

## Newsletter No. 21 – Christmas 2021

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### Reflection for the Season

It has been another strange year – but there have been highlights!

And one of my highlights has been a trip to Arizona in November to share an 80<sup>th</sup> Anniversary Celebration with #4BFTS. In 1941, Lend-Lease allowed British Flying Training Schools to be set up in America – #4 was in Mesa, Arizona, and it was here in Mesa we remembered that 80 years ago, the first contingents of young men sailed across the Atlantic in June, July and August 1941 to become pilots and help defeat the evils that were besetting Europe.

America was then neutral but by Pearl Harbor, several hundred RAF cadets had already come to America, enjoyed everything that the New World could offer them including wonderful hospitality, and more importantly, had learnt to fly and sailed home about 6 months later as pilots ready, after a bit more training, to defend their country. Over four years later, four BFTS still trained pilots until the abrupt end to hostilities in August 1945 and several thousand RAF pilots had received RAF Wings; almost without exception, their time in America remained amongst the cadets' most treasured memories. Several hundred USAAF cadets, who had trained alongside the RAF cadets, proudly wore both RAF and USAAF Wings for the remainder of their service career.

So it is with immense gratitude to the Wings of Flight Foundation in Mesa and the descendants of #4BFTS cadets (and to the US Government who opened up their country on November 8 – just two days before we were due to fly) that my husband and I were invited and able to attend a wonderful weekend of celebration culminating in a service on November 14 (Remembrance Sunday) to remember 23 cadets who never made it home and are buried in Mesa Cemetery. I was proud to represent #5BFTS and honored to stand with the descendants of #4BFTS cadets and remember our fathers and uncles, giving thanks for all the cadets who helped to make the world a better place.

We left Arizona in temperatures of 90°F (32°C) to be greeted at home by snow! Just to remind us that Christmas is coming! As I write, the Omicron variant is gaining a foothold, and none of us known what the future may hold – but wherever you are, I hope you are safe and if needs be, cared for and are able to be with, or make contact with, loved ones wherever they may be.

And so, to everyone, I send Season's Greetings using the words of Gerry Beardsmore, 5BFTS Chairman from 1998 to 2005:

“From me and mine to you and yours, Best Wishes for a Merry Christmas and Health and Happiness and Peace in the New Year”

### 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



*Jenifer Harding*



## 65<sup>th</sup> Annual British Memorial Day Service May 31, 2021



The 64<sup>th</sup> Annual British Memorial Day Service may have been cancelled, but the 65<sup>th</sup> went ahead as normal – normal that is, except for those of us who live in the UK as we were unable to attend because of ongoing travel restrictions; however, we were with you in spirit if not in person! 'THANK YOU' - to the Rotary Club of Arcadia, to Paul Bennett Seusy, British Memorial Service Chair, to Richard Eagles who sent me photographs and told me about the service, to organisations who laid a wreath, and to everyone who attended to remember and honour John Paul Riddle and the 23 cadets who died in Florida and are buried in Oak Ridge Cemetery, Arcadia.

Please see the September 2021 Newsletter (no. 20) for pictures and more information.

**The 66<sup>th</sup> Annual British Memorial Day Service will be held on Monday May 30, 2022  
Covid permitting, the service will start at 10am**

The Service is organized, as it has been for the past 65 years, by Arcadia Rotary Club  
Address: PO Box 1492, Arcadia, FL 34265-1492  
Telephone for information at 863-444-0664  
Email: [BritishMemorialService@gmail.com](mailto:BritishMemorialService@gmail.com)

**More details to follow in March – everyone is welcome.**

### *In Memoriam*

Sadly during 2021, we heard about several ex-cadets and an instructor who had 'handed in their Logbooks'. Obituaries and other details about their lives are in the March and September 2021 Newsletters.

- Richard Anthony (Tony) Donell (Course 10). Died in 2007;
- Simon Donell, Tony's son, traced details of Tony's friend, Robert Philip (Phil) Dixon (Course 10) who died during WW2 on November 13, 1943;
- William Arthur Read Jnr (Instructor) who died on September 29, 2019;
- Dennis Hart Wyatt (Course 22) who died on March 10, 2020, aged 95.

