

# DIRIGO FLYER

Vol. VIII, No. 7 July 2000

*Newsletter of the Maine Aviation Historical Society*  
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## From Biplanes to Bombers, Part II

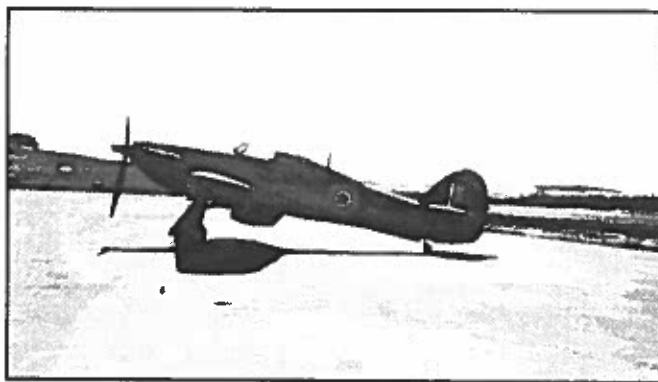
*We are pleased to run the second part of Jules Arel's great story of Houlton aviation. Jules has done a great deal of research and written an informative and interesting history which we are happy to help preserve.*

By Jules J. Arel

In November, CAA engineers arrived at Houlton to determine the most expeditious means of getting American aircraft across the border. At that time, the airport had two crude runways oriented north-south and northeast-southwest. A proposal was made to construct a third runway running east-west to abut a similar east-west runway to be constructed on the Canadian side of the border. Ideally, the airplanes would land on the U.S. side of the runway, then taxi up to the border where Canadian pilots would then fly the airplanes into Canada. Unfortunately, there is a 300-foot hill with a north-south alignment immediately east of the airport, and, although construction of the runway was started on the U.S. side of the border, it was never completed, as time was critical and it was decided it would take too long to overcome such an obstacle. The alternative was towing the aircraft from the airport, 300 yards to U.S. Route 2, then through U.S. and Canadian customs. The aircraft, now manned by Canadian pilots, were flown from the highway to St. John and Halifax for shipment by sea to Europe.

Somehow, the word got out that on Sunday, June 2, 1940, 33 Stinson Model 105 trainers would arrive at the airport. Thousands of people including Canadians jammed the roads leading to the airport. The crush was so great that state police and sheriff's deputies had to be called in to help clear the runways. Amid the wailing of sirens and the clouds of dust raised by police cars as they raced up and down the gravel runways, people spread blankets on the very edges of the runways and sat down to picnic lunches.

Shortly after three in the afternoon a rousing cheer went up as 11 of the Stinsons swooped low over the field, circled and landed. The colorful airplanes continued to straggle in until dark. On Monday morning the remainder of the flight arrived to an almost deserted airport. Overnight, U.S. and Canadian police had succeeded in completely sealing off the airport.



A British Hawker Hurricane Fighter at Houlton Army Air Field in World War II.  
(Jules Arel Photo)

People thronged into Market Square in downtown Houlton to catch a glimpse of and possibly talk to the pilots who had ferried the planes and were now strolling about the square, thoroughly enjoying the attention heaped upon them.

Shortly after dawn on Tuesday morning the job of towing the aircraft across the border began. Using mostly farm tractors, with an occasional truck mixed in, the planes were towed to the customs house. Following a perfunctory customs check, the planes were towed clear of the buildings, and three flights of eight aircraft took off in the early morning from the road leading to Woodstock, New Brunswick. The final flight of nine planes was airborne by noon.

They were shipped from Moncton, N.B. and Halifax, N.S. to France, to be used as trainers and artillery spotters. On June 12, 1940, the first of 20 Curtiss SBC-4 "Helldiver" divebombers, capable of speeds of 200 mph and equipped with radios and machine guns, arrived from Buffalo, N.Y. The pilots were mostly Army and Navy reserve pilots with a few airline pilots working under contract to the government. This time the planes were towed through U.S. and Canadian customs to an improvised strip on the Canadian side of the border and flown to Halifax for shipment. This being a tedious and inefficient way of diverting aircraft to the Allies, the Neutrality Act was

*"Houlton," continued on page 3*

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Monthly meetings  
are held at 10 a.m.  
on the second Saturday  
of each month  
at various locations.

