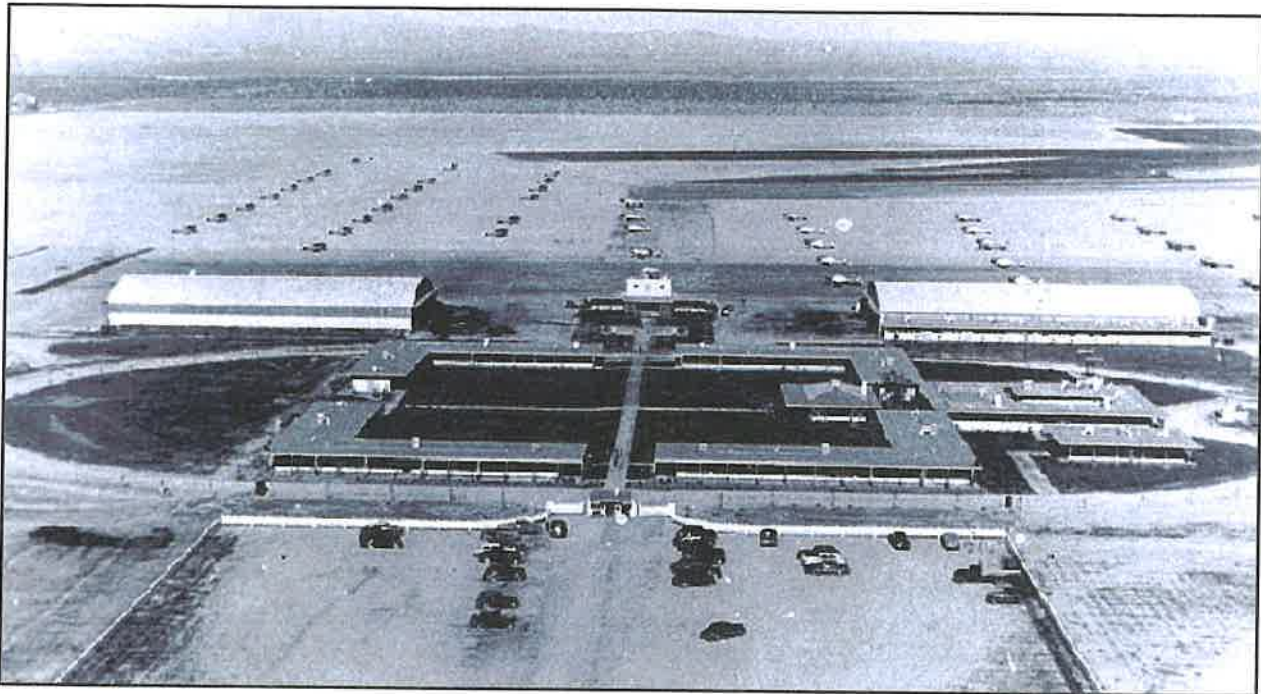


The Falcon Field Story

Arizona's Falcon Field During World War II
No. 4 British Flying Training School
and
No. 3044BU - AAF Training Base, Mesa, Arizona



Aerial view of Falcon Field looking north

Early in 1939, a war with Germany was clearly evident to a few forward thinking men in England. These men knew that they would need far more fighter planes and pilots than their present training system could produce. They also knew that the biggest drawback to the training of new pilots in England would be that Luftwaffe fighters could over-fly their country should France fall. This would make training of new pilots a very risky business. In order to train new pilots in relative safety, they devised a plan to train pilots in three Commonwealth countries: Rhodesia, South Africa, and Canada. This plan was called "The Empire Air Training Scheme" and it probably saved Great Britain from invasion at the end of the Battle of Britain. The Germans already had operation "Sea Lion," the invasion of England, planned and ready to launch as soon as they won control of the air from the RAF. This training scheme provided just enough extra pilots throughout the Battle of Britain to replace their losses and hold the Luftwaffe at bay during this critical period.

There were three distinct phases to the Battle of Britain; the initial convoy attacks in the English Channel and North Sea, the airfield and radar site attacks and the bombing of London and other major cities. These battles occurred between approximately July 10, and Oct. 31, 1940. Contrary to popular belief, there was a critical shortage of fighter pilots, not planes at this time.

THE FALCON FIELD STORY



No. 4 B F T S
(British Flying Training School)
and
No. 3044 BU A A F Base Unit
(Army Air Corps Training School)

Mesa, Arizona 1941 to 1945



by
Larry J. Simmons
Second Edition, August, 2002

The R.A.F was also forced to comb through the ranks of Coastal Command and Air Transport Command to obtain enough replacement fighter pilots. The Fleet Air Arm also supplied about 60 pilots from their ranks. As RAF Fighter Command struggled to maintain it's combat strength, it is beyond doubt that these "scrounged" pilots combined with "Empire" and other "National" pilots made the difference between winning or losing the Battle of Britain.

As the Battle of Britain began, Fighter Command had at its disposal approximately 800 fighter planes and about 900 pilots. They had 304 Spitfires posted into 19 fighter groups, 384 Hurricanes in 24 fighter groups, 32 Boulton Paul Defiants in 2 fighter groups, and 96 Bristol Blenheims in 6 fighter/bomber groups. The Defiants were two seat fighters with a four gun turret that weighed 1700 pounds, located behind the pilot ,but it had no forward firing wing guns. The Blenheims were twin engine light bombers. Neither of these aircraft was suitable for combat against the Messerschmitt Bf-109's and Bf-110's in speed, climb, firepower, or maneuverability. Fighter Command's aircraft reserves totaled only 546 planes, although not all of these were combat ready. Hugh Dowding, Chief of Fighter Command, had carefully saved these aircraft from certain destruction had he continuing to send them in small numbers to France, as he had been ordered to do. Prime Minister Churchill finally realized that France was about to surrender and agreed to Dowding's demands. The Luftwaffe by contrast, at this time had about 2,500 fighters and bombers to un-leash against England, giving them a three to one advantage. The heroes of the Battle of Britain were not only the RAF pilots, "The Few," but also Sir Hugh Dowding, head of Fighter Command, who saved enough fighters, Reginald Mitchell, designer of the Supermarine Spitfire, and Sydney Camm, designer of the Hawker Hurricane. These men provided England with the pilots and aircraft to win the Battle of Britain, and with the help of the U.S.A., World War Two.

