

Chapter Eight

The British are Coming

(1941-1945)



British cadets marching to class.

HAMPTON

As they stepped off the train onto the hot, dusty platform at the Tulsa train station, the British flying cadets must have thought they had come to the end of the earth. Over the past three weeks, they had been on an almost incredible journey. Leaving their beautiful, green, but embattled England, they had crossed the North Atlantic on an escorted liner, landing at Halifax, Nova Scotia. Then a long train ride down the St. Lawrence River to Toronto, and a brief indoctrination into Canadian life. There they entrained again and, in deference to the U. S. official but oft-broken neutrality, donned identical grey civilian business suits. After viewing the spectacular Niagara Falls, they entered the U. S. at Buffalo, traveling on through Chicago, then St. Louis, until they finally arrived at Tulsa.

It was 5:30 in the morning, June 16, 1941, when they lined up on the platform in Tulsa, a sleepy, unwashed, bearded group, their suits hopelessly

wrinkled after two nights cramped sleeping on the train. Captain Maxwell Balfour, his piercing black eyes scanning the motley crew, gave them their first official greeting in the U. S.—

"Welcome to Tulsa. Climb on that bus and we'll take you to breakfast". The British had come to Spartan.

As the war intensified in Europe, in 1940 and 1941, the concept of training British aircrews in the United States became an attractive option to the top officers of the R. A. F. Indeed, there was a precedent for this; in 1917 British flying students and their Curtiss "Canuck" trainers had been moved from Canada to Texas in order to train in more suitable weather conditions. But in 1917 the U. S. was at war; in 1940 America was at least outwardly neutral, although obviously sympathetic to the English cause.

The advantages of training in the U. S. were many, including better weather conditions, more resources,

and freedom from enemy action. Because of this, the negotiations were carried to the highest level, and by late 1940 the U.S. had agreed to assist in aircrew training. Several proposals were considered, including sending R. A. F. cadets to USAAF training establishments alongside Americans, and the setting up of separate, private contract schools, exclusively for British use, called the "All Through Scheme".

The question of cost was of vital concern to the British Government, as the expense involved would have to be paid in dollars which already were in short supply. But when Roosevelt pushed the Lend-Lease bill through Congress, in the spring of 1941, ample funds became available.

Harry Berkey was secretary of the Miami, Okla., Chamber of Commerce, and it was through his efforts that a British Flying School was established at Miami. In the fall of 1940, hearing rumors of such schools being built, and seeing the business boom that Tulsa was enjoying from similar activity, he prepared a very detailed leather-bound document entitled, "A Proposal for the Number One Royal Air Force Pilot Training Facility in the United States". In the spring of 1941, a delegation of Miami business leaders traveled to Washington, D.C., and presented the document to Lord Halifax, the British Foreign

Secretary. He told them that no funds were available for such schemes at present, but if the Lend-Lease Bill were passed, he would consider their request.

A few weeks later, when the Lend-Lease went into effect, the British Embassy called a number of the private contract school operators to Washington to discuss the training of British pilots. Captain Max Balfour was in this group, but after seeing the scope of the requirements, he regretfully announced that Spartan did not have any spare capacity available for such training. At this point, the head of the British Mission handed him the Miami proposal, and suggested he give it serious consideration.

In his "Open Post" history of the #3 British Flying Training School, Alan Thomas describes how Miami finally became chosen as the site for this enterprise.

"After studying the brochure, Captain Balfour made an appointment to visit Miami. This was the first of a number of visits with the Chamber of Commerce representatives there, but for some reason, Captain Balfour decided to locate the school at Ponca City, and not Miami. (Ponca City had also prepared detailed proposals, and would later have another contract school located there.) But having put so much effort into the proposals for Miami, Harry Berkey decided to make a final attempt to



The British students meet Mr. Nicholson, their instructor, and their PT-19 trainer.

Colonel T. D. Harris
Continental Oil Company
Ponca City, Oklahoma

Dear Colonel Harris:

Sunday A.M. I flew over the section south of Ponca City with an Army representative. He finds, as I expected, that the south portion is much too low and would need a great deal of drainage. This type of soil becomes very sticky when soaked and we fear we could not operate without numerous runways. However, the data you sent is not lost as there are future possibilities.

However, for the time being, to my regret, they have decided against the Ponca City project. They have chosen the Miami privately owned airport which is ready to go.

I wish to thank you for your whole-hearted cooperation and to express my regrets for the trouble and expense to which you and the town have been put. Perhaps we will have better luck next time.

