



Course 22, section A, poses with their flight instructors during the advanced phase of flight instruction.

Kneeling, left to right: Cadet Jock Dickson, flight instructors Ray Shelton and Amos Richardson, Flight Commander Cy Perkins, and flight instructors Joe Burwell and Ernest Piercy.

Standing, left to right: Cadets Ivor C. J. Davies, John James Adams, Grant, Lex Bijl, John Brereton, Paul Clifton, Kenneth Harvey Holyman, E. D. Kenneth Coombe, H. Abram, Jack R. Caley, and Geoffrey Brady.

Sitting on the wing, left to right: Cadets J. D. Arnott, Peter Dalton, Robert Crawford, and Kenneth J. Bell.

Standing on the wing, left to right: Cadets Geoffrey D. Diss, George Spetch, W. Armistead, and Alan G. Davis.

Beginning with Course 13 when class size was doubled, each course was divided into four sections: A, B, C, and D. In the mornings two sections conducted flying training and two sections attended ground school. In the afternoons the schedule was reversed.

No official records of Course 22 can be found, but the Falcon Field Association of Great Britain has reconstructed a roster of 122 names which are listed in the Appendices. By the time Course 22 graduated on January 20, 1945, the RAF had more trained pilots than they had seats in aircraft, and many of these cadets never received squadron assignments.

Photograph and identifications courtesy of Flight Dispatcher Keith Hansen

Formation Flying

Formation flying, which began in primary, took a steady hand and steel nerves. Philip Gray of Course 16 explained that “there would be five aircraft involved in each group, and to reach the standard these instructors demanded, we would really have to work and sweat to get it all together. Our own instructor, Mr. [Ernest] Piercy, put it on the line for our group.”

“Let’s get this clear right from the start. When we say “formation flying,” we mean just that: five planes getting in there really close and flying as if they are one plane. Five aircraft flying in the same general direction is not formation flying. Get your wingtip right in behind the wing of the plane on which you are formatting, so close that you can scrape the paint off the side of his fuselage with your wingtip. I want total, razor edge concentration. And here’s the incentive. We will keep at it until we all get it right, whether it takes one go or five hundred go’s. It’s up to you. But if you want them to pin those wings on your chest. . . .” (The rest was left unsaid.)²⁸



“Razor edge” concentration. American cadet David Rutledge Sargent of Course 15 pulls in tight on the lead aircraft — so close that we can read the fine print stenciled on the fuselage: “U.S. Army 41-335 Falcon Field, Arizona.” This aircraft was one of only five hundred seventeen AT-6As built by North American at their Inglewood, California, plant. (Inglewood serial numbers are 41-149 through 41-665.)

Photograph courtesy of Mrs. David Rutledge Sargent

²⁸ Philip Gray, *Ghosts of Targets Past*, pp. 20-21.



AT-6A advanced trainers in formation

John R. Dowling of Course 11 is flying AT-6A number 264. Dowling retired from the Royal Air Force as a wing commander. He is a recipient of the following awards: Member of the British Empire (MBE), Distinguished Flying Cross (DFC) and bar (second award), Air Force Cross (AFC).

The aircraft in the foreground, tail number 1649 (serial number 41-649), is an AT-6A manufactured in Inglewood, California, but it differs from other AT-6As in that only one venturi tube is visible on the fuselage. AT-6As were manufactured with two venturi tubes on the starboard side of the fuselage, one for each set of vacuum operated instruments.

Photograph courtesy of Falcon Field Association of Great Britain, John Dowling collection

Tower Operator Chuck Whittemore

A formation of six aircraft was unusual for Falcon, but one day Don Prosser and two of his solo students formed up with another instructor and two of his solo students for a flight of six aircraft. After practicing for a time, Prosser's group overflew the field. Calling the tower, he asked Chuck Whittemore how the formation looked "for a bunch of amateurs." Whittemore stepped outside and took a good look. Then came his laconic reply, "Like a bunch of amateurs."

Photograph by
Flight Instructor Ray Shelton,
courtesy of Flight Instructor Sid Wood

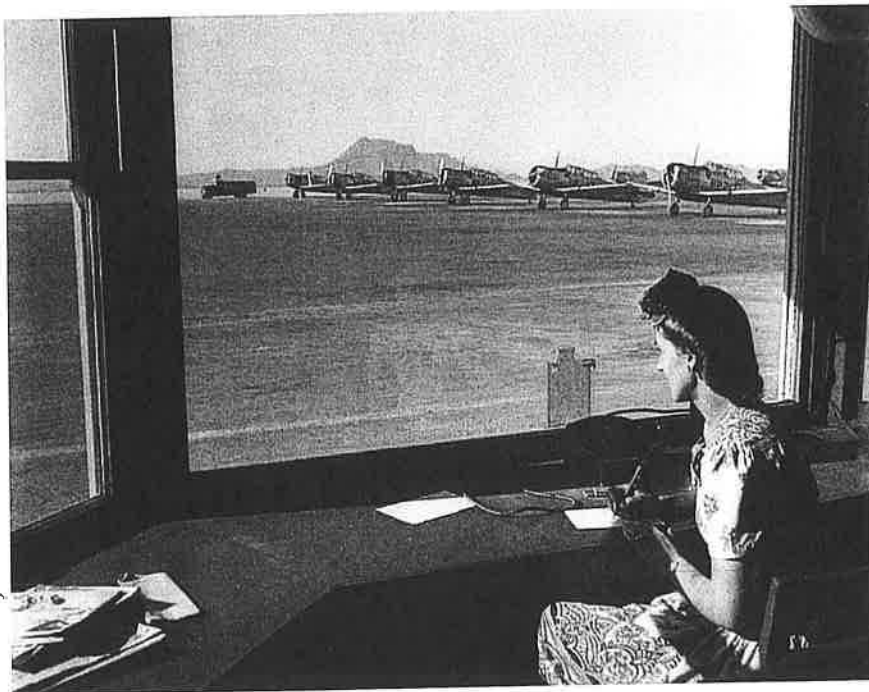




Advanced phase instructors provide preflight briefings for cadets.