In the U.S. there were also a few equally far-sighted men. U.S. Army Air Corps General Henry "Hap" Arnold proposed a plan called "The Arnold Plan," to use civilian instructors to train Army cadets as a "Civilian Pilot Training" (C.P.T.) program. U.S. Navy Admiral John Towers also had a plan that he called the "Towers Flight Training Scheme" that would use U.S. Navy instructors and schools to train British naval pilots. These navy schools were eventually located in Gross Ill, Michigan, Pensacola, Florida and Coral Gables-Miami, Florida, and trained many Fleet Air Arm pilots for the Royal Navy. General Arnold and Admiral Towers convinced President Roosevelt that war was also imminent between the U.S. and Japan, and, with the Presidents tacit approval, these Civilian Pilot Training programs were set up. President Roosevelt also set in motion other covert operations to aid the British, the most important being his "Lend Lease" plan. As this was an American plan, it's odd that the English to this day still call it "Lease Lend". Prime Minister Winston Churchill, about this time and in secret talks with President Roosevelt, easily convinced him to allow British cadets to be trained under this newly organized CPT program. To President Roosevelt's credit, he understood all to well that if Britain were to be defeated, the U.S. could find itself fighting a two-ocean war, ill-prepared and all by itself. This was a bold move by President Franklin Roosevelt as we were still neutral at this time. Britain's survival and possibly our r own were at stake, and he did not hesitate.

At this point, RAF Squadron Leader (Major) Stuart Mills was summoned by the British Air Delegation to Washington and after a meeting with President Roosevelt, was given the task of scouting out sites in the U.S. on which to locate British Air Training Schools. Mills, a combat veteran who had flown bi-plane Gloster Gladiators in the Norwegian Campaign and had been wounded there, ultimately selected seven sites for such bases, The seventh site however, was turned over to the U.S. Army Air Corps two months after it had opened. This base, located in Sweetwater, Texas, became the training center for the "WASPS" (Women Air Service Pilots). The other sites chosen by Sqd. Ldr. Mills for bases were:

No. 1 British Flying Training School, Terrell, Texas	(#1 BFTS)
No. 2 British Flying Training School, Lancaster, California	(#2 BFTS)
No. 3 British Flying Training School, Miami, Oklahoma	(#3 BFTS)
No. 4 British Flying Training School, Mesa, Arizona	(#4 BFTS)
No. 5 British Flying Training School, Clewiston, Florida	(#5 BFTS)
No. 6 British Flying Training School, Ponca City, Oklahoma	(#6 BFTS)

Southwest Airways was incorporated in Phoenix in 1940 and after purchasing a flying school, located at Phoenix Sky Harbor airport, they built and started operations at their second school near Glendale. These schools trained US Army pilots under the Civilian Pilot Training Program.

The first site Sq. Ldr. Mills had selected for Arizona's No. 4 B.F.T.S was on Pima Indian Reservation land just north of the Salt River bed, (north of present day Falcon Field). Negotiations for the use of this property soon fell through and another site had to be chosen. This site was six and one half miles North West of Mesa, Arizona, it's present location.

One square mile, 640 acres, plus an additional 80 acres, was purchased by the city of Mesa from a local rancher, Mr. Elias Habeeb for \$28,740. A few months later it was leased to Southwest Airways Corp. for a fee of \$4.50 per acre per year. The U.S. Government soon allocated a sum of \$21,337,165.62 that was to be used for the purchase of "Defense Aid Facilities and Equipment." With this money available, the "Defense Plant Corporation" paid off the investment that Southwest Airways had already made in Falcon Field's physical assets. A contract was now negotiated between the British and Southwest Airways to provide pilot training as they already held the necessary Civilian Pilot Training Certificate. This certificate, issued by the U.S. Government, was necessary to operate a C.P.T. school. Southwest now began to hire the many skilled people to do the training and operate the field. Some of the personnel they needed were: pilot instructors, mechanics, ground school instructors, Link training instructors, guards, mess hall people, ambulance drivers and tower operators. Their contract also required them to provide; room and board for the cadets, gasoline and oil for the aircraft, a clinic, all aircraft repairs and everything else needed to operate the base.

No. 4 B.F.T.S. came under RAF command and discipline as soon as it was opened. As housing was provided for the cadets only, all other personnel had to seek housing locally. This included the officers, instructors, mechanics, and in short, everybody else. This in itself was to create a major housing shortage in the Salt River Valley because of the rapid growth of the many other military bases around the Salt River Valley.

All aircraft, engines, spare parts and fuel and oil would be supplied through the "Lend Lease" requisition No.3451 from the U.S. Government, However before the Government could start supplying gas and oil, Southwest Airways had to purchase these supplies locally and at one time, according to Leland Hayward, President of SWA, "I owed over one million bucks" for gasoline and oil alone. The British of course would supply the cadets. However, the U.S. was later to have 125 Army Air Corps cadets included for training with the British using the RAF training syllabus. Of this number, 116 were graduated.

Under a proposal and contract, signed on March 29, 1941, between the British Air Delegation and the U.S. Government, the following payment schedule was initially agreed to:

- \$ 21.60 per hour for primary trainers, (PT-13 and PT-17)
- \$ 32.70 per hour for basic trainers, (BT-13 and AT-6)
- \$ 5.00 per hour for Link training time
- \$ 25.00 per month for cadet's room and board (on a pro rata basis)

The British, under Lend Lease, were to pay 60% of all these costs, and later, to pay the 10,000 dollar G.I. Insurance for all U.S. Army cadets training there.

These prices were lowered slightly in later re-negotiations between the British Air Delegation and the U.S. Government. A schedule for engine overhauls, repair parts, aircraft repair, and new engines was also established. A new Stearman engine was \$450 and a new T-6 engine was \$700. In the *unlikely* event of an aircraft being "totaled," the price was slightly higher: \$1,000 for a Stearman and \$2,500 for a Texan. By way of comparison, the top rate of pay at this time was \$1.35 per hour for Southwest mechanics and they also had to join the Air Corps Enlisted Reserve to prevent being drafted into the Army.

