

Loading up with cargo, kit bags etc. drew everybody out to watch. The deck with its puffing donkey engines, noisy gear wheels & rattling chains, had quite an atmosphere of its own. Standing about in small groups were airmen and sailors discussing the why's and wherefores, a few gazed skywards examining details on the mast. . . . Silent faces lined the rails taking in the scene of quayside and other shipping lying in the basins; their last close up view of Britain. . . .

Supper time at 1800 took us down for the night. . . . Our place was as bad as any of them. . . . The ceiling of these decks is low, as would be expected, and crossed by iron supporting girders. Altogether 248 men sleep, eat and live in a space about 50 by 25 feet. Underneath the girders are wooden beams and below again are the racks on which all kit and packs must be stowed — a space about two foot square by one and one half foot high for each man. Into the beams are screwed iron hooks for the hammocks. These are so close together that when hammocks are slung there is absolutely not a square inch to spare. . . . One has to bend double at night to walk across the floor, but in the daytime, below part of the hooks which are at the side there are the mess tables, each sitting 16 men. There are plates and utensils at the end of each table. Two mess orderlies appointed for the day, collect enough for 16 meals from the galley and serve up, peel potatoes etc., and then clean the table down at the end for us to use as a writing desk, reading or card table. Although the overcrowding is pretty awful, we could put up with it were the atmosphere not so terrible. In the morning, after 248 chaps have been sleeping as I describe above, we all feel pretty foul.

December 25, 1941. We are all more or less settled by now. The weather today is a great improvement on yesterday when there was what sailors term, a slight swell running. My goodness. "Slight" waves were coming half way up the ships bows with the boat rolling and pitching accordingly. A fierce wind caught the water thrown up above deck and whisked it along the ship, dampening everybody as it passed.

. . . I can't describe the sensation but the whole mess seemed to lean first to one side, then the other, leaving us off our balance each time. That would not have been so bad, had not the deck also been alternately pushing us up and then dropping away from us. Our feet were first pressing us on the floor and then seemed to be taking off and leaving us nothing to get a grip on. Our stomachs meanwhile, were lagging behind each time. It was something like being in a lift which kept on reversing every few feet. Anyhow, I felt fine rolling up the hammock and went to get washed. The motion seemed more pronounced there, and my stomach certainly did not like it. However, breakfast had to be collected from the galley after that, as I was one of the orderlies for the day. We two went up and waited in the queue outside the serving hatch. The rolling was nagging away and well, we'd just come to the serving point when I realized how unequal the battle was. Giving the utensils to the other bloke it was a case of running as fast as the rolling would allow, and even then I only just reached the washplace in time. . . .

. . . The hammock is a godsend. Although Monday night was a bit awkward, by last night I'd got the hang of getting into it and still leaving the blankets in the correct position for folding over me. It absorbs all rolling and pitching and never was such a relief as when I got in last night. It is bliss to stay in the same attitude all the time, listening to the ship creaking and seeing all hammocks swaying first to one side and then the other. . . .

December 28, 1941. Thought I'd try a shower last night. There are no baths at all on board but two sets of salt water showers, hot and cold. First of course I had to get a bar of sea soap from the Naafi — ordinary soap will not lather in salt water. . . . The room was about as big as our garage with showers round the edge. Undressing was quite alright, the various pipes, taps, etc. acting as hooks for the clothes. Then, having got down to the business proper I found that the rolling made it impossible to stop in one spot. Water on the floor swished all over the place, first one side, then the other, and it was only with a bit of luck that the soap re-appeared from under the ledge over the drains. Sitting on the floor was the only alternative. All went well until

the ground tipped up a bit more than usual. Wet slippery lino-hands flung out, and smack into the other side after sliding the length of the room. The hair cum scrubbing brush disappeared at the same time but floated back on the next tidal wave. Eventually only my hair remained to be done but I had to give up — it felt as if glue, not salt water had been spraying from the showers and hurt correspondingly.

The next problem was how to dry both feet and put socks, then boots on while standing on a floor swimming in water. At the same time I wanted to get trousers on before boots. However, it was all solved for me, one of the socks falling off a pipe in the soup, and the nearest clean pair was at the other end of the ship. Although funny now, at the time I was pretty fed up, especially as towel, myself and all the clothes were sticky with sea water and nowhere to dry anything. To crown all, my hammock had been pinched as it seems to be a case of first come first served, for the last few nights at any rate. . . .

December 29, 1941. These decks seem to stink more and more each day — I don't think they will be habitable after this week or so. However much they are swept each day the overcrowding causes a permanently heavy atmosphere. . . .

Our first contact with Canada came this morning. We were on the deck when a hooter not heard before, made a devil of a queer noise, something like a cross between a dog yelping and a high pitched maroon. Everybody looked around and then we spotted a plane in the distance. The noise was evidently a pre-cautionary "action station" as an "all clear" went the moment the aircraft was recognisable. It turned out to be a Douglas Digby of the R.C.A.F. on patrol. . . .

Sterling was handed in today. As you know 10 pounds is the maximum allowed for any individual to take out. We all handed our notes to an officer today, a check being taken of the amount for each individual but no receipt issued. The arrangement is that on our first pay day at our permanent station (about Jan. 15th) we get the equivalent in dollars issued without pay. Till then we will have to exist on the advance of Canadian dollars brought on board at Halifax — anything up to a maximum of 25 dollars. (It turned out to be ten.)

"Aids to Airmen in America" was handed round today. Not exactly that title you know, but that is the idea. The booklet isn't all bad, dealing briefly on the effect of geographical and racial influences on the American character and telling you to be tactful; nothing that was really new to most of us.

January 1, 1942. . . . The first visit on deck this morning felt like looking on a strange unknown land, altogether disconnected with our little England. A dozen twinkling lights from some fairy city shone in the darkness on one side, while red, white, and green shipping lights could be seen in every direction. Lighthouses flashed and harbour searchlights gave brilliant beams to penetrate the opacity of night. It was truly glorious. . . .

The air was still with not a sound to be heard and no movement either on ship or shore — the tall trees seemed carved from rock — that whole scene was more like a painting than real life. In fact, it was nothing but one of those picture postcards of Dad's. . . .

