

Source: “British Honor Fallen Soldiers from Falcon Field” from *The Mesa Republic* (published November 21, 2007). http://www.azcentral.com/news/articles/1121mr-Britishvets1121.html?nclick_check=1

A short but notable slice of the city's history is remembered each November at the Mesa City Cemetery where 23 Royal Air Force pilots from England are remembered for the sacrifice they made during World War II.

The Mesa-England connection was forged in 1941, when, after sensitive international negotiations, Falcon Field was born. The purpose: Use Mesa's good weather to quickly train British pilots and send them back Europe to battle Hitler's Nazis. The pilots, many of them 18 to 20 years old, were sent by ship to the United States and put on trains for Mesa. They received 70 hours of in-flight training that included night landings between two rows of flares about 450 yards long and 100 yards apart, according to historian Jim Dawson. About 2,000 RAF pilots were trained in Mesa over four years.

Accidents were common, and training was extended to 130 hours. The job was dangerous, with 326 Falcon Field cadets known to have perished in the war. Many others didn't make it that far, There were 28 fatalities at Falcon Field, including 24 RAF cadets and one American RAF cadet.

All but one of the British cadets are buried at the Mesa City Cemetery in an area that includes a monument with their names. They are remembered each November by the Daughters of the British Empire. This year's ceremony was Nov. 11, and included a flyover, bagpipes, a 21-gun salute and Hank Marshall, the honorary British Consul for Arizona.

Included in this year's ceremony was a nearly 100-year-old poem by British poet Rupert Brooke, which read in part:

*If I should die, think only this of me:
That there's some corner of a foreign field
That is forever England . . .*

Source:

“Falcon Field Unit Praised.” The Arizona Republic Newspaper Date: February 20, 1943

“Falcon Field graduated another class of Royal Air Force cadets yesterday, and already they're on their way to England. ... American and British cadets are training side by side at Falcon Field, he said "this sharing of schools, of instructors and of airplanes is getting together on the common job and the common purpose."

[...]

He said it was important, not only that British cadets could train here, so far from home, yet enjoying the home life of friends and allies, [uninterrupted] by the enemy, but it also was important "that you can train here free from interference by the weather."

Source: Article: Falcon Field celebrates 70 years by Art Thomason. The Arizona Republic Newspaper. Date: Mar. 31, 2011

[From http://www.azcentral.com/community/mesa/articles/2011/03/30/20110330mesa-falcon-field0401.html?nclick_check=1#ixzz2KWWGAAtW]

Falcon Field Airport's 70th anniversary will be celebrated Saturday with an open house at the northeast Mesa airport. The airport, which was developed to train pilots for America's eventual involvement in World War II, is now one of the busiest general-aviation airports in the nation. The celebration, from 9 a.m. to 3 p.m., will highlight the vital role that the airport and surrounding businesses play in the city's economy and jobs growth.

"For the third year in a row, the open house provides us an opportunity to showcase the importance of this community asset and to commemorate Falcon Field's 70th anniversary," said airport Director Corinne Nystrom.

"Falcon Field is a prime example of how a pilot training base can evolve to become a thriving [city] airport," said Mesa Mayor Scott Smith. "The solid foundation built by the military has made Falcon Field an aviation asset for the entire region. The airport has a great legacy in Mesa spanning 70 years with a promising future as Mesa's aviation industry continues to grow."

"The Falcon Field Open House is an opportunity for residents to visit one of the city's celebrated transportation assets," District 5 Councilwoman Dina Higgins said.

Vocabulary for this source:

Aviation = Related to flying

Asset = Valuable possession

Source: “The Day Mesa Took Flight: July 16, 1941” by Jim Ripley, contributing columnist from *The East Valley Tribune Online* (published March 17, 2011).

[From http://www.eastvalleytribune.com/columns/article_053c3942-50e3-11e0-8c9a-001cc4c002e0.html]

My Mesa Takes Flight sub-committee assignment is to write a narrative about events that took place 70 years ago - events that **changed everything in what we now know as the East Valley.**

... What began as the Mesa Military Airport soon became Williams Field, then Williams Air Force Base and today is the location of the Phoenix-Mesa Gateway Airport complex and Arizona State Polytechnic in southeast Mesa. It is **the heart of an economic development area that Mesa** and the neighboring [cities] of Gilbert and Queen Creek believe will someday employ 100,000 people.

