



DIRIGO FLYER

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Newsletter of the Maine Aviation Historical Society
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The Ill-fated Final Flight of "The Dawn"

In this issue, we conclude the dramatic story of "Old Orchard Beach — The Dawn" by Frederick R. Hamlen. We wish to thank Leonard E. Opdycke, editor of Skyways Magazine, for granting us permission to reprint this exciting story.

By Frederick R. Hamlen

Afterward, Stultz reported that with so much fuel in the prow she was simply too nose heavy to climb with a full gross load. Goldsborough added that when he'd attempted to retract the wheels for a hasty water landing, prior to fuel release, the mechanism did not work properly. Frances Grayson then summoned Sikorsky back, ASAP or sooner, from Long Island to look into both matters, but particularly the landing gear problem, it seemed to all of them that the shock-cording had deteriorated during the foul wet weather.

Sikorsky arrived with new material which was installed, replacing the old. There was another test flight wherein the repair work was found to be satisfactory. However, Stultz began to express his fears that "The Dawn" could never make an ocean flight with the fuel that would be required by two thirsty engines, burning high octane at the rate of 32 to 35 gallons per hour. But apparently the matter was left at that because a second attempt, this time with a full fuel load of 910 gallons, was made on October 22nd. Once more the crew took "The Dawn" off in the direction of Pine Point. And *once again* the same thing happened, putting Stultz through another horror show involving a dangerous turn at very low altitude. Only, this time the plane was seen to flutter down into the water. It was a one and a quarter mile water taxi back to the hangar.

By the next morning, October 23, the weather had become far from perfect. Nevertheless, with 71 gallons of fuel drained off by order of Mrs. Grayson, "The Dawn", with only a very few spectators on hand, was taxied to Pine Point for a takeoff toward the pier. And at about 6:00 AM she began her run, lifting off easily after one mile. She was seen to make a great left hand turn and finally disappear into the northeast, behind Prouts Neck.

After ten hours of flight, during which she reached a point some thirty miles south of Sable Island, "The Dawn" staggered back to a landing on the beach, her port engine smoking profusely. Then the crew told its story. At first things had gone



The Sikorsky S-36, "The Dawn", comes ashore at Old Orchard Beach after an unsuccessful attempt at gaining altitude.
(Photo courtesy of HJC/OOBHS)

well, the plane cruising smoothly along at about 125 mph. Then, entering a cloud bank, "The Dawn" shook from turbulence and went into an inexplicable and horrifying dive from 600 feet. Stultz fought to bring the nose up, Goldsborough dumped 110 gallons of fuel, and Stultz pulled the plane out of its dive ten feet above the water.

Exactly what was in the minds of the crew regarding continuation at that point is uncertain, but no doubt remained in Stultz' mind when, after some altitude recovery, he suddenly saw puffs of smoke emitting from the port engine where the number two cylinder was becoming white hot. Amidst misfiring and severe vibration, the tachometer for the left engine went crazy and finally packed up. The crew considered a landing next to a freighter which they had just passed, but Stultz felt that with the altitude he had managed to regain, they could make it home, albeit on only one engine. (Perhaps he was gambling on the effectiveness of the compensating rudders which Sikorsky had developed and for which he had received coverage with U.S. patent No. 1560869. These, because of their opposed airfoils — like sections of two wings turned vertically, could by virtue of their differing angles of attack make it possible to maintain longitudinal and spiral stability, even with one engine totally out.)

"Dawn," continued on page 3

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 telephone: 207-941-6757
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ASSOCIATION OFFICERS

President

John Garbinski (#245)
 Bangor, ME 04401
 207-990-7318
 e-mail: jgarbinski@hotmail.com

Vice President

Peter Noddin (#295)
 East Millinocket, ME 04430
 207-746-5166
 e-mail: petef86a@midmaine.com

Corresponding Secretary

Alfred Cormier (#196)
 Bangor, ME 04401
 207-941-6474
 e-mail: acorm6H@aol.com

Recording Secretary

William Townsend (#101L)
 Bar Harbor, ME 04609
 207-288-5654
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Treasurer

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 Winterport, ME 04496
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Monthly meetings
 are held at 10 a.m.
 on the second Saturday
 of each month
 at various locations.

See calendar for details.

Maine Aviation Historical Society Scenes from the January Meeting

The January 2001 meeting was held at the Maine Air Museum on Saturday, January 13. Following the installation of new officers and members of the Board of Directors, we listened to a great presentation on the role of Dow Field during the Cold War by new president John Garbinski. Since a picture's worth a thousand words, we'll let the following photos by Bill Robertson substitute for our regular monthly report.



