



DIRIGO FLYER

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Newsletter of the Maine Aviation Historical Society • P.O. Box 2641, Bangor, Maine 04402 • 207-854-9972
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The Air War Comes to Maine

By Jim Chichetto

By the summer of 1944, the allies were beating back the Germans on every front. D-Day had started the land offensive which would end the war within a year. Vast convoys traveled across the Atlantic bringing to Europe the men and supplies needed to help end the war. U-Boats, once so strong and effective against these convoys, were now being hunted down whenever they made an attack. The losses of ships to these undersea raiders was steadily declining. This was the time setting for this true story, about a submarine and a blimp, which met offshore at Bar Harbor one night in July 1944.

Reports by local fishermen of a U-Boat being spotted near the Mt. Desert Rock area prompted the local Navy Commander to ask for additional air patrols of the area. Mt. Desert Rock is a small point of ledge rising up from deep water about 25 miles from Mt. Desert Island. With its lighthouse showing the way, it has been a navigation point off the Maine coast for hundreds of years. With the advent of WWII, U-Boats used it as such and often were seen in the area. During 1942, just as the Trenton base was opening up for business, a U-Boat sank two fishing trawlers near the Rock with gunfire.

At the time of the reports in 1944, there were six aircraft which flew missions along the Maine coast out of the Trenton airport. Due to their patrol duties and flight range, they couldn't stay on a search area for any length of time. A patrol blimp was requested from ZP-II Squadron and it was flown up from Lakehurst, NJ. The plan was to have the blimp, with its ability to float quietly for days if needed, do a grid search of the sighting area. If it spotted a sub, it could attack with its weapons; two depth charges and one .50 caliber machine gun. It could also lower a magnetic airborne detector into the water. This MAD unit could track a submerged sub once it was located. With the blimp overhead tracking and reporting the submerged sub's whereabouts, other aircraft and local surface vessels could be called in to sink the U-Boat. Since there had been few U-Boat sightings and no ships attacked or sunk near Bar Harbor during this time period, everyone thought it would be just another wild goose chase with no results expected, other than more on-the-job training for the blimp crew.

The ZNP-K-14 was a patrol blimp. It was built before the Navy realized that fast aircraft were better suited for anti-submarine work than slow airships. The K-14's gasbag was



A Coast Guard YNG with the gondola of Blimp K-14 on its hoist.
(All photos with this article courtesy of Bar Harbor Historical Society)

280 feet in length and contained non-explosive helium. A crew of twelve was carried in a 30 foot long aluminum car hung underneath the gasbag. Two Pratt & Whitney engines were mounted on this car, one on either side, about halfway back from the nose. They could push the blimp along at about 50 knots an hour in still air. Two officers and ten enlisted men flew this airship and ran its surveillance gear. There was room for the men not on watch to eat and sleep. With only thin walls and windows to keep out the roar of the two engines, little could be heard inside the car when it was underway. The only weapons carried were two gravity depth charges which could be dropped and one .50 caliber machine gun facing forward from the upper part of the gondola. In order to work properly, the MAD unit had to be lowered into the water from just above the surface. The MAD unit's read-out display was mounted in the front of the car by the pilot. With one machine gun and a few small arms to shoot at attackers, blimps were large, slow targets for anything they came close to.

Blimp patrols were usually flown at 50-100 feet above the water and at 50 knots. The idea was a U-Boat would dive if they saw you coming or if you attacked them. The blimp would then wait over the sub and try and track it by sight and using the MAD

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"Air War," continued from page 1

gear. It was a good plan in theory, but changes came rapidly during WWII and blimps were not very adaptable. By mid-1944 the Germans had learned how to equip their subs with enough anti-aircraft gunnery to protect them while surfaced against modern aircraft. Against a low, slow blimp this firepower would be overkill. With so many better equipped and able anti-submarine aircraft around, blimps became part of the "home guard." They patrolled the harbors and coastal shipping routes and other less dangerous areas along with converted pleasure boats and fishing trawlers, which had been pressed into service as makeshift mine sweepers. Most of these units were commanded by USNR people who had great skills but were considered too old for "real" combat duty or freshly trained young officers learning their first command duties.



The gasbag of U.S. Navy Blimp K-14 at Southwest Harbor Coast Guard Base.