. . . No time was lost between ship and train. One of the giant C.N.R. trains waiting to take us away. . . . It will be a long time yet before a letter from home arrives, but when it does, I hope to hear how you are getting along at Northgate House. . . . Cheerio Mother, Dad and Michael, (Last but not by any means least). Look after yourselves and keep the home fires burning.

Love to everyone and especially yourselves,

Peter

[George Peter Alexandra (Course 7) was killed in action on February 3, 1945. He was flying a Lancaster on a bombing mission to Bottrop, Germany. He is buried with his crew at Reichswald Forest War Cemetery. His letter to his parents was provided by his brother Michael Alexandra.]

British Cadets Arrive in Arizona

The first class of British cadets arrived in June 1941 when Falcon was still just a stretch of desert; consequently, their training began at Thunderbird Field. Thunderbird, itself still under construction, was a contract school where Southwest Airways had been training United States Army Air Corps cadets since March 1941. The first Royal Air Force class, Course 1, was joined at Thunderbird by Course 2 in July and Course 3 in August.⁵ Course 4 would be the first course to start its training at Falcon.

The British cadets of Courses 1 through 4 traveled by train from Canada to Mesa, Arizona, wearing identical government-issue gray Montague Burton civilian suits and carrying identical brown cardboard suitcases, not military kit bags.⁶ Squadron Leader Stuart Mills DFC, busily setting up the British flying training schools, had never liked the grey suits. He worried that discipline might be impossible without uniforms.⁷ But Stuart Mills respected President Roosevelt's wishes that nothing resembling a British troop train cross the heartland of America.

By late October and early November 1941, any doubts about Roosevelt administration sentiment had vanished, and a need no longer existed to follow pretext.⁸ We were not really training British civilian pilots, and fifty men with identical suits and identical suitcases must have seemed a curious oddity anyway. Consequently, Course 5 crossed the United States of America, a country still officially neutral, in uniforms of the RAF.



Phil Parker and Jim Swaby of Course 2 in their Montague Burton 50 shilling suits.

Photograph courtesy of Jim Swaby

Cadets of Course 1 with Flight Instructor Silas J. Minton at Thunderbird Field prior to the opening of Falcon Field. Pictured on the bottom left is W. J. Crimmin who graduated and attained the rank of Flight Lieutenant. The other cadets have not been identified.

Photograph courtesy of Falcon Field Association of Great Britain, Silas J. Minton collection



⁵ At Thunderbird, Course 1 commenced training on June 18; Course 2, on July 17; and Course 3, on August 27, 1941. When Southwest opened a second field with the Thunderbird name, this one named Thunderbird II, many people began referring to the original Thunderbird as Thunderbird I. However, Southwest Airways, Inc., in its official company magazine *The Thunderbird* continued to use the names Thunderbird and Thunderbird II.

⁶ Jim Swaby, "Course 2 — Graduation and Course Photograph," *Falcon Field Association of Great Britain Newsletter*, ed. W. McCash AFM, 1996 No.1, p. 4.

⁷ Charles R. Hyer, "Thunderbirds in the SW Desert," *Journal of American Aviation Historical Society*, Vol. 30 No. 3, Fall 1985.

⁸ U.S. troops had been sent to Iceland on July 7, 1941, the Atlantic Charter had been signed by Roosevelt and Churchill on August 14, 1941, and U.S. Navy ships were escorting convoys as far as Greenland. On October 31, 1941, a German submarine sank one of these escort ships, the U.S. destroyer *Reuben James*.

Marvin Grant would become the commanding officer of an American Army unit later established at Falcon Field, but in 1941, he was just another American aviation cadet at Thunderbird.

"The British were coming. Falcon Field, designed for their flight training, was not ready. It was June, 1941.

"Thunderbird Field, Glendale, Arizona, was developed for flight training of U.S. Army Air Corps cadets. Although still under construction, it was midway through the first class of cadets. Training began there on 22 March 1941. I was there. I arrived at Thunderbird on June 9 in my new 1941 Chevrolet Club Coupe with five fellow cadets. We had enlisted at Dallas, Texas, as aviation cadets in the U.S. Army Air Corps.

"Upon arrival at Thunderbird, about 3:30 on a bright, summer afternoon, we were met by the cadet Officer of the Day and directed to park the car and report to the flight line. Excitement! No. Calisthenics! Eddie Miller was our Physical Training Director. After about an hour of arms up, side straddle hops, push-ups, and sit-ups, Eddie stopped. "Now," he said, "you will run to the far fence and back. No walking. When you can't run anymore, stop until you can, then run again." He smiled and walked over into the shade. Now, Thunderbird Field was on a section of land, one mile square. It was one mile to the far fence and another back. Some of us just out of school were in pretty good shape from sports. I made it over and back in about 30 minutes; some did not return until after 7:00.

"I describe this welcome because the British arrived a few days later, fifty cadets under the command of Squadron Leader Stuart Mills. It was mid June in Arizona. Temperatures were consistently above 100 degrees. There was no flying in the afternoon because of tornado like dust devils and heat thermals under clear skies. The cadets were in their English winter woolen uniforms. They received the same friendly welcome that we had.

"There was some friendly rivalry with the British cadets, although our training was separate. While American training stressed precision flying, Chandelles, Lazy Eights, Pylon Eights, short field landings, simulated Forced Landings, etc., the British stressed other flying skills. They seemed to consider any landing you walked away from a good flight.

"Our class 42A graduated from Primary Training in mid August. Forty-seven of the initial 100 survived the training. The elimination rate was so drastic that many of us felt that the instructors just wanted to reduce their flight task from their initially assigned five students each.

"The British moved to their new base at Falcon Field on September 27, 1941. It was reported reliably to us by our previous Thunderbird Field underclassmen (Class 42B) that their flying skills were improving.

"I progressed on through basic training in BT-13s at Gardner Field, Taft, California, and advanced training in AT-6 airplanes at Luke Field, Phoenix, Arizona, to graduate with my class of 42A on January 9, 1942, the first class to graduate after Pearl Harbor."⁹

Marvin R. A. Grant

⁹ Marvin R. A. Grant, letter to the author dated February 10, 1999. Unlike the "All-Through" training scheduled for the British flying training schools in the U.S., each phase of American Army Air Corps flight training — primary, basic, and advanced — was conducted at a different flight school.



