

DIRIGO FLYER

Vol. V, No. 5 May 1997

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

The Continuing Saga of the "White Bird"

By Ed Armstrong

For the past twelve years, Jim Rivers, ardent outdoors person, registered Maine guide and former Naval air traffic controller, has been on a quest: to find the unidentified engine that his good friend Jim Millett found almost completely buried in the ground somewhere in the road-less wilderness of downeast Maine.

Millett met Rivers one spring day in 1985 in a Bangor restaurant and held up a newspaper which proclaimed that an out-of-state hunter had relayed information to an organization called TIGHAR which was coming to Maine to look for the "White Bird," a plane missing since May of 1927 when it took off from Paris to be the first to fly non-stop across the Atlantic. The plane, piloted by two famous French aviators, Messrs. Nungesser and Coli, was last seen flying off the coast of Ireland. Tens of thousands of New Yorkers gathered at the base of the Statue of Liberty awaiting its arrival — it was actually a flying boat, since it was designed to drop its landing gear upon takeoff and then land on water after reaching its destination — and there was much excitement among the crowd.

But the plane never arrived in New York harbor and after anxious days of searching the ocean and expecting news of the aircraft, newspapers finally ran stories that it was presumed that the plane went down at sea. Relative and friends still help out hope for the survival of the two men but after two weeks, everyone on both sides of the Atlantic realized that there was very little hope of finding the men alive. The daunting challenge of flying the Atlantic was left to another brave soul, Charles Lindbergh, who successfully made a west to east flight and landed in Paris two weeks after the "Oiseau Blanc" ("White Bird") disappeared.

While the newspapers in Bangor, Maine reported on all of these events at the time, an eleven year old boy who plodded the streets of the city selling daily newspapers and reading of the events each morning would, years later, play a very important part in helping the search for the "White Bird" to continue.

Twenty six years later, in 1953, this same Jim Millett who had sold newspapers on the streets of Bangor years before was out hunting with two companions in downeast Maine. Just



Ready to start up where we left off last fall: (left to right) Jules Arel, Bill Haeefe, Jim Chichetto, Ed Armstrong, Al Graves and Bill Robertson.
Sue Chichetto Photo.

before noon Millett, hungry and tired, yelled to his two companions that he was going to break for lunch. The three men, who were within sight of each other, sat down and had their own respective lunches, keeping their positions in the field. Millett spied a large outcropping of ledge and headed for it to sit down. When he had done so, he noticed a large, black metal object protruding from the ground. Puzzled by the presence of such an object, he proceeded to open his lunch bag and, while eating his lunch, pondered about the object that he now rested his feet on.

It was large and had four distinct metal globes of some type sticking out of what appeared to be the block of an engine. Millett finished his lunch and tried to move the engine by bracing his two hundred pound frame against the ledge and pushing with his feet. It wouldn't move. He tried unsuccessfully to twist one of the cylinder-type canisters off the engine, for by this time he was certain it was some type of engine. He was struck with the remembrances of his youth. Could this be the engine of the "White Bird?" Funny looking engine, though. He looked around for other debris and sure enough he spotted a three foot length of what appeared to be a large piece of white, laminated canvas. He looked some more and there was

"White Bird," Continued on Page 2

"White Bird," Continued from Page 1

evidence of a long-ago fire on some of the trees. Then he picked up a piece of bone and after calling to his two friends to come see what he had found, he looked at the bone again and decided that it looked like a tibia bone from a human.

His two friends, curious to see what Millett was all excited about, came running. One came down the ledges and one came up, for Jim happened to be the middle man in the three-person hunting party. He showed his two companions what he had found. The strange looking engine which should not have been there, for there were no woods roads in the area. The piece of white canvas and the bone. He ventured that they could possibly be from the missing French plane. But his two companions would have none of it. They laughed at his conclusion and, after examining the engine, offered their own thought that it might be some kind of snow machine or log hauler. The three men left the area and, Millett, still carrying the piece of white, laminated canvas, finally stuck it on the branch of a tree saying that he would come back to get it. He never did.