[This is also the time when they began building the] training field for Royal Air Force pilots. What began as British Flying Training School No. 4 soon became known as Falcon Field. **Today Falcon Field is one of the nation's busiest general aviation airports and is also a hub of economic development in northeast Mesa.** With groundbreaking at both air fields on the same day, it does not take a flight of imagination to identify July 16, 1941, as the day that **Mesa entered the age of aviation.**

... our local age of aviation began when Mesa was a town of a mere 7,200 people. Chandler, which played a major role in the development of Williams Field during World War II, claimed only about 2,000 people. And neighboring Gilbert was a speck.

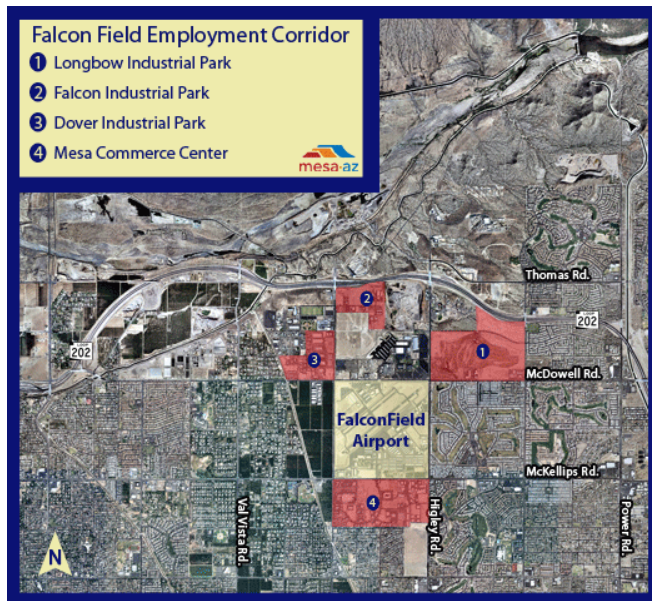
[...]

the small town of Mesa had the vision, bought the land and made the pitch [to build a training field]. And what they did changed everything. The United Kingdom's first pick for an airfield was on the Salt River Indian Community. But when negotiations faltered, Mesa stepped up having purchased 720 acres from an orange grower northeast of town. On June 10, 1941, British authorities announced they had selected Mesa as the site for training field number four.

[...]

The Mesa Journal-Tribune's story on the twin groundbreakings didn't hold back. "Mesa's Baby," the newspaper trumpeted. But it wasn't just "Mesa's Baby." An exhibit at the Chandler Historical Museum says that jobs at **Williams Field brought Chandler out of the Great Depression.**

Source that explains what it is today: *Falcon Field Employment Center, Official Website of Mesa, Arizona.*
Accessed January, 2013.



A thriving airport, convenient freeway access, existing aerospace and technology companies, surrounded by executive and affordable housing communities, combined with land development and building availability create the perfect location for companies to locate and prosper- the Falcon Field Business Center. Mesa's Falcon Field Airport serves as the economic catalyst for the Falcon Field Employment Center.

In 2011, Falcon Field was the 5th busiest general aviation airport in the country and had over 750 based aircraft. More than 105 businesses call Falcon Field home, and they **employ over 1,000 people**. More than **13,000 people are employed by businesses in the off-airport Falcon Field employment area**. Each year over **\$2.3 billion** is contributed to the local economy by the airport and its businesses. It is truly an economic engine for the community.

An impressive group of major employers representing the aerospace/aviation, high-tech, manufacturing and software industry clusters are located in this employment center. Boeing's Apache

Helicopter facility is the largest company in the area employing more than 4,700. Located within the Falcon Field Employment Center are more than ten industrial/office parks with both land and building availability for development and occupancy. The Red Mountain Freeway (Loop 202) provides access to a growing population of more than 1.5 million residents within a 30-minute drive.

