



DIRIGO FLYER

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Newsletter of the Maine Aviation Historical Society
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The British Are Coming! **The History of the U.S. Naval Air Station, Brunswick, Maine — Part IV**

The following U.S. Navy narrative outlines the use of the Brunswick Naval Air Station from its beginning.

— Leo Boyle, Editor

With the arrival of three additional 63-foot aircraft rescue boats and crews, NAAF Casco Bay assumed an important place in their command. Due to the increase in personnel it became necessary for Brunswick to take over the operation of the mess and to make use of the fine barracks formerly occupied by the Fleet Officers' Torpedo School. In addition, work progressed on the renovation of other buildings on the base to be used as officers' quarters and considerable effort was put forth toward the establishment of an adequate maintenance depot for the fleet of seven aircraft rescue boats now attached to this command.

On the night of October 27, 1944 a night air/sea rescue drill was held. Following an IFF signal, one of VJ15's TBFs dropped a float light. Using the fighter director radar, VJ's ready plane was vectored to the scene and the AVR's based at Boothbay Harbor and Rockland, Maine were dispatched. AVR C-26597 from Boothbay arrived on the scene approximately twenty minutes after departure. However, communication difficulties made it impossible for the boats to communicate with the plane or the plane with any of our bases. This drill further substantiates the previous conclusions that communications play a most important part in any air/sea rescue program.

Considerable activity occurred on the Georgetown Island Rocket Projectile range during the month of October 1944. VT83 from NAAF Ayer, VT48 from NAS Squantum and VT49 from NAAF Sanford used the range extensively during this period. One of the AVRs patrolled the seaward side of the range to keep out stray fishing vessels while the Ordnance Department "weasels" did a fine job getting around the range through and over the marshes.

Bad weather with fog and high winds again curtailed flight operations at the Maine Air Stations. Abundant rains raised the low water table to satisfactory levels and a second hurricane

threat was averted when the storm center veered out to sea. This bad weather did not prevent a considerable exodus of units from this command as RN 1846 and 1848 left Brunswick. AG 27 left Sanford and VOF 3 departed from Rockland. These plus the CASU Unit at Rockland brought the total up to 119 officers and 246 men leaving during this period.

The end of November 1944 brought a record high wind which rocked the Maine Air Stations with its 70 knot gusts. Previous warning prevented any serious damage, although many trees were blown down and wires broken. Communications suffered damage between Brunswick and the facilities but was quickly repaired. Two substantial snowfalls occurred during the month but following rains prevented any plowing difficulties.

At Brunswick work was started on the installation of the high intensity approach and runway lights for low visibility operation, and the addition of the gate house for the Labor Board and Civilian Personnel Officer was completed. For the most, public works efforts were toward catching up on maintenance and winterizing the existing buildings.

The activity on the Rocket Projectile range increased to such an extent that it was found necessary to extend the hours of use to include from 0800 to 1700 and to seek possible locations for an additional range. NOLF Portsmouth, New Hampshire was the scene of an emergency night landing by an Army B-24. Alertness and prompt action by the C.A.P. guard in turning on runway lights allowed the lost airplane an opportunity to come in when most fields in the area were closed by fog and low visibility.

In spite of the severe wind, snow and rain storms, contact and instrument conditions prevailed to 80% during November

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

See calendar for details.

Maine Aviation Historical Society

Monthly Meeting Notes • July 13, 2002

Special guest Chuck McClead, former 75th, 76th FIS, Maine Air Guard and I'm sure many other Air Force assignments. As the members who were part of our marathon crash hikes in June of last year know, Chuck's and Capt. D.H. Roe's F-101 crash was the first site we visited. More on this in the crash report.

We will be contacting the Bangor City Hall code people on Monday to come and see if we pass the inspection to get the Code of Occupancy Certificate as Les hopes to be able to open as a "Working on the Displays" museum. It will *not* be the Grand Opening, as that will be held when we are finished with this year's displays. As we have many items that can grow legs and walk out the door, we will need both watchers and explainers of what we are about and are trying to do for and about Maine aviation history. Our hours to be open will be: Saturdays and Sundays, 10 a.m. until 2 p.m. As I have taken on the job as the Coordinator of Volunteers, I can't and won't be able to do the job by myself. So let me know if you can volunteer to work at the times above. You can choose any time or day to help out.

Les welcomed the members to the July meeting, thanking them for coming.

Treasurer's Report: Joe Quinn (as Joe was at GE's Open House, Les read his paper.) We have around \$4000 in the bank, which is going fast for materials for making the displays.

Recording Secretary's Report: Bill Townsend. Bill is taking care of the web site and he reported that he had updated it and how many hits it has had.

Membership: Leo Boyle. We have 168 paid members. We need more, so please help and talk to people about what we are doing and add to our membership.

Museum: Thanks to you all! You know that you volunteers have helped us to get to this point, so don't forget to come and help us to continue growing. Jim Chichetto talked about what the display people have and are doing. Starting with Maine's early aviation years, through the Civil War to today's working airports, and how we are going to show that.

