



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 Richmond F-84 Thunderjet Crash Hike

by Jim Chichetto

The first organized MAHS hike of 1998 was taken after the April 11th, 1998 monthly meeting, which was held at the Portland Jetport. Due to numerous other events, only three members had a chance to go on this hike on Saturday. The weather was excellent and the directions which Scott Grant had provided were right on the money.

We took Exit 26 off I-95 and drove down Rt. 197 toward Richmond. We found the Furlong Road marked and drove about a quarter of a mile up to the red house. Once we stopped, we spoke with the lady living there and she was very helpful. We geared up and headed into the woods accompanied by Chris Peaslee of Richmond. The ice storm damage was still very evident in the woods with broken trees and branches down everywhere. After a short woods search we decided to walk the edge of the field up to the crash site. A few hundred yards behind the barn we found the first aircraft artifact, dragged out near the stone wall which bordered the hay field. We headed into the woods at this time and the real search began.

Just on the other side of the stone wall the land fell away into a slight hollow with alders and a stream running through it. At this time of year, a stream in a low area becomes a swamp,



Republic F-84E of the type flown by Lt. Duke which crashed in Richmond, Maine.

and we were in it. Walking from one high spot to the next led to our discovery of a large section of aircraft. The toothed rail running on one side and the hooks on it led us to believe it was the attachment point for weapons or a centerline drop tank. Hopefully our pictures will allow Larry Webster to identify this part for our information. At this time, we discovered more wreckage in the form of small bits of twisted stainless steel, driven into the ground and accorndioned into a compact rippled mass by the impact of the crash.

"Hike," continued on page 2



Member Bill Townsend with wreckage from the F-84E crash site in Richmond, Maine on 4/11/98. (Jim Chichetto Photo)



Our erstwhile helper, Chris Peaslee, at the F-84E crash site in Richmond, Maine. (Jim Chichetto Photo)

"Hike," continued from page 1

While I went to put on my knee boots, Brian Woods and Bill Townsend and Chris worked their way toward the drier ground and made a circle search to determine the extent of the debris field. We searched the area fairly well and found many small bits and chunks of bent metal. The far end of the site held part of the wing tip tank, complete with writing. A section of flaps with the control mechanism still attached was found at this point with other parts of aircraft panels and twisted tubing.

Working our way back toward the field, we found more twisted bits in the swamp. Chris had gone home and came back with hip waders. He and I zig-zagged the water covered ground and found those parts not buried in the mud.

After a good search it was time to head back out to the vehicles. Bill and Brian were working the woods back toward the road when they found parts of the aircraft just beyond a junction in the stone wall. As Chris and I started along the wall toward them, I felt a bit of metal beneath my boot. Stopping, I brushed aside the leaves and came up with a twisted bit of cockpit metal. Chris started poking and within ten minutes we had found all kinds of scraps. Bits of the instrument panel with holes for gauge mounting, radio cases, wire, gears, twisted metal strips and all kinds of bits were unearthed at the base of the wall. Some were embedded in the very trees growing along the wall. I picked up a part of the engine, Bill found a section of aft fuselage with the blue and part of the white star on it.

We worked our way up the wall and back down the other side. Most of the aircraft parts were on the swamp side of the wall. As we worked our way back toward the first bit of wreckage, we had a good idea of the direction and path of the aircraft on that June night. MAHS member Rob Rohr had been the first to see this site last fall, followed by Scott Grant and Cliff Haines. All three had spoken with various local people and we had a good idea of what the final minutes of flight looked like.

Second Lieutenant C.P. Duke, of the 457th Fighter Squadron, Dow AFB, was flying his Republic F-84E fighter-bomber along the Maine coast about 11:30 p.m. when a problem developed. Lt. Duke had no choice but to eject from his damaged aircraft into the dark night. His ejection seat functioned as designed and he was safely lowered from the night sky to land on Westport Island. Unhurt but unable to reach the mainland until morning, no one knew he was alive and had safely left his stricken aircraft.

