



# DIRIGO FLYER

Vol. V, No. 7 July 1997

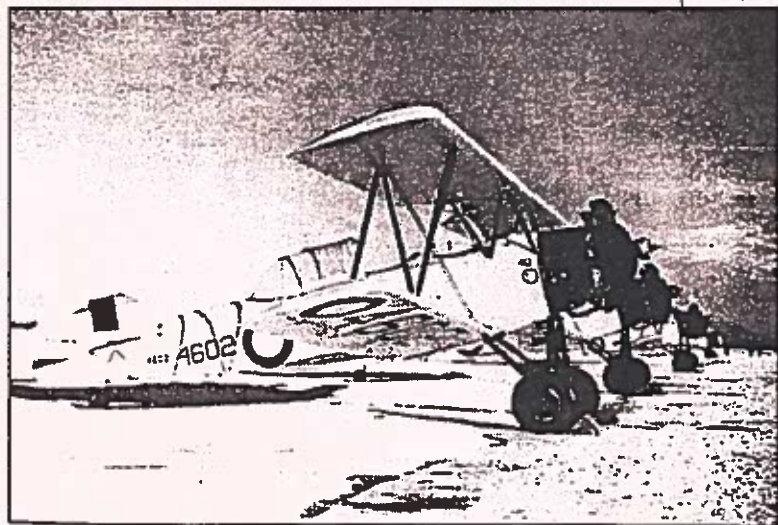
Newsletter of the Maine Aviation Historical Society • 101 Monroe Avenue, Westbrook, Maine 04092 • 207-854-9972

## A 1944 USAAF Search for Lost RCAF Pilots

By F.E. "Ed" Maliar

In 1944, Presque Isle (ME) Army Air Force Base was a North Atlantic Division Air Transport Command (ATC) base. It was both home base and an en route stopping point for air cargo and passenger transports, both USAAF operated and contract air carrier operated. These aircraft supplied stations in Canada, Newfoundland, Labrador, Baffin Land, Greenland and Iceland. It was also the final stopping place in the continental United States where USAAF and Allied aircraft being ferried overseas received their over-water specialty equipment (life rafts, life vests, etc.) and a thorough 100 hour check (new spark plugs, the works). [Member Ed Maliar of Bohemia, NY (born in Lewiston, ME) was transferred there from Houlton Army Air Force Base in January 1944. In late September 1944, he was transferred to the Air Transport Command Base at LaGuardia Field in New York.]

I was assigned to the maintenance section of the ATC cargo and transport portion of the base on the swing shift - 6 p.m. to 2 a.m. - as a supervisory inspector. This was the ideal shift as the base commander allowed all personnel not on duty to work off-base for any civilian companies needing manpower. I found a job with the IGA store distributing groceries and beer as a truck driver.



An RCAF Fleet Finch of the type lost in northern Maine in 1944.

One morning the base operations officer sent out a request that volunteers were needed to fly as observers on a search mission for four RCAF aircraft overdue at Millinocket since the previous afternoon, and presumed down. These four Fleet Finches (125 hp Kinner engines) were RCAF trainers and were being ferried from Moncton, New Brunswick to Windsor, Ontario, Canada via Millinocket, Maine for refueling and remain overnight. There were then to proceed to Montreal, Quebec and then to Windsor. A vicious storm came up suddenly with rain squalls and high winds. It drove these light biplane trainers all over the western and southwestern part of northern Maine.

I volunteered and was assigned along with three other observers and a pilot and co-pilot to a Curtiss C-46 Commando cargo plane. About a half-hour after take-off, the pilot said, "Stay alert, we are approaching our assigned grid." As I recall, we were over some pretty rugged country south-southwest of Chesuncook Lake and west of Millinocket.

After about an hour, the pilot and co-pilot were screaming and yelling, "There's one of them! See the chute in the tree! See the Fleet nosed into the woods by that dry riverbed!" Then we saw the pilot walking along the riverbed going downstream and away from his parachute. This was a mistake as the survival manual says, "Stay near your chute as it is usually visible to the search aircraft." It also said if you are going to walk, always walk downstream and eventually you'll come to civilization. In this case, however, he'd probably still be walking as from our vantage point, going upstream was the correct direction.

