

Newsletter No. 3 – Christmas 2015

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Reflection for the Season

Every family has their traditions and, as our sons were growing up, one of ours was to sit together and read that lovely tale by Clement C Moore, 'The Night Before Christmas', using a version given to my elder son when he was very small. My son now has his own children, and he and his wife continue the tradition.

Christmas in the UK starts in October (or even earlier in some places!) when decorations appear in shops, shopping ideas feature in magazines and on-line supermarkets invite their customers to 'book their slot' for Christmas deliveries. In the US, you have the same period of frenetic commercial activity, but split into three parts, Halloween, Thanksgiving and Christmas covering respectively, October, November and December. UK shops (real ones and those on-line) have been quick to realise the commercial potential of Halloween and Thanksgiving, but merge these events into their much more major focus – Christmas!

I have to admit that I love going into 'Christmas' shops at any time of the year, although generally, only to browse. We have very few in the UK but there are many in the US, all smelling of cinnamon and other spices which bring instant recognition and nostalgia for other seasonal traditions - decking the hall, roasting chestnuts, singing carols, etc.

This is a short newsletter, with one main focus – to share season's greetings with everyone in our rapidly growing 5BFTS family. Whether you celebrate Christmas or whether you don't, I hope you all get to enjoy some time with your family and friends and use the holiday to stop, unwind, reflect on the old year and look forward to the new one. And in 2016, there is a very special 5BFTS landmark. In May, it is the 60th British Memorial Service at the British Plot at Oak Ridge Cemetery – please come and join us to celebrate and thank the Rotary Club of Arcadia for organising this service for the past 60 years (see below).

Five 5BFTS Facts

Opened in
July 1941 at
Carlstrom
Field

Moved to
Riddle Field
September
25, 1941

26 Courses

1434
graduates
(1325 RAF
and 109
USAAF)

Closed in
September
1945



I can't think of a better way to end this Reflection than to quote Gerry Beardsmore, 5BFTS Chairman from 1998 to 2005. In his 2001 Autumn Newsletter he said:

"Sometimes I have to think how to conclude my letter but this month, it's easy.

From me and mine to you and yours

Best Wishes for a Merry Christmas

And

Health and Happiness and Peace in the New Year"

Jerry Harding

Memorial Day, May 30, 2016, is a very special 5BFTS day

So, please come and join us at the **British Plot, Oak Ridge Cemetery, Arcadia**, for the **60th Annual British Memorial Service** to remember the 23 cadets who died in training and never left Florida, AND at the same time, thank the Rotary Club of Arcadia for organising the service for 60 years.



The service starts at 10am

The Service is organised, as it has been for the past 60 years, by the Arcadia Rotary Club

Mailing address: PO Box 1492, Arcadia, FL 34265-1492

Telephone for information at 863-444-0664

Email: BritishMemorialService@gmail.com

EVERYBODY IS WELCOME

And afterwards: Please join us for **lunch at Mary Margaret's Tea and Biscuit, 10 South Polk Avenue, Arcadia, Florida 34266.**



Mary Margaret's Tea and Biscuit takes us back to the grandeur of the Victorian era. As well as lovely soups, salads and sandwiches, desserts include traditional British favourites, which 5BFTS cadets would instantly recognise, such as White Chocolate Bread Pudding (although the strict rationing of sweets and sugar in war time Britain meant that chocolate in bread pudding was a luxury not enjoyed by people back home), Sticky Toffee Pudding, Chocolate Log with Raspberry filling and of course, Scones with clotted cream and Strawberry Jam. Their tea selection includes Earl Grey and English Breakfast, and having been there, I know that they make tea British style with warm pots and boiling water poured directly on the tea!

If you would like to join us for lunch, please let me know as soon as possible, preferably by email (jen@jennyharding.co.uk). Mary Margaret's has a relatively small dining room and places may be limited and allocated on a 'first come first served' basis.

For more information about Mary Margaret's Tea and Biscuits, and details of their menu, please visit: <http://marymargaretsteaandbiscuit.com>

GOOD NEWS FOR 2016

5BFTS Grove - UK National Memorial Arboretum (NMA)

In previous newsletters, I have told readers about the poor state of the information board by the grove of 5 birch trees donated by 5BFTS to mark the entrance to the RAF Wings area at the UK National Memorial Arboretum. The good news is that the Arboretum has agreed to replace that board with one of their standard dedication plaques at their expense. Photographs to follow when the plaque is in place.