The F-84E flew onward, engine running poorly and then catching on fire. As the 23,000 lb. aircraft passed over Richmond headed NW at about 320 degrees, residents saw the flames clearly in the dark sky and watched in horror as the flaming plane crashed into the woods off the Furlong Road and blew up in a huge fireball. The blast from the explosion was felt in Richmond and five miles away in Dresden. Local people rushed to the scene and helped contain the fire until it burned itself out.

The aircraft had started to rock side to side as it flew toward the earth and just as it passed over the Furlong Road the left wing dropped down and the aircraft slipstreamed into the edge of the field, wing tip first. The point of impact was right at the wing tip and the wing tank blew up as the aircraft bounced into a cartwheel which carried it into the woods where it impacted

the swampy ground and drove its nose into the mud. The aircraft exploded at this point and shards of metal buzzed into the trees and spread the fire. The stone wall acted as a blast fence and the earth on the swamp side was littered with flaming bits of burning aircraft.

The fires were controlled and by morning the clean-up began. Most of the larger parts which had escaped the fire were dragged off by the USAF crew. Much of the burned and twisted metal was also removed. After the safe return of Lt. Duke from Westport Island, the site was no longer of much interest to the USAF. The aircraft itself was a total loss and the straight winged F-84s were being phased out of the USAF inventory at the time of the accident. They had been designed to be the next jet fighter, replacing America's first combat ready fighter, the World War II designed P-80 Shooting Star. Shortly after the first series of P-84s were built, the F-86 Saber eclipsed the F-84's dog-fighting performance. The sudden start of the Korean War caught the U.S. unprepared and the F-80 and F-84 saw extensive ground attack service in Korea, while the F-86 became the USAF's leading Mig killer. A few F-84s flew with tactical weapons in Europe into the late 1950s, but they were replaced by the redesigned swept wing F-84F.

Dow AFB in Bangor, Maine was the home base for both aircraft as they came into the USAAF/USAF inventory. Maine has an extensive history of F-84 and F-84F crashes suffered as the bugs were worked out of these new aircraft by the squadrons based at Dow. As with all new aircraft, the lessons learned from these accidents were applied to the improved versions as they came off the production line. At the time of this crash, the F-84 had served its purpose and its career was coming to an end. Most ended up being scrapped by 1957.

As with other crash sites in Maine, once the Air Force left, the local people came by to poke around and see for themselves the site of this strange event. They picked over the bits and dragged off many scraps of metal and other mementos of the night the fighter crashed. Part of one wing still adorns a local Richmond garage. After a few weeks, the site began to revert back to its natural state and the events of that night passed into local folklore.

Today very few large parts are to be found, but many smaller ones are still buried in the mud beneath the water, waiting for someone to dig them out. It was a good hike, and allowed me to add more to my file on this accident. A special thanks to Rob, Cliff and Scott for their research on this site and to Chris and his mom, Kathy, for their help. It was another successful hike, a good way to start our hiking season.

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The 765th Aircraft Control and Warning Squadron

By Jim Chichetto

Located on top of Bull Hill in Charleston, Maine, 28 miles north of Bangor, were three large white domes. These housed the radar sets of the 765th Aircraft Control and Warning Squadron. Clearly visible from the hills around Bangor, these giant radars were part of the early warning system of the Air Defense Command. They were tied by radio and telephone to other radar sites like the Buck's Harbor AFB radar site near Machias, Maine, the Bomarc Missile site four miles from Dow AFB, and to Dow AFB itself. Their mission was to alert the base of any incoming aircraft and to provide the radar controlled interception of this air traffic. The F-84s, F-86s and later F-89s had very short range radar on board. The F-89 was the most advanced, but it had lock on ability only within 15 miles, with a maximum search range of only 30 miles. The 765th's job was to scramble fighters and bring them to within five miles of their targets no matter how bad the weather was. Once the fighters got that close their radar would start to track the targets. The system worked well for its time, and it did some great air rescue work during its active service life. Here are a few of the aircraft which it helped when they needed it the most.

