

Newsletter No. 27 – New Year 2024

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5BFTS - 1941

Clewiston 2016

Daytona Beach 2022

Reflection for the Season

For my family, 2023 was a very strange year! It started on a high note with my mother's 100th Birthday in March but ended on a low note with her death aged 100 and an injury to my husband's ankle which meant he was unable to drive and has been hopping about using one leg and crutches for several weeks now. One consequence of these events is that my usual Christmas Newsletter has been delayed and I am writing this on New Year's Day. I hope everyone had a happy Christmas and that Santa was good to you.

On a much happier note: Hugo Trotter (Course 11) who was 100 in May met Anne Hughes again in November (see page 4) and Eric Denham (Course 13) who is 102 wrote to me enclosing some photos which will be in the March 2024 Newsletter.

Many readers will remember that in 2016, I arranged for a new plaque to be installed at the 5BFTS Grove of five birch trees (Five for No 5) at the National Memorial Arboretum (NMA) to replace the original plaques which were almost unreadable as a consequence of time and the British weather. Adjacent to our grove is a tree and a bench donated by 1BFTS in 2006. The Falcon Field *The Next Generation* Association which is continuing the work started many years ago by the 4BFTS Association, realised that 4BFTS is not remembered with either a tree or a plaque – this is now being rectified and 5BFTS is helping 4BFTS to achieve this aim. Please see page 4.

One of the reasons, Number 5 could help Number 4BFTS is our wonderful archive which told me everything I needed to know about the original dedication of the trees at the NMA. But it is mainly still a paper archive, and this is just one reason why we need to build and maintain the 5BFTS digital archive at Embry-Riddle Aeronautical University (ERAU) so that these stories, and the many documents and photographs that have been collected over the years, can be preserved for future generations. People are asking what their grandfathers/great-grandfathers/great-uncles, did during WW2. Thanks to ERAU, if they became a pilot at 5BFTS, their descendants will be able to find out!

A Happy and Peaceful New Year to everyone.

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

66th Annual British Memorial Day Service May 29, 2023



A big 'THANK YOU' once again to the Rotary Club of Arcadia and to Paul Bennett Seusy, British Memorial Service Chair, those who took part in the service, organisations who laid a wreath, and everyone who attended the British Memorial Day service where we remembered and honoured John Paul Riddle and the 23 cadets who died in Florida and are buried in Oak Ridge Cemetery, Arcadia.

Please see the September 2023 Newsletter (no. 26) for pictures and more information.

The 67th Annual British Memorial Day Service will be held on Monday May 27, 2024

The service will start at 10am

The Service is organized, as it has been for the past 67 years (no service was held in 2020), by Arcadia Rotary Club. Address: PO Box 1492, Arcadia, FL 34265-1492

Telephone for information at 863-444-0664

Email: BritishMemorialService@gmail.com

More details to follow in March – everyone is welcome

November 2023 at The British Plot

Memorial Day is traditionally the day when Americans remember their military personnel who have fought and died during wartime while serving in the United States armed forces, and it is appropriate that the 5BFTS British Service is held on Memorial Day as it remembers and honours RAF cadets who died in America while serving their country during WW2.

Armistice Day, later known as **Remembrance Day** in the UK and Commonwealth and **Veterans' Day** in the United States, is on November 11. The UK and Commonwealth National Service of Remembrance takes place on the nearest Sunday to November 11.

No formal ceremonies normally take place at the British Plot in November as 5BFTS honour the cadets on Memorial Day, but people do visit to place flags and remember the cadets.

And once again, we are very grateful to Bill Kirk. Bill, an RAF veteran, lives near Arcadia. He first visited The British Plot at Oak Ridge Cemetery on Remembrance Day in 2022 and his pictures were in the Christmas 2022 Newsletter. This year, he was there again on Remembrance Day. He planted flags by the cadets' headstones and laid a wreath on behalf of the Global Branch of the Royal Air Forces Association, of which he is a member. He told me there were five other people there; two were Canadian whom he had first met in 2022.



The British Plot, Oak Ridge Cemetery, Remembrance Day 2023

In Memoriam

Sadly during 2023, we heard about two people who were at 5BFTS Riddle Field and died during the year. Their obituaries and other details about their lives are in the September 2023 Newsletter.

- Douglas Laning Day (Flying Instructor). Died April 7, 2023 aged 99½;
- Lois Mae Heflin Blount (Secretary). Died August 18, 2023 aged 97.

We also heard about the deaths of the widows of two pilots. These two ladies supported the 5BFTS Association and contributed greatly to its success. Their obituaries will be in the March 2023 Newsletter.

- Shirley Neyhart, widow of Charles (Chuck) A Neyhart (USAAF Course 17 – Obituary Newsletter 10, March 2018) who died in 2023;
- Wendy Hogarth, widow of George Hogarth (Course 3) who died October 17, 2023 aged 100. *[Editor's note: Wendy and George were my parents].*

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!

5BFTS DIGITAL ARCHIVE



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

With thanks to so many people, the 5BFTS Digital Archive is now available for viewing, sharing, contributing, etc. It is very early days and there is a huge amount of material to be added (and much of this still to be scanned), but we have made a start and there are currently seven collections being populated.

A lot of people have been involved in setting up this website, but there are three people in particular that I want to thank – because without them, we would not have even been able to start – let alone get as far as we have! So - thank you to:

- **Bill Thompson**, Executive Director Engagement Initiatives & Eagle Heritage Project, who has provided funding;

- **Dr Sally Bloomstrane**, ERAU Professor of Communication, Humanities and Communication Department – and Bill’s wife - who is supporting the project;
- **Chip Wolfe**, ERAU Scholarly Commons Administrator, Hunt Library – without whom, nothing would have happened and who has been patiently instructing me in the basic skills needed to upload and manage documents in a website.

