

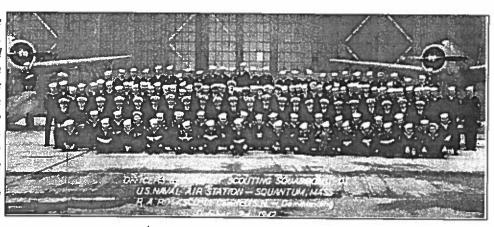
DIRIGO FLYER

Vol. X, No.11 November 2002

Newsletter of the Maine Aviation Historical Society
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Lewiston-Auburn Airport in 1942 ... Revisited in 2002

Last summer, member Norm Houle made contact with William Russell, now living in Florida, who had served with U.S. Navy Squadron VS1D1 when this detachment was at the Lewiston-Auburn Airport in 1942. They flew Vought-Sikorsky OS2U-3 Kingfishers on anti-submarine patrols. Mr. Russell had some pictures he had taken during his stay in Auburn. Here are some of Mr. Russell's memories of his detached duty there. — Leo Boyle, Editor



By William Russell

My memories of detached duty at Lewiston-Auburn are the very best. The flying experiences were challenging, the coastline of Maine is absolutely beautiful, summer and winter, and the people of that area were quite possibly the most hospitable in the U.S.

I remember that Charley and Vivienne were the local couple who took such good care of us Navy types, preparing our food with a special effort to please us and make our stay there a satisfying experience. By the way, do you recall their last name?

As you know, our squadron was home-based at Squantum, MA, which is a fine locale, but we all enjoyed the assignments in Maine with great gusto as well.

Here are some notes from my records regarding the duty in Maine:

- The Vought-Sikorsky OS2U-3 Kingfisher was a singlewing two-seat observation and scouting aircraft with a wingspan of 35 feet 11 inches, height of 15 feet 1 inch. Empty weight: 4123 pounds; max take-off weight: 6000 pounds. Single engine, Pratt & Whitney R-985-AN-2, 450 hp. Range: 805 miles. Cruise speed: 119 mph; max speed: 164 mph. Ceiling: 13,000 ft.
- Our Kingfishers were usually operated as land planes, but a few of them were fitted out for seaplane missions with a single pontoon under the fuselage and small floats under the wing tips.

Officers and men of VS1D1 at Squantum, MA in 1942. (Wm. Russell Photo)

- We had thick fogs at Lewiston-Auburn and sometimes they were so bad that our flights were cancelled. One morning the Officer in Charge of our detachment there raised up in his bunk, peered intently at the window, and exclaimed, "Fog's so bad I can't even see the hangar. Cancel all flights." Then he sank back into his pillow and was instantly asleep. No one bothered to tell him that the white window shade was down.
- On dawn patrols we often swooped down to secondstory level around Bar Harbor and startled the early-rising residents who were morosely staring out of their bedroom windows toward the sea. Their expressions were amusing when they found themselves suddenly confronted with two sets of goggled eyes and a couple of big grins floating by just fifty feet away. For our part, we hadn't realized how many people wear neither pajamas nor underwear early in the morning!
- Served with a squadron detachment at the Lewiston-Auburn Airport in Maine. Our dawn and dusk patrols and convoy escort flights ranged all along that beautiful rugged coastline and linked up with the Royal Canadian Air Force patrols at Halifax, Nova Scotia. We were working hard, flying long hours in a lot of bad weather. But there were compensations. The patriotic local citizens saw to it that we partied even harder. Some of them would be lined up at the airport fence

"L-A Airport" continued on page 4

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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

President's Message • October 2002

We may be closed for the winter, but that doesn't mean that the work will stop. We need to work this winter and spring to be better prepared to open in the spring. One of the things learned this past year was that a few can not keep this museum going for very long. It will take the combined efforts of a large group who are willing to dedicate a small amount of time each month to make it successful. The expectations that a few will spend the required hours is not realistic and will result in losing the most active members if it continues.

We will be working, starting next month, to find people to take responsibility for different areas. Some suggestions are: Museum Manager, Gift Shop Manager, Physical Plant Maintenance, Groundskeeper, Public Relations Manager, Volunteer Coordinator, Membership Manager, Fundraising Manager, Program Chairman, Activities Chairman, and Records Keeper. If you have an interest in any of these areas, let one of the Board members know. We will be assigning duties and organizing these positions starting next month. Some areas can work alone, others will require committees, but all are important if we are to succeed. We have made the commitment to open the museum, now let's make the commitment to keep it open. Everyone should be able to spare a few hours a month so that the burden is not too much for any one person. Think about what you can do to help and be ready to answer the call. We need you.