Once in the air, things could go wrong fast. The November 1943 issue of *The Thunderbird* magazine reported an in-flight verbal exchange between advanced phase Flight Commander Cy Perkins his cadet student. After a three-turn spin, the cadet said, "I'll bet 50 percent of the people down there thought we were going to be killed that time." Perkins' dry response, "Yes, sir! And 50 percent of the people up here thought so, too."

Photograph by Flight Instructor Ray Shelton and Cadet Robert Hampton Purdy of Course 15, courtesy of RAF secretary Molly Turner



Flight Dispatcher Wanda Gertje joined Southwest Airways in June of 1943. She would say, "Anyone want to go solo?" A cadet would answer, "Only with you, Wanda!" Red Rock Mountain can be seen in both photographs on this page.

Photograph by Flight Instructor Ray Shelton, courtesy of Flight Dispatcher Keith Hansen

In any emergency situation the control tower would always be in contact with the pilot, trying to provide assistance and assurance. According to Philip Gray of Course 16, U.S. cadet Andrew Albert Carroll's dialogue with the tower was a classic.

"Carroll was the pilot, an American cadet from the South, his conversation always clipped and laconic. In the heat of the day he could invariably be found lying on top on his bed, naked, with only his hat on to shield his eyes from the sun. Most of us liked Carroll and his disdain for bullshit. Apparently his engine had cut out when he was quite a distance from the airfield, the one redeeming factor being that he had a fair amount of height. At this point we all heard the 'Mayday! Mayday! Mayday!' emergency call on the radio, given in the typical, unhurried Carroll fashion.

"In an emergency, the Control Tower will always pour out a continuous stream of assurances to calm the pilot of a stricken aircraft. They do the best they can, which is to keep on talking. The advisers are still down there on the ground in their warm, safe control tower; the pilot is still up there in his ailing aircraft, hanging on by his eyelashes. No one would ever say this out loud, of course.

"Correction, no one but Carroll would dare say it. That changed this emergency into a classic. Every pilot listening in, instructor and cadet alike, must have doubled over with laughter.

"As the stricken AT-6A did its slow, agonizing, engineless glide toward the distant haven of Falcon Field, the goo from the Tower continued unabated: 'You'll be alright. You still have plenty of height. Hang in there.'

"Then came the clincher. What the controller said was: 'You're alright, Number Three Four. We have you visual. We can see you now.'

"The Southern drawl from the cockpit cut straight back, and pulled that one right down to size.

" 'I can see you too,' iced back Carroll, 'but that doesn't do me any f----- good.'

"Oh yes, friend Carroll did make the base — just — landing downwind on the runway in use. Yes, he did get a wrap over the knuckles for using a heavy, four-letter expletive in the air."²⁹

Philip Gray

Camera Gunnery

Camera gunnery was used to teach aerial marksmanship at Falcon. The equipment consisted of a Type N.3 Gunsight and a Gunsight Aiming Point 16 mm camera mounted inside the cockpit of an advanced trainer marked with black and white invasion striping.

The first level of exercises involved air to air combat with one cadet "firing" at another cadet's aircraft from different distances at a continuous flight level. A more advanced exercise required one cadet to "fire" on another cadet's aircraft while the second aircraft was making different turns. Air to ground exercises were also conducted.³⁰

²⁹ Ibid., pp. 19-20.

³⁰ "Camera Gunnery," No. 4 British Flying Training School, Mesa, Arizona, U.S.A., (document provided by Kenneth Pullan of Course 25).

Prior to December 1943, gun camera film was processed at Ajo Army Air Field, Ajo, Arizona. This arrangement proved unsatisfactory because the cadets had no opportunity to see the film while the exercise was fresh in their minds. After December the film was developed at Falcon. Flight Lieutenant Hector White, a gunnery officer on the RAF staff, served as department head of the new photographic section. He was assisted by Corporal (later Sergeant) Cy Cartwright of the U.S. Army, two civilian employees of Southwest Airways, and Flying Officer Neil Funston of the Royal Australian Air Force (RAAF).³¹

Bill McLean of Course 21 said that "Flying Officer Funston occasionally tried to 'bounce' us by attacking with the sun behind us. During those flights he flew an AT-6 with black and white stripes on it."³²



The striped fuselage and wings signal that this aircraft is equipped with a camera. A student pilot was considered "shot down" if the photo plane could photograph his six; in other words, if the photo plane could fly in behind him (his six o'clock position) and snap his photograph. The paint scheme was first used at Normandy to enhance identification of Allied aircraft and minimize casualties from friendly fire. This aircraft, tail number 115856 (serial number 41-15856), is an AT-6A manufactured in Dallas, Texas.

