



# Dirigo Flyer

Newsletter of the Maine Aviation Historical Society

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## The Great Meltdown

by  
David H. Bergquist

News that Americans hungered for came on May 8th, 1945, when President Harry Truman announced that Nazi Germany had unconditionally surrendered to Allied Forces the day before. In less than three weeks, war-weary bombers appeared in the skies over Bangor on their way home through Dow Field. The first group of twenty homebound bombers landed on Friday, May 25th, refueled after their 1,600 mile flight from Greenland, and left for Bradley Field in Connecticut. Each bomber carried its flight crew and as many of the ground crew, usually 10-12 "anxious to get home soldiers," as was safe. Once at Bradley, the Army Air Forces issued each airman a 30-day furlough while telling each to prepare for duty in the Pacific. The AAF then flew many of the bombers to various depots where they planned to retrofit them for Pacific war duty; the war with Japan raged on.

The parade of B-17 and B-24 bombers through the Air Transport Command base went on for more than a month. By the end of June, nearly six thousand airmen and their aircraft had flown through Bangor. This bustle of activity gave the Signal Corps detachment at Dow a photo opportunity resulting in pictures which are preserved for posterity by the Bangor Public Library. Some of the planes already had earned war renown. Among these were the *Nine-O-Nine* B-17 which flew 140 bombing missions over the ETO without a casualty, killed or wounded. The *5 Grand*, another photographed B-17, was the 5,000th Seattle-built Boeing and bore the signatures in black and red ink of everyone who had a part in its manufacture there.



*5 Grand and crew at Dow Field, June 14, 1945*

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The Maine Air Museum is located at  
98 Maine Avenue adjacent to  
Bangor International Airport

## **Coming Event – The Blue Angels**



By Bob Umberger:

It's amazing that later in 2017, eight years will have passed since the last two Navy P-3 Orions departed Brunswick NAS for the very last time, and the long standing Naval facility began transition to a civilian airport and industrial park, now known as the Brunswick Executive Airport – Brunswick Landing. In recognition of its former military heritage, the Navy's precision demonstration team, the Blue Angels, will once again make an appearance at Brunswick, which will be its only performance in New England during 2017. The dates for the event are Sat. / Sun. August 26-27<sup>th</sup>. The last Time the Blue Angels came to Brunswick was in 2015.

### **Editor's Note:**

If you have feedback regarding any article, or if you have photos or an article of historical, Maine aviation interest, please email me at [rhlittlefield@roadrunner.com](mailto:rhlittlefield@roadrunner.com). Your input would be appreciated.

The museum always needs new members, monetary contributions, and volunteers to keep the museum running. Contact President Chuck Byrum – address at left.

### **Answers to Quiz on page 7:**

<b>5</b>	<b>6</b>
<b>3</b>	<b>2</b>
<b>1</b>	<b>4</b>

(continued from page 1)

While at Dow, the young airmen relaxed and reveled at being on American soil. Many stayed overnight, swamped the Post Exchange, swapped war stories, and departed for Bradley the next day. The joyous crews scooped up Bangor soil, posed for pictures, and drank fresh milk- an unknown amenity in Europe. Airmen knew that this reprieve in wartime activity was short lived as the Pacific war continued unabated. The bloody attack begun in April on Okinawa, one of Japan's home islands, horrified Americans. Desperate Japanese fighter pilots flew their aircraft against American warships in suicidal attacks while their armies dug deep into the land in defensive positions.

Over the July 4th holiday that year, Americans pondered what was next in the war with Japan. Rumors circulated about a massive Pentagon planned land invasion of the major and heavily populated Japanese home islands. The projected American casualty numbers were staggering. A few days later while meeting with Allied leaders in Potsdam, Germany, President Truman learned of the successful test of a new American bomb. In August, the Army Air Forces dropped this new "atomic" bomb on the Japanese cities of Hiroshima and Nagasaki. Japan's Emperor Hirohito, moving to save his country from total destruction, agreed to surrender terms. The Second World War came to a resounding and sudden end.

The United States had more than 16,000,000 men and women in uniform at the cessation of hostilities. Soon, soldiers overseas clamored for release from military duty. President Truman, himself a World War I army veteran in France, empathized with the plight of troops and sailors. He ordered the Pentagon to speed up its military demobilization and get the servicemen and women home. But this was not the only headache for the military chiefs to deal with for they also had to contend with the tremendous surplus of war equipment no longer needed. For the Army Air Forces and the Navy, this meant the disposition of more than 200,000 aircraft. Congress established the War Assets Administration during the later part of the war years to work with the Depression Era Reconstruction Finance Corporation and with the military to deal with this problem. The WAA designated 30 locations where surplus aircraft were to be flown for their eventual disposition. One of these sites was the Kingman Army Air Field in Kingman, Arizona; it was here that the AAF flew in many of their heavy bombers that landed at Dow Field in May and June of 1945. These victorious and lauded aircraft came to rest at Kingman and awaited their fate.



