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Vol. V, No. 2 February 1997

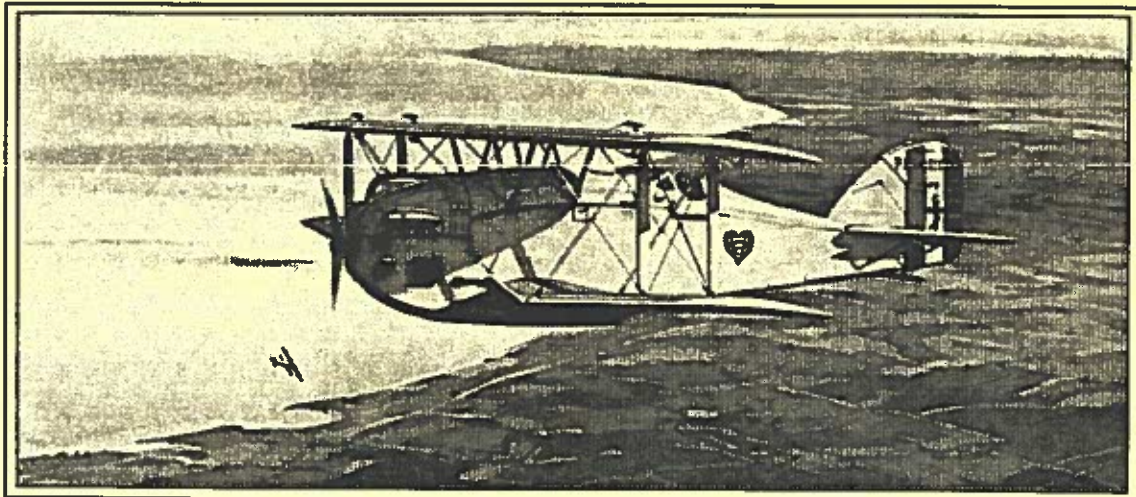
Newsletter of the Maine Aviation Historical Society • 101 Monroe Avenue, Westbrook, Maine 04092 • 207-854-9972

WARNING — LAST ISSUE?

If there is a red dot on your address label, and a 1997 application in this newsletter, we have not received your dues when this issue was mailed, and this will be your last Dirigo Flyer unless you renew. With increased costs, we cannot extend subscriptions indefinitely. We want and need you — renew today!

Meet the "White Bird"

By Leo Boyle



Levasseur PL.8 "L'Oiseau Blanc" ("White Bird") leaving the French coast behind after dropping its landing gear early in the morning on May 8, 1927.

Why?

Seventy years ago, Raymond Orteig's prize of \$25,000 for the first non-stop flight by an aeroplane between New York and Paris was a grand challenge. Combine this with the evolution of the aeroplane and its engine to the point where the necessary range was a distinct possibility, and the engine could run long enough non-stop, and a wild dream became one that might come true. Throw in a large number of restless aviators, anxious for fame and glory, not to mention the money, and the stage was set for the great trans-Atlantic air race.

The Men

Captain Charles Nungesser, the pilot of the "White Bird," was born in Paris in 1892. After school he spent some time in Brazil where he learned to fly. In 1914, he was a corporal in the 2nd Hussars, won his first decoration and transferred to the

aviation section in 1915. He flew reconnaissance and night bombing missions with Escadrille V.B.106. He was transferred to Escadrille N.65, a Nieuport fighter unit. Wounded 17 times, awarded his and other country's major decorations, he was France's 3rd leading ace with 45 victories. After the war, he formed a flying school, and toured the United States as an aerobatic pilot. Bitten by the fever, he approached the French Air Ministry for help but was turned down. Pierre Levasseur, manufacturer, agreed to build him a modified version of a French naval plane he was then producing. Now that he had a plane, Nungesser went searching for a navigator.

