

Newsletter No. 15 – Christmas 2019

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Reflection for the Season

Today (November 28) is US Thanksgiving Day (Canadian Thanksgiving for 2019 was on October 14). Consensus suggests that the first Thanksgiving was at Plymouth in 1621, prompted by the good harvest that year. George Washington proclaimed the first nationwide Thanksgiving on November 26, 1789 and in 1863, Abraham Lincoln officially called for Thanksgiving in all states. It now begins the ‘Holiday’ season with the following day marking the start of Christmas shopping. Black Friday ‘sales’ invite people to spend their money, and here in the French speaking part of Switzerland, shops are highlighting their ‘Black Friday’ deals – the two words now being internationally accepted as a way to encourage sales!

Thanksgiving Day is a day for Americans to reach out to family and friends with everybody giving thanks for what they have. They share a meal including roast turkey and pumpkin pie (in Switzerland, I enjoyed *Dinde de Thanksgiving* or ‘Thanksgiving Turkey’ with a sweet potato side!). Change the sweet potato and pumpkin pie to sprouts and Christmas pudding, and you have a typical British Christmas meal – traditional since turkey was introduced to Britain around 1526, although originally it was just one of several birds and meats at the Christmas feast.

Today, I am thinking about my American (and belatedly, Canadian) friends many of whom I have got to know since I started writing this newsletter. And in 1941, the pilots in Clewiston were thinking about their homes and family: ‘A Pilots Thanksgiving Prayer’ in Flypaper, November 26, 1941, includes the following lines - as relevant at Christmas 2019 as they were then in 1941:

“I thank Thee for my parents, ‘cause two better has no man;
 For brother and for sister, too, and friends: not one I ban.
 From asking that You bless them as You’ve blessed me this past year.
 Please grant them all continued peace.”

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”



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 and RAF 100 in 2019 –The Highlights

In January:

We heard that **Anne Hughes**, a volunteer researcher at Imperial War Museum, Duxford, who is helping us with the 5BFTS section on the American Air Museum Internet Archive was appointed as Chair of the Vintage Aircraft Club (which provides a focal body for owners, pilots and enthusiasts of vintage and classic light aircraft). Congratulations Anne!

In March:

I told readers about the **RAF Schools Project** - History and STEM (science, technology, engineering, mathematics) activities for secondary schools which continues 'Commemorate, Celebrate and Inspire' well beyond 2018. The Historical Association and the Institute of Physics have created a website (<https://www.raf100schools.org.uk>) exploring scientific ideas and history, and with interactive maps to show RAF activity globally over 100 years.

The US Ambassador to the UK, Robert Wood Johnson launched his campaign '**Keeping the Memories Alive**' which aims to find living individuals who remember D-Day and the American military in the UK during WW2. Mali Gardner, Mayor of Clewiston, thought that he should also know about the British military in America during WW2. She wrote to him about 5BFTS:

"These young Brits trained to be pilots in our community during the war years (even before Pearl Harbor) then returned to [Britain] to defend their homeland. Airglades [Site of Riddle Field] still serves as a reminder of the UK-USA alliance by the flags of both countries flying side by side along with some archival memorabilia – the City also flies the flags side by side in our City Park as a testament of our sweetest heroes."

In May:

63rd Annual British Memorial Day Service May 27, 2019

This Memorial Day was the last time that Judy Kirkpatrick hosted the service after 20 years of chairing or co-chairing the relevant Rotary Club Committee. Paul Seusy is taking over. Paul is an Arcadia lawyer and a past president of the Arcadia Rotary Club. Thank you, Paul.



May 27 was a beautiful day – blue skies and hot sun. Around 200 people came to remember and honour John Paul Riddle and the 23 cadets who were killed in Florida and are buried in Oak Ridge Cemetery, Arcadia. Thanks are due to the Rotary Club of Arcadia for their support; it was very humbling to see how many still come to remember the 5BFTS cadets who didn't make it home.

Paul Seusy and Judy Kirkpatrick →

"Over the 20 years", Judy says, "things have changed, not least because so many of those directly associated with WW2 have died or are now too frail to attend". But the legacy lives on thanks in no small part to Judy and the efforts she has made to ensure each service is special and a poignant remembrance for those young men whose permanent home is at Oak Ridge.



