



DIRIGO FLYER

Vol. VI, No. 9 September 1998

Newsletter of the Maine Aviation Historical Society • P.O. Box 2641, Bangor, Maine 04402 • 207-854-9972
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John Butler Ayer, American Eagle

By Charles Francis



Frances Butler Ayer's hand shook as she placed the cable from England on her writing desk. The message it carried was one that every mother with a son in combat feared. The cable had stated in concise, terse words that Flying Officer John B. Ayer was missing in action. Worse news was to follow, however. John Ayer's status would change to KIA, killed in action. He was shot down over the English Channel on April 17, 1942.

John Ayer was the only Maine born man to join the famed American Eagle

Squadron of the Royal Air Force (RAF). The RAF's American Eagle Squadrons were made up of Americans who decided to fight the Nazis while the United States was still maintaining a posture of neutrality. In fact, under the Neutrality Acts passed by Congress in the late 1930s, it was illegal for Americans to enlist in the military of any of the belligerents already at war. Yet, hundreds of Americans crossed the border into Canada to join Canadian forces or to book passage to England and enlist with the British — even though facing punishment back home that included a \$20,000 fine and ten years of prison — and John Ayer was one of them.

John Butler Ayer was born in Bangor September 21, 1912. His parents, Frederick Rollins Ayer and Frances Butler Ayer, were scions of two socially prominent and wealthy families. Frances Ayer was from Milwaukee, where her father John Butler had expensive real estate holdings and was president of the prestigious City Club. Frederick Ayer would succeed his father Frederick W. Ayer as president of the Eastern Manufacturing Company of Brewer. The Eastern Manufacturing Company was one of the early giants of the Maine timber industry and one of the nation's foremost distributors of fine paper. Another member of the Ayer family, William Ayer,

served several terms in Congress and was responsible for building the Somerset Railway.

John Ayer spent his boyhood in Bangor and it must have been an idyllic time for him. He and his brothers, Frederick and Winslow, and his sisters, Dorothy and Frances, sailed Penobscot Bay on their grandfather's yacht and lived a life of privilege and luxury. Then his parents divorced and John and his siblings moved with their mother to Milwaukee.

In Milwaukee the Ayers moved in much the same circles as they had in Bangor. John attended Milton Academy, Northwestern Military Academy and Columbia University, where he studied engineering. He also joined the Army Air Corps, where, as a Cadet Pilot, he received the training which would enable him to enlist in American Eagle Squadron No. 71. In December of 1935, John's engagement to Marguerite LeCron was announced. Marguerite and John's sister Dorothy had both been debutantes the previous year. They had been presented to society at a ball at Milwaukee's Service Club. The marriage never took place, however.

"Ayer," continued on page 4

ELECTION ALERT!

Election time is upon us again. It is time to choose the candidates for office to lead us through the coming year. Our outgoing President, Jim Chichetto, has appointed Norm Houle (#1), to be in charge of nominations for the upcoming elections.

We need nominees for the offices of President, Vice President, Secretary and Treasurer. The current Vice President, Scott Grant, Secretary, Leo Boyle, and Treasurer, George Tinker, have agreed to serve another year if nominated and re-elected. It is your Society and we must all work on the best nominees who will serve us best in the forthcoming year. We especially need nominees to fill the shoes of our outgoing President, Jim Chichetto, who has served us well for the past three difficult years as we have transitioned from a great club to a growing, dynamic historical society. Please be sure your nominees are *able* and *willing* to serve as our dynamic leader.

Please communicate your thoughts, ideas and nominees to:
Norm Houle, P.O. Box 563, Barrington, NH 03825-0563
Telephone: (603) 664-5631 e-mail: nhoule8751@aol.com

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Monthly meetings
are held at 9 a.m.
on the second Saturday
of each month
at various locations.
See schedule for details.

An Exciting Day in Houlton



Jacqueline Cochran taxis to her parking place after landing at Houlton, Maine for the 1947 Air Show.



Her Lockheed 18 Lodestar being inspected by the crowd in front of Hangar #1.

Famous aviatrix Jacqueline Cochran flew to the Houlton, Maine Air Show in 1947 at the invitation of Houlton native Patricia Chadwick. Chadwick served as a WASP pilot in WWII under Cochran who headed the WASPs. In the lower photo is the WWII control tower which still stands today.

Member Peter Hurd is one of a group planning to restore the tower and move it closer to Hanger #2. Hurd attended the air show at the age of 11 and sent in these photos, which were taken by photographer Holmes Gardner, recently deceased. Peter's father was the civilian pharmacist at the base hospital during WWII.