5BFTS Memorial Plaques in the City of Clewiston's Civic Park

These two plaques remember all those RAF cadets who trained in Clewiston during WW2. They are in need of restoration and the people of Clewiston are doing this to show their appreciation of the job the RAF did during WW2.

Sean Scheffler, Director of the Public Works Department for the City of Clewiston, writes:

'I have worked for the City for 37 years and my start was in the Civic Park, also known to the British airmen who trained at Riddle Field at "Memory Park". I have been directed to rebuild the park and create a "better" memorial to all service men that have trained, served and paid the ultimate price. I am working on "new" memorials and have some grand ideas I want to share with you and am asking for your input and help in bring them to reality. Please contact me at sean.scheffler@clewiston-fl.gov or call my office at this number (863) 983-1471. I look forward to hearing from you soon. And 'Thank You' for your service. May the work done today preserve the memory of what happened in the past. Our youth will never understand the cost of Freedom if projects like this one never become reality.'

Please get in touch with Sean if you would like to be involved. There will be more details in the next newsletter.

From the Archives – 5BFTS at Christmas Time

In 1941:

My father, George Hogarth, arrived at Riddle Field from Edinburgh in October 1941. October in Edinburgh can be glorious when the sun shines through the leaves as they change colour. Conversely, it can be very wet and windy. In either case, however, it certainly isn't beach weather! So imagine how George must have felt three months later to be on a Florida beach on Christmas Day 1941 basking in temperatures of 95°F! The following week, George was in Miami on December 31, 1941, and saw the New Year in at midnight whilst bathing in the Atlantic Ocean on Miami Beach. *"The water was beautifully warm".*



George on the beach at Fort Myers: December 1941

George spent Christmas in Fort Myers as a guest of Ed and Ruth Simpson who had befriended George and three of his fellow Edinburgh cadets on their first weekend in Clewiston and provided generous hospitality for them nearly every weekend (including Thanksgiving and Christmas) throughout their time in Florida.



The 5BFTS Christmas card that George sent home to his parents for Christmas 1941

For other 5BFTS cadets, being able to ‘Spend X’mas in Miami’ was high on their wish list and Flypaper (December 31, 1941) reported that their wish was granted when ‘more than 80 of the U/Kers from Riddle Field’ went to Miami, with the great majority of the ‘chappies’ staying with their Miami Beach host, Sydney J Burrows, the genial manager of the Colony Hotel. Many Miami residents provided generous hospitality for Christmas Eve dinner and Christmas Day luncheon, including Harry Vandebilt¹, who entertained about 50 cadets at the beautiful Bath and Surf Club in Palm Beach on Christmas Day. The ‘boys’ reported that they all had a marvelous time – one that will be long remembered.

In 1942:

Course 9 graduated in December 1942. Their ‘Listening Out – The Ninth Edition’ was in Flypaper dated December 25, 1942 and included a Seasonal Postscript’ as follows:

I remember, I remember, nothing after that
Till I wakened up next morning on an alien lobby mat,
And I felt not unpersuaded, though my reasons were not clear,
That I’d had a Merry Christmas and a Prosperous New Year!



The full Flypaper can be found on <http://commons.erau.edu/fly-paper/171/>

In 1943:

Riddle Round Up (Flypaper, December 24) reported that:

1. Christmas time may be the first away from home for many at Riddle Field. But every effort is being made to make it a pleasant time for all cadets;
2. The 5BFTS Christmas Dance held on December 18 at the Sugarland Auditorium had been a ‘bumper show’ thanks to the Band from Buckingham’s Flexible Gunnery School.

¹ The great-grandson of the shipping and railroad tycoon, Cornelius Vandebilt, and son of the then President of the Vandebilt family’s vast railroad empire, Harry had served in the US Naval Reserve and had spent five months in 1918 with the US Naval Forces in Europe.

3. Mr Nicodemus, Head of the Mess Hall, served Christmas Dinner Thursday with turkey, dressing, hot mince pies and all trimmings;
4. 102 cadets were to be guests of the Everglades Club in Palm Beach by invitation of Mr Dillman, President of the Club;
5. Through efforts of Syd Burrows and the USO, 75 cadets will spend Christmas Day as guests of generous Miami residents.