At this point, two dynamic entrepreneurs now entered the picture and made aviation history. Jack Connelly, 41 years old, was a New York born ex-army pilot and engineering test pilot for the Civil Aeronautics Administration and an aircraft salesman. He was licensed to fly most aircraft then on the U.S. civil registry. Leland Hayward, 39 years old, on the other hand was a more urbane personality. He was a noted Hollywood producer and talent agent who had been taught to fly by his first wife, Lola Gibbs, a beautiful Texas debutante. Hayward had a client list of "Stars" that read like a Hollywood Who's Who. Among his many friends and clients were; Jimmy Stewart, Henry Fonda, Fred Astaire, Ginger Rogers, Daryl Zanuck, Helen Hayes, Cary Grant, Myrna Loy, Hoagy Carmichael, Gene Kelly, Gregory Peck, Robert Taylor, Charles Laughton, Dashiell Hammett, Greta Garbo and about a hundred others. During the Falcon Field years, he was married to his second wife, the famous film actress Margaret Sullavan. He was also the producer of such great motion pictures as *Mr. Roberts*, *The Spirit of St. Louis*, and *The Old Man And The Sea*.

These two friends, over dinner one night at the Brown Derby in Hollywood, decided to take advantage of the opportunity to start a flying school and applied for a contract from the U.S. Government to operate a Civilian Pilot Training program school. With this goal in mind, they purchased from Mr. Carl "Pappy" Knier, a small flying school operating out of Phoenix Sky Harbor Airport. Now in possession of a Civilian Pilot Training certificate issued by the government, *that just happened to come with the school*, they formed a Phoenix based corporation on Oct. 1, 1940, and named it Southwest Airways. They now bid for and won a U.S. Government contract to build a school and train Army pilots under the C.P.T. program. This flying school, which they named Thunderbird, was located near the town of Glendale Arizona. It is now the home of Thunderbird Graduate School of International Management. Next came a contract to build and operate Falcon Field and then Thunderbird No.2, which is now the present Scottsdale Municipal Airport. These were followed by contracts to set up and operate Sky Harbor Maintenance and Overhaul Division, and the Air Cargo Division in California to carry hi-priority military cargo between the west coast airfields.

Falcon Field Chronology of Events

1	Oct. 1, 1940	Connelly and Hayward buy flying school from Carl "Pappy" Knier and start Southwest Airways.
2	Mar. 22, 1941	Thunderbird No. 1 started to train Army pilots (Glendale)
3	June 12, 1941	Site approved by C.A.A. for a new airfield (Mesa)
4	June 19, 1941	First RAF class starts at Thunderbird (Glendale)
5	June 26, 1941	Mesa buys Habeeb property for \$28,740 (720 acres)
6	July 16, 1941	Ground breaking at new field (Mesa)
7	July 28, 1941	"Falcon" name approved by the British. Mesa City Engineer, E.B. Tucker, submitted this winning name in a contest sponsored by the Mesa City Chamber of Commerce.
8	Sept. 14, 1941	Falcon Field opens as No. 4 British Flying Training School (#4 BFTS)
9	Sept. 24, 1941	First 144 British cadets arrive from Thunderbird to continue flying training (Courses 1, 2, and 3)
10	Sept. 27, 1941	First PT-17 flight at Falcon,
11	June 22, 1942	Thunderbird No. 2 opens at Scottsdale
12	July 1, 1942	Overhaul Division opens at Sky Harbor for engine and airframe overhauls
13	Nov. 9, 1942	Cargo Division opens at San Bernardino, California
14	Nov. 16, 1942	First joint class of RAF and AAF cadets begins. (Course 13)
15	May 24, 1943	First AAF class graduates, No. 43 B-1 (with course 13)
16	June 22, 1944	Last AAF class graduates, No. 44 B-3 (with Course 19)
17	Sept. 11, 1945	Falcon field closes, Courses 26 and 27 were not completed and the cadets were returned to England.

After purchasing the land, by means of the sale of general obligation bonds, Mesa began the improvements in the utilities that were needed to create an airfield. A three-inch gas main was run to the field in late July and a water line to augment a 3,000-gallon well, which already existed were installed. A sewer line and 60-cycle electricity, supplied by the Salt River Valley Water Users Association were installed to complete the requirements for utilities. Construction of the hangars, tower, mess hall, clinic, and paving of ramps and other improvements was now undertaken. Southwest Airways, now under contract to the British, began hiring flight instructors, parachute riggers, ground school instructors, radio repairmen and all the other personnel needed to operate the field. Soon about 170 civilians and a small number of RAF and AAF officers were employed at Falcon Field, not counting approximately 75 instructors. Of interest also is that by 1944, 60 percent of the routine maintenance was being performed by women mechanics under the supervision of a licensed A&E mechanic (A&P). Most of this work was done on the night shift and included such jobs as cleaning and re-packing tail wheel bearings, cleaning and re-oiling air filters, greasing wheel "down locks" on AT-6's, cleaning and adjusting spark plugs and valve settings, and checking brakes and tires (tyres to the British). Dust was a constant problem at the field, requiring daily attention to bearings and especially propeller governors. The only paved runway initially was 4—22 and it was used mostly by the AT-6's. A parallel runway and three more grass runways were later added for cross wind landing safety. The grass parallel runway was use mostly by the Stearman's.

Most major overhauls were performed at the Sky Harbor facility, which was now called the Overhaul Division. They had the capacity to completely rebuild three engines and one air-frame from the ground up, each day.

Operations began under the Command of Squadron Leader (Major) R.S. Mills and Sq. Ldr. W.T. Holloway as the executive officer. Major Mills was very busy setting up the other schools and in his absence Sq. Ldr. Holloway became acting Commanding Officer. They started with less than the scheduled complement of 30 PT-17 Boeing Stearman's, 30 BT-13 Vultee Valiants (Vibrators), and 30 North American AT-6 Texans. The Vultee's were however soon discontinued as the British did not like the concept of basic, primary, and advanced training in three separate phases. They preferred to have primary and basic training combined as one phase and advanced as the second phase. They especially disliked the Vultee "Vibrator" because of its annoying habit of developing cracks in the wing spars skin and tail assemblies. It apparently came by its sobriquet "The Vultee Vibrator" quite honestly.