Sincerely yours,

1-3

Maxwell W. Balfour

Balfour letter to Ponca City, Oklahoma.

FAITH

change the Captain's mind and arranged a meeting on a Monday morning at 6:00 AM. Berkey took along Herb Cobban, President of the North Eastern Oklahoma Railroad, for added support. It meant a 3:30 AM start for these gentlemen, but it proved to be well worth it.

"As the meeting progressed, the Miami representative's eloquent and powerfully persuasive arguments impressed Balfour to the point he was reported to have said 'For two cents I'd choose Miami over Ponca City'. At this point, Herb Cobban pulled two pennies out of his pocket and tossed them on the desk. Balfour smiled, picked them up and said 'O K, Miami it is', and Miami became the site of the #3 British Flying Training School."

However, it was to prove impossible to prepare facilities at Miami for the first class of British cadets that were due to arrive in late June. Thus it would be necessary to house them temporarily in Spartan's Tulsa facilities. For this reason, these first cadets

would be riding the Spartan bus to the School seven miles to the northeast of the train station, on this sweltering morning of June 16, 1941. They were treated to some new and amazing sights. Downtown Tulsa could be seen, with multi-story "skyscrapers" appearing to grow almost out of the raw prairie. Even at the early hour of 6:00 AM there were a number of cars on the road, huge cars by British standards. And the weather was HOT. Although it was early morning, the temperature was in the 80's, making their grey woolen suits scratchy and uncomfortable. Arriving at the barracks, they were allowed to change to their lightweight khaki British uniforms, topped off with their grey overseas caps. Captain Balfour then led them to the Spartan cafeteria, where, after a welcoming speech, they were treated to a huge American-style breakfast.

Throughout the existence of the British schools, the students were universally amazed by the food and accommodations furnished them. One of the first

British Pilots to Be Trained at Miami

One of Oklahoma's Five Flying Cadet Schools Will Open in County Seat July 19

One of five flying cadet schools to be operated in the United States for the training of British civilian pilots will be opened in Miami July 19 under direction of the Spartan School of Aeronautics. It was announced at Tulsa Tuesday by Capt. Maxwell Balfour, director of the school.

The school will be one of three operated by Spartan, the nation's largest trainer of civilian pilots, in the state of Oklahoma. The other schools are at Tulsa and Muskogee.

Captain Balfour said that he was not privileged to reveal full details of negotiations which led to the selection of Miami as the site for the school but admitted that the unit to be operated there is the same one that previously had been scheduled to be located at Ponca City.

Immediate construction has been authorized on hangars, barracks, office buildings and other needed housing facilities, Captain Balfour said. Outlay on the part of Spartan, will be in the neighborhood of \$250,000 with the ultimate investment to approximate \$500,000.

Balfour said that there would be little difference between the conduct of the school at Miami and the schools at Tulsa and Muskogee.

cadets reported: "Everything in this place is clean and efficient. Aeroplanes, equipment and on down to such things as food, beds and shower baths. Nothing is short or inferior. America has everything!" From the outset, the United States officials insisted that the British receive exactly the same meals, physical facilities, recreation opportunities and medical care as that furnished for Americans. At first the British representatives resisted this extra cost, but since the Americans were paying for it through Lend-Lease, they had to agree.

After only one day to settle in, the first class of British cadets reported to their flying instructors and began training on the PT-19 primary trainers, using the Tulsa Municipal Airport. And while busy by day learning the new skills of flying, their nights were equally exciting. From the beginning the "R.A.F. Boys out at Spartan" were local headline news. Invitations flowed in daily. Tea dances, ball games, rodeos, swimming parties, and church services were opened to the visitors. Families drove to the school to pick up any stray "Britisher" they could find that was off duty, and took him out for the evening. Girls kept the school telephone ringing. Some lucky students met members of the Tulsa Country Club and were driven out to a beautiful setting in the hills for golf, dining or swimming in lavish surroundings. A great many friendships were formed with the Americans training at the Spartan schools, their identical tasks and ambitions gave them something in common.

True to their traditions, the British cadets marched to all their classes, and even to the flight line, in a crisp military manner; swinging their arms stiffly in exact cadence. Their even ranks and precision marching did not go unnoticed by the officers in charge of the American trainees. Shortly after the British arrived, the "Yanks" were called out to close order drill each evening in an attempt to remedy their rather casual marching techniques. Captain Balfour was said to have personally ordered this addition to the cadets training routine.