Course 1 in full flying kit with para'harness

Of the forty-eight cadets who began training as Course 1, one was killed in a flying accident at Falcon, and thirty-nine graduated. Many graduates went on to pilot Halifax and Lancaster bombers in raids over German territory. Some who did not graduate were reassigned as navigators. Eighteen Course 1 pilots and three navigators are known to have been killed in action during the war. One of their classmates was taken POW. The Course 1 roster is included in the Appendices.

Photograph courtesy of the Falcon Field Association of Great Britain, Vic Lewis (Course 1) collection

With construction well underway at Thunderbird and just beginning at Falcon, workmen, instructors, and cadets found themselves faced with an unexpected presence — crickets! Crickets by the millions! They were swarming at Thunderbird, and they were being shoveled into buckets by workmen at Falcon.¹⁰ Southwest Airways Flight Instructor Donald N. “Don” Prosser met his Course 2 students at Thunderbird.¹¹

“I well remember that sweltering July day in 1941 when we were first introduced to our cadets inside a hangar (to avoid the sun), with cadets in wool uniforms, with literally thousands of crickets swarming about. I’ll never forget walking the cadets around a Stearman and trying to hold their attention while crickets were swarming up pant legs, buzzing around faces, and climbing in their hair. . . .

“Our assignment was to meet our four new cadets and introduce them to the Stearman aircraft. By the way, students were assigned alphabetically, and as I recall mine were Hoggard, Hounsell, Hyde, and another that was soon exchanged for Challis. (These names stick because they were my first student pilots ever.)”¹²

¹⁰ Mary Louise (Turner) Bustrin, telephone interview with the author in January 1999.

¹¹ Flight Instructor Prosser was later promoted to the position of flight commander. Southwest Airways flight commanders taught flying and supervised five or six flight instructors.

¹² Donald N. Prosser, letter to the author dated January 18, 1999. All four cadets were killed in the war.



Thirty-eight of the thirty-nine graduates of Course 2 with three of their instructors

The cadets are wearing their RAF Sidcot flying suits with "fleecy collars that caught fire like crazy," according to Joe Wischler, head of Falcon's aircraft maintenance department. Five of the cadets seated in the front row are wearing heat-resistant flying boots. Of the fifty-two cadets who began training as Course 2, one was killed in a flying accident at Falcon, nineteen are known to have died during the war, and one was taken POW. The Course 2 roster is included in the Appendices.

Photograph courtesy of Jim Swaby (Course 2)



Arthur Reginald "Bill" Hyde of Course 2

Flying Officer Hyde was killed on June 15, 1944, while flying with 615 Squadron.

Photograph courtesy of Falcon Field Association of Great Britain, George Green (Course 2) collection



John Robert Howard of Course 2

Flying Officer Howard was killed on April 8, 1943, while flying with 268 Squadron.

Photograph courtesy of Falcon Field Association of Great Britain, George Green (Course 2) collection



United States flag, wing commander pennant, and Royal Air Force flag flying at Falcon

Photograph courtesy of Falcon Field Association of Great Britain,
Carson Boyd (Course18) collection

CHAPTER THREE

THE ROYAL AIR FORCE COMMAND

*What counts is not necessarily the size of the dog in the fight,
it's the size of the fight in the dog.*

Dwight D. Eisenhower

The Royal Air Force (RAF) sent their own staff to administer No. 4 British Flying Training School (No. 4 BFTS). The civilian staff of Southwest Airways would teach the RAF syllabus, but British officers and NCOs — and later two Canadians and one Australian — would provide quality control. They also maintained RAF records, supervised cadets, conducted check rides, and taught some ground school courses.

The RAF staff became involved quickly when Southwest reported that a student was being considered for elimination from the program. If the pending elimination were for ineptitude at flying, the RAF staff conducted check rides and would either concur that elimination was the best for all concerned or specify remedial action. The RAF had precious few human resources to discard; therefore, cadets who were denied their wings at Falcon were reassigned to other RAF schools, typically in Canada, to learn specialties such as navigator, air bomber, or wireless operator/air gunner.

The British wasted no time in setting up their command structure for Falcon. The two British officers most instrumental in establishing Falcon Field's organization were Squadron Leader W. T. "Bill" Holloway and Squadron Leader R. S. "Stuart" Mills.¹ Holloway was the first commanding officer, and Mills, the officer who had helped set up the BFTS system in the United States, stayed on briefly in 1941 as Falcon's chief flying instructor.

The other RAF staff members in 1941 were Flight Lieutenant E. C. Metcalf who served as adjutant and Sergeant J. G. McCowan who, while officially assigned as armaments instructor, served as administrative officer.

¹ Group Captain R. S. "Stuart" Mills DFC, "How It All Began," *The Falcon* (a Reunion booklet of the Falcon Field Association of Great Britain), 1984, pp. 4-5.



Squadron Leader W. T. "Bill" Holloway (left) and Squadron Leader R. S. "Stuart" Mills. Holloway would be the only commanding officer who was not a pilot.

Photograph courtesy of
Tom Austin (Course 5)

The RAF staff increased in numbers as the RAF assumed greater responsibility for training and training supervision. Falcon had nine RAF staff by early January 1943, and the numbers were increasing. In January 1943 a U.S. Army document titled "British Flying Training Schools" shows that the RAF Delegation, Washington, D.C. (Rafdel) authorized twelve positions for each BFTS: one commanding officer (a wing commander), one ground training supervisor (a squadron leader), one administrative officer or adjutant (a flight lieutenant), two assistant flying supervisors (flight lieutenants), two navigation instructors (flight lieutenants), two armament instructors (sergeants), one wireless operator/air gunner instructor (a sergeant), one physical training instructor (a corporal), and one accounts (a corporal). By mid 1944 the British were recording on-board strength in their Operations Record Book (ORB), RAF form 540, a daily log book for British air force units. The first such entry on May 31, 1944, shows a total of fourteen — nine officers and five enlisted.² The two additional positions — over and above the 1943 authorization — were apparently for gunnery officers. From February 1943 until the base closing, Falcon always had one or two RAF officers assigned as gunnery instructors.