Captain Francois Coli, navigator without parallel, was ten years older than Nungesser. A seaman, he rose to command merchant ships traveling around the world before World War I. In the service, he rose quickly through the ranks to captain

"White Bird," *Continued on Page 2*

"White Bird," Continued

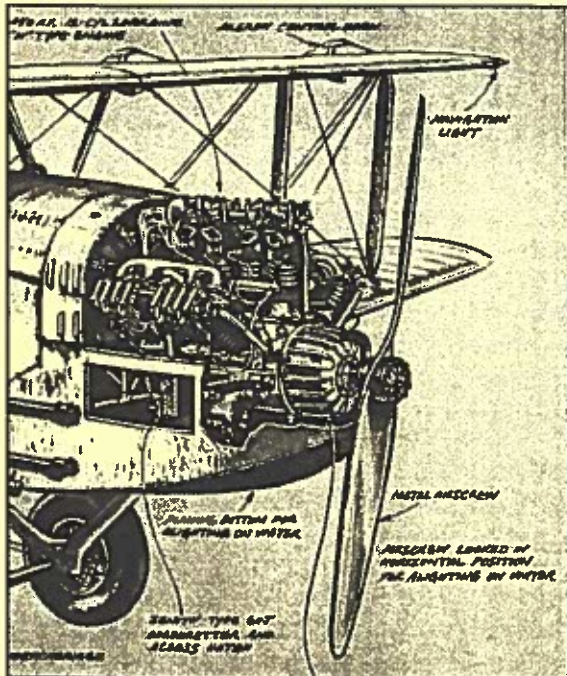
despite severe wounds, including the loss of an eye and frostbite. He transferred to the Air Service and commanded an observation squadron at war's end. Back to sea, he too wanted to be first to fly the Atlantic. The plane he had been planning to navigate across had just crashed on a test flight when along came Nungesser.

The Plane

"L'Oiseau Blanc" was a Pierre Levasseur PL.8, a modified version of the French Navy PL.4 three-seat shipboard reconnaissance biplane. Except for the upper wing cutaway being filled in and the two front cockpits being replaced by three huge fuel tanks, the plane was essentially the same. Plywood covered the fuselage sides, strengthening was done where necessary, and the rear cockpit was moved aft and enlarged. The three 5-1/4 foot tall fuel tanks could hold 1063 gallons. The strengthened landing gear was droppable after take-off, and the plane could land on water and float. Painted white, with red, white and blue rudder stripes and one French insignia below the lower left wing, "White Bird" sported Nungesser's black heart with skull and cross bones, casket and candles.

The Engine

"L'Oiseau Blanc" was powered by a 450 hp Lorraine-Dietrich 12 cylinder engine with a reduction gear driving a two-bladed Levasseur forged Duralumin propeller of 12-1/2 foot diameter. The propeller could be stopped in the horizontal position for water landings, but only had a ground clearance of eight inches for take-off. The engine was of W configuration, with a vertical row of four cylinders and a row on each side at about 60°. Dry, the engine weighed about 915 pounds. The engine had been tested for 43 hours on a simulated Atlantic flight and had lost none of its power.



Lorraine-Dietrich 450 hp W type engine used in the "White Bird."



Captain Francois Coli and Captain Charles Nungesser in the cockpit of the "White Bird" just before the final take-off. (Musee de L'Air Photo)

The Flight

On May 7, 1927, Nungesser flew the "White Bird" from Villacoublay to LeBourget outside Paris. The compass was swung and final preparations made. A favorable weather forecast was received and a dawn take-off was planned. Four days of provisions, signal rockets, a sea water distilling device, sealed instruments and a full load of fuel and the "White Bird" was positioned at the end of the runway. Nungesser and Coli arrived, the engine was warmed and at 5:18 a.m. they began their take-off run. A long take-off and a slow climb and they headed west for the French coast, accompanied by four military aircraft. They dropped their landing gear and were last seen crossing the French coast at Etretat. About 11 a.m. a positive sighting was made of them crossing the Irish coast and heading out over the Atlantic.

Reports of sighting and hearing an airplane came from Newfoundland, down the coast in Maine, and even as far as Boston, but Nungesser and Coli never arrived in New York, nor their alternate of Montreal. To this date, no positive proof has ever been found of the "White Bird" despite diligent searches in Maine and Newfoundland by various groups and individuals. But the search goes on in Maine! What better way to celebrate this 70th anniversary of Nungesser and Coli's flight in the "White Bird" than to establish their ultimate fate.