- Les Shaw, President

Exciting Times Ahead

We are now on the verge of opening next spring with Maine's newest and most exciting museum. Everything is now in place to move rapidly forward toward this goal. The most important part of any successful organization is the people. You are our people and

WE NEED YOU!

To begin with, VOTE! We have dedicated people who are eager and ready to work to make this museum a success. Some of them have volunteered and agreed to run for office. We encourage write-in votes, and if you wish to run for office, or know good candidates, vote them in. (Just be sure they are agreeable and willing to serve.)

Next, look over the lists of people needed to take charge of various aspects of running a museum. If you like to mow grass and plow snow, become the groundskeeping manager. If paperwork is for you, how about being record keeper? If you like retail sales, or are into books and/or models, why not run the gift shop? Don't want to be in charge? Volunteer to help out in the area of your choice.

Here is your chance to find your second home, have a place to go, meet and enjoy new friends, swap war stories, enjoy life. Make a new world for yourself at the Maine Air Museum, add spice to your life with a renewed interest and enthusiasm, and most of all, enjoy life while being of service to others.

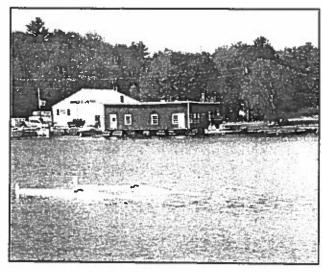
WE NEED YOU TO MAKE THE MAINE AIR MUSEUM FLY!

Some Excitement at Greenville

As the exciting and successful International Seaplane Fly-in at Greenville drew to a conclusion, a little excitement occured.

A Cessna 180 on amphibious floats flipped over. The people were rescued and Max Folsom and crew recovered the aircraft.

(Bill Robertson Photo)



Wings of the Past: Curtiss JN-4D Jenny

By Neal Strange

Glenn H. Curtiss, renowned airman, aircraft designer and founder of the Curtiss Aeroplane and Motor Corporation in Hammondsport, New York, designed, constructed and flew no less than thirty various types of aircraft in the period between 1909-14.

The majority of early Curtiss designs were of "pusher" configuration (engine mounted in the rear). By 1914 the more conventional "tractor models (engine mounted in the front) were developed. In 1916 the better features of two basically similar "tractor" biplanes, designated "J" and "N",

were merged in a single design which became the start of the famous "JN" series.

The name "Jenny" was adopted from the letters "J" and "N" and "she" was often referred to as " The First Lady of Aviation". Four JN models were produced with some variations in design and power, but the one most revered in appearance and reputation was the "JN-4D".

The JN-4D "Military Tractor", as described in the Curtiss Hand Book: A biplane of all wood construction seating two in tandem open cockpits; top wing being 43 ft. 7 7/8 in. in length, the lower wing 33 ft. 11 1/4 in. Power supplied by a single, Curtiss OX-5 V8, water cooled engine delivering 90 HP at 1400 RPM. Top speed in horizontal flight, 75 MPH; minimum speed horizontal flight, 45 MPH; stall or landing speed 30 MPH.

As the significant role played by aircraft during WWI became more apparent to the U.S. and its allies, greater emphasis centered on aircraft production and pilot training.

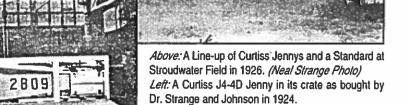
When America entered the war, the JN-4D was ordered by the military into immediate mass production as a primary trainer for pilots assigned to overseas duty. A total of 7,166 Jennies were manufactured by Curtiss and his affiliated plants in England and Canada before war's end.

Contrary to popular belief, the era of low priced warsurplus airplanes did not begin right after the war. The government invited bids from Curtiss and other manufacturers who in turn "bought back" hundreds of Jennies and OX-5 engines for as little as 13 cents on a dollar, anticipating lucrative sales to a civilian market.

However, in 1919 there was little public interest in buying an airplane as the majority of the population had yet to even see one, so retail sales fell far short of expectation. Consequently, Curtiss and other firms, faced with an excessive inventory of JNs, were forced to reduce the average selling price of \$4000 in 1919, to less than \$2000 the following year.

In the mid 1920s, the government retired most of its remaining JNs that had been retained by the Army and Navy for post war training purposes. Some became available directly to the public through government surplus warehouses at prices from \$500 to \$1000 depending on condition.