Friday, September 24th, 1954 was a cloudy day. Dow AFB was hidden from view by layers of clouds. Most of the surrounding hills were hidden as well. First Lt. Joseph H. Byrne was watching the operation of the radar when he noticed a strange blip making shaky circles near Dow AFB. It didn't answer to any local call signs and wasn't in a known flight path. A call to the Civil Aeronautics Administration cleared up the problem. The aircraft was a B-25 Mitchell which had suffered the loss of its radio navigation compass among other things. The pilot knew he was near Dow, but didn't dare drop into the clouds to find the runway. The aircraft was getting low on fuel and they needed to get the proper compass heading for the runway. Lt. Byrne dialed up the 49th Fighter Interceptor Squadron and asked them to fly an intercept on the B-25. Captain Louis H. Hitter and First Lt. James List guided their F-86 Sabres off the runway and were vectored to the B-25. Breaking out of the clouds, the pilots flew up to the B-25 and, using hand signals, explained it was to follow them. With one F-86 in the lead and

the other flying a wing formation, the three aircraft went into the clouds and flew a radar controlled approach to Dow. Once the B-25 had the runway in sight, it was easy for the pilot to land. No one was hurt and no damage was done due to the 765th and the 49th's help.

This was the second time in a month the 765th had "saved" an aircraft in trouble. An F-86 on a training flight had lost its radio compass during bad weather about two weeks before. A second F-86 was sent to find and bring back the damaged aircraft. The radar brought the second F-86 to within eyeball distance in the cloudy sky. Both aircraft made it back safely to Dow that day.

Seven months later the 765th again saved the day for another damaged lost aircraft. A "Mayday" was heard on the international radio band. A C-54 from the Military Air Transportation Service was lost and in trouble. It was enroute from Dover, Delaware to Harmon Field, but shortly after take-off the aircraft entered a cloud bank and became lost. By the time the crew realized they weren't where they should be, they had flown quite a distance in the wrong direction. To make matters worse, the outer port engine failed. With fuel running low and one engine shut down, the crew wanted to land anywhere as soon as possible. Lt. Victor M. Seebold scrambled an F-86D from the 49th F.I. Squadron. First Lt. E.A. Lewis was airborne within two minutes after getting the call. The radar control officer gave him headings as he climbed into the thick cloud cover. Within five minutes the F-86 broke out of the clouds and caught up with the C-54. Using the radio, the pilots worked out their landing plan. The C-54 followed the Sabre down to the safety of the base below. A safe landing was made, and another problem aircraft had been intercepted by the 765th.

Over the years this radar site saved many aircraft from possible crashes. Most incidents didn't make the papers since the aircraft involved were military. The Charleston site is gone now, the domes sold to a local person for storage sheds. The state of Maine now uses the base buildings for a prison. It is one more of the last vanishing military bases that once covered the east coast of the U.S. to protect us from the U.S.S.R. Time and technology wait for no one when the government is footing the bill, but for a few short years, Charleston was tops in its field and more than a few people were saved by its guidance and help.



Stinson R, registration NC-12124 of the Guy Gannett Publishing Co., about 1932. (Photo: The Portland Newspapers)



The Maine Instrument Flight School's old hangar at the Augusta Airport on the way down April 1998. It will be replaced by a new hangar. (Norm Houle Photo)

Meet the 1998 Officers of the MAHS



President Jim Chichetto

RR 1, Box 1730, Etna, ME 04434
207-269-3281

Jim Chichetto is starting his third year as President of MAHS. His interest in aviation history began in 1991 when Larry Webster (#7) contacted him about doing aircraft accident research on Maine crash sites.

As President, he has seen MAHS achieve 501(c) Non-Profit Status, set up direct links with the Maine State Museum, Maine Historic Preservation Commission and other Maine museums and aviation groups. Presently he is working to promote the Maine Air Museum and the overall growth of the MAHS. He lives in Etna with his son, James (#31). He enjoys motorcycling, scuba diving and living history along with aviation-related activities when he's not working at Federal Express.

