

DIRIGO FLYER

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FB-111A Crashes in Maine

By Jim Chichetto

Since the late 1930s, Maine has been an aerial training ground for pilots of the US armed forces, and for pilots of Allied nations. As with any training, mishaps have occurred. Starting with a twin-engine USAAF B-18 Bolo bomber making an emergency landing in Poland Springs on July 19, 1941 and later an RCAF Anson landing on Kebo Golf Club's fairway in Bar Harbor on October 24 of that same year, Maine became part of the pre-war military build-up. The first fatal accident was the crash of a B-18 from the 20th Bomb Squadron on a remote hillside in Lee on November 15, 1941. The bomber crashed as it tried to abort an emergency landing and flipped over, killing all four crewmen on board. During WWII, other pilots and aircraft were unlucky with their emergencies and the woods and waters of Maine are littered with the wreckage of training accident aircraft.

The fact that almost every aircraft which crashed has usually been listed as being on a routine training mission is misleading. Most were training flights, but a few were combat ready aircraft flying actual missions when they had a problem which ended up causing them to crash. After WWII and during the Cold War, Maine played an active role in the nation's defense, and training was carried out daily, 365 days a year, 24 hours a day, to be prepared for the threats facing our nation, the F-101B crash as Bald Mountain in Dedham being a case in point. It was on an active search and ID mission when it was lost.

To this day, Maine is still being used by the armed forces as a training ground, and to date, three FB-111As have crashed while practicing their low level capabilities along a flight path called the "Olive Branch" route. While these aircraft were not based in Maine, their training and crashes have made them part of our aviation history. The story of these losses and the cause is interesting, and it shows that information gathered from these accidents was instrumental in making modifications to insure the rest of the fleet would not suffer the same fate.

The F-111 was designed as a joint USN-USAF venture to develop a swing-wing fighter bomber. Two companies, General Dynamics and Grumman, shared the design and early stages of production. The wing was designed to give the aircraft a great

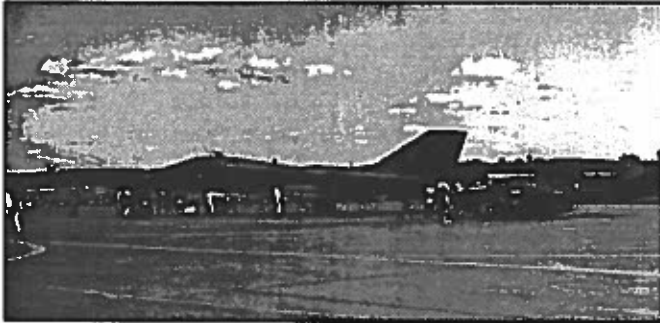


General Dynamics FB-111A Aardvark at Bangor. (Jim Chichetto Photo)

lifting and load carrying capacity while allowing it to achieve high speeds once it was airborne. As the first aircraft were tested, the Navy and Grumman pulled out of the project since the F-111 was too large for practical carrier use. They kept working with this swing-wing idea and the result was the highly effective F-14 Tomcat. The USAF kept the General Dynamics project going and developed a number of variations including the EF-111A Raven, an electronic warfare aircraft, and the F-111D, F-111E and F-111F strategic strike aircraft based in and near Europe in response to the growing Soviet menace. Nicknamed the Aardvark, the two-seat fighter bomber could carry a number of weapons packages including nuclear and conventional bombs, along with missiles and a 20 mm. cannon.

Designed around the swept wing and two P&W TF30-P-7 turbofan engines, these aircraft had a maximum take-off weight of 98,850 lbs. and a top speed of Mach 1.2 at sea level. The ceiling for this aircraft was 58,000 feet, but the terrain hugging ground attack system proved to be the aircraft's best selling point. It could fly under many existing radar systems and was fast enough to out-run many of the defenses set against it. It was designed and operational, doing the job the newer B-1 was to be tasked with in the 1980s, back in the mid-1960s, and doing it well.