That late afternoon, arriving back at their hunting camp some miles from the scene in the woods, they told their tale of adventure over dinner to the three other men in the cabin, one of whom came from Pennsylvania. The men hunted other area of the woods for several more days and then they went home and promptly put the 1953 Thanksgiving week hunting trip behind them. A few good memories and lots of laughs, especially the engine that Millett had found. The "White Bird" engine? Preposterous! Impossible!

Now, let's move this story rapidly to 1985 again. Millett let Rivers read the newspaper article about the search for the plane and then said, "Jim, I was the one to find that engine in 1953 and I can take you to the spot in fifteen minutes after we get there." Jim Millett told Jim Rivers his entire hunting story from long ago and said that he knew that Rivers would believe him. He did.

So for two years, during the summers of 1985 and 1986, the two men tramped the woods of downeast Maine but were unable to find the exact location of Millett's engine find. Now the area was criss-crossed by logging roads but Rivers, armed with a compass and a topographical map, tramped the mountain because by this time the two men, pouring over the topo map had determined that one mountain in particular was the proper site of the find - one degree at a time trying to find the elusive engine. Nothing was found.

Then, in the spring of 1987, Rivers called me. He told me of a lost plane which, quite frankly, I had never heard of before — an engine in the woods — and would I like to meet with him and Jim Millett and see if I would like to help them locate the motor. This was done and for another eight years the three of us made our annual spring trek to downeast Maine.

The story gains rapid speed at this point. My son William, representing the United States, spent two months in Indonesia where he met hundreds of other students from around the world. One of them was a young man from Germany and one evening, while swapping stories, Bill told of accompanying us on several trips to search for the "Oiseau Blanc." The young man became

excited and said that he had learned of the plane in one of his history classes in school. The two friends corresponded and Bill sent his German friend photocopies of articles and stories (and a video that we had made during one of our search trips) and then the young man sent it to a friend in France who knew of the Nungesser and Coli Society in Paris. The story gets very interesting now.

The Paris Society called a relative of Nungesser who lives in New York and who himself has been keeping alive the hope that one day his cousin's remains would be found. The gentleman's name is Bill Nungesser and he called me. After we talked for a while, he mentioned an organization called the Maine Aviation Historical Society whose president was a man named Leo Boyle who lived in Portland. I called Leo, left a message on his answering machine and the next night I received a call from an old family friend.

"Hi, Ed, this is Jim Chichetto," he said. I was happy to hear from him for I hadn't seen him in several years.

"How are you, Jim. What can I do for you?" I inquired.

"Well," he said, "I am the new president of the Maine Aviation Historical Society." You can surmise the rest of the conversation.

Jim Chichetto has recruited me, my son Bill, Jim Rivers



(left to right) Jim Chichetto, Ed Armstrong and Jim Rivers on Basking Ridge, 10/27/96. Sue Chichetto Photo.

and Jim Millett into MAHS. We have all participated in several searches for the engine but now we are joined by a dozen of more of dedicated, serious but fun-loving people. Walkie-talkies, global positioning devices, whistles, topo maps, etc. aid us in our searches. So far nothing has turned up and until our Bangor meeting of April 12th, most of us assumed that the engine was probably a victim of a woods crew who picked it out of the search with one of the cherry pickers and sold it for scrap. However, yesterday's meeting proved to be full of surprise information.

One of our members was in a downeast restaurant talking to several old-timer woods people from the area and they offered that no such engine had ever been pulled from the downeast woods because that is a clique-y business and everyone knows who is doing what and who is logging what and if an engine was pulled from the woods, the entire logging commu-

"White Bird," Continued on Page 3

Meeting Notes

April Meeting

The April meeting held in Bangor was a great success, with an overflow crowd of 38-plus and much discussion was held on the "White Bird" searches, past and future (see Ed Armstrong's lead article). We are hoping to bring some 21st century technology into our search from various sources, but in the end it's going to take people on foot slogging through the woods, technology or no, so keep your boots and detectors ready.

