



DIRIGO FLYER

Vol. IV, No. 9 September 1996

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

FLASH! FLASH! FLASH!

MAHS "White Bird" Expedition Slated for October 1996

by Jim Chichetto

Since our hike up Big Spruce Mountain last fall, members of MAHS have been working on following up more leads. Members by themselves and with other interested parties have sifted through much more information about this aviation mystery. As a result of information received from people in New York, France and Germany, members of MAHS have conducted one small search and worked with people on locating the site we will be hiking on Saturday, October 12. In a recent interview with the original source of the "sitting on the engine while eating my lunch story," John Miller, Ed Armstrong and myself have narrowed down the area where "something" was seen in 1953. Using John's map-reading skills along with the various collected data and with this first person account, we have a site which shows some interesting promise.

We learned much last year at Big Spruce Mountain about how to conduct a hike in a productive, professional manner. We are going to build on that foundation during this year's hike. Each person should have the following equipment: a compass, knife, matches or lighter (or both), a canteen and a lunch. Choice of footwear and other tools are left up to each person. We have three GPS units but anyone who has one should bring theirs also. At least one person should bring a camp stove for heating coffee or tea at the base camp. Bring extra clothes and personal snacks. We want any people with metal detectors to bring them. At least two entrenching tools and a set of walkie talkies are needed. We will supply each person with an enlarged map of the hike area and then set up the search pattern. We have certain points already plotted and will be using them as our starting and finishing points.

In case of rain the hike will be on the following Sunday. A gathering point has been picked for everyone to meet at: Time 0900 hours in the Maine Coast Mall Shopping Center in Ellsworth, Maine. There is a McDonald's on one side. We will park in the Mall lot near McDonald's. We hope to carpool as much as possible.

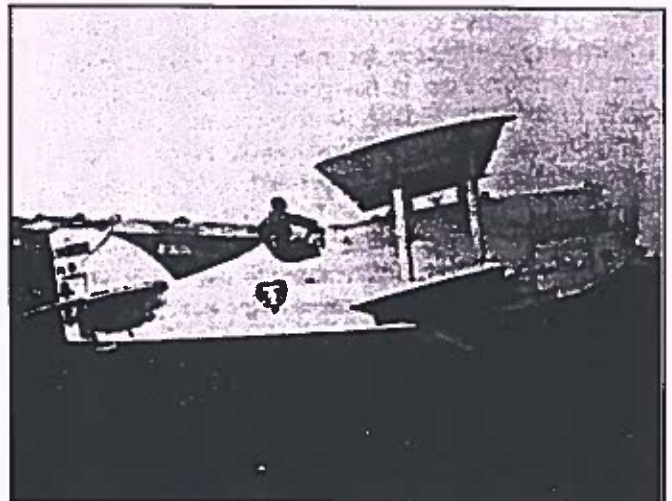
We have not announced this hike to the press nor are we inviting reporters. If and when we find something of interest, we can then call the press and let them know. This policy was decided on due to the nature of our research. A single spokes-

person will handle the press. There will be no media circus if we can prevent it, that's not what MAHS is about.

Any questions, call me (Jim Chichetto) at 207-269-3281.

Of necessity, certain rules have been formulated and all participants are expected to abide by these rules.

1. As noted above, no mention will be made by participants to the news media.
2. No video cameras will be permitted on the hike. It will be videotaped professionally, and members and participants will be able to purchase this video at a later date. Still cameras are permitted.
3. Absolutely nothing will be taken from the woods or the site by participants. The Society may bring out items deemed essential to positive identification of any wreckage or remains found, and will be approved by Mr. Chichetto and Mr. Boyle.
4. There will be no uninvited guests. If any show up, a charge of \$35.00, payable then, will be charged to participate.



The elusive "White Bird." Musée de l'Air Photo.

As Promised Last Month . . .

An Interview with Gen. Charles (Chuck) Yeager

by Clay Carkin

At this summer's Bangor Air National Guard Airshow/Open House on August 11, 1996, I interviewed Chuck Yeager, along with other media from the Bangor area including newspaper, TV and radio.

Media: Are you doing more since you have retired ?