Anyone with personal photos of the Houlton tower or other WWII airfield structures are requested to contact Peter Hurd, P.O. Box 1005, Houlton, Maine 04730 or e-mail to: NISS@ainop.com.

Highlights of Summer Meetings

June . . .



Director Herman Bayerdorffer (#163) and his beautiful Cessna 310 at the June meeting in Houlton. (Don Saunders Photo)

August . . .

The August meeting of the MAHS was held informally at the Owls Head Transportation Museum on Saturday, August 8th at their Annual Transportation Spectacular Aerobatic Show. With no exciting news since the July meeting and the *Dirigo Flyer*, it was mostly informal. A large number of members showed up, and many helped man our display during the day. We signed up three new members and sold a number of MAHS T-shirts, patches and hats. Many aspects of the Society were informally discussed and, as usual, the search for the "White Bird" was a primary topic. We are awaiting the possible results of the U.S. Navy P-3 mapping search which is still continuing this week. It will probably be into September before we hear anything definitive.

The B-17 "Memphis Belle" made a flight during the show and their B-25 was on display. Dan McCue flew his jet L-39 Albatross and Reese Dill his T-6. Owls Head flew many of their antique aircraft, the highlight being member Ken Cianchette in his Fokker Triplane replica. It was good to see the Fokker C-IV nearing completion in its restoration, and to see the Farman replica in the air. Members Dick Jackson and his wife Pat and Bill Thaden and his wife Louise flew up in the late Dave Swanson's beautiful Lockheed 12. Bruce Stephenson kept us up to date on the Sebago Lake situation. Special thanks go to Peter Marini of Bangor for his help in manning the display all day



Director Carl Sederquist, President Jim Chichetto, Secretary Leo Boyle and VP Scott Grant man our table at Owls Head August 8. (Jack Denison Photo)

July . . .



Captain Morgan Barbour (#B-777), our featured speaker on test flying the Boeing 777 at the July meeting at John Miller's Antique Airfield. Captain Barbour from Bellevue, Washington chats with Norm Houle (#1) at snack time. (Jim Chichetto Photo)



Part of the large turnout in John Miller's Hangar in Newburgh for the July MAHS meeting. (Jim Chichetto Photo)

Saturday, and to Jack Denison, Scott Grant and your editor for being there both days.

Don't forget to plan on helping at the table at Greenville next month and at Lewiston-Auburn later in September. We need your help, and you meet loads of interesting aviation people and members while doing yourself and the MAHS a favor. We look forward to seeing you there.



Member Mike Farrey and a friend relax in the shade of the wing of Mike's DC-3 in Northeast Airlines colors at Owls Head August 8. (Jack Denison Photo)

Lindbergh Crate Day 1998

By Oscar Blue

In September of 1926 Charles Lindbergh was a 24 year old air mail pilot and captain in the Missouri Air National Guard. One night on a routine air mail flight between St. Louis and Chicago, he daydreamed about trying for the \$25,000 prize for the first NYC to Paris non-stop flight and thought he stood as good a chance as anybody of being successful. Lindbergh made this his goal, took a leave of absence and took on his NYC to Paris flight as a full time activity.

Lindbergh secured the financing and inspired the work force at Ryan to build his one-of-a-kind "Spirit of St. Louis" in just 60 days. Then, flying the "Spirit" east, he set speed records between San Diego and St. Louis and St. Louis and NYC.

When he took off for Paris the "Spirit" lifted a record weight per horsepower off the ground. Lindbergh succeeded in flying non-stop to Paris, becoming a world hero.

Lindbergh has been referred to as the last hero and a man who spent his life being a leader without followers. To many, Lindbergh became a fallen eagle because of his isolationist stance before WWII and his bitter feud with FDR leading to the resignation of his Army Air Force Commission. When war came to his country Lindbergh, working as a civilian for the Ford Motor Company, was most instrumental in getting the Ford B-24 bomber plant at Willow Run in operation where a new four engine airplane was produced every fifty minutes. Lindbergh then went out to the Pacific as a technical representative for the United Aircraft Corporation where, as a civilian, he flew a full complement of 50 combat missions.

Some historians have implied that Lindbergh's contributions to the success of American military aviation in the Pacific was just as instrumental in bringing WWII to an end with the minimum amount of casualties as were the atomic bombs. Later in his life, Lindbergh became a very active conservationist.