See schedule for details.

## MAINE AVIATION HISTORICAL SOCIETY

### President's Report

June 10, 2000

**Old Business.** First, I would like to thank all our members who worked hard to make the MAHS presence at the ANG Air Show a positive one. Special thanks go to Mike Cornett for his help in the movement and set up of the museum and display, the grills and returning the equipment and books after the event, along with cleaning and painting, etc. at the museum. Rob Rohr did a great job helping to bring aircraft to the event and cooking at the BBQ later. Bill and Cathy Cook did a great job of providing uniforms and living history for the people at the show. John Garbinski and Ed Armstrong worked hard to get the books ready in time for the event. John Miller was kind enough to lend some of his personal items for display which helped make our presentation that much nicer. Don Martin donated shirts and helped set up and work hard to get the museum building ready for the event. Al Cormier, Leo Boyle, Cliff Haines, Peter Marino, Peter Noddin, Les Shaw, Mike Shaw, Dick Johnson and many others helped at the display in the hangar and on the ramp.

Our display was interesting and we had many useful contacts. Carl was all over the area handing out flyers and talking to people about the museum. Overall we had excellent press and good write-ups in the *Bangor Daily News*.

Since that time we have had two nice articles in the *Bangor Daily News* about the MAHS and the Young Eagles program. Each time our name is in print like that is a positive reinforcement of our place in the community and gives us more exposure. The museum is coming together, slowly, and with more manpower than money at this time, but it is moving ahead.

One of the major points which has been discussed and will be discussed more is the need to get more folks working on the building in a planned manner. We have jobs for all people no matter what kind of talents you have, so don't be shy.

**New Business.** We need to elect some officers to the Board of Directors. According to our current by-laws, they need to be approved by the membership at a public meeting. In July we will be asking you to approve some new directors. These people will be elected to hold office until the regular election in December, at which time they can run again if they so choose. Other positions will be appointed or filled after the new officers are sitting on the Board.

**Next Board Meeting.** There will be a meeting of the Board of Directors at 9 a.m. July 8, 2000 at the Maine Air Museum in Bangor. All directors should make every effort to attend.



MAHS Member  
Charles E. Stickney Jr.  
at the Bangor Air Show  
in May in his NAA T-28.  
(Jim Chichetto Photo)

**Congratulations!** The winner of the raffle for the ride in Herman Bayerdorffer's NAA SNJ is . . . Tony Moukas of 172 Patterson Road, Hampden, Maine 04444. We hope Tony enjoys his ride.

*"Houlton," continued from page 1*

amended in July 1940 to allow U.S. merchant ships to haul cargo to the Allies while U.S. aircraft were allowed to be flown directly into Canada.

Early in 1940, residents noticed that along with the ferrying of aircraft, editorials in the local paper began warning citizens to be on guard for fifth columnists. Following the announcement that \$325,000 had been appropriated by the government for airport expansion, construction at the airport became almost frantic, with construction crews working 24 hours a day. Included in the expansion was the installation of a radio beacon and increased air service by Boston & Maine Airways. Houlton experienced a drastic housing shortage as hundreds of workers began drifting into town in an effort to cash in on the good paying jobs. Consequently a building boom developed, with \$180,000 earmarked for home construction. Houlton had never had it so good.

By January 1941, the work at the airport became the largest dirt-moving job in the state, with 970,000 cubic yards moved. In June, the Civil Aeronautics Administration (CAA) began construction on an "Airways Communications Station," which included air-ground radios, teletype equipment, and when completed, a staff of five specialists. In late summer rumors began to circulate that the military was considering use of the Houlton airport as a base for ferrying four-engine bombers destined for England. The War Department announced, on August 13th, that it had purchased the airport for one dollar. It would spend over \$9 million on enlarging and improving the field, and as soon as the necessary quarters could be constructed, 715 military personnel would be assigned to what would become known as Houlton Army Air Field.

