

DIRIGO FLYER

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Newsletter of the Maine Aviation Historical Society
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Maine and the Cold War, Continued

This important article by Vice President Peter Noddin gives a great picture of the real Cold War in which Maine was so involved. It was originally published in the November 2000 issue of "Atlantic Flyer." Our thanks to publisher Jackie Lanpher for permission to reprint it.

As darkness set in, clues began to filter into search headquarters. As with any incident of this type, much of it was well-meaning but frivolous. Shots and explosions were heard, flares and parachutes were seen at points throughout the region. Two pieces of information that collaborated, however, caught Major Henderson's attention. Mattawamkeag Police Chief "Stu" Campbell reported that hunters staying in a remote cabin on the east side of Macwahoc Ridge had heard a loud impact and explosion at about 2:30 p.m.

Several people at a camp at Molunkus Lake, just west of the same area had seen something fall from the sky to the east and saw what they thought was a parachute through the falling snow. They estimated the impact point as somewhere near Lower Henderson Brook, between U.S. Routes 2 and 2A, near the small Aroostook County village of Macwahoc. Several others in the area reported hearing an explosion about the same time. Based on this information, he decided to move search headquarters east to the Community Center in Mattawamkeag, in the early morning hours, and focus the search effort near Lower Henderson Brook.

By Thursday morning, the Air Force search team was augmented by State Police, Game Wardens, Civil Defense personnel, Civil Air Patrol volunteers, local policemen, firemen, guides and hunters. The small towns of Mattawamkeag and Macwahoc took on the look of a small military base as resources continued to pour in. A field next to a roadside motel was turned into a helicopter staging area and nearly everyone who could pitched in some way.

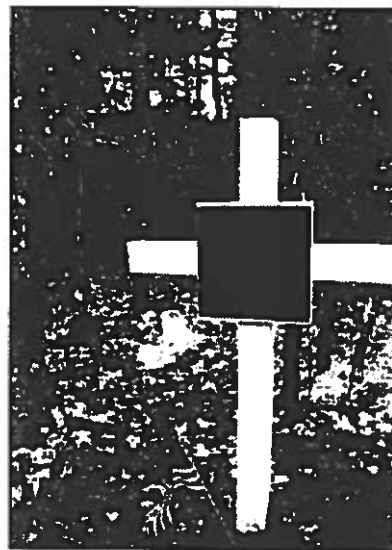
This scene was not at all a strange one to the residents of Mattawamkeag. A few years earlier, in December 1959, the Air Force had set up a search base in the same building during a 14-hour search for two B-52 bomber crewmen who had ejected from their plane after a mid-air collision with the KC-97 tanker that was refueling them. The crewmen were located from the air near Medway the next morning and were rescued by helicopter. The planes had both made safe

emergency landings at separate Air Force bases. In December 1953, an F-86F "Sabre" jet fighter from Dow had crashed just outside of town. The pilot safely ejected and walked to a woods camp. The Air Force had set up operations in town while they investigated the accident and recovered sensitive equipment from the wreckage

Early Thursday morning, a Civil Defense worker posted in a pickup truck on Route 2 north of Macwahoc saw a man in a flight suit walk out of the woods and flag down a passing vehicle.

Captain McClead was driven to the search headquarters to debrief with Major Henderson, then transported to Dow for a thorough medical examination.

Captain McClead was uninjured and in good spirits after spending a night in the snow-covered woods. He stated that after vain attempts to recover the aircraft, he and Captain Roe had decided to abandon the aircraft at 10,000 feet. The procedure for doing this from a two-seat fighter was for the canopy to be blown off by one of the crew and for the RIO to eject first. The pilot would wait several seconds after the canopy was gone to give the RIO time to get clear so that the rocket from his own seat would not burn the RIO. McClead said that he ejected at 8000 feet indicated altitude. The spin had had



The MAHS memorial plaque at the McLead/Roe F-101B crash, the first one visited with Captain McLead on June 9, 2001.

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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 News and Notes

MAHS Display at ACE Dedication Ceremony

Thursday, June 21st, we set up a display at Pilot's Grill for the American Civil Engineers dedication of Bangor International Airport as a Historic Civil Engineering Landmark.

John Garbinski, Ed Armstrong, Carl Sederquist, Bill and Cathy Cook and Mike Cornett talked to a lot of airplane people from BIA and other places, also business leaders from the civil engineers. They saw a great one-act play about Amelia Earhart from three teachers and two students from the Rockland High School.