The first three courses (classes) of cadets started their training at Thunderbird No.1 in Glendale and were transferred to Falcon when it opened in September of 1941. Course No.4 was the first class to start and finish at Falcon Field. There were 27 courses all together, although the last 2 classes did not complete the 28-week training schedule as the war had ended and they were returned to England.

American cadets were included with the British beginning with course number 13 and continuing through course 19 and they followed the British syllabus of training. They were co-mingled with the British cadets alphabetically in the barracks with no attempt to segregate them. The American cadets were subject to British rules and The King's Regulations in every aspect except as pertained to violations of U.S. military code and civil statutes. At the graduation of their last class, course 19 (AAF 44 B-3), on June 17, 1944, 116 American cadets had graduated as Second Lieutenants. Two American cadets had died while training at Falcon Field. One, together with an RAF cadet, in the crash of an AT-6, and the other of natural causes. The British graduated just under 1400 cadets and during the four years of training, 23 died in training accidents. The British cadets are all buried in the Mesa Cemetery,

The cadet barracks consisted of four "L" shaped buildings with an open quadrangle in the center (centre to the British). This was later to be the location of the swimming pool donated by the film company Twentieth Century Fox for the help filming the motion picture "Thunderbirds." The four buildings would accommodate 200 cadets, 50 to each building. The rooms were very Spartan and were furnished with G.I. beds, chairs, and tables. The showers and toilets were located at the intersection of the two wings forming each "L." To cope with the summer heat, the buildings were equipped with the latest thing in comfort and technology "Swamp Coolers," and gas heat in the winter. Two additional barracks buildings were added in May of 1943 to increase the capacity of cadets to 300.

Upon graduation, American cadets were awarded two sets of wings, one British and one American, and graduated as Second Lieutenants. The RAF wings were cloth and were worn over the right breast pocket. The AAF wings were Sterling Silver and were worn over the left breast pocket.

This was later to become a minor sore point with the British cadets as most of them graduated as Sergeant Pilots. Because of the class system in existence in England at the time, only a few pre-selected cadets would graduate as Pilot Officers (2nd. Lieutenants) and the rest would become Sergeant pilots, at a lower rate of pay and less chance of promotion. This however, was not an inflexible rule, and the base commander probably had the last word. The cadets chosen to graduate as Pilot Officers were generally from the ranks of the

upper classes, university students, Air College schools and professional people, even including a few policemen. A board of officers, prior to training, reviewed them and approved them as suitable to become officers. All too often however very low grades or poor flying performance was not considered. Before being sent to the United States, (by way of Moncton, Canada), they were given 8 to 10 hours training in de Havilland Tiger Moth trainers. This took place at an Initial Training Wing, (I.T.W.), to test their suitability to become pilots

The maintenance of all aircraft at Falcon was under the supervision of a Chicago born pilot and A&E mechanic, Mr. Joe Wischler. Joe had as many as 125 mechanics to service, repair, and clean the aircraft and keep them airworthy and ready for flying every morning. There were separate crews and foremen for each type of plane and performed the maintenance work under the control of a licensed A&E mechanic. Hangar number 1, on the east side of the ramp, was the AT-6 hangar, and number 2 hangar on the West was the PT-17 hangar. By 1944, fully 60% of the maintenance personnel were women, working under the direction of a fully qualified mechanic. With a complement of up to 72 AT-6's and 35 PT-17's to service, they worked three shifts each day. Most of the routine checking and cleaning had to be performed at night so the planes would be ready each morning for the fearless young aviators. In addition to routine service, they also had to retrieve all the "pranged" aircraft the cadets left scattered around the desert. Minor repairs were made in the shops at Falcon, but things like engine re-building and major structure repairs were sent to the Overhaul Division at Sky Harbor. For the most part, only the Stearman's Continental R-670 engines and airframe were rebuilt at the Sky Harbor Overhaul Division. An average of three engines and one complete airframe were turned out each day.

Falcon Field was used for the filming of two major Hollywood motion pictures: "*Thunderbirds*," released in 1942 starring Gene Tierney, Preston Foster, Jack Holt, John Sutton, and Reginald Denny. "*Journey Together*," was released in 1946 and starred Edward G. Robinson and Richard Attenborough. After the filming of "*Thunderbirds*," 20th Century Fox donated money to build a swimming pool, and its construction began in July 1942. This pool still exists in the park in front of the Champlin Fighter Aircraft Museum. Mesa has created a memorial to Falcon Field in this park, using as its centerpiece, the chimney from the cadet lounge, which still exists.

On the Sunday night of February 21, 1943, a fire broke out in hangar number one and caused damage estimated at \$20,000. Most of the damage was confined to the East hangar including the instructor's locker room and crew room. About 100 parachutes were also destroyed. Less spectacular however were the destruction of all the flight grade books and the individual flight progress records of one section of students. One must wonder at the thoughts going through the minds of the cadets as they watched their "report cards" going up in smoke. Before the fire department arrived, the cadets helped roll all the aircraft and some heavy construction equipment out of the hangar to save them from also being destroyed. This was the second fire to break out at a Southwest Airways facility in eight days although arson or sabotage was not considered the cause. The first fire was at Thunderbird One and caused damage estimated to be \$75,000.

The cadets had Saturday afternoon and all day Sunday off, and for the most part, they headed into Mesa, Phoenix and Tempe to enjoy the sights. Some of the sights wore skirts. Mesa at this time had a population of about 7,500 and Phoenix 65,000. Another very popular recreation for the cadets was to be taken into the homes of local citizens for the weekends. These very lonesome and homesick young boys were very happy to be treated like one of the

family by these generous people. Indeed, several of the cadets married local Mesa girls, although this was done in secret as it was very definitely against military regulations. The cadets were treated to parties, dances, picnics, movies, swimming, and soccer games. Some cadets even tried their hand at picking cotton one summer. At the end of their primary training, they were given a short leave of ten days and the most popular destination was Hollywood, followed by the Grand Canyon. To get to these and other locations however, they had to rely mostly on hitchhiking, although in those days' motorists would pick up servicemen quite readily. A free bus service was provided to downtown Mesa and Phoenix for the cadets by Southwest Airways.