John Garbinski tells members of the nuclear Genie missiles that were at Dow Field in Bangor during the Cold War.



John Garbinski and Ed Armstrong outline a plan of action for 2001.



Leo Boyle contemplates a weighty problem at the January meeting.

"Dawn," continued from page 1

Stultz was proven right, for with the port engine all but shut down and the starboard one opened to nearly full throttle, "The Dawn" managed to get back to Old Orchard Beach, landing at 4:20 PM at roughly half-tide.

On the 24th "Doc" Kincaid, who had gone home, returned. After a brief examination he declared that they had been terribly lucky. Their deep trouble had involved a piston and valve in number two cylinder, and had it not been for a freak repositioning of two errant parts there would have been an explosion and most surely a fiery death for them all.

The persistent and undaunted Frances Grayson was fast to get on the phone and order a brand new engine from the Wright factory. It was quickly delivered, installed and properly broken in . . . but more troubles were cropping up for Mrs. Grayson. It appeared at this point that Wilmer Stultz wanted out of any further commitment to the venture. If there was a row brewing, it didn't particularly show. But observers felt that stresses and strains were growing between Grayson and Stultz. There was some "fiddling and diddling" around the beach until suddenly Frances Grayson, while showing her disappointment at the string of delays, announced that her ship would be returned to Curtiss Field. The takeoff came at low tide on October 30th.

Once home she released Stultz from his duties but not without remarking in effect that if he couldn't "hack" the situation he certainly was not the pilot for her. For the first time she gave the impression of a truly exhausted and disillusioned woman, and she left on a trip to Europe in order to get as far away as possible from "The Dawn".

She came back to New York from that trip with a renewed yen to fly the Atlantic. While seeking out new prospects for a pilot she approached Harry Jones, requesting him to fly her plane. However, Harry balked, answering Mrs. Grayson's proposal with the flat statement that "it would serve no purpose." Almost all aviators refused to countenance her stubborn persistence and sheer madness in a mission which at that time of year carried odds of ten to one against success. Finally, though, she found one Lieutenant Oskar Omdal of the Norwegian navy. He was a heavily experienced arctic flyer who had been recommended by the famous Bernt Balchen, who himself

had been one of the many to shun her. Bryce Goldsborough agreed to stay with the mission. Additionally, one Fred Koehler agreed to act as copilot. Because of a gut feeling that soon his luck would run out after having logged 4,500 air hours, he wanted to quit the profession, but he was willing to accompany Mrs. Grayson part way inasmuch as he was well acquainted with conditions in Newfoundland.

With a crew thus formed, Mrs. Grayson announced a decision to make a late December flight to Harbour Grace, Newfoundland from whence she would hop off on the 19 to 20 hour over-water flight to either England or France before going on to Copenhagen. Takeoff for the first leg was to be from either Roosevelt Field or Old Orchard Beach, she said, but at the very last moment she wrote Harry Jones with her cancellation of all plans for that departure point. She would instead depart from Roosevelt Field, using the Byrd ramp, on the evening of Friday, December 23rd, so that the 1,160 mile flight would bring her over Bennett Field at Harbour Grace sometime before daybreak on the following morning.

On the afternoon of the 22nd, "The Dawn" was flown from Curtiss over to Roosevelt and hauled immediately to the top of the ramp where the ground crew began the work of fueling her with 595 gallons of strained high octane. All necessary provisions for a night flight went aboard as well. So, when the four fliers were in place, "The Dawn's" total gross load would be a little under 10,000 pounds — considerably less than the 12,434 pounds which she weighed when flying to near destruction off Sable Island. Mrs. Grayson gave reporters and officials a description of the plane's course, which would be subject to any in-flight alterations that might be deemed advisable by Bruce Goldsborough. It would take them up through central Connecticut, Massachusetts and a corner of New Hampshire to the southern tip of Maine and quite near Old Orchard Beach. From there "The Dawn" would follow the inside coast of Nova Scotia and then continue on to Harbour Grace. Should they arrive during darkness, Omdal would circle the area until daylight before landing on the runway at Bennett Field.


On the 23rd, metro reports, which had been gathered by Goldsborough, showed fine conditions all along the northeast coast — clear skies with light westerly winds at Roosevelt and vicinity, but northwesterly winds at Harbour Grace. These were expected to go to westerly later in the day. Further to the southeast, however, weather conditions were not the best, in fact, they were bad. This didn't phase Frances Grayson a bit as she continued to insist that there was nothing particularly hazardous, except possibly for the cold, about long distance, over-water, winter flight. At any rate, as far as the coastal situation went it looked as though favorable conditions would obtain into the early evening hours. The super-cautious navigator Goldsborough would far rather have postponed departure until next morning so that the flight could be made under daytime pilotage procedures, but Mrs. Grayson laughingly told reporters that it would be good for the crew to get its "shake down" in night time conditions before tackling the open Atlantic.

