



# *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)

---

**Volume XVII No. 3**

**May – June 2009**

---

Here we are at the beginning of what looks like a summer to remember. Not for events but for weather. Cool, cloudy, foggy, and record rain is the characteristic for the season so far. Not good flying weather and one certainly needs to be IFR qualified to get in any flight hours. Hopefully this will not be the rule for the remainder of the summer...time will tell.

The editor, and most of our members are busy with summer visitors, summer work, and summer travel so in this issue we will have a few short articles and some pictures from our archives.

---

## **Parachuting - Now and Then**

*By Bob Umberger*

I suspect many of you recently caught the coverage of former President George H.W. Bush's parachute jump in Kennebunkport near his Walker's Point summer residence in celebration of his 85<sup>th</sup> birthday. The feat was performed as a tandem jump from 10,500 feet with the assistance of the U.S. Army's elite sky diving team the Golden Knights then their Fokker C31A troop ship into the church yard of St. Ann's, a short distance from the Bush compound. In actuality, senior Bush, "41", made two jumps, one for his birthday with full media coverage and a day or two later an unannounced jump along with a couple of members of the Bush family. It is well known that his first jump occurred when he was forced to bail out over the Pacific Ocean in 1944 as a Naval aviator. In recent years he has made several jumps, a couple highlighted previously on the occasion of his 75<sup>th</sup> and 80<sup>th</sup> birthdays, with this event the first here in Maine.

Parachuting or more common now, skydiving has grown in popularity over the past twenty years or so with at least 3 active operations in Maine catering to the sport with others nearby in neighboring states. Jumps by President Bush in his senior years demonstrates that nearly anyone so inclined can participate and experience the thrill or terror of bailing out of an airplane from several thousand feet, followed by the trip back to terra firma. From an historical standpoint, the concept of man suspended by a "parachute type device" dates to da Vinci's notes, circa 1495, and in the ensuing years there were a number of early parachute jumps from balloons, but it was considered quite another thing in the early 1900's to attempt parachuting from a moving airplane. In fact, our



earliest aviation experts such as the Wrights and Glenn Curtiss postured that jumping during the flight of an airplane would likely end in death of the pilot and parachutist. They were sure equilibrium would be affected by a sudden release of a heavy weight resulting in loss of control of the aircraft. In addition, they feared the parachute could get caught in the propeller or aircraft mechanisms and/or not deploy properly and/ or “blacking out” thereby causing the parachutist to perish as well.

However, on March 1<sup>st</sup> of 1912 the trio of Tony Jannus, Albert Berry and Tom Benoist set out to make history. Flying a Benoist Model 12 biplane, Jannus as pilot and Berry, a balloonist and aerial acrobat, took off from Kinlock Field near St. Louis, MO headed for the pre-determined jump site of Jefferson Barracks, an Army fort bordered by dense woods and the Mississippi River to the east. Circling several times to be certain they were directly over the fort Berry worked his way to the undercarriage and then onto a trapeze like contraption attached to the chassis. Reaching for the cone-shaped parachute he pulled it to his body and released his hold. At the same time, Jannus throttled back and nosed the aircraft downward to prevent prop wash from closing Berry’s chute. Immediately the aircraft shot up to a steep climb from the reduced weight, and Jannus was threatened with a stall. Berry meanwhile fell for a hundred feet with no chute deployment; after another hundred feet it started to open and it was fully open after another hundred feet. On the ground hundreds of cadets watched with awe as Berry floated to the ground, landing on the parade ground. The excited onlookers surrounded Berry and raised him onto their shoulders. Jannus circled the fort and shortly after Berry’s landing touched down and taxied the aircraft directly in front of the fort commandant’s quarters. Everyone present knew they had witnessed history in the making, but some viewed the feat as just a gimmick, while others immediately recognized the potential for advancing aerial warfare beyond their current use of aircraft for observation and scouting purposes.

The following day Berry was asked if he’d do it again and he exclaimed, “Never again!” “I was not prepared for the violent sensation I felt when I broke away from the aeroplane.” Although successful on that March day in 1912, it didn’t happen without some trial and error. They planned and practiced for six months. In the first experimental flight they utilized an anvil attached to the chute which nearly spelled disaster. Once airborne the anvil and chute came loose: spinning wildly and out of control. Berry climbed out onto the landing gear and kicked at the container until its 65 pounds parted from the aircraft.

Their greatest challenge was finding an effective design for the parachute and container. On one experimental flight they again faced near disaster when the parachute unfurled accidentally. Finally they settled on a tin megaphone shaped container with the 36 foot parachute packed into it and held in place with rubber bands.