The British quickly became accustomed to American food, and the somewhat different social life, but the Oklahoma weather was another matter. In contrast to their cool, damp England, they were to endure the heat, high winds and thunderstorms common to the midwest. One student described this weather in a letter to his parents:

The British school was welcome news throughout northeast Oklahoma. This article appeared in the June 19, 1941 edition of the Afton American.

"I have not done much flying lately because since last Thursday we have been having some terrible storms, the worst rain, wind, thunder and lightning I have ever seen or heard. Today it is beautiful and sunny again, but now at four o'clock the temperature is 93 degrees. I am sitting under an electric fan with just a pair of shorts on, but even the fan sends hot air over me."

While this first class was starting its training in Tulsa, Balfour and the Spartan management were rushing to completion the new flying school being built in Miami. Less than a month after signing the contract with the R. A. F. Mission, the Tulsa firm of Waller-Wells had been engaged and were hard at work on the buildings for the new school. By July 1, Mr. Edmund Wells, the superintendent of the project, reported that over 125 men were working on the buildings and that things were "on schedule".

"RAIN"

When we're back in dear
old England,
And we hear the gentle
rain,
With its pitter-pitter-
patter,
Beating on the window-
pane,
Let us silently remember
That we ought not to
complain,
For it never rains in
England
Quite like Oklahoma
rain.

—"Nimbug"

"Rain" poem by a British cadet.

DORSON



The huge American cars amazed the British.

HAMPTON

The total cost of the new facilities would be over \$500,000; but the ample coffers of the now-prosperous Skelly Oil Company could easily handle the necessary finances.

The centerpiece of the building complex was to be the abandoned and boarded up tourist hotel, the "Pierce Pennant". In the late 1920's and early 1930's, the Pierce Oil Company started a chain of "Hotel Stops" along the much promoted U.S. Highway 66, later to be called "The Mother Road" and made famous in film and television. (It is interesting to note that this same Highway 66 is now being promoted internationally as a major tourist attraction by the various cities and towns along its old route.)

These Pierce Pennant roadhouses were spaced about 100 miles apart and would offer all the services needed by the cross-country traveler. In addition to a multi-pump filling station, there would be a repair garage, restaurant, barber shop, and hotel rooms available. One was built at Miami, another to the east at Rolla, Missouri, and one at Tulsa. But the concept was not successful, and by the mid-1930's most had been abandoned. For a while the main building at Miami was operated as a tavern, with dances being held in the ballroom of the former hotel; by 1941, the building was boarded up and vacant.



#3 BFTS at Miami, Oklahoma. The former Pierce Pennant Hotel in the foreground.

SPARTAN

But now, once again, it could serve a useful purpose. As remodelled under Balfour's directions, the hotel would become the main administration building of the school complex, containing a reception area, offices, game room, snack bar and post store. On the third floor one-time hotel rooms would become living quarters for the Spartan staff.

The old filling station would now become a gate-house and entrance office, but the rest of the facilities would be new construction. Behind the tavern building a large level quadrangle was laid out, bounded on the other three sides by frame buildings. On the north side would be a 48x110 foot restaurant, with a seating capacity of 200. Along its south exposure would be a long screened in porch. On the west would be one story classroom buildings, and on the south a huge T-shaped barracks.

At the 300 acre airfield, a half mile west of the school buildings, other construction was under way. Earlier, the Miami city fathers had purchased land for the airfield, and had constructed a steel hangar. Now this hangar would be used by Spartan as a maintenance shop. A field headquarters building would be erected, as well as classrooms for Link Trainers, and a parachute packing facility. Later, several additional large hangars would be built.

"TONY" MING

As soon as the #3 BFTS began operations, Max Balfour appointed Anthony J. "Tony" Ming as the school's Director. He was to remain there throughout the entire period, from 1941 to 1945. Since all the flying instructors, as well as the ground school personnel were American civilians, it was an intricate task to weld together the diverse personalities into a successful team. He took pilots who had been barnstormers and ferry pilots, instructors who had been farmers or schoolteachers, and formed a creditable and efficient organization. His efforts were noted by British Air Ministry when they appointed him as an Honorary Member of the Order of the British Empire. The citation read:

"I am commanded by the Air Council to inform you that they have learned with much pleasure that His Majesty the King has been graciously pleased to approve your appointment as an Honorary Member of the Order of the British Empire in recognition of your services to the Royal Air Force. The Council wishes me to convey to you their warm congratulations on this mark of His Majesty's Favor and to thank you for all you have done."