Chuck: I retired out of the Air Force in 1975. Since then I've worked on the F-15 E and F-16 block 50 projects and Stealth technology. This is keeping me abreast of new technology. I've worked on the B-2 for fourteen years and the F-22 for six years.

Media: Seeing what's coming down the road aviation-wise, isn't it frustrating not being able to fly some of the new aircraft ?

Chuck: No, basically the only new airplane in the way of fighters is the F-22 and I have been working on that project for six years.

Clay: Will there be any special events marking the 50th anniversary of your breaking the sound barrier ?

Chuck: Yes, lots! Basically there are two things happening. First, the U.S. Postal Service is issuing a stamp with the X-1 on it. They can't mention me because in order to be honored on a stamp you have to be dead for at least ten years. Second, Edwards Air Force Base is setting up an event. Every October Edwards has an air show, and I fly in it. Since October 14, 1997, the 50th anniversary, happens to fall on a Tuesday (which it did 50 years ago), we'll have a Commemorative Day, and I'll be flying an F-15. We are trying to get approval to put Bob Hoover in an aircraft since he chased me on that day fifty years ago. We'll also be having a symposium. We're trying to get Dick Frost (Bell X-1 project engineer) and Jack Russell (crew chief). We'll be having an Open House on the following Saturday.

Media: As a pilot, is it more fun to fly a prop or a jet ?

Chuck: It doesn't make any difference (in an airplane) whether you are pushing or pulling. The only thing you'll notice, like the P-51, is it's harder to climb than anything you see out here on the ramp, but it's simpler. The kind of weapon systems in the new airplanes are spectacular. You take a new airplane today and they are ten times more effective than the airplanes ten years ago.

Media: Do you find as many kids with an interest in aviation these days?

Chuck: Oh yeah! There's no problem. The difference between today and when I was a kid was that the military offered us an opportunity to fly. The kids today don't have that opportunity. There are many guys who are pilots who own their own airplanes and donate their time and fuel. There were a couple of guys at Oshkosh

that flew 1000 kids personally, themselves!

Media: I noticed the P-51 Mustang on your shirt and hat. Do the days of WWII flying still stick with you?

Chuck: There are always those days that I remember that I'd scared myself to death while flying. The Mustang is not an easy airplane to fly. On the ground it's touchier than most airplanes to handle, but in the air it's a tougher airplane to fly because of torque and yaw, and you are constantly trying to trim it up. We've been able to fly Mustangs continuously for 52 years.

Clay: What was it like working with Sam Shepard in the movie "The Right Stuff"?

Chuck: Sam Shepard is a neat guy. He hunts and fishes, drives a pick-up truck, and shacks up with Jessica Lange!!! What else would you want? No really, I enjoyed working with him. The casting director for that movie I thought did an outstanding job. The seven astronauts (actors) even looked like those guys did back in '59 and '60. It was fun! The way they portrayed the Air Force pretty well was the way it happened.

Media: General, you talked about kids today being prepared for flying modern aircraft by being familiar with computers. Do you find that the younger pilots have what they need?

Chuck: The younger guys today, they're a lot sharper, they're more effective in using the equipment that they have and it makes it easier for them to do their job. As a good example, before I could take a P-51 in WW II into combat I had to be trained a lot in order to shoot gunnery, to shoot airplanes down, or dropping bombs. I'd have to drop hundreds of bombs to learn how to hit a target. Today, you strap a guy in an F-15 or F-16 and his first bomb drop is exact. It shows you that they're more effective.

Media: What is your sense of the country as a whole?

Chuck: One per cent of the bad ones gets 90% of all the publicity. That is the media, no criticism, but that's the way they sell papers. All in all people in America are relatively happy.

Media: General Yeager, you look very healthy. Are there any secrets to share with the rest of us?

Chuck: Quit drinking when you are thirty ! No really, I bum around the high mountains, hunting and fishing, and try to eat well.

Clay: What runs through your mind, General Yeager, when you see the Bell X-1 at the National Air and Space Museum?