"FB-111A," continued on page 2



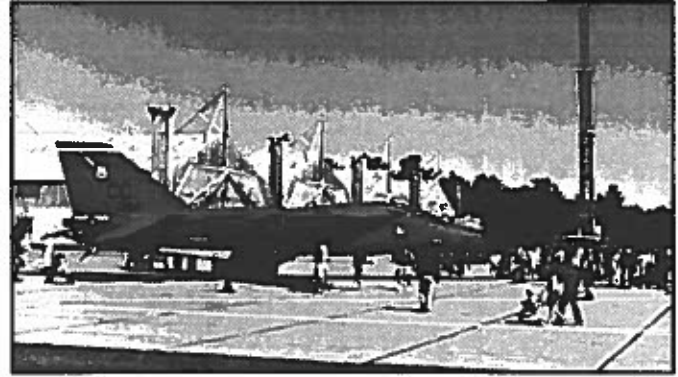
FB-111A (in camo) at the ME ANG Open House at BIA. (Jim Chichetto Photo)

"FB111A," *continued from page 1*

The FB-111 saw limited wartime use in Vietnam, but it did have good results in pinpointing bombing of bridges and other high risk targets in North Vietnam during 1972. It was the first aircraft to have the laser targeting system installed and used in combat. The accuracy of the FB-111As has since been well documented and their record of pinpoint strikes in heavily defended air space has been one of the better points in the USAF's bombing campaigns. The FB-111A has been replaced by the F-15 Strike Eagle, but for many years this aircraft was the best long distance mud mover the USAF had.

The FB-111As which crashed in Maine were flying out of Plattsburgh AFB in upper New York state. They would fly up the Atlantic Ocean and then turn in toward the shore near Jonesboro, Maine. Their route was a flight line called "Olive Branch." As they crossed the coast and headed into the Maine woods they were a sight to see. I have seen a couple of F-14s coming in over the ocean and skimming over the forest as they thundered off toward Ashland. Their mission was to fly this attack path until they came to the Radar Bombing Site. This site is used by many US flyers for doing low level ground attack practice. The site is about 18 miles from Loring AFB and aircraft are allowed to operate at full military power in this air space. It is not unusual to see an F-14 or a B-52 come screaming across I-95 on its way to this site. The first time you are shocked; after that you keep your eyes peeled. I once watched a B-52 fly across my path at about 100 feet above the trees at over 350 knots. Big, ugly and fast, it gave me new insight into what these huge bombers could do. The ground shook with its passing. Another time a single F-15 ripped across the sky so low I just saw it for a few seconds as it crossed right over my truck. You couldn't hear it coming and it was gone in a flash. It brought home the true speed of today's combat and gave me an idea of what the pilot must deal with. Any mistake at this level and speed could be fatal in a blink of the eye.

The first aircraft to be lost was on a high speed, low level bomb run over Garfield Plantation on December 23, 1975. One of a two aircraft flight from the 380th Bomb Wing flying out of Plattsburgh AFB in New York, the aircraft was inbound on its RBS bombing run when the accident happened. The aircraft's pilot lost control and both crewmen safely left the aircraft seconds before it crashed into the ground via the escape capsule. In the FB-111A the crewmen sit side by side and are inside an ejectable capsule. Rather than both men riding a seat up and out



General Dynamics FB-111A Aardvark at the ME ANG Open House at Bangor International Airport. Note the old ready hangars in the background. (Jim Chichetto Photo)

of the aircraft, this system fires the entire cockpit area free of the aircraft and then activates a parachute system to safely lower the capsule to the earth. Both men, Captain Robert J. Pavelko and Captain Michael R. Sprenger, were safe. Their capsule landed right side up in the woods and they were spotted and later picked up by a Huey flying out of Loring AFB about 15 miles from the crash site. The aircraft was totally destroyed in the crash. The aircraft crashed and burned at 10:30 a.m., both crewmen were safely picked up by 12:30 p.m. and the site was secured by the USAF. There wasn't much to recover from the crash site. The speed and impact had destroyed the airframe and the fire took care of what was left.

