



DIRIGO FLYER

Vol. III, No. 9 October 1995

Newsletter of the Maine Aviation Historical Society • 101 Monroe Avenue, Westbrook, Maine 04092 • 207-854-9972

First of all, your editor apologizes for the lateness of this issue of the Dirigo Flyer. It's been a hectic fall season, what with air shows and meetings, frustrating time spent on the calendar, plus having to work as well. Lots of exciting things are going on, and we'll try to keep you posted on all of them in better time in the future.

Background Notes on the White Bird

As most of you know, Nungesser and Coli took off from Paris, France on May 8, 1927 in the *White Bird* attempting to fly to New York. They were last seen crossing the Irish coast, and a plane was heard over Newfoundland and as far as Machias, Maine. Extensive searches were made at the time. Since then, ENIGMA has searched in Newfoundland, and TIGHAR has searched the Machias area extensively and in Newfoundland, all without positive results as yet. Maine native John Argraves theorized that after arriving in the Machias area, Nungesser and Coli, not having enough fuel to reach New York, would have diverted to Montreal. This theory, combined with the 1942 sighting of a wreck on Big Spruce Mountain by the U.S. Army Air Force, has led to aerial searches there in 1994 and 1995. On October 29th, a small group of MAHS members climbed the mountain on a preliminary hike to get the lay of the land.

Member Jim Chichetto has written the following account of this hike. It was also covered by Royal Ford and Mark Wilson of the *Boston Globe*. Their account with two pictures appeared in the *Boston Sunday Globe* of November 5, 1995, pages 39 and 40. This story was reprinted in the *Portland Press Herald* on Tuesday, November 7, 1995, page 5B.

Report on the MAHS Big Spruce Mountain Hike

On Sunday, October 29, 1995, members of MAHS make their best attempt to date to find the *White Bird* on Big Spruce Mountain. Joining them were four hikers from the New Hampshire and Massachusetts area. Everyone converged in Milo, Maine for the long awaited ground search of Big Spruce Mountain. The weather was damp and rainy. It had rained all night leaving the ground soaked and the streams were running high. The forecast was for showers to come through the area and for the temperature to cool down.

Leo Boyle had spoken with Royal Ford, a reporter for the *Boston Globe*. Mr. Ford had expressed interest in going along on this hike and learning more about Maine's aviation history. With Royal were *Globe* photographer Mark Wilson and two hiking companions, John Pratt and Mike White. John is a pilot who flies for Delta Airlines. He learned his trade while flying P-3s out of Brunswick for the Navy. Mike married a girl with local ties and has spent time in the Milo area.

Leo, James and myself arrived early in Milo to have time to go over some background for the story with Royal. We spent about an hour talking about the *White Bird* and other Maine aircraft stories before heading back down to the Milo Fire Department to meet the other adventurers. At 0910 we all got together and discussed the best way of traveling to the site. It was decided to take all the vehicles in as far as the gate by Katahdin Iron Works. We pulled out in a six vehicle line at 0930. The weather was damp with light showers and pockets of misty ground fog.

The roads were good and we drove into KIW in about 35 minutes. We stopped at the old ruins and took a few pictures of the site. Since the gate was open and the road good, we decided to press on with all the vehicles. We drove another six miles up to the High Bridge area and then parked the two autos. We squeezed the spare gear into the three 4WDs and Rob Rohr's pick-up. The easy part of the trip was over. It had stopped raining but was getting colder.

The road to Greenwood Pond was good until we reached the halfway point near where Greenwood Brook crosses the old road. At this point we went four wheeling as the road became washed out springboard, nice flat gravel with sudden holes large enough to drive a truck into and hopefully out of.

Jeremy Williams, a new MAHS member who knows the KIW area, took point. John and Maria Miller rode with him in his full size Chevy pick-up. James, myself and Leo followed in my S-15 GMC. Royal and his party came next in a Toyota Forerunner. Rob and his "I-can-go-anywhere" Ford pick-up were next. Cliff Haines rode with Rob. We hit one mud spot and then two washouts within the first quarter mile. The big Chevy eased down into these and dragged its bumper as the nose started up the other side of the washouts. Williams, who has done this before, make it look easy. The shorter wheel based GMC and Toyota zipped up and over each challenge with no problem. After we hooked a rope onto Rob's Ford at the second

Continued next page

washout and pulled it out by hand, it was decided that he would park it right there and we would use only 4WDs to continue. We swapped more gear around and then Rob and Cliff climbed into the back of the Chevy as we all headed towards the pond.

