



# *Dirigo Flyer*

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## **Early Mishap at Bangor Air Base**

by

David H. Bergquist

Sunday, October 26, 1941, seemed a perfect day for flying. Winds were light and variable, temperatures hovered in the low 50s, and the sky was overcast with no inclement weather in the offing. The yellow, orange, and red adorning the broad-leaved trees, mixed with the dark green of the spruce and fir that bordered the runways, characterized so well a colorful Maine fall. Bangor Air Base, opened officially only a few months before, was home to the 43<sup>rd</sup> Bombardment Group, a unit organized at Langley Field in January. Major Francis B. Valentine, then commander of the 43<sup>rd</sup>, had visited the new base still under construction in April, and announced that Bangor would be the 43<sup>rd</sup>'s new home. The year before, Major Valentine was stationed at Mitchel Field and was one of four Air Corps officers who investigated the collision of two B-18 bombers over the Queens suburb of Bellerose. James F. Dow of Houlton was among 11 young flyers to die in that accident on June 17, 1940. By the end of August, 1941, the bulk of the 43<sup>rd</sup> was in Bangor, had taken up its duty station, and begun to use the new runways just finished by the WPA.

Once in Bangor, Valentine, by then a Lieutenant Colonel, immediately put into place a strict training schedule. Many of his pilots were new to the Army Air Forces and lacked flying experience. The urgency for this training was all too apparent as the war situation in Europe worsened. The life and death struggle known as the Battle of the Atlantic was in full sway; the attack by a Nazi submarine on the American destroyer, the USS Greer, in early September did not augur well for continued American neutrality.

2<sup>nd</sup> Lieutenant Wyman O. Thompson climbed into the cockpit of the B-18 Douglas Bolo bomber early that Sunday afternoon, knowing full well the importance of his training mission. He joined the Air Corp at age 20, less than a year before, after leaving Jamestown College. The Underwood, North Dakota native completed flight training only a few months prior to his assignment to Bangor. A senior officer of the 43<sup>rd</sup> Squadron 63 accompanied Lt. Thompson along with two other airmen; off they roared into the sky of central Maine. The Douglas aircraft was a derivative of the DC 2 and by this time was vastly obsolete. Still, it could be used for training purposes and for submarine patrols off the Atlantic coast; it was all the bomb group had. The 43<sup>rd</sup> was promised B-17s.

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The Maine Air Museum is located at  
98 Maine Avenue adjacent to  
Bangor International Airport

## Plane Spotting

By  
Bob Umberger

Upon leaving the Museum one Saturday afternoon, just outside of Bangor heading down I-95 South, as I approached the Hampden Rest Area, I noticed something worth pulling in to "check it out" . . .



Nobody came out of the rest area building, even after I waited for a while, so maybe they were in the motorhome, resting. The front wheel of the plane was caked in mud indicating the plane may have been sitting somewhere for a while, and possibly was being saved from the fate of neglect? The motorhome had a Florida plate, so it's likely this vintage Piper's new home will be in the Sunshine State!

As Paul Harvey would say . . . here's the rest of the story! Well, some of it anyway. Norm Houle took the time to plug the registration number into the FAA Registry, and forwarded the info to me. The Piper is / was a Maine owned plane. It is a Piper model PA22-150, model year 1957, location Aroostook County, Fort Fairfield. It appears the last current registration goes back to 2013.

### Huey is Bundled and Staying at MAM for the Winter



The museum has been given permission to keep the Huey over the winter – thus ensuring its presence for the full summer season.

*(cont. from page 1)*

The afternoon light was fading as Lt. Thompson began his descent southerly onto the new north-south runway when trouble appeared. The young pilot “undershot” the runway as he brought his ship down for a landing. The right landing gear collapsed, and the B-18 ground looped, flopped around like a fish out of water, and skidded off the runway across the safety strip, coming to rest at the edge of the grass. Base officials witnessing this mishap from their primitive control tower near the steel hangar sent the “crash wagon,” housed in the new central fire station, rushing to the scene.



*The B-18 resting on the grass. Notice the crash wagon to its rear under the left wing.*

When the rescue crew arrived, they found a chagrined lieutenant, embarrassed by his pilot error, emerging from the bomber followed by an upset senior officer and the other airmen. All were uninjured, and fortunately no fire erupted. The B-18 sustained “nominal” damage and rested on the grass like a beached whale. Base officials allowed newspaper photographers to take pictures. As fate would have it, the young Lieutenant Thompson had only three short weeks left to live. He was the co-pilot on the B-18

bomber which became lost on its November 15<sup>th</sup> return flight from Westover Field, missed the Bangor Air Base because of deteriorating weather conditions, and crashed near Springfield, Maine killing all four crew members<sup>1</sup>.



The Bangor Air Base Fire Station Under Construction, Spring 1941



2nd Lieutenant Wyman O. Thompson

*(cont. on next page)*

<sup>1</sup> For more information on the November 15, 1941 crash of the B-18A Bolo Bomber, see: Peter Noddin, “Another B-18 Story” *Dirigo Flyer*, Vol. XI, No. 11, p.5; Jim Ignasher “Near Springfield, ME – November 15, 1941,” [www.newenglandaviationhistory.com](http://www.newenglandaviationhistory.com), March 6, 2016; David Bergquist, *Bangor in World War II: From the Homefront to the Embattled Skies*. History Press, 2015, p.54.

