

Newsletter No. 9 – Christmas 2017

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Reflection for the Season

One hundred years ago, 1917 was a momentous year. The battles of Arras, Vimy Ridge and Passchendaele were fought without significant result. At the battle of Messines, mines were exploded under the German lines killing 10,000 people. The German air force carried out the first major bombing raid on London. The United States declared war on Germany. T E Lawrence (of Arabia) led the Arab Revolt and captured Aqabar. General Allenby accepted the surrender of the Ottoman army. In Russia, revolution led to the abdication of the Tsar. On a more pertinent note, a report in August recommended formation of the RAF. Many features of our world were taking shape.

Seventy-five years ago, in 1942, the Pacific war was not going well; the Japanese took Guam, Hong Kong, Wake, Singapore and the Philippines, although in June, the tide started to turn after the Battle of Midway. But admit the turmoil, the *Declaration of the United Nations* was signed on New Year's Day by 26 Allied nations laying the foundation for the United Nations.

And one of the most popular songs of all time, "White Christmas" sung by Bing Crosby in the movie "Holiday Inn", premiered in August. "White Christmas" topped the charts in October 1942 and stayed there for 11 weeks.

And I am sure that however much they were enjoying the Florida sun and having plentiful food, every RAF cadet must have thought a little wistfully about their homeland on Christmas Day – and in the words of Bing Crosby:

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|---|---|
| <p><i>1. I'm dreaming of a white Christmas
Just like the ones I used to know
Where the treetops glisten and
children listen
To hear sleigh bells in the snow.</i></p> | <p><i>2. I'm dreaming of a white Christmas
With every Christmas card I write
May your days be merry and bright
And may all your Christmases be
white.</i></p> |
|---|---|

In 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"



Jenifer Harding

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





5BFTS in 2017 –The Highlights

See Newsletters 6 (March 2017) and 7 (September 2017) for more information

In February – Anne Hughes (Volunteer researcher) and I met Nick Jordan (son of John Jordan, Co 13) at IWM Duxford. Nick, who lives in Canada, was over here on a two-week visit. We had a wonderful day at Duxford. It was so good to meet with Nick again and share experiences. Nick also met Eric Denham at his home in Oxfordshire. Eric was on Course 13 with John Jordan and shared many happy memories of their time in Florida with Nick.



IWM Duxford - L-R: Jenny Harding, Nick Jordan, Anne Hughes. February 2017



Eric Denham (Course 13) at home

Also in February – Anne Hughes went to Florida – and FLEW OVER AND LANDED AT RIDDLE FIELD! Anne was staying with friends in Florida and flew to Clewiston in a Grumman Tiger. Landing at Airglades, Anne could see Jeff Barwick waiting to greet them. Anne took photos of Riddle Field from the air; comparison with wartime photos is fascinating.



Riddle Field (Airglades) from the air February 2017 © Anne Hughes



Airglades reception - Jeff Barwick, Anne Hughes and 'an American serviceman'

In April - we heard from Vikki Brittain who told us about her father. Frederick J. Brittain was an instructor at 5BFTS from 1942-1945 and was also a good friend of John Paul Riddle.

After 5BFTS closed, he instructed for the Embry Riddle Company in Miami and taught French Naval cadets. He then flew for Riddle Airlines and after that, for Airlift International. In total, he accumulated almost 30,000 hours.



Vikki is developing a website telling the story of her father - 'Frederick J Brittain Flying was my Life 1918 – 2002'. The website is dedicated to her father and all of the pioneers of aviation. It has copies of Frederick's Log Books, letters, photos, stories, documents and more. Do check it out at www.frederickjbrittain.com.

In May - Bill Archibald told us about his father, Alfred William Archibald, who was an instructor at Riddle Field. Bill said that he (Bill) was born at Clewiston during the war and that he was trying to find out something of his father's time there.

Hearing from Vikki and Bill made us realise that although we know a lot about many of the cadets and what they did after Clewiston, we know very little about the instructors. This will be rectified in 2018!

Also in May – "A Living History – memorial keeps British Flight Training School and World War II era alive for Central Florida Community" was published in 'Wings of Legacy' in LIFT, the Embry-Riddle alumni magazine. The author, Alan Cesar with help from me, Jeff Barwick, Judy Kirkpatrick, Harold Kosola and Charles (Chuck) Neyhart (Co 17), describes 5BFTS before and after WW2. <https://lift.erau.edu/a-living-history/>

Memorial Day 2017– Once again, a very special day. It was very moving to see that more than 200 people came to the British Plot on May 29 to remember the cadets. Afterwards, we had an excellent lunch at Mary Margaret's Tea and Biscuit in Arcadia where the speaker, Bill Thompson (Executive Director of Alumni Relations, Embry- Riddle Aeronautical University) and his wife, Sally, joined us.

