

Newsletter No. 26 – September 2023

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Reflection

As we approach November 11 (Armistice Day or Veterans' Day) and Remembrance Sunday on November 12, I reflected on these words, written by a volunteer at Clewiston Museum and posted on their Facebook page on Memorial Day. I thought it was a lovely tribute from someone who up until very recently, didn't know anything about 5BFTS. Thank you so very much – it is appreciated.

Memorial: 'serving as a reminder', 'memory'.

Clewiston: As I pass through the heart of this little place now called home my eye invariably goes to the stand of flags having pride of place in the city park. I wondered about the Union Jack that waved beside the Stars and Stripes but considered that we have a lot of British & Canadian 'snowbirds' and gave it no more thought.



Recently I have been volunteering at our local museum and have found as Paul Harvey would have said, "the rest of the story". I have become enamored with that story, with the role "Americans Sweetest Town" played, even before the U.S. entered WWII. Fascinated with how the lives of 'locals' and 'Brits' became entwined and was articulated on tissue paper letters now yellow with age. The story of Riddle Field, where 1,325 British RAF cadets graduated as pilots, returning "home" to defend Britain and to fight over Europe, the Far East and Africa.

As the day approaches, I am thinking of the Memorial Day ceremony that continues eighty plus years later and honors young men buried thousands of miles away from home and families. 23 of 900 young British men, Scots, Irish, English who are buried on American soil. 23 who are remembered each year by the sons and daughters, and now the grand and great grandchildren of the friends they made when learning to fly in the blue of South Florida skies.

I know of these twenty three but what about Rex, David, Brian and Arthur? Four young cadets met through those eighty year old tissue paper letters. Letters marked by inspectors before being forwarded to the family at Box 503, Clewiston. I know their handwriting, their appreciation of the friendship given them by those who resided at Box 503, of the cookies eaten on the train as they transferred to Canada, of some of the girls they met, and one they married. What I don't know is did they live! 51% of RAF pilots were killed on operations, 12% were killed, or wounded on non-operations, 13% were POW's; statistics provided by 'Life & Death in Bomber Command'. Were my four Brits included in these numbers, to be honored and remembered on Memorial Day, or did they live to become jolly old men of England?

The address of the 'little white house' is lost in time, a few uniforms are folded and boxed, the outlines of barrack buildings remain at the airport, a stack of letters is found on a shelf; for the 23 there is a Memorial Day ceremony each year in Arcadia.

Each day, in Clewiston, there is a Memorial Day for the other 1,300 who eighty plus years later must mostly be gone. We can think it is also for those who lived at Box 503 and the other 'locals' who willingly played their part, however small, in gaining peace for us all.

Memorial Day, at a cemetery in Arcadia, and with the Union Jack that flies in the city park. Being a memory, serving as a reminder..."lest we forget".

**'Their efforts to preserve the freedom of the world were not in vain
and will never be forgotten**

Five 5BFTS Facts

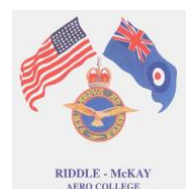
Opened in July
1941 at
Carlstrom
Field

Moved to
Riddle Field
September 25,
1941

26 Courses

1434
graduates
(1325 RAF and
109 USAAF)

Closed in
September
1945



Jenifer Harding

Hugo Trotter: Course 11 (September 1942 to April 1943)

And we have a 100th birthday to celebrate! Hugo Trotter, the 5BFTS solicitor was 100 in May. A very happy birthday, Hugo

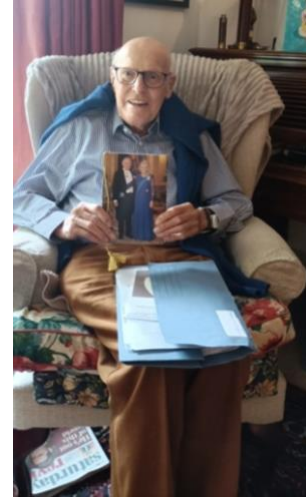
Some pictures of Hugo Trotter spanning eighty years from 1943 and 2023.



Fishing: Lake Okeechobee



Course 11 – Listening Out



Hugo at 100 – May 2023

The photo of Hugo was taken by Anne Hughes (developer of the 5BFTS section on the American Air Museum Internet Archive) who launched her book, 'Waterbird: Wings Over Windermere' in April. Without knowing about Hugo's connection with 5BFTS, she contacted him because she discovered that his father's cousin, John Trotter, flew the original 1911 Waterbird. For more information, please visit <https://www.waterbird.org.uk>

66th Annual British Memorial Day Service May 29, 2023

It was a real pleasure to be back at Arcadia in May; meeting old friends, making new ones and taking part in the British Service to remember and honour John Paul Riddle and the 23 cadets who were killed in Florida and are buried in Oak Ridge Cemetery, Arcadia.



