

# *Dirigo Flyer*

Newsletter of the Maine Aviation Historical Society  
PO Box 2641, Bangor, Maine 04402 • 207-941-6757 • 1-877-280-MAHS (in state)  
[www.maineairmuseum.org](http://www.maineairmuseum.org) [mam@maineairmuseum.org](mailto:mam@maineairmuseum.org)

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In this issue of the *Dirigo Flyer* we will cover our February field trip to the Lufthansa Technik hanger at the Auburn-Lewiston Airport and an article about the first jet crash in Maine, also at the A-L airport. This latter article was generously submitted by Pete Noddin and is a chapter from his upcoming book on air crashes in Maine.

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## **AUBURN-LEWISTON FIELD TRIP**

On February 14<sup>th</sup>, Valentines Day, the Maine Aviation Historical Society was invited to visit the ongoing restoration of the Lockheed L1649A Super Constellation (FAA #N7316C) at the Auburn/Lewiston Airport. Members of MAHS are quite familiar with this aircraft and another that is also located at the airport, having visited them several years ago before the current restoration.

Local resident Maurice Roundy had purchased three of the Constellations several years before and was attempting to restore them himself. Two were flown to Auburn/Lewiston in 1983 and 1986 while his third aircraft remained in Florida where today it is a static display at the Fantasy of Flight museum. The two Maine aircraft N7316A and N 8083H, were flown by TWA when they were operating and the Florida specimen was originally a Lufthansa airliner D-ALAN.

The aircraft being restored was delivered to TWA in 1957 and was called the *Star of Tigris*. She served as a passenger liner for a little over two years and was converted to a freight aircraft at Lockheed in 1960. It then went to Alaska Airlines and was later used in the construction of the Alaska pipeline from Prudhoe Bay to Valdez. Sold and re-sold through the 60s and early 70s it was then used for hauling livestock for Burns Aviation Co. Eventually left idle it was purchased by Maurice Roundy in 1983 and was flown to Auburn/Lewiston on 9 November 1983. It has been there, idle but with occasional engine restarts for almost exactly 25 years.

Roundy was unable to complete his project and finally put the airliners up for bid. In 2007 and they were purchased by Deutsche Lufthansa Berlin-Stiftung for \$745,000 US. A heated well-lit 50,000 sq-ft. hanger was constructed at a cost of \$3 million and this is where the restoration is taking place and the site of our field trip.

We had an excellent tour led by project manager Michael Austermeier and were given a full tour of the facility and the aircraft itself. For those of us who had visited the intact Connie



several years ago it looked rather pitiful in its stripped state but the realization that she would eventually be returned to full flying condition ameliorated those feelings.



The engines have been sent to Idaho for overhaul and the horizontal stabilizer is at Bizjet, a Lufthansa company, in Tulsa, Oklahoma. There are piles of parts and tubing in the hanger, all of it carefully sorted and labeled for future reinsertion or replacement. The cockpit will be replaced by a modern glass cockpit.

Current plans are to have the restoration finished and to fly the aircraft out of the airport on 10/10/2010. It will eventually make a world tour and be present any many future air shows.

Lufthansa must be commended for their policy of contracting work to local businesses and craftsmen. The

hanger was constructed by a local company, the jacks holding up the Connie were fabricated by a local boat yard and many of the workers are local people.

Overall it was a very informative and interesting field trip that melded both the historical and future of aviation in the State of Maine.



## President's Message

As you settle in with this issue of the *Dirigo Flyer* hopefully the worst of a rugged Maine winter is behind us, and we can set our sights on an early spring, maybe? For those that are reading this from afar, the National Weather Service has confirmed a record setting -50 degrees (F) recording Jan. 16<sup>th</sup> at Big Black River in northern Aroostook County, the earlier record being -48 degrees(F) at Van Buren in 1925. MAHS Members who have stepped inside our museum during the past couple months think we must have the "lowest indoor record" in the State.