Vocab:

Catalyst = the spark, the reason something started

Source: “Mesa History: World War II to Present” by from *Mesa Historical Museum Online*. Written by Sarah Zafra, et al. from the Mesa Historical Society. Revised February 2000. Accessed 1/15/13.
<http://www.mesamuseum.org/mesa-history>

Falcon Field Airport and Williams Air Force Base were built in 1941 to provide training for World War II pilots, Falcon Field for the British Royal Air Force and Williams for U.S. pilots. After the war, many military families, including that of John J Rhodes, later minority leader of the U.S. House of Representatives, decided to settle in Mesa. Air conditioning came into more common use and tourism also began as a major force in the late 1940's. The decade of the 1950's brought more commerce and industry to Mesa, including early aerospace companies. However, until 1960 more than 50 percent of the residents earned their living directly or indirectly from farming, mainly citrus and cotton.

Source: Video Transcript of “Arizona Stories: Falcon Field” from *PBS Arizona Collection*. Accessed November 10, 2012. <http://www.azpbs.org/arizonastories/ppdetail.php?id=20>



Falcon Field In the forties, British and American pilots came together in an important part of both nations' histories at Falcon Field in Mesa. They were part of the Empire Air Training Scheme to train new pilots to fight the Luftwaffe. Today, Falcon Field is still an operating airport. Former Falcon Field pilots reminisce and pay tribute to their fallen brothers.

Narrator: Before the United States had entered the war, the British were desperate to train new pilots. What the United States did for Britain was to participate in the empire air training scheme.

Bill McCash (British): We didn't have the weather. We didn't have the air bases. We didn't have the airplanes. We didn't have the gasoline, of course, for it, and there always the chance of being shot down. General Hap Arnold came across just after the Battle of Britain and offered bases at the American schools, and the idea came up... It was exceptionally important that we got pilots from every source we possibly could because the death toll was pretty high in the early days, as you can imagine.

Narrator: British pilots began training in the Sonoran Desert at Falcon Field in 1941.

Ken Beeby (British): We arrived at the Mesa station, my course did, in August in 1942, and when those doors opened on the train, it was like walking into a wall of fire. And there were two Mesa school buses parked outside that had been there for a couple of hours, and we all had R.A.F. Uniform on, about half-an-inch- thick wool, and by the time we got to Falcon Field six miles away, we'd all lost 10 pounds.

Tom Austin (British): I can't speak highly enough of the local population, how they accepted us. I mean, when we actually arrived, on the first Saturday that we were allowed out, we had exactly -- 200 cars came to the main gate to request us to join them for the weekend.

Narrator: Most of the aircraft maintenance was done at night and frequently by women, who played a large role in Falcon Field's success. Today, Falcon Field Airport is home for nearly 1,000 aircraft and multiple businesses. Here at Falcon Field Park, very little remains of the site where the R.A.F. cadets lived and trained. The swimming pool was used in an initiation ritual.

Narrator: ...The training at Falcon Field helped defeat the nazis in World War II. It also formed a bond between American and English pilots and a bond between these British men and the Mesa community. That relationship continues to this day, reflected perhaps most poignantly in the annual ceremony honoring the fallen pilots. On this day in this cemetery, the pilots have, in a way, come home, for there will always be a small but significant piece of British history in the heart of the city of Mesa.

Source: "The Economic Impact of Aviation in Arizona," Arizona Department of Transportation Aeronautics Divisions, Arizona State University, College of Business. Accessed 2/10/13. <http://azmemory.azlibrary.gov/cdm/singleitem/collection/statepubs/id/7046/rec/20>

Aviation is vital to the Arizona economy. Air travel and airports play the same role today as ships and seaports or trains and railways in by-gone years. Just as seaports formed the first settlements in America and railroads opened the West, airports now provide the essential linkages for Arizona's people and commerce to connect with the world. In the future as in the past, Arizona's economy rides the wings of aviation.

Arizona's economic growth in the past decade consistently ranks the state among the nation's leaders in new residents and job creation. Population in 1990s increased by more than one third and employment increased by a striking 42 percent. Combined passenger enplanements at Phoenix Sky Harbor and Tucson International airports increased by 46 percent in the same period.

If the economy can be thought of as a machine that produces goods and services, then aviation is the lubricant that makes the gears turn in the Grand Canyon State.