Between May 2022 and May 2023, the Commonwealth War Graves Commission (CWGC), who care for the men and women of Commonwealth Forces including those who died in WW2, have undertaken work on the British Plot to keep it in really good condition. The Plot now has a slightly changed layout, new plants and all the headstones have been cleaned. It was lovely before but is now sparkling and is a very fitting memorial to the 23 cadets and John Paul Riddle.

←*The Rotary Club sign surrounded by new plants*

Paul Seusy, the British Memorial Day Service Chair organised the service which was, as usual, well attended. It was delightful to listen to Ross Allen of the Jacobites Pipe and Drum Band of Sarasota as he played while we assembled and then again for the Lament and Taps. Terry Stewart led the singing – and remembered that we now have a King in the United Kingdom. After 65 years, this is quite a change to the programme and a new experience for Terry! Paul asked me if I would help Christopher Nind to read out the names of the cadets and John Paul Riddle for the placement of poppies and flags which I was honoured to do.

Lt Col Christopher Nind, who gave the Memorial Comments, retired from the British Army in 1990 and has worked with charities in the US for many years. He lives in Naples. He had done a significant amount of research into the history of 5BFTS, and his address was interesting, poignant and just right. Christopher was introduced by William (Bill) Dalgarno, originally from Scotland and a long-time Florida resident, who served in the RAF in 1945.

And this year, we have a straight flagpole – thanks to Phil Nash of Bradenton. He visited the British Plot in November 2022 and noticed the flagpole was ‘wonky’. He got in touch with Paul and the flagpole is now straight again. Phil, who served in the RAF as a mechanic from 1967 to 1975 then flew helicopters as a civilian up to 2013, has been in America since 1994, also took a video and pictures of the headstones which will soon be in the digital archive. Thank you Phil.

The Annual British Memorial Day Service in pictures



*Paul Seusy & Hon Judy Wertz-Strickland
Arcadia Rotary Club*



William Dalgarno



Christopher Nind



Ross Allen



The British Plot from the south end



The plaque with the Rupert Brooke poem



The flags fly over the British Plot

Under the tree by the Rupert Brook plaque someone placed a photograph of (I think) a USAAF airman and some flowers. I didn't notice this until I was looking through my pictures for this

newsletter and my photo isn't clear enough for me to read the name which is printed under the photo. Can anyone help me identify this airman? If the person who placed the photo and flowers is reading this, thank you so much for sharing your relative or friend with the cadets on the British Plot.

All the cadets buried at Oak Ridge Cemetery are British, but some have Welsh or Scottish heritage. In recent years, in addition to these cadets having a poppy placed by their headstone on Memorial Day, those who are known to be Welsh or Scottish have the relevant national flag placed instead of, or as well as, the Union Flag. This year, every grave was marked with a poppy wreath in addition to a flag and poppy cross as you can see from the photos below. This was Christopher Nind's idea and a lovely gesture. Thank you, Christopher.



John Paul Riddle



Foreground: Dennis H Washer (died April 28, 1943) and Edward C F Vosper (died August 24, 1943 with Leonard Stone -see below)



Foreground: Thomas J Parry (died Jan 14, 1944) and Ronald A Purrett (died December 12, 1942)



The Welshman, Derick R Clandillon (died January 19, 1943)



Horace Bowley Booth and Scotsman, Thomas W Calderhead (both died May 4, 1945)



Leonard Stone (died August 24, 1943 along with Edward Vosper - above)*

* Leonard's relatives come each year and place his picture with the words "Much loved and always remembered by his family in England and Canada".

We owe an ongoing debt of gratitude to those who placed Floral Tributes, the Rotary Club of Arcadia, the CWGC and the many others who remember the cadets and John Paul Riddle and look after and care for the British Plot so wonderfully well.

After the service, several of us had lunch at **Mary Margaret's Tea and Biscuit**, 10 South Polk Avenue, Arcadia, Florida 34266 where it was lovely to catch up with Vicki Brittain, whose father Fred was an instructor at Riddle Field (see 'The Instructors') and Bill Thompson and Sally Bloomstrane from Embry Riddle Aeronautical University (ERAU) and talk more about the ERAU 5BFTS digital archive project (see '5BFTS Digital Archive').

For more information about Mary Margaret's Tea and Biscuits, and details of their menu, please visit:

<https://www.facebook.com/MaryMargaretsTeaAndBiscuit/>

	<p>Annual British Memorial Service May 27, 2024</p> <p>The service will start at 10am</p> <p>The Service is organized, as it has been for the past 66 years, by Arcadia Rotary Club</p> <p>Address: PO Box 1492, Arcadia, FL 34265-1492</p> <p>Telephone for information at 863-444-0664</p> <p>Email: BritishMemorialService@gmail.com</p> <p>EVERYBODY IS WELCOME</p>
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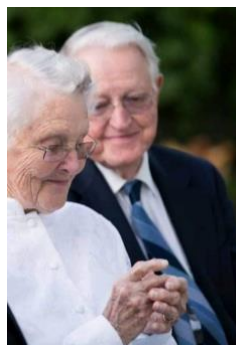
In Memoriam

Douglas Laning Day (5BFTS Instructor) died April 7, 2023, aged 99½

In April, I heard from Lesley Flahie who told me that her father, Douglas Laning Day, died in April. Lesley told me a little more about her father and mother, Douglas and Ruth Day.



