

BRITISH FLYING TRAINING SCHOOL. NO. 5

In September 1941 Riddle McKay Aero College opened "Riddle Field" near Clewiston as a training base for Royal Air Force Cadets, under contract with the RAF. John Paul Riddle and John G. McKay, both of Miami, built and operated the field, among others.

Primary, basic and advanced training was given pilots at the school, who received upon graduation their Wings of the Royal Air Force in ceremonies at the Field.

1325 RAF cadets and 109 American cadets were given their pilots wings at the successful completion of their training here. 23 British cadets were killed during training and were buried in the British plot in the cemetery at Arcadia.

G. Willis Tyson was first manager of the field. After his death in a plane accident in Tallahassee on Aug. 31, 1943 Ernest J. Smith, then field engineering officer, became manager and remained in that position until its closing.

The first wing commander of the RAF here was Kenneth J. Rampling; he was succeeded by W/C T. O. Prickett, W/C G. Greaves and W/C C.W. Lindsey, in order.

In 1944 John G. McKay bought Mr. Riddle's interest in Riddle McKay Aero College. Riddle Field in Clewiston was closed in September 1945. Riddle-McKay Aero College is still operating in other parts of Florida.

There is an organization of former Riddle Field cadets in England, who hold periodic reunions, and a similar group of American instructors and personnel; there have been at least two trans-Atlantic reunions.

In October 1975, at a Veterans Day program in Clewiston's Civic Center Park, four of the RAF cadets presented a bronze marker to the City of Clewiston, in appreciation of friendships extended the cadets three decades earlier. The RAF cadets in England had contributed to the fund for the marker.

The field itself is now the charge of the county, but it must always be open for aviation use.

Through the years, there have been cattle pastures, mobile home park, and other uses of parts of the property.

As the buildings were not used and kept in repair, they disintegrated through the years, and eventually most of them were removed. The swimming pool remains intact, and foundations of various buildings and walkways form an outline of the one-time splendid campus.