"White Bird," Continued on Page 3

"White Bird," *Continued*

Postscript

On January 11, 1997, member Alan Graves and a companion went to the "White Bird" search area with a new, powerful metal detector. Despite a coating of ice on top of some snow, Al reported several positive strikes with the detector in one of the high probability areas. Depending upon the weather and snow cover, we may be searching before too long. Keep your hiking gear ready to go . . .

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January Meeting

Saturday, January 11, 1997, the first meeting of the MAHS for 1997, and my speaker had canceled because of illness. But not to worry, Norm Houle told me he would entertain us with a few slides or some tall airline tales. Norm and Jack Denison were the first to arrive, and Norm told me that a speaker he had heard the night before had been asked and he might come up to speak to us that day. Shortly after 9 a.m. a gentleman arrived with slides and maps. His name was Doug Joyce, retired USAF Colonel and former test pilot, and he had been the New Hampshire CAP Search Coordinator for the Learjet 35 that disappeared on December 24, 1996 near Lebanon, NH.

Doug had no projector so we borrowed one from the Airport Manager's office, only to have the bulb blow shortly after we turned it on. Naturally, there was no spare bulb! Doug never blinked an eye, set up his slides so all could see, used his maps and gave a very interesting presentation of this extensive aerial search. The coordination of the search, the bringing in of other CAP groups (particularly Massachusetts), the National Guard Units, the Air Force and Coast Guard made a most interesting story. The layout of the search grids, the sections to be gridded and searched, both primary and secondary, the probability factors and, of course, the weather all played important roles in the search, as did the uninvited searchers following their own ideas.

Following his hour-plus long presentation, Doug fielded questions from members, and at the end some speculations on where the Learjet might be and/or what might have happened to it and its two-man crew. The twenty or so members present had just received an unexpected bonus, and they all gave Doug a great round of applause. We want to thank Doug sincerely for visiting us. Not only did he have to give his presentation twice in twelve hours, but he drove up from New Hampshire and back to do it for us. Thank you, Doug, and thank you, Norm Houle for arranging this talk for us. We know we'll hear your delightful stories in the near future.

Business Meeting Notes

- The Secretary's and Treasurer's Reports were given and we moved on to old business.
- Jim Chichetto briefed us on the "White Bird" search to date and things we will be doing to be ready when the French are. Bill Townsend took some aerial photos from 2000 feet. Jim and John Miller will be doing the same shortly from 200+ feet. Bill Townsend will be looking into the purchase of two-

way radio equipment for our searchers and hikes. We'll be waiting and ready for spring to break.

- A decision was made on where some of the meetings are to be held and these, as always, subject to change, are listed on page 5. We will be participating in various events this season including the Hampton, NH Flea Market in May, the Military Air Show at Owls Head June 28-29, the Great State O' Maine Air Show at Brunswick July 18-19, the Seaplane Fly-In at Greenville September 5-7, plus others. Choose yours now and volunteer to help us man displays, meet lots of interesting folks and have fun.
- We need volunteers for two jobs: one is for a meeting planner. This person will be responsible for arranging where the meetings will be held, making sure we have a place to meet, and arranging an interesting speaker for these meetings. Jim and Leo will be of assistance in transitioning our new volunteer to handle this easily.
- We also need a volunteer to be an events coordinator. This means working with the sponsoring organizations of the events scheduled above and others to be determined to make sure we have good display space, will be welcomed by and can coordinate with the sponsor, and arrange for our displays and material to be there and to come up with promotional ideas and implement them. It may be that two members would like to work together on these tasks. We're anxious to help you get started, so call 207-854-9972 or 207-269-3281 now.
- The following volunteers have been appointed to the Museum Committee. It is expected that they will appoint the following sub-committees: Bangor, Sanford and Brunswick to follow-up on these three current possibilities.