"Dawn," continued on page 4

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"Dawn," continued from page 3

At the top of the ramp the crew, in heavy winter flying gear, took their positions in the plane, its wings "coated" with glycerin "to stop" ice from collecting. Engines were started and warmed. There was the usual momentary idling, then Omdal pressed both throttles full open. As the tachometers showed maximum RPMs, the wheel chocks were removed and the tether cut, and "The Dawn" rolled down the incline and halfway across the field to an easy takeoff at 5:08 PM.

Almost immediately, and without waiting to gain very much altitude, Omdal banked around to take up a course toward the northeast. Chilly spectators followed the ship's progress for a few moments before she vanished into the darkness . . .

"The Dawn" and her crew were never seen again, and no one has ever learned what happened to the plane and the four persons aboard. At least 15 reports concerning either the plane in flight or its fate surfaced in the two weeks after its disappearance, but few of them checked out. A man at Orleans on Cape Cod reported hearing "The Dawn" headed out to sea at 7:25 PM. That would be two hours and eighteen minutes after takeoff and about 220 miles from the departure point. A radio operator on a trawler southwest of Cape Cod reported picking up a call from "The Dawn" around 7:00 PM trying to get its bearings and said he exchanged signals with the plane for twenty minutes before the plane abruptly stopped sending. Ten days later, members of the crew of the schooner "Rose Anne Beliveau" reported that while encountering gale-force winds off outer Cape Cod at 7:30 PM on December 23rd they heard a motor, a splash and then the sound dying away five minutes later. That report has come to be considered as the best evidence of what happened to "The Dawn". However, it is hard to believe that the plane was ever in this area, so far from its planned course, yet the times and distance make it possible.

Another report, from the wireless station on Sable Island, said that at 9:45 PM December 23rd the operator there heard

"The Dawn" saying on its emergency set that something had gone wrong. He could not get through to the plane, owing to interference, but did get its call sign, WMU. Then a radio operator in Newfoundland, near Harbour Grace, reported picking up a message about 6:30 PM December 25th that said, "Where are you? Can you locate us?" and ended with what could have been WMU, the plane's call sign. Had the plane flown toward Newfoundland while being blown off course to the south so that it missed its landfall and then, possibly experiencing trouble, landed on the Atlantic? It was just possible. In fact, such speculation would have ended there if it had not been for the discovery of a bottle that came ashore at Salem, Massachusetts sometime in 1928. That bottle contained a scrawled pencil message, "1928. We are freezing. Gas leaked and we are drifting off Grand Banks. Grayson." Examination of the message showed the handwriting was not that of Frances Grayson and might have been the work of two people. The note indicated the plane had gone on and gone down, due to a fuel leak, south of Newfoundland. It also was in line with the radio message received by the operator near Harbour Grace. But could the plane have stayed afloat for eight or more days? It is barely conceivable, but not probable.

One thing stands out. There were no positive sightings of the plane over New England after its takeoff. Also, there were no reports of the plane sending out its call sign after two hours, as had been planned. These facts tend to indicate that the plane went down early, or that its radio set or main set failed. If "The Dawn" did continue on across the Atlantic for Newfoundland without at least its main radio, it is conceivable it made it to that area and then went down either from a fuel leak or, lost, from fuel exhaustion.

The one thing that seems certain is that, somewhere, "The Dawn" and the four people aboard her went down at sea, and that the sea will forever keep unto itself the secret of their final resting place.



In a Related Story . . .

Pilot Lloyd Bertaud with his mother and wife in front of "Old Glory" on the morning of September 6, 1927 just before his noon takeoff on its ill-fated transatlantic attempt.

Photo from Dan Blaney Collection



Maine: One Stop on the Way to War

A True Story of a WWII Bomber Crew Heading for the Hostile Skies of Europe



By T/Sgt. Forrest S. Clark, 67th Squadron, 44th Bomb Group, 8th Air Force as he recalls it 57 years later.

We took off on a bright sunny day from a remote airfield in central Kansas on a flight that would take us 4,500 miles from a peaceful United States to the war zones of Nazi Europe. Our last stop in the U.S. was at Dow Field in Bangor, Maine.