(cont. from previous page)

By February, 1942, the 43<sup>rd</sup> Bombardment Group left for the Southwest Pacific. The Army transferred Lt. Col. Valentine to the 1<sup>st</sup> Army as liaison officer for the First Air Force and the Canadian Forces. Full Colonel Valentine returned to Bangor Air Base, renamed Dow Field, on September 9, 1942 accompanied by his wife, Geneva (Croxford), who was a native of Brewer, to become the Commanding Officer. Colonel Valentine served as Dow Field CO until November 27, 1943. The popular Valentine was the longest serving CO of the eight wartime commanders.

### First Presidential Flight to Maine

By

Bob Umberger

In recognition of the fact we have just concluded another presidential election cycle, I am reminded of visits to Maine by former Presidents, obviously most frequent during the Bush years with their family ties to Walker Point and Kennebunkport. Mostly, those visits involved flight plans to and from the Sanford Airport utilizing the smaller backup “Air Force One” or “Marine One.” However, what piqued my interest most was which President was the “first” to fly into the State of Maine, and when?



Based on details from multiple sources, that honor goes to Dwight D. Eisenhower, our thirty-fourth President. The event in question was a brief two-day vacation, with Ike staying at the Parmachenee Club in order to enjoy some fly fishing in the Rangeley Lakes area with Don Cameron as his Registered Maine Guide. By all accounts, the fishing excursion was very successful. However, Ike did lament that he was “wiped by them black flies.” His return travel on June 27, 1955, included streets lined with crowds of well-wishers in Farmington, a

procession from downtown Skowhegan to the fairgrounds for a short political speech, then on to Bangor and Dow Field where he again spoke briefly to those gathered at the airfield that evening. After thanking the dignitaries and people of Maine, he flew back to Washington, D.C. on the Presidential aircraft, *Columbine III*, a VC-121E (the military version of Lockheed’s Super Constellation).

As an aside, the name “Columbine” came from the official state flower of Colorado, and was chosen by Ike in honor of Mamie who considered Colorado her adopted state. Although *Columbine III* was in fact also “Air Force One,” at that time the call sign was known to the Air Force and ATC Controllers, but was not familiar to, or known by, the public. In actuality, *Columbine II* was the first plane to receive the designation of “Air Force One.” There are a couple conflicting accounts as to how the call sign came about, relating to the avoidance of possible mid-air collisions; nevertheless, “Air Force One” became the official call sign in 1959, according to knowledgeable sources.

During our 34<sup>th</sup> President's administration (1953 - 1961), Ike traveled the country and many parts of the world in three successive versions of the Lockheed, *i.e.*, *Columbine*, *Columbine II*, and *Columbine III*, the latter a much more luxurious and technically sophisticated aircraft. Another significant difference between all earlier models and *Columbine III* was extended range with the ability to fly non-stop to Europe without refueling. Interestingly, prior to running for election, Ike's assigned plane was yet another C-121 Lockheed Constellation; this was while he was NATO's European Supreme Allied Commander.

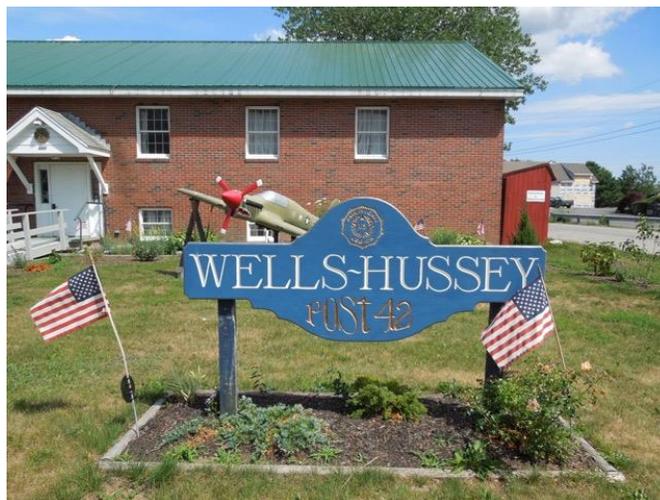
The 1960s and the next election ushered in a new era with the introduction of the "jet age" ..... and a new "Air Force One," VC-137, derived from the Boeing 707. As for *Columbine III*, it was relegated to other VIP transportation missions, and was retired from flying status in 1966. Today, it remains on static display at the National Museum of the Air Force, Dayton, Ohio.

*Post-script:* I can't help mentioning another point about "Connies" since they have been of passing interest here in Maine with the "Starliners," previously owned by Maurice Roundy, parked at the Auburn-Lewiston Airport dating back into the 1980s, and more recently, due to the ongoing and much anticipated total restoration of one of those aircraft by Lufthansa as a "historic flagship" matching their first commercial overseas air service with its fleet of Lockheed "Starliners" during the pinnacle of the airline era for piston powered aircraft. It will be exciting, in the very near future, when the restoration is completed to see their "Starliner" take to the air again. And best of all, it will have happened right here in Maine.

Sources: MAM Archive, HistoryNet

### Mystery Corner

The answer to Bob Umberger's Mystery Corner challenge in the July – September, 2016 edition of the *Dirigo Flyer* is the Wells-Hussey American Legion Post in Damariscotta, Maine. Did you get it?



Thank you, Bob. If you have an aviation-related, mystery photo from somewhere in Maine, send it to the editor at [rhlittlefield@roadrunner.com](mailto:rhlittlefield@roadrunner.com) for publication in the next *Dirigo Flyer*.



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