The second FB-111A to be lost in Maine came to grief in Garfield Plantation on October 28, 1977. This aircraft was flying a 380th Bomb Wing also, flying out of Plattsburgh AFB. The pilot was making his high speed run into the targeted site when the aircraft started to roll and the crew punched out. The aircraft crashed into the ground and came to rest in the shallow water of the Machias River, less than three miles from the 1975 crash site. Neither the pilot, Captain John D. Miller, nor his navigator, Captain John J. Blewitt, were injured. Their capsule safely removed them from the stricken aircraft. The only facts that they could add to the investigation were that the aircraft started to do an unrequested right roll and, as they punched out, the right ENGINE FIRE light came on. Later the USAF would pay H.E. Sargent, a Stillwater construction company, to dig up the wreckage still in the river and help them transport it to a building for study. The clues to this crash were later found, after investigators had an idea what they were looking for.

High speed runs over the forest keep most flyers honest. You can't get too low or you will eat a tree top or a bird will pop up and ruin your day. The ocean is another matter and when you have a clear night and no obstructions, some pilots like to get down low and go max power. It is, after all, what most of today's flyers like, the feeling of speed and power that a jet aircraft can inspire in a human being. You can take it to the edge, and if you're good and also lucky, you can bring it back, knowing you got away with it once again. Humans like to do this in many walks of life, but flying jets is a dangerous business and the results of an error or machine failure at high speed can be sudden and deadly.

"FB-111A," *continued on page 7*

Aviation Pioneers See Maine Art



Famous X-15 test pilot Scott Crossfield and Jean Kaye Tinsley, noted nuclear physicist, and Executive Director of the International Women Helicopter Pilots admire the art work of Jason Marshall, a student of the Greater Houlton Christian Academy.

The artwork, one of the winners of Maine entries in the International Aviation Art Contest, was seen by more than one thousand participants in the 1998 National Congress of Aerospace Educators at St. Louis, MO. The artwork was later displayed on the IMAX screen of the Smithsonian's Air & Space Museum, Washington, DC during a meeting of the International Aeronautic Federation.

The academy submitted 59 entries, winning all three categories for the state as part of the academy's Aerospace Science Lab aviation projects for 1998. The lab, Maine's first such (K-12) educational facility under one roof, was opened last December under direction of MAHS member Pete Hurd, a volunteer instructor for the academy.

Crossfield, a WWII Navy fighter pilot, was later the X-15 chief flight test pilot for North American Aviation, Inc. He flew the first 30 demonstration flights of the X-15, an aircraft in which Maine's Robert Rushworth later became the first pilot to win his astronaut's wings by taking the X-15 to an altitude of more than 60 miles. The X-15 set the world's record for manned atmospheric controlled flight at the speed of Mach 4.6 (4,500 mph).

Two ACE Camps (Aviation Career Education) Planned for Summer of 1998

The Maine Education Council for Aviation and Aerospace (MECAA), FAA, and Bangor Air National Guard's 101st Air Refueling Wing are sponsoring *two* Aviation Career Education (ACE) camps in June and August. These overnight camps are for students ages 13-17 who have a sincere interest in aviation.

Students receive hands-on and classroom instruction on various subjects such as: History of Aviation, Basic Aerodynamics, Theory of Flight, Aircraft Instrumentation and Components, Rocketry, Introduction to NASA, Ballooning, Helicopters, KC-135 refueling fighters orientation flights, light aircraft, land and seaplane orientation flights, and flight simulators. Aeronautical career information, presentations, and guest speakers are provided from Daniel Webster College, Embry Riddle University, FAA, Military, NASA, major airlines, and local FBOs. Due to the tremendous support of many volunteers from professional and local organizations, ACE Camps are expanding and becoming better each year!

ACE Camps help our young students consider which roads to take now in school so they will be better prepared when they get out of high school. We feel very strongly that this mission is vital and with proper guidance and instruction now, these students will become our future pilots, navigators, mechanics, technicians, engineers, and managers. Students also receive vital information on drug and alcohol abuse awareness from local DARE police officers.