We continued to circle around him, always going upstream; i.e. in the other direction from which he was walking. We had a couple of pre-packed emergency ration kits to toss out to him, and we wrote notes to attach to the kits. They told that about two or three miles upstream he would find a dam and a private road on paper company property, and what we assumed to be a phone in a box. When he acknowledged that he understood he should walk upstream, we left to return to Presque Isle. Our pilot had radioed of our acquisition of "one lost flyer."

RCAF Pilots, continued on page 4

## The Continuing "White Bird" Search — Spring Hike '97

By Jim Chichetto

After a winter of little snow, hopes were high that we could begin searching for the "White Bird" earlier this spring. Then winter arrived and we had snow, rain and cold from March into mid-April at which time the rains came and managed to make up for the lack of snow with one week after another of overcast damp weather. Finally we set a date and on May 31st, 1997 we did manage to gather a party and head back to the site.

We gathered in Ellsworth and about 0910 we had grouped up and headed for the woods. There were nine people in the party: Jim and Irene Rivers, Marc and Cindy McDonnell, Cliff Haines, Bill Haeffele, Ed Armstrong, Oscar Blue and myself. The day was warm, sunny and the bugs weren't too bad — really they weren't — well, at least not at first.

We arrived at the site Jimmy Rivers has been searching over the years. Using Jim Millet's drawings and a topo map, Rivers showed us how he had been conducting a search for the last 12 years or more. We spent a lot more time studying the tree growth and streams, etc. By placing ourselves in the position that Mr. Millet was in during the hunt that day, we came up with many possible sites within a 1000 ft. area. In areas with trees less than 40 years old, we could see the lake at times. In areas with older tree growth, it was possible to note that not many of these trees were over 55 years old. In Millet's drawings, he drew a mostly cleared site with few trees growing, survivors of earlier logging operations.

Back 50 years ago, most logging was done during the winter and horses played a major role in yarding out the wood. We did find one old woods camp which was set up with a place for horses on one side and men on the other. It is almost collapsed from old age, but it was once the winter home for local loggers. The loggers would head to camp after hunting season was over and all the "home" work was done. They would stay in camp a week or two, sometimes more depending on how far they were from home. Generally they would be "in camp" from December until the spring thaw. The Maine woods are full of these remote camps where one or two guys would cut wood for sale and haul it out to the nearest RR siding for transport to the paper mills. Before the advent of chain saws, cutting by saw and ax was the old slow method. It was a dawn to dusk affair and the only source of hard money to buy goods and pay land taxes. Once trucks, skidders and chain saws arrived, it expanded greatly and today is a year-round operation in most parts of Maine.

We left the base camp in Cliff's capable hands and set out for the contour line we needed to locate. Once we found the area we searched with eyes, metal detectors and shovels. The high iron deposits of the rocks gives almost constant readings on the metal detectors. After a horizontal and vertical search, we came to the conclusion that we need a higher form of technology to probe the ground. Our thoughts were based on what little was visible in 1953 and which now might be completely overgrown and buried under moss and small trees.

Once back at the base, some members checked out another site on the right side of our primary area. Parts of it had been



"White Bird" Searchers (l to r): Jim Rivers, Cindy McDonnell, Irene Rivers, Cliff Haines, Ed Armstrong, Bill Haeffele, Oscar Blue. (Jim Chichetto Photo)

logged during the winter and the skidders had dragged enough tree length wood over the ground to strip off the moss, small trees and expose the ledges, which of course look just like the ones Jim Millet drew back in the first interview with Jimmy Rivers. That is one of the problems with this site, every set of ledges looks just like what he drew, and having a skidder strip them clean gave us all an idea of what the area must have looked like back in 1953.

We will go back to area this fall, hopefully with some high tech help. We will keep you updated on this long time, ongoing search.