The 1943 authorization included two navigation instructors. In reality, the officers assigned to these positions were supervisors. Squadron Leader Ted Irwin, Canadian Armed Forces (CAF) retired, served as one of Falcon's two navigation officers from June 1944 to August 1945.

"The RAF aircrew staff all had to be qualified instructors. If a specialty was taught by Southwest, the RAF specialists' job was to supervise the work of the Southwest instructor and sometimes add his own input if the need should arise. Some courses were not taught by Southwest (e.g. armament, gunnery, and signals) and RAF instructors handled these. All were instructors, but some supervised and some instructed. [The 1943 U.S. Army document] says two navigation instructors. These would be supervisors. Before and during my time at Falcon, one supervised the navigation ground school training, and the other, the navigation flying training. I was the navigation flying training supervisor. (As a non-pilot flying with trainee pilots, I had quite a number of interesting experiences.)

"The RAF navigation bible was (maybe still is) Air Publication 1234(A.P. 1234). In it one learns that if you are flying from A to B, the line on the chart joining these places is the 'track.' You then put in the wind vector and plot the 'course' which is the direction the airplane must be pointed to follow the track. But it never works out as planned and so when you make the flight and plot the actual path of the airplane on your chart, this is the 'track made good' (t.m.g.). At the time, I believe the American designation was 'heading' for 'course,' 'course' for 'track,' and 'track' for 't.m.g.' This is one small example of the many differences encountered. So the student pilot is taught one set of aeronautical terminology in ground school and is then sent out to the flight line to this godlike figure, his flying instructor, who seems to speak a different tongue. Hence the supervisor. The task is threefold; to help the civilian ground school instructors better comprehend the RAF manuals and publications they were required to teach from; to have sessions with the flying instructors to achieve some level of aeronautical bilingualism; and, of course, to help level the playing field for the students."³

Ted Irwin

² One year later F/SGT A. S. Cartwright had been promoted to Pilot Officer, and the ORB for May 31, 1945, shows on-board strength at ten officers and four enlisted.

³ Squadron Leader Ted Irwin, e-mail to the author dated March 26, 2001.

Three commanding officers served No. 4 British Flying Training School. Squadron Leader Bill Holloway was followed by Wing Commander John Fergus McKenna AFC in April 1942, and McKenna, by Wing Commander Alan Vernon Rogers AFC in July 1944.



No. 4 BFTS officers and guests in attendance at the graduation of Course 18 on April 13, 1944

Front row, L to R: Squadron Leader Alan S. Johnson, ground training supervisor; Wing Commander Thomas Prickett DSO, DFC, graduation guest; Group Captain Robert Spaight, director of U.S.A. flight training and graduation speaker; Wing Commander John Fergus McKenna AFC, commanding officer; Al Storrs, Southwest Airways director of training for Falcon Field.

Back row, L to R: Flying Officer G. R. Coleshill, gunnery instructor; Flight Lieutenant Harry D. Carter, administrative officer; Flight Lieutenant J. Geoffrey Faulkner, navigation supervisor; Flight Lieutenant R. C. Finlayson, Royal Canadian Air Force, navigation supervisor; Squadron Leader J. P. Blackman, graduation guest; Flight Lieutenant W. Russell McClelland, flying supervisor; Flight Lieutenant Hector White, gunnery instructor; Flying Officer John Lloyd Owen, flying supervisor.

Photograph courtesy of Betty (Storrs) Downing

Falcon was an “accompanied” tour of duty for RAF staff. Wives could join their husbands — if they could find a way to get to Mesa. Arriving at Rafdel after three and a half years in England, Royal Canadian Air Force Flying Officer Ted Irwin was unmarried, but he had definite ideas about how to correct his predicament. On leave, he traveled to Ontario and married Eleanor Beaton, his “dream girl.” Returning to Washington alone, he found himself booked to Mesa on the Golden States Limited — three days by rail. Irwin recalls that “you had to be a real VIP to

even think about getting an airline reservation.” Meanwhile, Eleanor arranged for a passport and flew out to join him. Happy that Eleanor was able to secure an airline ticket, Irwin found the source of their good fortune in the wording of her passport — “wife of a foreign government official.”⁴ And Eleanor Irwin was not the first Falcon bride lucky enough to get an airline ticket.

One of the navigation supervisors who preceded Ted Irwin was Flight Lieutenant Laurence Turner who, like Irwin, was single when he arrived in the U.S. and wanted to correct the situation. Turner was engaged to Molly Hurrell when he was assigned to teach navigation to RAF cadets at the University of Miami in Coral Gables, Florida. Turner wanted Molly to join him, but Molly was an ocean away in England and working as a conscripted war worker; furthermore, in August 1941 booking transportation to the U.S. was a difficult task. She says that she “could not get an exit permit without a booked passage and could not get a booked passage without an exit permit!” Turner eventually secured a flight for Molly on a Pan American Airways clipper. The PanAm flight went via Southern Ireland (neutral during WWII). Molly Hurrell arrived in Coral Gables in June 1942 and married Flight Lieutenant Charles Laurence Turner a few days later. She had been the only non-VIP on the PanAm clipper that had brought her to America. She recalls that fellow passengers included the Prime Minister of Norway, his wife and daughter, and a senior Royal Air Force officer who was bringing jet propulsion plans to the U.S.⁵

At Coral Gables the Turners met Flight Lieutenant Geoffrey Faulkner and his wife Vera. Turner and Faulkner went on to other assignments but met again at Falcon Field in 1943. They would share duty as Falcon’s RAF navigation supervisors. Molly and Vera worked in the RAF office.



RAF staffers (L to R) Molly Turner, Lee Harris, Thelma LeSueur, Ruth Marler, and Vera Faulkner

Photograph by Flight Instructor Ray Shelton, courtesy of RAF secretary Molly Turner

⁴ Irwin.

⁵ Molly Turner, letter to the author dated March 27, 2001.