*5 Grand parked at Kingman Army Air Field*

One of these bombers was the famous *5 Grand* mentioned earlier. Adorned with the signature of more than 38,000 workers (the weight of the additional ink cost the B-17G seven miles per hour loss in speed compared to similar aircraft), the *5 Grand* joined the 338th Bomber Squadron of the 96th Bombardment Group in England. From there, *5 Grand* flew 78 successful bombing missions over Nazi Germany. Now at Kingman, she sat parked among thousands of similar B-17s and B-24s in the arid sun baked desert. The WAA gave cities and other organizations an opportunity to claim famous aircraft as war memorials. But they needed to act quickly as the WAA developed a plan to bring in three huge aluminum smelters to deal with the surplus aircraft and reduce each of them to an ingot with the proceeds upon sale going back into the U.S. Treasury.



*5 Grand awaits her doom*

The City of Seattle initially exhibited an interest in saving the *5 Grand* as a war memorial and as a reminder for posterity of the cost of war. Citizen interest in this project, however, soon lapsed in the heady and boom driven days immediately after the war; Seattle's initiatives waned. *5 Grand's* number came up, and like its sister airships sitting there, it too met the chopping block.

The smelting operation at Kingman was methodical and thorough. Specialized work crews removed the radial Wright and Pratt and Whitney engines from each bomber. Then, workers gutted the interior of a bomber (the AAF had previously removed bomb sites and machine guns) of radio and oxygen equipment, life rafts and fire extinguishers, and other equipment. A powerful tractor dragged each empty hulk over to an area where a guillotine type contraption cut off the wings and then chopped the fuselage into manageable sections; workers fed these parts into one of three smelters. Each smelter operated 24 hours a day and consumed 35 bombers per day.



*One of three smelters at work with the remains of bombers now "ingots" in the forefront*

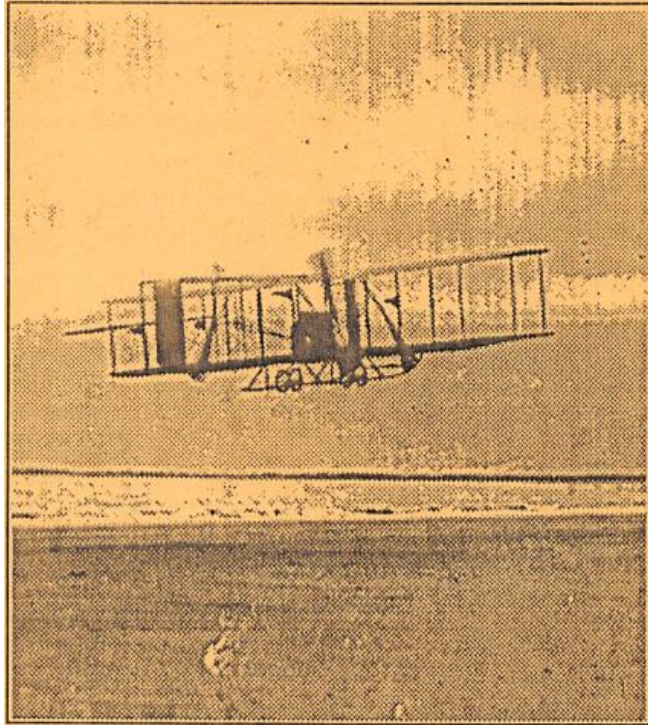
So, an ignoble end came to many noble aircraft-aircraft that helped to free Europe from the bondage and tyranny of the Nazis. Each of these aircraft could tell its own story of the bravery and heroism in war of its crews made up of young American men, many of whom were still in their youth. The *5 Grand* was but one of these proud aircraft now lost to history forever. But still their deeds are remembered and kept alive 75 years later by those who truly understand that freedom is not free.



## PORTLAND AIRPORT (then and now)

### THEN . . .

On the 7<sup>th</sup> of September, 1912, Blue Hill native George A. Gray (the first Maine-born aviator) was very likely the first to fly over Scarborough during his unannounced flight from Old Orchard Beach to Portland and back. A field in Scarborough was to become the site of Portland's first airport. Gray was flying his Burgess-Wright Model B (pictured below).