I have also heard of two other people who have died recently – both widows of pilots and both of whom contributed greatly to the success of the 5BFTS Association. Their obituaries will be in Newsletter 22 in March 2022.

- Jean Leeks, widow of Harry Leeks (Course 5) who died December 30, 2018, aged 81
- Alma Mary Newsham, widow of Gordon Newsham (Course 24) who died June 26, 2020, aged 95

**We remember with thanks these pilots who have handed in their logbooks, and to other pilots, Riddle Field staff and friends known to us who have done so much to keep their memories alive.**

***WE ARE HERE BECAUSE THEY WERE THERE!***

**2021 marked 80 years since the British Flying Training Schools programme began**

Under Lend-Lease arrangements, it was agreed between America and Britain that six civilian operated flying schools would be set up in the United States from May 1941, and on June

9,1941, the first cadets for **#1 at Terrell, Texas** and **#2 at Lancaster, California** arrived to start their training. Neither the site at Terrell nor at Lancaster was ready for the RAF cadets in June and so, these cadets started their training at US Primary Flying Schools at Dallas TX and Glendale CA respectively. #2BFTS closed in 1942.

The first cadets arrived at **#3 Miami, Oklahoma** and **#4 Mesa, Arizona** on June 16, 1941. Again, neither site was ready for the cadets; as a temporary measure, #3BFTS used an Army School in Tulsa and #4BFTS started out at the Thunderbird Field in Phoenix before moving to the Falcon Field site in September 1941.

**#5BFTS** was, of course, at Riddle Field, starting on July 17, 1941. As Riddle Field wasn't ready for occupation until September 1941, Courses 1 and 2 started their training at Carlstrom Field, an Embry- Riddle airfield that was already a USAAF and RAF Arnold Scheme primary training location.

**#6BFTS at Ponca City, Oklahoma**, started on August 23, 1941, at Ponca City, but was closed on April 17, 1944, the remaining cadets being sent to other BFTS to complete their advanced training. A very short-lived **#7BFTS at Sweetwater, Texas** started in May 1942 but closed after three months in August 1942. So, by the end of hostilities, just four BFTS remained. In total, nearly 7,000 RAF pilots and about 550 USAAF pilots received their Wings from a BFTS.

### **So, what has happened in the intervening 80 years?**

I have some limited correspondence and information about BFTS Nos. 1, 2, 3 4 and 6 showing that each of the six original BFTS formed an Association and that there were some plans during the 1980s to consider joint meetings and projects. There will be more about this in the March 2022 Newsletter but suffice to say just now that I have very little information about #2BFTS, and more information about the Falcon Field Association (#4BFTS) than the others. I also have a directory developed by the #6 Ponca City Association which appears to list every cadet who was at Ponca City by name and course number, some instructors and in the case of those who were actually members of that Association, it includes their address and phone number.

It was very helpful to discover that I have information about these two BFTS (Nos. 4 and 6) because of two recent events I have been invited to attend.

Throughout 2020 and 2021, in a very limited way, I have been helping Kathryn Masters (daughter of Hugh Harrison, Course 27, #4BFTS) to resurrect the Falcon Field Association and set up an online archive database at the American Air Museum, IWM Duxford. Kathryn has been amazing and in a very short time, has found ex-cadets who were at #4BFTS and many relatives of those who are no longer with us. She has written six newsletters, the first being for last Christmas, arranged a wonderful day at Bentley Priory Museum and helped organise an 80<sup>th</sup> Anniversary Gala

### **Bentley Priory Museum, Stanmore – October 25, 2021**

Kathryn was kind enough to invite me to Bentley Priory Museum (the Battle of Britain Museum) in October where four wonderful veteran pilots took to the stage (or the 'top table!'), talked about their experiences and answered many questions. The pilots were **Wally Martin** aged 97 (Course 19), **Vernon Duker** also 97 (Course 19), **Keith Leedham** aged 96 (Course 26) and **Len Wordsell** also 96 (Course 27). Vernon was first sent to Ponca City (#6BFTS) and was part of the last course, Course 17. He was one of those cadets who transferred to Mesa (#4BFTS) to finish his advanced training when Ponca City closed. It was interesting to find Vernon's name and address in my #6BFTS Association directory (alongside 16 other fellow Course 17 cadets) showing that he was a member of both #4 and #6BFTS Associations.