When Flight Lieutenant Faulkner's tour of duty at Falcon ended in June 1944, he was assigned to 35 Squadron as navigator in a Mosquito. A Mosquito's twin 1,680 hp Rolls-Royce Merlins enabled the lightly armed (if at all) Mosquito to outrun just about anything the Germans could put up, but on December 23, 1944, Faulkner's Mosquito was not fast enough. Squadron pilots saw his parachute open, but he died of exposure in the water before he could be picked up by Air Sea Rescue. He is buried in the Dieppe Canadian War Cemetery, Hautot-Sur-Mer, Seine-Maritime, France. Ted Irwin recalls that "it was a dark day when we learned of his death."⁶ Vera now lives in London; Molly Turner lives in Arizona. They correspond each year at Christmastime.



Rafdel authorized two navigation supervisors for each British flying training school. Pictured above are navigation supervisors Flight Lieutenant J. Geoffrey Faulkner (left), Falcon RAF staff from June 14, 1943, to June 25, 1944; and Flight Lieutenant Charles Laurence Turner, Falcon RAF staff from January 11, 1943, to March 7, 1944.

Photograph by Flight Instructor Ray Shelton and Aviation Cadet Robert Hamilton Purdy (Course 15), courtesy of RAF secretary Molly Turner

In case anyone doubted that RAF pilots could fly airplanes, an occasional hot-shot pilot would make the rounds of the British flying training schools. The ORB documents two such visits in one month in 1943. On February 8, Group Captain T. Donaldson arrived at Falcon in a Curtiss P-40 single-seat fighter-bomber. The ORB simply states that he gave "a brief demonstration of aerobatics." Cadet Bill Bishop of Course 14 had a somewhat different take on the matter and confided to his diary that he was "privileged to live through a terrific exhibition of flying" and that the P-40 screamed over the spectators so low that "our Wing Commander. . . was relieved that the cadets fell flat on their faces."⁷

⁶ Squadron Leader Ted Irwin, e-mail to the author dated March 22, 2001.

⁷ *The Diary of Bill Bishop*, private manuscript compiled by William Ernest John Bishop and his wife Baroness Detta O'Cathain OBE in 1989 from the extensive diaries Bill kept during his flying career, p. 10.



RAF cadet Wyn Fieldson did not join the other cadets who “fell flat on their faces” as Donaldson’s P-40 screamed over the crowd. The intrepid cadet remained standing to take this memorable photograph. Classmate Herbert Whittaker recalls that as Donaldson touched down, he cut his engine and rolled silently to a stop, a practice copied the next week by several cadets with predictable — and chaotic — results. Distinguished Flying Cross winners Fieldson and Whittaker both flew Halifax bombers with 76 Squadron.

Photograph courtesy of E. D. Fieldson (Course 13)

The cadets were impressed by Donaldson’s flying exhibition; nevertheless, some of the civilian instructors still thought they could “fly rings around the British,” according to Mary Lou Turner, a secretary in the flight accounting office. Then came Squadron Leader J. A. F. MacLachlan DSO and bar, DFC for the second flying exhibition of February 1943.⁸ On February 19, he put his Curtiss P-36 Hawk fighter through maneuvers that impressed the veteran instructors — even the crop dusters and barnstormers among them, and as Squadron Leader MacLachlan dismounted his fighter, everyone could see his left uniform sleeve pinned neatly to the shoulder of his tunic. He had lost his left arm in the Battle of Malta. “That made believers out of the flight instructors,” writes Mary Lou Turner in her memoirs. “They admitted that they’d be hard pressed to fly the way that RAF veteran did with TWO arms, much less one.”⁹



Photograph by Bill Bishop (Course 14), courtesy of Baroness Detta O’Cathain OBE

Squadron Leader J. A. F. MacLachlan DSO and bar, DFC, impressed everyone with an aerobatics exhibition on the occasion of Course 11’s graduation, February 19, 1943. The one-armed veteran pilot provided inspiration that still lives on in the former Falcon cadets who saw the exhibition and met this extraordinary young man. His aircraft is a 1934 design, a radial-engined Curtiss-Wright Corporation P-36 Hawk. The Curtiss P-40, with its Allison Vee, is a later development of the same airframe.

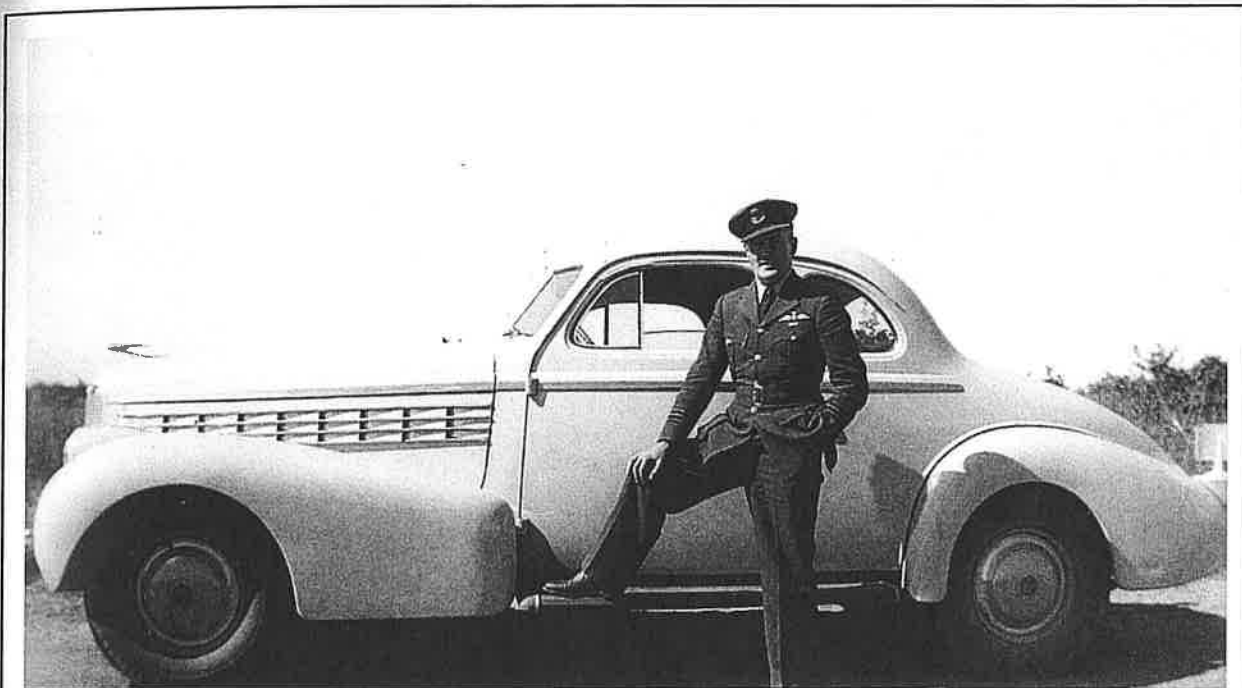
Six months after his flying exhibition, the August issue of Southwest Airways’ company magazine *The Thunderbird* reported that MacLachlan’s P-51 Mustang had been shot down over Paris — but the Luftwaffe had paid a heavy price to silence MacLachlan’s guns. A few weeks earlier, Squadron Leader MacLachlan and his wingman had themselves shot down six German aircraft over Paris.