By December 7, 1941, 1,500 men, working with the help of almost 200 pieces of earth moving equipment, labored 24 hours a day in an effort to complete what everyone believed would be a critical air field in the coming war effort. By mid-December, 40 buildings were nearly complete. With the exception of the hospital area, each building had its own steam heating system. The interiors were finished in Celotex and beaverboard with hard pine floors. The aircraft parking area could accommodate 60 to 100 four-engine bombers. Water was supplied by a 200,000 gallon reservoir which was constructed on the hillside

east of the field. A railroad spur was constructed to haul thousands of tons of coal, food and the other supplies needed to maintain a military population that would eventually reach almost 3,000 people.

The military phase of the airport began on October 1, 1941, when Capt. Berthier C. Riley, Jr. assumed command of Houlton Army Air Field. In November, the 314th Materiel Squadron was established. Its mission was to expedite the completion of the barracks and other buildings needed to house the men of the 20th and 58th Ferry Squadrons, due to arrive in the next several months. The winter of 1941-42 was one of the coldest in years, with temperatures routinely falling to 40 degrees below zero. Yet, work continued unabated in the extremely harsh conditions, no doubt spurred on by the new base commander, Major Albert C. Holburn, whose stated goal was, "We are going to make this the best air base with the best operational facilities in the whole Air Force."

The tremendous influx of workers and military personnel was good news for the transportation industry, especially Northeast Airlines, which had recently been formed from the old Boston & Maine Airways. Northeast Airlines began serving Houlton with its new 24-passenger Douglas DC-3. The military granted Northeast permission to operate a terminal on the west side of the airport, adjacent to the NYA training center.

With the onset of war, the townspeople adjusted rapidly, even eagerly, to the wail of air raid sirens and civil defense training. There was no lack of volunteers to man the newly erected aircraft ground observer post on the "B" road. It was the duty of the observers, working in shifts, 24 hours a day, to report all aircraft sightings to the base. In January 1942, over 160 civilian jobs needed to be filled: clerks, typists, plumbers and guards. The war proved to be a financial bonanza to this isolated agrarian community.

By March, more than 700 men were stationed at Houlton, with more coming every day. In an effort to provide these men with a place to socialize and relax (other than at beer halls), a USO, under the direction of William Dohoney, was opened on the third floor of the Fogg Block on Main Street. It consisted of 13 rooms divided into reading rooms, game rooms, a lounge,

*"Houlton," continued on page 4*

### Roll Up Those Sleeves — It's Party Time!

There will be a volunteer work party at the museum just about every Saturday from now until late fall — and you're invited! We need your help to clean, paint and repair the displays and building and help with aircraft restoration. Can you think of a better way to spend a summer Saturday? Call Al Cormier at 207-941-6757 or 1-877-280-MAHS, or Jim Chichetto at 207-269-3281.



## Aerobat Aviation Gallery

LAWRENCE E. NICKERSON  
2107 CARMEL ROAD NORTH  
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"Houlton," continued from page 3

and a large ballroom. The ballroom was the center of attraction for the men and the local girls, because in this era of the big bands, the men at the base had formed an excellent dance band which was in constant demand at dances throughout the area.

Lt. Col. James A. Ellison replaced Maj. Holburn as base commander in May 1942. One week after assuming command, Col. Ellison was involved in the investigation of the airfield's first fatal aircraft accident. A C-40, twin-engine transport crashed at Howe Brook while attempting a landing during a heavy rainstorm. All six crew members aboard died in the crash.