After the War, Ming stayed with Spartan, finally becoming Director of its satellite overhaul operations at Camden, later Trenton, New Jersey. Sadly, he was to die in a plane crash, August 14, 1961 near Charleston, South Carolina.

One month after their arrival in Tulsa, on Sunday morning July 13, the #1 class of cadets boarded the Spartan busses and moved to their new home at the #3 BFTS, Miami. At that time, Squadron leader A. C. Kermode arrived to take up his duties. During the first few weeks at Miami, construction work was still going on, so the cadets were housed in the girls' dormitory of the N.E. Oklahoma Junior College; the girls were still on summer vacation. This began a long and pleasant association with the college; many friendships began at the welcoming dances held for each new group.

Churchill was reported to have said "English is the common language that divides us." The British cadets found some amusing language differences during their visits with American friends. F. C. Rainbird recalled one such incident. "I was invited to a Sunday dinner by one family, they then repeated the invitation a week later. When I arrived the husband did not appear to be at home. 'Where's Russ?', I asked. 'Oh, he's just piddling in the garden' she replied. I was puzzled, I knew they had a modern toilet indoors. He soon appeared, and it became clear that he had been 'fiddling about' in the garden, as we would have put it."



"Horseplay" with mascot "Pete".



The N. E. Jr. College campus; temporary British barracks.

FAITH

Peter McCallum was a cadet in one of the first courses, and fortunately sent a series of descriptive letters home to his parents beginning on August 26, 1941. Excerpts from these letters tell of the typical wonder and excitement experienced by the young British fliers. "This school is actually run by two British Officers and one Flight Sergeant. The instructors and all other personnel are Americans. It is a new school and you could just not imagine what a wonderful place it is. We have four fellows to a room furnished like a hotel and two men to clean up and clean our shoes and press our clothes and do anything we want doing. We fly from 7:00 AM until 12:00, then have ground school in the afternoons.

"The food in the camp is excellent and beautifully served by waiters. All the food is fancy and you never recognize anything until you taste it. It is all rich and sweet. The national drink seems to be iced tea served with lemon and sugar; we also drink a lot of milk and orange juice."

Peter was evidently a good student, because he soon was describing his solo flight in a letter home: "September 7, 1941. I went solo at 9 hrs 20 min which is nearly two hours below the average time. I was second to go solo in my course. The penalty for this feat was buying everyone else in the flight a drink at the canteen. In case you misinterpret this - the drink was orangeade. Oklahoma is one of the few dry states in America and there are no pubs or licensed houses of any kind.

HAMPTON



PT-19 flown by the British students during Primary Training.

DOBSON MUSEUM

"I have met a very nice American family in Miami by the name of Slayton. Mr. Slayton gave me a lift to Miami the other evening and as I wasn't going anywhere in particular he invited me to his house for dinner. They are very rich people, farmers. They own five farms or ranches around here, nearly half a million acres. (Editor's note: this figure must be in error). The family comprises Mother, Father, June age eighteen and at College, and Mary Lou who is married and she has a baby boy. She lives in California but is home on a holiday. They own three cars; Mum's, Dad's and June has one with her at college in Washington. I spent the weekend with them and they gave me a 'swell time'. They are teaching me to ride a horse and I had a good time driving a 40 horsepower Buick. At first it was difficult to keep on the right side of the road!"

In another letter home, October 1, 1941, Peter mentions the close relationship he had developed with the Slayton family:

"Last Sunday the local Episcopal Church gave a tea, in one of the hotels, to the British cadets. It was a 'help yourself from the table' affair, and all had a good time. There were lots of Americans there and everyone got invitations out for Christmas and lots of

other places and festivals. I had to refuse quite a number of people because my friends (the Slaytons) have already booked me up on every occasion I go out from now on until I leave."

Sadly, this was to be Peter's last letter home. A short time later he became one of the first cadets killed in an aircraft accident. His plane fell during night training near Columbus, Kansas; he is buried along with fourteen of his countrymen in the British section of the Miami cemetery.



BT-13 Basic trainer used at Miami.

PEEK

A touching illustration of the regard and affection shown the British "boys" by the good citizens of Miami, is the example of Mrs. F. M. Hill. When accidents happened, the casualties were buried in the G.A.R. Cemetery on the north side of town. Mrs. Hill made it her personal obligation to care for these graves. In 1990, her daughter, Mrs. Florence Cunningham, gave this account:

"I do not remember why Mother and I happened to be out at the cemetery that day. At the time there were two graves, but they were so unkempt looking -- no grass, big clods of dirt that had not been smoothed out (of course they were pretty new). Anyhow she said, 'I'm going to do something for those British boys', and she did.