The past two years ACE Camps have been hosted by the 101st Air National Guard unit in Bangor, and due to the resounding success of past camps, has now become an annual event!

This year there will be a senior camp for 30 students ages 15-17 from June 22-27, 1998, and a junior camp for 30 students ages 13-14 from August 4-7, 1998. To apply, students must fill out an application form, complete two essays and submit a teacher or guidance counselor recommendation. Application deadline will be May 30, 1998 for the senior camp and June 30, 1998 for the junior camp. For more information contact Kathy Crawford or Bruce Ayer at Bangor AFSS, 207-947-3349.

IMPORTANT NOTICE · IMPORTANT NOTICE · IMPORTANT NOTICE · IMPORTANT NOTICE

Enclosed with this Dirigo Flyer is a prospect sheet. Please give this sheet your utmost thought and consideration. We need to supply Benita Deschaine of Deschaine Associates, our chosen fundraising organization, with a quality selection of people who would be receptive to our concept of the Maine Air Museum and who could be major contributors to our fundraising efforts. They would be supplied with positive information about our mission and its goals, interviewed by Ms. Deschaine as to their support for the museum, and the level of their possible financial support. This will enable her to evaluate the interest and enthusiasm for the Maine Air Museum and the feasibility of raising the necessary monies to make the museum a reality.

Put your thinking caps on! We must do our part to achieve our goals and this is the first step and a major priority for turning our hopes and dreams into a real museum home for the Maine Aviation Historical Society. Please complete this prospect sheet (make extra copies or use plain paper) and send these to: MAHS, P.O. Box 2641, Bangor, ME 04402 as soon as possible. A lot of work has gone into bringing the museum as far as it has by your officers and committee chairmen and members. We have successfully raised the necessary funds within the membership for this study, and now we need to go forward with this next important project.

Thank you for your continued support.

The NC72025 Comes Home

Submitted by Dan Bilodeau

In early 1946, Gerry A. Bilodeau and his associate Roger A. LaBrecque ordered a new Luscombe (two-seater) from Roland Maheux at the Maheux's Airport in Minot, Maine. It was a polished Silvaire, registration NC72025, a model 8A "all metal" aircraft with a Continental 65 h.p. engine. Roger flew the plane recreationally and Gerry began to take flying lessons at Maheux's School of Aviation, Inc.

When Gerry acquired his private pilot's license, he used his aircraft to market his soft-drink bottling business, Sunset Beverage Company. He printed "free ride" in a number of bottle caps and the lucky winners found themselves flying over the falls in Lewiston and Auburn.

Mrs. Jeanne Bilodeau, Gerry's wife, loved to fly in the Luscombe, especially to Boston to enjoy big city life. She remembers quite well how exciting those days with her husband were and loves to tell the family all the details.

In late 1947, during a family crisis, Gerry decided to fly the Luscombe for a "free ride" winner. His mother had just passed away; she never wanted Gerry to fly. On that day in October, Gerry attempted to take off from his gravel runway off Washington Street in Auburn. Before getting safely aloft, the Luscombe flipped on its back in the brush at the end of the strip. At the time, Jeanne and other family members believed that the crash was a curse from Gerry's deceased mother who stole the lift from his wings. Fortunately, no one was seriously hurt. Strangely enough, the authorities and the press never found out Gerry was carrying passengers.

Later it was concluded that pilot error caused the crash. The aircraft was overweight, the air temperature was high, and the pilot was under family stress, all on a runway barely long enough for a normal take-off. Gerry soon gave up flying and decided to market his bottling business and hotel in other ways. He believed his mother would have wanted it that way.

The Luscombe aircraft was severely damaged and the insurance company hauled it off. Gerry kept the original propeller and his log books stored away. It was later discovered that Gerry's signature on the bill of sale (what was left of the aircraft) was forged by an unknown party.

In 1985, Gerry's grandson Daniel L. Bilodeau (Dan) attended Embry Riddle Aeronautical University in Daytona Beach to learn to fly and receive a degree in Aeronautical Science. Before his graduation in 1989, Gerry had passed away. Dan had never taken his grandfather flying. A few years after Gerry's death his youngest son Michael found the old propeller and the log books from the Luscombe. Dan was quite pleased to receive them in their original condition but never examined them extensively.