A traveling routine was soon established. The trucks would drive up to the next washout and stop. The three drivers would then check it out while the passengers disembarked. The drivers would then work their way through the bad spot and reload on the other side. Most washouts were solid and we didn't sink at all. The last mile or so to our hiking site took us over an hour to reach.

When we reached the site near Greenwood Pond, we spent time checking gear and comparing the topo map with the new J.W. Sewall Co survey photos. We then divided into two groups. Leo and Cliff would stay with the trucks and act as our base camp. The rest of us headed into the woods across from the trucks at 1202. The wind had picked up some and the temperature had dropped a few more degrees. It was much colder than it had been back in Milo, but at least the rain was holding off.

The first 200 yards up the mountain were the worst. Some timber had been cut there years ago and small evergreens about 10 feet high had grown in the cleared area. This dense growth was thicket-like and one had to bull between the small trees, pulling oneself through by holding onto the small tree trunks. We all separated as we picked paths of least resistance through this section. By the time we had all gotten past the new growth we were scattered across the bottom of the hill. Since it had rained all night, we were all soaked by the time we had pushed our way through the dense evergreens. We re-formed into two groups and moved upward following roughly parallel lines.

The mountain is covered with moose trails and we followed them when they ran in an uphill direction. About one-third of all the trees on this side of the mountain were dead from bud worms. Many had lost their tops from the high winds. The tops were criss-crossed on the ground everywhere. At this point Rob stopped for a few minutes before heading back down to help Leo and Cliff at the trucks. The rest of us headed upward, still in two groups. The rain held off, but it was getting colder as we climbed.

As we reached the 2700 foot level we spread out a little more. We moved along the face of the mountain in a vertical line. John, with the hand-held GPS, guided us toward the prime search area, pinpointed by Oscar Blue. We explored every open stop and rock outcropping we could find on the northeastern side. The area has few clearings and no large rock formation. We reached the target area clearing at 2790 feet around 1315. We stopped and checked the map, took a few group photos and then decided to check the woods around the site and the peak above it. We were having problems with the GPS unit so we did a visual check to locate our position. We circled the north side of the mountain to visually see the area. Once having seen the northern view, we crossed to the back and looked down that slope. We then walked to the top of the north end of the mountain. We consulted the map and photographs again. We knew we had hit the right spot but had found no sign of any man made objects. It was cold and windy at the top of the mountain,

and the rain was starting again. We decided to head back down the mountain in a scattered manner to check over more ground. We had done a good job checking the face of the mountain thoroughly while climbing up. We hoped we might see something we missed by coming at it from another angle. We headed down and divided into small groups as we struggled over blowdowns and into pockets of small evergreens. The hike down was much easier except for the last 200 yards. At last everyone was down and we gathered around the trucks to compare notes.

Cliff had brought donuts and instant coffee, along with a small camp stove to heat the water with. As we shed some of our water soaked gear we enjoyed the coffee and donuts. We agreed that we had covered the area well, but had found nothing to support the *White Bird* theory. After 20 minutes or so we decided to head back to Milo.

The trip back out was quicker, but the washouts were worse than before. It had rained off and on while we were hiking and the water was ripping the washouts more by the minute. Our tires had also torn up the sides of these washouts while driving into the pond. Now on the way out it was more of a challenge, but we all made it without anyone having to be towed.

Once back in Milo, the group broke up. Many of us headed for Miller's Field in Newburgh, Maine. John had offered to show Royal and the others his collection of aircraft parts and art. While we were there we had a chance to go over some more files and compare notes. John then gave everyone a tour of the field and showed off the F-84F parts recovered from the East Bucksport crash site this year. It was early evening before everyone headed home. We had not found the *White Bird*, but we all had fun. We will continue to look for clues and investigate reports, like the strange engine found in tidal mud flats near Lubec . . .