Fundraising: Ed Armstrong. Les told the members about the Walk of Fame and how we will use this to help raise money for us.

Physical Plant: Al Cormier. Al has been working on the duct work and has installed the duct work smoke detector in it and is working with the installers to finish the ducts. He hopes to complete it before fall.

"Report" continued on page 5

(l to r)
 Carl Sederquist;
 Laurie Lennon,
 donor's rep;
 Les Shaw;
 Cathy and Bill Cook
 in Bar Harbor
 to accept the
 Lancaster painting.
 (Mike Cornett Photo)



"BNAS," continued from page 1

and training flights amounted to 1086 hours. On November 13, Lt. Lyford, USCGR, arrived with JRF and Coast Guard crew to establish an air/sea rescue task unit at this command. November 27th saw the arrival of Lt. Comdr. D. Morell, USCG, who reported for permanent duty as Air/Sea Rescue Task Unit Commander. A CG PB5A with suitable pilots and crew arrived at this time to take over the task of air/sea ground service and rescue activity.

Strange unseasonable weather was the rule rather than the exception during the month of December 1944. Frequent snowfalls turning to sleet and rain turned roads and runways into icy thoroughfares. Until Wednesday night, December 27th, no real winter snow appeared although frequently ice and slush caused much difficulty in clearing the runways. The December 27th storm followed by high winds on the 28th blew the eight inch snowfall into considerable drifts, but the excellent snow removal equipment soon had the runways plowed and the fields open.

Sunday, December 31st brought forth the station's first real test of air/sea rescue equipment. At 0749 the standby JRF was dispatched on a search mission in the vicinity of Mt. Desert Rock by Comdr. Northern Group on a report of an SSS message picked up by Yarmouth NS radio. A futile search of more than an hour had a negative result and the JRF returned to Brunswick at 0910. Subsequently at 1155 the JRF was again dispatched to the scene on a report of bodies and floating debris. Aircraft rescue boats from Rockland and Boothbay Harbor were sent to the scene at full emergency power and an AVR from Casco Bay was dispatched to stand by for the above two boats. At 1405 AVR from Rockland, Maine arrived at the scene and picked up three survivors, damaging her hull due to engine failure and rough seas. A fishing vessel, the Notre Dame, near the scene was directed to the area by the JRF, and picked up two other survivors. All five were later transferred to the other AVR from Boothbay Harbor and speeded to the Rockland Coast Guard Repair Base where they received immediate medical treatment. Other planes engaging in this search were two PV-Is from Hedron 9-1 and one PB5A from VJ-15 located at NAS Brunswick.

Work continued on the installation of the approach lighting system for the E-W runway, and the auxiliary water supply for fire protection neared completion. The old metal hangar was moved from the south side of the field over to the incinerator area to be used as a storehouse for salvageable material. Considerable progress was made in the dismantling of the many stricken off F4Us which had become an eyesore during the past months. The public works maintenance crew completed the winterizing of the buildings and put the finishing touches on the snow removal equipment.

In spite of unseasonable weather, flying conditions remained at a high level with 86% contact conditions during December 1944.

The new year started off with one of the most severe rainstorms so far experienced. Temperatures rose nearly 40 degrees in 24 hours and 3/4 inch of rain fell. This coupled with a terrific warm wind reaching 50 knots quickly took care of the snow removal problems. As if to make up for this strange unseasonable start, the rest of the month brought many snowstorms amounting to 25 inches and a period of prolonged cold lasting for over a week with a minimum temperature of -50 degrees. In every case the snow removal equipment proved adequate and the runways were promptly cleared for traffic.

Work was finished on the extension to the transmitter building and a start was made on the enclosure of the Fighter Director Unit. The medical facilities were rounded out by the completion of the new morgue building, and a great improvement in the laundry service resulted from the completion of the water softening process for the laundry and powerhouse.

Among the high-ranking officers visiting the station during January was Capt. V.D. Herbster, USN, Ret., Sub Commander Northern Air/Sea Rescue Group; Capt. Imlay, USCG Air/Sea Rescue Officer for ComFairSea/con; Capt. Miller, USN, and Capt. McQuiston, USNR, from the Bureau of Aeronautics.

A working inspection of NAS Brunswick by Commander Naval Air Bases and staff was made on Monday, March 12, 1945. Various department heads met with the staff to discuss departmental problems, after which the staff met with the Commanding Officer to summarize results of the inspections. Among other high ranking officers visiting the station during this period were Commodore Rowe, USN, ComFairQuonset; Capt. Adams, USN; Comdr. Fielder, USN, ConUtWing, USA Fleet; Comdr. Shards, USN, Operations Officer for ComFairQuonset, and Lt. Col. Saville, USA.

There were eleven alerts for the Air/Sea Rescue Task Unit during March 1945, which necessitated the dispatching of plane and boats. A busy night for both the air/sea rescue outfit and station operations occurred on Saturday, March 24th, when two ordnance men were lost at sea off the Georgetown Island Rocket Range and a PV landed short on runway 34. Fortunately, the pilot and crew of the plane emerged unscathed but despite an all-night search by the Air/Sea Rescue PBY, three AVRs and numerous Coast Guard and fishing vessels, no trace was seen of the two men and the "weasel" in which they were lost.

