

## ROWLAND WILKINS HILL (1919-1943)

The name *Rowland Hill Reliable Footwear* was so well-known, for so many years, as London's biggest shoe store, that **Rowland Wilkins Hill** could never have avoided the limelight. He didn't want to. There have been five generations of the Hill family with the name Rowland. Interestingly, this Rowland was never called by his given name but went by the nickname "Billy", a diminutive of his middle name Wilkins, his mother's maiden name.



231 Baseline Road

From the family home at 231 Baseline Road, Billy breezed through *Wortley Road Public School* and landed at *South Collegiate* in September 1932. At *South* he seemed to be involved in every aspect of high school life. Good academic grades set him up to go on to university



**BUSINESS STAFF - 1936 Oracle** - R. Hill ( Back Row, 3rd from left)

and his extra-curricular interests were varied. He wrote articles for the *Oracle*, *South's* annual yearbook, as well as serving on both its editorial and business staffs. He played on the WOSSA winning Junior Rugby Team in 1935(photo page 27) and even took a role in the school Operetta, *The Nautical Knot* in 1934-35 (See above extract from cast photo). Outside of school, Billy became an accomplished musician (piano and flute) and was also a Sunday school teacher.

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**THE NAUTICAL KNOT**  
(L to R): J. Summers & R. Hill

After graduating from *South* in 1937, Billy (now Rowland) secured a place at *Wheaton College* in Illinois, west of Chicago. This prestigious small university seemed a good fit for his belief in the "integration of faith and learning". In 1940, *Wheaton* underwent an upheaval over the policies of its controversial President, Oliver Buswell. When Buswell was fired, Rowland came home to London. Perhaps he also heard the call for young Canadians to join up to support the war commitment in Europe. At any rate, he signed up in 1941 for service in the *Royal Canadian Air Force*.



Qualifying as a Flying Officer in 1942, Rowland was sent to Northern Ireland to join the *RAF's Coastal Command*. At this point in the war, the greatest threat to the Allied cause was the German "wolfpacks" of U-boats and *Luftwaffe* bombers which preyed on the convoys of supply ships crossing the Atlantic Ocean. *Coastal Command*, flying a variety of *Liberator* aircraft, as well as the amphibious *Short Sunderland Flying Boat* (on which Rowland Hill flew) tried to minimize the threat from several bases in north-west Ireland.

On November 11, 1943, Rowland Hill and his 5-man crew flew out of their base at *Aldergrove, Northern Ireland*, on an ill-fated mission. Returning from an Atlantic patrol, the bow of their *Sunderland* aircraft split open while attempting a landing on *Lough Erne*, near their home base. All five crew members died and their bodies were never recovered.

Flying Officer **Rowland Wilkins ("Billy") Hill** is commemorated on Panel 173 of the *Runnymede War Memorial* at *Egham, Surrey* in England, dedicated to the more than 20,000 WW II Commonwealth airmen, including 10 *South* alumni, with no known graves. (photos pages 44, 54 & 58)



Short Sunderland "Flying Boat"