Vice President Scott Grant

P.O. Box 17632, Portland, ME 04112
207-767-0878 (H) 207-761-9288 (W)
e-mail: sgrant7777@aol.com

Scott lived in Rhode Island near the Newport Naval Base and Quonset NAS and became interested in aviation from watching the planes and the air shows there, including the Blue Angels. He spent summers with his grandparents at Sebago Lake where he learned about maneuvers and crashes there during WWII. He worked for four years for Jim Parker setting up air shows. He has lived in Maine for 10 years, and for the last six years has owned Supreme Pizza in Portland with his father and brother. Scott is in charge of meetings, events and displays.



Secretary Leo Boyle

101 Monroe Ave., Westbrook, ME 04092
207-854-9972 (H) 207-883-3772 (W)

Leo Boyle was born in Portland, is a veteran of WWII, studied aero-engineering at Purdue and is a graduate of University of Maine at Orono. For several years he worked in sales management in the insurance and auto-

motive fields. Later he owned a book shop in Portland where the original MAHS was established in the 1960s; in the 1990s, he was instrumental in its revival. Past president, treasurer and current secretary of MAHS, he is also editor of the *Dirigo Flyer*. Leo Boyle is the current holder of Gadabout Gaddis Cup.

Treasurer George Tinker

54 Thomas Hill Road, Bangor, Maine 04401-4622
207-942-2036

George, our newly elected treasurer, had the misfortune to have a major heart attack shortly after our March meeting. He's recuperating well, but it will be a while before he's 100%. Do send him a card or give him a call wishing him well.

In the meantime, Leo Boyle will temporarily handle the treasurer's duties.

May 16 Meeting Agenda Houlton, Maine

The May 16th meeting will be held in Houlton, Maine. Peter Hurd and Jules Arel have promised a most exciting program. The agenda follows:

0900 Meet at Brookside Restaurant, Smyrna, Maine for breakfast, business meeting and rendezvous point. Exit #61 from I-95. Brookside will be clearly visible from exit ramp. Telephone #: 207-757-8456. If your ETA is after 0945, please call the restaurant and advise us so we can update you on any last minute changes for the daily mission ops order! We have a private meeting room with table service and menu ordering, which can accommodate up to 30 people. This is about 20 minutes south of Houlton.

0945 Depart Brookside for the Greater Houlton Christian Academy (aka "old" HHS; aka Lambert School building), 27 School Street. Telephone #: 207-532-0736. Instructions for out-of-formation VFR arrivals: proceed to Houlton via I-95, exit at #62, Route 1 N&S. Proceed toward downtown Houlton via Rt. 1 markings on North Street — you will be southbound unless your approach plate is upside-down. Pass all of the following in order. (Note: You will be passing through four traffic lights enroute): shopping mall on your right • McDonald's • Maple Street • Katahdin Trust Co. Bank • Kentucky Fried Chicken/Smyrna Street • bridge which leads you into Union Square and your third traffic light • drive straight ahead with Houlton Photo on your right to stop sign at which time you will either turn left (correct) or right (wrong). Proceed to next traffic light which will be the intersection of Court and Military Streets. Continue straight (east) with Bangor Savings Bank on your right (south) and a large county court/jail building on your left (north) for one block to School Street; turn right, run the landing checklist and prepare to park on your right at the GHCA. Front entrance will be open.

1030 Presentation by H. Anderson Giles on "WWII's Pacific Ghosts" as reported in the *Bangor Daily News*, April 17th edition. This will be a first class overview of Tinian Island ops, then and now, by the winner of the 1997 Telly Award for his video documentary "Thunder from Tinian."

1130 Walk two blocks to Market Square for lunch at the Shiretown Bakery.

1230 Jules Arel's presentation on the Houlton International Airport, USAAF airbase history.

1330 "A Silent Warrior's Cold War: Flying the Soviet Border" by Pete Hurd.

