

2017 HHAS Remembrance Day Ceremony at Springbrook

by Jodi Smith

If you were here 75 years ago, in 1942 this aerodrome would have been a bustling place with hundreds of young men coming and going, almost all with British accents. The newest ones would be in ground school but the rest would be learning to fly twin engine Airspeed Oxford airplanes. It was a Royal Airforce Base staffed entirely by Brits and was built as part of the British Commonwealth Air Training Plan (BCATP).

Our society has taken responsibility for preserving the history of both BCATP bases in Central Alberta: No. 32 Elementary Flying Training School near Bowden (now the Bowden Institution) and No. 36 Service Flying Training School here at the Red Deer Airport, both of which were RAF bases during WWII. Initially both bases were staffed entirely by RAF personnel.

By November 1942 both bases would have been in full operation for one year with several classes of students at different stages in their training.

At Bowden flying instruction was initially done with de Havilland Tiger Moths and Stearmans which are both biplanes.

Fourteen service men died while on active at the two bases during the 1942 calendar year. Students stationed at Bowden were buried at Innisfail and students stationed at Penhold were buried at Red Deer. Both locations were very far from their homes. Several were married, while others were young and single leaving their parents, siblings and perhaps a girlfriend either back home or in Central Alberta

Today we remember them.

They are:

LAC¹ F. J. Brand stationed at No 32 EFTS Bowden age 20 from Essex, England who died on July 29, 1942 in a Stearman while landing at No. 36 EFTS Pearce, Alberta. He is buried at Lethbridge.

LAC Philip Edward Bushell, stationed at No. 36 SFTS Penhold age 28 from Hampshire England who died on January 6, 1942

P/O² Albert George Clark stationed No 32 EFTS Bowden age 31 from Middlesex, England who died on July 29, 1942, in a Stearman while landing at No. 36 EFTS Pearce, Alberta. He is buried at Lethbridge

LAC E.R. Delamere, stationed at No 36 SFTS Penhold age 21 from Manchester, England.

"...While flying in formation at 4,000 feet east of Penhold Village at 1830 hours on the 27th July 1942, Oxford BG 304 piloted by LAC Delamere changed position from No. 3 to No. 2 and collided

¹ Leading Aircraftman

² Pilot Officer

with Oxford AS 924 piloted by **LAC J.W.S. Forrest**. **LAC Delamere** sustained multiple injuries and was killed instantaneously.”

A/F/SGT³ George Frederick Jennings stationed at No 36 SFTS Penhold, age 35 from London England. ‘natural death, cerebral haemorrhage’

LAC Charles George Tone Mann stationed at No 32 EFTS Bowden age 25 from Middlesex, England who died on August 3, 1942 in a Tiger Moth accident at Netook.

LAC Norman William Alfred Pressland, stationed at No 32 EFTS Bowden age 21 from Lester Shire (Leicestershire), England who died on September 10, 1942 in a Tiger Moth accident at Netook. “Near the Emergency field at Netook on Thursday evening about 7:30 two Bowden airplanes crashed into one another in the air with disastrous results. One of the fliers LAC McLaughlin was able to bring his plane down for a crash landing and got off with just a severe shaking up, while the other flier LAC Pressland bailed out but the plane was not sufficiently high to make it possible for the parachute to open in time and the unfortunate airman was killed.

Funeral service for LAC Norman W. Pressland was held with full air force honors. Interment was at the Innisfail cemetery....”

Cpl⁴. Stanley Ryder⁵, stationed at No. 36 SFTS Penhold. Age 20 from Yorkshire, England. “Fractured base of the skull, which was the immediate cause of death sustained on 29th, January 1942, when a tractor he was driving overturned.”

LAC Ralph A Stevens stationed at No 36 SFTS Penhold, age 21 from Birmingham, England who died on March 10, 1942 in an Oxford, “The death of LAC Stevens occurred due to an accident at approximately 1500 hours. He was executing solo landing practice in Oxford A.R.972 at Innisfail Relief Aerodrome. The weather was fine with a strong sun and landings were being made on a runway in the 180 degree direction. At approximately 30 feet, he was involved in a collision with Sgt. Gulliver, who was also executing solo landing practice in Oxford A.S. 674, and crashed. LAC Stevens succumbed to his injuries at 2220 hours, the cause of death being laceration of the brain due to severe head injuries.”

LAC Charles William Thorp stationed at No 36 SFTS Penhold, age 20 from County Durham, England who died on October 29, 1942 in an Oxford. “LAC Thorp was carrying out solo night flying circuits and landings and had successfully completed two circuits and landings. He had taken off on his third circuit when a sudden and unexpected snow flurry came over the area at 2115 hours. Shortly after, information was received from a civilian that the aircraft had crashed. LAC Thorp sustained multiple injuries causing instantaneous death.”

LAC Arthur Stanley White, stationed at No. 36 SFTS Penhold. age 21 from Berkshire, England who “Died as a result of multiple injuries sustained in a flying accident on January 29, 1942.”⁶

³ Acting Flight Sergeant

⁴ Corporal

⁵ He was one of three airmen whose deaths during WWII at the two bases did not involve flying accidents

⁶ Words in parentheses are direct quotes from the official record of death.

LAC Reginald, James Whyte, stationed at No. 32 EFTS Bowden. Age 25 from Surrey England who died on Feb 19, 1942 in a flying accident at Netook, a relief landing field between Bowden and Olds.

P/O Gordon Howell Williams stationed at No 32 EFTS Bowden age 21 from Bristol, England who died on September 19, 1942 in a Stearman. He and LAC Wynne crashed in a farmer's field.

LAC Owen William Wynne stationed at No 32 EFTS Bowden age 20 from Tabora Tanzania who died on September 19, 1942 in a Stearman.