In spite of its ungainly appearance and limited horsepower



by today's standards, the Jenny was capable of performing all basic aerobatics and was

structurally capable of withstanding repeated hard landings in the hands of trainees and novice pilots.

Former military pilots, and a few who had learned to fly after the war, now began buying surplus JNs to "barnstorm" the countryside, thrilling crowds with their aerial circuses and carrying passengers to earn a living. These early itinerant airmen and their JNs so stimulated national public interest in aviation that the period 1920-1929 is often called "The Jenny Era".

The Jenny migration touched down in nearly every state and Maine was no exception. One of the first, if not *the* first JN to venture into Maine skies was piloted by a young man from West Enfield named Merle L. Fogg. In 1922, after learning to fly in Florida, Merle flew his JN-4D to his hometown, landing enroute near the State School for Boys in South Portland. The following day, after some difficulty acquiring fuel, he took off and completed his journey to West Enfield.

Capt. Harry Jones, noted pioneer in Maine aviation, carried scores of passengers on scenic flights and offered flight instruction in his JN-4D at Old Orchard Beach during the early 1920s.

In 1924 two Portland dentists, Clifford Strange and Albert Johnson, bought a surplus JN-4D in the original crate from a warehouse in New York and had it shipped to Jones' hanger at Old Orchard. With help from Jones' mechanic and several enthusiastic spectators, the Jenny was assembled and flown by Strange to a small field he and Johnson had acquired the previous year on the outskirts of Portland.

As time passed, the dentists cleared and leveled the field into a usable air strip which attracted other intrepid pilots with their Jennies. By 1926, four JN-4Ds occupied tie downs between flights off the soft turf runway, the foundation of the Portland International Jetport.

Parked in the open, the wood and fabric trainers were vulnerable to the elements and, as the 1920s decade ended, one by one the Jennies faded away, replaced at the tie-downs by a new variety of trim three passenger biplanes.

But the saga of "The Jenny Era" still lingers on in the Owl's Head Transportation Museum where an immaculately restored JN-4D can be seen parked among other historic aircraft as if waiting for a voice from the past to shout, "CONTACT!"

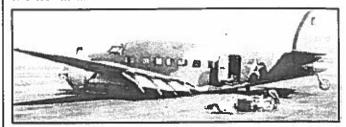
"L-A Airport," continued from page 1

with paper cups of booze for us when we landed in the evening. It was possible to get sloshed before you reached the hangar with your parachute. They would invited us out for dinners at their homes, as well as for some rather boisterous forays into the ethnic social clubs (Polish, French, Lithuanians, Irish, Italian, etc.) and a few nightspots. We had more invitations available than we could accept.

On a flight to Lewiston-Auburn we ran into a heavy snowstorm just past Portland and were forced to very low altitudes to maintain visual contact. The pilot said he was going to turn back to Boston but I told him I knew all the landmarks and could guide him in by following the coastline, about a hundred feet above the water, to the Androscoggin River, flying up the river to Lewiston, make a hard left turn, and follow the road to the Auburn airport. My plan worked out very well, to my great satisfaction, and the pilot later praised my work in a report to the Skipper.

Addendum: There were two crashes in July 1942 at Lewiston-Auburn Airport. On July 6, 1942, a Lockheed PBO-1 of VP-82 had the left engine fail on take-off and swerved off the runway. There were no injuries to the four crew aboard.

On July 21, 1942, A Vought OS2U-3 of VSIDI had a forced landing due to low oil pressure, again with no injuries to the two crewmen.



The Lockheed PBO-1 crash which Norm Houle saw at Lewiston-Auburn Airport in 1942.

Right: The Landing can be seen in the left background and the Houle house behind the flyers.

(All photos courtesy of William Russell.)



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Right: Norm Houle's mother with her young helper when she was preparing and feeding the Navy three meals a day in 1942.

Above: Lt. Comm. Rosasco inspects Seaman 2nd William Russell.



Above: Henry Dingley, Auburn airminded businessman who owned the hangar used by the Navy in 1942.

> Right: Bill Russell seated in Henry Dingley's Waco in a photo he sent his Dad.





Norm and your editor decided that this would make a great place to revisit and see what things looked like today-60 years later. Amazingly, it's still all there and recognizable. After breakfast at the airport cafe, we drove around to the back side of the airport on Hotel Road There we met Mrs. Marc Moreau who now owns the building at 2578 Hotel Road. This building was known as TheLanding and was a local bar. The building next door was a small general general store that was run by Norm Houle's parents, and his father also worked in the shipyard in South Portland building Liberty ships.