Jules Arel	Gary Leighton
Ed Armstrong	Marc McDonnell
Don Strout	Bill Haeefe
Bill Townsend	Wayne Briggs
- Rob Rohr presented us news of the possibility of the Brunswick Naval Air Station opening a museum on the base. There is a possibility of their combining their efforts with those of the Air National Guard in Bangor and the Maine Aviation Historical Society. Stay tuned for more details as Brunswick, Sanford and Bangor all become viable possibilities for a new home for the MAHS. And keep your affairs in order at home for we may suddenly need volunteers to do all kinds of exciting jobs.
- Sue Chichetto has volunteered to do some aircraft crash research in the state records to bring our crash records up to date and more complete. Thanks, Sue.
- Work is progressing and we are getting cost estimates on an MAHS Journal full of articles and pictures depicting Maine aviation history. This would be an annual to supplement or possibly replace the *Flying Down East* calendar. Leo Boyle is also coordinating his slides and getting more slides made. This summer he will be working with Bill Armstrong to do a voice-over film depicting Maine's aviation history which we can run continuously at our air show displays (and eventually in our museum). Particularly needed by Leo (207-854-9972)

"Business," *Continued on Page 4*

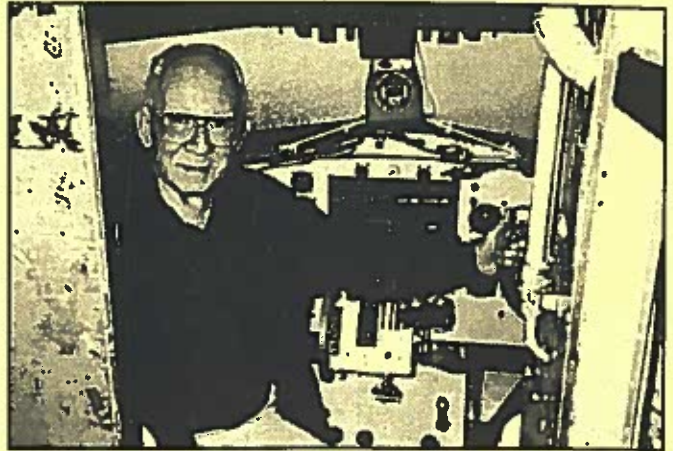
Business, Continued

are photos and/or slides representing Maine's aviation history. Especially needed are WWII air base photos and post-war 1946 to present. Help us with that photo that can make a good presentation great.

- The current slate of the Board of Directors — Norm Houle, Jack Denison and Scott Grant — were all re-elected by vote of the members' ballots received.
- The Massachusetts Aviation Historical Society needs some help. Edward Rowe Snow, maritime historian, and his wife took over from Maine's own original Flying Santa, Bill Wincapaw of Rockland. Bill flew from 1929 to 1936 when Snow took over until 1980. George Morgan is the current Flying Santa. They need to know the types of aircraft that Snow flew on his route. If anyone has any information on this, especially photos or newspaper clippings, please let your editor know. They need this for a recurring Christmas display in the South Shore Plaza in Braintree, MA. Also, if anyone has a photo of a Mass. ANG HISSO Jenny with the seagull insignia, Crocker Snow needs it for his forthcoming book.

Change of Address

70. Scott F. Grant
P.O. Box 6, Bridport, Vermont 05734
Telephone: (802) 758-2521



Your editor looks happy as he climbs out of the left seat of Mike Farrey's DC-3 at Sanford on December 17, 1996. (Norm Houle Photo)

February Meeting

Be sure to try to attend the February 8th meeting at the Conference Room of the Portland Jetport. We hope to have another interesting speaker (or a good video). We also will have important business to discuss regarding the "White Bird" search and the Museum Search Committee.

The "Flying Lobster" — Another View



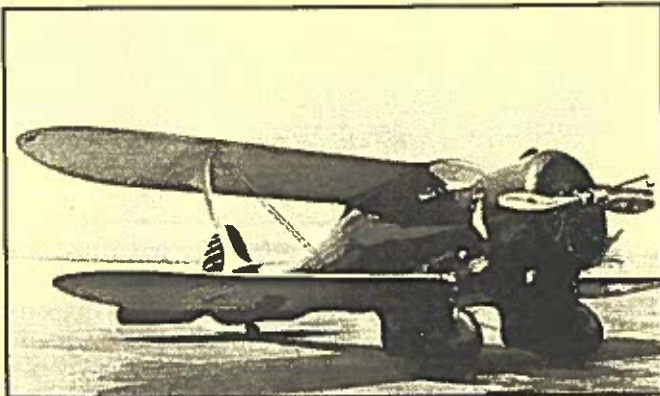
The "Flying Lobster" Martin PBM-5, engines removed, at Bar Harbor, Maine June 28, 1953. At this time it was owned by the Caruso Brothers (Bar Harbor Airways) and shortly thereafter sold to the Argentine Navy. (Bob Gordon Photo via Rich Frangella)