James Archibald Findley MacLachlan lies at rest in the Pont L’Eveque Communal Cemetery, Calvados, France. He died on July 31, 1943. He was 24.

⁸ Operation Record Book (ORB) RAF form 540, No. 4 BFTS, Mesa, Arizona, entry for February 19, 1943.

⁹ Mary Louise (Turner) Bustrin, *My Second Job*, private manuscript, June 1990, p. 25.

Fast airplanes were not the only hot machines desired by the British. High powered American cars were a dream come true. Captain Marvin R. A. Grant, the senior U.S. Army representative at Falcon from late 1943 until the end of the war, said in a 1999 letter to the author that the British “needed transportation” but “wanted performance.” In the days when the national speed limit was forty miles per hour to conserve gasoline and rubber tires, the RAF staff had “a collection of Packards, four-port Buicks, front wheel drive Cords, Lincolns, and a LaSalle.”¹⁰



Wing Commander McKenna and his high-powered 1938 yellow Cadillac LaSalle Coupe, a.k.a. the “Yellow Peril”

Photograph courtesy of Mary Louise (Turner) Bustrin

Wing Commander A. V. Rogers, who relieved McKenna, also loved fast cars. He was renowned locally for his highway speeds, “frequently in excess of 70 to 80 miles per hour,” according to Captain Grant. Wing Commander Rogers was stopped many times by local police departments and by the Williams Field military police. Ted Irwin recalls that Rogers drove a U.S. Army car from the motor pool, and that is why his “driving excesses led to problems with the U.S. military police.”¹¹ Grant remembers the car as a V-8 Ford. Claiming the wartime responsibilities of his position, Rogers was typically issued only a warning. Once, the commander of the military police at Williams called Captain Grant to advise him that Wing Commander Rogers would be arrested that evening if he persisted in his driving habits. “He did and he was,” said Captain Grant. Rogers spent the night in the Mesa city jail before being released in the custody of Captain Grant. Grant reports that the wing commander was “in good spirits.”¹² Rogers would later be heard boasting that he had been in jail in every country where he had served with the RAF.¹³

¹⁰ Marvin R. A. Grant, letter to the author dated February 10, 1999.

¹¹ Irwin, March 22, 2001.

¹² Grant.

¹³ As told to Robert Hugh Brown (Course 20) by David Livingstone-Spence (Course 25).



Partially finished Falcon Field looking northeast, 1941

The roof is on the east hangar, and a concrete slab has been poured for the west hangar.
The four "L" shaped buildings are the barracks.

CHAPTER FOUR

FALCON — THE EARLY DAYS

Far better it is to dare mighty things, to win glorious triumphs, even though checkered by failure, than to take rank with those poor spirits who neither enjoy much nor suffer much, because they live in the gray twilight that knows not victory nor defeat.

Theodore Roosevelt

September 1941 found the British cadets of No. 4 BFTS still in temporary over-crowded facilities at Thunderbird Field, the Southwest Airways base built for the training of American Army Air Corps aviation cadets. With American and British cadets competing for flying time at Thunderbird, Southwest instructors assigned to the British cadets had difficulty getting necessary training hours in at that field. A few of these instructors took their students to conduct training flights from the unfinished runways at Falcon.

Along with those first few cadets and instructors came personnel from the flight accounting office who would keep track of the flying training hours so that Southwest Airways could invoice the British government for training provided. While carpenters, plumbers, and electricians worked among piles of lumber, Southwest employees began the move to Falcon. Mary Lou Turner of the flight accounting office describes her first day at Falcon.



Red Rock Mountain

Photograph by George Peter Alexandra (Course 7),
courtesy of Mike Alexandra

"It was September 10, 1941. Falcon Field was located northeast of Mesa in a beautiful setting. There was a very large mature orange grove to the west, mountains to the east and the land-mark Red Rock Mountain to the north, although the British always called it McDowell Peak, having found its official name on some map. Every building at Falcon was at some stage of construction. . . . I'll never forget the sight of our office, located in the same relative position and of the same design as Thunderbird — under the control tower. Not a stick of furniture anywhere and the sole telephone line into Falcon sitting in the middle of the bare floor. When it rang, one was required to bend over it and announce that this was Falcon Field. Thereupon you took the message and then started scouting around the field to find whomever the call was for. Needless to say there wasn't an adding machine in sight."¹

¹ Mary Louise (Turner) Bustrin, *My Second Job*, private manuscript, June 1990, pp. 9-10.

First Flight from Falcon

At Falcon and at the other British flying training schools, the U.S. Army owned the airplanes, and the civilian contractor, in this case Southwest Airways, maintained them. The RAF administration, for their part, determined aircraft usage in the training program syllabus. Flight training was divided into three separate phases — primary, basic, and advanced. A different U.S. Army aircraft was used for each phase: the Boeing-Stearman “Kaydet” for primary, the Vultee “Valiant” for basic, and the North American “Texan” for advanced.