With the parachute and container problem resolved Berry was ready to go, but Jannus insisted on a final practice run. At altitude Berry positioned himself on the trapeze and went through several acrobatics, even hanging from his heels. All the while Jannus was putting the plane through several maneuvers and Berry continued to hang upside down. After a while Berry realized the ground was coming toward him rapidly and suddenly he was bouncing off the ground, and then dragged headfirst down the muddy field for about 300 feet. Jannus unable to regain altitude was forced to land which only further plowed Berry’s body into the mud. Jannus was sure Berry was dead, but amazingly he escaped with only scraps and contusions.

They initially planned their historic parachute jump for February 18<sup>th</sup>, but high winds forced them to postpone. Two days later the entire area was hit with sixteen inches of snow. A year later, Jannus and Benoist received a U.S. patent for advancements in carrying and deploying parachutes. It’s remarkable that in many respects that Berry was successful considering that just a few days later on March 20<sup>th</sup> a parachutist died in a less challenging jump from a balloon, as did another on July 5<sup>th</sup> of 1912. Nevertheless, the use of a parachute was from that day forward no longer confined just to

carnival & daredevil acts. It would still be awhile before the value of issuing parachutes to pilots would be recognized; during the 1930's came the advent of organized competitions, and parachuting became an internationally sanctioned sport in 1951.

Those early aviators would be amazed how the field of parachuting has progressed from their crude equipment and techniques to today's high tech chutes and very maneuverable, so precise that experienced skydivers can land exactly on just about any small target within a drop zone, or carry another person in tandem to a designated spot as was the case with former President Bush's jump.

*Credits:* Aero Journal, T. Reilly, No. 149, 1995; An Intro to Deployment Recovery Systems, Jan Meyer, Aug. 1985.

---

## President's Message

As most of you know there was no June Member meeting so that we could participate in the Portland Jetport's "Roads – Rails – Runways – Rudders Transportation Show" for 2009. This year's event was better than any of the previous venues, and our display in the hangar was very well attended, plus we were successful in selling \$335 worth of items during the show's two days which goes toward our gift shop revenue and greatly helps the bottom line. However, the overall slump in the economy and the less than stellar weather so far this summer means we are not having the best of seasons. Hopefully, things will improve as we head into July; also we are looking forward to a most interesting meeting July 11<sup>th</sup> as it will be held in combination with the Penobscot Scale Modelers' organization. In addition, there are a couple of new displays in the works so do come out and bring a relative or friend along. Finally, it goes without saying we continually need more members to help out staffing the museum throughout the remainder of the summer season. Please consider helping out once or a couple times when you can spare the time on a Saturday or Sunday. You can check the volunteer openings /requirements each weekend day by going to our website, and contacting Les Shaw, Mike Cornett or Jim Nelligan to sign up.

Bob Umberger

---

## 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.

\$16.00 at the museum, \$20.00 via mail. To order, call or email the museum.

"...a great story by a member of the Greatest Generation. Exceptionally good reading, riveting to the end." Bill Townsend  
Teacher-in-Space, STS-51.

---

*The United States Air Force  
in Maine*



*Progeny of the Cold War*  
John C. Garbinski

*The United States Air Force in Maine, Progeny of the Cold War*

by John Garbinski.

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

\$20.00 (plus \$3.00 postage and handling). To order, call or email

---

## When U.S. Navy Came to Auburn, Maine

Just a very few months after the December 7, 1941 disaster at Pearl harbor, the German submarines were sinking ships just off the east coast of the United States at an alarming rate. It was obvious to our military something had to be done to curb this menace.

One thing the US Navy did was send a detachment from Aviation Scouting Squadron VS1D1 from the US Naval Air Station in Squantum, Massachusetts to the Lewiston-Auburn Airport in Auburn, Maine (April or May 1942 – I was 14). This detachment, as I remember, consisted of about five officers and six enlisted men (not a

very large war machine). The airplanes they brought with them were two Vought-Sikorsky OS2U-3 Kingfishers. They were a two place airplane with the pilot in the front cockpit and an air crewmen in the rear with a 30 cal. Machine gun and two depth charges (one on each wing). These airplanes were used to patrol the Maine coast for German submarines.

This detachment came to the Lewiston-Auburn Airport you can say COLD TURKEY. There were no facilities waiting for them (*this was war time*). They had to improvise and improvised they did! The Navy took over half of the only hangar at the airport at that time. This hangar was located on the Old Hotel Road side of the airport. This hangar was built, I think, in 1938 by the WPA and is still I use today some 71 years later.