Aviation and airports move more than just people and cargo for business or personal travel.

Suppliers of aviation goods and services create jobs and income in their own right, on airports and in the cities and towns across the state. For example, airlines now employ more than twice as many persons as copper mining, historically a fundamental Arizona economic sector, and aviation-related jobs in the state outnumber those in the construction industry.

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Aviation's importance in the dynamic growth of Arizona in the second half of the 20th Century is unquestioned. But, growth is a "two-edged sword"; it produces economic development, but it is not sustainable without maintenance of the infrastructure and enhancement of the system to meet future needs. We must insure that resources are made available to the system so it

can continue to grow and contribute to the State's economy. It is estimated that more dollars will be needed to just maintain the present system than projected income from all the current revenue sources. Now, as we look toward the new millennium, it is essential that private and public stakeholders in Arizona's future provide for the infrastructure and develop aviation policies that will keep Arizona at the forefront of global economic development.

General Aviation Fuels Arizona's Economic Development



Arizona has over 5,000 general aviation aircraft used by corporate, government, tribal and private pilots for travel across the state and throughout the nation. Arizona, 21st in population size, ranks 11th among all

states in number of private pilots and registered general aviation aircraft.

General aviation aircraft are used for business and recreational travel. Arizona records more than three million general aviation operations (take offs and landings) each year.

Over 10,500 Arizona workers have jobs directly related to general aviation. Economic activity from general aviation aircraft owners and general aviation airports was nearly \$1 billion in 1998. After allowing for multiplier effects, the total impact of general aviation was \$1.5 billion.

Arizona's Future Rides on Aviation

Economic development in Arizona depends on aviation. Suppliers of aviation services move cargo and passengers in and out of the state and around the globe. The state's position as a leader in job creation and population gains is linked to continued expansion of the reach of Arizona commerce.

While Arizona's population is forecast to increase 20% by the year 2010, passenger traffic at Arizona airports is projected to rise by more than 70%.

The total impact of aviation on the state will exceed \$40 billion by 2010 with over 650,000 jobs linked in some way to the supply or use of aviation services.

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Source: "Falcon Field Beginnings" from *AAHS Journal - American Aviation Historical Society, Volume 30, p. 175 (published 1985)*.

In 1940 the British were in serious trouble with regard to training new pilots. They didn't have enough fields which were suitable, enough airplanes or enough fuel to mount the huge training program necessary to maintain the continued strength of the RAF. In addition to this, English weather was definitely not conducive to an efficient training program.

In order to solve this dilemma, the "Empire Air Training Scheme" was devised.

[...]

Construction was started soon after and flying operations began among much confusion on September 14, 1941.

[...]

Most of the maintenance was performed at night, with swing shift starting around 5:00 p.m. A good part of the maintenance crews were women, about 60 percent. The same endless chores of valve adjusting, plug changing, oil, brakes, tires and repairing damage took place night after night. Many women were utilized as specialists in the nightly maintenance program. It was found that a woman who had never seen an airplane before could be trained to perform one specific job on the airplane. For instance, one would clean and grease all the tail wheel bearings and tail gear throw-out clutches. Another would go from one aircraft to the next removing the "air maze" filter, cleaning, oiling, then reinstalling it. Still another removed the plates, cleaned and oiled the landing gear down-lock latches on the AT-6. It was no real problem to take a woman out of the cotton fields or kitchen and teach her to do one specific thing every night. That's all she did and all it required was someone to come along behind to check the safe tying, etc. It really worked quite efficiently. By morning all the aircraft were repaired, washed, oiled, fueled and ready for another day of flying.

The British students had gone through a lot and come a long way to be where they were ... taking flight training in Arizona. It all started in England where about 1500 potential cadets were being called up weekly.

To an English, Scottish or Welsh youth who had been selected for flight training in a flying school in far-off Arizona, this was high adventure. After an ocean voyage to Canada, five or six days on a train got the group of cadets to the Arizona desert, which to them must have seemed like the end of the world. The time away from England and back usually took about nine months. Operational training was usually taken on return to the British Isles.