Training flights were recorded on a U.S. Army form that carried the official designation “Flight Report — Operations, War Department Air Corps., Form No. 1” — simply “Form 1” to the office staff. A Form 1 dated September 10, 1941, was the first issued for Falcon Field. That form shows that a Vultee Valiant BT-13A, airplane serial number 41-1630, was used for five training flights — three solo flights and two dual flights (instructor and cadet flying together). The solo flights were by Leading Aircraftman (LAC) W. G. Hampson, LAC A. M. Leigh, and LAC A. A. MacIntyre, all of Course 1. The dual flights were by LAC D. W. E. Morgan of Course 2 and Flight Instructor F. O. Smith and LAC H. A. Langton of Course 1 and instructor Smith again.²

A Form 1 was required paperwork for all training flights in U.S. Army Air Corps aircraft, and it gained added significance when a civilian contractor like Southwest was involved. Southwest was paid based on the flight training hours recorded on those forms. Mary¹ Lou Turner’s job as a Southwest employee in the flight accounting office was to keep track of every minute the training aircraft were in the air so that Southwest Airways could be paid. At the end of the day’s flying, she took custody of the signed flight forms. For every flying hour recorded, Southwest Airways submitted a monthly bill to the British Government and was paid \$17.50 per hour for primary instruction and \$25.80 for basic instruction and advanced instruction plus gasoline and oil difference between the basic and advanced aircraft. On April 1, 1942, the contract was changed from the British Government to the United States Army Air Forces. The new contract specified rates of \$17.50 per hour for primary instruction, \$25.80 for basic instruction, and \$27.80 for advanced instruction. These prices included gasoline and oil, but effective on July 1, 1943, the United States Government began supplying gasoline and oil, and the price was reduced to \$16.50 per hour for primary instruction and \$24.45 for advanced instruction (the basic phase had been eliminated in 1942).³

Of the five cadets who flew the Vultee BT-13A from Falcon on September 10, two did not survive the war. Flight Lieutenant MacIntyre was lost and presumed killed while flying with 222 Squadron on February 28, 1945, and Pilot Officer Morgan was killed in action on September 7, 1942, while flying with 10 Squadron. Pilot Officer Langton, later Wing Commander Sir Henry Algernon Calley, distinguished himself while serving as a bomber pilot and a squadron commander. He was awarded the Distinguished Service Order (DSO) and the Distinguished Flying Cross (DFC). At Falcon he had served as Course 1 senior cadet. Flight Lieutenant Hampson also won a DFC. The only information available on LAC Leigh is that he was commissioned on, or soon after, graduation.

² Flight Report, War Department Air Corps Form No. 1, Tentative, Sept. 1940, filled in as follows: Date Sept. 10, 1941, Station Mesa, Arizona, Corps Area or Dept. Southwest Airways, Branch British Primary Basic School, Airplane Model BT-13A, Airplane Serial No. 44-1360, Engine Model R-985-AN-1, Engine Serial No. 41-5609. From the documents collection of Mary Louise (Turner) Bustrin.

³ Lieutenant Marvin R. A. Grant, *History of 15th Army Air Forces Flying Training Detachment (January 1, 1943 to March 1, 1944)*, p. 3.



A Vultee BT-13 in flight over the Arizona desert in late 1941 or early 1942

Early war Boeing-Stearman Kaydets and Vultee Valiants were brightly colored. The official paint scheme called for a blue fuselage, yellow wings and stabilizers, and a red and white striped rudder. The thirteen stripes (seven red and six white) represent the thirteen original American colonies and correspond to the thirteen stripes on the American flag. "U.S. Army" is stenciled in large letters on the underside of the wings. The wing insignia is a white star on a blue field with a red dot in the center. On August 18, 1942, all military commands were directed to remove the red dot from the center of the star so that the U.S. insignia would not be mistaken for the red rising sun insignia used by the air forces of Imperial Japan.

Photograph courtesy of The Arizona Historical Society - Central Arizona Division,
Joe Wischler collection

The Move to Falcon

On September 12, 1941, the *Mesa Journal-Tribune* proclaimed that Falcon was “nearly ready” and that Royal Air Force flyers would probably arrive at Falcon within the next two weeks.⁴ In reality, the barracks buildings were still incomplete, and construction had just begun on the first of two hangers. As *Journal-Tribune* staff photographer Max Openshaw carefully posed a large group of workmen for a front page photograph,⁵ the thought may have come to some in the group that their time might be better spent driving nails. Because work was not yet finished, there would be no public opening.⁶



Partially built east hangar

Photograph courtesy of Roy M. Allan (Course 3)

Ready or not, by Thursday, September 25, 1941, close to 150 men — the newspaper said 144 — were moving from Thunderbird to Falcon. They were the RAF cadets of Courses 1, 2, and 3. Another group, Course 4, arrived by way of Canada on Friday, September 26.⁷ On Saturday Flight Instructor Ray Corn met his first students.

“I was hired as an instructor for Falcon Field before it was actually open. I spent four months at Thunderbird Field just awaiting Falcon Field’s completion. We who were to instruct could hardly wait for that day.

⁴ “Falcon is Nearly Ready,” *Mesa Journal-Tribune*, September 12, 1941.

⁵ “Crew of Workers at Field Pose,” *Mesa Journal-Tribune*, September 12, 1941.