Lindbergh was a boyhood role model for most of the young men growing up in the 1920s and '30s who became the military aviators of WWII.

Can Lindbergh and people like him be an inspiration for

young Americans of the 1990s? Larry Ross of Canaan, Maine certainly thinks so. Larry Ross owns the Lindbergh Crate, the box that protected the fuselage of the "Spirit of St. Louis" on its trip back to the USA aboard the battle cruiser "Memphis." Larry has the crate at his residence and it is fixed up as a small museum to the life of Charles Lindbergh.

Each year Larry has a gathering at the crate to celebrate the anniversary of Lindbergh's famous New York to Paris flight.

This year there were several busloads of school children from nearby towns at the celebration. Larry had already communicated with them and their teachers and asked them what they had as goals for their lives. What do you want to be when you grow up?

Larry had invited many guests to the celebration, one Austin Wilkins who was in Paris going to school at the time of Lindbergh's flight. Others included a professional conservationist, a veterinarian, a commanding officer of a Navy ship, a marine patrol officer, a game warden, a sports manager, a state trooper, a Naval officer, a doctor, a commercial fisherman and a U. S. Congressman.

Larry had this group of people there active in their chosen professions to show the children that these people are now what they wanted to be when they were school children their age.

Also at this year's celebration a helicopter landed, several planes did fly-bys, including a Lockheed Electra, the type of plane Amelia Earhart was flying around the world when she disappeared.

John Miller of Miller's Field did aerobatics and made smoke with his bi-plane. There was a portable climbing wall for the kids to scale, a skydiver landed. There were racing cars and ultralights on display.

The antique auto community was represented by my 1931 Franklin, the car of aviators. Lindbergh owned and drove at least four Franklins. The antique auto community hopes to get more autos of the late 1920s there at future Crate days so the school children can see and experience cars in use at the time of Lindbergh's flight.

"Ayer," continued from page 1

Following his graduation from Columbia, John Ayer worked for the Aetna Life Insurance Company as a special agent and then for Wadham's Oil Company as a salesman. From the latter position he went to work for the government as an administrator for the Civilian Conservation Corps in Wisconsin. It was here that he met his future wife, who was living in Appleton at the time. Little did the couple know that they would soon be caught up in events that were unfolding in Europe.

On September 1, 1939, Germany invaded Poland. Two days later Britain, which had given guarantees of support to Poland, declared war on Germany. With the fall of France to the Nazis in June of 1940, Hitler issued the directive for Operation Sea Lion, his invasion plan for Britain. On August 8, Herman Goering, commander of the Luftwaffe, launched the air attack on the island nation. The RAF had 1475 first-line aircraft to the

Luftwaffe's 2670. However, the British actually had several advantages. One was the recent development of radar, which could track incoming planes. Another was Ultra. In 1938, MI-6, the British secret intelligence service, had purchased a working model of the Nazis cipher machine, Enigma, from a Polish mathematician who had memorized diagrams of the machine's main parts. The British machine, which was code named Ultra, was able to decode all the Luftwaffe's flight plans. However, even with these advantages, Britain was in desperate need of planes and men to fly them.

The Luftwaffe's first bombing targets were Britain's southeast harbors, channel shipping, airfields, factories and radar stations. When this tactic failed, Goering added daily raids on London, hoping to break British morale. In response,

"Ayer," continued on page 5

"Ayer," continued from page 4

the RAF counterattacked with bombing missions against key German targets. Despite Goering's boasts that the Luftwaffe would gain air superiority, it never did due to the heroic efforts of a few hundred RAF pilots, who included in their number the American Eagle Squadron and John Butler Ayer.

On July 27, 1940, John Ayer married Polly Smiley in a quiet ceremony in Chicago. On August 9, the day after he enlisted in the RAF, John called his mother from Ottawa with the news that he would leave for Britain in forty-eight hours. By the time the wedding announcement of John and Polly Ayer was published on August 25, the couple were in England. John was training for combat and Polly was a member of the Women's Auxiliary to the RAF. The couple had made sure that the FBI would not stop their plans to aid Britain in its war effort.

While the government of the United States considered Americans who enlisted in the military of foreign nations to be criminals, the American press, for the most part, looked on them as heroes. One of the first articles about the American Eagle Squadron, which appeared in papers across the country, was clearly laudatory. Its headline was "'Okay, Let's Go! Eagle is Flying for England.'" John Ayer was named in the article as one of the first eleven members of the first American Eagle Squadron, No. 71. Soon there would be enough American flyers in Britain to form two more Eagle Squadrons.