Chuck: Really, not a lot, because at that time I was working on 10-12 different test programs, flying 25 or so different kinds of airplanes a month, and working about 18 hours a day. It was a tough program. The only feeling

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Yeager, Continued from previous page

I had toward the X-1 was that I appreciated it, and it never let me down. When I see it up there (NASM) it's a pretty airplane, and it flew just the way it looks. It would be fun to fly again!

Clay: General, was your fastest flight on December 12, 1953 in the X-1A?

Chuck: No, I worked on the SR-71 program. The fastest I've flown was 3.26 Mach at 76,000 feet in the SR-71. The X-1A was part of a research program on our rockets. The reason why that airplane was built was to find out things and we found out that it needed a bigger tail. We found out that if we were going to operate up to two and one half times the speed of sound we're going to have to make the airplane out of something other than aluminum. Then the X-2 came along and we moved it out to Mach 3.2. It was made out of stainless steel. It also had the same directional problem that the X-1A did. It killed Mel Apt. Then the X-15 had a much bigger tail, and it operated out of Mach 6. That's the reason why we had research airplanes in those days; the X-1, X-2, X-3, X-4, X-5. They were research planes to get data.

Clay: Did you get the Harmon Trophy for your flight in the X-1A?

Chuck: That and a few other airplane flights. You don't look at it that way. It was just one of many test airplanes that was your duty to work on. You finish one, then step into another.

Media: So where does, whatever it takes - courage - to get into a test airplane come from?

Chuck: It's not courage; it's duty. It is your job to do and that is why you are trained. In the days of test flying at Edwards A.F.B. there were 29 streets named after guys that didn't live. It was your duty to get data, and

the guys accepted that. For an example, my squadron went overseas in November of 1943 to fly Mustangs. There were thirty guys in the squadron and twenty-one got killed. It's what you expect, and you just hope that it ain't your time. If it is your time, you don't know anything about it anyway. It was easy to transition into research flight when I came back after WWII. Most of the guys like Bob Hoover and Jack Ridley that did research flying were all combat veterans that went through test pilot school.

Media: General, what is your favorite military aircraft to fly and what is your favorite recreational aircraft?

Chuck: The best military airplane to fly is the newest or F-22. An airplane that was a really fun airplane to fly was the F-86. The F-86 was just a neat airplane. It performed well. Then for nostalgia reasons I like the P-51 Mustang that I fought in. As far as a recreational aircraft, I don't own one. I have a hang glider, that's all I have.

Clay: Working with kids, do you promote any aspirations for youngsters since you are involved with the E.A.A.?

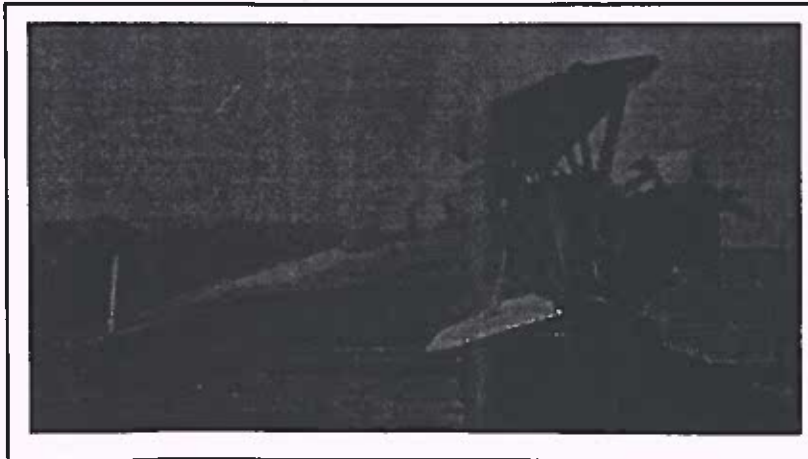
Chuck: Yes, for example down at Maxwell A.F.B. in June I flew 23 students without even shutting down the engine or getting out of the cockpit. At Oshkosh I flew ten terminally ill kids who had leukemia and diseases like that who will never get well. The Canadian and American customs people put it together and paid their way down to Oshkosh. I took ten of them up in a Ford Tri-motor. They really got a kick out of it. They (kids) are fun to watch. They really get excited about it.

