



Dirigo Flyer

Newsletter of the Maine Aviation Historical Society
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November-December 2009

Welcome to the last issue of 2009. The past year has seen slow, but steady development of the museum, the cataloging of historical items, and increased interest in Maine Aviation History. This issue will cover some historical aspects and some of the events of 2009, some are on-going and some will be destined to become part of Maine history.

The Christmas Eve “Broken Arrow”

Much has been written about SAC’s decision to close Dow Air Force Base in 1968, and most of us are familiar with the stated reasons that Dow became a “problem” base. Many older World War II facilities were in need of replacement at great cost. The great blizzard of December 1962 brought attention to the fact that the base layout made it more difficult to keep the base running in heavy snowfall than at some “modern” northern tier bases, like Loring. Recent advances in Soviet submarine launched missiles and Bangor’s proximity to the coast made the future ability of the Dow alert force to make their take-off mission less likely. There was also the route of Interstate 95 that separated the base from the weapons storage area and required the presence of a civilian security force of U.S. Marshals, in addition to USAF security personnel, when weapons were transported. One final nail in the coffin of Dow AFB, however, is much less known. The Broken Arrow, or accidental event involving nuclear weapons, of December 24, 1963 was the topic of a brief Bangor Daily News editorial by the late John Day on July 5, 1968, but all of the official information about the mishap was unavailable and he had to rely on statements from former base civilian employees. With additional information now available, we can piece the events together as follows.

Christmas eve of 1963 brought a typical Maine snow storm and ground crews were busy moving the 6 alert force B-52Gs amongst the 8 parking ramps of the “Christmas tree” alert area across the runway from the current location of the Maine Air Museum. Around 10 PM, B-52G 59-2570 was moved from position X-Ray 4 to the freshly plowed X-Ray 1 by a team of 5 personnel and a Euclid tractor. The Stratofortress was in alert configuration with its emergency war order armament of 2 AGM 28 “Hound Dog” cruise missiles with W-28 thermonuclear warheads and 2 B-39 thermonuclear gravity bombs. As required, the Pilot, Copilot and Radar Navigator of crew R-50 were aboard during the movement. When the bomber was initially parked in X-Ray 1, it was 15-20 feet off the centerline and 15 degrees off parallel. The slight downward grade from the taxiway, the weight of the loaded bomber, and the falling snow prevented the tractor from gaining enough traction to pull it out again. After a conference with the aircraft crew, the decision was made to start the 4 inboard engines and taxi it out, then reposition it with the Euclid. Once this was accomplished, the crew completed the “rechocking” checklist, and the ground crew chocked the rear of all 4 landing gear trucks.

A few minutes after 11 PM, the Crew Chief had just completed hooking up the MD-3 generator and was preparing to hook up the MA-1A compressed air engine starter when the aircraft jumped the chocks and rolled backward off the ramp. One airman reportedly boarded the bomber, against regulations, in an attempt to apply the parking brakes, and suffered a minor injury in the process. The right wing broke off a light pole, rupturing a fuel cell, and caused the aircraft to roll onto its left wing as it traveled backwards down an embankment, It finally came to rest with the fuselage in a drainage ditch and both wings deflected upwards on the ground on either side.

Just how much damage occurred to the aircraft and to the weapons is still redacted from the reports available, but it is both clear and fortunate that no serious fuel fire erupted that could have resulted in a high explosive detonation of a warhead and caused serious contamination of the area.

59-2570 was repaired and returned to service in the 397th Bomb Wing at Dow AFB. She soldiered on in SAC and Air Combat Command for nearly another 40 years, being assigned to AMARC at Davis-Monthan AFB for storage shortly after Desert Storm.

.....Pete Noddin

President's Message

As 2009 fades into history and we reflect on what a decade it has been in our personal lives and for the country, it's obvious some things have changed forever; nevertheless, we must remain optimistic for the future. The same goes for MAHS and MAM. Just think, a decade ago the Maine Air Museum had no name recognition and was just barely coming together; at best you would have described the museum as "bare bones inside and out." Late in 1999 a few dedicated volunteer members had just pulled off an early "open house" for the benefit of the membership, some distinguished guests, and media. At that point in time the museum was only identifiable on its exterior by a small temporary sign and logo; we had secured two aircraft, the Luscome and Stinson, still with us today. As with any similar organization, over time members come and go, and a decade ago we had issued just over 300 memberships. Mike Cornett, our current Recording Secretary, was one of three new members highlighted in the December '99 newsletter. By comparison, at the end of 2009 we have surpassed the 500 membership mark, with the membership level remaining near 150 paid up / active members. Elsewhere on the Maine aviation scene of that period, Maurice Roundy had grand visions for his beloved Lockheed Super Constellations at the Lewiston – Auburn Airport. Who would have ever thought we would see a prominent world airline, Lufthansa, carrying out a restoration project here in Maine to save these aircraft. As you will recall, we toured the Lufthansa operation and aircraft in conjunction with our February '09 off-site member meeting.