"I went with her on lots of trips over there, as did our little cocker, but she did most of the work. Mother had a flair for gardening. Rose bushes came to the graves and Irises. Later when there were more graves, little Juniper trees were all in a row with the white crosses. As our Memorial Day would come, the newspapers would make mention of it, and Mother, being a rather shy soul, was a bit overwhelmed by the fuss. She heard from a lot of people around the country about it as well as the U.K.

"One lady in New York, an expatriate from Great Britain, sent the Union Jack flags every Memorial Day for years. Mother would put the flags out and then take them in to make them last longer as they were hard to come by.



Mrs. Hill's grave marker, 1993.



Above: British graves in Miami cemetery, 1943.

Below: Same graves, 1993.

DOBSON

PECK

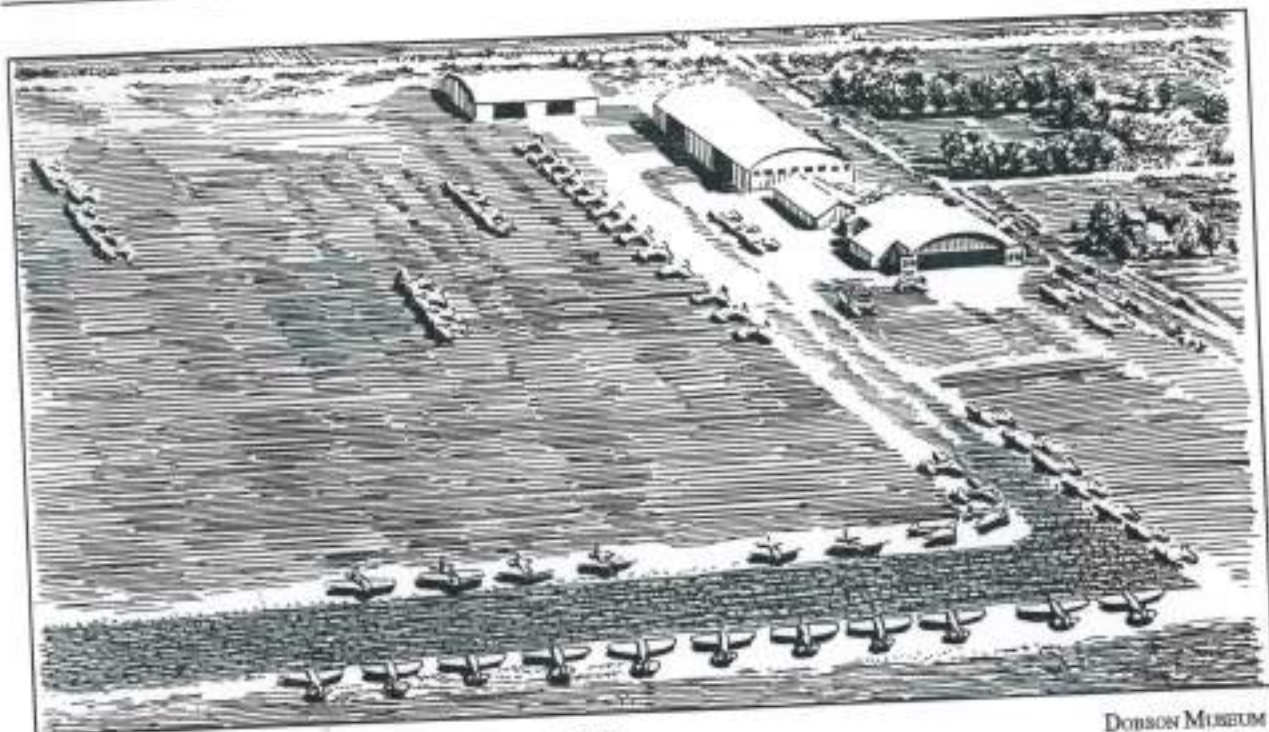
"Time passed and then there were 15 graves. The Junipers had to be taken out in time as they were rather short lived. The wooden crosses were taken down and the stone markers you see today were put in place. Some of the parents used to send money to Mother to have flowers put on their son's graves on appropriate days, but most of the parents are gone now.

"These days an American veteran's organization put on large red and white wreaths on Memorial Day. They are artificial and are taken down and stored for the next year."