### Welcome, New Members!

- |      |  |   |
|------|--|---|
| 199. | <b>Rick Alexander</b> ( <i>WW II to present slides &amp; models</i> )<br>P.O. Box 1325<br>Blue Hill, ME 04614-1325 | 207-374-3766  |
| 200. | <b>Barry L. Valentine</b><br>6 Spa Creek Landing, #B2<br>Annapolis, MD 21403                                       | 410-626-0978  |
| 201. | <b>Robert A. Cossette</b><br>Hancock County-Bar Harbor Airport<br>RFD #1, Box 170A<br>Ellsworth, ME 04605          | 207-667-7329  |
| 202. | <b>Peter DeGroff</b> ( <i>'30s-'40s Aircraft</i> )<br>P.O. Box 1145<br>Blue Hill, ME 04614                         | 207-374-2781  |
| 203. | <b>Howard F. Smith</b><br>P.O. Box 634<br>Mt. Desert, ME 04660<br>207-460-1265 (summer)                            | 301 Airport Ave., #708<br>Venice, FL 34285<br>941-488-2411 (winter) |

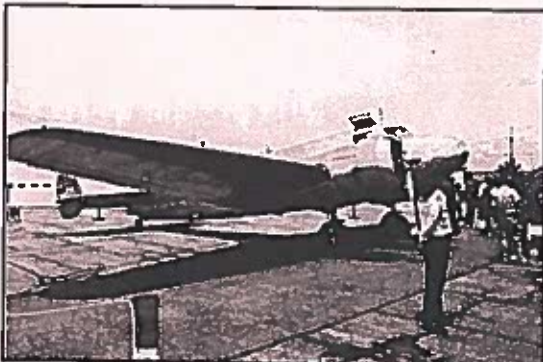
## Meet Linda Finch: Successor to Amelia Earhart

By Clay Carkin

Sixty years later an Oakland, California mother and pilot completed a Round the World Flight attempted by Amelia Earhart in 1937. During this expedition Linda closely followed Amelia's route spanning five continents and 26,000 miles, stopping 30 times in 20 countries. Her three month flight was made in a Lockheed Electra 10 E, the same model that Amelia Earhart used.

Linda made a stop at the Sanford (Maine) Airport on June 7, 1997 while en route to the Paris Air Show. Her plan is to tour the United States promoting herself and her chief sponsor; Pratt and Whitney. Just after noon Linda made a low fly by, landed, then taxied her Electra right in front of the cheering crowd. The atmosphere was so electric that when Linda opened the cockpit door and climbed out, the crowd cheered and clapped. Linda made a short formal presentation to the crowd then proceeded to take questions from the audience. Because she is so endeared to kids and the project's educational program, most questions answered were for the kids.

- 1) How did you feel while flying around the Howland Island area? *It was more emotional than I had anticipated. After New Guinea I felt a great relief and felt happy that I would be home soon.*
- 2) How many navigators did you have. *Three.*
- 3) What was the hardest leg of your flight? *From Honolulu to Oakland because it was so long. Some legs were hard because I was tired and the noise bothered me. The airplane worked well and the Pratt and Whitney engines used little oil.*
- 4) How much gas did you use in the flight? *22,000 gallons.*
- 5) Did you get hungry? *Yes, and I ate a lot of sandwiches.*
- 6) What was your favorite place? *New Guinea*
- 7) What city did you like best? *Calcutta*
- 8) What was the scariest time for you? *Getting the Electra ready to go. I was very nervous on the first day of my flight (March 17, 1997) and I flew over the airport (Oakland) several times to make sure the Electra was okay.*
- 9) Would you do the flight again? *No. I really missed my children.*
- 10) What were the engines on the Electra? *Two Pratt and Whitney Wasp engines. They are the only new Wasp engines in the world. They have the same serial numbers as Amelia's engines.*
- 11) What will happen to your Electra? *It is now in a trust to my children. It may be donated to a museum in the future.*