In April 1945, one of the new AT-6Ds was apparently drafted for camera gunnery duty. In a report to his headquarters, Captain Marvin R. A. Grant mentions the difficulty of "converting the 12 volt camera gun to the 24 volt output of the AT-6D electrical system."

Photograph courtesy of Flight Dispatcher Keith Hansen

³¹ Capt. Marvin R. A. Grant, *History of 3044th Army Air Forces Base Unit (Primary — Advanced) and Falcon Field, Mesa, Arizona (March and April 1945)*, p. 7. Another reference lists civilian employee Virginia Cartwright.

³² "Hours Flown During Training at Falcon," *Falcon Field Association of Great Britain Newsletter*, ed. W. McCash AFM, 1998 No. 3, p. 5.

Cross Country

Cross country flights were designed to teach long distances navigation, and the pinnacle of training for all cadets was a 2000 mile cross country flight to Texas. Some cross country flights, like the night flight from Falcon to Tucson and back, presented little challenge. Bill Bishop said that all one needed to do was take off, climb to 10,000 feet, look south and spot the lights of Tucson. Achieving Tucson, one just looked north and saw the lights of Phoenix.³³ Other cross countries were more challenging and fraught with possibilities. Don Prosser tells of an incident in which Mexican authorities demanded to know why RAF cadets had landed an American military aircraft in Mexico.³⁴ On one night cross country, RAF cadet Jimmy Traill and USAAF cadet Richard "Junior" Wagner of Course 13 also failed to find their destination. Jimmy Traill tells the story:

"We were on the first run of a night cross country, Falcon — Casa Grande — Gila Bend — Salome — Falcon in AT-6A, BP241. I took off and set course for Casa Grande and soon was in heavy cloud. I climbed above most of it and continued on course but without seeing much below. I turned on the second leg for Gila Bend with the cloud getting worse. Richard. . . had promptly gone to sleep very soon after we had taken off. This was the normal procedure for the one acting as navigator.

"At our ETA over Gila Bend the cloud was something like nine-tenths and through one small hole I saw lights below. . . . I turned on to my new heading for Salome. The cloud by now was total, and the bumpy conditions were making life difficult. One of the more severe bumps finally awoke Richard. I [told] him if he had kept awake we might know where we were, [but] I had severe doubts about my own navigation. I [decided] to fly a reciprocal heading and try to find the hole in the cloud over Gila Bend. We suddenly came to a small break in the clouds and there below was a ring of lights. . . Gila Bend was as good as anywhere. When we got lower we could see. . . buildings with lights shining outwards and one building that in outline looked like a control tower. But there was no flare-path and no indication whether there were any runways or not.

"I then told Richard that . . ., with landing lights on, [I would illuminate] the building that looked like a tower and see if I could find. . . a runway. As I am flying this circuit, Richard is yelling from the rear cockpit 'Hell, Traill, I can see the ground, close, pull up.' 'Nonsense' was my reply, 'I know the height of Gila Bend. We have plenty of clearance.' There was no need for radio communication. We could hear each other quite clearly. During [several circuits] Richard, in no uncertain terms, was still going on about seeing the ground very close to our ass! I landed with one wheel on the runway and one on sand. . . but sufficient to say I kept the aircraft straight and landed in one piece. Following a jeep, [we] parked close to the tower.

"We decided the first thing was to ring base. Richard. . . reported [to Falcon that] we had made an emergency landing at Gila Bend. One of the American officers present immediately interjected with 'No, you're at Ajo.' He said Ajo was a gunnery school, and because of the surrounding hills it was too dangerous for night flying and there were no night flying facilities. Richard. . . had seen the ground too close for comfort whilst I made my circuits. Richard and I were the lucky ones for it was April 8, 1943, and April was a tragic month for our course."³⁵

³³ Bishop, pp. 27-28.

³⁴ Donald N. Prosser, telephone interview with the author.

³⁵ Jimmy Traill, "How Close Were We?" *The Falcon* (a Reunion booklet of the Falcon Field Association of Great Britain), 1990, pp. 11-12. As they touched down at Ajo, Traill and Wagner could not have known that classmate George Davison had just been killed in a crash at Gila Bend.