Later, in the early 1990s, Dan met a loyal friend, Stephen W. Whitney of Gray, Maine. Dan and Steve began a flying business together named Bethel Air Service, Inc. at the Colonel Dyke Airfield in Bethel, Maine. Here Dan proudly displayed his grandfather's propeller on a wall in the office and there it remained for many years.

In 1993, Dan became the Sunday River Skiway pilot and Steve became their aircraft mechanic. Business went on as usual. Then, a couple of years later, while waiting for a flight, Dan noticed the Luscombe propeller had an engraved serial number adjacent to the hub. After closely examining the log books, Dan found the numbers on the propeller and in the log books matched exactly. The excitement generated from this correlation prompted Dan to call the Federal Aviation Administration, Aircraft Registration Division, in Oklahoma City. With the tail number (N72025) it was easy to find out the status of the airframe and who the present owner was. No one since the accident had ever questioned the whereabouts of the Luscombe, all involved assumed the crash had been a total loss and that the plane was no longer in existence.

Sid Mason's Airport, Maynard, Massachusetts, had been the home of N72025 since the early 1950s. At the time of the crash the insurance company sold the aircraft to Turner Aviation Company in Turner, Maine (Twitchell's). It was one of Ron Twitchell's first salvage projects. He successfully repaired and restored the Luscombe to FAA standards, flew it for about a year and then sold it to Don's Flying Service in Marlboro, Massachusetts. Sidney H. Mason (Sid) had been the proud owner for most of the Luscombe's life and was very surprised to hear from Dan that afternoon. Sid and his wife Susan were excited to talk to somebody who actually had information on their aircraft's past. During the telephone conversation, it was revealed that Sid would someday lay under a tombstone that was engraved "N72025."

Dan journeyed south to meet with Sid and to see a piece of his grandfather's past. Upon arrival Dan was well received despite the fact that Sid had owned the aircraft so long and did not realize that a man named Gerry Bilodeau had once owned and crashed the little Luscombe. After a brief inspection of the original log books it was quite evident that Dan was who he said he was. That day Dan and Sid enjoyed an afternoon of "hanger flying" and before leaving they had come to an agreement. If Sid ever intended to sell the Luscombe he would give Dan first option to buy. In exchange for this, Dan would forward the original log books if for any reason he could not buy the aircraft. After a brief ride (taxi) in the Luscombe, Dan said good-bye to his new friend(s).

In 1996, Sid and Susan telephoned Dan. It appeared he was interested in selling N72025. Steve promptly arranged for a pre-purchase inspection and an offer was made and accepted with two conditions. One, that Sid would deliver the aircraft to Maine, and two, that he would return at his leisure to fly it whenever he wanted to. Steve, assisted by the Portland FAA, acquired the necessary "ferry" permit that Sid would need for the flight to Maine. It was a beautiful day when Sid touched down in Bethel in September of 1997. As expected, Sid was practically in tears as he handed the keys over.

A great deal of maintenance was immediately put into the Luscombe so Dan could prepare for a very important, very

Upcoming MAHS Meetings and Calendar of Events

June 13	9 a.m.	MAHS Meeting, Brunswick Naval Air Station. (<i>See notice.</i>)
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.

Meeting sites are flexible. We are always looking for suggestions on locations, guest speakers, slide shows, etc. Call Scott Grant at 207-775-3404 if you have any ideas or can be of help.

"Luscombe," continued from page 4

exciting first flight. Approximately one week after the delivery, September 23, 1996, exactly fifty years to the day that his grandfather Gerry had had his first flight in the Luscombe, Dan took to the skies. It was also Dan's first flight in the Luscombe. He had been diligently preparing all week long getting flight training in numerous conventional gear (tail-draggers) aircraft similar to the Luscombe.