Wedding Day August 1945



*73rd Wedding Anniversary.
August 2018*

Douglas was born in Minneapolis St Paul, Minnesota in 1923. The family moved to Florida when he was in his early teens. His elder brother was Donald and both Donald and Douglas became flying instructors at 5BFTS. Douglas gained his flying license at the age of 16 and after he died, Donald told Lesley that Douglas had learned to fly because he (Donald) was flying. But Donald also said that they both believed that flying was the future.

Douglas married Ruth who was born in Providence, Rhode Island in 1924. Her family also moved to Florida at about the same time as the Day family, and Douglas and Ruth met each other in high school. Their first date was set up by their mothers – with Douglas taking Ruth up for an airplane ride! They were the first couple, post WWII, to marry in their hometown of

Lake Worth, Florida. They had five children (Lesley is in the middle) and were happily married for 76 years. Sadly, Ruth died on September 14, 2021 – Lesley writes *“They were the perfect example of how a marriage could and should be!”*

After Ruth died, Douglas sold the family home which he had designed and helped build and moved to Georgia to live with Lesley and her husband Bill. Douglas was very familiar with Georgia as he and Ruth would regularly visit and he considered Georgia his ‘second home’.



Douglas flew all over the world and in many different kinds of planes ending with the Hercules C130 in which he flew over 10,000 hours. Lesley writes, *“He was gone a lot but when he was home, he stayed home meaning he didn't go off to sports games, bars, etc. Family came first. He liked sailing and working in his workshop. He taught us kids many things. He even marked our dresses for hemming”.* (Left – Douglas in his workshop)

Lesley ended by saying, *“Daddy was a sweet, patient, intelligent, loving father and husband. He was very independent and wanted to keep doing things until he couldn't! He went into the hospital on Tuesday and passed away 4 days later (Good Friday), a few months shy of turning 100 years old”.*

Douglas' older brother, Donald Day, is still living in Hendersonville, NC and will be 104 in November (wow!). I have spent some time looking through information that I have about the Day brothers and trying to sort out which came from Donald and which from Douglas!

In April 2018, I heard from Douglas who wrote and told me about what he did after Clewiston closed. This was included in Newsletter 11 (September 2018) and in honour of Douglas, I have reproduced the first paragraph below. Douglas wrote:

“We were on our honeymoon when I received a wire asking me to return to work. We were to finish training the last class before Riddle Field closed. I then worked several months as a mechanic at Morrison Field in West Palm Beach. I was called back to flight instructing by Riddle to help train French naval cadets, including Charles de Gaulle's son, at Homestead Air Base (just south of Miami). The aircraft we used were AT6s and Cessna”.

There will be more about Douglas and Donald in the March 2024 newsletter.

Lois Mae Heflin Blount (5BFTS Administration), died August 18, 2023 aged 97

In May 1943, Lois Heflin was 16 years old. She had just graduated from high school and was about to start her first job as a secretary at Riddle–McKay Aero College. And from then until she died last month, Lois remained passionately interested in 5BFTS and the cadets who passed through Riddle Field. In 1981, Lois gave an interview to the Clewiston News in which she said she got letters every now and then from one of the cadets (this may have been Keith Martin of Course 16) and regularly corresponded with one of the cadet's wives in England.

In May 2016, I had the honour of meeting with Lois at her Clewiston home in E Avenida Del Rio. I also met her middle son, Raymond, and heard a little more about Lois' time at Riddle Field. Lois started working for George Sloan in the Personnel Department and in July 1943, moved to the General Manager's office and became secretary to Ernie Smith the General Manager and James Durden Assistant Manager. Her duties included working the Western Telegraph at the field, operating the small switchboard and secretarial duties. About eight ladies were working at Riddle Field. One, Hazel Townsend, married a Riddle Field mechanic, Guy Hand. Much later, Lois' eldest son, Richard married Cindy Hand, the daughter of Hazel

and Guy. Two of Lois' graduating class at High School married people from Riddle Field. Tempe Ange married John Garlick, a cadet on Course 23, and Helen Dumpy married Tom Pullen, one of the ground school instructors.