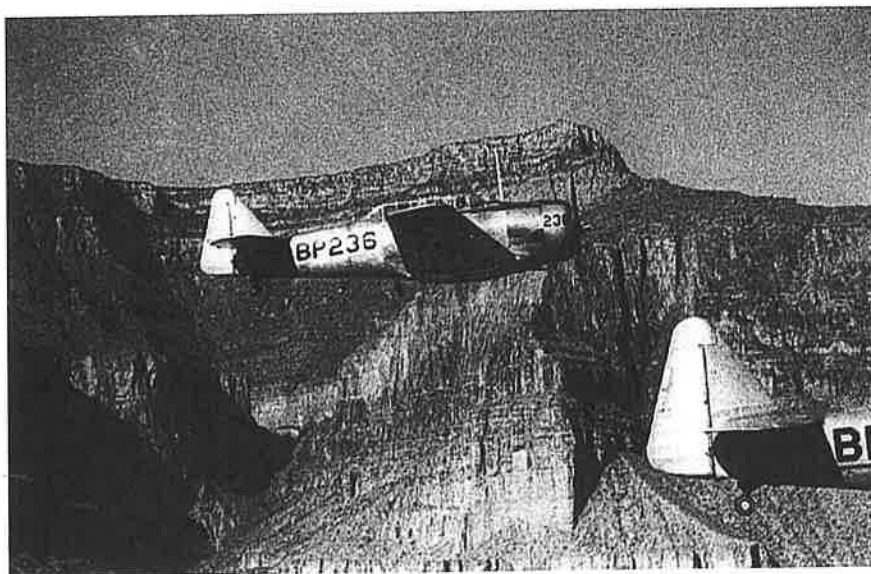
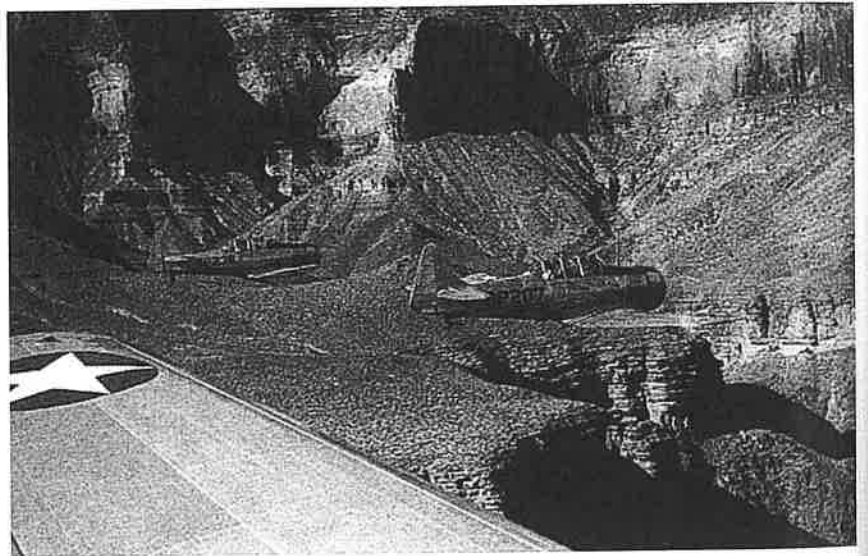


Below the Grand Canyon Rim

Bill Bishop and some of his pals from Course 14 take a scenic cross country flight to Arizona's Grand Canyon.

All photographs by Bill Bishop,
courtesy of Baroness Delta
O'Cathain OBE

**Three thousand feet below
the rim and a hundred feet
off the second shelf**



Climbing Out



Christmas Party, 1944

Front row, left to right: W. J. R. "Bill" Sims, Southwest Airways field manager for Falcon; Flight Lieutenant Hector White, RAF, gunnery instructor for No. 4 BFTS; Mike Foydl, Southwest Airways advanced phase chief flying instructor for Falcon; and Al Storrs, Southwest Airways director of training for Falcon.

Middle row, left to right: Captain John Barlow, Army of the United States (AUS), surgeon for the 3044th Army Air Forces Base Unit; S. H. Kirby, Southwest Airways chief of radio repair for Falcon; Flight Lieutenant Ron Finlayson, RCAF, navigation supervisor for No. 4 BFTS; Flying Officer Phil Parker, RAF, assistant flying supervisor for No. 4 BFTS; and Squadron Leader Alan Johnson, RAF, chief ground supervisor for No. 4 BFTS.

Top row, left to right: First Lieutenant Eldon Cleveland, AUS, supply officer for the 3044th Army Air Forces Base Unit; John Bonnell, Southwest Airways chief ground school instructor for Falcon; Flight Lieutenant Harry Carter, RAF, administrative officer for No. 4 BFTS; Les Ward, Southwest Airways assistant chief of maintenance for Falcon; Ben Burns, Southwest Airways chief of guards for Falcon; Mel Lyster, Southwest Airways chief Link Trainer instructor for Falcon; Joe Wischler, Southwest Airways chief of maintenance for Falcon; Ted Hanna (behind Wischler), Southwest Airways assistant director of training for Falcon; Neil Killgore, Southwest Airways primary phase chief flying instructor for Falcon; and Wing Commander Alan Vernon Rogers, RAF, commanding officer of No. 4 BFTS.

Photograph by Flight Instructor David Thiele, photograph and identifications courtesy of Mary Lou (Turner) Bustrin



An official U.S. Army accident investigation photograph dated August 30, 1943. The actual circumstances surrounding this accident are not known. The aircraft on the right, tail number 116390 (serial number 41-16390), is a Falcon AT-6A manufactured in Dallas, Texas. The Stearman on the left does not display Falcon numbering. Based on figures for the summer of 1943, Falcon experienced one accident for every three hundred hours flying.

Photograph by Sergeant Cy Cartwright,
courtesy of Captain Marvin R. A. Grant

CHAPTER TEN

ACCIDENTS

In peace the sons bury the fathers, and in war the fathers bury the sons.

Francis Bacon

Accidents were a part of life at Falcon. When asked whether the death of his friend Bob Hammond caused him to dwell on such events, Flight Instructor Sid Wood said, "Well, you just say to yourself, it's not going to happen to me." Like those of us on the ground who shut our automobile doors and keep on driving, they closed their canopies and kept on flying.

