



# NEWS RELEASE

For Immediate Release

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## **Connaught Honours War Hero — Air Commodore Len Birchall, CM, DFC, OBE, OOnt, CD**

On Friday May 25, 2007 at 2 pm, Connaught Public School will honour the memory of their most famous former student—Air Commodore Len Birchall CM, OBE, DFC, O.Ont, CD.

In 1942 Royal Canadian Air Force pilot, Len Birchall spotted a fleet of Japanese war ships off Ceylon (now Sri Lanka) and warned the allies of a possible attack. Although the invasion was thwarted, Len and his crew were shot down in the Indian Ocean and taken prisoner. The allies assumed he was lost. A tree was planted at Connaught in his memory—only to be rededicated to honour him upon his return in 1945. During the four years as a POW, Birchall emerged as a leader. Despite facing solitary confinement, beatings and appearing before a firing squad three times, Birchall arranged secret medical operations for his men, gave up his food for those more needy and even organized a sit down strike against sending sick and dying men to work in the shipyard attached to the camp. Testimonies to his gallantry in the camps abound. For his efforts, Len was awarded numerous medals and commendations, but the most significant title is “Saviour of Ceylon”. Prime Minister Winston Churchill considered Birchall’s act as “one of the most important single contributions to victory.”

Len Birchall was born and raised in St. Catharines, Ontario. He attended Connaught Public School, later going on to attend Royal Military College, Kingston, and joining the RCAF in 1937.

On May 25th the staff, students, and community members will honour Air Commodore Len Birchall in the presence of his nephew, Ellis Landale. An Assembly and presentation will take place in the Gymnasium of Connaught School.

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