Lois was born in Woodhall, Illinois in 1926, but in June 1939, her family moved to live in Citrus Centre about 10 miles out of Moore Haven where her father worked on a poultry farm. She had four siblings, Dean, Glen, Jean and Billy Ray who was born just after their move to Florida. Lois continued to live at Moore Haven while working at Riddle Field taking the bus to and from the field every day, although sometimes renting a room in Clewiston. After Riddle Field closed, Lois got a job at US Sugar as secretary to Malcom Big who was the Secretary and Treasurer of the company and moved permanently to Clewiston where she had lived ever since.

Lois met Lewis Blount in 1947. Lewis, who was born in Arcadia in 1927, had lived in Clewiston since 1932. His father was an electrician and a plumber. Lewis had worked at Riddle Field although Lois didn't know him then. He was a member of the ground staff and looked after the planes and serviced the buses in the transportation department. Lewis joined the US Navy 1945 to 1946, then joined US Sugar and he and Lois were married in 1950. Their first son, Richard, arrived the next year, followed by Raymond and then Robert. Lewis retired from US Sugar in 1989 and died in 2006. Richard learnt to fly and Raymond became a sky diver and when I met him in 2016, Raymond had already got more than 50 dives to his credit – at Skydive Spaceland Florida based at Airglades (Riddle Field during WW2). Robert married Angela.

Since we met, Lois regularly sent me long letters – usually to thank me after she had received a 5BFTS newsletter. She told me a little of her life in Clewiston, her walks around the area, the flowers round about, the birds she saw, her family news and always the temperature – I think that this was just to make me envious especially when it was cold, wet and snowy in Britain!

Lois had 11 grandchildren and many great grandchildren. Her funeral was held in Clewiston on August 25, 2023. Jeff Barwick was able to attend and represented 5BFTS on our behalf.



Lois in 1944



Lois and Raymond. May 2016



Lois. (Photo: Akin Davis Funeral Home)

We remember all pilots who have handed in their logbooks, and to other 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!



And News from No 4 British Flying Training School (Falcon Field)

I am combining two section headings here because Kathryn Masters, Chair - Falcon Field Association: The Next Generation, has kindly invited me to the next Falcon Field Day in October – which will be held in the Airside Suite at Duxford. The programme includes:



- Update on the restored video from the inaugural meeting of the original Falcon Field Association in 1981;
- Update on recent contact with a famous 4BFTS Historian;
- Meeting veteran pilots;
- ‘Show and Tell’ session;
- Visit to the Museum to see a Spitfire, Stearman (PT-17) and Harvard (AT6).

This year the Imperial War Museum Duxford is celebrating 50 years of Duxford Air Shows. The former RAF airfield played a leading role in some of the most dramatic days in 20th century history - as a base for many of the Spitfire and Hurricane pilots during the Battle of Britain. And one of their shows for 2023 asked visitors to ‘**Step into Summer 1940**’ at the **Duxford Battle of Britain Air Show**, filled with nostalgia and vintage entertainment on September 16 and 17. <https://www.iwm.org.uk/airshows16and17/duxford-battle-of-britain-airshow>

To read about 5BFTS people on the American Air Museum Internet Archive, please visit www.americanairmuseum.com and search on 5BFTS, Riddle Field and/or Clewiston.

RIDDLE ROUND-UP

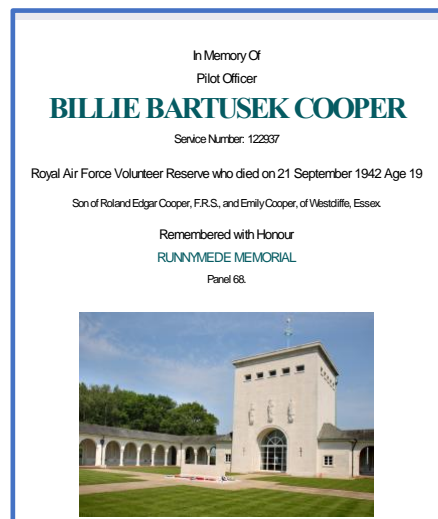
Billie Cooper: Course 3 (October 1941 to March 1942)

In a 1942 Flypaper dated November 20, Riddle Round Up mentioned a letter received from Mr R E Cooper of Edinburgh in which he says that his son, Billie Cooper, has been reported missing. Billie Cooper was a member of Course 3 and had been a member of the Edinburgh University Air Squadron. He was a close friend of my father, George.

Sadly, any hopes held by Billie’s parents were dashed as Billie had died, aged 19, on September 21, 1942. His plane was officially, “Lost Without Trace Over the Western Approaches After Running Out of Fuel in Bad Weather During an Anti-Shipping Patrol”. In reality, Billie was on a training antisubmarine patrol in the Bay of Biscay and did not return. Billie was at No. 10 OTU (Operational Training Unit) flying an Armstrong Whitworth Whitley. He is remembered on the Runnymede Memorial on Coopers Hill overlooking the River Thames at Englefield Green.