And So the Search Continues . . .

A good time was had by all, and the search continues. The top of the mountain is moss-covered and there is nothing on the surface to be seen. As a prelude to a return in the spring in 1996, we will continue our research. We want to talk to any wardens or foresters who have possibly been in the area. We also want to investigate the possibility of a magnetic or infra-red search then. It would be possible to put a small group on the mountain by helicopter. And then there's that strange engine near Lubec . . .

Thanks Again

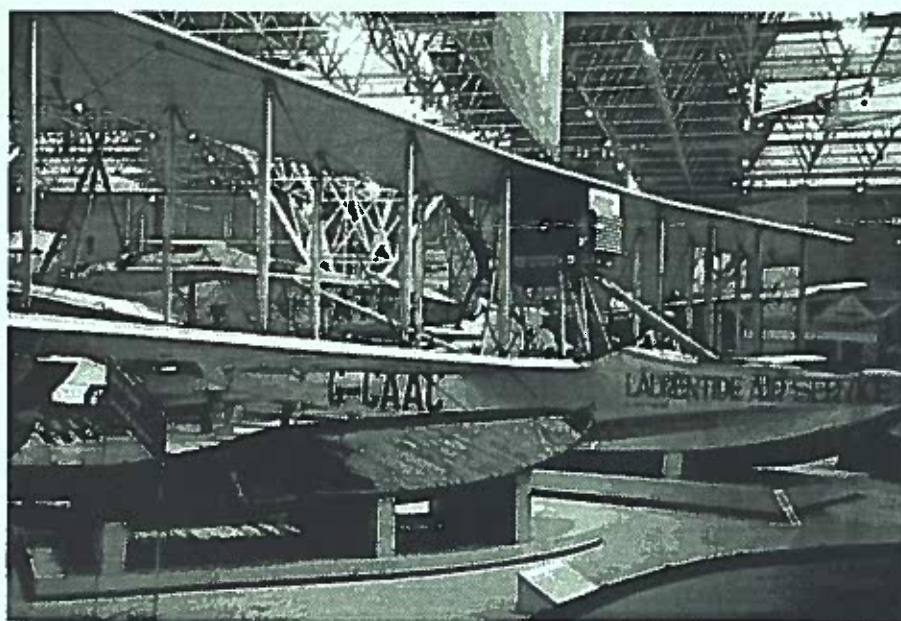
Special thanks this month go to the James W. Sewall Co. of Old Town and Clark Thompson for the great aerial photos of Big Spruce Mountain that they took on October 23 and had for us in time for the hike.

We also want to thank Billie Kostis of Sanford for the original U.S. Navy sign from the Sanford Naval Auxiliary Air Facility of World War II vintage. And, as usual, thanks to Norm Houle who provides us with labels, a real time-saver.

The 31st Northeast Aero Historians Meeting Ottawa, Canada



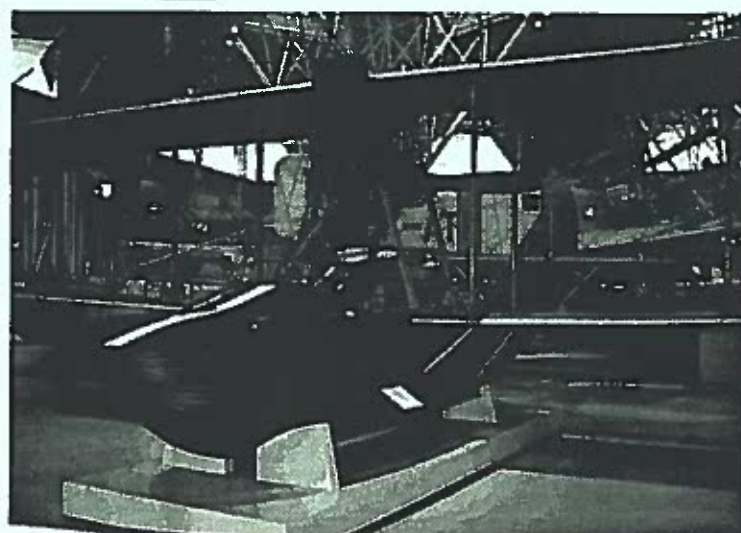
*(left to right) George Fuller of Canada, Harvey Lippincott of the New England Air Museum and Leo Boyle of MAHS at the 31st Northeast Aero Historians meeting in Ottawa.
(Jack Denison Photo)*