If you'll indulge me, I'd like to share a brief account of an earlier Maine winter. It was 1942 when a troop train carrying approximately 450 soldiers departed Texas bound for Bangor, and the newly renamed Dow Field (Jan. '42). After weaving its way East and then North they arrived in early February, stopping in the train yard well short of Union Station where unloading took place. For you see, en route to Maine there was a contagious outbreak so everyone was ordered into quarantine upon arrival in Bangor with all the arriving troops held at the old Bangor Auditorium for one and a half weeks and only allowed outside briefly once a day for fresh air from the back door. Among this cadre was a young soldier from Pennsylvania – Ohio that had enlisted the day after Pearl Harbor, i.e., our MAHS member Robert Umberger, Sr. Some of my father's recollections related to his first days in Maine that I've enjoyed include his depiction of the Buck Sgt. that met them at the train. He had a bandage wrapped around his head, and when one of the arriving troops shouted out "what happened to you Sarg?" he snapped back, "I froze my G.D. ears". Climatic records from January & February of '42 indicate several daytime highs at or around -1 degree (F). Several of the southern boys resorted to wearing two pair of their underwear as a means of warding- off the Maine chill, while the seasoned Mainers claimed they hadn't seen the ground in 6 months due to icing. In the way of a little background, the troops had been shipped in to build up the 43<sup>rd</sup> Bomb Group (H), with Dow Field being the staging location before embarkment of the 43<sup>rd</sup>

B.G. from the port of Boston to Australia on the Queen Mary for battle in the South Pacific Theater (2/17/42). As it turned out, the chain of command decided not all were needed for the departing squadron, and some remained for re-assignment including my father. So, from mid February until April, awaiting orders, there were the usual duties like guarding the field in a sand bag bunker with a “water cooled” machine gun, keeping the coal fired furnace stoked in the hangar (aircraft on the field were few at that time), and making the acquaintance of a certain local gal who volunteered at the USO (*his wife -to-be after the war*). In April, with winter waning, orders came through and he was off to assignments in Louisiana, Alabama, and Florida for various segments of air cadet training followed by B-17 action in Europe with the 8<sup>th</sup> AAF, 303<sup>rd</sup> Bomb Group.

Thanks for letting me share this story with you and I welcome and encourage other members to let us tell some of their first hand/personal accounts in upcoming issues of the *Dirigo Flyer*. By the way, my father has experienced many a long, harsh, cold Maine winter during his long career working outside for the Maine Forest Service, but I have to disclose he is sitting this one out in Ft. Myers, Florida. **Good for you, Dad!**

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## Buy a Brick and Support the Maine Air Museum

The Maine Air Museum is proud to announce the Memorial Pathway Program. To successfully carry out and reach the museum vision, and to help refurbish Building 98, the Maine Air Museum needs the financial support of businesses and public community leaders and individual private citizens. To this end, the museum board has established a means for receiving your monetary donation and recognizing your gift permanently in the museum pathway and wall of honor. These donations are fully deductible.

Details available on our web site: [www.maineairmuseum.org](http://www.maineairmuseum.org) or from the museum by request.

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### Now available:

***Memoirs: With an Angel By My Side*** by member Alfred Cormier.

His flying life as told by Al and available exclusively from the Maine Air Museum.

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in Maine*



*Progeny of the Cold War*  
John C. Garbinski

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Another exclusive book from the Maine Aviation Historical Society. Softbound, 134 pages, 151 illustrations.

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### **The Loss of “Minimum Goose” Maine’s First Jet Crash 22 September 1946 at Auburn**

As the weekend of September 21-22, 1946 approached in central Maine, the front pages of the local newspapers were dominated by the story of the Wednesday morning crash of a Belgian Sabena Airways DC-4 in the wilderness near Gander Lake Newfoundland. Although the crash site was quickly located and reached by ground teams, it took 4 days to rescue the 18 survivors in the world’s first large scale helicopter rescue operation.