It was lovely to be joined at Bentley Priory by Anne Hughes, volunteer researcher from Duxford. Anne helped develop the #5BFTS database on the Duxford American Air Museum website, and she and Kathryn have set up a similar database for #4BFTS. After lunch, we had a guided tour of the museum. I was honoured to be asked to say a few words about #5BFTS. It was a grand day where we made new friends and enjoyed looking at memorabilia (logbooks, photographs, letters, invitations etc) that people had brought with them.



Perhaps the most memorable of these treasures was Wally Martin's cigarette packet from WW2. As he told us, one day, he put this packet on a canister in the cockpit near to where he was sitting to fly the plane. He was aware a bullet had passed close to him, but it wasn't until later he realised it had gone straight through his cigarette packet leaving the hole you can see in the photograph to the right!



*Len Worsdell, Keith Leedham, Vernon Duker and Wally Martin surrounded by relatives and friends of cadets. I am wearing a green jacket and Kathryn Masters is to my left. Anne Hughes is on the left-hand side, second row.*

And then it was November 10, and time to go to Arizona.....

### #4BFTS Falcon Field 80<sup>th</sup> Anniversary Event

	<p style="text-align: center;"><i>80<sup>th</sup> Anniversary</i></p> <p style="text-align: center;">No. 4 British Flying Training School Rededication and Gala</p>	<p style="text-align: center;">A celebration for all involved; their descendants, their friends and Mesa, the city that embraced them.</p>
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This was organised by the Wings of Flight Foundation in Mesa, expertly led by Planning Coordinator Jocelyn Condon who was supported by a wonderful team including four descendants of those graduating from #4BFTS – Anne Beeby, Jennifer Duff, John Barber and (in the UK) Kathryn Masters.

*Jocelyn with her husband, Dan, daughter, Brenna and son, Piers ↓*



Mesa is a city with a population of over 500,000, about 20 miles east of Phoenix. It has a hot desert climate with very little rain; daytime temperatures while we stayed there, were over 90F (32C) although it was cooler at night. It is in the Sonoran Desert - which meant we were surrounded by the Saguaro Cactus (the one that could have come straight from a scene in a Western Movie).



We had a wonderful four days in Mesa making more new friends. It was such a privilege to represent #5BFTS and I felt so proud when I saw that my father's photograph had been included on the poster board with photographs of the fathers, grandfathers and uncles of all those descendants of #4BFTS who took part in the celebrations.

What follows is just a flavour of the weekend which started with us taking part in a Veterans' Day Parade through Mesa on November 11 organised by Anne Beeby (daughter of Ken Beeby Course 11/12) and John Barber (son of Dennis Barber Course 26). Our vintage trolley was vehicle number 76 in a parade of over 100 vehicles and marching bands.

The following day found us taking a cruise along the Saguaro Lake – and seeing a LOT of Cacti!!



*Vintage trolley, decorated, in line and ready to go!*



*Anne Beeby in 'uniform' standing by the trolley*



*One of the many! By Saguaro Lake*

On November 13, we went to the Gala Dinner and Hanger Rededication. Unlike, the hanger in Clewiston which blew down in Hurricane Wilma (2004), the two WW2 hangers at Mesa are still there, in good condition and are well used for their original purpose which was to house aircraft!



*Me by the photo of my father (top of the two photos to the right of the logo)*



*Descendants at the Gala Dinner. I am in the centre in the blue dress. Kathryn is on the far-left hand side.*



And on November 14 (UK Remembrance Sunday), we went to Mesa Cemetery for a service at the RAF Cadet Memorial to remember the 23 cadets who died while training at Falcon Field and never went home.