*Curtiss HS-2B Flying Boat at the National Aviation Museum, Ottawa, Canada. This type, used by the U.S. Navy, Alexander and Maxim, was seen frequently in Maine in the 1920s.
(Jack Denison Photo)*



*Jack Denison masquerading as a World War I ace.
(Leo Boyle Photo)*



*Curtiss MF Seagull Flying Boat of the type popular in Maine in the 1920s and used by Maxim, Jones, Williams and others. On display at the National Aviation Museum in Ottawa, Canada.
(Leo Boyle Photo)*

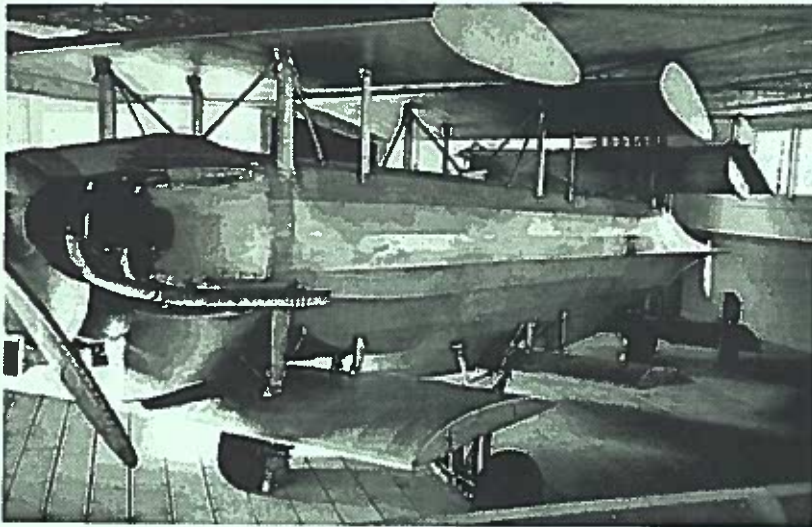


Photo Quiz of the Month

SKROBACK
"Flying Automobile"
on view at
Willowbrook at Newfield
in Newfield, Maine.

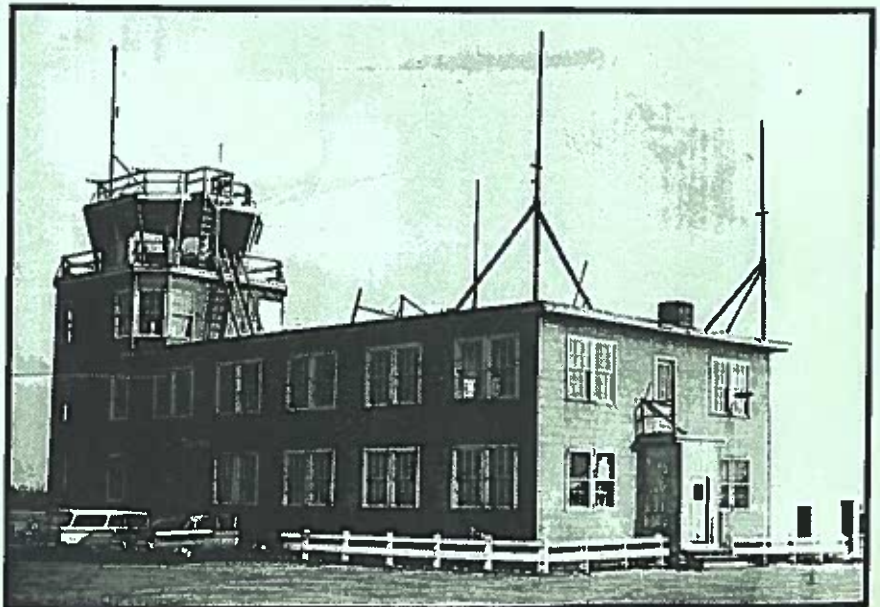
*Does anyone
know more about
this unique machine,
originally from
Bridgeport, NY?
(Norm Houle Photo)*



