

# 2018 HHAS Remembrance Day Ceremony at Springbrook

talk by Jodi Smith

This year is the 100<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the end of WWI. Germany signed the armistice (surrender) documents at 5 AM on November 11, 1918 but the cease fire occurred at 11 AM. The first Armistice Day, to remember the dead from WWI, occurred throughout the British Commonwealth was on November 11, 1919. It was called Armistice Day until 1931 when Canada officially changed the name to Remembrance Day

If you were here 75 years ago, in 1943, this aerodrome would have been a bustling place with hundreds of young men coming and going, almost all with British accents. The newest ones would be in ground school but the rest would be learning to fly twin engine Air Speed Oxford MkI planes. It was a Royal Airforce Base staffed entirely by Brits and was built as part of the British Commonwealth Air Training Program (BCATP).

Our society has taken responsibility for preserving the history of both BCATP bases in Central Alberta: No. 32 Elementary Flying Training School near Bowden (now the Bowden Institution) and No. 36 Service Flying Training School here at Springbrook, both of which were RAF bases during WWII. Initially both bases were staffed entirely by RAF personnel.

By November 1943 both bases would have been in second year of operation with several classes of students at different stages in their training. At Penhold students were taken on in groups of about 60 and Bowden in groups of about 30. At both bases each group was given a unique 'course number'.

It was here at No 36 SFTS that students finally 'got their wings'. So in addition to British accents there would have been the din of twin engine Air Speed Oxford engines as students practiced landing and taking off, etc.

At Bowden the planes used for training were changed in May 1943 from biplanes (PT-17 Stearmans and de Havilland DH.82 Tiger Moths) to Fairchild Cornell PT-26As. However there was a construction fault in the main spar of the wing of these planes which resulted in the wings falling off when they were stressed during flight. All five deaths at Bowden in 1943 occurred after May when the PT-26A Cornells came into use.

Ten service men died while on active at the two bases during the 1943 calendar year. They were buried, Innisfail for students at Bowden, Red Deer for students from Penhold, far from their homes. Nearly all of them were young and single. They left behind their parents, siblings and perhaps a girlfriend either back home or in Central Alberta. Today we remember them.

They are:

**LAC Nevil William Armstrong** 1861932 Based at No 32 EFTS Bowden who died on October 26, 1943 in a crash of Cornell 14395. He was 18 years old.

**LAC Ivon George James Davies** 1652832 Based at No 32 EFTS Bowden who died on July 26, 1943 when Cornell 14409 crashed. He was 20 years old.

**LAC Cuthbert William Cyril Ellis** 1608111 who was based at No 32 EFTS Bowden who died on August 27, 1943 when Cornell 10740 crashed. He was 19 years old.

**LAC Richard Ronald Gilpin** 434589 Based at No. 36 SFTS Penhold who died on September 16, 1943. He was 25 years old, a week shy of his 26<sup>th</sup> birthday. He was a member of the Royal Australian Airforce.

**LAC Kenneth Lewis Gover** 657938 Based at No. 36 SFTS Penhold who died on April 9, 1943 as a result of Oxford X6555 crashing near Innisfail. He celebrated his 29<sup>th</sup> birthday the week before he died.

**F/L Ralph Mount** 85931 who was based at No. 32 EFTS Bowden who died on August 27, 1943 when Cornell 10740 crashed (see I.G.J. Davies). He was 44 years old. He left behind a widow in Sussex, England t

**LAC Cyril Woodyear Smith** 1394906 Based at No. 36 SFTS Penhold who died on April 9, 1943 as a result of Oxford X6555 crashing near Innisfail (killed with his flight instructor, K.L. Gover). He was 28 years old.

**LAC Peter John Stuart** 1320346 Based at No. 36 SFTS Penhold who died on June 13, 1943 when Oxford T1181 crashed. He was 21 years old.

**SGT/Pilot Barry Howard Thompson** 1232209 who was based at No. 32 EFTS Bowden who died October 26, 1943 when Cornell 14395 crashed (see N.W. Armstrong). He was 20 years old.

**LAC Donald Barclay Young** 1397797 Based at No. 36 SFTS Penhold who died on June 13, 1943 when Oxford T1181 crashed. He was 18 years old.