On the night of July 2nd, 1944, the K-14 was doing a grid pattern search near Mt. Desert Rock. It was a warm night with a bright moon. A few small clouds drifted by but nothing to worry about, visibility was unlimited and the seas were calm. Only eleven men were on board this night, one had stayed in Bar Harbor. Lt. Charles W. Kluber and Ensign William J. McDonnell, USNR, were at the helm as the K-14 patrolled. At least once an hour the K-14 would report its location, speed and heading. If it had finished a grid, or had anything else to report, it would update the Bar Harbor station via radio. A log was kept by the duty watch at Bar Harbor. At 2100 the radio message was normal, after that the radio was silent. When the K-14 didn't report in or answer repeated calls from Bar Harbor, the duty officer called the Base Commander. An alert was sounded, crews gathered and waited, hoping that the K-14 had just had a radio breakdown. As the night dragged on, patrol vessels and mine sweepers headed toward the last known location of the K-14. As the clear night air gave way to early morning fog, a sweeper, the Patriot, called in at 0530. It had come across the wreckage of the K-14 floating on the water south of Mt. Desert Rock.

All that remained of the blimp above the water was part of its gasbag. Five men were on one of the islands formed by the fabric and trapped gas. They were taken on board the Patriot

and it headed for shore. Only four of these men survived, the fifth died before the ship made port. A picket boat from the USCG in Southwest Harbor was dispatched to tow the K-14 into shallow water. Using the mooring line, the K-14 was hauled into a cove on Cranberry Island, just offshore from Mt. Desert. A four man crew from Lakehurst was sent up to help recover the blimp. A YNG and diver from Portland were sent to help lift the car. (A YNG was a net tender vessel with twin hoisting horns and heavy winches onboard.) After removing the bodies of the trapped crewmen, the diver worked at releasing the gasbag from the car. Using Yankee ingenuity a plan was devised and put into play to stabilize the car, detach the gasbag and then brace up and hoist the car onto the ship. The plan worked well and the gasbag and gondola were taken to the Southwest Harbor Coast Guard Base. At some point before the public saw the gasbag, the Lakehurst crew checked it for damage. What they found was a series of shell holes. The shells had entered the lower rear of the gasbag. The K-14 had been shot out of the night sky by a U-Boat.



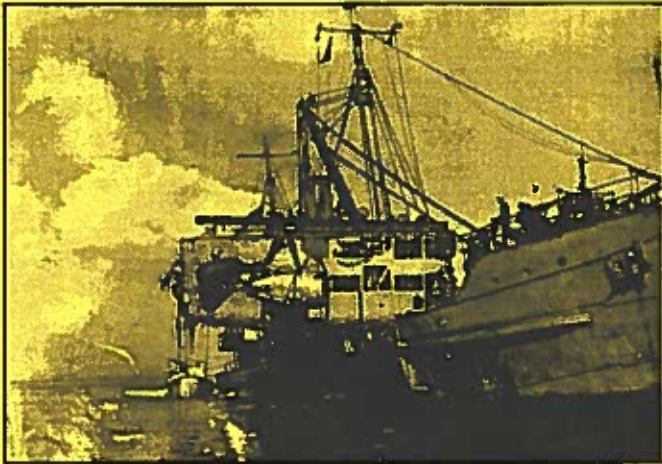
The crew of the USCG YNG attempting to separate the gondola of K-14 from the gasbag.

Interviews with the survivors added little to what was already known. The K-14 had been doing a search pattern flying about 50 feet above the water. It was doing about 50 knots when it suddenly pitched over nose first into the Atlantic Ocean. The front of the car broke open on impact and the seawater rushed in. At least five men made it out of the car and around the gasbag before it collapsed completely over the car, trapping the rest of the stunned crew in a watery deathtrap. The survivors swam around in the 55 degree water until the gasbag had settled enough to crawl up on. They climbed onto a section of fabric and rested. Each gas pocket formed a small floating island in the ocean. Their weight on top of these gas pockets caused the gas to leak out. As each "island" got smaller they had to swim to another section. By the time they were found only four small islands of fabric remained. One survivor said that the car had tilted to one side as it went under the water and moonlight shone through the starboard windows, allowing the survivors enough light to see a way out of the water filled car. The normal noise of the blimp in flight had drowned out any

sound of gunfire and none of them knew they had been shot down. The survivors were sent back to Lakehurst after the Navy took their statements. At some point the Navy brass decided that the K-14's crash was a case of pilot error. People who heard about this judgment, after seeing the holes in the gasbag, were appalled by this ruling. The USN had decided that the Maine coast was safe from U-Boats and they closed the books on this matter.

