



Dirigo Flyer

Newsletter of the Maine Aviation Historical Society
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With this issue of the Flyer, the editor finds it necessary to ask our readers and Society membership to start thinking about submitting new articles for publication. I have a few very short, general interest stories, but only two articles of any length. Both of these are “crash” stories. Always interesting reading but, of course, a bit on the negative side of aviation. One of which is the lead story for this issue. It would be nice to have some stories about early aviation in Maine, personal experiences, and particularly stories about flying in the backcountry of Maine. Earlier stories about WWII experiences involving Maine people have been well received and there is always room for a good tale of adventure from that time period. And don’t ignore experiences from more recent times either.

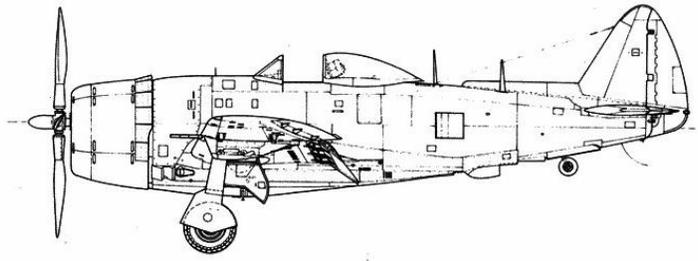
Death of an Ace P-47N Thunderbolt 44-89339

Major Kenneth G. Smith had begun his military aviation career after two years of college, when he joined the Royal Air Force Cadets in 1941 and served as a fighter pilot in the famed RAF Eagle Squadron 121, made up of American volunteers. He transferred to the U.S. Army Air Forces in September of 1942 and continued to serve in England. He was credited with 126 combat missions as a P-47 Thunderbolt and later P-51 Mustang Pilot while assigned to the 4th Fighter Group, 335th Fighter Squadron. He was an ace, credited with downing 6 German aircraft. His awards included a Purple Heart and a Distinguished Flying Cross with two Oak Leaf Clusters.

In early December 1946, Smith reported to the newly activated 14th Fighter Group at Dow Army Air Field in Bangor to take command of the 37th Fighter Squadron. The assigned mission aircraft of the 37th was the P-47N Thunderbolt, but by October of 1947, the 14th Fighter Group was slated to become jet propelled and receive its first Republic P-84B “Thunderjets” in November. Major Smith had recently returned from Muroc Dry Lake (later Edwards AFB) California where he had been among a small detachment of pilots from the 14th assigned to conduct accelerated service testing of the P-84.

The “N” version of the Republic P-47 Thunderbolt was the final production version of the “Jug” and saw limited service in the Pacific Theater in the later months of WW II. Just over 1800 of them had been built. The 14th Fighter Group’s N models could easily be distinguished from those of the 132nd Fighter Squadron, Maine Air National Guard, with whom they shared Dow Field. The 132nd flew the “D” model, which was the quintessential WW II version seen in the air war over Europe, with over 12,000 manufactured. The “D” model had the classic “rounded” wing ends and had a “dry” wing. The N model had been developed to be a long

range escort fighter for B-29s over Japan and had a shorter, squared off wing which also contained a fuel tank. The squared off wing reduced drag, extending range, and also improved the plane's roll rate, increasing its effectiveness as a fighter.



The mission briefed on the afternoon of October 20 was for Major Smith to lead a flight of 4 planes on an aerobatics training sortie in the local flying area. The formation took off from Dow Field at about 1:40 P.M. and climbed to 18,500 feet. The exercise began with the planes in trail formation and Smith leading a series of Chandels (climbing turns) and lazy eights.

The number 2 plane, flown by Captain Murray, developed a high engine oil temperature and turned back toward Dow after the first few minutes of maneuvering.

As the remaining flight of 3 leveled off at 14,000 feet, Smith notified the other pilots by radio that his engine was backfiring and he was breaking formation to troubleshoot. A few minutes later he rejoined them saying that his engine was running smoothly. The "rat race" began with Smith leading a shallow dive to 13,500 feet and pulling up into what the other two pilots believed was the beginning of a loop. As he reached the apex of the loop, with vapor trails coming off his wing tips, inverted and wings nearly level with the horizon, the plane suddenly departed from normal flight. The number 3 pilot witnessed Smith's plane complete a $\frac{3}{4}$ snap roll to the right, stall, and slip tail first back toward the two following Thunderbolts. The aircraft was seen to momentarily right itself, and then fall off into a steep nose down spiraling turn which quickly degraded into a flat spin.

Lieutenant Homer Hayes, in the second ship, caught up with 339 at 11,000 feet and it was still in a flat spin. Both he and Lieutenant John Savage flying the Number 3 ship fully expected Smith to recover from the spin. As they watched, the P-47 would spin 4-5 turns, then slow down, level and oscillate in pitch as if it were successfully being recovered, but would then suddenly snap into another series of spins. As the aircraft was well below 10,000 feet by this point, both Hayes and Savage began making radio calls to Smith urging him to bail out of the stricken aircraft. Neither recalled seeing anything that made them believe Major Smith had attempted to abandon the aircraft.