After the meeting, many members went on a tour of the Maine Air National Guard facilities and the hangars that have been offered to us. The Museum Committee continues to work on all phases of our possible new home and we'll pass on the news as it evolves.

Watch for next month's *Dirigo Flyer* — lots of interesting things — the story of this month's mystery airplane, a new mystery airplane, photos from the Norm Houle Collection, how to obtain our new patches, Ed Maliar's search and rescue story, and more — plus all the up-to-date news on the "White Bird," other hikes, the museum and other exciting things on the horizon.

"White Bird," Continued from Page 2

nity would know about it. That means that the engine that Jim Millett found in 1953 could still be there covered with gravel and moss and alders and waiting for MAHS to come find it.

Another interesting fact came up at our April meeting. After the morning session ended and members were leaving to visit the site of our potential Air Museum, a gentleman by the name of Bob Bacon approached Jim Rivers and me standing at the back of the room.

He said, "What was the name of the guy who found that engine downeast?"

We said, "Jim Millett. Why?"

"Well," said Bacon, "in the spring of 1954 my partner and I (Bacon is a retired pilot of the Maine Forest Service) were approached by a guy from Bangor who told us about finding an engine in the woods during the last hunting season and could I fly him over the area." Jim Rivers and I were all over Bob Bacon with questions but we learned quickly that Bacon couldn't remember what the guy looked like or what his name was, but that he did take him over the area and he became disoriented in the air. Even after landing on the pond nearby, the man couldn't seem to get his bearings. They flew him back to their seaplane base on the Penobscot River and promptly forgot the episode. So Bob Bacon and John Craig flew with Jim Millett to find the location six months after hunting season. I couldn't wait to get home to call Jim Millett (he is not able to get around much as he used to as he approaches his late eighties) and tell him what we had learned at the meeting. I relayed the Bob Bacon story about the flight.

May Meeting

The May meeting will be held at Dick and Pat Jackson's place at 156 Rochester Hill Road in Rochester, NH. From Portsmouth take Route 16 North to Route 108 North toward Rochester. Their location is just beyond the Rochester Airport (on your right) on the left side of the road. If you come through South Sanford on Route 4, or on Route 9, turn right on Route 108 North at Dover or Somersworth. If you come through Sanford on Route 202 and 11, take Route 108 South from Rochester and they are on the left just before the airport. Their telephone number is 603-332-7115.

See his Sikorsky S-39 Amphibian and more!

CATCH THE EXCITEMENT!

Need help? Have ideas? Want to get involved?

Maine Aviation Historical Society

101 Monroe Avenue

Westbrook, ME 04092-4020

or call (207) 854-9972

If you are not yet a member, join today!

"That wasn't me," he said.

I asked him to try to remember. "Are you sure it wasn't you, Jim?"

"Positive," he said. "Must have been one of the other two guys."

There you have it. Either Jim Millett is suffering a case of memory loss or one of his two hunting companions, the two men who had laughed and scoffed at his ideas of the engine being part of the "White Bird" had decided during the winter months that the theory wasn't so far fetched after all. They, too, had seen the engine. They, too, had seen the canvas and the piece of bone. Who was the person who was flown downeast in search of the engine six months after the initial find? Another aviation mystery and right in our group!

By the way, I believe Jim Millett and I also believe Bob Bacon. Bacon describes his plane as an Aeronca Sedan, a four-place, single engine seaplane.

As a final note to this interesting tale, one of our newer members is going to try to get us some help to locate the engine using some high tech aerial methods. I personally don't care if he uses clairvoyance, if it will help us to solve this mystery and save us hours and hours of traversing through some pretty difficult terrain.