As Flypaper of December 31, 1943 reported, the cadets were really appreciative of the efforts made to ensure they had a great time – Course 17 said that they were very grateful to all whose hospitality made their Christmas holiday so enjoyable. They wished all their friends, and Course 16, a very Happy New Year.

Course 16 reported that they were back in circulation after a grand Christmas ‘break’ when Palm Beach was invaded in force – they called the Everglades party (attended by 7,000 service men and women), a ‘grand do’, and (reminiscent of George’s experience in 1941) *‘many of the course achieved their ambitions by swimming and sunbathing on Christmas Day’*.

Course 16 wrote: *‘All the members of the Course would like to have on record their appreciation to the people of Clewiston, Palm Beach, Fort Lauderdale and Miami for everything. Their kindness eased the burden of being away from home at Christmastide’*.

New Year 1944:

The New Year Edition of Flypaper (December 31, 1943) reflected on the significance of the first day of the New Year....

‘January 1, signifying as it does the birth of a new year, gives us pause to reflect. The past year has seen us pass the turning point in the War and progress definitely on the uphill road to Victory’.

New Year 1945:



When the New Year reflection was written at the end of 1943, the War in Europe still had nearly 18 months to go and the war with Japan a little longer before Victory was achieved. The next 12 months, however, saw the success of D-Day and other notable achievements leading towards Victory. The last Flypaper Christmas message of WW2 (Flypaper December 15, 1944) sensed that the end was imminent.

‘On behalf of the RAF and USAAF officers and the Officials of Riddle-McKay Aero College, the editors wish the cadets and civilian staff a very merry Christmas and a successfully Victorious New Year’. This was achieved by September 1945!

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The next newsletter will be published in March 2016. Please can you let me have any articles, information, etc, by the end of February. The more you tell me, the more interesting the newsletter will be – and I would especially like to hear if anyone worked with, or knows, any of the people mentioned in this newsletter. Anecdotes, stories and pictures would be great. So - over to you!

### **Useful websites:**

Clewiston Museum: <http://www.clewistonmuseum.org>

Embry-Riddle Aeronautical University Archives: <http://www.alumni.erau.edu/archives>

#5 British Flying Training School: <http://www.5bfts.org.uk>

‘George Hogarth – Clewiston and Beyond’. Memoires of George Hogarth, 5BFTS Course 3  
<http://commons.erau.edu/clewiston-beyond/1/>

US Contact: Harold Kosola – [hkairplane@aol.com](mailto:hkairplane@aol.com)

## The last words for 2015

The first 'last word' is the 1943 Christmas Message from John Paul Riddle and his wife:

As Christmas announces the close of 1943 and thoughts are turned to holly and mistletoe, we cannot help becoming a bit sentimental despite the pressing business of War.

So may we display sentiment for the moment and say to each and every one of you – we're proud of you.

We're proud of your spirit, we're proud of your loyalty, we're proud of your work. You deserve the merriest of Christmases and the brightest of horizons in the New Year.

Mr and Mrs John Paul Riddle

The second 'last word' brings us back to the start of my Seasonal Reflection when I talked about our family tradition reading 'The Night Before Christmas'. The following (with apologies to Clement C Moore) was written by someone working at the Embry-Riddle School of Aviation's Chapman Field, Miami, and published in Flypaper, December 24, 1943.

### 'Twas the Day before Christmas

'Twas the Day before Christmas and all over the Field,  
The spirit of Christmas was all that prevailed  
The Cubs were parked on the line with care  
We knew a capable line crew was there.

When all of a sudden there arose such as noise  
We knew in a moment it was none of the boys  
A plane circled over and came in for a landing.  
It came to a stop right where we were standing.

Then out jumped Santa with a great big smile,  
And we hoped the jolly ole Saint would stay for a while.  
He waved us a greeting and got on with his task,  
Unloading the things for which we had asked.

The nicest of heaters were installed in a jiffy  
And new motor scooters that really were spiffy.

On all personnel he hung a big smile,  
For that is the latest for '44 style.

There were Ray-Bans and goggles and helmets to spare,  
"C" tickets and nylons and other things rare.

Upon all he bestowed so much treasure  
That we were happy far beyond measure.

He filled every heart with courage and cheer.

**Merry Christmas to all and a Happy New Year!**



*Until we meet again, good-bye to y'all and may one and all have a very Happy Christmas and a peaceful New Year*