The local buzz, though, was the weekend Army/Civil Air Patrol show at the Lewiston-Auburn Airport. During WW II, this facility had been the Lewiston Naval Auxiliary Air Field where hundreds of U.S. Navy and Royal Navy Fleet Air Arm personnel had trained to fly and maintain American built fighters and torpedo bombers. The two day show was scheduled to include a model aircraft flying competition, static display of several CAP aircraft, a B-29 Superfortress, four P-51 Mustang fighters, an A-26 Invader medium bomber, a C-47 hospital plane, and a landing demonstration by a GG-15-A troop carrying glider. The star of the show, however, was to be a flight of the Army Air Force’s first operational jet fighter, the Lockheed P-80 “Shooting Star”.

The P-80 had entered service in May of 1945, too late to see combat service in WW II, By May of 1946, the 412<sup>th</sup> Fighter Group was still the Army Air Force's only operational jet fighter unit. The 412<sup>th</sup> had been tasked with "Project Comet", a whirlwind tour from their home base in March Field, California to 9 different cities around the country. The state military mission of this operation was to test the feasibility of long range deployments of jet aircraft and to iron out the logistical needs of such movements. However, the operation was as much a public relations and political campaign for an independent Air Force. Each of the Group's gloss grey aircraft was named and had individual nose art. Since each of the pilots was a WW II veteran, the pilot assigned to each plane had his combat victories prominently displayed on the vertical stabilizer.

On July 3, the 412<sup>th</sup> was designated as the 1<sup>st</sup> Fighter Group to better reflect its status as the nation's first jet fighter organization and was bestowed with the WW II lineage of that group. A second public relations project, known as "Concern" would see smaller groups of P-80s participate in various air shows around the country, to show the post-war modernization of the Army Air Forces and to assist in recruitment. This was the operation that brought a flight of P-80As of the 31<sup>st</sup> Fighter Squadron (Jet Propelled) to Auburn for the weekend.

The Shooting Star was a single engine, single seat, straight winged fighter with hydraulically boosted control surfaces and armed with six 50 caliber machine guns in its nose. It was capable of carrying 2000 pounds of bombs or other external ordinance. It had a maximum speed of 558 mph, a service ceiling of 45,000 feet, and a maximum range of 1360 nautical miles. As a new fighter aircraft, it had suffered a dismal attrition rate during testing and development of operational squadrons. The publicity from these accidents had caused Congress and many within the Army itself to question feasibility of such a jet fighter in the post war era, with so many high performance conventional fighters sitting in storage with no immediate plans for assignment.

Besides the usual "teething" problems associated with a new aircraft type in the era, the P-80 also suffered from the shortcomings of the early jet engines. The Allison J-33 engines used in the early Shooting Stars were barely capable of going 25 engine hours between overhauls and suffered from a drop in maximum available thrust after just a few hours of operation. Jets required a longer take off roll and an equally longer landing roll as the "speed boards" were not nearly as effective as the drag from a propeller at engine idle. The usual challenges of take off, landing, air field penetration, and cross country navigation were still present, but since the P-80 had a top speed 100 mph higher than WW II era fighters, things happened much faster. Jet engines "spooled up" slower and had to be throttled up slowly to avoid flooding. If a pilot got behind the power curve or had to abort a landing or maneuver, there was no available instant burst of power and air flow over the control surfaces that was readily available from a conventional engine and propeller.

The 1<sup>st</sup> Fighter Group's big picture mission was to work through all of these issues and show the public and their government leaders that jets could function satisfactorily in operational units, thus providing the U.S. with improved air combat capability.

This was the reality under which Captain Edgar Yarberry took off from Lewiston-Auburn Airport in "Minimum Goose" for a solo aerobatic display for the crowd on Saturday afternoon. To this day, "Maximum Goose" and "Minimum Goose" remain among the most often photographed and modeled of the early Shooting Stars. Major Jack Brown had named his P-38 Lightning "Maximum Goose" during his WW II service with the 1<sup>st</sup> Fighter Group in Italy. He carried the name over to his P-80A. "Minimum Goose" was usually flown by Captain John Babel.