*And I remembered the 23 RAF #5BFTS cadets and John Paul Riddle who rest in Oak Ridge Cemetery, Arcadia, Florida, with a poppy cross that I left on the Mesa RAF Cadet Memorial.*

I should like to thank Jocelyn Cordon, Anne Beeby and John Barber, and of course, Kathryn, for inviting me to Mesa, and giving me such a wonderful opportunity to make new friends within our BFTS Family. I left Mesa with the feeling that in some ways, it didn't really matter which BFTS the cadets went to because, although each BFTS has its own particular characteristics and all cadets and descendants were and still are very emotionally attached to 'their' BFTS, overall the training, the experience and above all the wonderful American hospitality was similar at each one and their time in America was remembered with affection and gratitude by each and every cadet (clearly demonstrated at Bentley Priory Museum on October 25 by Wally, Vernon, Keith and Len).

We started our two weeks in Arizona with #4BFTS and ended it with #5BFTS! After a week of wandering round Arizona, we ended up near Tucson – and met up with Tuck Renshaw. Tuck's father, Fred, was a USAAF cadet on #5BFTS Course 12, the first course in Clewiston to have USAAF cadets training alongside RAF cadets. Fred's uniform is on display in Clewiston Museum; like other USAAF cadets graduating from a BFTS, he proudly wore both the RAF Wings and USAAF Wings. Tuck lives in the lovely Oro Valley and took us to see the wonderful Desert Museum in Tucson. He and his wife, Reiko, invited us to dinner at their home on our last night. The other guests were Bill and Jane Coleman – see 'Jed Coleman' in Riddle Round-up below!

There will be more about Arizona and meeting Tuck in the March Newsletter. But I will leave you with a couple of pictures of cacti and a picture of a snake! Not just any snake but a Western Diamondback Rattlesnake – and not one that I would like to meet!



*The rare Crested Saguaro. A 'young' cactus just beginning to grow side arms after 75 years. The crest may end up 6 ft wide.*



*A Saguaro Cactus at sunset (17.24 local time). It takes 75 to 100 years for the cactus to grow its first arm!*



*Fireman from the Oro Valley Fire Service removing one of two rattlesnakes from Tuck's yard at 14.45 local time – about two hours before we arrived there for dinner!*

## **CHRISTMAS RIDDLE ROUND-UP**

### **William Charles (Charlie) Strong: Course 20 (April 1944 to November 1944)**

Earlier this year, Joanne Strong sent me several photos that Charlie had kept from his time in Florida. Included in the bundle were two postcards that obviously meant something to Charlie.

One of these postcards shows Christmas time on an unknown station – as this camp seems likely to be an RAF station on which Charlie had served, and as this is the Christmas newsletter, I have included it on the right. If anyone recognises it, please let me know. I have also included two photos which show Charlie at the start and end of his time in Clewiston, and a third showing Charlie and his fellow cadets at Riddle Field.





LAC William Charles Strong: Course 20



Charlie Strong ('Bill') standing right. Kneeling: W Rammage ('Ginger') and A Keith ('Jock')



Charlie Strong's Graduation Nov 1944

**Jed Coleman – Instructor 1943 to 1945**

When we met Bill Coleman, Jed's son, at Tuck Renshaw's lovely home in the Oro Valley, Bill gave me this photo (below) of his parents, Jed and Dorothy, with Bill and his two brothers. Bill can just about remember living in Florida when his father was an instructor at Riddle Field. His family lived in Moore Haven at that time, but this photo was probably taken just before they moved from the north as everyone is well wrapped up and his mother is wearing her fur coat!

One of the documents that Robert Mueller sent me that belonged to his father, Albert, another instructor at Riddle Field (see Newsletter 19, March 2021), was a copy of the July 1942 #5BFTS First Anniversary Booklet with the signatures and home addresses of a large number of instructors who were at Clewiston as it closed. The extract below clearly shows Jed's name and address at the top (the family moved back to New York State – no wonder they needed warm clothes in winter!) and at the bottom, the name of Jed's friend also from New York State, Thomas Heard. Thomas lived at Orlando Street, Kingston; there is quite a temperature contrast between Orlando, Florida (as we know it now) and Orlando (Street), Kingston in the winter!!