Life was generally agreeable for the cadets except those who arrived in the summer wearing their blue wool uniforms. These were soon replaced with khaki ones, more suited to the 110-degree summer temperatures. Their training syllabus called for four hours a day on the flight line, which included one hour of flying and the rest in general aircraft procedures. Night flying was emphasized a great deal as was cross country flying. In their cross countries, they started out slowly going to only one destination and returned. Soon however, they were going on two day flights that could cover six or eight landings at different airports. The bases that they flew to were as far away as Hondo, (San Antonio), Marfa, (Midland) Texas and Yuma, Arizona. Ground school occupied the other four hours. Four students were usually assigned to each instructor who taught the complete *primary* or *basic* course and they usually soloed after four and one-half hours. This would then be followed by an additional 75 hours divided equally into solo and dual time. Night flying was also taught by the same instructor who just switched the day flying to night flying. Aerobatics and formation flying were taught in both aircraft, but formation flying was soon discontinued in the Stearman as it proved to be unsuitable for in-experienced cadets. Unlike the Americans, the British did not teach pylon eights, Cuban eights or "s" turns across a road as they considered them un-necessary for combat pilot training.

The cadets put in a 12-hour day beginning at 5:30 AM, with flying starting at 7:00 AM. They had a one hour break in the afternoon and were graded each day on their flying performance and ground school work. By 1945 the average combined number of hours had increased from the original 160 to about 210. They also received 5 hours of Link training time. Falcon Field was the only school in Arizona to train British cadets.

The aircraft used at Falcon were painted yellow and blue, and had the letters BP painted in 2-foot characters, in black, on the blue fuselage sides to signify the *British Program*. The rudders were painted in alternating red and white horizontal stripes. They also had an identification number after the BP, *example BP 13 or BP 144*. The Army Air Force, whose airplanes were painted all silver, did not use this marking system. Gradually, as the demands of war diminished, the blue and yellow gave way to all silver as more and more rebuilt parts were added to the aircraft. The British BP was however retained until the base was closed.

Parachute training at Falcon was the responsibility of one man alone. This man was Marty Birdman, and he worked at Falcon for over three years as their parachute rigger. In addition to inspecting and re-packing the chutes every sixty days, Marty also instructed the cadets in the proper method of bailing out and controlling the chute on the ground. He would open a chute on a ramp when there was sufficient wind and put the cadets in the harness so they could learn how to control it. Every ten days he would inspect the safety wire on the rip cords and if there were minor tears in the chutes, he would sew them. A drying rack was located in the overhead area of hangar number one and any chutes that were wet had to be dried by hoisting them up to the hot overhead area. On at least five occasions the chutes were used as a necessity and not as training. These five cadets or instructors took to their parachutes to save their lives when they lost control of their ships. In one mid air collision, the

instructor, David Thiele, was thrown clear of the ship but the cadet in the front seat of the AT-6 was killed. These kinds of accidents brought home the importance of the work of the parachute rigger. Early after the school opened in 1941, an unfortunate cadet who jumped from his stricken plane at too low an altitude for his chute to open, was killed.

As with all military operations, there were to be some casualties. In the 25 classes that graduate from Falcon, there were 23 RAF cadets, 2 American cadets, and 4 instructors who lost their lives in training accidents. All of the British cadets are buried in the Mesa Cemetery and the two American cadet and four instructor bodies were returned to their home states. On eight separate occasions, there were crashes that took the lives of two pilots, either two cadets or a cadet and an instructor. The last crash occurred on November 27, 1944 when RAF cadet Peter Mitson and instructor Don Walker were killed.

When the school closed down in November of 1945, the 173 remaining RAF cadets still in training, in courses 26 and 27, were shipped back to England. A total of 116 Army Air Corps and approximately 1400 Royal Air Force cadets were graduated by the time the school had closed down, after four years of operation.

Falcon Field was sold back to the city of Mesa by the Defense Plant Administration, after the war for a token price of one dollar. It lay almost abandoned for about twenty years before Mesa began gradually to improve its infrastructure with new hangars, runways, ramps and a new control tower.

Today Falcon Field is the municipal airport for the city of Mesa and is one of the busiest airports in South West Arizona. Falcon Field is also the home of the Champlin Fighter Aircraft Museum who display their fighter aircraft collection in the two original hangars, built to train Royal Air Force cadets those many years ago.

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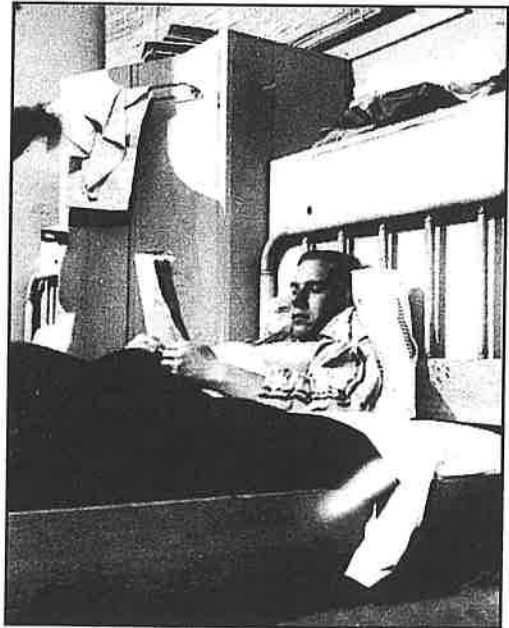
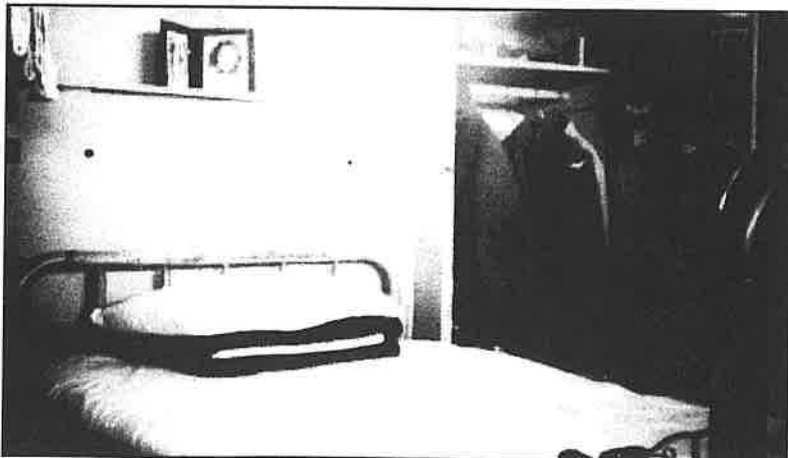
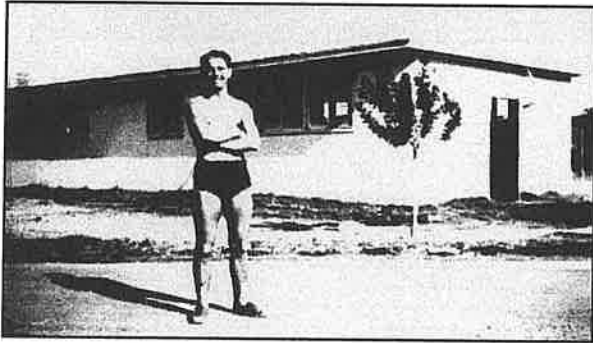
T-6 flight line looking North with Red Mountain in the background, the British however called it by its correct name, McDowell Peak