What about housing for the men? This was taken care of by taking over the local tavern known as **The Landing** just across the road from the Airport. This facility was owned by one Mister Alsid David who lived on the second floor and operated the tavern on the main floor. This was a small operation, a few booths for patrons, a small kitchen for making sandwiches, a small bar, small dance floor and of course a 5 cent juke box (Saturday nights, this place was jumping). The second floor was used for Officer's Quarters, a communications room, etc. Enlisted men made do with cots in the back part of the tavern. Sometime later, a small temporary barracks was constructed in the rear of the main building. The heat source was a simple pot-belly stove. To operate the stove, you simply opened the top and dropped in a 15 lb. bag of coal (no central heating here).



The Commanding Officer (CO) had a problem – feeding his command. He came up with an easy solution. Next door to his new Command Center was a store called **The Airport Store**. At that time, the store was operated by my parents, Charles and Bibiane Houle. It was a very small store containing some groceries, a small grill for making sandwiches, a very small soda fountain and two ESSO gas pumps out front. The CO saw my mother at the grill and told her there was a war and he did not have a cook to feed his crew. Could she help? My mother said “You want me to go over to your new Navy Base and cook for your crew of twelve or so men, three meals a day, seven days a week until you can find a cook, is that right?” “Yes”, he replied “that’s about right”. “When do you want me to start?” she asked. “Right now would be a good time” was his reply. My mother did just that with the help of Roberta Sweetser, a young, Edward Little High School student whose father ran a garage just down the road. This lasted for about five months until the Navy came up with a cook. Did my mother do something for the war effort? I like to think so. Well done Mom.

Norman Houle  
June 2009

---

### UPCOMING:

12 July- Spurwink Fly in 8-11 a.m. 13<sup>th</sup> annual Spurwink Farm Fly-in and pancake breakfast at Cape Elizabeth  
8 Aug Monthly meeting of the Maine Aviation Historical Society at 10 a.m. at the museum in Bangor  
18-19 July Trucks, Tractors, Commercial Vehicles and Antique Aeroplane Show at Owls Head  
25-26 July Wings, Wheels Spectacular and Antique Aeroplane Show at Owls Head  
5-6 Sep Vintage Motorcycle Meet and Antique Aeroplane Show at Owls Head  
10-13 Sep. 36<sup>th</sup> annual International Seaplane Fly-in at Greenville.  
20 Sep Convertible Meet and Antique Aeroplane Show at Owls Head  
4 Oct Foreign Auto Festival and Antique Aeroplane Show at Owls Head

---



Vought O2U-1 Corsair and Ford XJR-1 Trimotor at Scarboro 30 Sep 1928.



Nels Nelson takes off in Bar Harbor on September 6, 1911, the third aviator to fly in the State of Maine. Nelson built his own Curtis-type biplane

---

Web site: [www.maineairmuseum.org](http://www.maineairmuseum.org) email: [mam@maineairmuseum.org](mailto:mam@maineairmuseum.org)

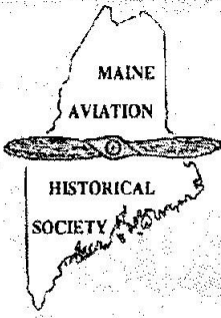
1-877-280-MAHS toll free in Maine. 207-941-6757

---

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

---



## Maine Aviation Historical Society Maine Air Museum \* Membership Form

Name: \_\_\_\_\_

Address: \_\_\_\_\_

City, State, Zip: \_\_\_\_\_

Special Interests: \_\_\_\_\_

Phone: \_\_\_\_\_ Email: \_\_\_\_\_

Dues are for one year, and membership will expire in the month you joined.

Annual membership includes six newsletters!

Mail payment to:  
Maine Aviation  
Historical Society  
PO Box 2641  
Bangor, ME 04402-2641

Membership	Dues	Benefits
Regular	\$25 annual	Newsletter, Museum Admission
Family	\$35 annual	Newsletter, Museum Admission
Corporate	\$100 annual	Newsletter, Museum Admission
Supporting	\$100 annual	Newsletter, Museum Admission, .
Lifetime	\$500*	Newsletter, Lifetime Membership Number, Museum Admission,
	* 2 annual \$250 payments	

We need volunteers-docents, mechanics, maintenance, librarians and exhibit specialists, etc.

Please call me. I want to be active in the organization.

I cannot join now, but would like to help. I am enclosing a check for \$\_\_\_\_\_.

Contributions over \$20 are tax deductible within the limits of the law.

I wish to support and obtain membership by purchasing a memorial brick.

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