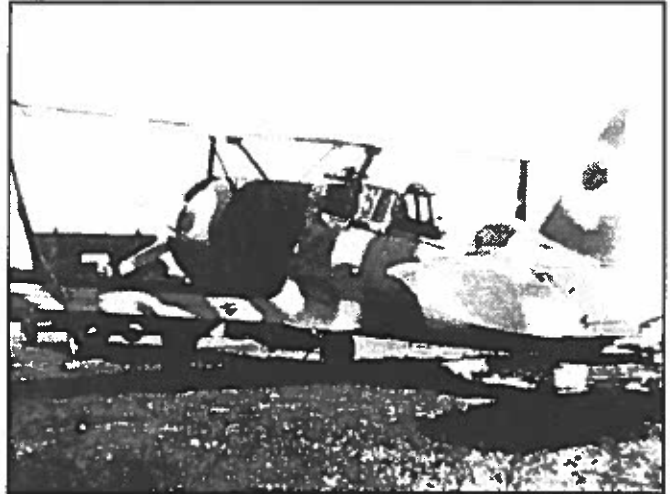
The Royal Air Force established a ferry command at Houlton Army Air Field on June 26, under the command of Squadron Leader B.V.S. Smith. RAF and RCAF aircraft being ferried to Europe were service-checked by Army Air Corp personnel, then flight checked by RAF/RCAF pilots and cleared by Army Air Corp operations. The first plane to be ferried by this unit was a B-24 bomber, which was flown by a "free" French pilot and a Polish copilot. This was the first of hundreds of flights that would utilize nationals from European countries overrun by Hitler's armies.

The chairman of the Special Committee Investigating the National Defense Program, Senator Harry S Truman, accompanied by Maine's Senator Owen Brewster, arrived in August to inspect Houlton Army Air Field. Their inspection was followed by another conducted by the Army's Inspector General. All agreed the base's overall operation was excellent.

Thursday, September 3, 1942, a clear warm day, found the potato harvest in full swing. In downtown Houlton, people were busy shopping in anticipation of the upcoming Labor Day weekend, which promised to be unusually warm and ideal for one last weekend party at the many lakeside cottages at Drews and Nickerson lakes. Most people were becoming used to the increasing flying activity at the base. But this morning the shoppers noticed an unusually loud roar which increased rapidly as a military trainer, known as a T-6, Harvard, roared over the town square in an inverted position not more than a hundred feet above the trees. As it came over the square it rolled upright, climbed straight up, looped, and dove for the square, which by this time had filled with people. Flight Lieutenant Frederick Guyotte, stationed at the RCAF base at Moncton, New Brunswick, had decided to demonstrate his flying skill to his mother and grandmother who lived in Houlton. After a spectacular 30-minute performance, Lt. Guyotte headed east to Moncton. Unfortunately, some spoilsport reported the incident. Rumor had it that Lt. Guyotte was grounded for a month.

The second fatal accident at Houlton occurred on December 5, 1942, when Pilot Officer George N. Harrison of the Royal New Zealand Air Force, flying a RCAF Lockheed Hudson bomber, crashed while attempting to land in gusty crosswinds. Realizing he was drifting off the side of the runway, he pulled up too rapidly causing the aircraft to stall. It crashed in a wooded area on the west side of the airfield. Harrison and three other crew members died in the subsequent explosion and fire.

The busiest year for the base proved to be 1943. The new year was accompanied by a bitter cold wave, with temperatures



Another ex-U.S. Navy Curtiss SBC-4 at Houlton about to be towed across the border to Woodstock, New Brunswick, Canada. (Norm Houle Collection)

well below zero. The weather, in conjunction with a sense of urgency for mechanics to work as rapidly as possible to prepare aircraft for the long flight to Labrador, occasionally contributed to mishaps. One such instance occurred when a B-17, which had been giving mechanics a lot of problems, was finally believed to be ready. It required only a final run-up of the engines. With the B-17 in front of the hangar, the mechanic locked the brakes while all four engines were run up to full power. Intent on watching the engine gauges, the mechanic reached down and accidentally retracted the landing gear. The big bomber settled on the apron with all engines at full power. It took several weeks to replace the engines and send it on its way to Europe.