Course 3: Edinburgh University Group. Back: George 2nd from left. Billie far right. Front: Sandy Manson 2nd second right.



From the CWGC website

I originally intended to include this last year to mark 100 years since Billie died, but I hesitated,

and the reason why was intriguing. I knew that Bill had been selected for 5BFTS Course 3 as a member of the Edinburgh University Air Squadron. During early 2022, I visited Edinburgh Castle where the Scots Roll of Honour is in the Scottish National War Memorial. Anyone can search the Roll, but I was unable to find any record of Billie which surprised me. Nor could I find details of his birth on any UK genealogy website.

I then searched the CWGC website. I found Billie and his recorded home address – in Essex!

Bill's full name was Billie Bartusek Cooper, Bartusek being his mother's maiden name. His parents were Roland Edgar and Emily Cooper. Roland was born in Surrey, but orphaned at 4 years, came under the guardianship of his aunt and uncle in 1905. His uncle was William Wright-Smith (later Sir William Wright-Smith) a botanist and horticulturalist who was Curator of the Royal Botanic Garden, Edinburgh and later Regius Keeper (Director) from 1922 to 1956. William greatly influenced his nephew's choice of career and between 1907 and 1910, William and Roland went travelling in northern India collecting botanical samples. Roland then continued his horticultural education at the Royal Botanic Garden.

Emily was born in Bohemia (then in Austria). Along with her parents and brother, Emily then aged 16, became a naturalized British Subject in 1909. They lived in London where Roland and Emily married in London in 1919. On their marriage certificate, Roland is recorded as being a 'Botanical Explorer' as indeed he was having been to Sikkim in 1913, Bhutan in 1914 and 1915 and the Punjab in 1916. In 1921, Roland became Superintendent of the Botanic Gardens at Maymo, Burma (Myanmar) and it was here that Billie was born in 1923.

The family returned to Britain in the late 1920s so that Billie could be educated in Scotland. In 1930, Roland became Assistant Curator of the Royal Botanic Gardens, Edinburgh and in 1934, was promoted to Curator (Head Keeper) following in the footsteps of his uncle. During his curatorship he lived in the East Gate Lodge with his wife, Emily and this was Billie's home while he was growing up in Edinburgh.

Sailing to Halifax on the SS Capetown Castle, wasn't the first time Billie had been to North America and Canada. In 1937, aged 14, Billie was one of 108 Scottish boys who sailed back from Montreal to Glasgow in August. I am not sure why the boys were in Canada nor which school Billie attended, but he did follow his father, Roland, to Edinburgh University.

At Clewiston, Billie shared a hut with my father, John Penman and Alexander Wilson (Sandy) Manson. These four spent most weekends at the Fort Myers home of Ed and Ruth Simpson where the 'boys' were able to stay in rooms built over their garage and were really well looked after. Sandy was also killed during WW2 in July 1944 and is buried in France. John went to live in Rhodesia after WW2. I am not sure if George (my father) went to see Billie's parents while he was in Edinburgh on leave, but after WW2, my parents went to visit Roland and Emily at their home at East Gate Lodge. Roland retired in 1950 moving to Westcliffe in Essex which was the address recorded against Billie's Commemoration on the CWGC website.



L-R: John, Sandy, Billie, George

Billie, Ken MacVicar (Obit Newsletter 17, Sept 2020), George

Cecil Jolly: Course 3 (October 1941 to March 1942)

In the Christmas 2022 newsletter, I wrote about Ben Jolly and his quest for information about the colour of airplanes flown by cadets at 5BFTS. Ben is building a model of each plane flown by his great-uncle, Cecil, and he wanted to be sure he was painting them in the correct colour.

I am pleased to report that Ben has now finished his Stearman PT-17 – modelled on Stearman No 23 at Riddle Field. Checking in George’s Logbook, I note that he flew No. 23 three times.



Ben’s finished model PT-17 No 23



PT-17A No 23. 5BFTS, Clewiston, Florida 1942
<http://www.vickersvaliant.com/no.5-bfts-clewiston--florida.html>

Ken McVicar: Course 3 (October 1941 to March 1942)