The British boys took well to the Southwest style of living. They loved the unaccustomed abundance of food, which was available to them. Ice cream, malts and cokes (many preferred to drink them warm, much to the disgust of the Americans) were consumed in huge quantities. In Britain, one egg a week was the norm, with six days taken to decide whether to fry, boil, scramble or poach it. In the states there was no rationing of any kind. They also learned to drink American beer and even bourbon whisky.

The families of Mesa, Tempe, Scottsdale and Phoenix took the British to their hearts. They took them into their homes and treated them like family. Organized by the squadron adjutant, the individual members of each class were "adopted" by Arizona families during their stay. When they went back to England, the next class was likewise distributed among willing Arizona families. Every boy was assured of a place to have Sunday dinner and a source of clean laundry. When, four years later, it was all over, the British Embassy made a special point to express their gratitude to the people of Arizona.

[...]

There were fatal accidents at Falcon. Twenty-three cadets are buried in Mesa Cemetery testifying to the ultimate sacrifice some were called upon to make." One of the first was caused in a "go around" when the student raised the flaps instead of the gear. That was when American ground crews found out that the big fur collar on the RAF flight jacket burned like a torch.

[...]

It goes without saying the adventures and misadventures in the training of thousands of cadets are myriad. Falcon Field had its share, but the operation as a whole worked remarkably well. From September 1941 until November 1945 many hundreds of RAF and American cadets received their wings at Falcon.

CONCLUSION

Falcon Field closed in November 1945. The field was turned over to the city of Mesa for one dollar. Thunderbird II had closed earlier in October 1944 and Thunderbird I had closed in June 1945. Southwest Airway had embarked upon a mighty effort and it had been an unqualified success. From a small training operation at a sleepy little airport, it had grown to a vast training complex with four fields. Records indicate that over 20,000 fliers had been graduated from the fields and they had flown over a million-and-a-quarter training hours. In addition, the engine and airframe overhaul facility also had been extremely successful, making the whole operation work by providing the hardware where and when it was needed. It took a lot of effort to provide backup for almost 500 aircraft.

Statistics really only tell part of the story...over a million flight hours, almost five million landings and takeoffs, twenty million gallons of gas burned and all those cadets trained to be pilots. The whole thing had been accomplished with flair, style and imagination. Morale, efficiency and motivation had never been found wanting. The results achieved were far and away in excess of anything the Air Force had originally envisioned.

Source: *The Falcon Field Story: No. 4 BFTS and No. 3044 AAF Base Unit: Mesa Arizona, 1941 to 1945* by **Larry J. Simmons.** (No publication date. Purchased from Commemorative Air Force Museum November, 2012).

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 is itself was to create a major housing shortage in the Valley because the rapid growth of the many other military bases around the Salt River Valley.

[...]

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% of the routine maintenance was being performed by women mechanics under the supervision of a licensed A&E mechanic. Most of this work was done on the night shift...

[...]

Falcon Field was used for the filming of two major Hollywood motion pictures: *Thunder Birds* 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 filing of *Thunder Birds*, 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's flying school in this park, using as its centerpiece, the chimney for the cadet lounge, which still exists.

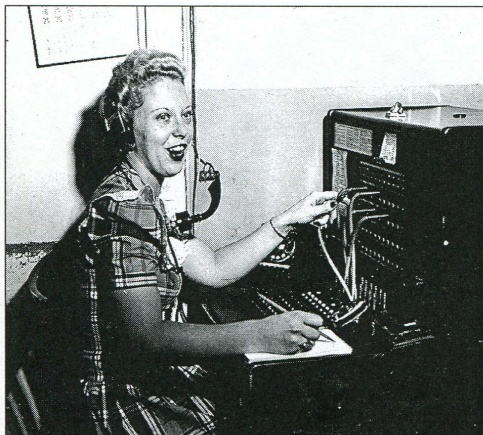
[...]

The cadets had Saturday afternoon and all 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 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.

Falcon Field was the only school in Arizona to train British cadets.

[...]