August Meeting

The August meeting will be held at 10 a.m. on Saturday, August 11, 2001 at John Miller's Antique Airfield, Miller's Field, 115 North Road, Newburgh, Maine. Our guest speaker will be member Hank Marois from St. Petersburg, Florida and Trenton, Maine. Hank will speak to us about his experiences flying B-52s out of Loring and Dow Field in Bangor during the Cold War.

We will also show the video of the restoration of the Boeing 247 and its flight to Oshkosh scheduled for last month. Member Morgan Barbour was ill and could not make it. We missed him and we hope he's well and safely back in Washington State by now.

To get to Miller's Field, take Exit 43 off Route 95. If coming from the north, turn left, and cross over Rt. 95. If coming from the south, turn right. North Road is the second right very close to the exit. The field is about one-half mile down North Road on your left. See you all there!

State of the Art in the late '50s...



Pilot and flight instructor Don Morin employed at Central Maine Flying Service, Old Town Airport in the late '50s. Cessna 195 in background was owned by the J.W. Sewall Co. and used for aerial mapping. Mr. Morin is now retired and living in Maine. (Photo via Norm Houle)

... and Now



F-15s on a take-off roll
 outside the museum
 in Bangor.
 (Photo via Mike Cornett)

"Cold War," continued from page 1

him pinned against the left side of the cockpit and the negative G forces had him straining against his straps up off his seat. After several frantic seconds of difficulty reaching and arming the ejection mechanism, his automatic ejection seat had worked flawlessly. He had separated from his seat and his chute had automatically opened. Seconds later he had seen a flash and heard the aircraft impact on a wooded ridge below him. His chute had snagged a tree and he swung feet first into the trunk.

He had not seen Captain Roe's parachute through the clouds and snow, but felt sure that he had safely ejected. Once on the ground, McClead had checked the gear in his survival kit and set out toward a chainsaw that he could hear in the distance. Encountering a thick wet swamp and realizing that it would soon be dark, he wisely decided to make camp for the night. He could hear the aircraft burning and heard several secondary explosions. On the way back to his parachute, he walked to within sight of the burning wreckage hoping to link up with Captain Roe. He set up a "teepee" type shelter with his parachute canopy but did not build a fire, deciding that it was better to stay dry than get wet while building one. In the morning, after a reasonably comfortable night with periodic sleep, a lull in the storm allowed him to move toward highway noises and find an old woods road that he followed about two miles to Route 2.

Continued bad weather prevented a helicopter air search of the area from locating the wreckage, but ground teams backtracked McClead's route to his campsite and fanned out looking for Captain Roe and the crash site. The ground searchers had to wade through three-foot snowdrifts that obliterated McClead's tracks in the thick woods. By early evening, the snowstorm turned to freezing rain, adding to their misery. At 7:30 p.m. the last of the teams shuffled into headquarters, empty-handed, for a hot meal and needed sleep to prepare for an all-out effort again at daylight.



The 30-foot crater blasted by the F-101B when it crashed, showing the total destruction of the aircraft by the impact.
(Photo courtesy of Bangor Daily News)



Hike leader Peter Noddin showing some of the debris from the F-101B crash site.

(Photo courtesy of Mike Cornett)

By Friday morning, 35 additional airmen from Dow arrived to bring the total ground search force of military and civilian personnel to over 100. A second helicopter had arrived on site, along with Civil Air Patrol planes and a Navy P-2V "Neptune" patrol bomber. A mobile command post was set up at a weigh station on Route 2 a short distance from where McClead had walked out.

Searchers lined up along Route 2 near Lower Henderson Brook and marched through the woods on line to Route 2A. At times the woods was so thick that visibility was limited to a few yards. Other teams searched areas on both sides of the roads. By afternoon, the weather was clearing enough to allow a somewhat effective air search. Regardless of the magnitude of this effort, everyone headed back at nightfall with neither the plane nor the pilot being located. The strain of the three-day effort was showing on the faces of the airmen, public safety professionals and volunteers, but there was still a pilot out there somewhere who may need help. His chances of survival grew smaller each day, especially if he was injured.

There was, however, one glimmer of hope. Captain McClead had returned to the search and during a helicopter flight that afternoon he spotted what he thought was the ridge face where he had seen the aircraft impact. Plans for Saturday morning included a more extensive air search, made possible by improving weather, another all-out ground "grid" search and six airmen being lowered from a helicopter into the area pointed out by McClead.