Soon you will receive a notice of our next "White Bird" search date. Try to make it. You'll enjoy yourself but come prepared. Compass, lunch, emergency survival kit, etc. Hope to see you there.

Answer to Last Month's Mystery Photo Revealed

By Ed Maliar

In the spring and summer of 1994, the first B-29s were rolling off the Wichita, Kansas assembly lines and being flown to India and China. Their staging area was the Presque Isle Air Base, and member Ed Maliar was stationed there from January to September 1944. As this was a new and secret airplane that folks had not seen before, there was a great deal of curiosity. Air base officials had been briefed, and they instructed all military personnel to tell the media and civilians that this was the latest model B-17 — the B-17Q. However, as at least half the local population worked at the base, the story never flew very far.

Presque Isle outfitted these B-29s for overwater flying for their flight across the Atlantic to North Africa, India and over the hump to China. A total of 257 B-29s from the 40th, 444th, 462nd and 468th groups of the 58th bomb wing were ferried to the 20th bomber command. Services rendered by Presque Isle included oxygen replenishment, life vests, rafts, pyrotechnics, updates on air, frames and engines, and physicals and shots for personnel.

About 50 B-29s arrived in June 1944 and they were loaded with spare parts, instruments, accessories, propellers and even spare engines. The engines came as "Quick Engine Change" kits, weighed several thousand pounds and were carried in the bomb bay. One B-29 could not lower its left landing gear and flew around for an hour and a half burning fuel. He was ordered to jettison his spare Wright R3350 engine within the perimeter of the field, between runway 4 and a taxiway. He did this successfully, the engine burying itself ten feet deep in the ground, and then he made a fine left gear up landing. The minor damage was repaired and the plane proceeded overseas with the next group. Do you suppose that engine is still there?

Welcome New Members!

188. Budd O. Spaulding (*various interests*)
Rte. 3, Box 2652
Lubec, ME 04652 (207) 843-7259
189. Jerry Arel (*aircraft restoration*)
1720 W. Bailey Avenue
Edwards AFB, CA 93523 (805) 258-0208
190. Albert H. Meryman (*AAHS*)
14141 Weidner Street
Arletta, CA 91331-4459
191. Jeremy Williams (*flying/history*)
58 Sawyer Road
Hampden, ME 04444 (207) 862-3878
192. Richard E. Cumming
P.O. Box 538
No. Hampton, NH 03862-2119 (603) 964-8413

Joint Get-Together

The Maine, Massachusetts and New Hampshire Aviation Historical Societies will have an informal get-together at the Barnstormer Restaurant at the old Pease Air Force Base in Portsmouth, NH on Saturday, May 17th at 4:00 p.m. This is the first day of the Hampton, NH Aviation Flea Market, only a short distance away, and a chance to have a full, fun-filled day. It will be a day to exchange ideas, hear others' plans for the future, and explore ideas of how we can all help each other. See you there!

Volunteers Needed

As our plans expand, we need a great deal of volunteer help. Please let us know what you would like to do, skills you have, and how you can contribute to what looks like an exciting future. Can you pound a nail, paint, do plumbing, carpentry or electrical work? Can you do aviation mechanical work or restoration, or would you like to learn? Can you go on hikes, interview aviation pioneers on audio or video tape? Can you do accounting and set-up budgets? Are you into fund-raising and making telephone or personal calls on people to get their membership or financial support? Let us know about your talents and your wishes — we need you! Help us grow and become a fine organization with a great home!



Members of a N.E.A. DC-6 flight crew at the Portland, Maine Airport in 1957 are (left to right) Co-Pilot Norm Bishop, Auburn, ME, Stewardess Valery Williams, Madison, ME and Captain I.R.A. Cumming, Naples, ME.