Media: Do you have any opinions about the health of the country and the directions in which it is going?

Chuck: I don't see anything wrong. The kids I know today are just like we were as kids when I was younger. The country itself is doing very well as long as you don't read the papers.

Mystery Photo of the Month

Member Larry Closson of Bernard, Maine submitted the following photo. He had his first airplane flight in this plane at Anacostia in 1942.



Tell us what plane it was, how many were built and as much as you can about it. Best answer wins a MAHS T-shirt.

We received no answers to last month's Mystery Photo. Someone must know what it is, particularly since it flew into Arbo's Airport, the Prairie at Brownville. Answer will be in next month's newsletter if no one guesses it.

Two Great Weekends

by Leo Boyle

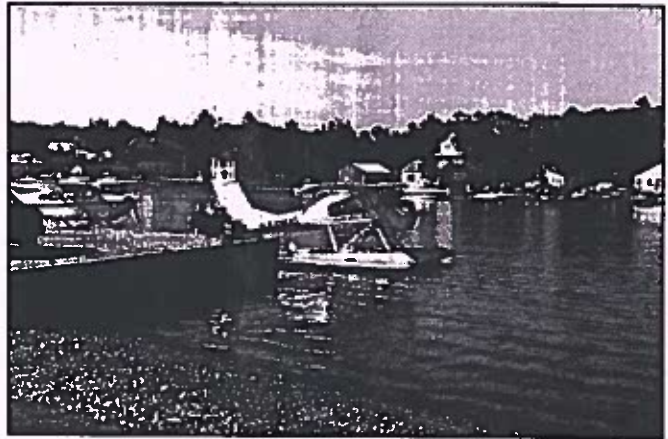
A sunny day brightened Saturday and proved what many had begun to doubt: the sun can shine in Greenville! After a great steak and chicken barbecue Friday evening at Squaw Mountain, member Leo Boyle gave his slide show on "Early Aviation in Maine" to an overflow crowd. On Saturday and Sunday, thanks to the help and generosity of member Frank Woodworth and Max Folsom, we set up our booth in Folsom's hangar and Leo, Scott Grant, Jim Chichetto and Bill Townsend had a great time meeting new friends, greeting old ones and answering questions. Sunday turned cloudy, but it was a great event as usual. Jim Chichetto's account of his, Scott's and Bill's trek to the Elephant Mountain 1963 B-52 crash site follows.

A week later, we were at John Miller's field in Newburgh. John was in Reno for the air races, but Maria Baeza was our gracious hostess. We reviewed our progress and problems to date and talked extensively about the upcoming *White Bird* search. Many photos in John's collection were reviewed, as well as others brought by members. Of special interest were new member Herman Bayerdorffer's P-51 restoration project photos. This P-51 is currently being restored out-of-state and is still a year or more from completion. We can hardly wait to see it! We want to thank member Larry Closson for his generous contribution to the Society of a large box of old aviation magazines (see Mystery Photo), which I haven't catalogued yet.

The view from our booth at the Folsom's hangar at the Greenville Seaplane Fly-In, showing new member Herman Bayerdorffer's Polish Wilga Float Plane on Moosehead Lake. (Scott Grant Photo)



The DC-3 (ex C-53) on floats flying at the Greenville Seaplane Fly-In on September 7th. It is owned by Dick and Max Folsom and members Lou Hilton and Herman Bayerdorffer. (Jim Chichetto Photo)

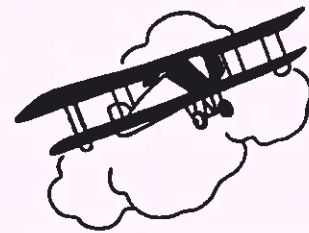


Welcome New Members

162. **Doug Freeman** (*Maine Aviation*)
P.O. Box 589
Farmington, ME 04938 (207) 778-9289
163. **Herman Bayerdorffer** (*WWII, Mustang*)
P.O. Box 2, Box 178
Guilford, ME 04443 (207) 997-3625
164. **Don and Judy Martin** (*Model Aircraft*)
P.O. Box 232
Carmel, ME 04419-0232 (207) 848-7360

POST CARDS — An assortment of 22 new B&W airplane picture post cards from old photos. \$4.00. Norm Houle, P.O. Box 563, Barrington, NH 03825.

