

VE Day

Sight of bonfires signaled end of war for Bowes

By BRUCE STAPLEY
Correspondent

Travelling on a train to Liverpool, England after finishing his tour of operation with the RAF on May 8, 1945, Harry Bowes looked out the window to see bonfires lighting up the night sky.

He knew exactly what it meant. "We knew right then the war was over. There had been a blackout in effect throughout the war in England, and there were these bonfires burning," recalled Bowes.

For Bowes, currently a veteran Whitchurch-Stouffville school trustee, the long awaited cessation of hostilities in Europe came as no surprise.

After serving as a bomb aimer on 30 raids or "trips" with the RAF's 103 squadron, he said Nazi resistance had weakened. "We had a pretty fair idea it was coming. The (Nazi) anti-aircraft was not as strong as it had been a year before."

Bowes, who was living in Hamilton at the start of the Second World War, enlisted in the RCAF in the summer of 1942 at the age of 18. He was eventually posted to the RAF with his tour of duty ending shortly before VE Day.

His air force stint wasn't without

its anxious moments. "We were hit by flak once, and another time we got caught in the cone of the (enemy) search lights. But our pilot was pretty clever and we evaded the lights."

Bowes said he felt relief at war's end, along with a sense of thankfulness that the ordeal of the British people was finally over.

Returning to Canada in mid May, Bowes said it took a while to readjust. "You're sort of lost because you've been away from civilization for so long. But it was also a matter of being able to have some decent food at last."

Bowes was afforded a hero's welcome upon visiting places he had worked before enlisting.

He began his pharmaceutical apprenticeship after meeting a supportive pharmacist, and with the help of a lawyer he met was able to jump the line of applicants for the University of Toronto's pharmacy course.

His tuition was paid by the Canadian government, and he was given a \$65 monthly government allowance to sustain him during his two years as a student. After a year or so spent working for other pharmacists, Bowes bought a small pharmacy business in Toronto in 1948.



Harry Bowes, left, served as a bomb aimer in the RAF during the Second World War.

Now retired, Bowes has served 20 years as Whitchurch-Stouffville public school trustee, including six terms as chair of the York Region Board of Education.

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