There were several requirements to becoming an RAF pilot. First, for American Eagle Squadron flyers, was the taking of an oath of allegiance to Britain. All pilots who were to fly combat were supposed to have 500 hours of flying time. Not all the Americans did but as they were anxious to get into the air,

they would pad their hours of actual flying time. The new combat pilots then had to learn to fly in close knit military formations. This training was done in two-seater Miles Masters advanced training planes. From them, the next step was to Hawker Hurricanes. Flying Officer Ayer flew in them for nine months until Squadron No. 71 switched to Supermarine Spitfire II's. He also flew bombers.

Squadron No. 71 flew its first combat mission July 2, 1941. The squadron was one of several assigned to escort twelve Bristol Blenheim bombers sent to destroy an electric plant at Lille, France. From this time on the American Eagle Squadrons performed at the forefront of the Battle of Britain. All told the RAF would lose 790 fighters and 449 pilots. The Luftwaffe would lose 1389 fighters and an untold number of pilots.

It would take the Japanese attack on Pearl Harbor to bring the United States into the war. However, it was Americans like John Butler Ayer, who, ignoring the criminal penalties that could be brought against them for their actions, first brought the enormity of the Nazi war machine home to the United States and inspired other Americans to join British and Canadian forces. In fact, at the time of his death John Ayer's brother Winslow was following in John's footsteps. He was in Canada training to be a pilot in the Royal Canadian Air Force.

Perhaps the words of Winston Churchill in regard to the Battle of Britain best sum up the spirit of John Butler Ayer and his fellow pilots. "Never in the field of human conflict was so much owed by so many to so few."

The author wishes to thank Norman Houle of the Maine Aviation Historical Society for his contributions to this article.



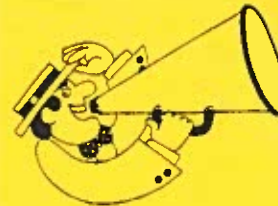
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Book Review

The Great Steel Pier, An Illustrated History of the Old Orchard Ocean Pier

Peter Dow Bachelder

The Breakwater Press
P.O. Box 367, Ellsworth, ME 04605-0367
\$19.95 plus \$3.00 sales tax and postage.



Why in the world is the *Dirigo Flyer* reviewing a book on the Great Steel Pier at Old Orchard Beach? Because in the 1920s and early 1930s, Old Orchard Beach was the hub of aviation activity in Southern Maine.

Noted marine historian Peter Dow Bachelder has included twenty pages of pictures and text of the flying at "the beach" from 1912-1938. Mr. Bachelder tells this story well, and was nice enough to ask your editor to check it for accuracy.

In addition, the story of the pier itself is a most exciting one, including its battles with storms and fires. The story of the attempts to get the pier built will sound very familiar to those of you who have been working on our attempts to build the Maine Air Museum. The idea for the pier was first proposed in 1878, and the pier was finally built in 1898 — twenty years later.

Read this enjoyable book and keep the Museum faith!

Sharing the Wonder of Flight



Aviation education is alive and well in Southern Maine as your editor gives Max Campbell his first lesson in how a helicopter flies on his birthday. (Lynne Campbell Photo)

Welcome New Members!

259. **Macy Lawrence**
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260. **William B. Phelps**
RR 3, Box 863, Fuller Road
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For more information, please call
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✻ In Memorium ✻

Doug Gould 1918 - 1998

We deeply regret the death of member Doug Gould of Bangor on July 29, 1998 at the age of 80.

Ret. Col. Douglas B. Gould was born in Farmington and attended schools there. His flying career began in 1935 at the age of 16 when he soloed in an OX bi-plane.

Upon graduation from high school, he worked as a civilian flying instructor in Waterville, Lewiston and Old Town before joining the U.S. Army Corps in 1944 as an aviation cadet. Upon completion of pilot training, he was commissioned as a Second Lieutenant in the Army Air Force and flew the T-6, A-26 and B-25 aircraft until his release from active duty in 1946.

He became a member of the U.S. Air Force Reserves and the Maine Air National Guard in 1949 as a pilot and flight instructor in the 132nd Fighter Squadron. He became Commander of Airbase of Flight "E" Headquarters, 8132nd Air Base Squadron, and the 101st Supply Squadron during the Korean War.

Upon his retirement in 1973, Colonel Gould had completed more than 28 years of service and exceeded over 15,000 hours of flying time in some 14 different military aircraft, from T-6s to F-101s.