B & M AIRWAYS T-SHIRTS — Original 1931 logo. Yellow and black, size XL only. \$14.00. I pay postage. Norm Houle, P.O. Box 563, Barrington, NH 03825.



In Memory of . . .

Roland J. Benoit

It is with deep regret that we learn of the passing of member Roland J. Benoit of Old Orchard Road in Buxton.

Roland was born in Rhode Island, served in the Army in Korea and moved to Maine in 1963. He was a mechanic and was particularly interested in airplanes and Corsairs. We had many long and enjoyable conversations on the telephone.

Our sincere regrets and sympathy are extended to his family and friends.

MHAS Hike to the Elephant Mtn. B-52 Site

MAHS had a booth set up as part of the Greenville Fly-In on Sept. 7th and 8th. Leo Boyle and Scott Grant manned it on both Saturday and Sunday. Bill Townsend and Jim Chichetto helped out on Saturday. Many MAHS members stopped by and a few new folks signed up. The weather on Saturday was great so some of us decided to hike up to the B-52 crash site while it was still light. Bill, Scott and myself were able to head out at about 4:30 in the afternoon. The site is a short drive up the Lily Bay Road.

On a cold Thursday afternoon in January of 1963 a B-52 Stratofortress took off from Westover AFB in Mass. This aircraft was flying a routine training mission when it crashed north of Greenville, Maine. The aircraft suffered a structural failure with it's vertical fin 8.5 seconds before it crashed. The loss of the vertical fin while flying at low level over the mountains did not allow the crew to escape the stricken aircraft. Of the nine crewmen on board, only two survived. Captain Gerald J. Adler of Houston, Texas and Lt. Col. Dante E. Bulli of Cherry, Ill. Capt. Adler ejected so low his chute didn't open, but the deep snow broke his fall enough to allow him to survive. Both men spent the night in the woods, Adler semi-conscious and strapped to his seat. Bulli set up a camp site and made a shelter out of his parachute. He couldn't move well due to a broken ankle and the fact that snow was 4 to 6 feet deep. The aircraft exploded and burned on impact. Bulli could see the glow from the fires but could do nothing but watch. Searchers found both men the next day. After extensive searching no other survivors were found.

The B-52 was designed in the late 1940s and entered production in the early 1950s. A huge weapon carrying system, the early versions could carry about 259,000 lbs. of fuel. This fuel plus in-air refueling allowed the B-52 to stay aloft for days if need be. Missions of 24 to 36 hours were practiced by flight crews. The B-52s were flown in combat in Vietnam and Desert Storm. They have been an effective and adaptable aircraft used for research with the X-15, and now as flying missile platforms for stand-off weapons. They are slated to still be flying in the year 2010 as a USAF heavy bomber.

The crash site is about 25 minutes from Greenville and can be reached easily by any 4WD. To drive to it, you take the first dirt logging road on the right after the Beaver Cove Marina sign. There is a hand painted *No Hunting/Men Working* sign on a tree at the end of this road. Take a right turn and follow the signs up to the site. Autos can drive up to the site, but wash-outs caused by recent rains left ditches which could hang up a 2WD car if one is not careful. Once you get to the site you will see a sign which says B-52. Follow the path into the woods on the right and you will soon be standing in the middle of the crash site.

The woods which have grown up around the wreckage have not been logged. The areas on either side have been clear-cut so one can't get lost. Starting in from the path, you see scraps of metal and rubber. The rubber is from the fuel cells which exploded during the crash. On the right hand side of the woods you notice wing panels and parts of the flaps. Everywhere are bits of the fuel bladders and the filler hoses and lines. On the left

hand side are parts of the aircraft's internal ribbing and heavy castings. On the ground are hundreds of feet of wire, the insulation was burned off, so now only the copper remains.