Mrs. Hill died in 1989 and, as she wished, was buried with the "British Boys" she loved so well. Her gravestone carries the following inscription:

"MRS. F.M. HILL of Miami, buried alongside, voluntarily tended these fifteen British Airmen's graves and helped their loved ones from 1941 to 1982. These selfless human actions were unknown to most. She was awarded the King's medal for service in the cause of freedom by King George VI."

PECK



DOBSON MUSEUM

A British cadet's drawing of the Miami, Oklahoma, airfield.

The flying courses were arranged very much as those already being given by Spartan to the U.S. cadets. Each course was divided into stages, Primary, Basic and Advanced. There were three different types of aircraft used, the PT-19 Fairchild in Primary, the BT-13 Vultee in Basic, and the AT-6 Harvard in Advanced. Eventually the BT's were dispensed with and the students went directly from the Fairchild to the Harvard. The classes were arranged to have 50 cadets each at the start, and to last 20 weeks. Forty-five ground and flight instructors were involved as were over 80 aircraft.

The school was run on the cadet system, with cadet officers responsible for the day to day discipline. There were no R.A.F. staff living in the camp. Those assigned to the school were:

- Commanding Officer
- Senior Administrative Officer
- Two Pilot Instructors
- One Navigation Instructor
- One NCO Signals
- One NCO Armaments
- One NCO PTI

Cadets trained six days a week, half day flying and half a day ground school.

The usual procedure for the Primary stage was for half the students to fly out to the auxiliary field with the instructors while the other half drove out in the school bus. The procedure was reversed in the

evening. The bus would often stop at the Ice Factory on the way out to the airfield to pick up a block of ice for the water cooler in the crew room.

One unusual feature about flying from the auxiliary field was that both right and left hand patterns were used. Cadets were told which circuit they had to fly. If they should forget and take off or land on the wrong side, their instructor would sentence them to a period of standing at attention by the large wooden wind tee.

Two of the most critical and best remembered events in a flying cadet's schooling would probably be his "Solo", and the awarding of wings or "Graduation". Cadet E. Cook wrote these thoughts about his solo flight in the October 1941 Open Post magazine. His experience was typical.



British cadet's art work.

DOBSON



These cadets soloed successfully.

"What a grand morning, the air is so still and calm, an aeroplane could fly itself. My instructor is waiting for me, highly pleased for his other student, John, has soloed this morning. We are soon aloft together and I manage to make three good circuits. The last was a bit bumpy, but a nasal voice booms down the ear tubes 'take me back to the stage house'. I taxi back, and my instructor slowly, almost maddeningly, climbs from his seat. With a cheery wave and a word or two of unheeded advice, he saunters off.

"I am alone in the plane but somehow I do not realize it. Why worry, I can fly the thing. For the past 4 or 5 hours I've been doing it; he has been only a passenger. Taxi back to the end of the field for take-off. S-turn, not too fast, don't forget to look around. Give her the gun, not too fast, let the engine pick up speed, keep her straight. Hell, she's off the ground, there's the wind-tee and stage house below. She never came off so quickly before.— Oh yes, less weight, no instructor in front. Throttle back a little, watch the altimeter and tachometer. 250 feet, level off and turn to the right. Keep her nose up. Climb to 500 feet. Oh, this is easy. I'm even singing away at the engine. 500 feet, level off and turn on the downwind leg. I must throttle back and turn on the base leg. That wind is stronger than I thought. I've gained 50 feet. Now cut the gun, keep her nose up a bit to lose speed, then down with the flaps. Put her nose down, glide at 80, look out for the fence. Oh, good, I'm well over it, I won't overshoot. Level off, ease back on the stick—and I'm on the ground with barely a bump. I've done it, my first solo trip!"

HAMPTON

Every day those who were flying marched up to the flight lines where they met their instructors.

Also on the municipal field, as part of the hangar complex, was the Link Trainer building. This form of simulated flying was an important element in the training of pilots, but for some reason many of the cadets felt that the instructors took fiendish delight in putting the pupils in unusual positions as soon as the hood was lowered. The terms "needle, ball, airspeed" took on a whole new meaning, when heard over the earphones in that hot, dark cockpit.

STUDENTS OF THE R. A. F.
 You Are Always Welcome At The
COLEMAN THEATRE
 WE SHOW ALL THE LATEST HITS FROM HOLLYWOOD

The Gayest... Fastest...
FOUR STAR MUSICAL
OF 1941!
FAST...FUNNY...FRISKY!