Captain Yarberry had entered the Army immediately after graduation from high school in 1940 and qualified for Aviation Cadet School. After earning his wings and training as a fighter pilot he had served a combat tour with the 48<sup>th</sup> Fighter Squadron of the 14<sup>th</sup> Fighter Group in Tunisia during 1943. Flying twin engine P-38 "Lightnings" in the Mediterranean theatre of operations, he had been credited with a single air to air kill.

After takeoff, Yarberry cleared the pattern and flew north of the field, turning for a low speed flat run over the field at 5000 feet to begin his exhibition. As he passed the field, he advanced the throttle to military power to accelerate for a climb. As he did, however, the engine failed in increase thrust as expected. He held the aircraft level, hoping that the engine would "catch", but 5 miles south of the field, the engine flamed out. He immediately radioed the tower and declared that he had an emergency and would need to make a forced landing. Colonel Kenneth Powell, commanding the flight detail, recommended to him, through the control tower, to bail out of the aircraft. After a short exchange, Powell agreed with Yarberry's intention to try and return to the field.

He made a 180 degree turn back toward the airport and lowered the landing gear. As the aircraft approached the field, however, it became obvious that there was not enough airspeed and altitude to make a final leg turn to line up with the runway. Ahead, Yarberry saw two large open fields with no buildings nearby. He picked one and lined up for a landing,



brushing a row of trees before touching down. The aircraft was seen to settle normally onto its landing gear, but the nose gear dropped into a small depression and suddenly the aircraft was tumbling across the field and breaking up.

The wings, empennage, and engine all separated and broke up into varying degrees in a fan shaped pattern across the field. The cockpit section and nose, however, stayed in one piece and landed nearly upside down. Yarberry remained conscious. The sound of to release his harness and exit not burn. Yarberry emerged and aircraft with no serious injuries. small crowd of locals who had impact. A military ambulance Surgeon aboard arrived soon back to the airport, where he contusions to the forearms and



dripping fuel hastened his efforts the wreckage, but the aircraft did stepped away from the destroyed He was immediately met by a rushed in to the field after the with the 1<sup>st</sup> Fighter Group Flight afterward and transported him was treated for cuts and hands.

To date there had been nearly Yarberry was only the third pilot At the airport he was upbeat, and apologized profusely to the Crew Chief for “messing up his plane”. He later gave an interview to reporters in which he expressed his desire to get back in the cockpit, explained that it was a myth that only “a superman” could fly jets, and stated that jets were just the small beginning. Experiments were already being undertaken on rocket propelled and atomic propelled aircraft which may possibly step up speed aloft to levels now thought impossible”.

20 P-80 accidents, and Captain to survive a Shooting Star crash.

A few days later, however, a local newspaper reported that Captain Yarberry had resigned his commission in the USAAF.

----- Peter J. Noddin

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### Next Meetings.

14 March - Pittsfield Airport FBO Building at 10 a.m.

11 April – at the Museum in Bangor at 10 a.m.

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We will finish this issue with a couple of pictures submitted by members.




Above is a Scott Grant picture of Vice President John Miller passing overhead in his 1957 Piper PA-18A

Below is a photo taken at a 1950s Air Show at Dow Air Force Base in Bangor—from the collection of John Miller



The Maine Air Museum is located at the 98 Maine Avenue adjacent to the Bangor International Airport.  
44° 48' 2.10" North 68° 48' 36.02" West

|              | <b>Maine Aviation Historical Society<br/>Maine Air Museum * Membership Form</b>  |   |                          |          |         |             |                              |        |             |                              |           |              |                              |            |              |                                 |          |        |   |  |
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|   | We need volunteers-docents, mechanics, maintenance, librarians and exhibit specialists, etc.   |   |                          |          |         |             |                              |        |             |                              |           |              |                              |            |              |                                 |          |        |   |  |
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|   | <input type="checkbox"/> I wish to support and obtain membership by purchasing a memorial brick.   |   |                          |          |         |             |                              |        |             |                              |           |              |                              |            |              |                                 |          |        |   |  |

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**MAINE AVIATION HISTORICAL SOCIETY**  
**PO BOX 2641**  
**BANGOR, ME 04402-2641**