The recovery of the K-14 marked the first time that both the gasbag and car from a blimp had been recovered from an ocean wreck. The parts were sent back to Lakehurst, NJ. for study.

What really happened out off Mt. Desert Rock may never be completely known. The best guess is that the lurking U-Boat (U-233) was spotted by the K-14 during its pattern search. It must have been a split second case of each side seeing the other and opening fire. Spent .50 caliber brass was found inside the blimp and both of its depth charges were missing. If they broke free during the crash or were dropped isn't known: the Navy never acknowledged that the K-14 went down fighting. After the blimp hit the water, the U-Boat left the area without



K-14's gondola aboard the USCG YNG Net Tender vessel.

checking for survivors or being seen. The U-Boat survived the battle and did send a radio message to HQ that it had shot down a blimp. Ed Michaud came across this information while doing research on U-Boats. The U-233 was a Type IXB boat and during this cruise it was under an officer named Steen. I haven't traced its war history yet, but do know it was a short-lived victory as the U-233 was sunk July 7th, 1944 by depth charges. The U-233 was attacked by aircraft flying from the USN Card (CVE-II). The Card was working with a pair of destroyer escorts, the Baker (DE-190) and the Thomas (DE-102). The aircraft dropped depth charges on the sub and between the aircraft and the DE's, the U-233 was sent to the bottom of the cold Atlantic Ocean. Her final resting place is 42-16 N, 59-49 W, SE off Halifax, N.S.

In late 1944 most of the air and sea patrols were withdrawn from the M.D.I. area. The Trenton airport became a little-used base again. The lack of U-Boat activity led the Navy to believe the U-Boat menace along the coast was over. Shortly after the base's patrol duties were cut back, a Canadian vessel was torpedoed off Great Duck Island. It managed to stay afloat, but did prove that the U-Boats were still around. There are many interesting stories about U-Boats and their actions along the Maine coast. After the war, many people told about their chance meetings with U-Boats. These stories have become part of the local folklore. There isn't much written down about most of these stories because the Navy said they didn't happen either.

For more information about this incident, read Alexander W. Moffat's excellent book A Navy Maverick Comes of Age, Wesleyan University Press, 1977 and Henry Keats' Field Reference to Sunken U-Boats, American Merchant Marine Museum Press, 1987. You may also want to check with the Bar Harbor Historical Society, Mt. Desert St., Bar Harbor, Maine. There are four photographs on display of the salvage of the K-14. They also have members with personal knowledge of this event and other WWII events which happened in and near Bar Harbor.

BOOK REVIEW • BOOK REVIEW

The United States Air Force in Maine: Progeny of the Cold War by John C. Garbinski. Peacemaker Press, 1229 Broadway, Suite 444, Bangor, Maine 04401. \$12.00.

New member John Garbinski of Bangor has written a must-have book for those interested in Maine's aviation history. His 150 page large-size softbound book chronicles the role of the U.S. Air Force in the state of Maine in the years from its creation in 1947 through the closing of Loring AFB on October 1, 1994. Beginning with the flight of the U.S. Army Bomber Force under General Billy Mitchell to Bangor in August 1923, the author briefly outlines the role of the U.S. Army Air Corps and Air Force through World War II to 1947.

The main portion of the book covers the U.S. Air Force installations in the state, their openings and closures, and the units stationed there. It thus becomes an invaluable reference of



who and what, where and when the U.S. Air Force was here. It places in perspective the recent book, The First Line, which details the U.S. Air Force activities in this Cold War period.

The book is available by mail at the above address for \$12.00 plus \$3.00 to cover tax and postage.

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March Meeting Notes

The regular monthly meeting of the Maine Aviation Historical Society was held on Saturday, March 14 at the American Legion Hall in Bangor. A short business meeting of the officers was held at 8:30 a.m. prior to the meeting proper. The Treasurer's Report showed a balance of \$2,302.93 in the checking account and \$9,376.61 in the money market fund for the fundraising feasibility study. The President and Vice President then reported on the works of the various committees.

