



# *Dirigo Flyer*

Newsletter of the Maine Aviation Historical Society  
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The following article was submitted by member Loren Harmon. It was dictated by his friend Dave Lennan of Biddeford who was a Lieutenant in the Army Air Force in WWII. It is in Dave's own words via a recording made by his daughter. Dave passed away in 2006. The pictures are stock pictures of the POW camp at Barth and are from internet sources and were not part of the article submitted.

## **The Mission**

Nov. 16, 1944 – the target was Munich, Germany. I was the Bombardier—we were a crew of 10 on a B-24 flying with our 460<sup>th</sup> Bomb Group 15<sup>th</sup> Air Force from Italy. We were crossing the Alps on our mission to Munich when the war weary B-24 we were in developed engine problems and we proceeded only on three engines. As a result we dropped way back from the group. It was our pilot's decision not to abort and turn back but to continue alone to the target. We had aborted three prior missions due to aircraft mechanical problems and our pilot, a proud man, did not want to be “chewed out” again by our commanding officer. We were on the target run at the same altitude as the group had gone in on many minutes before us. We lost a second engine on the run and it may have been hit by flack. I dropped our bomb load and we turned right, from the target and headed for home base. We could not maintain altitude and all hands tried to lighten the ship by throwing out flack suits, guns and ammunition, etc. It was apparent that we were not going to get over the Alps. Our pilot give the order to bail out. I had opened the nose wheel door earlier – and I grabbed my G.I. boots which were tied together and dove out head first. Ironically if we had turned left after dropping our bombs, we most likely would have made it to Switzerland where we would have been interned for the duration of the war.

**Nov. 16<sup>th</sup> 1944-** I parachuted out of the nose wheel door of our crippled B-24 bomber over the Austrian Alps. My descent was inadvertently rapid because several panels of my chute had deteriorated and were torn. I bailed out into an undercast (a snowstorm) and upon hard impact- I landed on a rock ledge- my left shoulder, the nape of my neck and head striking the ledge. It was quite painful and after I was able to set myself right and assess where I was. I used a compass I had in my coverall pocket and started heading south, hopefully to allied lines. After coming down from the granite precipice I had landed on, I found progress to be very slow because with each step I took I would sink up to my crotch in deep snow. After a few steps I suddenly found myself over my head in a crevice that had been covered with snow. I was afraid I might not be able to get back up and out. I accomplished my escape by packing snow on the walls of the crevice with my bare hands into icy handholds and footholds. Needless to say I was exhausted and I decided to wait until the day light the next day to start walking again. I cut the remains of my chute in half and made a windbreak of the other half up against the face of the cliff. I made a small fire so that the heat and smoke would blow toward me in the wind break. I spent the night trying to dry out and keep warm and I didn't sleep.

The next morning broke clear and bright, the snow having stopped. I ate a small piece of a D-Bar I had in my pocket. It was the only food I had for energy. I set out walking south again and I was able to now identify and avoid other possible snow covered crevices.

I managed to climb only one peak in the daylight of the first day. The snow was so deep and my energy was being sapped with each step. While going up the peak I had to practically haul my body with my arms. My shoulder, neck, and head pained each time I did so.

At dusk on the mountainside I prepared to spend the second night by hollowing out the snow, wrapped myself in half the chute and lined the hole with the other chute part. My head, neck, and shoulder were by now painful and my feet and hands became very cold because my gloves and boots were wet. My "encampment" was visited by a curious large black mountain goat. I know he wasn't going to eat me- I sure wished I could have him for dinner!!

About noon the next day I had accomplished climbing one more peak and I ate the remainder of my D-bar. While sitting on top of the world I witnessed a large group of B-24 bombers from Italy passing overhead on a mission into Germany. Oh how I wished that I could be returning to base with them. I heard a Celestial choir singing the Lord's Prayer and I left at peace and not afraid. I could see on a peak several miles away what seemed to be a small building. My goal was to reach it somehow so my body could be found and my family advised ultimately, and my remains properly taken care of for burial.