ROYAL AIR FORCE..... Imphal.				R. A. F. (India) Form 401- Sheet No.	
Date	Ref. No.	Orders or nature of duty :-		Time up	Weather
13.4.43.	20/214.	Tee/R. & P/R. Kale Vakkey, Kindat, Pantha, Trewa.		1615	8/10 cloud showery.
Unit: 20 Squadron.	Aircraft Type: Lys. No. L.4315.	Pilot: P/O. Stilliard.	Crew: P/O. MacVicar.	Time down: 1735	4-20 m.
Map Reference :-				Total time: 2.20	Report.
Place.	Time (Hrs.)	Height (Feet.)	Serial Number of Message.	Action taken.	
Mawlaik.	1600	4000'	2 runs photos E-W. 2 runs photos S-W. Trench under tree. 23 canoes. 1 run photo S-W. 1 run photo S-E. 1 run W-S Log bridge under construction E of village. Hugouts in village. white boat & 2 shelters in W of village. 14 rafts all on W bank. None E bank. No sign on possibility of strip in vicinity. 1 bullock cart unloading onto raft. 3 bullock carts moving towards river from W. 4 bullock carts moving E 1/2 m from river. About 20 natives seen in and around rafts and carts. V.L.C. Telegraph mast to Salun. Also 1 short run of canoe & pit 4 m S.E. bank. <i>NOT DONE.</i> P/R in Kale Valley owing to rain and low visibility.	Photoed.	
Kindat.	1610	3,000'			
Pantha.	1630.	3,000'			
Ta'aga.		3,000'			
S.L.0672.		2,000'			
Hemlaw.		0'			
Yusa.		3,000'			

In Newsletter 17, September 2020, I reported receiving an email and photo from John Fockler mentioning Johnny Penman, a close friend of my father at 5BFTS and the best friend of John’s father, Eddie. Eddie was not at Clewiston, but the photo included Ken MacVicar (Obituary Newsletter 17) and Ian A S Gibson both from Course 3. Further photos were in Newsletter 19, March 2021. John has now sent me a scan of a Reconnaissance Report from April 1943 when his father, Johnny, Ken and Ian were with 20 Squadron stationed at RAF Imphal, India. This report shows P/O Ken MacVicar flying with P/O Stilliard – not many Reconnaissance Reports outside India and similar areas would report on the activity of bullock carts!

Ron Pottinger: Course 7 (March 1942 to September 1942)

Ron died aged 101 in 2021 (Obituary Newsletter 23, September 2002). His son Mark is still sorting out photographs and sent me a few more from the 250 he has now scanned. He also told me that Ron sailed to North America on the MV Highland Brigade, docking at Halifax, Nova Scotia. Then by train to Moncton, Boston, New York and eventually Clewiston. The scanned photographs start in Moncton, probably where Ron bought the camera. After training, there was a train journey back to Halifax, sailing home on RMS Queen Elizabeth.



Ron by Stearman PT-17 no. 34



MacFadden Deauville Hotel, Miami Beach



Ron on Miami Beach

The hotel and casino, originally built in 1926, became the MacFadden Deauville Hotel (as known by Ron) in 1936. It was replaced in 1957 by the new Deauville Resort Hotel built in the MiMo (Miami Modernist) style. This was allowed to fall into disrepair and eventually imploded in 2022. The site is currently awaiting development.

A reminder that Ron's account of his time in the Florida is related in his book 'A View from the Office', also published in paper back by Stackpole under the title 'Soldier in the Cockpit'. www.stackpolebooks.com

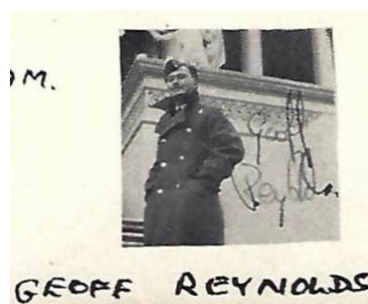
Ron Cox: Course 22 (August 29, 1944 to March 31, 1945)

and Geoffrey Reynolds, David Smith, Ivan Sneezum and Dennis Wyatt (all Course 22)

In May, I found myself in the Sevenoaks area, and while there, went to see Ron Cox at his home. I was made so welcome by Ron and his wife, Kristel; we talked all afternoon and then went out for a delightful meal in the evening. Thank you Ron and Kristel for your hospitality.

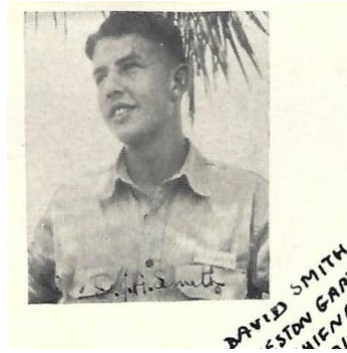
I could now fill an entire newsletter with new (to me) information about 5BFTS, but this time, I will restrict it to pertinent details from a short correspondence between some members of Course 22 written in 2014. Ivan Sneezum wrote to Geoffrey Reynolds, David Smith, Ron Cox and Dennis Wyatt just after he had received the final letter from the last 5BFTS Chairman in July 2014 following the disbanding of the 5BFTS Association. Ivan suggested that they kept in contact and headed his letter, "Course 22 Survivors' Letter". He included some news of Geoffrey, David, Dennis and himself. Nothing from Ron, possibly "hiding in Naples Bay, FL!".

The photographs below are taken from Course 22 Listening Out (March 1945) with the exception of Ivan's photo which is from the group photo taken at the start of their training.