Linda Finch's Lockheed 10E Electra NX72GT at the Sanford Airport on June 7, 1997. (Clay Carkin Photo)



Linda Finch speaks to the large crowd that greeted her at the Sanford, Maine Airport on June 7, 1997. (Clay Carkin Photo)

- 12) When were you the happiest? *When I saw the Oakland Airport after circling the world.*
- 13) Did you ever have a doubt that you would not make it? *I always believed that I would make it.*
- 14) What did you do at the stops? *On many days I just rested. I did see children everywhere that I went.*
- 15) Do you have any future adventures? *I want to extend the educational program. It teaches geography and makes places real.*
- 16) What media coverage will occur as a result of the flight? *There was a chase plane following and filming me around the world. In the future, there will be a documentary film made.*
- 17) Do you have any message of inspiration for today's youth? *Stretch yourself to reach your dreams. Work on it every day.*

After the Q & A session Linda autographed free copies of a pamphlet called "Directions," a publication made for Pratt and Whitney employees. In addition, there was available for \$20.00 her book entitled No Limits. Linda departed that afternoon bound for the Paris Air Show!

### RCAF Pilots, continued from page 1

The next day I was about to go into Presque Isle to work on my job as a truck driver when my first sergeant told me to report to Major Barnes in operations. It seems the pilot we found the day before was being flown to Presque Isle and he hoped it could be the crew that found him the day before. Major Barnes agreed, we were all happy to oblige, and we took off in the C-46 for Millinocket. Just to keep things looking right, they assigned us a grid to search, which didn't take too long, and we landed at Millinocket and picked up the lost pilot. He was from England and was on loan to the RCAF as an instructor pilot. He has spent almost a year in the hospital in England, the result of an unfortunate landing gear collapse as his Spitfire touched down. He did say one thing that I remember to this day: "I say, old chaps, if I'm ever lost again and you find me, don't drop any of the biscuits like those in the box because they are bloody awful!" He still had a box of C-rations and the note we dropped under his arm. That's all I remember, but if I'd had any inkling that I'd be writing for the enlightenment and entertainment of a group of hiker/crash site groupies 53 years hence, I'd have made notes!

The next day, after returning our RCAF pilot to Presque Isle, there was another call for search volunteers. They were scraping the bottom of the barrel for pilots who hadn't volunteered or been selected before. The only ones left consisted of rated pilots who only flew four hours a month to qualify for their flight pay, like PX officers, laundry officers, some squadron commanders, etc., very few of whom had green cards; i.e., current instrument flying proficiency.

There was a large B-17 group in Presque Isle being processed for their flight across the Atlantic to England. The general volunteered as many of his 250 B-17s as we had processed to search for the missing Canadians. They were assigned the hilly mountainous areas of western Maine. I volunteered and was assigned with a pilot (PX officer), co-pilot (weight and balance officer) and two other observers to a Noordwyn UC-64 Norseman, a Canadian-built bushplane with a 600 hp engine. We flew to our assigned grid at 125 mph and found nothing in our sector. Under increasingly cloudy skies, the pilot said we've got to go on top of these clouds is we expect to get back to Presque Isle. I did not know he did not have a

current instrument rating until, after climbing through 600' of overcast, we arrived on top and he wondered out loud, "Where the hell are we?" We proceeded in a northeast direction until finally the co-pilot said, "Hey, look at all those B-17s over there going around in big circles!"

We'd had a bit of dumb luck and stumbled into the holding pattern of the volunteer search B-17 group awaiting the slide down the instrument path to Presque Isle's runway. Out PX officer requested and obtained permission to make an emergency descent due to low fuel. I noticed, during our descent through the cloud cover, that our left wing navigation light just missed the tower on top of Quaggy Joe Mountain — and that the tower structure needed painting! We continued our descent and just after the outer marker, we broke out of the overcast. Coming directly at us, taking off on runway 22 was a Lockheed C-60 Lodestar. We each banked right, and our pilot went around for a downwind, base and final on runway 22. We were about a quarter mile out on final at 600' when our trusty old P&W R1340 quit cold because of no fuel.