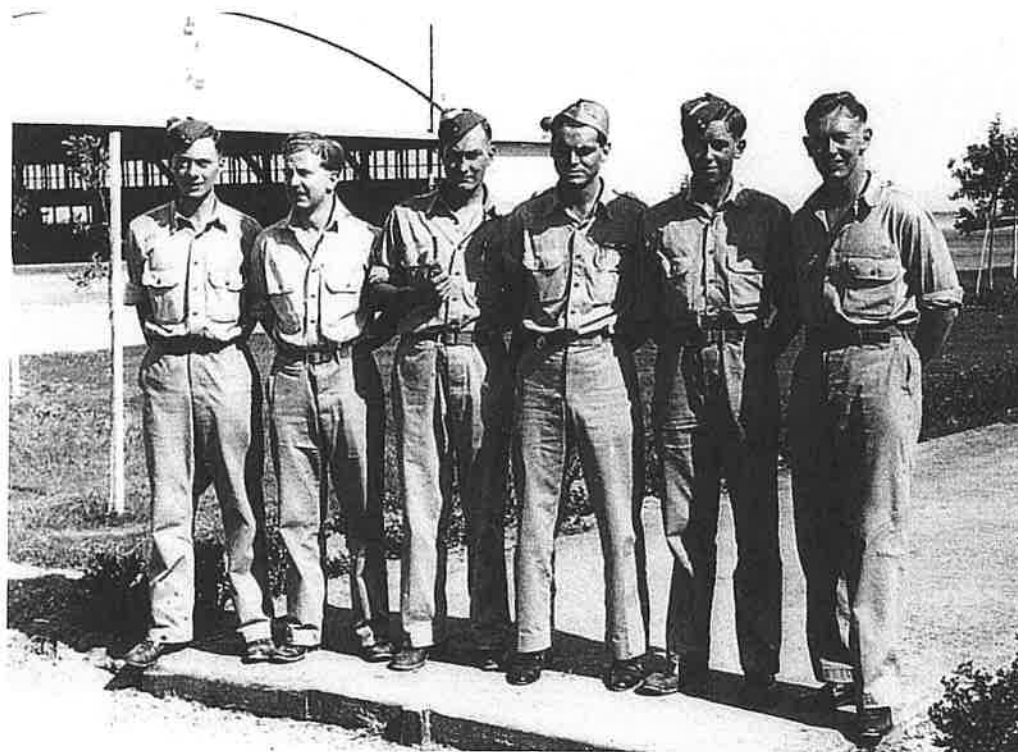
⁶ “Airport Nearly Ready, Workers Rush Buildings to Completion at RAF Pilot Training Field,” *Mesa Journal-Tribune*, September 19, 1941.

⁷ “144 Men on Field at Mesa,” *Mesa Journal-Tribune*, September 26, 1941.

"It was September 27, 1941, when we reported for duty. That Saturday morning when we arrived at the field seems like only yesterday. Two hangars were not fully completed, and the tarmac was lined with parked planes. Then there was a general assembly of the newly arrived cadets, which was Course 4. As their names were called out, they stepped forward to meet their instructor. It was a great day when my five student pilots stepped forward. Lilwall, Williamson and Love. (The other two students, I did not record in my log book.)

"After meeting my students, I went to Phoenix to the Maricopa County Courthouse to marry Nell Marie Seay. I paid two dollars for the license and found Justice of the Peace Harry Westfall in his office where he married us at no charge. It was the best deal I ever got!"⁸

Ray Corn



Flight Instructor Ray Corn (fourth from the left) with his primary students of Course 9

They are LAC Ian Ferguson Glover, LAC John Arthur Barker, LAC Ronald Cyril Saville Clements, LAC Kenneth Herbert Bernau, and LAC Harold Bennett. LAC Glover graduated as a pilot officer and later attained the rank of flying officer. LAC Barker graduated as a pilot officer and later attained the rank of flight lieutenant. LAC Clements graduated as a pilot officer and was posted to 115 Squadron. He was killed on October 20, 1943, during a Lancaster II bombing mission to Leipzig, Germany. He was second pilot for John T. Anderson of Course 7 whose photograph graces the cover of this book. LAC Bernau graduated as a pilot officer and flew Mosquitos with 85, 256, 169 (bomber support), and 29 squadrons. He demobilized in 1946 as a flight lieutenant. LAC Bennett graduated as a sergeant and was posted to 106 Squadron where he flew Lancasters and later to 10 Squadron where he flew C-47s.

Photograph courtesy of Flight Instructor Ray Corn and Ken Bernau (Course 9)

⁸ Ray H. Corn, letter to the author dated January 11, 1999, and telephone interview on January 24, 1999.

On Monday, September 29, 1941, Falcon Field was in full-time operation even though the facilities were far from complete. Navigation Instructor H. Dean Page described those early days.

"Any enthusiasm we had for Falcon, when we first saw it, was all negative. It certainly wasn't impressive — a few semi-finished buildings, a few foundations being laid, and carpenters, painters, plumbers, and electricians dashing wildly around looking efficient. But then who could work up any enthusiasm when the temperature was one hundred and twenty degrees and the nearest shade was seven miles away, in Mesa.

"During those first few days, we all developed into habitual milk drinkers. . .with good reason, it was the only thing we could get. The plumbers were continually testing the water mains. At the most, you could expect a light orange dribble out of the faucets, and ordinarily all you would get would be momentarily a gurgle, followed by a dry discouraging hiss.

"Of course there were no classrooms, and no ground school office, so the office was to be found in the unpainted, partially completed canteen, and classes were held in the barracks. Anyone unlucky enough to miss getting one of the few chairs, or a seat on a bed, had to be satisfied with the floor. Of course there were compensations. Later, a "coke" machine was installed in the barracks "classroom" and not only served in the capacity for which it was intended, but also made a fairly cool place from which to lecture. We had competition, however, with a vengeance in the form of radios, off key snorers, and singers-in-the-showers, further down the barracks.

"It seemed like eons before our rooms were finally finished. I say "finished" only in respect to having four walls, a roof and a floor. Workers were still swarming over the ground school when we moved in, and continued to swarm for weeks. While a lecture was being given, it would be accompanied by the racket of hammer, saws and electric drills. Groups of foremen and crews of laborers would lumber through the rooms and meditatively eye a beam in the middle of a class. After a discussion accompanied by a thorough inspection of all of the doors, and the view from the windows, they would wander out, only to have the painters, complete with scaffolding, set up business in the front of the room.

"Outside, the carpenters seemed to be playing some kind of game. They would throw planks, tools, and anything else they could find, off the roof; then peer fiendishly over the edge to count their victims. The carpenter's helper was almost as bad. His favorite article of destruction was a twelve-foot plank which became an awful weapon as he came around the corner.

"We didn't get much chance to see the flight line in those days, but what we did see wasn't very encouraging. The dust-covered dispatcher had a place to himself by the half completed tower. A nail keg served as a chair, and his knee did very well for a desk. Whenever a PT, or a BT took off, he disappeared in the resultant dust cloud, and it was minutes before you could see him again, coughing and spluttering, and trying to fill in the dispatch sheet.

"The flight line itself consisted of a plank supported on one side by a nail keg, and on the other by a decrepit saw horse. The planes held a sort of competition with the road graders and steam rollers wandering over the field. It was even money as to which would win."⁹

H. Dean Page

⁹ H. Dean Page, "Falcon is Founded," *The Thunderbird*, Vol. 2 No. 3 (May 1944), p. 4.