A reminder that it is early days, but I should love to hear what you think. Any ideas, comments and offers of source materials all gratefully received.

Hugo Trotter, Course 11

Readers may remember that Anne Hughes, who developed the 5BFTS part of the IWM American Air Museum digital archive, has written a book called *Waterbird, Wings over Windermere* about the story of the original Waterbird, a floatplane which made the first successful hydro-aeroplane flight in Britain from Lake Windermere in November 1911, and the replica Waterbird which flew in 2022.

Her research found that Major John Trotter who trained at Windermere in 1914, was Hugo’s relative. When she and Hugo met, they discovered the 5BFTS connection between them and have met periodically ever since. The photograph to the right was taken in November 2023.



1BFTS, 4BFTS and 5BFTS – working together at the National Memorial Arboretum

In 2002, the 5BFTS Grove of five birch trees was dedicated at the National Memorial Arboretum (NMA) during the 5BFTS Association September National Reunion which was held in Derby. In 2006, the 1BFTS Association dedicated a tree and a bench.

There is nothing at the NMA to remember the 4BFTS Association (possibly because they had been disbanded by then) and so the Falcon Field Association: *The Next Generation* has decided to rectify this. Unfortunately, there are no trees left to dedicate in the RAF section, but the NMA suggested that a plaque remembering 4BFTS could be attached to an existing tree. 1BFTS only have one tree which already has a plaque attached, but 5BFTS has five trees, only one of which has a plaque. I asked four 5BFTS Association members, whose postal addresses I knew, if they had any objection to 4BFTS placing a plaque by one of our trees. They all immediately said ‘yes’ and so hopefully by next October, the new plaque will be in place and this small area of the RAF section at the NMA will stand as a quiet place of remembrance not just for those at numbers 1, 4 and 5, but for all those who were at any of the BFTS locations in America.

A big ‘thank you’ to the four 5BFTS pilots who were so positive about helping 4BFTS. For the record, their average age is 99.

At the recent Falcon Field Day 2023 at the Imperial War Museum in October, I gave a short presentation about how the 5BFTS Grove was established and wrote a handout for delegates there. This is reproduced below.

National Memorial Arboretum (NMA), the RAF Wing and the 5BFTS Grove

The NMA is in Alrewas Staffordshire on reclaimed gravel workings and bordered by the Rivers Trent and Tame. Planting began in 1996 and it was officially opened in 2001.

And it was in 2001, that the 5BFTS Association agreed to donate at least £150 for a tree and a donor's plaque to be situated in the proposed RAF Grove. In addition, members were asked if they would like to give a personal donation. The final total was £1100, sufficient for a small grove of two English birch trees and three North American birch trees (5 for Number 5), a plaque and an information board, which stood in the shade of the birch trees which form an entrance to the RAF Wing site.



5BFTS board 2002-2016



Chairman John Potter planting a birch tree in 2002



Information Board 2002 – 2016 by 5BFTS Grove at the entrance to the RAF Wing.

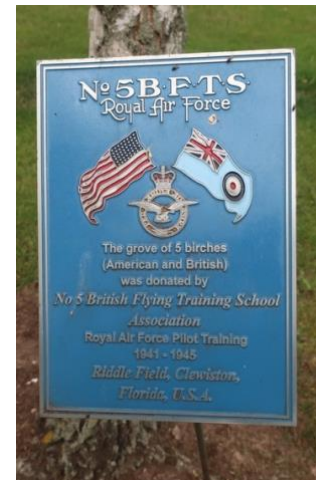
By 2014, the trees were growing well, but the 5BFTS board was shabby and the information board was virtually unreadable. By then the 5BFTS Association had been disbanded and all remaining funds distributed, but the agreement with the NMA included maintenance of the boards. Which is why, in 2016, the NMA placed a new plaque between the two central English birch trees.



←5BFTS Grove in 2014

There are two English birch trees in the centre with two American birch trees on the left-hand side and one on the right-hand side.

*The new plaque is by one of the English birch trees.
The Editor at the 5BFTS Grove in 2019 →*



The 5BFTS Grove and Plaque 2019

The next newsletter will be published in March 2024. 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
- #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
- Roy Mather DFC (Co 12): "A Pilot's Story – A Chesterfield Hero" 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>



First Words for 2024

81 years ago, Willard Rodney Burton, Chief Instructor of the Instructors' School at Embry Riddle wrote in Flypaper on January 1, 1944:



"This is the last of 1942. It has been an eventful year, eventful in the history of the world and in the history of every nation on the face of the globe [.....] And what of 1943. Its history has yet to be written, but we know that each of us will play his or her part in the writing of that history. Let us approach the coming year with our sleeves rolled up and with our heads and hearts held high. Let us work as hard as we can, pay our taxes and buy our bonds."

And he finished his Editorial with these words:

How right he was!

HAPPY NEW YEAR TO ALL

Let us not complain about little things. And let us remember that this is the biggest job we have ever faced and that it is a long, long way from being finished. We must face it together, without dissension. We must realize that defeats may come along with victories, dark days with the bright. For a New Year's resolution, let us take this: In victories we shall not become too confident; in defeats we shall not be disheartened; in work we shall be faithful, that the final Victory *shall be ours* .

Until we meet again, good-bye to y'all and may you and your families have a happy, safe and peaceful New Year