Dan flew the plane from the western mountains of Maine to Minot, where his grandfather first flew. The airport was still in operation and the owner was still Roland Maheux who was now in his eighties and still flying! As the morning fog dissipated, Dan touched down on the grass strip and there awaited Jeanne and a special guest, along with Roland and Gerry's former associate Roger LaBrecque. Dan's father and mother, Leo and Cecile Bilodeau, along with other relatives were also present for his arrival.

A few days before Steve had finished the maintenance on the plane, Jeanne had called Dan with exciting news. She had spoken with a man named Marcel P Toutain, now in his seventies, who was the flight instructor that Gerry first flew with. He was the special guest that morning and had agreed to meet Dan and fly in the Luscombe! Therefore, as fate would have it, Dan and Marcel flew that morning in the same aircraft, with the same pilot, at the same airport as his grandfather did exactly fifty years prior.

The flight began with a valuable lesson. Marcel explained with great caution how to safely hand-prop the Luscombe. Marcel turned out to be a wonderful instructor and it was incredible that he could pick up where he had left off so many years ago. When they were ready for engine start, Dan shouted "contact" and Roland hand-propped the Luscombe just as he did fifty years earlier when Gerry purchased the plane.

Once the operational checks were performed, N72025 departed and, when safely airborne, Marcel instinctively took the controls and began to fly! What lasted only twenty minutes seemed like a lifetime for Dan and Marcel, both excited to be there in the sky in their own way. With a textbook three-point landing all the hard work and preparation was over. And like that day in September 1946, Marcel signed Dan's pilot log book "RFI," for registered flight instructor, just as he did in his grandfather's. The flight lesson was finished, and a job well done.

As of May 1998, Steve Whitney is flying the Luscombe out in Fredonia, Wisconsin where he is completing his training to be a New Tribes Mission pilot. Dan Bilodeau is living in Bryant Pond, Maine with his wife Stacey. He is a DC-10 pilot for Continental Airlines and plans to go "air camping" this summer in Maine with the Luscombe. The old propeller now hangs in his home.

Jeanne Bilodeau, a terrific and loving grandmother, is residing in Lewiston, Maine as well as Marcel Toutain and Roger LaBrecque, who both await rides with Dan. Sid Mason visits his old airplane bi-annually to fly it as he did for many years, and Roland Maheux still maintains his airport in Minot.

Dan hopes for a 100th anniversary flight in the Luscombe, but he feels the airplane may be too old by then. His old, bold friends will never die.

One last note: if anyone has a crown (bottle cap) manufactured between 1946 and 1947 from Sunset Beverage Company with the words "free ride," please contact Dan to arrange for your flight.

Please check out www.air98.com to view the photos that were to accompany this article or to contact Dan Bilodeau for further information about this story.

Maine Aviation Historical News Clips

Pilot Escapes Death as Plane Crashes Off Raymond Cape

Raymond, April 15 (Special)—The pilot of a British training plane which crashed on the rocks off Raymond Cape, Friday, escaped with a bruised arm, according to officials at the Brunswick Naval Air Station, where the plane was based. He lost control of the plane while flying at a low altitude over Sebago Lake and after the crash walked two miles to the home of F.W. Lord to telephone report of the accident to the air station.

A detachment of Marines was sent to the scene and salvage operations immediately started.

This news clip is from the Portland Evening Express, April 15, 1944, page 3.

Pilot Killed at Rockland

Rockland, April 29 (Special)—An American pilot was killed instantly Friday afternoon when his training plane crashed and burst into flames about 1,000 feet north of the runway at the Naval Auxiliary Air Facility here. His name was withheld pending notification of next of kin.

Lt. (j.g.) James H. Quillen, public relations officer at the Brunswick Naval Air Station, said the pilot was thrown clear of the plane when it struck a rock near the tar surfacing plant and burst into flames. The plane was on a routine training flight from the Rockland Naval Air Station. Cause of the accident was not immediately determined, Lt. Quillen said.

This news clip is from the Portland Evening Express, April 29, 1944, page 10.

Two British Planes Crash in Sebago Lake

Brunswick, May 16 (Special)—No trace of two British Navy planes or occupants had been found at mid-afternoon today after a noon crash in Sebago Lake, about one and one-half miles from Fisher Island, the Naval Air Station here reported.