It was mid-August 1943 and the air war in Europe was at its deadliest peak. Three out of five U.S. airmen would not survive to finish their missions that year. Landing on a cool late afternoon, the bomber crew, of which I was one part, was composed of men barely out of their teenage years. Some were 19 and 20 and the oldest about 25.

I remember clearly even 57 years later that day landing at Dow Field in Maine. We had flown for the first time on a long distance overland flight as a crew. I was assistant radio operator and we managed to maintain radio contact with our Kansas base all the way across the country to Bangor and to Dow Field, something we were proud of.

Dow Field, as I remember it, appeared to me as a rather remote small somewhat primitive airfield in the midst of a vast pine and spruce forest surrounded by farms and bogs. Later I was to hear talk of Bangor bog, a kind of sub-arctic wetland not far from the base.

We landed as the sun was declining over the dark woodlands and a chill was coming on despite the fact the calendar was reading only August. I recall our landing after which we taxied to a dispersal area. We were housed that night in a barracks where we had to build a fire in a rather old looking wood stove for heat.

One of us had to pull guard duty to protect our new bomber, a four-engine B24 Liberator we were assigned to take to Europe. We drew lots to see who the guard would be among the crew. One of our waist gunners got the assignment. We gave him our blankets to keep him warm all night in the unheated bomber. Off he went in the pitch black night to our bomber while we huddled in the barracks, playing black jack and breaking out K-rations.

Late that first night at Dow I had an experience that was new to me as a kid who grew up in southern New Jersey and had

never been that far north before. About midnight or shortly after we were awakened by a cry from outside. One of our crew had wandered out unable to sleep. He came running into the barracks and cried, "Come on, there are big lights in the sky. What are they?"

Aroused from our warm bunks, we hastily pulled on flight jackets and ran outside the barracks, thinking that we might be invaded by some enemy force. I guess at that time we had been so indoctrinated with wartime propaganda we thought we might be under attack. As we gazed skyward toward the north, we saw giant curtains of colored lights undulating in the night sky.

Sgt. Jack Harmon, one of our crew who was a native of Maine, said, "Oh, that's the Northern Lights."

As I stood there taking in the smell of the pine spruce forests and the clear night air of northern Maine, it was like a magical moment that sank into my memory.

That was the first time I had seen them. It was like a kind of omen as we faced our unknown and hazardous future in a war we knew not how it would end and in which we were to be personally involved.

It was a thrilling sight and somehow encouraging at the same time to a crew of young men, most of whom had never been so far from home before. The pilot was from Oklahoma, the co-pilot from Pennsylvania and others from Chicago, Texas and North Carolina.

After two or three more days to give our bomber a final check-out and refueling, we took off from Dow Field bound for Goose Bay, Labrador, and then onward to Greenland, Iceland and the United Kingdom. Two of us did not survive that war and others were wounded. We were shot down over Germany and escaped.

However, that clear cold night at a Maine airfield in 1943 has remained in my memory bank and could not be erased by all the fears, the anguish, the deadly hazards of a war we experienced over Nazi Germany. To that I remain thankful to Maine and those mysterious northern lights.



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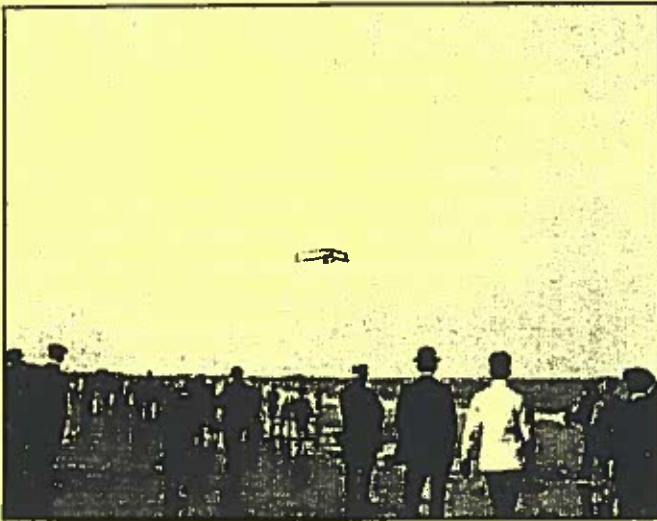
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Mystery Photo of the Month



A Burgess-Dunne tailless float plane flying along a beach before a crowd of spectators. Could this be Old Orchard Beach? The time would be the early 1900s. Who was the pilot and when did it occur? (Photo from Dan Blaney Collection)

Win a copy of U.S. Air Force in Maine by John Garbinski with your correct answer.