Judy – from all of us who have a direct or indirect connection with 5BFTS, THANK YOU VERY MUCH for all your hard work and dedication. We have appreciated it.

Amongst those taking lunch at Mary Margaret's Tea and Biscuit in Arcadia (now under the ownership of Helen Cooke) were the sons and daughters of Instructors, Jean F Reahard Jnr (1941-1945) and Fred Brittain (1943-1945), RAF cadet George Hogarth (Co 3) and USAAF cadet, Charles A Sweet (Co 18).

The 64th Annual British Memorial Day Service will be held on May 25, 2020.

Richard Nester, a Briton who lives in Fort Lauderdale, normally attends the British Memorial Day services in Arcadia – but not this year. He was in England, with 94-year old US Paratrooper, Sid Levit. Sid, a Purple Heart recipient whose grandparents were British, served with the 17th Airborne Division in Europe. They visited the Airborne Assault Museum at Duxford and the Bomber Command Museum in Lincoln. On Memorial Day at the US Cemetery near Cambridge, Sid met US ambassador Robert Wood Johnson. Then Sid and Richard went to Cambridge Airport and flew in a Dakota C47 with the ambassador – as Richard says, “*an amazing experience!*”. There are more details in the Sept 2019 newsletter.

In June – there was good news from Clewiston Museum:

First – the museum has received a donation of some 20 letters between a Clewiston family who were connected with 5BFTS and the cadets they befriended during their time at Riddle Field, and their families. We are looking forward to hearing more about these letters.

Second – The museum has a new curator. The grandson of a long-time Clewiston citizen, he has a background in history, relevant qualifications, etc. We look forward to hearing more.

The Museum website www.clewistonmuseum.com has display information and links, which connect to photographs and other archives on the subject of 5 BFTS.

Jenny Harding writes: *On behalf of 5BFTS, please can I, once again, thank Clewiston Museum, Jeff Barwick and the new Curator for looking after the 5BFTS archives and doing such a wonderful job keeping 5BFTS alive for the visitors to the museum.”*

In August:

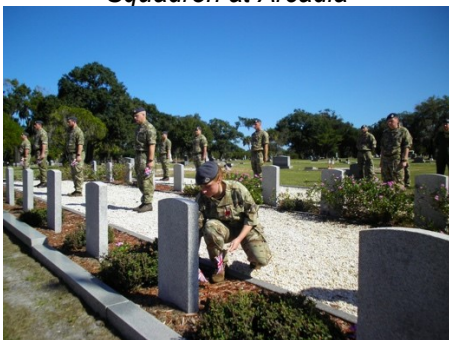
Changes at Airglades [aka Riddle Field] are progressing. The US FAA (Federal Aviation Administration) deemed that the proposal (now called the Airport Investment Partnership Program) to convert Airglades International Airport into an all-cargo and perishable goods logistics hub was ‘substantially complete’. The new 4000m runway will run north/south rather than use the east-south-east to west-north-west runway – quite a change from Riddle Field!

In September 1999 (as noted in the 5BFTS March 2019 newsletter!):

Twenty years ago, the 5BFTS Association held its **Millennium Reunion of 1999** at Bedford. Attendees included instructors, John S W Davis from Clewiston and Reed Clary from Miami. This was the first time here but from 2005 to the final one in 2013, all Reunions were held in Bedford. Although the hotel, originally the Moat House and now the Park Inn, is a rather dull tower block, there is a lovely view of the Great Ouse from the bar and lounge area – especially on Sundays when the crews from the adjacent Bedford Rowing Club come out to practice.

In November:

CXX Squadron and Poseidon Line Squadron at Arcadia



In September, I heard from Sgt Craig Martin of RAF Lossiemouth in Scotland who told me that around 30 RAF personnel were going to Oak Ridge Cemetery on the 10th November to commemorate those who died during their training in Florida. And so, on Remembrance Sunday, CXX Squadron and engineers from the Poseidon Line Squadron based at Naval Air Station Jacksonville in Florida attended Oak Ridge Cemetery, laying crosses and poppies at the graves of the 23 RAF cadet pilots.

More in March 2020...