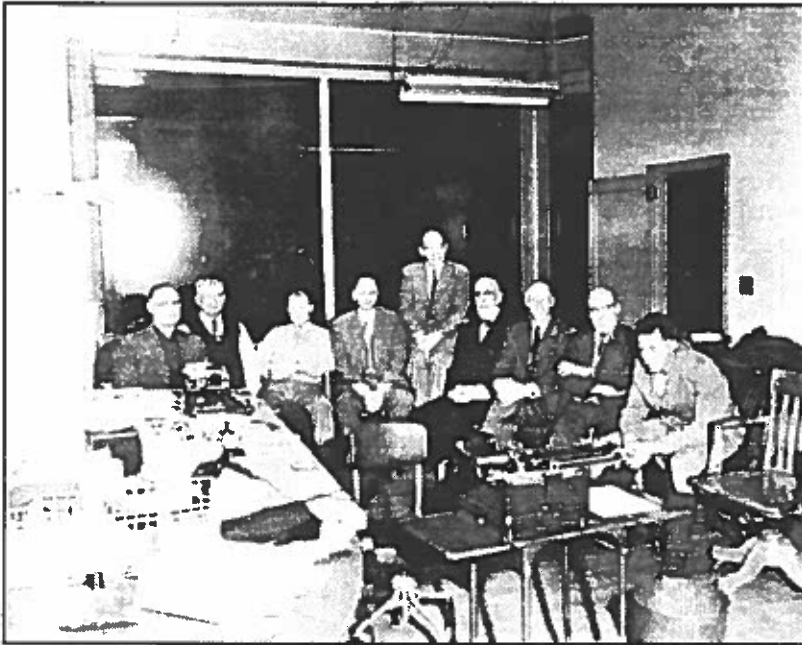
The winters in Houlton could only be described as severe. Trying to preheat aircraft in temperatures as low as 30 and 40 degrees below zero required dedication, patience and care against the ever present danger of frostbite. Even the large hangars with their huge boilers were unable to maintain temperatures much above 40 degrees, and if the hangar doors had to be opened, it took hours to reheat the hangars. With conditions very similar to those found in Alaska and the Arctic, the Army decided to put the cold weather to use by establishing the 378th Arctic Service Group/Squadron, whose mission was to train troops in skiing and sled dog handling for possible use in Alaska. Consequently, a large kennel of malamutes was started. Training included trips to Mt. Katahdin for mountain climbing in ice and snow conditions.

As spring arrived so did the aircraft: B-17s, B-24s, P-38s, along with RAF Lancaster and Mosquito bombers, Spitfire and Hurricane fighters, and a wide variety of transports and trainers. During the summer months flights began at 4 a.m.

Pilots started their takeoffs one after another until a formation had formed either for training for those newly arrived or for the long flight to Gander and Goose Bay for those who had completed training and were on their way to Europe.

Mess Sergeant Victor Dupleshin recalled, "It was not uncommon for the five kitchens, which were open 24 hours a day, to serve 10,000 to 12,000 meals a day. The Army allowed

## Mystery Photo of the Month



A Bangor-area "Gathering of Eagles" was held in the office of the Bangor Commercial, about 1954.

How many of these greats can you name? The winner (the first with the most) wins a copy of John Garbinski's book, The United States Air Force in Maine, a \$20 value.

Send entries to:

MAHS Photo  
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*"Houlton," continued from page 4*

67 cents per meal per person. Unused funds were returned to headquarters at the end of the quarter. In order to avoid having to return the surplus funds and risk having our ration allowance cut for the next quarter, we usually spent any surplus on a huge beer bust. On one occasion the mess officer, Major Marchetti, and I drove to Eastport and bought 800 pounds of lobster at 30 cents a pound, and on the way back we stopped at a beer joint on the "B" road and bought cases of beer. What a party that was.

Except for the harsh winters, being stationed at Houlton was not a bad duty assignment. The people of the county readily accepted and befriended the servicemen at the base. Most of the servicemen spent their leisure time lounging at the USO, attending dances and courting the young ladies of the area. The base commander became concerned his troops might be enjoying too much of the "good life," so, in an effort to restore their enthusiasm for the fine points of soldiering, he established a bivouac area at Pleasant Lake, 25 miles southwest of Houlton. Every week a different detail of men was selected to march the 25 miles to the area, spend the week living in tents, conducting field problems, and living with black flies, mosquitoes, deer flies and moose flies. At the end of the week they marched the 25 miles back to Houlton with all their combat gear on their backs.

In the fall of 1942 a special "Buy a Bomber" campaign was started throughout Aroostook County. By July 1943, folks in the county had raised over \$420,000. The money was used to buy a B-25 Mitchell bomber, which was christened, "Aroostook—Spirit of Maine." Unfortunately, nothing is known of the "Aroostook's" subsequent record or fate.