It was also wonderful to see Harold Kosola and his wife, Joan, at Oak Ridge and at lunch. Harold had a stroke on Christmas Eve, 2016, and started home rehab at the end of January. So, it was extra special to see and speak with him in May.



Harold Kosola, Bill Thompson and Jenny Harding

Following Memorial Day, I spent a week in Clewiston, not quite living as a resident as we stayed in the Holiday Inn Express, but nearly so. It was lovely to experience Clewiston, not as a tourist but just being there. I spent four days helping Jeff Barwick sort out and catalogue Clewiston Museum's 5BFTS archives – a fascinating way to learn so much more about the cadets and instructors. Jeff and I also listed uniform donated to the museum including the Flying Jacket belonging to L O Moore (Co 17), the RAF uniform from C Edwards (Co 2) and the USAAF uniform from Marty Bennett (Instructor).

June 4 was a red-letter day for three people who hadn't met before, but whose common link was having a father connected with 5BFTS! Vicki Brittain (father, Frederick J Brittain was an instructor) and David Brannan (father, Peter Brannan was on Co 25) met me at Clewiston Museum. Jeff took Vicki and David round the museum and then we spent a wonderful time – talking and sharing photos, artifacts, experiences, etc. We saw Clewiston City Civic Park and the 5BFTS Memorial Plaques and then went off to Airglades to see the 5BFTS plaque and the flags, which permanently fly on what was Riddle Field.



By 5BFTS Plaque on the Terminal Building (No 5 British Flying Training School Memorial Building) at Airglades Airport, Clewiston. L-R: Vicki, Jenny and David. June 2017.

In September – the number of 5BFTS people on the American Air Museum (IWM Duxford) website archive rose to 22. A big ‘thank you’ to Anne Hughes for all her hard work in developing the site. To read more on the American Air Museum Internet Archive, please visit <http://www.americanairmuseum.com> and search on 5BFTS and/or Riddle Field.



Also in September – Hurricane Irma hit Florida. Thankfully, as far as we know, all our friends in Florida remained safe although some property was damaged. I heard from Jeff Barwick in November that Clewiston is now pretty much cleaned up although a few roofs are still ‘decorated’ with blue tarpaulins. Readers may remember that it was Hurricane Wilma in 2005 that destroyed the final 5BFTS building, a hanger, which remained at Riddle Field.

In October – Robert Moffa of the American Ideals Foundation told me that they have now acquired Carlstrom Airfield and that it has been designated an International Historical Site. Good news indeed. See the March 2018 newsletter for more details.

In Memoriam

Sadly during 2017, we heard that several ex-cadets had ‘handed in their Log Books’. Obituaries in Newsletters of March and September 2017, or will be published in March 2018.

- **John Jorgensen (Co 11) died January 2016**
- **Thomas Masano (Co 16) died January 16, 2016 aged 98**
- **Alan Bruce DFC (Co 11) died November 7, 2016**
- **Blaine Harris Schultz (USAAF Co 12) died November 24, 2016 aged 94**
- **T J Lees (Co 17) died January 15, 2017**
- **Peter Alfred John Brannan (Co 25) died June 24, 2017 aged 91**
- **Arthur John (Clem) Thurgood (Co 19) died 25 July, 2017 aged 94**
- **Charles (Chuck) A. Neyhart (USAAF Co 17) died November 12, 2017**

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! 

Our 5BFTS Family 2017

Lois Heflin Blount is a regular correspondent; it is always lovely to receive a letter from Lois even when she points out that there are tomatoes growing outside in Clewiston in January and the weather is 66°F in the morning!

This year, we have heard more from or about the following Riddle Field people: George Griffin (Co 1), Duncan Wilson (Co 3), Albert E Sloman (Co 3), Bob Lasham (Co 4), Dennis Luke (Co 5), Hugo Trotter (Co 11), Cyril Oettinger (Co 13), Ron Cox (Co 22), N H Beverton (Co 22), Robert Andrew Murche (Co 25) and Frank Barlow (Co 26).

Rob Mather has developed a website dedicated to his father, Roy Mather DFC (Co 12) called, “A Pilot’s Story – A Chesterfield Hero”. Roy was in the RAF from 1941 to 1964; one of the

many things he did was take part in the Berlin Airlift. Visit www.vickersvalient.com for details.