In Memoriam

Sadly during 2019, we heard that several ex-cadets had 'handed in their Logbooks'. Obituaries and other details about their lives are in the March and September 2019 Newsletters.

- Dr Stuart James Cox (Course 11) died October 16, 2016
- John R Midlane (Course 17) died November 4, 2017 in Scarborough, Ontario
- Geoffrey Lindsell Reynolds (Course 22) died July 31, 2018 aged 93
- Ivan Dennis Sneezum (Course 22) died October 3, 2018 aged 93
- Donald MacIntosh DFC (Course 11) died January 10, 2019 aged 96

In September, it was very pleasant to report that for the first time since I started writing these newsletters in March 2015, there were no deaths of former cadets, instructors or Riddle Field personnel to record. Instead, I focused on the life of one of the 23 cadets buried at Oak Ridge cemetery - Michael Kevin Hinds (Course 19) who died July 13, 1944 aged 20 following a crash while practicing a landing at Riddle Field. His funeral is one of the few with surviving photographs. Michael died not knowing he had a son and that son, Neil Tait, did not know about his father until many years later when he had children and grandchildren of his own. Neil and his wife, Audrey, travelled to Florida in 2011 and took part in a very moving Memorial Day Service. The full story with photographs is in Newsletter 14, September 2019.

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. [SEP]

WE ARE HERE BECAUSE THEY WERE THERE! [SEP]

RIDDLE ROUND-UP

Harold Kosola is still in contact by email, although sadly, once again he was not fit enough to attend the British Memorial Day Service in 2019.

Lois Heflin Blount is a wonderful correspondent – her last letter was in October when the weather was 76°F at 8.30am, *"just right to get out and walk"*! Fortunately, Clewiston was not affected by Hurricane Dorian in August 2019.

Amy Ferrell retired as President of the Gulf Coast Welsh (Sarasota Welsh) Society after 6 years although remains as a Trustee. The Sarasota Welsh Society is a good friend of 5BFTS; they attend every British Memorial Day service and lay a wreath to remember the cadets buried there. So 'thank you' Amy and enjoy your retirement.

See Newsletters 13 and 14 for more information about the following 5BFTS people:

Dr Stuart James Cox: Course 11 (September 1942 to April 1943)

Stuart Cox, who died in 2016, wrote a brief history of his life. His son, Bob sent me a copy of the relevant pages about his experiences in WW2 and the RAF. In March 2019, Stuart's Obituary was part 1 of an amazing and very interesting RAF life. Part 2 followed in September 2019 which covered his arrival in America. What happened next will be in March 2020.

James Gordon Oakes: Course 12 (November 1942 to May 1943)

In January 2019, Anthony Oakes, a pilot in Emirates Airline, told us about his grandfather, James Gordon Oakes (Course 12). Anthony was only 9 when James died but he does remember James telling him what great hospitality he received in the US and how Americans made him, and all the British cadets, feel very welcome.

Anthony says, “*On behalf of my grandfather I would like to say a big thank you to the American families that looked after him and the British during their time in America*”.

In April, Anthony visited Clewiston Museum. He was fortunate enough to stay with Jeff and Carlota Barwick and sample their wonderful hospitality. He was not able to make it to Arcadia in May but sent a lovely message “**I am writing at approximately the time of the service in Arcadia, my thoughts are with those fallen heroes that gave their lives for our great country. I wish I could have been there to honour them**”.

Forbes McKenzie Robertson: Course 13 (died April 24, 1943)

In February, I heard from Mike Willoughby of the Henley on Thames WW1/2 Remembrance Association who is creating a Memorial Book for the Men of Henley on Thames who died in WW2 of whom Forbes Robertson is one. Forbes died following an aircraft crash on Saturday April 24, 1943 and our research has found out the location (Kenansville) and weather conditions (a turbulent storm) at the time of the crash.

Charles A. Neyhart (known as Chuck): Course 17 (November 1942 to May 1943)

In October 2018, Chuck’s wife, Shirley, generously set up a scholarship at Embry-Riddle, the **Major Charles A Neyhart No 5 BFTS Memorial Scholarship**. In April she generously donated a further \$10,000.00 bringing the total to \$50,000.00. **Thank you, Shirley, for your generosity**. Should anyone wish to support the scholarship at ERAU, please go to givingto.erau.edu/bfts and make a donation to the scholarship fund.