There were thirty fatalities at Falcon. Twenty-three RAF cadets, one American cadet, and four instructors died in flying accidents; and one American cadet and one instructor died of natural causes. They are far from forgotten. They are remembered at reunions of the Falcon Field Association of Great Britain and by the Daughters of the British Empire in Arizona each year and by the cadets themselves. In 1995, former Falcon cadet Philip Gray dedicated his book, *Ghosts of Targets Past*, "to the memory of Arthur 'Ginger' Lewis, who died 'in action' while still trying to earn that coveted wings brevet. At twenty-one years of age, his life was barely into second gear. He now lies at rest forever in a small cemetery plot in the Arizona desert."¹

Most of the accidents at British flying training schools, about seventy percent, occurred when pilots were attempting to land. Approximately twenty percent occurred when pilots were taxiing; eight percent, when flying; and two percent, when taking off. Falcon averaged one accident per day in the summer of 1943.² (Many of these accidents were minor, but Rafdel encouraged the reporting of all accidents.) All three aircraft types were involved in accident and injury, but in the estimation of maintenance chief Joe Wischler, the Stearman was the safest aircraft in the fleet. His rationale was that the center section gave pilots tremendous protection. Wischler said, "We had several occasions when two Stearman landed on top of each other, and no one was hurt."

Dated October 6, 1941, this official U.S. Army photograph shows the aftermath of a Stearman crash caused when both aircraft landed at the same time, one on top of the other. A similar accident occurred during a night flying exercise in November. In the November accident, LAC K. Hermiston of Course 3 landed on top of classmate LAC D. Maxwell while Maxwell was taking off. Both cadets graduated as sergeants and were later commissioned. They served with distinction during WWII, and each earned Britain's Distinguished Flying Cross.

Photograph courtesy of Ruth Wischler and Carolyn (Wischler) McDaniel



¹ Philip Gray, *Ghosts of Targets Past* (London: Grubb Street, 1995), dedication.

² *Analysis of Accidents at British Flying Training Schools, June-July 1943*, Rafdel A.21,066/43, Sept. 3, 1943.

One Stearman crash could have been more serious had flight instructors Ray Shelton and Sid Wood not come to the rescue. Ray Shelton was an amateur photographer who took many of the photographs that appear in this book. According to Sid Wood:

"One afternoon after we had worked the morning shift, I went with Shelton on a photo field trip around the airport. We were at the advanced hangar looking east at Superstition Mountain with the idea of using it as a backdrop. A Stearman PT-17 was turning on base leg for landing toward the west. We saw him roll into his turn to final, but he didn't roll out. He went into a spin which ended in a cloud of dust.

"Shelton and I raced to the car and sped out there. The Stearman was resting on its nose and one wing. Gasoline was draining down from a gas tank in the top wing. The cadet was hanging over the edge of the cockpit as far as the seat belt would allow — bleeding. He had apparently crushed his nose on the windshield.

"Shelton and I gently lifted the cadet out and carried him away from the plane. The ambulance came soon after. The following week a letter came down the line to the effect that if any of you dumb instructors are present at an airplane crash, don't take the pilot out as you are liable to hurt him. (If the airplane hadn't caught on fire and burned I suppose.)"³



A crashed aircraft photographed in November 1941

The pilot(s) had apparently parachuted to safety as no deaths were recorded for November. Several cylinders of a radial engine can be seen in the left foreground. The manifold exhaust port, which projects from the engine cylinders toward the center of the photograph, identifies the engine as a Pratt & Whitney R-1340 and the aircraft as an AT-6A. (The engine is upside down with the starboard side toward the viewer.)

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

³ Sid Wood, letter to the author dated February 3, 1999.

1941

Accidents took the lives of three cadets in 1941. The first, Leading Aircraftman (LAC) Alexander Thomas Brooks of Course 1, age twenty, died on October 20 from injuries he received on October 16 when his AT-6A crashed during a night exercise. He was the son of Alexander Daniel and Mary Brooks of Eltham, London. The second, LAC Paul Cecil John Colling of Course 2, age eighteen, was killed on October 21 in the crash of his BT-13. He was the son of G. C. and Madge Colling of New Forest, Galaha, Ceylon. The third, LAC Alec Henry Sutton of Course 3, age twenty, was killed on December 28. The *Arizona Republic* reported that Sutton's aircraft went into a glide after a minor mid-air collision at 3000 feet. At 1000 feet, the cadet appeared to be in control of his aircraft, but in a tragic miscalculation, he parachuted. His parachute had no time to open. The newspaper noted that the aircraft flew almost two miles further before crashing. The fuselage, minus the wings and engine, came to rest on Indian School Road four miles east of Scottsdale. Cadet Sutton was survived by his mother Florence E. Sutton of Brixton, London.

This photograph is dated December 28, 1941, the day Alec Henry Sutton of Course 3 was killed. The North American AT-6A may be his airplane.

Photograph courtesy of Ruth Wischler and Carolyn (Wischler) McDaniel



The original caption in the photograph album of George Peter Alexandra of Course 7 reads "inadvisable to fly a plane into the ground at night. Fraser Petherbridge was lucky, escaping with a broken nose, scarred face and black eyes, and without his teeth."

Photograph by George Peter Alexandra, courtesy of Mike Alexandra

1942

Six fatalities occurred in 1942. On January 7, Course 6 cadet LAC Peter Duncan Campbell, age eighteen, died in the crash of his Stearman. His flight instructor Don Prosser said, "On his first flight outside the traffic pattern, he attempted a fly-over of his girlfriend's house, but stalled in. Later I was to learn he had announced his intention earlier to his classmates."⁴ LAC Campbell was the son of Royal Navy Captain J. D. and Mrs. M. L. Campbell of Plymouth, Devon, England.