Upcoming MAHS Meetings and Calendar of Events

February 8	9 a.m.	MAHS Meeting, Conference Room, Portland International Jetport.
March 15	9 a.m.	MAHS Meeting, Brunswick Naval Air Station.
April 6-12	All Day	Sun 'n Fun, Lakeland, Florida.
April 12	9 a.m.	MAHS Meeting, Bangor. (<i>Note change.</i>)
May 10	9 a.m.	MAHS Meeting, Dick Jackson's place, Rochester, NH. Sikorsky S-39 Restoration.
June 1	10 a.m.	WWI Air Show, Owls Head Transportation Museum.
June 14	9 a.m.	MAHS Meeting, TBA.
June 28-29	10 a.m.	Military Aviation & Aerobatic Air Show, Owls Head Transportation Museum.
July 12	9 a.m.	MAHS Meeting, TBA.
July 18-19	All Day	Great State O' Maine Air Show, Brunswick Naval Air Station.
July 31-August 6	All Day	Oshkosh EAA Air Show, Oshkosh, Wisconsin.
August 9	9 a.m.	MAHS Meeting, TBA.
August 9-10	10 a.m.	Aerobatic Air Show, Owls Head Transportation Museum.
August 31	10 a.m.	WWI Air Show, Owls Head Transportation Museum.
September 5-7	All Day	International Seaplane Fly-In, Greenville, ME.
September 13	9 a.m.	MAHS Meeting, TBA.
September 20-21	10 a.m.	Antique Aeroplane Show, Owls Head Transportation Museum.
October 5	10 a.m.	Antique Aeroplane Show, Owls Head Transportation Museum.
October 11	9 a.m.	MAHS Meeting, TBA.
October 26	10 a.m.	Great Fall Auction, Owls Head Transportation Museum. Free admission.
November 8	9 a.m.	MAHS Meeting, TBA.
December 13	9 a.m.	MAHS Meeting, TBA.

The meeting sites can be flexible. We are looking for suggestions on locations for many of these meetings. The same goes for the weekend hikes — let us know. We are also looking for guest speakers, slide shows, etc. Call Leo at 207-854-9972 or Jim at 207-269-3281 if you have any ideas or can be of help. In addition, we will be scheduling hikes to aircraft wrecks from spring until fall. The search for the "White Bird" will resume as soon as the weather permits. Stay tuned for further details — it's going to be an exciting year!

Mystery Photo Returns!

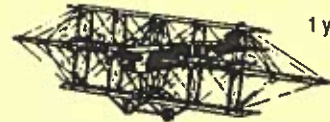


This airplane, one of a kind, was bought new by a Maine company in 1934. Within six months it was sold to a well-known aviation personality and had a racing career. It was destroyed in a hangar fire in 1944.

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'96-'97 *Flying Down East* Calendar

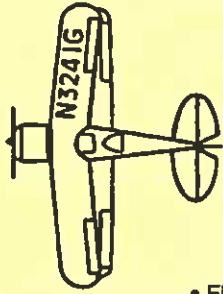
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'96-'97 *Flying Down East* Calendar

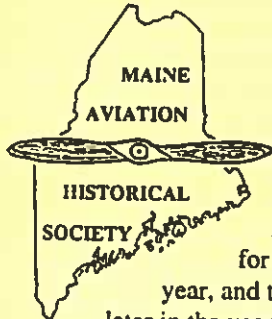
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Annual membership includes *12 monthly newsletters!* Mail payment to: MAHS
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Corporate	\$50 annual	Newsletter, Calendar
Supporting	\$100 annual	Newsletter, Calendar
Lifetime	\$500	Newsletter, Calendar, Lifetime Membership Number (2 annual \$250 payments)

Maine Aviation Historical Society
101 Monroe Avenue
Westbrook, ME 04092-4020



Camille Cyr # 61
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Brunswick ME 04011

JOIN US!
Saturday, February 8
9 a.m.
Conference Room
Portland International
Jetport Terminal