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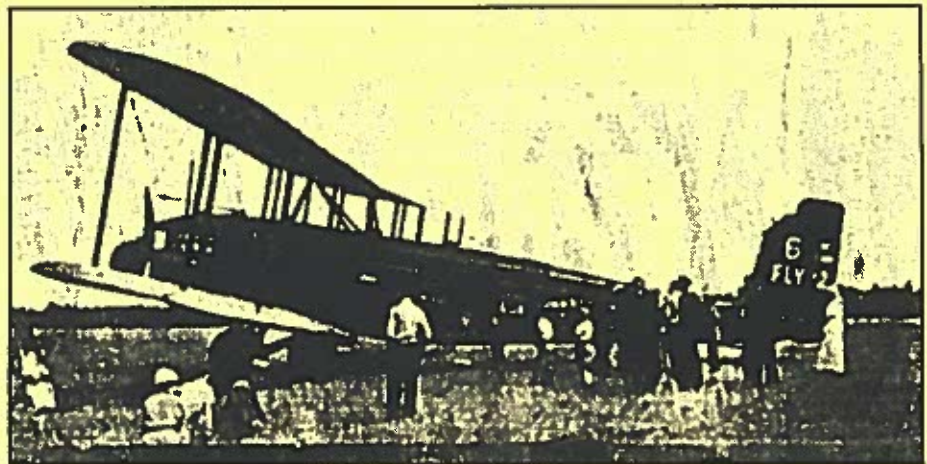
Renewals

Thanks to all of you who have already sent in your renewal dues. If you received a white 2001 membership application last month and you haven't renewed yet, please do so now. As we transition to our new mailing system, your name will be automatically dropped from the Dirigo Flyer mailing list after 30 days, so please renew promptly when your membership dues are due. Thanks.

Those Were the Days . . . in Greenville

Clarence Chamberlin's Curtiss Condor at the Walden Farm Airstrip in Greenville about 1933. This 1800 foot long airstrip was on the present site of the Greenville Airport.

Photo via Bill Robertson



Got News?

Share your ideas, photos and stories with those who will truly appreciate them! If you have news, photos or an article that you have written that would be of interest to other MAHS/MAM members, send it to Editor Leo Boyle at 101 Monroe Avenue, Westbrook, Maine 04092-4020 for possible publication in a future issue. We welcome first-person accounts of aviation-related stories and interviews with the pioneers of private and commercial flight.



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Upcoming MAHS Meetings

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- February 10 10 a.m.MAHS Meeting at the Maine Air Museum, Bangor.
- March 10 10 a.m.MAHS Meeting, Portland area (tentative).
- April 14 10 a.m.MAHS Meeting, Augusta area (tentative).
- April 14 1 p.m.Memories of Golden Age Flying, Jonathan Miller, OHTM, Owls Head, Maine.*
- May 12 10 a.m.MAHS Meeting.
- May 12 1 p.m.Amelia Lives, Alison Machaiek, OHTM, Owls Head, Maine.
- June 9 10 a.m.MAHS Meeting.
- July 14 10 a.m.MAHS Meeting.
- August 11 10 a.m.MAHS Meeting.
- August 24-25 All Day Transportation Spectacular and Aerobatic Airshow, OHTM, Owls Head, Maine.
- Sept. 8 All Day Greenville International Seaplane Fly-In, Greenville, Maine.
- Sept. 15 10 a.m.MAHS Meeting. Note change of weekend.
- Sept. 22-23 All Day Great State o' Maine Air Show with the Blue Angels, BNAS, Brunswick, Maine.
- Sept. 29-30 All Day Gadabout Gaddis Fly-In, Bingham, Maine
- October 13 10 a.m.MAHS Meeting.
- November 10 10 a.m.MAHS Meeting.
- December 8 10 a.m.MAHS Meeting.

* The Owls Head Transportation Museum will also have their Antique Aeroplane Show on the following dates:
 May 2 — June 10 and 24 — July 8 and 21-22
 September 2, 16 and 30 — October 14

Got Ideas?

MAHS meeting sites are flexible and we're always looking for new program ideas. Call Scott Grant at 207-824-8617 if you have any ideas or if you can be of help.

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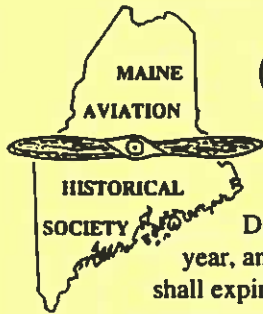
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Maine Aviation Historical Society
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February Meeting

Saturday, February 10, 2001

10 a.m.

Maine Air Museum Building
Bangor, Maine