*George Gray flying in his Burgess-Wright at Old Orchard Beach, September 4, 1912. C.E Moody Photo Courtesy of Robert Philgate, MacArthur Library, Biddeford*

For further historical details of the career of George A. Gray, read the article by MAM founder, Leo Boyle, in the May, 1994, *Dirigo Flyer*. You can find this edition of the *Flyer* in the *Dirigo Flyer* archives on the MAM website [MaineAirMuseum.com](http://MaineAirMuseum.com).

In 1926, Portland Chamber of Commerce president, Chester A. Jordan, and Portland investment banker, H.M. Payson (a WWI pilot), acquired a site in the town of Scarborough to build an airport. That site, seven miles southwest of Portland, would become the first Portland Airport.

In 1927, while the airport was still under construction, but operational, Charles Lindbergh who had soloed across the Atlantic in May of that year, announced he would make a stop at the Scarborough airport on his grand 48-state tour. On July 24, 1927, the appointed day, thousands awaited his arrival at the airport. However, after circling the airfield for an hour because of pea-soup fog, Lindbergh spent the night in Concord, N.H. The next day it was the same thing, but this time, he landed at Old Orchard Beach. To appease the waiting throng, he motored to Scarborough and shook hands with as many people as possible. He then motorcaded to Portland, where he met a crowd of 30,000 assembled at Deering Oaks.



*Office at the Portland Airport in Scarborough*



*Fireplace inside the airport office*



*September, 1928, fly-in at the Portland Airport in Scarborough*

Operation of the Portland Airport moved to the Stroudwater Field in the late 1930s because the Scarborough location proved too limited in runway size to accommodate the increasingly larger aircraft. The Scarborough field was 193 acres, and triangular in shape. There were two runways, which had sod and clay surfaces. One was 2,800 feet by 300 feet and the other was 3,600 feet by 400 feet. Once operations were moved out of Scarborough, that field was relegated mostly to pilot training and air shows. The field is now the site of the Scarborough Industrial Park. The Stroudwater field, now known as the Portland International Jetport, was not similarly limited in potential.

and NOW . . .

According to the February 2, 2017, Portland Press Herald, the Portland jetport inches toward the two million mark for air travel passengers, with a 2016 record of 1.78 million travelers flying in and out of the city's airport. The continued growth is attributed to increased routes, more frequent trips and larger planes, now being utilized by the airlines for connecting Portland with other cities, according to Jetport contacts. Southwest Airlines is now the largest single air carrier into Portland since adding flights to and from Portland to its route structure in 2013. Further, the Jetport's proposed twenty-year master plan calls for accommodating forty percent more travelers with intentions of more direct flights, including West Coast destinations.

Sources for this article include the Maine Aviation Historical Society's *Dirigo Flyer* archive, the Scarborough Historical Society website, the Portland Press Herald. Contributors include MAHS members, John Miller and Bob Umberger.



## Old Scarborough Airplane Quiz

Match the plane picture number to its appropriate name. Answers on page 2.



1



2



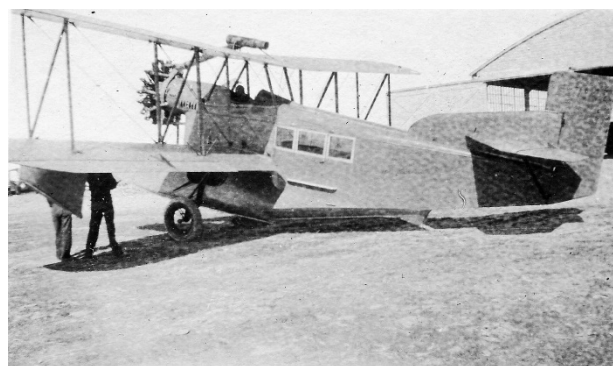
3



4



5



6

No.	Name
--	Moth
--	Travel Air
--	Curtis Robin

No.	Name
--	Loening
--	Ballanca
--	Stinson Detroiter



**All dues expire on June 30<sup>th</sup> of each year. If joining mid-year, pay \$2.00 for each remaining month**

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Lifetime	\$500*	Newsletter, Lifetime Membership
	*2 annual \$250 payments	Museum Admission

We need volunteers-docents, mechanics, maintenance, librarians and exhibit specialists, etc.

- \_\_\_ Please call me. I want to be active in the organization.  
 \_\_\_ I cannot join now, but would like to help. I enclose a check for \_\_\_\_\_  
 (Contributions over \$20 are tax deductible within the limits of the law)  
 \_\_\_ I wish to support and obtain membership by purchasing a memorial brick

**DIRIGO FLYER**

**MAINE AVIATION HISTORICAL SOCIETY**

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