Saturday, November 17, 1962 dawned relatively clear, allowing the Air Force to conduct air search operations in a manner that they were accustomed to. By 9:30 a.m. the six-man team that had been lowered into the woods by cable from the helicopter radioed to report that they had found the aircraft wreckage on the bank of Lower Henderson Brook a short distance from McClead's camp site. Everyone converged on this point.

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Almost a Half Century Later, A Visit to Four Crash Sites

Story by Peter Noddin / Photos by Mike Cornett

Saturday, June 9th dawned sunny and warm—a great day for a crash site hike! About 7 a.m. someone flew up the river and did a perfect buzz job on my house. I didn't get outside in time to get a look, but fully expected a member to call from Millinocket Airport for a ride to the meeting. The call never came. Oh well!

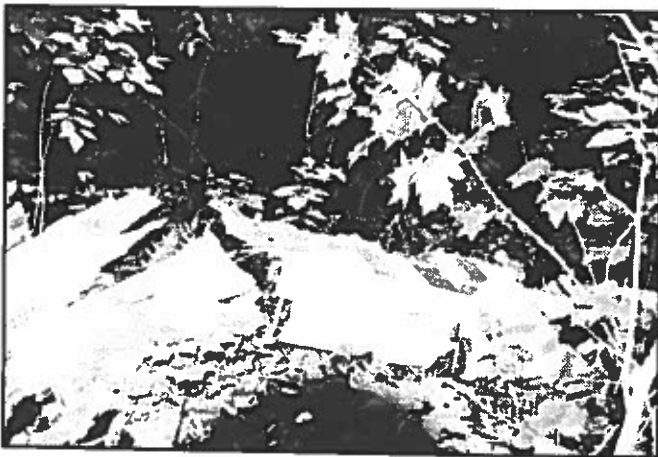
By 9:30 several members had arrived at the Bernard Coro Post DAV in Medway. Les Shaw brought up the navigator's ejection seat from the B-52/KC-97 mid-air in 1959 that happened almost right over where we were meeting. We put it out front with the banner to let everyone know that they had the "right place." I set up several tables with Millinocket area crash material such as news clippings, accident reports and photos from my collection as well as Jim Chichetto's. I also put my "Major Military Aircraft Mishaps in Maine" map up on the wall for all to look at before the meeting.

The media arrived, including a local newspaper reporter and a camera team from Channel 2 news. Chuck McClead, the RIO who ejected from the Macwahoc F-101B arrived with his wife as the "guest of honor" for the day's events.

The first site visited was the F-101B that crashed near Macwahoc due to a pitch up accident during a simulated intercept in November of 1962. The plane and crew were from the 75th FIS at Dow AFB. Chuck told the story of that afternoon's mishap, as well as his night in the woods in a record-setting blizzard. It was a real honor and treat to meet him in person and have him tell the oral history of the events first hand.

The site is a 30-foot round water-filled crater in the side of a ridge with pieces of wreckage strewn down the ridge face in a narrow 300-yard cone. Most of the participants stayed near the crater and looked over the debris there, including one of the engines collapsed to about four feet long. A new flag and flag holder was installed on the memorial to Captain Douglas Roe, the pilot who ejected outside of the seat's envelope and died in the crash.

After a short drive, we arrived at the F-86F site hike-in point near Molunkus, only a few air miles from the F-101B



Wing parts from the F-86F crash, the second crash site near Molunkus, Maine.



John Garbinski, Jim Chichetto, Chuck McLead and Peter Noddin at the MAHS plaque erected at the F-101B Voodoo crash site.

site. In December 1953, 1st Lt. Al Lang of the 49th FIS at Dow AFB lost control during an evasive maneuver while engaged in simulated combat. Lang successfully ejected and made his way to a nearby farm. The aircraft crashed in a thick snow-filled swamp. This was the longest walk of the day, about 400 yards and it is the hardest site to "hit" while hiking since there is little left and the brush is very thick. A shallow water-filled depression marks the impact crater and small pieces of twisted metal can be found in a 50-yard radius. This site is a good example of the need to preserve historic crash sites. The engine and tail section, with squadron markings clearly visible, were removed from the site during wood-cutting operations a decade ago and sold for scrap metal.

Al Lang went on to have a prosperous Air Force career. He commanded an F-4 squadron in Viet Nam and made a Mig 21 kill during his tour. He died of a heart attack before reaching retirement.

We stopped for lunch in Sherman and headed in to the F-86A site near Stacyville. In March of 1952, Captain George Thomas was engaged in camera gunnery training with two other ships from the 74th FIS at Presque Isle AFB. He had just returned from a combat tour, flying F-80s in Korea and was working toward alert qualified status in the F-86. Problems with the cockpit pressurization system, coupled with a poor fitting "borrowed" oxygen mask lead to hypoxia and the plane spun at nearly mach 1. Thomas died in the crash.