We made the runway and stopped cold. Our co-pilot urged us all to get out and push the UC-64 off the runway because all those B-17 search planes needed to come in and land, too. We were all transported to our quarters, and although it wasn't laundry day, I left my pants and underwear off at the base laundry around 8:00 a.m. the next day. Also, since the chapel was next door to the laundry, I stopped in for the 8:00 a.m., mass and I noticed that our co-pilot was serving the mass as an altar boy. You never know what the Great Motivator is . . .

P.S. Another Presque Isle search airplane found the second RCAF pilot that day, then word came in via telephone from the Maine State Police that the last two Fleets and their pilots had made forced landings in the western region of Maine near the Canadian border. That concluded the search activities for the four Fleet Finches of the RCAF.

### Important July Meeting

The July meeting will be held Saturday, July 12 at the General Aviation Terminal at the Bangor International Airport. This will be a most important meeting so, if possible, please make plans to attend. We need volunteers for all types of activities, from designing and printing an MAHS brochure to designing a web site. We need help in legal aspects, budget planning and accounting, and fund raising. If you have experience, talent or desire in any of these fields, please let us know you can volunteer. Our dreams are rapidly coming to fruition, and now is the time to get in on the take-off.



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## Tales From a Golden Age: An Educational Treasure

by Oscar Blue

If one were to fly over the rolling hills of Canaan, Maine and approached the position 44 46'45" N and 069 33'45" W, a barn would be seen with the numbers NX211 on the roof and anyone knowledgeable about aviation history would recognize this as the "N" number of the Spirit of St. Louis.

The building next to this barn is the Lindbergh crate, really the box that protected the fuselage of the Spirit of St. Louis on it's trip back to the USA from Europe aboard the battle cruiser Memphis. Larry Ross acquired the crate several years ago. The crate had been used as a camp in New Hampshire by the Admiral whose flagship was the Memphis. Larry Ross set the crate up as a museum to the life of Charles Lindbergh and has been given a helping hand by Lindbergh fans and aviation historians ever since. This year the antique auto community became directly involved in the educational mission of the Lindbergh crate.

When I told Larry Ross that the Model A Ford tour was coming to the crate and I would give a talk about the automobiles that Lindbergh owned, especially the four Franklins, Larry asked if he could have some school kids there to see and possibly ride in the cars. The Model A Ford owners were very agreeable to this and when we came about 15 young people got rumble seat rides in the variety of Model A Coupes and Roadsters present. Some even had rides in the Reo Flying Cloud that followed along the tour and had a flat tire in the door yard..

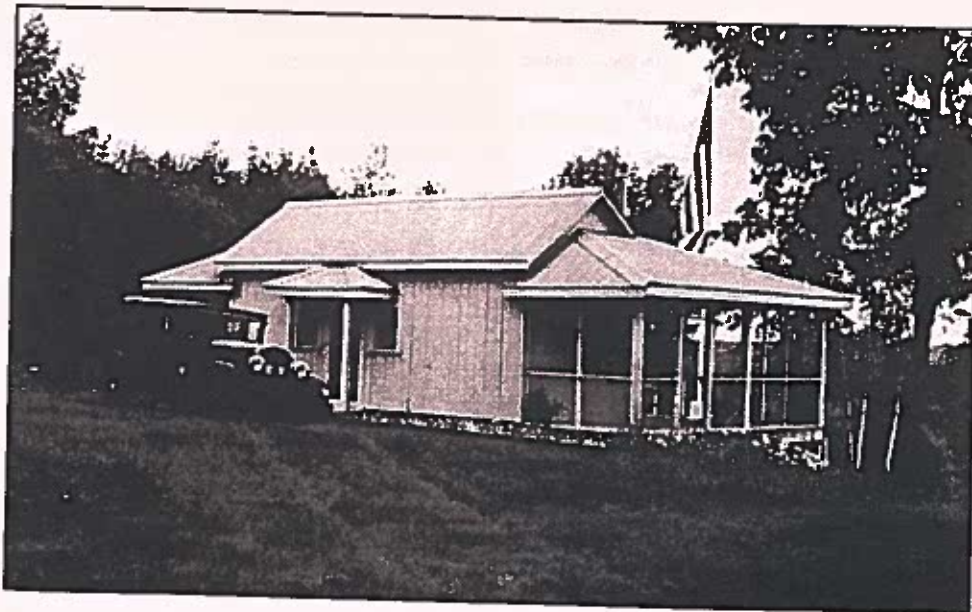
Of noteworthy significance was the original Model A Roadster of Bob Lash. Bob was a B17 pilot in WWII and flew his B17 out to England non-stop from the USA on June 6, 1944, the day of the Normandy invasion. The roadster was bought new by his wife's family in 1930 and has been kept in near perfect condition. Some of the youngsters riding the Model A's were the ones that Larry Ross took to New York to watch Bill Signs take off to the exact minute on May 2n, 1997 to reenact Lindbergh's famous flight.