I resumed walking and late that afternoon I came down into a sort of mountain valley where I saw a large mountain inn, which appeared to be uninhabited. I went into it and found a door had been forced. This gave me great joy that survivors of my crew had probably done it. I observed four figures coming down from a peak across the valley and happily they were my navigator and the gunners from the crew. We had a very emotional greeting and all decided that we would move into the large inn. They had been living in a smaller, almost snow covered house, on the far end of the valley. We survived approximately three weeks there, trying each day to find a way out. In the Inn we had found several cans of food and a wonderfully stocked wine cellar. We agreed to ration all of it and would eat one can of food each day with a bottle of wine to be divided among the five of us. The cans had no labels and some days we go hungry when the can opened was ketchup, mustard, etc.

Since we could not find a way out and we were probably going to starve there, we agree to surrender to anyone that might find us. Providence sent us an Austrian game warden who surprised us in bed one morning with his high powered rifle. I told him that we needed to eat a substantial meal to make it down the mountain to St. Bartholema where he lived. He was very friendly and we filled ourselves with food.

The trip was accomplished and he turned us over to the Wermacht soldiers who took us by power launch to Konigsee where we were first interrogated. The Germans were most interested in us because we were only about seven miles from Hitler's Eagles Nest in Berchesgarten. The interrogators had determined that our tail gunner, John Stariknok was of Polish decent and excoriated him by words and actions -taking a toothbrush he had in his pocket and brushing the inside of his mouth violently with it.

We were assigned two rifle carrying Wermacht guard to take us by train across Germany from Berchestgarten to Frankfort. When passing through a turnstile at the rail station the well-to-do Austrian owner of the mountain inn we had hidden in and who had voiced his anger at us during the first interrogation for drinking his "schnapps" -struck me with a heavy cane across the back of my head and shoulder. This added to the pain and discomfort I still felt from my bailout landing and which pain would continue to bother me through my life.

For approximately a week our guards took us by train during the days "or night" to various cities on our way to Frankfort for the final interrogation and assignment to a permanent P.O.W. camp. Along the way we were walked from train stations in the pitch black night to German billets. We felt very uneasy and thought our guards might shoot us. They walked us through Salzburg the morning after an allied bombing and the people were understandably not pleased to see us in our flying suits and helmets. Angry crowds in bombed out railroad stations, particularly in Munich, proved to be frightening experiences when certain leaders in the mob wanted to take us from our guards and beat us or kill us. Our guard protected us with their rifles and eventually we arrived in Frankfort.

We were immediately put into a solitary confinement cell alone. Each of us was interrogated later that day, much the same as all the others had been subjected to and endured. Being the senior officer of our group I went first at each interrogation and instructed my crew to stand at attention before the interrogators and in proper military fashion give name, rank, and serial number only. This seemed to work out OK. The Luftwaffe officers who interrogated us may have some little kinship or respect for us as fellow flyers. They treated us with the Geneva Convention rules and did not harm us.

During our trip we were fed spasmodically and minimally and were exhausted upon arrival at Frankfort. After a couple of days we were placed in barracks with other P.O.W. airmen. A few days later each P.O.W. was given a Red Cross box and we were told to board railroad box-cars. Fifty of us in half the car and two guards with a machine gun in the other half of the car. We lived in the box-car for one whole week while crossing Germany -headed for our permanent camp at Barth on the Baltic Sea some 80 miles north of Berlin. We were so limited for space in the box-car that we took turns sitting and standing up. We lived on the meager food provided by the Red Cross box. We used a bucket in the corner as a toilet. Drinking water was in short supply and our constant cries for it usually went unheeded. It was a long tedious and grueling trip. We saw almost complete devastation of cities from allied bombing attacks. Our train stopped frequently to avoid allied planes strafing or dive bombing. I assume (hoped) the train had red crosses on its' roof.

Eventually we reached Barth around the middle of December 1944 and were assigned to a compound and a barracks room. Fifty of us lived in this small room and slept in three tiers of bunks. It was cold most of the time so we slept in our clothing and had only one Red Cross blanket each for warmth. We began a slow starvation process from day one to our liberation in May by Russian troops. During our captivity I lost about 30-35 pounds from my normal weight of 170



pounds. I was so weak that I would black out sometimes and had to muster my remaining energy to climb up for sleep on my third tier bunk. Most days we would have only a mug of ersatz coffee and a very thin slice of black bread with a little of the Red Cross box jam on it. At Christmas our captors gave each man one Red Cross box and our "cooks" pooled the boxes and made a sort of Christmas dinner from their contents. It was the last Red Cross box or meat would receive until liberation in May. The Germans gave us what was called "Pea Powder" and it may have been stalks of nettles ground up. It made us sick and we only ate it

once. Occasionally we would receive a small ration of Rutabagas or Potatoes which our cooks made a water vegetable soup from.