Tragedy struck again. This time, for Course 3. LAC William Burke, age nineteen, the son of Thomas and Margaret Burke of Huyton, Lancashire, England, died in a crash on January 14. February and March passed without fatal incident, but April hit with a vengeance: three cadets and one instructor lost their lives. Course 7 cadet LAC Frank Glew, age twenty, and Flight Instructor Barney John Gordon, age twenty-four, were killed in a crash at Red Rock on April 1. Cadet Glew was the son of Francis Reginald and Daisy Glew of Belper, Derbyshire, England; instructor Gordon, the son of Mr. and Mrs. C. W. Gordon of Panhandle, Texas. Course 5 cadets LAC Jack Payne, age twenty, and LAC Harold Edward Hartley, age thirty, died when their AT-6A crashed on an April 15 night flying exercise. They were two weeks from graduation. Cadet Martin Burgess of Course 5 was a good friend of Jack Payne.

"After we had soloed at night, we used to fly with a fellow pupil in the rear cockpit: The reason for this was not clear, as although it was logged as 'safety-pilot' time, the lad in the back usually slept soundly throughout the trip. On this occasion, I was Control pilot, and my job was to stand on the edge of the runway and signal the machines in and out with a three-colour light gun and a portable two-way radio set. My friend Jack Payne was flying the plane with another student, Ted Hartley, in the rear cockpit and had just completed a night cross-country flight. They called from a height of some 8000 feet directly over the field, and received permission to enter the circuit and land.

"They let down into the circuit and made their approach a good deal too high and a trifle fast, so I flashed the red light at them, which was the signal not to land but to go around again. Jack opened up his motor and climbed towards the inky blackness of the desert mountains and moonless sky towards the east. At 1000 feet they should have turned right but instead they turned left at about 700 feet or so, and we watched, helpless, while the red eye of the port light on the machine curved into a gentle dive, motor running strongly, until it disappeared into a dry wash not far from the field, with the unforgettable thud and subsequent agonising silence which has been so often described by abler pens than mine.

"The ambulance went straight away, but it was useless. Jack was killed instantly and Ted was dead before they could lift him out of the cockpit."⁵

Bugs Burgess

Many accidents occurred during night flying operations. When there was no moon, a flyer could become disoriented and fly into the ground. Cadet Payne was survived by his parents Samuel Frank and May Payne of Uplands, Swansea, Wales; cadet Hartley, by his parents Chris and Nellie M. Hartley of Rudston, Driffield, Yorkshire, England, and his wife Alice Mary Hartley of Norton Malton, Yorkshire, England.

⁴ Don Prosser, letter to the author dated February 24, 1999.

⁵ "Reminiscences by Bugs Burgess," *Falcon Field Association of Great Britain Newsletter*, ed. W. McCash AFM, 1999 No. 3, p. 3.

Just when it appeared that happier days would fill the rest of 1942, Death had its own iniquitous Christmas gift for the boys of Falcon. The flight dispatcher's report of December 24 notes that LAC William James Watters of Course 11 "was dispatched in airplane BP234 (AT-6A) at 11:04 on a cross-country flight solo to Wilcox, Tucson, Chandler, and return. While on the leg between Wilcox and Tucson, LAC Watters crashed into a mountain and was killed instantly." The son of William and Jean Watters of Monifieth, Angus, Scotland, he was nineteen.

1943

The year 1943 began horribly and ended worse. Eleven British cadets and two instructors lost their lives. The flight dispatcher's report of January 18 states that Flight Instructor Bob Hammond was flying in airplane BP215 piloted by his student LAC Robert Lawther of Course 11 when their aircraft was involved in a mid-air collision with AT-6A number BP241 piloted by Sergeant N. I. Ballance, also of Course 11. Hammond, age thirty-five, and Lawther, age twenty, were killed instantly. Ballance, injured, parachuted to safety. A more detailed account is found in Rafdel document A.24,330/42 of February 17, 1943:

"Formation of three aircraft at 14,000 feet in starboard echelon. No. 3 left behind in a turn, opened throttle to catch up — at this moment leader was ordered to throttle back by Instructor in No. 2. No. 3 overshot No. 2 just as leader turned toward the right, thus putting No.3 in a position which he could not see No. 2, and in the close vicinity of a large cumulus cloud. No. 3 commenced to turn away to dive through this cloud and at that moment felt a heavy impact. No. 3 tested aircraft controls — found no response — then baled out. No. 2 went straight down. . . . The conclusions of the school were that the accident was due. . .to a combination of circumstances beyond the capabilities of a cadet to handle at that stage of training. The accident may be classified as 'avoidable'. . .and [schools should] stress the need for immediate break-away from the formation of any member who loses sight of the aircraft ahead. The breakaway should be rapid and should normally be upward and outward in relation to the formation. There is apparent need for further instruction of cadets and instructors in the best methods of obtaining power to keep up. The instructor is considered to have been at fault somewhat in ordering the leader to 'throttle back.' Any such order which is capable of interpretation in varying degrees must be issued with caution."

Bob Hammond was the husband of Hazel Hammond and the father of eight-month-old Susanna. Robert Lawther left behind a wife Muriel Jean Lawther of Lurgan, Co. Armagh, Northern Ireland. He was the son of Mr. and Mrs. John Lawther of Lurgan, Co. Armagh.

On March 5, 1943, twenty-year-old LAC Horace Raymond John Partoon of Course 12 died in the crash of an AT-6A near Four Peaks Mountains. He was the son of Horace John and Edith Marie Partoon of Wembley Hill, Middlesex, England.