Clearly the museum, now the cornerstone of our organization, has evolved and continually improved year after year, and we have many things in the works to further enhance the visitor experience. MAHS is now a well known entity within the aviation community of Maine, which we all should all take to heart. But, some of the challenges of a decade ago haven't changed much for MAHS, such as our long term financial health and much needed fund raising, acquiring a significant aircraft for static display, and above all greater ability to attract / retain new and younger members.

Continuing as your President, we enter this new decade knowing we have these challenges, but I and the other Officers & Board Members (new and /or reelected) are thankful for the organization's solid foundation so many of you have contributed toward. We need the continued support of all of you, and please keep in mind you can help MAHS & MAM in many ways, whether it be from the comfort of your easy chair, locally or from afar for those members residing outside of Maine. I close by wishing you my fellow "*Dirigo Flyers*" the best for the New Year!

Bob Umberger

Election of Officers for 2010

President: Bob Umberger

Vice-President: John Miller

Treasurer: Joe Quinn

Corresponding Secretary: Al Cormier

Board of Directors: Joe Belding, John Craig, Scott Grant

Bangor International Airport contract

A military transport company has solidified its relationship with Bangor International Airport with a three-year contract.

Airport officials say Georgia-based Global Aviation Holdings, Inc. will use Bangor as its exclusive fuel and maintenance stop on the East Coast. Airport Director Rebecca Hupp says that means Bangor will retain flights from two Global subsidiaries that transport military personnel.

The Bangor Daily News says it's good news for the local airport, which is under competition from New Hampshire's Pease International Airport for military flights.

Earlier this fall Oklahoma-based Omni Air sent some flights to Pease before switching back to Bangor, the last major U.S. airport for flights going to and coming from Europe.

...*Photo of Omni Air International DC-10 logo by John Miller*



Collins Foundation P-51C



The only visit to Maine this summer was at the Sanford Airport where this picture of an early model P-51C version was photographed by Bob Umberger.

Maine Military Museum

Maine Aviation Historical Society members recently visited the Maine Military Museum in South Portland. Owned and operated by Lee Humiston, the museum is located at 513 Broadway in South Portland. Visit their website at www.mainemilitarymuseum.org.



Aviator Rushes Home to Dying Father

Recounted by: Bob Umberger

It's Christmas time, December 21st to be exact, 1929. The country is still reeling from the stock market crash, and aviation marks the historic first flight of Admiral Byrd to the region of the South Pole. Here at home noted aviator (ex-army flyer) Herbert G. Partridge gets word in New York that his father was hospitalized in Belfast and dying. Aviator Capt. Partridge was in the planning stages for a record setting 7,700 mile non-stop flight from New York to Buenos Aires when he received word of his father's condition. Newspapers from around the state carried the story of young Herbert's journey home, being the only child of George W. Partridge, age 74, born in Prospect, Maine. The following account (as reported) comes from the original news clippings located in MAM's library/archives:

Capt. Herbert G. Partridge and Pilot Trying to Reach Belfast From New York When Fuel Runs Out - The Curtiss-Robin plane with Capt. Partridge and pilot H.B. Fisher left Valley Stream field, Long Island, N.Y. at approximately 4:30 p.m., reaching the vicinity of Biddeford shortly before 8 o'clock in the evening but soon realized "their fuel supply was running so low it needed replenishing immediately. They circled about Biddeford three or four times, and when over Saco in their efforts to reach the Portland airport, eye witness Eugene Hill, a resident of that city, spied the plane and a few seconds later saw the occupants throw out a flare. This failed to attract attention, and finally after sighting some fires on the airfield in Scarborough, the result of lack of electrical lighting, they determined their gas would permit them to go no further. Turning back to Biddeford, Fisher sighted a field in the farming district of South Biddeford." Partridge and Fisher had intended to easily reach Scarborough by 8 p.m. to refuel for the last leg to Belfast, but apparently flight conditions were not favorable. One account credits a Patrick Breen of Biddeford as likely saving their skins by his knowledge and quick action. Breen, and his nephew, Nathaniel Pierce Jr. were riding home when they heard the plane and recognized the flare as a distress signal. It turns out Breen had earlier been a proprietor of a lunch cart on Roosevelt Field, New York and knew what to do when pilots declared an emergency. Their car was turned about; its lights were turned on the nearby field, and offering a further reference was an oil lantern. Capt. Partridge claimed "he could only see a few flickering lights which looked to them like candles or lanterns."