On the ground, several witnesses had been watching the aerobatics over the coastal cargo port town of Searsport, and witnessed the final few minutes of flight leading up to the crash. Some perceived no attempt by the pilot to bail out. A few saw Smith open the canopy shortly before impact, between 500 and 1000 feet, and stand up in preparation to jump just before it hit the ground. Others stated that they clearly saw Smith climb out of the cockpit at a higher altitude and stand on the wing, but apparently he was pinned to the fuselage by the centrifugal force.

The Thunderbolt impacted with a large fireball near downtown Searsport in a stream gully between two residential streets. Lt. Savage reported the crash location to the Dow tower and stayed overhead until he saw a municipal fire apparatus arrive on the scene.

Near the crash site, several witnesses ran toward the burning wreckage in hopes of aiding the pilot. One of them was A.T. Wagner, a WW II veteran P-47 pilot. Major Smith was spotted laying face down in the brook about 10 feet behind the tail of the burning plane. Wagner and two other men ran into the brook and dragged Smith ashore, all three men suffering burns in the process. They quickly determined that he was dead and Wagner partially removed the parachute from its pack to shroud the body.

The local fire department arrived on scene and advanced two hose lines to contain the fire and prevent the loss of nearby buildings, but were unable to extinguish the aviation gasoline fire with water. Within an hour, a convoy arrived from Dow Field with an ambulance, crash fire truck and Military Police. The Army Air Forces crash crew quickly extinguished the remaining gasoline fire with low pressure carbon dioxide.

Based on testimony of Lieutenants Hayes and Savage, and the pre-flight servicing records for 44-89339, the Board of Inquiry for this mishap concluded that at least 50 gallons of gasoline remained in the fuselage auxiliary fuel tank of the aircraft when the last set of aerobatics began. Since the weight of the fuel in this tank degraded handling and gave the aircraft an aft center of gravity, the flight manual for the P-47N required 25 gallons or less fuel in the auxiliary tank for aerobatics of aerial combat. The flight had only been airborne for 40 minutes and it was not possible that Smith had used enough fuel to be down to 25 gallons in this tank. A

local order was issued reminding 14th Group pilots about this requirement and the Air Defense Command published this accident in its monthly *Accident Review* magazine as a reminder to all P-47N pilots.

Although Headquarters Air Defense Command did not concur, the Board of Inquiry also felt that Smith's temporary duty at Muroc flying P-84s had been a contributing factor to the accident. Even though he had almost 400 hours in P-47Ns and over 700 in all models of the P-47, this was only his third flight in a Thunderbolt since returning from Muroc Dry Lake and his first involving aerobatics. The Board stated that the intensive flying (about 50 hours) of the new jet aircraft with all of its handling peculiarities may have caused Smith's P-47 skills and working knowledge of the flight parameters to degrade.

.....Submitted by Peter Noddin.

PRESIDENT'S MESSAGE

I hope some of the comparisons of a decade ago contained in the last issue of the *Dirigo Flyer* were of interest to our membership. One other, an action from the Board of Directors from ten years ago was to set the membership annual dues at \$25.00, where it remains, even though every item or service has gotten progressively more expensive year after year "what a value!" Obviously, we want to keep everyone's involvement with the organization and the museum affordable, and frankly we have been able to operate all this time without increases to membership and the museum's entrance fee due in large part to the generosity of a few members that make supplemental monetary or in kind donations which defray some of the ongoing / reoccurring expenses. Without singling out these members, I wish to state how appreciative we are for their added support! With the start of a new year, plus springtime being the period when the majority of membership renewals come due, it is a great opportunity for other members to voluntarily give us a boost too. Rather than increase our membership fee, I would like to propose / request that members who can afford it consider including a little extra with your membership renewal, which by the way would be a "tax deductible donation". For example, should a hundred of our 140 or so members contribute an extra ten dollars, we would have an additional \$1,000 to work with. This is one way you all could help, especially if you are just unable to staff the museum during the summer months, or participate in other activities throughout the year. We shouldn't forget the "Memorial Brick" program either; if family members are looking for a gift to you or maybe as a tribute to any present or passed family member(s), we all benefit.

With the ninth operational year of the museum fast approaching, I want to thank our Board Members, new and re-elected for your willingness to serve the organization. We also extend a hearty thank you to member Hank Marois for his contributions to the Board and the several projects he spearheaded for the benefit of the museum during his tenure. We still need Hank's energy and talents for some things in the works when he returns to the area which will make the museum experience better than ever for all visitors.

Again this year, MAHS participated in the re-energized "Maine Aviation Forum", held at the Owls Head Transportation Museum, Feb. 27th. From the forum's proceedings, with eighteen Maine aviation organization's in attendance, I found some of their exchanges worthy of highlighting for the interest of our membership at large:

From the **Maine DOT** – Five Maine airports have received funds amounting to \$10 million dollars through the American Recovery & Reinvestment Act, second highest award within the New England states. From the **Recreational Aviation Foundation** – This organization is hoping to open up access and maintain back country airstrips throughout the country; this initiative could also be very beneficial for Maine aviation and its aviators. Contact person, John Nadeau, at Mcnade@aol.com. From the **Wiscasset Airport** – This is an anniversary year for the airport; Ocean Point Aviation will host a 50th Airport Anniversary Fly-In in the fall, Oct. 2nd. From **Wings Reality** – They have developed right here in Maine a new online aviation reality show; check it out by going to <http://www.wingsreality.com>.