Course 13 lost three members in one month in what would be a morbid tie with Course 16. The first, LAC George Davison, son of George William and Violet Davison of Edgware, Middlesex, England, died on April 8 about midnight when his advanced trainer crashed near Gila Bend, Arizona. He was twenty-one. One week later on April 14, LAC James Gilliam Buchanan, age nineteen, and LAC Robert Brotherton Horn, age twenty, died when their AT-6A crashed one and a half miles northeast of Scottsdale, Arizona. Cadet Buchanan was the son of Francis Henry Theodore and Gwendolen May Isobel Buchanan of Totland Bay, Isle of Wight, England; cadet Horn, the son of Thomas and Isabella Horn of Ellington, Morpeth, Northumberland, England.

Course 16's Philip Gray cannot forget one especially bleak week in August 1943.

"In life we were about to discover that the reality of sudden and violent death is not restricted to players in the front line. . . .

"On the night of Friday 13 August, Course 15's Gomm took his Harvard to about 200 feet when the engine cut. He was caught in the split-second decision of will-I or won't-I turn back. At that height there was, categorically, no choice. Every book in the trade quite rightly directs the pilot to land straight ahead. Unfortunately, he tried to turn back to the sanctuary of the airfield, stalled, spun in, and was killed.

"A few days later the carnage continued. Two planes collided in the circuit: a cadet in his first solo in one, the other an instructor/pupil duo. Both were Stearmans. The instructor and his pupil were killed. . . . [Another cadet] came waltzing in to land with his undercarriage still retracted, and ended up screaming along the runway, wheels up, sparks scything out in all directions. He bent the plane quite a bit.

"As the circus continued, Course 17 set a new record by ground looping four of their Stearmans in one day. Loveless, one of 'our' Americans on Course 16, had his Harvard engine cut while he was way out over the desert and, carrying out the correct procedure, landed, wheels retracted, in the sand and scrub. He got away with it."⁶

Corporal John Leopold Gomm was the husband of Phyllis Gomm of Yeovil, Somerset, England, and the son of Mr. and Mrs. H. L. Gomm of Thanington, Canterbury, Kent, England. He was twenty-three. The cadet and instructor killed in the Stearman crash were LAC John Going Versturme-Bunbury of Course 17, age twenty-five, and Flight Instructor Willard W. Schendel. They were killed instantly when their plane crashed and burst into flames. LAC Ralph Bryan Wainer was flying solo in the other Stearman. He safely landed his badly damaged aircraft. Cadet Vesturme-Bunbury was the son of John Clement Paillet and Dorothy Going Versturme-Bunbury of San Francisco, California. He was twenty-five.

The disastrous month of August 1943 mercifully ended, and the Operations Record Book (ORB) reports that September was uneventful. But the worst three days in Falcon history were about to hit with a vengeance. Philip Gray continues:

"Nobby Clarke and Chamberlain, riding together on their cross-country exercise, were way overdue. Meantime, the Highway Patrol had called in to report that they had seen a plane crash near Maricopa. We were to find out later that the Harvard had apparently clipped the tail unit of a Liberator bomber and then continued on, spinning into the ground. . . .

"Hours later, still subdued and fighting to cope with the realization that the chopper had hit Course 16, we got another boomer. As we were settling down to fitful sleep, a clerk from the Control Tower shook us back to life. Had any of us seen Ginger Lewis? He had reported back to the Tower when over the field at the completion of his cross-country, and then had virtually disappeared. Oh no! Dear Lord, not Ginger! He was also one of the six in our room, his bed area right opposite my space. Of all the cadets on the course, this amiable Londoner must have been one of the most popular. I could never ever remember seeing Ginger without a big broad smile fronting his open easy manner.

⁶ Gray, *Ghosts*, pp. 18-20.

"Next morning there was good news and bad. Ginger had been spotted by an early morning search plane, the wreckage of his Harvard spread over a fair area of one of the auxiliary landing grounds used by Williams Field, an American flying training school close by. Although badly injured, he had managed to spring his parachute and wrap it around himself as protection against the cold night air. We could only hope and let Ginger fight this one out by himself. As we were told next day, it was a fight he had lost. Arthur 'Ginger' Lewis died on Saturday, 30 October 1943, almost exactly twenty-four hours after his plane had hit the deck. He had simply forgotten to readjust his altimeter to local barometric pressure.

"I was a pallbearer twice in three days, Saturday for Nobby Clarke, and Monday for Ginger. Even now, after so many years, their faces appear very easily out of my recall."⁷

Corporal Reginald George Henry "Nobby" Clarke was twenty-three; LAC Walter William Chamberlain was twenty. The ORB recorded the time and date of their crash as 2200 hours on October 28. LAC Arthur Roydon "Ginger" Lewis was twenty-one. He crashed at 0230 hours on the morning of October 29 and died at Williams Field Hospital as a result of his injuries. Cadet Clarke was the husband of Teresa May Louisa Clarke of Newport, Monmouthshire, Wales, and the son of Mr. and Mrs. P. L. Clarke of Newport; cadet Chamberlain, the son of Rodham Wilfred and Mary Mack Chamberlain of Walthamstow, Essex, England; and cadet Lewis, the son of Frederick William and Blanche Maud Lewis of Kenton, Harrow, Middlesex, England.