Guided by Breen's actions with their gas running out they had no choice but to attempt a landing. Pilot Fisher later stated "it was the toughest landing I ever made; we struck rather hard with some of the under gear damaged, but neither of us sustained the slightest injury. We were doing fine until the gas got low."

Fisher was transported to the Scarborough airfield where the fires set for them were still burning. Capt. Partridge chartered a taxi without delay to transport him to Belfast, but it was reported it took all night to make the 110 mile journey, not arriving until 5:30 a.m. on Sunday the 22nd due to almost impossible road conditions between Portland and Belfast, plus engine troubles along the way. Regrettably, Capt. Partridge didn't know his father had already passed away until he arrived at the Belfast hospital that morning; a wire informing of his father's death failed to catch up with him. Back in Biddeford, as the word spread many of the locals ventured out to view the damaged airplane resting in a small gully where it came to rest. Later in the day the plane was loaded on a truck and brought to the Portland airfield in Scarborough to undergo needed repairs. Reported damages included the landing gear, propeller and one of the wings.

One complication for Capt. Partridge and Fisher upon passing into Maine airspace was the fact that the entire Biddeford-Saco area had been without electricity with downed wires from a heavy sleet storm two days earlier. This power outage appears to have extended to the airfield in Scarborough as well, hence the reason for the fires on the field at that time. In closing, there is additional history regarding this Maine born aviator which offers us an opportunity to learn more about Capt. Herbert G. Partridge if any member would like to do a little digging/research.

Credits: Portland Sunday Telegram, 12/22/29; Bangor Daily News, 12/23/29.

Footnote: Other sources indicate the Curtiss-Robin aircraft was conceived for private owners, and designed as way to use up the WW1 surplus 90 HP OX-5 engines which Curtiss had introduced in 1915 and throughout the war period. The plane was considered inexpensive in comparison to the general weight and power class of its competitors, most still being open cockpit biplanes. Production ran through the Depression Years of 1929 to 1930; cruising speed was listed at 102 MPH, although later models had different and more powerful engine & propeller features. The Curtiss-Robin models were produced at the Curtiss Robertson Aeroplane & Motor Company, St. Louis, Mo.

Pictures:



Above: Member Hank Marois in the photoprop P-47 that he constructed this summer. Plans are to use it for taking pictures of visiting youngsters at the museum and for MAM's float in local parades.

Below left: A USAF HC-130P taxiing behind the museum. Right: A NASA Gulfstream from the Dryden Research Center. Note the external pod under the Gulfstream. This is a UAVSAR, an Unmanned Air Vehicle



Synthetic Aperture Radar. It is in a specially designed pod that will be interoperable with unmanned aircraft in the future. It can also be used to gather scientific data for geological studies of earthquake prediction. Photo also taken at the museum. Photos by John Miller.

Didn't get what you wanted for Christmas, let the museum make up for it:

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

His flying life as told by AI 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

Name the Base (from the Midcoast Regional Redevelopment Authority –MRRA)

Do you have a name for the base properties in Brunswick and Topsham Annex once they're redeveloped? We want to hear from you. Go to www.mrra.us and tell us your name idea. You never know, we might just use it.

MAM 2009 Raffle winners

The winner of the P-47 model was Carol Walton of Orrington and the winner of the HH-60 model was Timothy Grant of Livermore Falls.

Upcoming:

13 February: Monthly meeting of the MAHS to be held at the Waterville Airport.

13 March: Monthly meeting of the MAHS to be held at the Boothbay Railway Village, Boothbay.



Doan's Airport of South Brewer, Maine 1947. Courtesy of Norm Houle

Web site: www.maineairmuseum.org email: 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.

	Membership	Dues	Benefits
Annual membership includes six newsletters!	Regular	\$25 annual	Newsletter, Museum Admission
	Family	\$35 annual	Newsletter, Museum Admission
	Corporate	\$100 annual	Newsletter, Museum Admission
Mail payment to:	Supporting	\$100 annual	Newsletter, Museum Admission, .
Maine Aviation	Lifetime	\$500*	Newsletter, Lifetime Membership Number, Museum Admission,
Historical Society		* 2 annual \$250 payments	
PO Box 2641			
Bangor, ME 04402-2641			

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.

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