His hobby of building and flying remote controlled airplanes with the R.D. Gulls was his whole life after retirement. He was the Club's Chief Flight Instructor for many years.

Our deepest sympathy goes to his wife and family. He will be sorely missed by all of us for his mischievous smile and his great tales of his flying adventures.

Upcoming MAHS Meetings and Calendar of Events

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.
 September 26 10 a.m. Annual Starliner Open House, Lewiston-Auburn Airport.* (Rain date: Sept. 27th)
 October 4 10 a.m. Foreign Car Oktoberfest, OHTM.
 October 10 9 a.m. MAHS Meeting, TBA.
 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.
 July 24-25, 1999 All Day Great State o' Maine Air Show, BNAS, Brunswick, ME.

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. *We will have a table at these events — volunteers needed!

September Meeting

The September meeting of the MAHS will be held at the International Seaplane Fly-In in Greenville. The meeting will be held at 10 a.m. on Saturday, September 12th at our table at Folsom's Hangar. The business meeting will be held at 9:30 a.m. and the general meeting at 10 a.m.

As at Owls Head, we will have a display there. Please try to volunteer a few hours to help out and increase your enjoyment — this is the year that they will be blessed with some great weather, so come and enjoy yourself. Leo Boyle will present his slide show after the dinner Friday evening at Squaw Mountain, so plan to arrive early and attend the show. Special thanks go to member Frank Woodworth for his help with these arrangements.

Great State o' Maine Air Show

Plan now for the weekend of July 24 and 25, 1999 for the next Great State o' Maine Air Show with the Blue Angels which is tentatively planned for those dates. More details as they become available.

Northeast Aero Historians Meeting

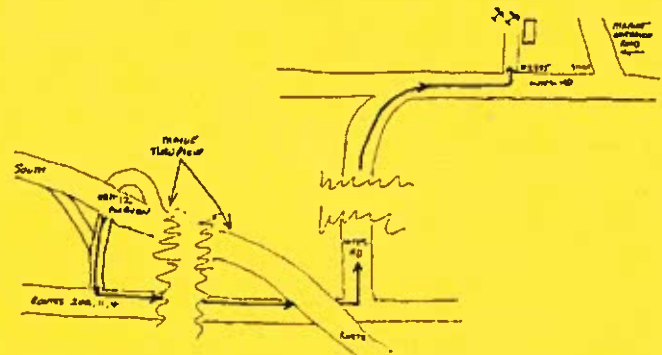
The 1999 Northeast Aero Historians meeting is being planned for mid-October at the Owls Head Transportation Museum and probably the Samoset Resort in Rockport. This is attended by leading aero historians from the Northeast and Canada. We will keep you informed.

Mystery Photo Identified

It appears that the photo of Amelia Earhart in the last issue was taken in Bangor, Maine in 1933 or 1934, and that the other people in the photo were Bangor Hydro officials. More details as they are received.

Annual Starliner Open House

Member Maurice Roundy, owner of the Lockheed Starliners based on the edge of the Lewiston-Auburn Airport, will hold his Starliner Open House on Saturday, September 26th at 9 a.m. Those of you who attended last year's open house will remember what a great time we had there. This year, we hope to have more visiting aircraft fly in and be available for viewing. Invited aircraft include the Collins Foundations' B-17 and B-24, Mike Farrey's Northeast DC-3 (C-47), Grumman Albatross, Navion L-17 and many others. Roland Maheu plans to be there and talk about his exciting aviation career in Maine, and we hope to welcome Carol Niewola, the new manager of the Lewiston-Auburn Airport. Refreshments will be available, MAHS will have a table and display and a fun time for all is at hand. Sunday, September 27th will be the rain date.



Directions to Starliner Place: Take Exit 12 (Auburn) off Maine Turnpike. Turn left onto Routes 202-11-4. Turn left on Hotel Rd. just after turnpike underpass. Up the hill and bear right at intersection. Starliner Place (#2355) is on your left before the store and airport entrance road.

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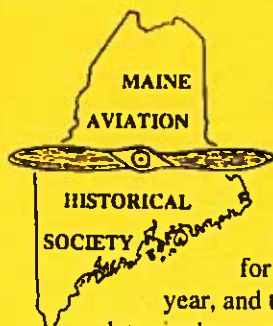
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Supporting	\$100 annual	Newsletter, Patch, Museum Admission, 4 Free Passes
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