Normal weather returned during the month of April here in Maine with an average mean temperature of 46.6 degrees. Nearly five inches of rain fell during this period which materially aided the ever-increasing soil conservation program. By now it appears that grass will grow at BNAS and the ever present dust is finally getting under control. A rigid enforcement of "keep off the grass" signs for both personnel and vehicles seems to be bringing good results.

"BNAS," continued on page 4

Another Mystery Photo from the MAHS Collection



MAHS member Norm Houle (*center*) Brewer Airport Flight Instructor and two members of the Dow Field SAC Aero Club and their L-2 Taylorcraft in 1953. Can anyone identify the two others in the photo? (*Norm Houle Photo*)

"BNAS," continued from page 3

Tragedy struck the broad scope of this command when at approximately 1215 on April 23, the USS Eagle (PE 56) was destroyed by explosions of unknown origin while cruising along a few miles SW of the Portland recognition vessel. Prompt action by the USS Selfridge (DD 357) which arrived on the scene in 30 minutes saved one officer and twelve men. Those lucky thirteen are the sole survivors of this hard-working little vessel which aided so materially in the training of both Royal Navy and American flyers. For the past ten months she had been engaged in towing all types of targets for bombing and strafing training by the planes from Brunswick, Lewiston, and Sanford.

Among the high-ranking officers visiting this station during the past month were Rear Admiral Schoffel, USN; Rear Admiral Bryant, USN; Commo. Wyatt, ComNsrAirBase IND; Capt. Day, ComFairWing 9; Capt. Dixie Keifer, USN, presently ComNavAirBases IND; Capt. True, USN; Capt. Imlay, USCG; Wing Comdr. Hervey, RCAF; and Lt. Comdr. Lance, USCGR. Capt. Imlay and group inspected the Air/Sea Rescue Task Unit and its newly arranged office which now contains three radio receivers, special phones and remote control transmitters to keep in close touch with all air/sea rescue activities from this central location.



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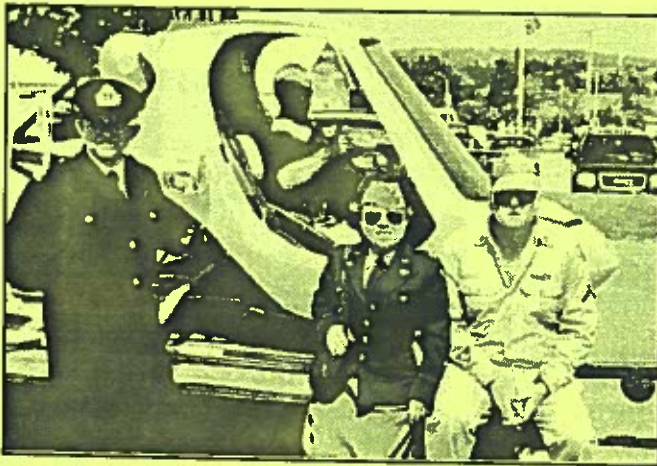
Scorpion Helicopter



Jean-Guy Paquet, builder of the Scorpion helicopter, checks the progress of our restoration. *(Mike Cornett Photos)*



The Scorpion helicopter ready to ride in the 4th of July parade.

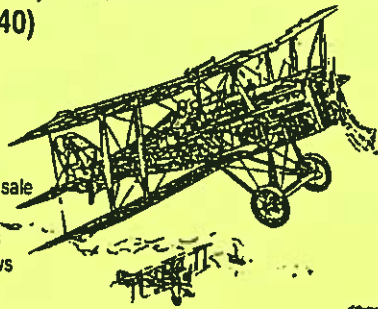


Bill Cook in a Fleet Air Arm uniform, Cathy Cook and Mike Cornett in Air Corps uniforms, and Carl Sederquist gives the thumbs up from the cockpit.

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- August 10-11 10 a.m.Transportation Spectacular and Aerobatic Air Show, Owls Head Transportation Museum
- Sept. 7-8 All DayInternational Seaplane Fly-In, Greenville, Maine
- Sept. 14 10 a.m.MAHS Meeting, Maine Air Museum, Bangor, Maine
- October 12 10 a.m.MAHS Meeting, Maine Air Museum, Bangor, Maine
- October 18-20 All DayNortheast Aero Historians Meeting, Cradle of Aviation Museum, Garden City, NY

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Got E-Mail?

Don't forget to send us your e-mail address if you want it listed in the *Dirigo Flyer*. It's a great way to keep in touch with other members, share information quickly and stay current on aviation issues and happenings.

Come Join Us!

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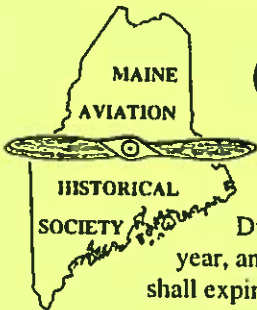
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August Meeting

Saturday, August 10, 2002
10 a.m.

Maine Air Museum
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