Our days were spent playing cards, talking about food, exchanging recipes and generally trying to make the best of things until we could be free again.

We had a clandestine radio and each barracks received a daily news sheet of the war's progress. The whole camp agonized when the Battle of the Bulge seemed to us to be won by the Germans, and our imprisonment might be forever.

The Germans made us fall out into the cold for countless head counts. At night they would startle us awake by turning on a bright overhead light in the room, making a din by stomping about and counting us to see that nobody had escaped. I had nightmares about those nights after the war. Our days also were spent nervously concerned with ugly and frightening rumors. The worst one later confirmed as true after the war was that Hitler was advised to kill all P.O.W.s. Another rumor had it that the whole camp would be forced marched to some distant destination in advance of the onrushing Russian Army. Our camp commanders flatly refused to allow us to be moved. Instead we spent what little strength we had left for digging bomb shelters and trenches in our compound, almost with our bare hands. This was done in case Russian artillery shells fell on the camp.



As the war neared its end the Germans supplied us with hardly any food and we grew more emaciated and weaker. In retrospect I believe that had the war lasted a couple of more months many more of us would have died from starvation.

The Russians did come and we were free at last! Then their generals were not happy that we all didn't tear down the fences that had bound us, and that we hadn't struck out immediately in search of allied lines. The Russians threatened to force march the entire camp of 10,000 to Odessa on the Black Sea. Our camp commander Col. Zempke, prevailed in that discussion and in a few days practically the whole 8<sup>th</sup> Army Air Force flew into Barth's airfield. All 10,000 of us left camp marching in ranks of four singing at the top of our lungs "Roll Out the Barrel", "Into the Army Air Force", and "Wait 'Till the Sun Shines Nellie" as we marched out to beautiful B-24 and B-17 bombers waiting for us on the runway at Barth. The few remaining citizens of Barth were impressed with our spirit. They smiled and clapped as we departed.

We all ended up in a huge tent camp named Lucky Strike, near LeHavre, France. After many egg-nogs and a few gallons of wine in the local village bars, and the daily hot pursuit of any female, I finally left for the U.S.A. on a brand new troop ship named the Admiral Butner. We docked at Norfolk, VA, went by train, eventually to Ft. Devens, Ma.

I had a happy and tearful reunion with my parents and younger brother, and went home with them to Worcester, MA. They had only found out I was a P.O.W. a few weeks before my return home since the Germans had not mailed my Red Cross note of my capture. So the pain and strain for them concerning me was finally over. I returned September 1945 to Clark University to resume my studies. I was in uniform there until my discharge in November 1945.

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### President's Message

By the time you are reading this issue Labor Day will have passed, and hints of fall will be descending upon us. I wish to express my regrets for cancelling the September meeting for a personal family emergency. While on the brighter side, there have been some great aviation events scattered around the state, even though there has not been until very recently accommodating weather conditions. We'll say more about them in our year-end issue.

First, I would like to advise all our membership that the Board of Directors is pleased to inform you that a frequent visitor to the museum and a supporter of our organization's objectives has been appointed to our Board by special vote in August. Matt Watkins is a Vice President at Bangor Savings Bank and will be of great assistance in better connecting us

with the business community, and brings a fresh viewpoint to some of our needs and challenges. A hearty welcome to Matt from all of us.

Although still a work-in-progress, and somewhat behind the scene, the creative talent of member Hank Marois combined with the transformation of some sheets of Weyerhaeuser Plywood means MAM will soon be adding a replica of a P-47 to its display material, its primary mission being for use in local parades and possibly taken from time to time to off-site events around the state.

I also wish to mention that the October 10<sup>th</sup> meeting at the museum will be the end of the season “closing up” session; once again we would like to make this a gathering time to socialize among members and friends. I encourage those that are able to attend to bring along a favorite dish, some munchies or a dessert for what has become our “Pot Luck Cookout.” We will try to have a little entertainment as well. Please come, and bring a guest.

