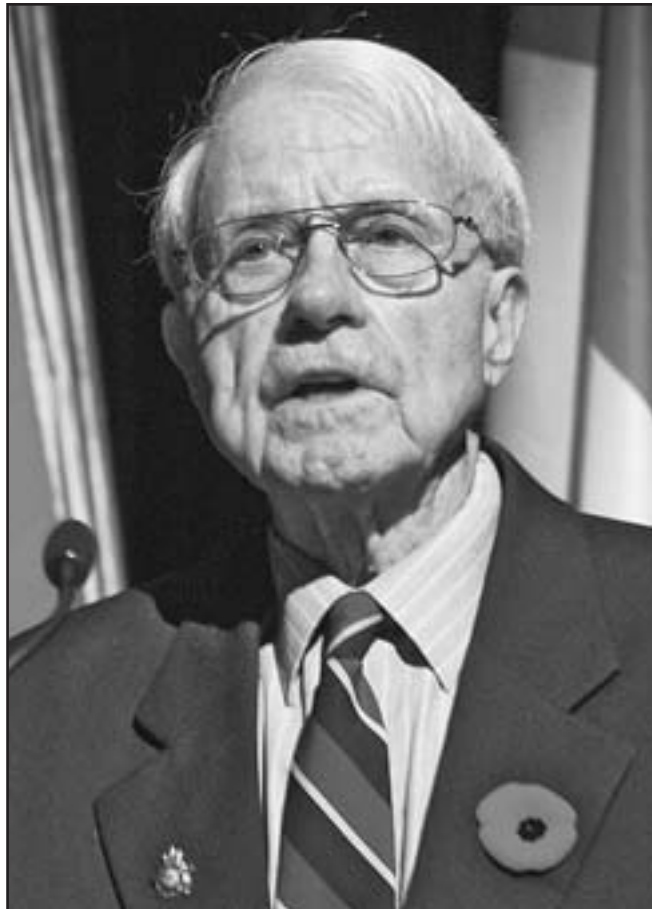
Weather played a factor in his training, he said. They were supposed to make two flights a night, serving as pilot in one and navigator in the other, but only when conditions permitted. In a good month, they could get in 85 hours of flight time, but 25 hours was more the norm, as there were a lot of nights when the weather prevented them from getting off the ground.

He also recalled training a cousin of his to be a navigator. They went on two flights together. But the cousin, who was a couple of years older, was lost when he was shot down over France. Folliott said it was sometimes hard to train these guys, since the life span of a navigator wasn't long.

Folliott recalled being in London during an air raid, and saw one German plane make its run and get away, despite absorbing a considerable amount of flack. "What a lucky guy!" he remarked.

There were some times when luck seemed to follow Folliott. He recalled flying back to base on one flight during an air raid. He instructed the navigator to set a course for a predetermined point about 50 miles to the north. One their way there, they ran into an ice storm, which caused the instruments and windshield to freeze. Then the plane went into a stall, and when he got things going again he had no idea where he was or where he was heading. As it turned out, they were over Wales, flying in various directions, but they were able to get back to base.

See 'Luck' on page 15



Howard Folliott, graduate of The Eversley School, addressed Country Day School students at their recent Remembrance Day observances.

Canadian National Exhibition grounds, in the cow palace. He also recalled that as he was completing his course there, there were efforts to get men to sign up to be navigators. But he still had his heart set on being a pilot and he was duly posted to flying school in Oshawa.

He trained on tiger moths, and it took about eight hours in the air before he was ready to solo. He recalled these crafts were easy to navigate, partly because they didn't fly too fast. While he was soloing, he was able to fly over the family farm, to the entertainment of his mother and brother.

He was eventually sent for training near Hagersville, where he flew Ansons. It only took him three hours to get to solo in one of these, and he took another trip over his home. "Nobody was there, so I headed back to base," he said.

Folliott received his wings Dec. 4, 1942, and he was given his orders to go overseas. He recalled his father and brother drove him to Toronto to see him off, with no one apparently realizing it would be two and a half years before they would see each other again.

Luck was evidently with Folliott from the start, because he switched hotels shortly after his arrival, and the first establishment was bombed a couple of days after the move.

"That was my first break," he observed.

He was sent to advanced training school, and shared a room with a young British flyer who soon died when his craft overshot a runway.

Folliott said he had asked to be trained to fly twin-engine fighters, but found



Michelle Cherny and Colin Noble playing the last post at the recent Remembrance Day service.

Photos courtesy of Lu Taskey

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