Women mechanic's work on T-6's on ramp in front of hangar No. 1
Notice Falcon emblem on hangar overhead face



RAF cadet Dick Cooper, course 24, on T-6 wing and in swim suit (below) outside new barracks



Typical bunk beds in Falcon Field barracks



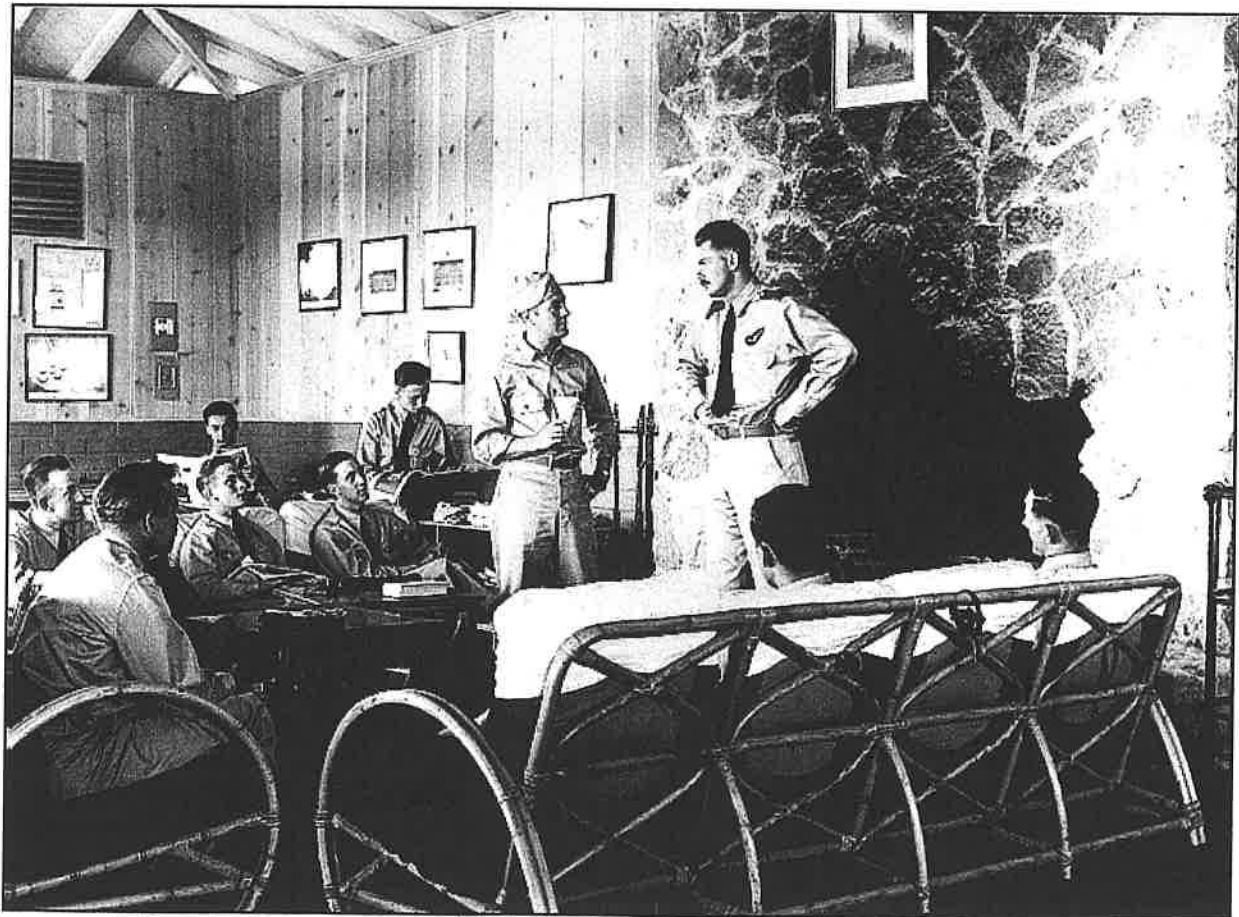
Course 18 advanced cadets and their instructors