The Museum Committee chair, Jules Arel, had talked with Bob Ziegler of the Bangor Airport. They had received our proposal for the lease and he foresaw no major problems. Hopefully, by the next meeting we will have received their counterproposal.

Bill Townsend has the web page pretty much set up and by the time you receive this newsletter we should be on the Internet. The address to visit our web site is acadia.net/mahs.

The Maine Air National Guard Open House has grown to two days, August 1 and 2, and we will be working with member Steve Alex to make this a great success. The Acquisition Committee is continuing to work on the loan and acquisition of various aircraft significant to Maine's aviation history.

Election results for MAHS officers for 1998:

President	James R. Chichetto (#5) RR 1, Box 1730, Etna, Maine 04434 207-269-3281 e-mail: jimF84F@aol.com
Vice President	Scott Grant (#70) P.O. Box 17632, Portland, Maine 04112 207-775-3404 e-mail: sgrant7777@aol.com
Secretary	Leo Boyle (#2) 101 Monroe Ave., Westbrook 04092-4020 207-854-9972 (H) 207-883-3772 (W)
Treasurer	George Tinker (#11) 54 Thomas Hill Rd., Bangor 04401-4622 207-942-2036

A photo and short bio of each will appear in the next issue.

Please note that the Maine Aviation Historical Society has a new address. It is: P.O. Box 2641, Bangor, Maine 04401. Please use this address for all correspondence regarding Society business. You may still correspond with the individual officers at the above addresses, e-mail or phone numbers. For the present, use townsend@acadia.net as the Society's e-mail address. All members who have an e-mail address should send it to the above e-mail address.



Part of the F-84 wing spar at the Richmond crash site.
(Photos by Rob Rohr)

Bonita Deschaine of Deschaine Associates, who has been selected to handle our feasibility study, then spoke to the members about how it is to be handled and what our responsibilities will be. The officers are now working on our plan, our five-year projection and the fundraising committee. A full report on this phase will be made at the April meeting.

Election of the Board of Directors:

Jules Arel (#147), Hampden
Ed Armstrong (#166L), Hampden
Herman Bayerdorffer (#163), Guilford
Don Godfrey (#18), Yarmouth
Peter Hurd (#176), Houlton
John Miller (#54), Newburgh
Jim McCurdy (#206), Bangor
David Saunders (#177), Ellsworth
Carl Sederquist (#218), Ellsworth
O. Wm. Robertson (#80), Greenville

Rick Alexander of Blue Hill then entertained us with a great slide show of military aircraft and of some nose art from the World War II era. His many and exciting different pictures entertained the nearly forty members in attendance.

As you can see from the calendar, many of the meetings for the year have been finalized and the first hike has been scheduled.

April Meeting

The April meeting will be held on Saturday, April 11 at 9 a.m. in the Conference Room upstairs at the Portland International Jetport. As before, all officers should be there at 8:30 for a short business meeting. All committee heads should be there then or have their reports to Scott Grant, P.O. Box 17632, Portland, Maine 04112 before the meeting. A special treat is in store for members: Bud Singer will present his slide show of aircraft he has photographed around the country over the years.

After the meeting we will proceed to the site of our first hike of the season. We will go to Richmond, Maine to the site of the F-84 crash there in 1953. (See the February 1998 *Dirigo Flyer*.) Directions to this hike will be given at the April meeting or you can call Jim Chichetto at (207) 269-3281 or Leo Boyle at (207) 854-9972.

May Meeting

The May 16th meeting will be held at Houlton, Maine. Peter Hurd and Jules Arel have promised a most exciting program. A hike in the area will be planned for that afternoon or the following Sunday. Details will follow in the next issue of the *Dirigo Flyer*.



Member Rob Bohr inspects wreckage from the F-84 crash in Richmond, Maine. We will be hiking to this site after the April 11 meeting in Portland.