*Norm Houle's Piper Warrior taxis past the flight line at John Miller's airfield in Newburgh after the October 14th meeting with Leo Boyle and Jack Denison aboard.
(Jim Chichetto Photo)*



*Scott Grant and Leo Boyle at the MAHS table at the MPA Air Show at Sanford on September 3rd.
(Jack Denison Photo)*



*The ex-U.S. Navy control tower at the Sanford Municipal Airport about 1961 when used by the 9121st Air Force Reserve Recovery Squadron.
(Photo via Billie Kostis)*

Welcome, New Members

121. **Karl Wiggin**
1235 Unity Road
Benton, ME 04927 207-453-2623
122. **Richard J. Bochkay**
RR 2, Box 627
Lincolntonville, ME 04849 207-763-4332
123. **Nicholas R. Wallner**
(Secretary, Aviation Archeology Club of NH)
4 Chestnut Pasture Road 603-225-5249-H
Concord, NH 03301 603-228-0301-B
124. **Paul S. Larcom**
7 Gregg Street
Beverly, MA 01915 508-927-0759
125. **Thomas Verrill**
70 Perkins Avenue
Farmingdale, NY 11735
126. **Maria Baez**
93 North Road
Newburgh, ME 04444 207-234-7214

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Election of Officers

As important, though not as exciting, are the upcoming elections for 1996-1997. We need nominations and volunteers for the following positions:

President
Vice President
Secretary
Treasurer
Newsletter Editor

Four additional members for the Board of Directors

Individuals volunteering or nominated should be able to attend the majority of meetings and willing and able to do the small amount of work each of these positions entails. We continue to grow and we have an exciting future in front of us, so let's nominate and elect great officers and board members.

Those with nominations and those volunteering should contact the Nominating Committee, Maine Aviation Historical Society c/o Jim Chichetto, RR 1, Box 1730, Etna, ME 04434 (207-269-3281, evenings). Ballots will be in the November *Dirigo Flyer*, new officers will be announced in the December *Dirigo Flyer*, and they will take office January 1, 1996.

Another Great MPA Air Show

Things started off this fall with a bang on Labor Day weekend with the Maine Pilot's Association '95 Air Show at the Sanford Airport. Those of you who attended know that we were blessed with great weather and a really fine air show for both days of the show. More in the next issue . . .

Upcoming MAHS Meetings

Mark your calendars for the following meetings:

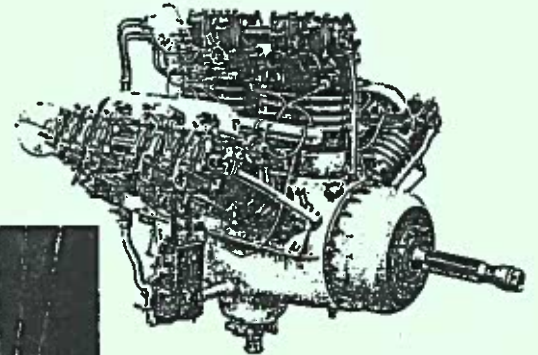
November 11 9 a.m. Terminal Bldg., Augusta Airport
December 9 9 a.m. TBA



(left to right) Mark Wilson (Globe), Joe Pratt, Jim Chichetto, Royal Ford (Globe), James Chichetto, Maria Baez Miller, Mike White and Jeremy Williams on Big Spruce Mountain.
(John Miller Photo)



Jim Chichetto's GMC S-15 4WD crosses one of the 18 washouts on the road to Big Spruce Mountain.
(John Miller Photo)



Unique W engine from the Levasseur PL-8 L'Oiseau Blanc (White Bird).

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Next Meeting:

**Terminal Building
Augusta Airport
November 11, 1995**

9 a.m.