Jed and Dorothy Coleman with (from left to right) Bill, Tom and Jack



AUTOGRAPHS		
Name	Address	Remarks
Jed Coleman	Tioga Center N.Y. 1103 DANKING ST.	Old name in N.Y.C.
J.W. Hawkins	Lynchburg, Va.	Remember, Va. name from
Paul G. Ellis	Lawrenceville Va.	Mount Juliet, Va.
Fritz Sebek	45-38 ROBINSON ST. RUSHING L.I. NEW YORK.	Take you out to the
John J. Palmer	243 INGRAHAM ST. NW WASH. D.C.	Maybe again with the
Marion S. Gabel	CLEWISTON Fla. PO Box 1077 Clewiston Fla NO: Box 884 Ft. Pierce Fla.	war behind us - will begin Remembering the 7th September & your Roll of Honor
R.C. Parmela	2 Currie Crescent - W.P. Beach, Fla. 2818 E. 13th Ave	See you over P-13. from 5:00 A.M. to 8:00 P.M.
Paul Schwartrauber	2100, I 11	
Thomas Heard	Orlando St Kingston, N.Y.	and old Buffalo.



**The Seas Divide Us, But the Skies Unite Us – Celebrating Co-operation Between the United States and Great Britain**

(© No. 1 British Training Flying School Museum, Terrell, Texas)



The next newsletter will be published in March 2022. 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.

**Useful websites:**

- Clewiston Museum: <http://www.clewistonmuseum.org>
- Embry-Riddle Aeronautical University Archives: [www.erau.edu/archives](http://www.erau.edu/archives)
- #5 British Flying Training School: <http://www.5bfts.org.uk>
- 'George Hogarth – Clewiston and Beyond'. Memoires of George Hogarth, Course 3 <http://commons.erau.edu/clewiston-beyond/1/>
- Frederick J Brittain Flying was my Life 1918 – 2002 [www.frederickjbrittain.com](http://www.frederickjbrittain.com)
- Roy Mather DFC (Co 12): "A Pilot's Story – A Chesterfield Hero" [www.vickersvaliant.com](http://www.vickersvaliant.com)

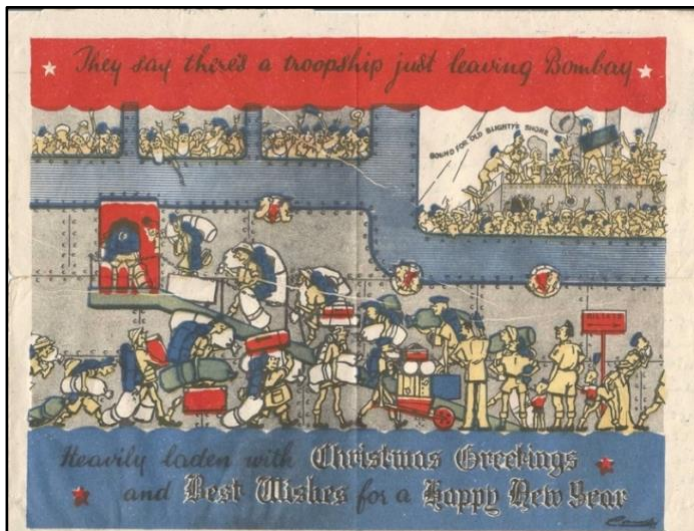


Readers may be interested to know that if you are a direct relative of someone who has served in the armed forces, you can apply to the Ministry of Defence for their service record - see <https://www.gov.uk/get-copy-military-service-records>



**Last Words for 2021**

These come from Richard Anthony (Tony) Donell: Course 10 (August 1942 to February 1943)



Tony's son, Simon, sent me a Christmas card and air mail letter that Tony sent to his sister, Joan, for Christmas 1944 when he was stationed with 356 Squadron in the RAF India Command. The cartoon of the troopship (left) was part of a special Christmas Air Mail letter for troops in India – in the letter, Tony says that he is looking forward to eventually coming home on a troopship – just not that one! The Christmas card (below) is very like a Riddle Field Christmas card. When folded, the colour bars remain visible.

And because 356 Squadron was in India, it includes a snake charmer – with another snake (although this time it's just a picture!)



**HAPPY CHRISTMAS!!**

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