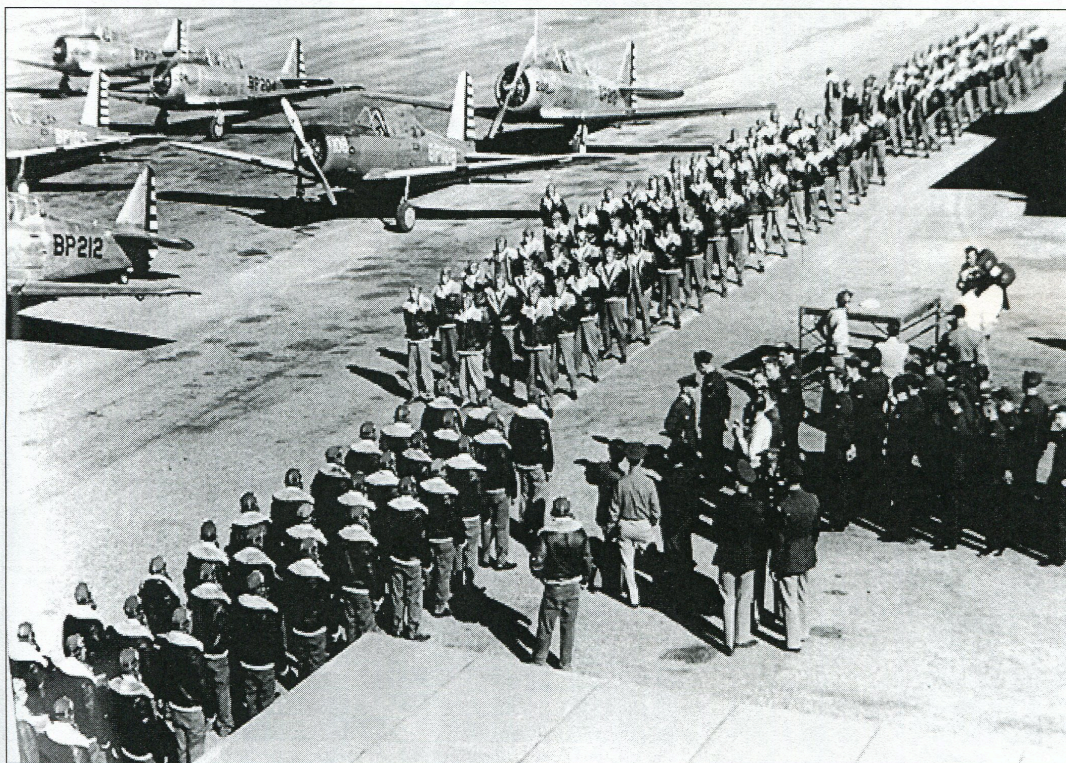
Falcon Field was sold back to the city of Mesa by the Defense Plant Administration after the war for the token price of one dollar. It lay little used and almost abandoned for about twenty years before Mesa began to gradually improve its infrastructure with new hangers, runways, ramps and a new control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



Switchboard operator Delilah Romaine



Some of the SWA ground "cranking" crew. Notice that three men in the back row, on right, are Pima Indians



Cadets in winter flying jackets, march in parade for the filming of motion picture "The Thunder Birds". Notice the three rows of aircraft with Vultee "Vibrators" in second row and North American AT-6's, in the other two rows. Notice camera crew at the right center of photo.

Source: *Images of America: Mesa* by Anderson, Jung, Smith and Wilson (published 2008).

Although the people of Mesa faced rationing and other wartime restrictions, the local economy showed signs of recovery from the Great Depression. Feeding and clothing the millions of service personnel involved in the war required an enormous amount of food, cotton, and wool. Agricultural industries boomed during the war years as Mesa's farmers worked to produce enough crops for local and national needs. The thousands of airmen stationed at Falcon and Williams Fields impacted the local scene in other ways as well. The sudden influx of servicemen and the rationing of goods and services strained the housing market. Housing was so scarce that the federal government built housing projects like Escobedo to help alleviate the shortage.

[...]