Crate Day this year was June 9, 1997 and Bill Signs was back in the USA and present at the ceremonies and sort of the star of the show. My Franklin was also present to give rides to the four bus loads of school kids present so that they could experience not only an automobile of the Lindbergh era but a Franklin, the exact type of car that Lindbergh owned and used.

Having put out the word that I wanted to give Bill Signs the chance to experience a Lindbergh type car and drive my Franklin and speak to him about it, I began giving rides to the school kids three at a time. We went up and down the street for at least ten trips. During this process of giving as many rides as possible to the school kids, one of the Franklin's tires went flat in the door yard. at the crate so I had quite an audience watching me change the tire.

After changing the tire and giving the last of the school kids rides that waited, the school buses left, the dignitaries left which left Larry Ross and myself in the door yard. I then asked Larry where Bill Signs was and Larry said they had taken him back to the Pittsfield Airport where he had left his plane. Larry said Bill was going to change his spark plugs before he left for Long Island. He suggested that if I went directly to the Pittsfield Airport I might get to talk to him before he left. Proceeding directly to the Pittsfield Airport Bill was taxiing out as my Franklin rolled into the parking lot. Bill then ran up his engine, checked his flight controls and took off before I could even get a picture of his plane.

Except for not being able to give Bill Signs the chance to drive my Franklin, the celebration at the crate was super. Even Christie McAuliff's mother was there and spoke briefly to the school kids about her daughter.



Member Larry Ross's Lindbergh crate in Canaan, Maine. Parked beside it is Oscar Blue's 1931 Franklin 131 Series Sport Sedan. (Oscar Blue Photo)

## June Meeting Notes

We had a great meeting in Trenton, thanks to the generosity of member Carroll Leland who opened his Lighthouse Restaurant for us, complete with coffee for all. We had a large turnout including new people and new members, and we can thank Letitia Baldwin of the *Bangor Daily News* for her fine article about MAHS a few days before.

Jules Arel, chairman of the Museum Committee, briefed us on the sites available in Bangor and their pros and cons. He also told us of his talks with Peter Siulinski, the contractor who moved the ANG hangars in 1971, and his estimate (\$150,000) and feasibility of moving them again. Jack Denison spoke of his recent visit to the Pima Air Museum and their use of two ready hangars there, which they did not have to move.

Bill and Kathy Cook presented us with three important papers on phases of museum planning, museum plan and organization, both short and long range, and proposed basic operating policies. Obviously, they put a large amount of thought and talent, not to mention work into this, and their help is invaluable.