Lt. Col. Hugh R. Gilchrist succeeded Col. James A. Ellison as base commander in October 1943. Gilchrist was fated to become the last base commander, as most of the flying activity

was now centered at Bangor and Presque Isle, where large, spacious bases with better approaches had been constructed. In January 1944, the office of Maine's Senator Brewster released a report confirming that the War Department had decided to curtail operations at Houlton. Except for the establishment of a Prisoner of War camp at the base, flying activity quickly diminished. Troops began to be shipped out in ever greater numbers, as evidenced by Northeast Airlines passenger figures for July-August 1944, when over 700 passengers enplaned at Houlton. By V-E day the base consisted mostly of military police guarding the POWs and a small RCAF ferry squadron. The hundreds of airplanes seen every day were replaced with an occasional straggler that landed at Houlton en route to Presque Isle because of mechanical problems or fuel shortage.

By the end of 1945, most of the 180 buildings at the base were vacant. The USO closed its doors on May 1, 1946. Many ideas were proposed on how Houlton Army Air Field might be utilized. Everything from a VA hospital to a college to a vocational school—all to no avail. The base was officially declared surplus in June 1946. The town was granted an interim permit to use the base as its municipal airport, and by the end of the year, Town Manager Woodbury Brackett accepted Houlton Army Air Field from the government for the price of one dollar. The government had spent an estimated \$9 million in its development.

Since World War II, the airport has slowly deteriorated. Northeast Airlines suspended operations for lack of passengers, and numerous charter and regional airlines have come and gone. The only remaining federal facility, the Federal Aviation Administration Flight Service Station, was closed in 1987. No doubt the airport will continue to exist, but its glory days are gone forever.

## The United States Air Force in Maine Progeny of the Cold War

By Member John C. Garbinski

It is with great pride that your society announces the publication of its first book (more are in the wings). John spins a fascinating tale of how, from the early days of Godfrey Field before World War II, to the end of the Cold War, the United States Air Force maintained a presence in the state of Maine. John has given us an historical guide to the U.S.A.F. installations and the units assigned to Maine.

He tells us of the major installations like Dow, Presque Isle and Loring Air Force Bases, as well as the lesser known ones like Houlton Army Air Field and Caribou Air Station. He also includes the Air Defense installations like the Nike and Bomarc missile sites and the Snark missiles, as well as the units responsible for them.

Unit histories of the 42nd and 397th Bomb Wings, the 4038th Strategic Wing and all of the fighter, bomber, tanker and missile squadrons in Maine are included. John also includes the secret history of the 3080th Aviation Depot Group at Caribou. Well illustrated and a fascinating read make this a must book for anyone interested in Maine's rich aviation heritage.

NOW AVAILABLE • NOW AVAILABLE

The Maine Aviation Historical Society's First Book  
by Member

JOHN C. GARBINSKI

## The United States Air Force in Maine Progeny of the Cold War

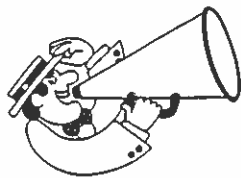
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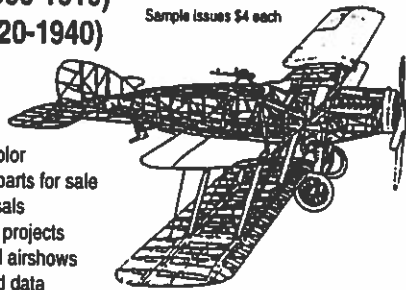
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## One Fantastic Weekend: Two Night Igor Sikorsky Seminar at Bradford Camps

Members Igor I. Sikorsky Jr. and Igor I. Sikorsky III are hosting a weekend seminar at the latter's Bradford Camps in Ashland, Maine on August 18-20.

The subject will be the personal life and early careers of Igor I. Sikorsky, including his many experiences flying helicopters and large amphibian craft as well as the world's first multi-engine airplane.

