

Percy Foster dies at 89

BOB OWEN

COLBORNE — For more than 25 years, Colborne Legion Branch 187 echoed with the harmonious ramblings of Percy Foster. The little man with the big smile was most at home in front of a keyboard; he shared his gift with everyone.

Foster, with his friend and frequent musical partner, Rex Dillabough, is credited with originating the Legion Jam Sessions, still held in the branch club room and other area branches.

Foster set up the loosely organized monthly jam sessions that grew in 1999. He later passed the duties to Ernie Stoneman, allowing Foster to return to what he loved — making the piano dance.

For years, the mild-mannered, warm-hearted veteran was a fixture at the local branch he joined when he moved to Colborne in 1975. When he wasn't at the keyboard, he might be found playing a little snooker.

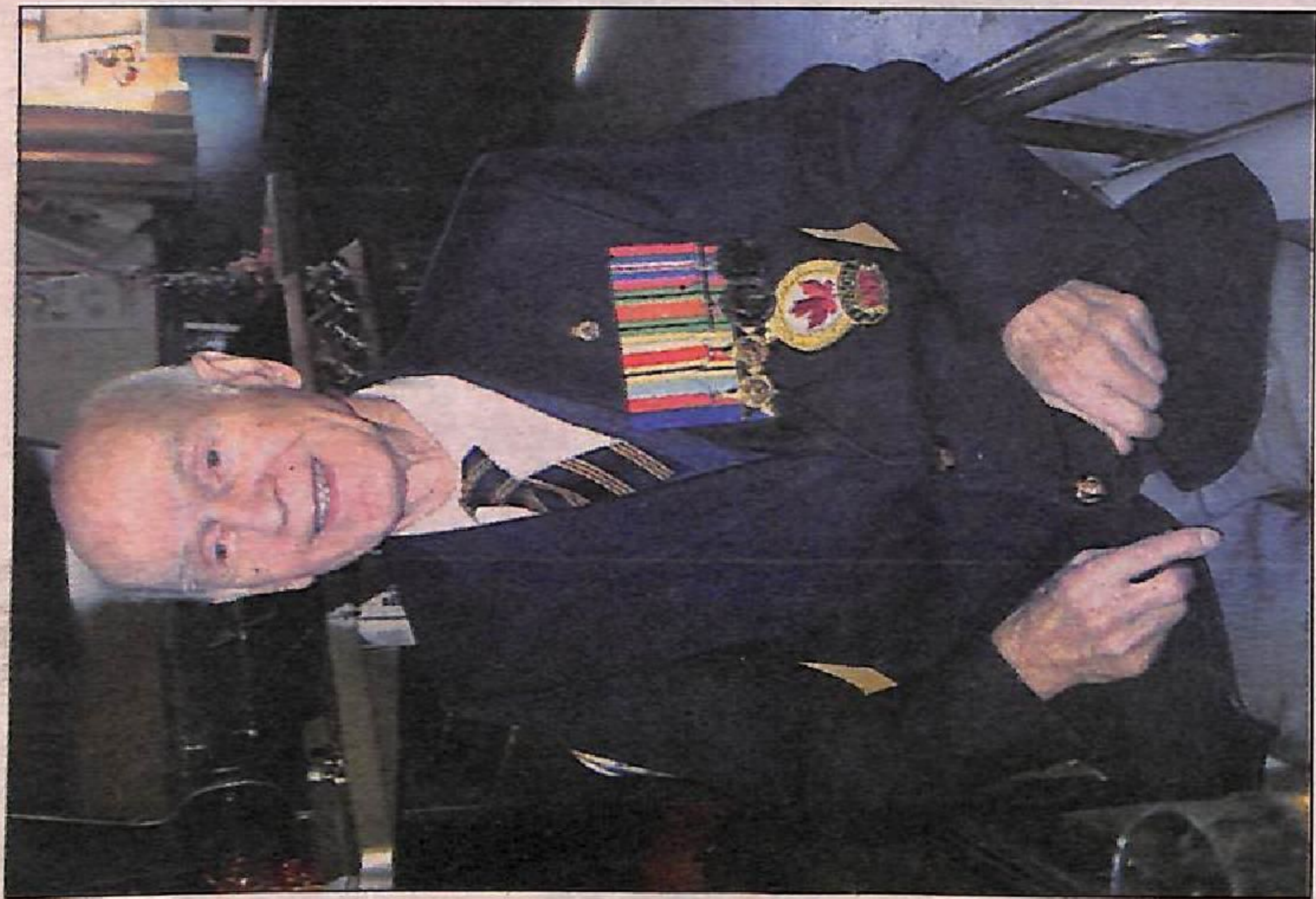
In his 80s, he was still gardening at his Burnham Street home, growing flowers and producing his own vegetables. Using his own recipes, he created cakes, breads and cookies.

Much of Foster's life had passed before he arrived here.

His family traces its lineage back to the 1800s in Leeds and Yorkshire where Foster's great-grandfather, Benjamin, and his father, Percy, farmed and raised families.

Foster's namesake and wife, Hephzibah, had 11 children. All but two remained close to their British home. Only Percy made it abroad.

Foster and his brother Tommy joined up at the start of the Second World War. Prior to the war, Percy had worked on aircraft and hoped to join the air force but instead served the entire war in the Royal Navy where he earned two campaign medals and two stars.