Looking a little further ahead, it won’t be long before we will need a number of candidates to run for positions that will be open at the end of this year. Please consider how important this is to the success of the organization and affords each of you an opportunity to apply your own talents; we especially need to have some that have never served to run for an Officer position or for the Board of Directors.

Bob Umberger

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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.

\$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.

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in Maine*



*Progeny of the Cold War*  
John C. Garbinski

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by John Garbinski.

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

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## Happenings:

Three key members of the Bangor International Airport administration visited the Maine Air Museum August 21<sup>st</sup>. It was the first time any of Some of the museum’s short and long The visitors were impressed with the artifacts. Pictured are Bob Jarvis, Scott Tash, BIA Finance Manager, and Director. Museum volunteer Hank



them had taken a tour of the facility. term goals were informally discussed. museum’s collections of Maine aviation Supervisor of Maintenance Operations, Anthony Caruso, Assistant Airport Marois escorted the group on their visit.

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## 2009 Greenville Fly-in

The Maine Aviation Historical Society was again represented at the annual Seaplane Fly-in at Greenville. A good time was had by all and the event never fails to impress those who visit. Photos by John Miller.



Left: Scott Cianchette’s 1975 Maule taxis past the steamer Katahdin. Right: Mike Lemieux’s 1974 Cessna 172 takes off.

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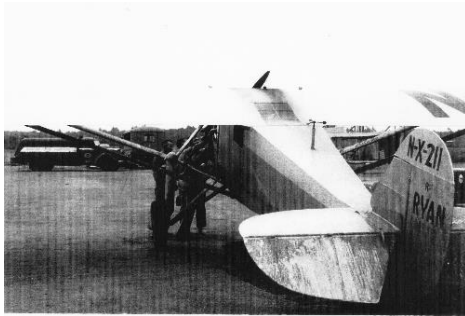
## 2009 Biddeford Airport Open House



The first day of the fly-in was washed out by rain but Sunday was marked by improving weather. Maine Aviation Historical Society members manned a display both days of the event. One of the highlights was an appearance by President George H.W. Bush. Member Scott Grant submitted this picture.

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### “Recent” Historical photo



No, this is not the “Spirit of St. Louis”, it is one of two replicas Hollywood had built for the movie “We” starring Jimmie Stewart in 1954. One replica was kept in reserve in case of damage to the first one as not to delay making the film. The picture was taken at the Old Town Airport (now the Dewitt Airport) in 1954. The mud on the airplane is not due to sloppy house keeping, it was put there to replicate the mud Charles Lindberg acquired on take off from Long Island, New York in 1927 on his solo Trans-Atlantic flight. A Stinson L-1 was used for filming and carrying some spare parts accompanied the “Spirit”. From

Old Town the planes flew on to Halifax, Nova Scotia filming as they went along. At Halifax, the “Spirit” was put aboard a ship bound for Europe where it was used to make the rest of the film. (Norm Houle photo).

...*Editor's note:* I remember the “Spirit” and the photo plane flying over Calais, Maine and St. Stephen, NB while filming. Based at the Princeton, Maine airport for a couple of days, the area was chosen for filming because there were no TV antennas sticking up out of the houses below. The only TV in the area was in the Queen Hotel in St. Stephen and they took down their antenna for the day of the filming.

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### Upcoming

**Sept. 21st - 23rd**, the Collins Foundation's Wings of Freedom Tour will be at the Sanford Airport with their B-17 Fortress, B-24 Liberator and the P-51 Mustang.

**Oct. 10** The **October meeting** of the Maine Aviation Historical Society will be held at the Museum in Bangor. This will be the closing day of the museum for the season and we hope many of our members and visitors will drop by. Check the web site for any changes and for program information.

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

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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**

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### A Taste From the Past.

For many years starting in 1940 the hangout for aviators in Bangor was the Pilots Grill. It is gone now but we have some of its paintings in the Maine Air Museum. There used to be a small dish on every table with their special cheese spread and crackers. Went real good with a cold beer while you were waiting for your order to be served. You can enjoy a taste from the old Pilots Grill at Hannaford Markets in the cheese section where *Pilots Grill Original Cheese Spread* is now available.



**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!

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Membership	Dues	Benefits
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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***  
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