Search is Started

News of the crash, transmitted to the local station by the *Evening Express*, sent two amphibian planes, Marines and Navy men to the lake where plane and boat search was made. The planes were a part of a formation in training flight from the Lewiston facility of the local station. Boats from Thompson's Camps and Long Beach were sent out immediately after the crash of the planes, but it was apparent that the planes sank immediately, leaving no trace of the planes or occupants.

Disappear in Lake

North Sebago, May 16 (Special)—Flight of six planes over Sebago Lake shortly before noon today, interrupted by two explosions which left only four to fly away, was described this afternoon by a local woman who witnessed the flight.

"The planes were flying quite low over the lake," she said, "when, it appeared to me, two of them skimmed the water. I could see spray flying up. Then there came an explosion and I saw smoke coming from one of two planes on the water. Then there came another explosion. I went into the house to (get) my field glasses, but when I returned I could only see four planes in the air. There was nothing to be seen on the lake."

The woman said she went to the home of a neighbor and both scanned the lake through glasses but could see nothing on the surface.

Portland Evening Express, May 16, 1944, pages 1 and 3.

☛ In Memoriam ☛

DAVID SWANSON

It is with deep regret that we have learned that David Swanson died of cancer in March of this year. Those of you who were privileged to attend the February 1997 meeting in Portland heard Dave tell the story of his 1939 Lockheed 12A. Dave purchased his plane from member Lou Hilton in 1996 and flew it to Sun n' Fun and also coast to coast with his wife Kathryn, members Bill Thaden and his wife and Dick and Pat Jackson. Dave's story of his airplane and his coast to coast flights were most enjoyable (see March 1997 *Dirigo Flyer*).

Dave was born in Illinois in 1937 and soloed on his sixteenth birthday. After many flying jobs, he joined Eastern Air Lines in 1963 and flew DC-9s, 727s, Constellations and L-1011s until he retired in 1989. Always a joy to meet and talk with, we will miss his smiling face very much. We extend our sincere condolences to his wife, Kathryn, and his family.



June MAHS Meeting at BNAS

The June meeting of the MAHS will be held at 9 a.m. on Saturday, June 13th at the Brunswick Naval Air Station in Brunswick, Maine. We will meet on the second floor of the New Hampshire College building. After the business meeting we will enjoy a tour of the base, inspect the P-3 anti-submarine Orion and, possibly, visit the old ammunition dump.

Directions: Go to the main gate, turn left after P-3, right at stop sign. Park in PX parking lot. Historical tour of BNAS, P-3 tour, go to Round the World Fliers monument in Mere Point.

Note: The May meeting notes will appear in the next issue of the *Dirigo Flyer*.

Great New Caps Now Available!

• **Maine Aviation Historical Society** •
surrounds an outline of the state, across which is written

• **Aircraft Investigation Team** •

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*Maine Aviation Air Museum
Prospect Sheet*

Prospect's Name: _____ **Spouse:** _____

Home Address: _____ **Phone** _____

Seasonal Address: _____ **Phone** _____

Profession and Job Title: _____

Business Name and Address: _____

_____ **Phone** _____ **Ext.** _____

Connections to or possible interest in Maine Aviation Air Museum: _____

Civic and professional affiliations: _____

Favorite Charitable Interests: _____

Other Pertinent Information: _____

Submitted By: _____ **Date:** _____

"FB-111A," continued from page 2

At about 10:20 p.m. on October 6, 1980, Major Thomas M. Mullen, 35, of Grosse Point, Michigan, an instructor pilot, and Captain Gary A. Davis, 32, of Milwaukee, Wisconsin, an instructor navigator, were killed when their FB-111A rolled into the Atlantic Ocean at high speed. They were flying with a wingman, who was above them at 1500 feet. They had taken off from Plattsburgh and were flying a night training mission. They were much lower, so low that when the aircraft started to make an unrequested right roll, it pitched into the ocean and cartwheeled across the water in a huge blaze of burning fuel and rocket propellant.