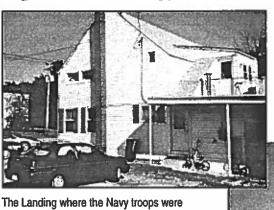
When VSlDl was shipped to Auburn, there were no living facilities for the sailors, so the Navy took over The Landing and quartered the men upstairs in this building. They then hired Norm's mother as cook to keep the troops fed for three meals a day, with the bars serving as mess hall. This continued on for about nine months until the Navy built facilities for themselves on the base.

Norm was then a teenager and living right across the street from the airfield made this an exciting time for him. He witnessed the crash of the Lockheed PBO-I on June 7, 1942 and also the forced landing of an OS2U-3 later in the month. (Naturally, when he was old enough he joined the US Navy air service.

Another exciting incident that he remembers concerns the Kingfisher that was returning from a mission, and the pilot decided to do a low pass over The Landing and scare the troops. In those days, as you remember, aircraft used reel-in trailing antennas for their radios to improve reception. On this day someone forgot to reel in the antenna, and as he roared low over The Landing and the Houle home, the weight on the end of his antenna went through the roof of the Houle house and into the bedroom of Norm's father. Since there was no heat upstairs in the bedroom, his father was sleeping in his long johns. When the weight came crashing through the ceiling and onto the floor by the dresser, and his father was rudely awakened by the crashing noises and the roar of the plane overhead, Norm heard some phrases in French he'd never heard before! The Navy sent some carpenters over to repair the roof and ceiling, and nothing more was ever said about the incident.

The hangar used by the Navy was right across Hotel Road from Norm's house and in about 100 yards from the road. This hangar, which belonged to HenryDingley was used by VS1D1. They kept their Kingfishers in the left side of the hangar and did minor maintenance on them there. Anything major was sent to Brunswick or back to Squantum, MA, their home base.

The hangar looks much as it did in 1942, still being in use, and mostly just needing a new coat of paint. It was a very interesting day, and fun to hear war stories from someone who - Leo Boyle was there.



quartered and fed.

The Houle house with a general store in the foreground with The Landing behind it on Hotel Road in Auburn as they look today. (Leo Boyle Photos)



The hangar used by the Navy in 1942 as seeb frin Hotel Road in Auburn.

12/02



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To successfully carry out and reach the museum vision, and to refurbish building 98, the Maine Air Museum needs the financial support of business and public community leaders and individual private citizens. Your interest in preserving the rich Maine aviation history will require funding presently not available to the museum effort. To this end, the museum board has established the following contribution plan for receiving your monetary donation and recognizing your gift permanently in the museum pathway and wall of honor. Remember: your donation is fully deductible.

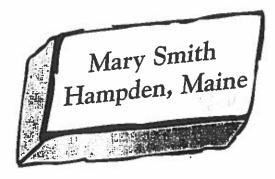
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See Order Form on Page 7

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Upcoming MAHS Meetings

November 9 10 a.m. MAHS Meeting, Maine Air Museum, Bangor, Maine

December 14..... 10 a.m.MAHS Meeting, Maine Air Museum, Bangor, Maine

MAHS meeting sites are flexible and we're always looking for guest speakers and new program ideas. Call Les Shaw at 1-877-280-MAHS if you have any ideas or if you can be of help.

We Remember



In answer to our "Remember When" photo in the October issue, member Peter Noddin writes:

The lattice mast and removed forward gun barbettes pretty much narrows it down to a turn of the century heavy cruiser converted to seaplane tender. The USN had three: Seattle, North Caroline, and Huntington. I couldn't tell which from the angle. All three were stationed at Pensacola, so they were all on the east coast.

Interestingly, all three were converted to aviation ships in 1915 and stripped of aviation gear in 1917.

In Memoriam

Sept. 24, 2002. Captain Howard C. "Speed" Holman, 90, of Wayne, Maine, a pilot for Northeast Airlines, passed away in Wayne. Private services were held at the family's convenience and internment took place in Riverside Cemetery, Dixville, on Sept. 25.

Captain Holman began his career with Northeast Airlines in May 1940 and retired in March 1972, five months prior to the merger with Delta Air Lines.

Messages of condolence may be sent to his daughter, Mrs. Beverly Joyce, 26 Eider Lane, Topsham, Maine 04086.

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November Meeting

Novembet 9, 2002 10 a.m. Board Meeting, 9 a.m. Maine Air Museum Bangor, Maine