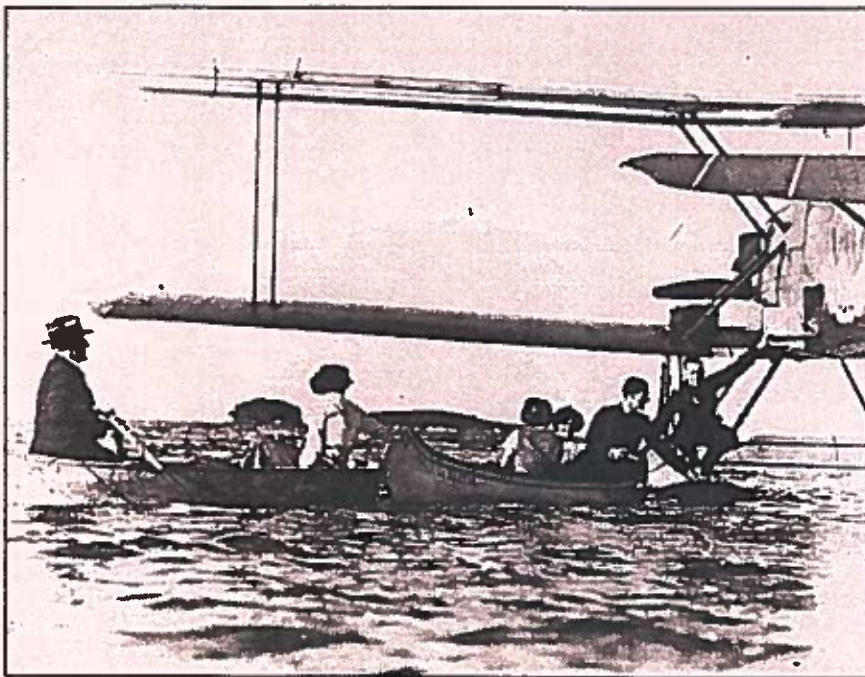
Discussion then turned to the continuing attempts to get high-tech search help from the USAF and/or USN and work is proceeding on obtaining this help in our "White Bird" search. A report was made from the Acquisitions Committee, progress is being made on obtaining appropriate aircraft. We also talked about what needs to be done now to preserve certain aircraft, such as a B-52G and an F-101 Voodoo, before they are chopped. The Museum Committee then met in a special session to further discuss the above items and lay out a plan for this month's work.

## BNAS Blue Angels Show

The 1997 edition of the Great State o' Maine Air Show will be held Saturday and Sunday, July 19 and 20, at the Brunswick Naval Air Station. This is the largest air show in Maine and should attract 100,000 or more visitors as this year's show will feature the U.S. Navy Blue Angels Demonstration Team in addition to other flying acts and static displays of current military and naval aircraft. Needless to say, this show gives the MAHS maximum community exposure. We will have a display table which will showcase our activities, and especially our plans for our new museum. We need you — to help man the booth, to explain our hikes, searches and meetings, to explain our plans for the future, to write up new members, sell t-shirts and patches and project the good image of the MAHS. Let Leo or Jim know or just show up. See you there!



Some of the large group of members at the June meeting in Carroll Leland's Lighthouse Restaurant in Trenton. Peter Hurd from Houlton (*left foreground*) listening to Norm Houle from Rochester, NH (*right foreground*) make an important point. (Jack Denison Photo)



Late in the afternoon on September 5, 1924, in a thick fog, two U.S. Army Douglas World Cruisers landed in Casco Bay, at Mere Point. They were on their way from Pictou, Nova Scotia to Boston in the last stages of this first flight around the world. This fog-forced landing meant that Maine was to be their first United States touchdown, leaving Seattle, Washington six months before.

This photo from Stan White of Brunswick shows one of the fliers being returned to his plane on the 6th by some of the locals. Probable identifications are (*left to right*): Ernest Allen, State Legislator; Mary Baxter White; Lydia Baxter; Bea Senter; Randy DeBevois and Lt. Leslie G. Arnold of the World Cruiser "Chicago."