William Walker (known as Bill): Course 19 (February 1944 to August 1944)

In January we heard from Chris Walker. Chris’ father, William, died some 13 years ago and Chris was looking through some photo albums when he came across one which was all about his time in Florida. After looking at the 5BFTS website, Chris was intrigued to find out that Sir Jack Hayward (Obituary – Newsletter 1 March 2015) was on Course 17. Sir Jack was the long-time owner of Wolverhampton Wanderers football club, and Chris comments that although his family are long-time supporters of the Club, Bill never mentioned that he was at Clewiston at the same time as Sir Jack! Bill was a sportsman and won a silver medal as pilot of a two-man bobsleigh at a winter Commonwealth Games.

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

Joanne Strong sent me a picture of Charlie’s wallet (inscribed Riddle-McKay Aero College) which he was given when he left Clewiston. It was much loved and very well used.

A Hicks: Course 22 (August 1944 to March 1945)

Colin Hicks has been trying to find information about his late father who was on Course 22. We haven’t been able to shed any light on this to help Colin but did suggest that he could apply to the Ministry of Defence for his father’s records.

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>

Ron Cox (Course 22 – August 1944 to March 1945)

Ron wrote to me having read of Stuart Cox in the March 2019 edition. Although they share a name, they didn’t know each other, although both entered the RAF by way of an RAF University Short Course at Queen’s University Belfast.

John Ambrose Hibberd: Course 26 (started June 1945 but not completed)

Nigel Hibbert told us about his father, John. Course 26 was the last course at Clewiston and the cadets on this course, along with those on Course 25, did not complete their training as WW2 came to an abrupt end in August 1945. Nigel’s sister found some photos from John’s time at Clewiston some of which were in Newsletter 14 with more to come next year.

INSTRUCTORS: If they hadn't been there - would we have been here?

Included in March and September 2019): William J Britton, Neil Mangold and Harold Cowlshaw (Senior Navigation Instructor and Chief Meteorologist 5BFTS 1941-1945)

Both Newsletters feature Fred Brittain and the Fall 2019 edition of LIFT (Alumni Magazine of the Embry-Riddle Aeronautical University) includes a really interesting two-page spread about him in the Wings of Legacy series. "A Pilot's Life" is written by Alan Cesar and is at <https://lift.erau.edu/a-pilots-life/>. A reminder that there is a lot more information about Fred on 'his' website, www.frederickjbrittain.com (developed by Fred's daughter, Vicki Brittain).

Following a request for badges worn by instructors, Bob Bennett, Marty Bennett's son, contributed photographs of his father's badges and Jeff Barwick found other examples of badges at the museum (see Newsletter September 2019)

Fly Paper of September 17, 1942 carries Course 7's Listening Out. In it, the cadets pay tribute to their instructors: "*We give Tribute to our Instructors. For binding us enough to keep us awake and yet not leave us 'rigid', for persevering when we ourselves knew we should be out on our necks, for giving us just a sigh and a "D" when we deserved a blast and an "E".*

The Hugo Trotter Archive

Hugo (Course 11) loaned me his album with photos from when he arrived in Canada to when he went back to Britain. **Thank you, Hugo.** In 2019, we have seen pictures of:

In March 2019:

- Hugo and his friends at leisure – fishing on Lake Okeechobee

In September 2019:

- Navigation lessons and Cross-Country Flying (they did at least manage to get back to Clewiston safely!)

Christmas Day in West Palm Beach 1942 →



The next newsletter will be published in March 2020. 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.

In the March 2020 Newsletter, there will be more about:

- Group Captain David Carnegie, Director of BFTS based in Washington 1941-1943
- Wing Commander George Greaves
- The 5BFTS trees at the UK National Memorial Arboretum
- Instructor Buddie Carruthers who died in a crash April 1942



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

The last words for 2019

In Flypaper, December 15, 1944, Riddle Round-Up finished with Festive Greetings:



On behalf of the RAF and USAAF Officers and the Officials of the Riddle-McKay Aero College [5BFTS], the Editors wish the Cadets and Civilian staff a Very Merry Christmas and a Successfully Victorious New Year (which it was!)



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