WEEK-END
IN
HAVANA

ALICE FAYE
JOHN PAYNE

CARMEN MIRANDA
CESAR ROMERO

A 20th Century-Fox Picture **IN TECHNICOLOR**

Sunday-Monday-Tuesday October 26-27-28

Movies at the "Coleman" were popular.

DOBSON MUSEUM



Three "Jones" and Hampton (R) with instructor Pitts in front of a Harvard.

HAMPTON

As each course drew to its end a number of events took place. There were the usual ground school exams, but the most challenging test was the "Wings" long distance cross country flight, usually to El Paso on the Mexican border. These flights involved two pilots flying alternately as pilot and navigator. In 1993 Fred Hampton still remembered this experience:

"October 12th, 1944 was a fine day and the airfield was full of sounds of departing Harvards, each carrying two excited young men on an adventure none had ever thought possible. On the first leg, Miami to Ardmore, I was the pilot with Toff singing along behind me as navigator. (All Welshmen sing!) Landing at Ardmore, I was dismayed when the aircraft acted erratically on landing. As the tailwheel touched the ground I had to fight hard to maintain a straight course along the tarmac. Toff was quite amused and 'ribbed' me for a bad landing. Fortunately, I had delayed touching

down the tailwheel until the aircraft was well below stalling speed, as was proved later.

"Toff flew the plane (AT-6 #93) on to the next stop at Big Springs, Texas. I was studying my navigation documents as we landed, but noticed that he, true to character, came boldly in at very near maximum speed. I felt a slight bump of the front wheels when everything went haywire. I was thrown around quite violently as the plane ground looped finishing up with one wing imbedded in the ground, and the airfield safety crews rushing to our rescue. We were sure our trip to El Paso was not to be, instead a long train journey was in the cards.

"We duly reported to the Chief Flying Instructor before making our very disconsolate way to the mess for lunch. As we ate we heard the crash crew heading out again. Someone had made the unforgivable error of landing without the wheels down! The plane was a wreck and we expected company on our return to base. However, the C.I.



PT-19 crash at night.

DOBSON



A BT-13 on its back.

DOBSON

appeared and explained the reason for our own sad experience. The locking pin in the tail wheel had failed, causing our ground loop. Furthermore, the staff at Big Springs were willing to replace our damaged wing tip with one from the other plane. True to their word, the plane was readied in short order, and we were on our way again.

"I asked Toff, who was navigating from the rear cockpit, for a compass course. He replied he'd had no time to check the weather and wind conditions, but if we flew west and followed a pipeline shown on the map, El Paso was somewhere ahead! So off we set, flying low and keeping the pipeline in sight. After a while I

noticed what appeared to be black clouds ahead. I asked Toff if it was possibly a big storm. He said no one had mentioned bad weather, so we flew on. Suddenly the supposed clouds became more visible; we were flying low into the Rocky Mountains, clearly marked on the map. Casually Toff said, 'Oh yes, I see. Turn left and fly alongside the mountains and we pass over them near Guadeloupe Peak.' I flew south until this gap appeared, then turned west towards distant El Paso, passing over the mountain terrain 3-4000 feet high.