This seminar will be limited to about 20 guests, so please answer their ad (*see below*) as soon as possible if you are interested. We hope to see you there!

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## Upcoming MAHS Meetings and Calendar of Events

- June 30-July 2 ..... All Day ..... Maine Chapter Antique Airplane Association Fly-In, OHTM.  
 July 8 ..... 8 a.m. .... Spurwink Farm Fly-In Breakfast, Cape Elizabeth. FMI: 207-839-6630.  
 July 8 ..... 10 a.m. .... MAHS Meeting, Maine Air Museum, Bangor.  
 July 26-Aug. 1 ..... All Day ..... Oshkosh Air Show, Oshkosh, WI.  
 August 5-6 ..... 10 a.m. .... Transportation Spectacular and Aerobatic Show, Benjamin's GeeBee, OHTM.  
 August 5-6 ..... All Day ..... EAA Chapter 736 Fly-In, Norridgewock. FMI: 207-634-2156.  
 August 12 ..... 10 a.m. .... MAHS Meeting, TBA.  
 August 12 ..... All Day ..... EAA Chapter 87 Fly-In, Merrymeeting Field, Bowdoinham.  
 August 12-13 ..... All Day ..... Great New England Air Show, Westover ARB, MA. Thunderbirds.  
 August 18-20 ..... All Day ..... Igor I. Sikorsky Seminar, Bradford Camps, Ashland, ME (see ad)  
 August 19-20 ..... All Day ..... Bowman Field Fly-In, East Livermore.  
 Sept. 2-3 ..... All Day ..... Radial Round-Up, Bethel. FMI: 207-824-4321.  
 Sept. 9-10 ..... All Day ..... Greenville Seaplane Fly-In, Greenville, Maine.  
 Sept. 30-Oct. 1 ..... All Day ..... 75th F. S. Reunion, Bangor, Maine.  
 Fall 2000 ..... All Day ..... Air Force Association Cold War Symposium.  
 October 14 ..... 10 a.m. .... MAHS Meeting, TBA.  
 November 11 ..... 10 a.m. .... MAHS Meeting, TBA.  
 Nov. 2000 ..... All Day ..... Cole's Land Transportation Museum Reunion.  
 December 9 ..... 10 a.m. .... MAHS Meeting, TBA.

Meeting sites are flexible. Call Scott Grant at 207-775-3404 if you have any ideas or can be of help.

### Welcome New Members . . .

359. **Tom Paiment** (*General Aviation*)  
 22 Jakes Run ..... e-mail: paiment@zwi.net  
 Woolwich, ME 04579 ..... 207-443-3201
360. **John Sowles** (*Old Planes*)  
 2 Walnut Hill Road  
 No. Yarmouth, ME 04097 ..... 207-846-4714
361. **Todd Lidback** (*CF II*)  
 184 Adams Road ..... e-mail: lidback@javanet.com  
 Bowdoin, ME 04287 ..... 207-797-0960
362. **James Dunphy**  
 RFD 1, Box 235, Bennoch Road  
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366. **Leon F. Higgins II**  
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- 367S. **James Russell Wiggins**  
 HCR 64, Box 506  
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368. **John Nadeau** (*Old Acton Airfield*)  
 266 Washington Street  
 Arlington, MA 02474 ..... 781-648-2610

### . . . And Welcome Back to:

236. **Michael A. Clark**  
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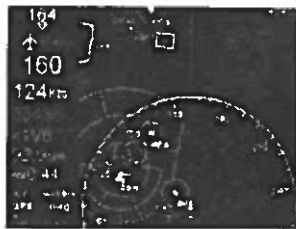
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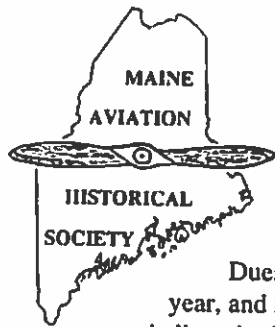
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Maine Aviation Historical Society  
P.O. Box 2641  
Bangor, ME 04402

**July Meeting**  
Saturday, July 8, 2000  
10 a.m.  
Maine Air Museum Building  
Bangor, Maine