This site is surprisingly intact despite its age and being picked over during several wood-cutting operations over the years. The plane blew a shelf-like crater into the ledge on a horseback ridge. Several large identifiable pieces remain and the markings are well preserved. Both drop tanks, the engine, generator, one wing, rudder, canopy pieces, landing gear, oil cooler, and several oxygen bottles can easily be picked out of the 100-yard debris pattern. On a thorough search of the site several years ago, I located the cockpit compressor that started the accident sequence.

I was alarmed at the condition of the memorial, which was fine when checked during last year's hunting season. The cross was leaned forward, showed some scars and the plaque had broken off at all four corner bolts. Looking around, I could not make sense of how "ice" from a tree had done this. A new flag was placed and a new plaque will be installed before Labor Day.

The Whetstone Bridge over the East Branch of the Penobscot was closed for redecking (none too soon), so we had to make do with a long backtrack through Medway to get to the Royal Canadian Navy FB.11 *Sea Fury* site in T3R8. It was a long drive and daylight was short as we hiked in, but it was well worth it.

On June 30, 1950, Lt. Mervin "Butch" Hare RCN disappeared while ferrying the aircraft on a leg from Montreal PQ to Dartmouth NS. Extensive searches failed to turn up any sign of the plane or pilot. In February 1968, two foresters discovered the wreckage and two searches of the site turned up confirming evidence that he was aboard at impact but no remains were ever recovered. The left stub plane had hooked a tree, cartwheeling the plane into the ground. It came to a dead stop in a 15-foot oblong crater and the engine and tail tumbled on a short distance. The whole aircraft is there, but broken up in a 50-yard radius.

The memorial showed minor damage similar to the one to Captain Thomas and it was clear from the marks just what was happening. Buck deer are antler rubbing on our memorials!

As it got dark, we convoyed back out of the woods to the DAV Hall. Several hikers went on their first crash site visits this day. Some visited these particular sites for the first time. Jim Chichetto and I, in spite of both being ill, were deeply touched again, even though the sites and the stories are very familiar to us. The *Katahdin Times* did a great full-page article on the event, focusing on Chuck McClead's return to the crash

site 39 years later. Visiting these sites and telling the stories of those who flew in the Cold War period is a vital part of preserving our aviation heritage and ensuring that the seriousness, dedication, and risks which veterans of this era "pushed the limits" to protect our nation is not forgotten or watered down by the "feel good history" movement. Two of the men killed in these incidents (Hare, Thomas) were WW II veterans. Two (Thomas, Lang) served combat tours in Korea. Two went on to serve in Viet Nam (Lang, McClead).

In spite of a few wrong turns and the mishap of losing the TV news crew, I hope all were properly honored by the day's activities. I want to thank Jim Chichetto for all of his help in research and keeping me motivated, John Garbinski making it out for part of the day and adding a veteran's touch to MAHS presence at the F-101B site, Les Shaw for bringing the material up from the museum, Mike Shaw for bringing his children and introducing another generation to our heritage, and Carl Sederquist for riding with me and keeping my spirits up so that I had the strength and voice left to complete what we started.



Selecting the memorial plaque site for the F-86A crash site. (left to right) Brian Wood and friend, Carl Sederquist, Pete Noddin and Jim Chichetto.

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"Cold War," continued from page 3

The crash site was an eerie scene. The area smelled of jet fuel and burned plastic. The plane had hit the ground coming straight down in its flat spin and had blown a thirty-foot diameter crater, 15 feet deep, in the side of the ridge. One engine and some debris were in the crater. Pieces of the aircraft were scattered for nearly 300 yards. Pieces of aluminum, plastic, wire and rubber hung in tree branches all around the crater. Pieces of the jet engine turbines had cut down small trees as they flew through the mixed forest. Molten aluminum "ingots" created by the intense fire surrounded the crater.

The site also offered hope that Captain Roe would still be found alive. Captain McClead's ejection seat was laying about forty feet northwest of the crater, a testimony to the fact that the aircraft had descended straight down. Captain Roe's seat was about 20 feet southwest of the crater and, like McClead's had been mechanically fired by its occupant.