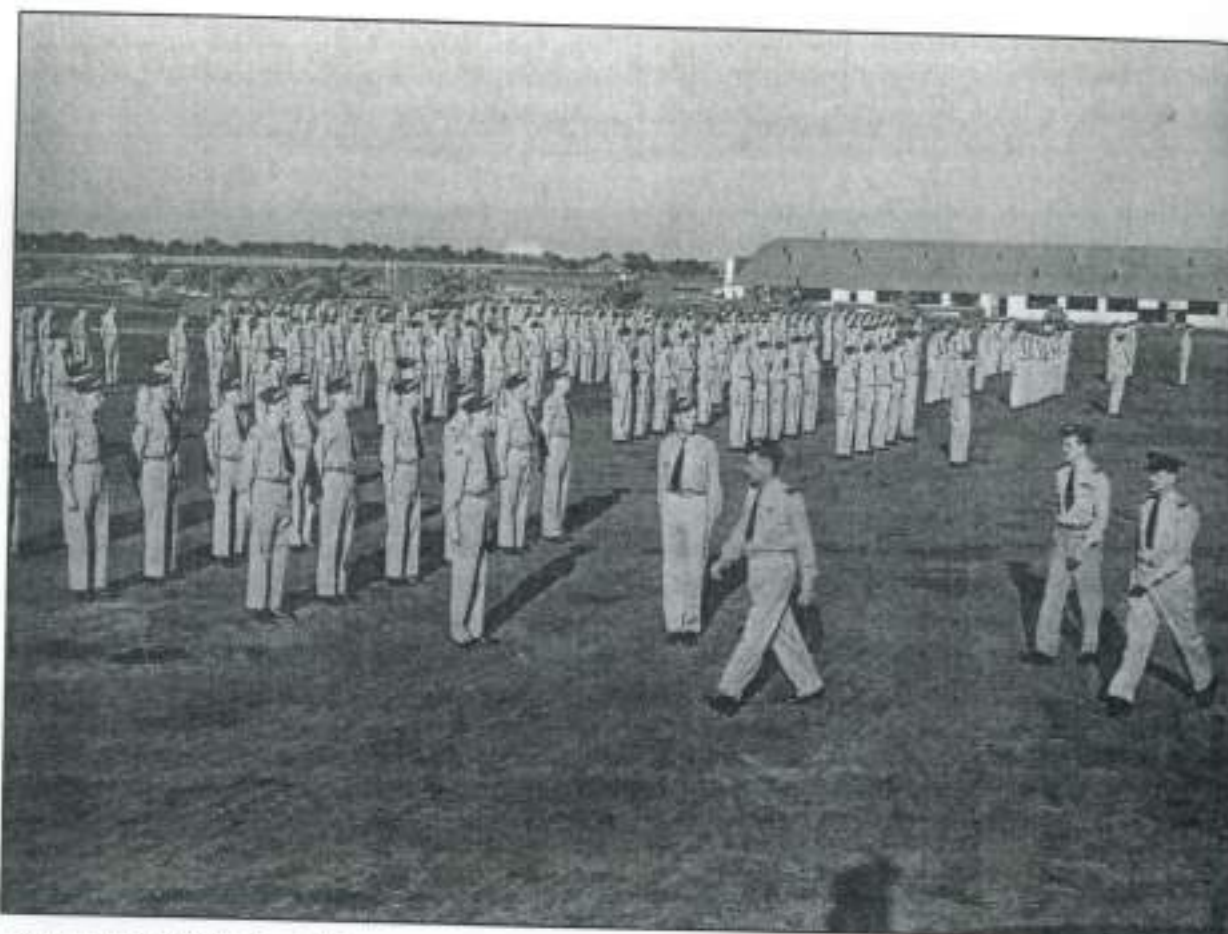
"At this point the fuel gauges indicated a change of tanks. I turned the valves, but the engine cut out after only a brief response. After two or three attempts to start, Toff pulled back his canopy and said 'Let's jump'. I pointed out that we were still over high mountains and that if we survived the jump, it might be weeks before we were found. At this point I decided to try the wobble pump, fitted to inject fuel manually when starting the engine. This worked and I managed to maintain a straight and level course. Taking turns on the pump, we descended over a desert looking area to El Paso. I called the El Paso Tower, but could get no response. I finally told them that if they were receiving me I was coming in straight ahead, regardless of traffic. We chased a plane or two out of the pattern, but made a safe landing, with fire engines, rescue vans and ambulances chasing us down the runway.

"Later we found a broken fuel pump had caused our difficulty. The school sent instructors down to ride with us on the return flight."



Midair collision causing four casualties.

DOBSON MUSEUM



The long-awaited "Wings Parade".

HAMPTON

Finally came Graduation, the big day of the Wings Parade and dance. The Parade was held at the Municipal field, and would be accompanied by a band and various dignitaries. Visitors in the form of friends and families would be present to witness that very proud moment which each cadet had worked so hard to achieve, the pinning on of those coveted "wings".

Presentations were made by a variety of personages, the Commanding Officer, visiting Senior R. A. F. officers, U.S.A.A.F. Generals and others. The bachelor "Wings" dinner was held at this time at a number of different locations as far away as Joplin. It was astonishing, in a dry state, where the liquor would come from, and the amazing assortment that masqueraded under the label of whisky. The dance on graduation night was a happy yet sad affair. The graduates had achieved what they wanted, yet they were sorry to be saying goodbye to Miami and many wonderful friends. They knew full well they would probably never meet again.

Altogether 27 classes started at Miami, but numbers 26 and 27 did not finish due to the war's end.

The Public Records Office at Kew, England, lists 2124 R.A.F. cadets and 117 U.S.A.A.F. cadets started in the program; 116 of the Americans and 1376 of the British cadets successfully completed the training and were awarded their coveted "wings". The school was closed in August of 1945.



Pinning on the coveted wings.

HAMPTON