MANDY MARTIN Sun Media

Percy Foster was awarded his 40th anniversary ordinary (saw military service) Legion membership May 2007.



MANDY MARTIN Sun Media

Above: (From left) Percy Foster representing navy veterans, Bert Oliver, representing army veterans and Bill Baluk representing air force personnel take the salute from passing Colborne Legion members at the Remembrance Day ceremonies in Colborne Nov. 11, 2000.



Left: Percy Foster, keyboard, and Rex Dillabough, vocals and guitar, kept it light and lively at the annual Cramahe Township New Year's Day levee hosted by Colborne Legion Jan. 1, 2005.

The young sailor was a keen recordkeeper and loved taking photos. His family treasures the many snapshots taken at exotic ports around the world. His personal leather-bound, embossed album contains black and whites of camels, pyramids and world military leaders like Winston Churchill and Field Marshal Montgomery.

Foster emigrated to Canada in the 1950s, settling in Toronto before his move to Colborne in 1975.

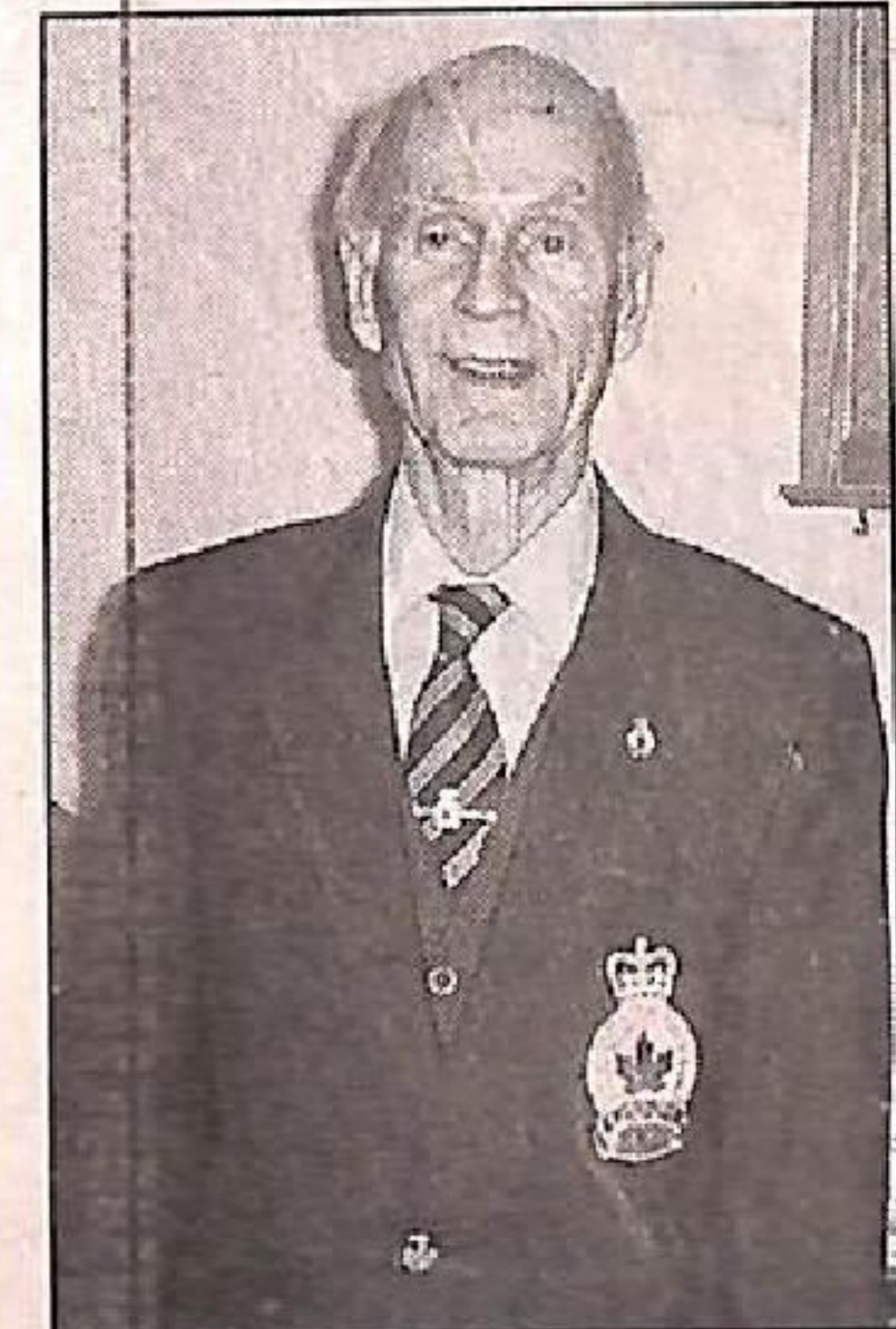
Percy Foster died on July 8, 2009, 10 days before his 90th birthday. He is survived by his wife, Gladys, his stepdaughter Valerie, step-grandchildren Kimberley and Ken, and step-great-great-grandchildren, Liam and Jillian.

Most of Foster's 10 siblings remained in England where their children reside today.



MANDY MARTIN Sun Media

For Remembrance Day 2000, Percy Foster was one of the veterans of Colborne Legion who spoke to groups of school children of his World War II military service.



MANDY MARTIN Sun Media

Percy Foster at the annual Colborne Legion honours and awards ceremonies, April 21, 1999.

51