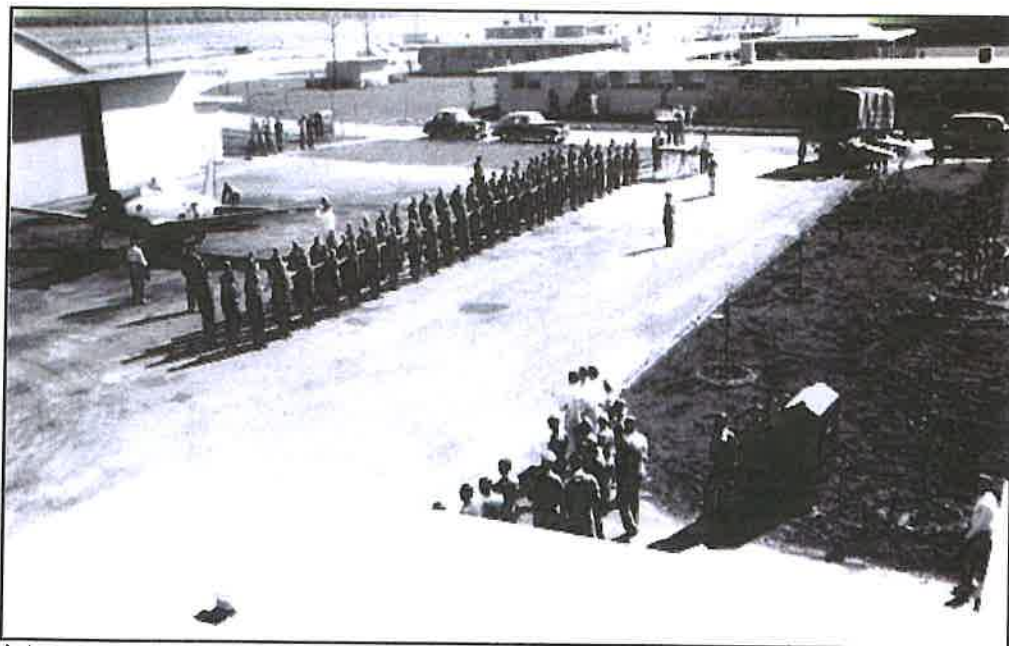
Army Air Corps cadet wearing both RAF and AAF wings



RAF Course 24 and their instructor's



Cadet lounge, the fireplace still exists in the park in front of Champlin Fighter Aircraft Museum



Cadets march past hangar No.1 on the East side of the tower, cadet barracks in background



Course 12 cadets departing from Mesa train station



Falcon Field sign on McKellips Road



WAC photographer takes photos at main gate



A truck load of fuel arrives at main gate



Some cadet's handiwork, a Vultee BT-13 "Vibrator"



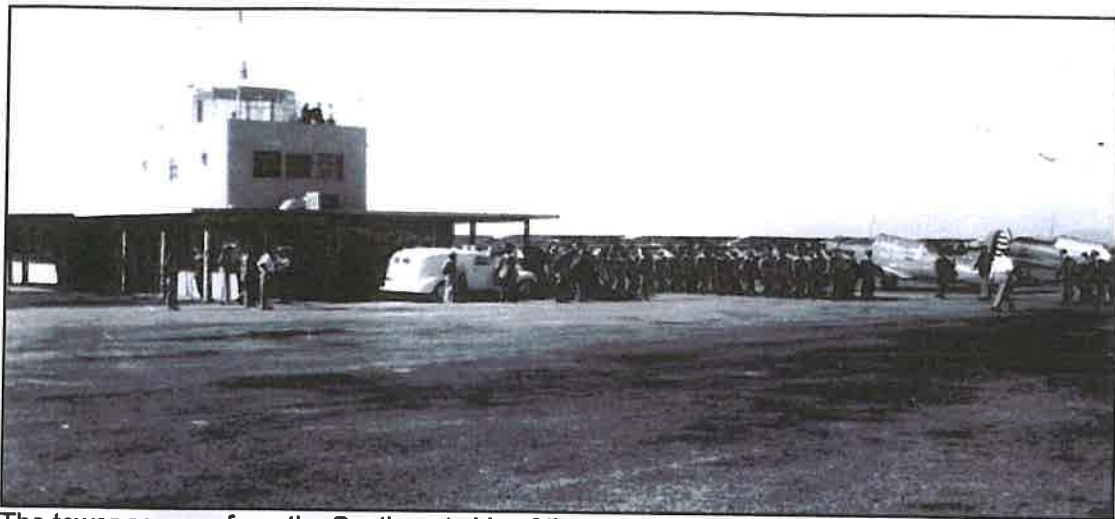
Wing Commander John F. McKenna, Commanding Officer, 6- 42 to 6- 44, and his Yellow 1938 LaSalle Coupe



Actors, Ralph Bellamy, Preston Foster and Bill Marsh



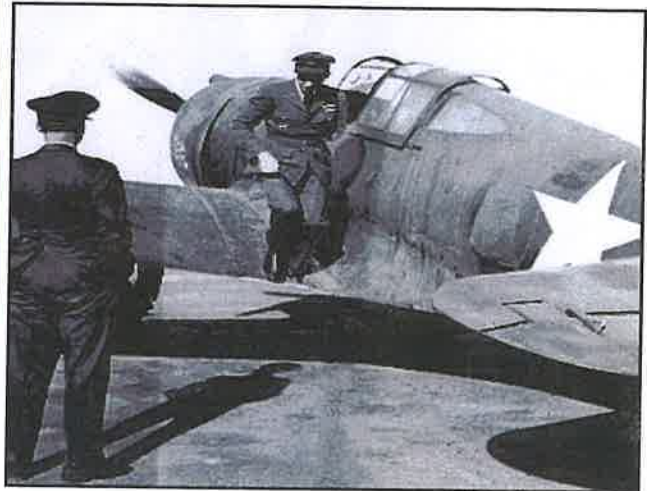
SWA office staff uniforms didn't last very long



The tower as seen from the Southeast side of the ramp, note white Ford ambulance which was initially provided by Southwest Airlines, later taken over by the Army Air Corps.



Instructor David Thiele dons parachute



One armed RAF Ace, Sq. Ldr. James MacLachlan, (16.5 aerial victories,) put on an aerial demonstration in February of 1943 in this Curtiss P-36 Hawk