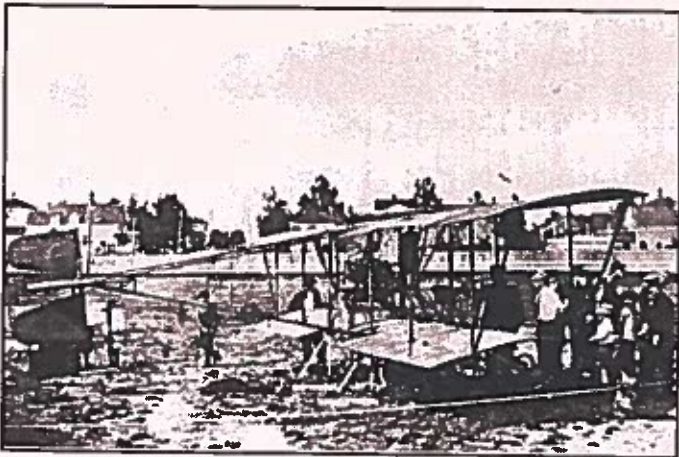
## Upcoming MAHS Meetings and Calendar of Events

June 28-29	10 a.m.	Military Aviation & Aerobatic Air Show, Owls Head Transportation Museum*
July 12	9 a.m.	MAHS Meeting, General Aviation Terminal, Bangor
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, Maine (207) 729-8169
August 9	9 a.m.	MAHS Meeting, Merrymeeting Airport, Bowdoinham, Maine (207) 729-8169
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, Maine*
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. A hike is planned to the Fort Mountain C-54 crash site in the near future. Contact John Miller, Vintage Wings, 207-234-2787 for information. Stay tuned for further details — it's going to be an exciting year!

\* We will have booths at these events. Volunteers needed.

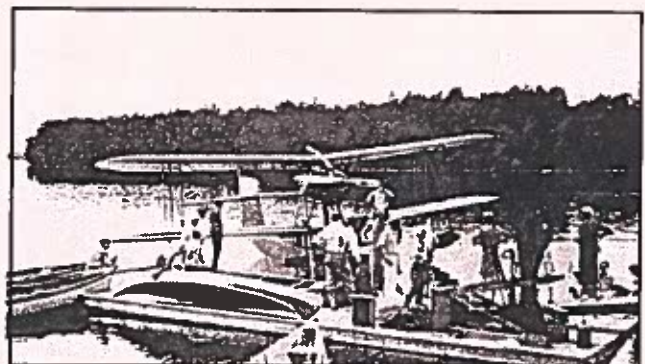
### Mystery Photo for July . . .

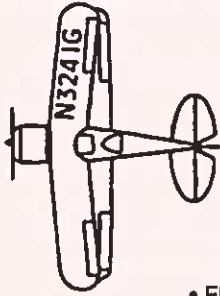


This photo, submitted by Bill Townsend of Bar Harbor, comes from the Calais area. Tell us the type of plane and/or who the intrepid barnstormer might have been who got that far Down East. Win a T-shirt and a patch!

### . . . June Mystery Solved

Last month's mystery photo showed a Keystone-Loening K-84 Commuter Amphibian. It was powered by a 300 hp Wright J-6-9 and was carrying passengers from the Balbrook Lodge in Litchfield, Maine.





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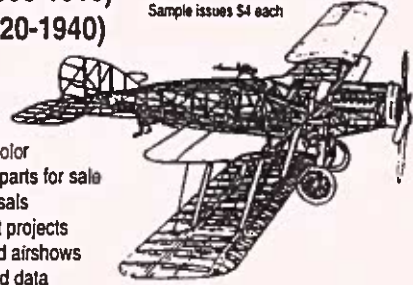
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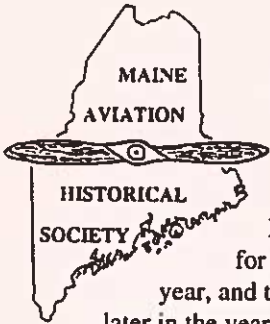
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Dues will be for the calendar year, and those joining later in the year will receive all newsletters retroactive to January of that year. All renewal of dues shall be due on January 1st.

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Saturday, July 12, 1997  
9 a.m.  
General Aviation Terminal  
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