More from the 5BFTS Association Newsletter Archive:

In 1977: There was little enthusiasm for countrywide reunions, the last being in 1973, and development of local groups was being encouraged. A national reunion was not held again until 1982 with the next in 1984 and thereafter annually. Maybe the lack of interest in national reunions was reflective of the economic state and turmoil in the country. The subscription was £2 and in 1979, it was "Still £2 per annum!" How do we do it?" (*Editor's note: UK inflation had been in double figures since 1973 except in 1978 – how DID they do it?*)

In the air: Freddie Laker's Sky Train from Gatwick to NYC started for £59 a ticket (normally £186) and Concorde first flew from Heathrow to NYC (for a lot more money per ticket!).

In 1978: The two memorial plaques, dedicated in October 1975, were placed in Clewiston's Civic Park Garden of Remembrance. Members contributed to the cost and John Potter took a "Commemoration Book" to Clewiston in November.

Editor's note: I wasn't aware of the existence of the 'Commemoration Book' until I saw it in Clewiston Museum in June. But it is there, safe, and photographs below prove it! I will now try and trace the second copy given to the RAF Museum Hendon in 1979.



Plaque dedication: October 25, 1975



Plaques in Garden of Remembrance 2014. Originally, flags were behind the plinth

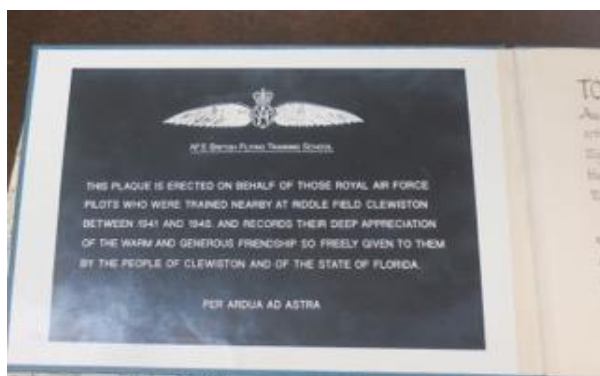


New Garden of Remembrance - 2016

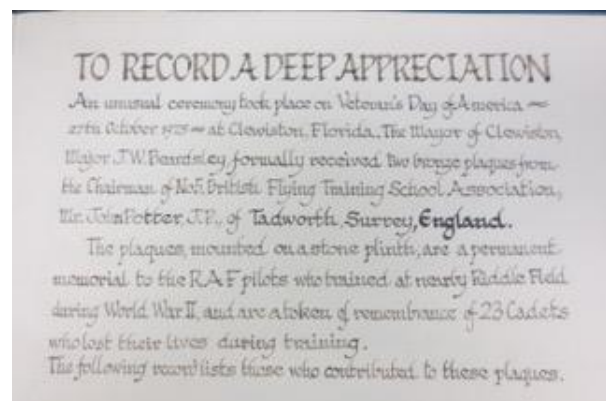


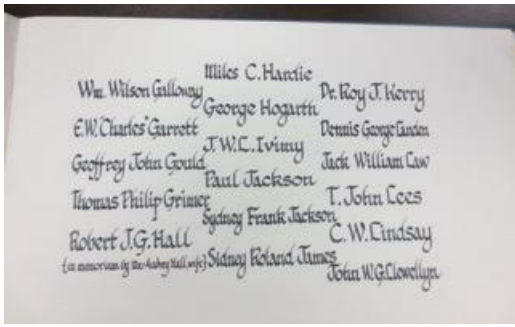
5BFTS plaques on their new plinths - 2016

5BFTS Association" Commemoration Book" – held by Clewiston Museum



Inside front cover





Inside back cover

In December 1978: the US #5BFTS group met for the first time for three years. John Potter (Co 11) and Eric Mowser (Co 17) joined 15 US members, including John Paul Riddle. Frank Veltri (Instructor) wrote, *“We cannot help but feel a spirit of the close ties that have held our #5BFTS together when you have friends such as Dave Fair who came all the way from Indiana to be with us for just a few hours to exchange hellos and talk of old times”*.

In 1979: John Potter finished his Winter newsletter with the words: *“I would like to send to you from all the Committee, in this the 17th year of the life of the Association, our warmest greetings for Christmas and the year ahead”*.

The next newsletter will be published in March 2018. 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/>

Frederick J Brittain (Instructor): Flying was my Life 1918 – 2002 - www.frederickjbrittain.com

Roy Mather DFC (Co 12): “A Pilot’s Story – A Chesterfield Hero” www.vickersvalient.com

US Contact: Harold Kosola – hkairplane@aol.com



The last words for 2017

Seventy-five years ago, John Paul Riddle’s message said (Flypaper, December 25, 1942):

United We Stand - and so it must be with every unit devoted to our National Defense. Christmas brings a smile to our lips as we look back upon the year’s work and know that it has been successful. **To the ‘Embry-Riddle “Family” – thank you and a very Merry Christmas!**



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