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 \$4.00 postage and handling). To order, call or email the museum.

Portland International Jetport to Offer Daily Service to Toronto

On Jan. 27 the Portland Jetport announced that it will be offering twice daily service to Toronto, Canada starting May 17th. The non-stop service to Toronto's Lester B. Pearson International Airport will be seasonal with decisions made on possible expanded services based on passenger numbers.

Air Canada will be using a Beech 1900D for the service, a pressurized twin engine turbo prop airplane designed to carry passengers in all weather conditions.

Half of Aviation Firm's Staff to be laid off

Five months after the company was sold to a Milwaukee conglomerate, Telford Group Inc., a Bangor-based aviation maintenance firm, is expected to lay off roughly half of its 65 employees.

After the sale the ACC (Air Cargo Carriers) acknowledged that there would be a consolidation.

Telford Allen II founded the Telford Group in 1982 in Waterville as a mom-and-pop charter flight company. In addition to the Bangor Facility, the Telford Group has a research and development facility at the former Loring Air Force Base in Limestone that employs 20 people. It also has operations in Alabama, Texas, and Maryland that are now part of ACC.

Museum Receives Exhibits from Deep South

The museum is the new home for two aviation related exhibits courtesy of the Museum of Science and Industry (MOSI) in Tampa, Florida. One of the exhibits is an ingeniously constructed aircraft wing airfoil section demonstrating the lift capability at various angles of attack. The second is a Bernoulli Effect demonstration showing that as wind speed increases, side air pressure decreases using two suspended bowling balls to illustrate the effect. Both exhibits will be reconstructed so as to be portable and used in schools and air shows as well as at the museum. The exhibits were made available through Dave Conley, Vice President of Exhibits at MOSI through MAM volunteer Hank Marois of Trenton, Maine and St. Petersburg.

Donations from Brunswick Naval Air Station

With the closing of the Brunswick Naval Air Station, John Coray, Commander of COMPATRECONWING 5 has given a number of items to the museum. These include a large Wing 5 emblem, Plaques from VP-8, WP-10, VP-11, VP-23, VP-26, VP-92, the Aviation Support Detachment, and Fleet Support Unit 5., Various photos and hats, Battle Efficiency plaques, the Wing-5 Captains Cup Trophy, and numerous other memorabilia all relating to the BNAS wings.

Recently Seen



T-6 at Biddeford



DC-10 Tanker at Portland



Last P-3 to leave Brunswick Naval Air Station

P-40 at Brunswick Naval Air Station

A Request

One request and one question: First: would members with email capability please notify the museum of your e-address. This will facilitate getting announcement of meetings and other events to you.

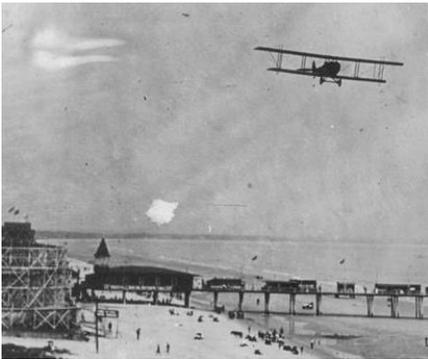
The question: How many members with email would be interested in receiving their copy of the *Dirigo Flyer* directly to them via email?

Links

Yes, we have started a Facebook page. Go to www.facebook.com and search for Maine Aviation Historical.

Peter Noddin's Maine Aviation Archeology site is at: www.mewreckchasers.com

The museum web site is: www.maineairmuseum.org



A Jenny over Old Orchard Beach..date unknown and Blue Angels over Brunswick 2009.

Upcoming:

April 10. 10 a.m. Monthly meeting of the Maine Aviation Historical Society at the Maine Air Museum in Bangor

May 8. 10 a.m. Monthly meeting of the Maine Aviation Historical Society at the Maine Air Museum in Bangor

The Museum will be opening for the season on Memorial Day Weekend

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Web site: www.maineairmuseum.org email: mam@maineairmuseum.org

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Association Officers

President: Robert Umberger, Jr. Biddeford, rumberge@maine.rr.com

Vice President: John Miller, Newburgh, ME vintagewings@cs.com

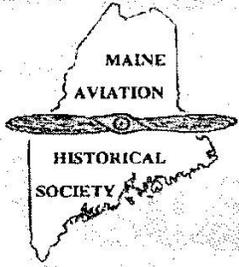
Recording Secretary: Mike Cornett MDF84B@aol.com

Corresponding Secretary: Al Cormier acormier@roadrunner.com

Treasurer: Joe Quinn, Levant, ME, jwquinn@midmaine.com

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.

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