Ivan Sneezum 1944



David Smith: Left - Listening Out 1945. Right - obituary photo published in RA-AM.com (Republican American) January 4, 2015



Geoffrey Reynolds (Obituary Newsletter 19, March 2021) kept busy writing for his old school 'mag' and the Church monthly and completely rebuilding his 16th century farmhouse. He also remembered a Hurricane at Clewiston – possibly the Cuba-Florida Hurricane in October 1944.

David Smith (Obituary Newsletter 1, March 2015) lived in Connecticut, New England. Ivan writes that he remembered meeting David in 1948 at a Lyons Corner House in Wolverhampton when he was persuaded to help out with a 'double date' for a Saturday Civic Hall Dance. Ivan ended up marrying his partner and David was his best man. David, however, had to wait until he fell off a motorbike to meet his future wife (his physiotherapist).

Dennis Wyatt (Obituary Newsletter 19, March 2021) was well except for his hearing which he attributed to damage caused by doing a loop too fast in an AT-6!

As for Ivan himself (Obituary Newsletter 16, March 2019), he played bridge and enjoyed working on his computer. Of relevance today is that Ivan was responsible for sending two RAF wreaths to Florida for the annual British Memorial Day Service. The 5BFTS Treasurer, Brian Gait Course 24, had finalised the 5BFTS accounts after the Association was disbanded, and as agreed by members, was sending any remaining funds to the Royal British Legion Poppy Factory so that wreaths could be sent to Florida each year until the money ran out.

Ron replied to Ivan's letter reminding his fellow pilots that it was exactly 70 years ago since they were able to solo in a Stearman therefore "believing that we were pilots at last". Ron said that he managed to pass his Private Pilots' medical each April and was able to continue flying the [Piper] PA28 Archer he shares at Lydd, and join fly-ins to various airfields with former members of the University of London Air Squadron and with the Flying Club of the Honourable Company of Air Pilots of which he had been elected a Liveryman (*Editor's note – this is a great honour given to those who have made a significant contribution to the world of aviation – Ron is now an honorary life member*). Ron noted that the Flying Club had very enjoyable dinners etc at the Mansion House and Guildhall! Ron was also in touch with a handful of wartime fliers, members of the former Air Crew Association, Biggin Hill Wing. This resulted in two "Lest We Forget" Association invitations to a Buckingham Palace Garden Party - "a nice experience!"



Bedford Reunion 2007
→
Ron on left with A R Eustace (also Course 22) on right with their wives.





Final 5BFTS Association Reunion: Bedford September 2013.

Standing L-R: Unknown, **Dennis Wyatt Co 22**, John S Wright Co 26, **Geoffrey Reynolds Co 22**, Peter Hines Co 19, Unknown, **Ron Cox Co 22**

Sitting L-R: Brian Gait Co 24, John Broome Co 18, Gordon Newsham Co 24, **Ivor Sneezum Co 22**

Norman F Whisler: Course 25 (Started April 3, 1945, but not completed)

In November 2022, we heard from Dave Whisler who told us that his father, Norman Whisler, had died over 25 years ago but his stepmother, Colette, had only died a few weeks previously in Galway, Republic of Ireland. Dave has now sent me a massive amount of information which is being uploaded to the Digital Archive for us all to enjoy – see below and thank you, Dave.

The Instructors

If they hadn't been there – would we have been here?



@David Brannan (Peter Brannan Co 25)

Frederick J Brittain:

"Don't worry if your job is small and your rewards are few - remember that the mighty oak was once a nut like you."

James Dawson Leftwich:



MR. J. D. LEFTWICH

In November 2022, we heard from Hank Leftwich who wrote: "My grandfather, whom I never knew, was an American instructor at a Clewiston during WW2". Hank's father knew little about his own father's work during WW2 and Hank was trying to "put the pieces" together for his father. I was able to add a 'few pieces' using lists of instructors and a picture from the 5BFTS First Anniversary Book (July 1942).

In 1942, James was a Link Trainer Instructor and by April 1943, was an Assistant Flight Commander. And it seems that after Riddle Field closed he was living in Coral Gables.

Donald & Douglas Day – see Douglas' Obituary - more about the brothers in March 2024.



<https://commons.erau.edu/british-flying-training-school/>

In May 2023, I went to ERAU in Daytona Beach to meet with the team who are working hard on our behalf to carry on enlarging and improving the #5BFTS Digital Archive. Every time I see the Hunt Library, I become more impressed by the wonderful facilities that the students at ERAU have. The digital archive is growing slowly, because one thing I have learnt is that it takes time to develop an archive properly – better to take it slow and get it right rather than rush and make mistakes! While we were there, Bill Thompson (Executive Director of Engagement Initiatives and Eagle Heritage Project) treated the team to lunch which was a great way to catch up. (Thank you Bill).

What's new in Biographies?