On November 14, 1943, American Air Cadet (A/C) Lawrence A. Janson of Course 17 died of a stroke at Williams Field Hospital. The last death recorded for 1943 was LAC Anthony Simpson Lovett, age nineteen, of Course 17. Flying solo, he crashed into Roosevelt Lake at 1100 hours on December 17. He was the son of The Reverend Samuel Henry Wesley Lovett MA, a retired Royal Navy chaplain, and Mrs. D. W. Lovett of Grayshott, Hindhead, Surrey, England.



Anthony Lovett's airplane being removed from Roosevelt Lake

Photograph courtesy of Steve Hoza

⁷ Gray, *Ghosts*, pp. 21-22.

1944

Four cadets and one instructor were killed in 1944, and one instructor died of natural causes. On March 8, 1944, an AT-6A flown by British cadet LAC John Reginald Durston and American cadet Private First Class (PFC) Neil Funk, both of Course 18, was reported missing from a cross-country flight. The search began immediately and continued for three days. Aiding in the search were Army Air Forces flyers from Ajo, Gila Bend, the 11th Army Air Forces Flying Training Detachment, and Davis-Monthan Air Field.⁸ Aircraft wreckage was spotted five miles northeast of Williams Field and later identified as that of the missing AT-6A. On March 11, the bodies of the two Falcon cadets were recovered. American classmate Carroll Goyne said, "Apparently they flew straight into the ground."⁹ An official United States Army inquiry into the accident found that the cadets failed to set their altimeter to sea level for the return leg of their cross-country trip.

Cadet Durston was the son of John Henry and Kathleen Constance Durston of Sway, Hampshire, England. Cadet Funk was survived by a wife and his mother Mrs. J. J. Funk of Manitoba, Canada. Flight Instructor James Earl "Jimmy" Netser died of a heart attack at his home in April 1944.



Official U.S. Army accident investigation photograph

On March 8, 1944, American PFC Neil Funk and British LAC John Reginald Durston, both of Course 18, died in the crash of their AT-6A. They were returning from a night cross-country flight.

Photograph by Sergeant Cy Cartwright, courtesy of Captain Marvin R. A. Grant

⁸ Capt. Marvin R. A. Grant, *History of 15th Army Air Forces Flying Training Detachment (Primary-Basic-Advanced) Falcon Field, Mesa, Arizona (March and April 1944)*, p. 2.

⁹ Colonel Carroll H. Goynes, Jr., letter to the author dated May 28, 1998.

The next death in 1944 occurred on May 23. At 1720 hours, British cadet Aircraftman Second Class (AC2/C) William Morrish reported an accident during formation flying in which two aircraft were destroyed in a mid-air collision. Less than a month from graduation, AC2/C Albert Morris of Course 19 was flying dual with Flight Instructor David Thiele. A Course 19 classmate, AC2/C Donald Parnell, was in the second aircraft. Cadet Morris was killed in the accident; instructor Thiele and cadet Parnell landed by parachute. Flight Instructor Thiele:

“While on a formation training flight, one of the solo cadets lost sight of our airplane and flew into our plane from above us. I heard the collision [and] my rear cockpit filled with so much smoke that I could not see out. I called on the intercom for my student in the front cockpit to bail out, but I couldn’t even see him. I undid my safety belt, opened my hatch, and just stood up. The wind blew my glasses off and temporarily blinded me. I didn’t know what to do! I struggled to get my eyes open. When I got them open — to my surprise — all I could see was blue sky. . .blue sky in all directions, even when I looked down at my feet. I had no idea how I got out of the cockpit. I was upside down in the sky, feet up and head down! I thought, ‘you don’t want to pull the rip cord too soon, or you might get tangled up in the aircraft wreckage.’ My next thought was, ‘You don’t want to wait too long either.’ I pulled the rip cord.

“It took me about five minutes to get down to the ground. As I got closer to the Arizona desert, I saw that I was right over a big saguaro cactus plant with big limbs reaching out from the trunk. I thought of pulling on the parachute side straps to move the parachute to one side, but then I thought that I had been very lucky so far, so I decided to just see where I would land. I was very lucky, and I landed on the edge of a small dry wash and went forward on my hands and feet in the dry sand on the bottom on the wash.”¹⁰

Cadet Parnell’s log book reveals that the accident occurred on the third formation practice of the day. He was flying solo in AT-6A number 203.

“We were flying in echelon with me at No. 3 and David Thiele and Albert Morris at No. 2. Forty minutes into the exercise over the Arizona desert I experienced a rare and violent air disturbance which seemed to lift my plane in a flash out of sight of the other two aircraft. I immediately slammed on right rudder and eased back on the throttle, but it was too late. My aircraft obviously dropped straight back, and my assumption — never confirmed — is that the tip of my port wing hit the propeller of ship 2. Subsequent events were a blur — the impact having temporarily knocked me out, and my next recollection was plunging to earth in and uncontrollable aircraft. The instinct of self preservation got me out of the stricken aircraft, and I managed to pull the rip cord. I found myself floating down on my chute only a few hundred feet above the desert, remembering vaguely that I could see only one other chute above me which proved to be David Thiele’s. I stayed where I was — I guess in a state of shock and David joined me sometime later having seen where I landed. I can only remember asking him if Albert had got out but can remember nothing else until we were picked up by a U.S. Army jeep. I was hospitalized for a couple of days having had a rather violent bang on the head apparently and resumed flying on April 29 after a thorough medical. I remained deeply shocked at the death of my close friend Albert Morris with whom

¹⁰ David Thiele, letter to the author.