Moving forward along the path, you spot the main landing gear wheels. One set of tires is burned, the other three sets are scattered near the center of the crash site. Large sections of wings, body panels and smaller bits and pieces litter this area. Near the lower end of the crash site lies the tail gunner's section. It is mostly intact and did not burn. Someone had left a parachute near this central point. Heading up hill from this section, one sees more small parts and twisted metal.

Scott and I started zig-zagging along the top of the wooded section looking for more large parts. We found more wing panels and flaps plus many bits of the fuel bladders. At one group of trees there was a long section of wire strung up 20 feet into the branches. Pushing into the thick undergrowth, we kept finding more fuselage parts. When we were within a hundred feet of the woods road, farther uphill from where we parked, we came upon the cockpit wreckage. A pile of wire 4 ft. high was off to one side. Part of the left front nose was upside down in the soft earth. As we turned it over we could see the black anti-glare paint, the bright blue from the front logo, a red stripe ran along one edge. The windshield wiper arm was still in place, but there was no glass to keep clear. All around this section lay piles of radio equipment. Most of the electronic gear showed heavy impact marks. The pull-out cases were bent and twisted by the hard impact with trees as the aircraft hit.

We found part of a parachute near the cockpit wreckage. It was torn and twisted by the weather. Beside it was a yellow canister inside a torn green bag. The bottom of the bag was marked M-2, and there appeared to be a round wire reinforcing which ran inside this bag. The valve assembly was missing, only a torn hole was visible on the top of the cylinder.

We didn't see any engines at the site. They were probably hauled away for study or scrap years ago. The local snowmobile club, the Moosehead Riders, has recovered the two ejection seats that Bulli and Alder rode to safety. In 1993 Gerald Alder was a guest as the club marked the 30th anniversary of this tragic accident. He was visibly moved when an honor guard brought the seat out from behind a curtain to allow him to clearly see it for the first time since that fateful flight. Capt. Alder was moved by the seat and the memorial display set up at the clubhouse.

Since that ceremony this site has become a tourist attraction. Hundreds of people visit this site each year, and stare in wonder at the wreckage left by this terrible accident. The twisted metal is a grim reminder of the price paid by those who fought the Cold War.

There may be more debris scattered further out from the crash site, but it was getting late so we headed back out to Scott's Jeep. We had run out of film and decided that we should make a day of it exploring this site at a later date. Once out of the woods, it was a beautiful evening skyline that greeted us as we looked out towards Moosehead Lake. It was a sight those unfortunate airmen never got to see on that dark January day.

Upcoming MAHS Meetings and Calendar of Events

- October 6 10 a.m. Foreign Auto and Air Show, Owls Head Transportation Museum
 October 12 9 a.m. *White Bird* Search. Meet in Ellsworth. (*See details in this issue.*)
 October 18-20 Northeast Aero Historians Meeting, Holiday Inn, Philadelphia
 October 27 10 a.m. Great Fall Auction, Owls Head Transportation Museum.
 November 9 .. 9 a.m. Open
 December 14. 9 a.m. Conference Room, Portland International Jetport Terminal

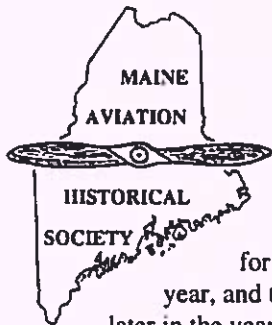
Hikes to be announced will include Big Spruce Mountain, Ellsworth area (*White Bird*) and others.

The meeting sites can be flexible. We are looking for suggestions on locations for many of these meetings. Call Leo or Jim if you can help. The same goes for suggestions on the weekend hikes — let us know. We are also looking for guest speakers, slide shows, etc. Scott Grant has volunteered to handle the scheduling of our meetings and arranging for speakers and slide shows., etc. Please contact him at 207-774-4438 (207-761-9288 business) or 225 York Street, #3, Portland, ME 04102 if you have any ideas or can be of help.

MAINE FOLKLIFE CENTER

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Dues will be for the calendar year, and those joining later in the year will receive all newsletters retroactive to January of that year. All renewal of dues shall be due on January 1st.

Annual membership includes *12 monthly newsletters!* Mail payment to: MAHS
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