Over the next hour, however, hope began to fade. The pilot's helmet was found in the snow 40 feet away. Of course, aircrew sometimes lost helmets during the ejection/descent process. McClead had. But airmen assigned to investigate the crater closely soon discovered human remains among the fire-damaged debris. Captain Roe had apparently ejected too late. Altimeter lag in the flat spin could have meant that the 8000 feet indicated when they started ejection was actually only 4000-5000, and he may have had similar trouble to McClead reaching the ejection mechanism. His parachute had not been able to deploy in time.

By the end of the day, a tired and frustrated search group demobilized. Air Force personnel loaded into vehicles and headed back to Bangor. Aircraft flew back to their home bases and civilians returned to their regular jobs knowing that they had pulled together and given their all to the effort. Air Force Security Police moved in to secure the site for a few days so that investigators could complete their work and munitions specialists could ensure that no dangerous missile debris remained.

Captain Roe left behind a wife and son in Brewer, as well as an extended family in his hometown of Phoenix, Arizona.

Captain McClead went on to serve with two more ADC squadrons and flew in F-4s in Vietnam. He later settled in Maine, and continued to fly in F-101B's for several years with the 132nd Fighter Interceptor Squadron of the Maine Air National Guard.

Captain Grenzbach, the instructor pilot following the stricken aircraft, later flew F-105 "Thunderchief" tactical bombers in Vietnam. In 1967, Colonel Grenzbach was shot down over North Vietnam and declared missing in action.

Major Henderson would lead another urgent search into the snowy frozen Maine woods just two months later. A B-52C bomber from Westover Air Force Base in Massachusetts suffered a structural failure and crashed near Greenville, Maine. Two of the nine crewmen aboard were rescued alive from sub-zero temperatures in the snow-filled wilderness.

The towns of Medway, Mattawamkeag, and Macwahoc would never be drawn into such a search again. Between 1950 and 1963, however, a total of 11 American and Canadian military aircrew died in accidents in Maine's Katahdin Region.

Many more died in other areas of Maine, especially along the coast and in northern Aroostook County. Thousands died around the world during the Cold War era due to accidents or hostile action. They were serving their country and preparing for a day that fortunately would never come. They were preparing to defend the United States and a way of life that most of us take for granted from an unthinkable attack.

Looking back with 20/20 hindsight, in an era where a single Air Force plane crash is national news, and the Cold War has ended, it is easy to forget the seriousness and earnestness with which these young men served. They were risking their lives to protect their families and their hometowns so that we could eventually live without the constant fear of nuclear war. They had to serve, fly and push the limits as if at war at all times, and their deaths are certainly no less honorable than if they were the result of enemy action in a shooting war.

The site of this crash in 1962 is now more accessible than it was then. A gravel logging road passes within 100 yards of the crash crater, which is now filled with water and easily mistaken for a natural pond. A perfectly round opening still exists through the overhead trees where the plane came screaming down in its death spin.

One engine and hundreds of small pieces of metal debris, unrecognizable to anyone who does not know the story of the mayday at 45,000 feet, are scattered around the crater and along a 300-yard pattern to the bank of the brook. Two large sections of the fighter's wings were removed and sold for scrap metal during a wood cutting operation in the late 1960s.

In recent years, since the road was built, the aircraft canopy was removed from its resting place a few hundred yards away. Captain McClead's ejection seat has also disappeared from the site during this decade. A white cross, informational plaque, and American flag are maintained at the crater by the Maine Aviation Historical Society as a memorial to the sacrifice made by Captain Douglas H. Roe on that cold snowy November afternoon. It informs those who stumble over the wreckage about the historic significance of the site.

It also serves as a reminder to those who visit of a time when nuclear war seemed almost certain. A time when a few small Maine towns rose to the occasion and came to the aid of those who took the risks and often paid the price of being the first line of America's defense.

A visit to this or any other crash site of the era cannot help leaving a person with a deep respect for our Cold War warriors and a newfound understanding that freedom is not free!

**JOIN THE MAHS TODAY
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Upcoming MAHS Meetings



- August 4-5 All Day Transportation Spectacular and Aerobatic Airshow, OHTM, Owls Head, Maine.
- August 11 10 a.m. MAHS Meeting, Miller's Antique Airfield, Newburgh, Maine.
- August 25 All Day St. Steven, New Brunswick Air Show (across the river from Calais).
- 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:
 July 8 and 21-22 • September 2, 16 and 30 • October 14

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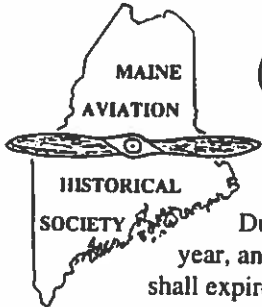


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August Meeting

Saturday, August 11, 2001
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