Upcoming MAHS Meetings and Calendar of Events

April 11	9 a.m.	MAHS Meeting, Portland Jetport, Bud Singer slide show. 1:30 p.m.—F-84 crash site hike.
April 19-25	All Day	Sun 'n Fun, Lakeland, FL.
May 16	9 a.m.	MAHS Meeting, Houlton, Maine.
May 16	All Day	4th Annual Maine SPA Safety Seminar, Telford Aviation, Waterville, 207-622-7332.
May 23-24	All Day	Aviation Flea Market, Hampton Airport, Hampton, NH.
May 31	10 a.m.	Model Show, WWI and Classic Aircraft Exhibition, Owls Head Transportation Museum.
June 13	9 a.m.	MAHS Meeting, Trenton, Maine.
June 14	10 a.m.	Ford and Chevy Show, Owls Head Transportation Museum.
June 27-28	10 a.m.	Pre-1940s Car Show, Owls Head Transportation Museum.
July 11	9 a.m.	MAHS Meeting, John Miller Field, Carmel, Maine.
July 12	10 a.m.	1950s-1960s Car Show, Owls Head Transportation Museum.
July 25-26	10 a.m.	Antique Truck Meet, Owls Head Transportation Museum.
July 29-Aug. 4	All Day	EAA Oshkosh Fly-In, Oshkosh, WI, 301-695-2083.
August 2	All Day	Maine Air National Guard Open House, Bangor International Airport.
August 8	10 a.m.	MAHS Meeting, Owls Head Transportation Museum.
August 8-9	10 a.m.	Annual Transportation Spectacular Aerobatic Show, Owls Head Transportation Museum.
August 22	10 a.m.	21st Annual New England Auto Auction, Owls Head Transportation Museum.
September 6	10 a.m.	Antique Motorcycle Festival, Owls Head Transportation Museum.
September 11-13	All Day	25th International Seaplane Fly-In, Greenville, ME, 207-695-2821.
September 12	10 a.m.	MAHS Meeting, Greenville Seaplane Fly-In.
September 20	10 a.m.	Convertible Meet, Owls Head Transportation Museum.
October 4	10 a.m.	Foreign Car Oktoberfest, OHTM.
October 10	9 a.m.	MAHS Meeting, Houlton, Maine.
October 25	10 a.m.	Great Fall Auction, OHTM.
November 14	9 a.m.	MAHS Meeting, TBA.
December 12	9 a.m.	MAHS Meeting, TBA.

Welcome, New Members!

244. **Steve Alex (Everything!)**
82 Union St., Belfast, ME 04915 207-338-6208
Steve will be our liaison officer with the MEANG.
245. **John Garbinski (Military - AF - History)**
1229 Broadway, Suite 444
Bangor, ME 04401 207-990-7318
246. **Maj. Pete Webb (Maine Army Aviator)**
U.S. Army School of Aviation Medicine
P.O. Box 620212
Fort Rucker, AL 36362-0212 334-255-7449
247. **Supreme Pizza**
46 Pine St., Portland, ME 04102 207-775-3404
248. **Maureen & Roger Pelletier (Flying in Maine)**
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MAINE AIR SHOW!

Does anyone know
what year this exciting
air show took place
in Patten, Maine?
Photos and info on
this 1930's air
show would be
appreciated.

(Flyer via Bill Deane)

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and will make a personal appearance with a talk on "Aviation" at
the Aviation Ball, Friday Evening, Aug. 11th.

TOM CROCE Veteran Scout Pilot of Flying Cloud Air
Force will give an exhibition of Aerobatic
Flying in his Special Scout Ship.

SEVEN PILOTS from Pan-American Airways and Aeronautics
Skyways are entered in the races.

Lieutenant Gen. W. Shaw	Dean Connelley
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and many other well known Pilots will be entered in the various events.

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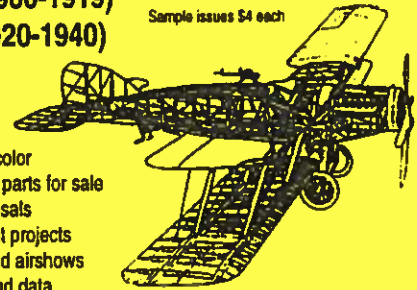
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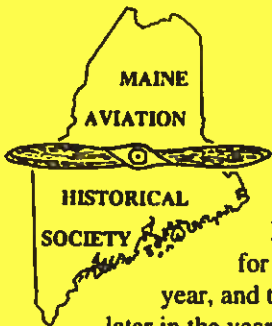


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Supporting	\$100 annual	Newsletter, Patch, Museum Admission, 4 Free Passes
Lifetime	\$500*	Newsletter, Patch, Lifetime Membership Number, Museum Admission, 10 Free Passes

* (2 annual \$250 payments)

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9 a.m.
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