The city bought the land for Falcon Field in June 1940 and leased it to a civilian company, Southwest Airways, to build and operate the No. 4 British Flying and Training School. The first 150 British Royal Air Force (RAF) cadet arrived at Falcon Field in early 1940. The airfield was named after the bird of prey that has historically represented the courageous spirit of the British people. Because America was still officially a neutral country, the airmen could not wear their uniforms off the base. More than 2,000 cadets, the majority of which were British, trained at the base during the war. Chinese and American pilots also trained at Falcon Field because of the additional navigational training provided. The cadets spent 300,000 hours in the air and flew more than 45 million miles. Twenty-four RAF cadets, one American pilot, and three instructors were killed during training. The British cadets are buried at the Mesa City Cemetery.

[...]

Following World War II, the economy of Mesa underwent a profound change. As the country demobilized and began to return to a sense of normalcy, a series of changes began that would transform Mesa from a rural farming community into a city of close to half a million people. ... The population of Mesa and the Valley began to swell as soldiers who had been stationed there during the war decided to settle here.

Source: *Images of America: Falcon Field* by Daryl F. Mallet and Connie Gullatt-Whiteman (published 2009).

Introduction:

"...this lonely patch of airstrip in the desert, founded at the height of the world's darkest days, still can bring people together, teach younger generations, and tug at the heartstrings of those who understand war and what it meant.

The importance of Falcon Field is multifaceted. Its history proves that ordinary people in ordinary places, working together, could make a difference in the outcome of a world war. It proved that people sharing the lives with people of another culture could have a great impact on their future and ours. The field not only is an important part of Mesa's history, but American and the world history as well.

At the time of this writing, as time edges into the 21st century, more and more members of the Greatest Generation pass away, and those left, both in the FFA (Falcon Field Association) and the Daughters of the British Empire, with whom the FFA held remembrance ceremonies at the Mesa Cemetery for decades, are hitting their late 80s and early 90s, there are plans to close down the FFA and the future of the remembrance ceremony future is imperiled.

It is up to Mesans, Arizonans, Americans, and members of the human race to preserve the Falcon Field not only as an asset for those who love to fly, but also preserve it as a living memorial to the cadets, instructors, field staff, Mesa citizens, and citizens of the surrounding area whose work helped keep freedom ringing throughout the world in its most difficult hours. And it is also a fitting memorial to those who died, whether training at the field or in battle to preserve freedom,..."

Source: “Williams Air Force Base” Maintained by John E. Pike, last updated May 11, 2007.

<http://www.globalsecurity.org/military/facility/williams.htm>. Accessed January, 2013.

Williams Air Force Base (Williams AFB) is in Mesa, Maricopa County, Arizona, approximately 30 miles southeast of Phoenix and just east of Chandler. Williams AFB, constructed in 1941, operated primarily as a flight training school from 1942 until the base closed on September 30, 1993.

The former Williams Air Force Base played a strategic role in America's aviation history. Over a span of 52 years, more than 26,500 men and women earned their wings at Williams. Gearing up for the combat pilot demands of World War II, the Army Air Corps broke ground in Southeast Mesa, Ariz. for its Advanced Flying School on July 16, 1941. In February 1942, the growing military base's name was changed to Williams Field to honor Charles Linton Williams, an Arizona-born pilot. The facility was redesignated as Williams Air Force Base (WAFB) in January 1948. WAFB was the U.S. Air Force's foremost pilot training facility, graduating more student pilots and instructors than any other base in the country and supplying 25 percent of the Air Force's pilots annually. WAFB provided training for a variety of fighter and bomber aircraft including the AT-9, AT-17, P-38, AT-6, B-17, B-24, P-51, P-47, F-86, F-100, T-33, T-37 and T-38.

WAFB was closed in 1993 and created a loss of more than 3,800 jobs and \$300 million in annual economic activity. The state and communities began work immediately to redevelop the base after the announcement of closure in 1991. Upon closing, Williams AFB was transferred to the Air Force Base Conversion Agency (AFBCA). AFBCA assumed responsibilities for the restoration and reuse of the base and worked with the Restoration Advisory Board and Williams redevelopment partnership to maximize reuse. On February 17, 1995, the Air Force signed the Record of Decision (ROD) for the Disposal and Reuse of Williams AFB. The decision in this ROD is to dispose of the aviation-related portion of Williams AFB in a manner that will enable the development of a regional airport with the capacity for expanding commercial and industrial development.