1415 TBM FCF video and GHCA aerospace science lab briefing and tour.

1500 Depart GHCA for tour of the Houlton International Airport. FBA overview and history; Hangar 2 walk-around; Beal's Aircraft Service visit; Control tower tour.

1630 Cleared for hanger-flying session.

Other great surprises may be in store. Don't miss this one!

Upcoming MAHS Meetings and Calendar of Events

May 16	9 a.m.	MAHS Meeting, Houlton, Maine. (See notice.)
May 16	All Day	4th Annual Maine SPA Safety Seminar, Telford Aviation, Waterville, 207-622-7332.
May 16-17	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 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.

April Meeting Notes

The April meeting of the MAHS was held on Saturday, April 11th, at the Conference Room of the Portland International Jetport. We were encouraged with the attendance of 17, more than most Portland meetings lately. Jim Chichetto showed the new drawings and floor plans for the museum building. Leo Boyle reported for the treasurer on the bank balance and the money market balance. The minimum deposit for the money market is \$500 and we have \$250 waiting for deposit. He also reported on the previous day's meeting of the Museum Committee in Bangor with Mr. Ziegler, Airport Manager of Bangor International Airport. We easily reached agreement on most points and we are now awaiting review by the city's attorney and receipt of the revised lease.

We then reviewed the committees and their tasks. A review was also made of the Board of Directors' responsibilities and duties, particularly with regard to the upcoming major fund-raising campaign. Discussion was also had as to contact with the media. Until such time as a publicity committee is appointed, all contact with the media should be referred to Jim

Chichetto or Leo Boyle. While we are all members of the Maine Aviation Historical Society, speaking for and on behalf of the Society to the media will be handled by, or with the direct personal approval of, Mr. Chichetto or Mr. Boyle. There will be no exceptions, please. Discussion was then held on the day's hike and possible future hikes. Thanks to the generous contributions of former State Senator Bennett Katz, Director Carl Sederquist, Don Brown of Utah and others, the deposit of \$500 was made to the money market fund.

Member Bud Singer of Falmouth, ably assisted by Peter Bramhall, then showed his dynamic slide show of his personal tour through aviation history. Using two projectors and two screens, his slides took us around the nation, from the Wright Brothers, through both World Wars and the golden years between, up to the present world of jets, civilian and military. Thanks, Bud, for a great presentation. He ended with some great World War II photos of bombers over Europe and target photos by Jay Madeira. This was all elaborated on by Mr. Madeira who was Bud's guest, and whom we also thank.

Welcome, New Members!

- | | | |
|------|---|--------------|
| 249. | Courtney R. Bailey (<i>Artist, WWII</i>)
92 Cottage Street
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| 250. | Alan Fernald (<i>Aircraft - Harleys</i>)
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Standish, ME 04084 | 207-642-2835 |
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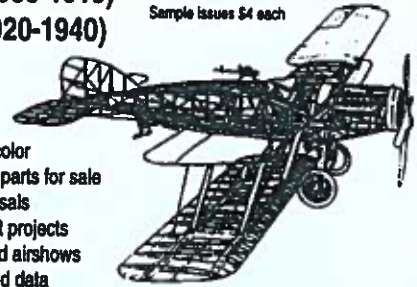


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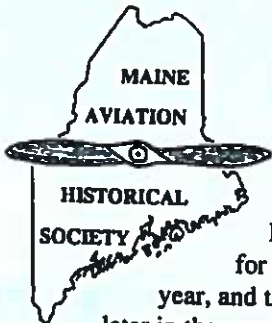
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* (2 annual \$250 payments)

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
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Maine Aviation Historical Society
P.O. Box 2641
Bangor, ME 04402



John Garbinsky # 245
1229 Broadway - Suite 444
Bangor, ME 04401

COME JOIN US!
Saturday, May 16, 1998
9 a.m.
Houlton, Maine
(see notice inside)