This FB-111A was carrying two of the USAF's newest SRAM weapons, with dummy warheads. The big jet crashed and exploded into thousands of parts and bits of wreckage in a split second. One minute it was screaming across a clear quiet ocean heading toward the shore under the radar level, the next second it was a flaming mass of scrap, scattered over a couple of miles of the Atlantic Ocean, six miles from the shore.

On the shore some residents saw the flash, others heard the explosion and rushed to their windows in time to see the fires on the ocean. The fires faded as the debris sank and the night became deadly silent. The crew never had a chance to eject. Local fishing boats and the USCG came to the scene as soon as they could. A few items were found floating, but most of the aircraft was lost to the sea. The USN brought in a recovery ship, divers and a deep water mini-sub. This led many local folks to believe that the aircraft had been carrying nuclear weapons, but this was not the case.

One of the items recovered from this crash site was the afterburner can from the righthand side of the aircraft. The damage found on this part, caused before the crash, showed the same burn pattern as the can recovered from the river crash site in Garfield Plantation. Investigators finally had enough clues to track down the cause of these accidents. All three aircraft were powered by the same series of P&W engines. Further study showed that in this series of engines, one nozzle was slightly out of alignment. Under certain conditions, such as high speed full power for long periods of time, this nozzle would superheat a section of the can wall and, if not shut down, it would burn a hole clear through the can. In these crashes, the can was burned open and the flight controls behind it were burned in two. The sudden snapping of this flight control caused the aircraft to start an unrequested right roll. A sudden right roll at high speeds and low altitude is impossible to overcome when you lose your flight controls.

The USAF grounded the entire fleet of FB-111As as soon as the results were known. At Pease AFB, only one aircraft had non-series P&W engines. All the flight crews had to share this one aircraft for a week. By the second week a second aircraft was repaired and by the end of the month, most of the squadron was back in the air. The chance remark that the right ENGINE FIRE light had come on as they ejected and the pattern of burn marks led to the corrections needed to keep these fine aircraft flying.

An interesting side note to the FB-111A story comes from

one of my sources, a crewman in Aardvarks for a number of years. He told me about a "hybrid" FB-111A. It seems that an early model A was damaged on the ground when it was hit by a truck. It was mated up to a newer model which had suffered fire damage. The result was a strange FB-111A called Frankenvark by the crew dogs. It flew OK, but had one small glitch. When flying this beast in clouds, the static build-up caused the radio system to fail repeatedly. It was written up by the crews, but since the exact causes couldn't be duplicated on the ground, it never was fixed properly. This curse kept the crews trying to dodge flying the aircraft for months. Finally the Squadron Commander took the beast up and while in clouds missed some FFA directions and wandered into a commercial aircraft's flight path. They didn't get close to colliding, but after that this aircraft was grounded until the problem was corrected. The curse of Frankenvark was over, but the name remained.

For more information about the FB-111A check out Fighters of the United States Air Force by Robert F. Dorr and David Donald, Military Press, New York; A Field Guide to Airplanes, second edition, by M.R. Montgomery and Gerald Foster, 1992, Houghton Mifflin Company, New York, New York; and The History of the US Nuclear Arsenal by James N. Gibson, 1989, Brompton Books, Greenwich, Connecticut.



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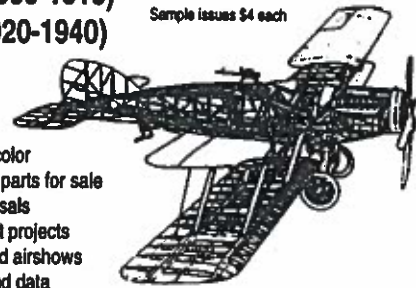
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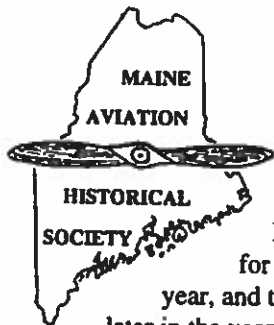
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