- **George Hogarth – Course 3.** This first of my father's two Logbooks has been added to the website. <https://commons.erau.edu/bfts-george-hogarth-logbook/1/>
- **Norman Whisler – Course 25.** As referred to in Riddle Round-Up, information provided by his son Dave is slowly being added to the archive. <https://commons.erau.edu/bfts-norman-whisler/>

What's new in History?

- **RAF Flying Training USA 1941-1945** - In 1999, Derick Croisdale who was at 4BFTS in Mesa, AZ, wrote this brief history on behalf of all 6 BFTS Associations. Representatives of all six made contributions to the document at the time. Derick's original work has stood the test of time and remains an excellent summary of RAF training in the USA during WW2, but an appendix has been added to bring the document up to date and includes information that was not available to any of the BFTS Associations in 1999. The appendix is written by me with contributions from the 'next generation' of representatives from #1BFTS and #4BFTS.

<https://commons.erau.edu/bfts-history/4/>

A reminder that it is still early days, but I should love to hear what you think. Any ideas, comments and offers of source materials all gratefully received. And of course, ongoing thanks to the team at ERAU especially Bill who has made this possible and Chip Wolfe

Who Do You Think You Are?

This is a British television programme in which genealogical experts help a celebrity to explore one or more of their ancestors. The celebrity does not have any idea of what they will be told until it is revealed on screen and inevitably, they will be led to a place where their ancestor lived, worked or died. This is usually a place they have never been to before and many immediately feel a connection between these places and themselves.



In June, we were in Chattanooga (of Cho-Cho fame) to see the former railroad Terminal Station (*left*). In early October 1941, my father, George, and his fellow cadets destined for 5BFTS left Toronto in a “*beautiful Canadian Pacific coach and eventually after two days in this and similar carriages*”, they arrived in Clewiston. George only mentions one place they stopped and that was Chattanooga.



Waiting Room (The Dome) in the 1940s.



Waiting Room (The Dome) – June 2023

The upper part of the station is now a hotel, but the waiting room (The Dome) has been beautifully restored and leads to the tracks which are being made into a public garden. Track 1 is also being restored with a platform and railway lines – and there is even a train on it.



I walked down Track 1 past the train, turned and looked back and could see the platform, train and the Terminal building rising over the canopy. And suddenly I realised that over 80 years ago, my father was here at this station (and possibly stood on this particular platform). The hairs stood up on my neck - it was definitely a ‘Who Do You Think You Are’ moment!



The tracks being made into a public garden



Chattanooga Cho-Cho!

Course 3 was the last course to take the train from Toronto to Clewiston via Chattanooga – only Courses 1, 2 and 3 went to Clewiston by this route. RAF Moncton opened in November 1941, Toronto was no longer use as a dispersal station and all subsequent courses went to Clewiston from Moncton via New York.



#5 British Flying Training School, Clewiston, Florida. Website Update



As always, it is a great pleasure to receive requests from people asking about relatives.

Any photos that are passed to us will, with the owner's permission, be uploaded onto the 5BFTS website and the Digital Archive at Embry Riddle Aeronautical University so that we can all share them. The 5BFTS website can be found at www.5bfts.org.uk and the ERAU Digital Archive is at <https://commons.erau.edu/british-flying-training-school/>

Clewiston Update



The Museum displays information and links, which connect to photographs and other archives <https://www.theclewistonmuseum.org>. Click the 'Exhibit' tab and the 5BFTS logo takes you to photo archives and clicking on, 'Clewiston and beyond' takes you to my book about my father in the ERAU archives. Look in Digital Archives for copies of 'The Clewiston News' published between 1941 and 1945 – a great way to find out what was happening at Riddle Field!

On behalf of 5BFTS, please can I, once again, thank Clewiston Museum, Jeff Barwick, Leigh Woodham, Director of the Museum and the Museum Board for looking after the 5BFTS archives and doing such a wonderful job keeping 5BFTS alive for the visitors to the museum. The museum has a Facebook page - one way to keep up to date with events in Clewiston.

Other news from Clewiston – THE SUGAR EXPRESS



The Sugar Express is really going places! Rides start in Clewiston, Lake Placid or Sebring. The current Fall schedule shows a choice of two 6-hourly trips (the Lake Placid Ltd and the Clewiston Comet), a 2-hour trip from Clewiston (the Moore Haven Meteor) and another 2-hour round trip from Sebring (the Highlands County Crescent). There are three Santa Specials from Clewiston, Lake Placid and Sebring and in January 2024, there is a special three-day event – the Rare Milage Train is running. Not bad for the third year of service!

<https://sugarexpress.com/trips-and-events/>

Useful websites:

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

The next newsletter will be published in March 2024. Please can you let me have any articles, information, etc. by the end of February 2024. 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. And for now.....

"Until we meet again, "good-bye to y'all".