Cadets enjoy the pool, control tower in background



A real flying cadet cools off, hangar No.1 in background



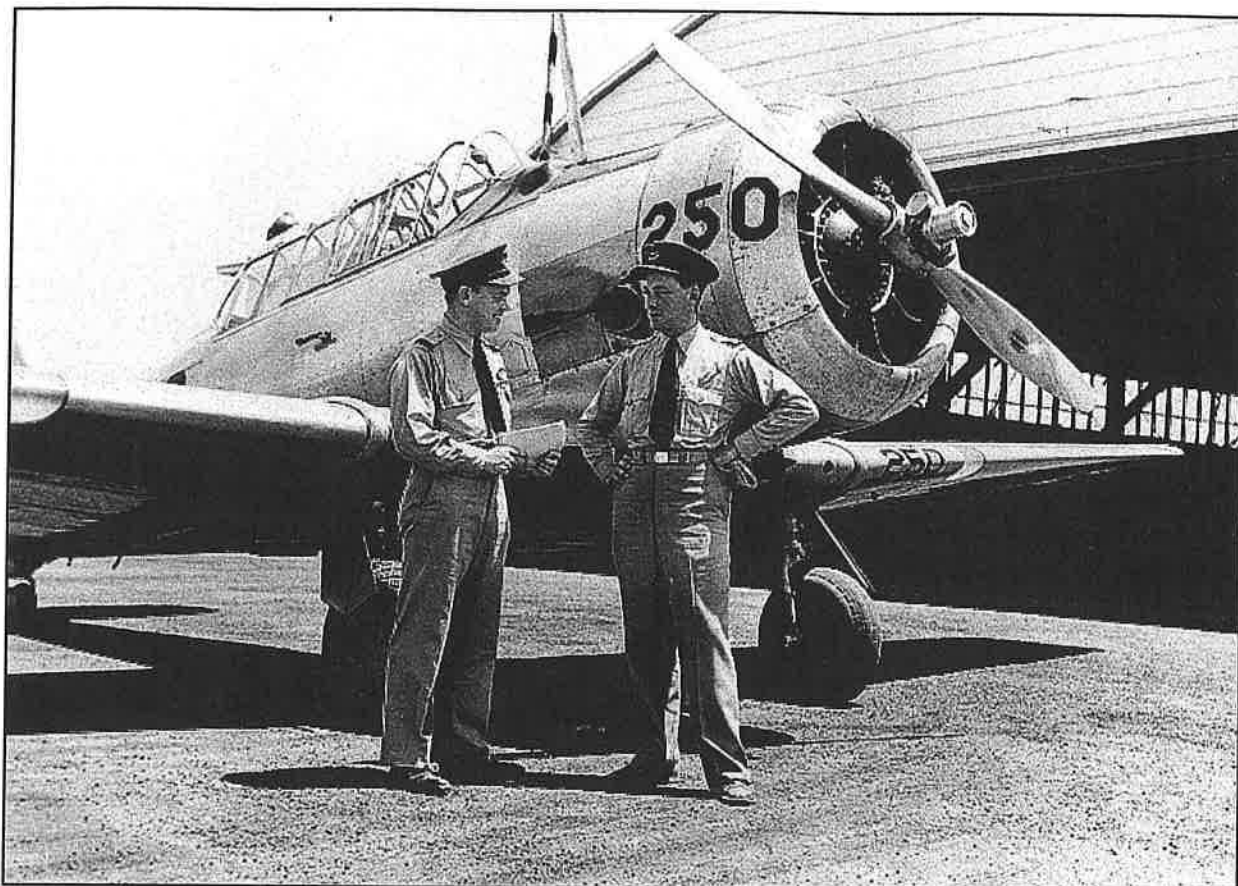
Washing the PT-17's for the next days flying



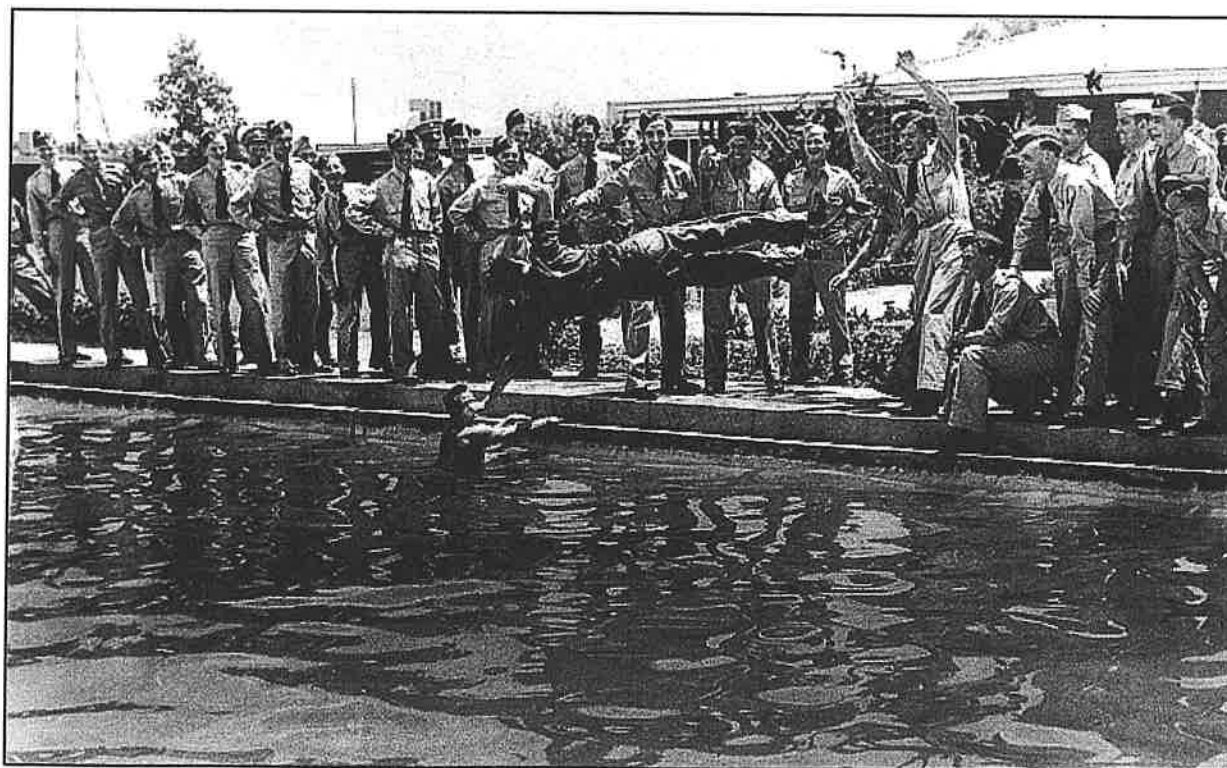
Ground crew wind up the inertia starter that cranks the engine



Cadets practicing ground handle of their parachutes



RAF Officers Geoffrey Faulkner and Laurie Turner



Beginning with course 12, the first cadet to "Solo" in each course got rewarded with a dunking in the pool