Upcoming MAHS Meetings and Calendar of Events

May 10	9 a.m.	MAHS Meeting, Dick Jackson's place, Rochester, NH. Sikorsky S-39 Restoration.
May 17	4 p.m.	Joint Get-Together: ME, NH & MA AHS, Barnstormer Restaurant, Portsmouth, NH.
May 17-18	All Day	Aviation Flea Market, Hampton, NH Airport.
June 1	10 a.m.	WWI Air Show, Owls Head Transportation Museum.
June 14	9 a.m.	MAHS Meeting, TBA.
June 21-22	All Day	Dakota Aviation Museum Open House, Sanford, Maine.*
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 8-10	All Day	EAA Chapter 87, Fly-In-Drive-In-Camp-Out, Bowdoinham, ME (207) 729-8169.
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.

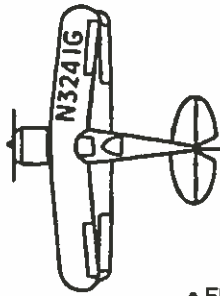
The meeting sites can be flexible. We are looking for suggestions on locations for many of these meetings. The same goes for the weekend hikes — let us know. We are also looking for guest speakers, slide shows, etc. Call Leo at 207-854-9972 or Jim at 207-269-3281 if you have any ideas or can be of help. 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! *We will have booths at these events — volunteers needed.

Mystery Photo for the Month of May



This McDonnell Douglas DC-10-10ER recently visited Bangor. On the outside, it looks rather normal, but inside it's quite a different airplane. Jim Chichetto had an opportunity to tour it while in Bangor and will tell us about it next month.

(Answer to last month's Mystery Photo on Page 4.)



93 North Road
Newburgh, Maine 04444
Tel/Fax: (207) 234-2777

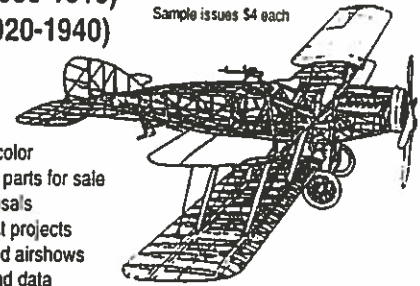
**VINTAGE WINGS
MILLERS FIELD**

- Flight Instruction - Basic, Tailwheel, Skis, Aerobatics
- Photography - Aerial Oblique, Air to Air
- Aircraft and Parts - Bought and Sold
- Aviation Art, Books, Artifacts

JOHN M. MILLER

**WWI AERO (1900-1919)
SKYWAYS (1920-1940)**

Sample issues \$4 each



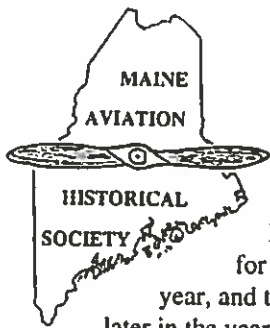
- historical research
- workshop notes
- information on paint/color
- aeroplanes, engines, parts for sale
- your wants and disposals
- information on current projects
- news of museums and airshows
- technical drawings and data
- photographs
- scale modelling material
- news of current publications

BUILD ONE! A REAL ONE!

Sole distributors for P3V, a computer program to generate a 3-view from a photograph.

Published by: **WORLD WAR I Aeroplano, INC.**

15 Crescent Road, Poughkeepsie, NY 12601 USA (914) 473-3679



1997

**JOIN THE MAINE AVIATION HISTORICAL SOCIETY TODAY
AND HELP ENSURE OUR LEGACY FOR TOMORROW**

Name _____

Address _____

City, State, Zip _____

Special Interests _____ Phone _____

Membership	Dues	Benefits
Regular	\$20 annual	Newsletter
Corporate	\$50 annual	Newsletter, Calendar
Supporting	\$100 annual	Newsletter, Calendar
Lifetime	\$500	Newsletter, Calendar, Lifetime Membership Number (2 annual \$250 payments)

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
101 Monroe Avenue, Westbrook, ME
04092-4020

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

JOIN US!
Saturday, May 10, 1997
9 a.m.
Dick and Pat Jackson's
Rochester, NH