



Dirigo Flyer

Newsletter of the Maine Aviation Historical Society



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Maine's Daring World War I Ace

Part Three of a Three-Part Series Commemorating
the Maine WWI Aviator One Hundred Years Ago

Dave Bergquist and Bob Umberger

"War moves fast. War strikes hard. War must be met on equal terms" - the words of Governor Sumner Sewall in his War Message to the Maine Legislature, January, 1942. The Governor knew war well for he had witnessed and participated in combat first hand, not in this new war but in the Great War, a generation earlier.

The Bath, Maine native, Sumner Sewall, like so many of his contemporaries, put his college education on hold, leaving Harvard half way through his freshmen year in early 1917 to join the American Ambulance Field Service. The United States was still neutral, but many young, idealistic, and adventurous American men, some still in their teens, sided with the plight of France as it fought off the German juggernaut; caught up in the war rhetoric of the day, they wanted to help to preserve democracy. Many of these volunteers, Sewall included, became the nucleus of early American aviators; they were to learn a new realm of warfare - that of the skies. Generally, these early aviators came from wealthy American families; Sumner was no exception. For generations, the Sewall family had built sailing ships and plied the seven seas in commercial ventures. They were risk takers; their success was earned. And Sumner was to carry on this legacy throughout his life.



Official picture of Sumner Sewall, Governor of Maine, 1941 - 1945

In August 1917, Sumner enlisted in the Army's Air Service and was assigned to aerial training by the French at Tours. He earned his wings by December, and joined the newly formed 1st Pursuit Group, 95th Squadron, in early 1918 as a combat pilot.

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The Maine Air Museum is located at
98 Maine Avenue adjacent to



Hampton (NH) Airfield fly-in and flea market

On Saturday May 19, 2018, Norm Houle (right) and Bob Umberger (left) set up a table to sell Maine Air Museum gift shop books and tee shirts at the Hampton Airfield fly-in and flea market hosted by the New Hampshire Pilots Association. This year marked the first year MAM has had a table at the long-standing, 2-day weekend event. Typically, the biggest turn out is expected on Saturday, but unfortunately, this year Saturday brought few planes and low attendance due to the prediction of adverse weather. Although the prediction was accurate, and by 2:00 p.m. everyone had packed up and departed, Norm and Bob managed to sell several MAM books and tee shirts.

BOOKS AVAILABLE AT THE MUSEUM AND BY MAIL

Did you know that the museum gift shop has four great books written by MAHS members? We would love to have you come to the museum and browse through the books before buying – OR – you can purchase the books by sending your check to MAHS, PO Box 2641, Bangor, ME 04402. See page 9 of the newsletter for brief descriptions of the books available. Prices quoted include state sales tax.

The influx of fresh American manpower to the European conflict that had lumbered on and then bogged down in Northeast France began to be felt by 1918. Sumner Sewall and his compatriots of the 95th Pursuit Squadron and other units of the 1st Pursuit Group played a crucial part in pushing the Germans back. He saw action in all the major American initiatives: Chateau-Thierry, St. Mihiel, and the Meuse-Argonne Offensive which finally drove the shocked Germans back, leading them to sue for peace and the Armistice of November 11, 1918. In this hurly burly of fierce battles, Sumner always piloted his Spad XIII doggedly, and determinedly; he was daring. Eddie Rickenbacker, in his 1919 book *Fighting the Flying Circus*, described Sewall's cool and calm tactics under crisis as he maneuvered to escape the deadly aim of the enemy's attack in a July 1918 aerial contest:

Sumner was tranquilly following along at the rear end of his formation composed of 95 boys when he was startled by a sudden series of shocks in his aeroplane. He was over the enemy's lines and some 16,000 feet up in the air. He glanced behind him and found a Fokker immediately upon his tail. The Heinie was deliberately riddling Sumner's Spad with flaming bullets!

The rest of the formation actually drew away from Sewall without knowing that he had been attacked!

Sewall turned his machine about in a quick renversement (reversal or turning backwards), but just as he did so he felt his heart go into his mouth. The enemy's incendiary bullets had set fire to his fuel tank! With a sudden puff of flame, all the rear part of his machine burst into a furious blaze. And he was almost three miles above ground!

Sumner instinctively put down his nose so that the flames would be swept by the wind to the rear and away from his person. Anybody but a Hun would have taken pity on a fellow being in such a plight and would have turned his eyes from so frightful a spectacle. But this Fokker Hun was built of sterner stuff. Instead of turning away to attack the rest of the 95 formation, Fritz stuck steadfastly on Sumner's tail, firing steadily at him as he descended!

One can imagine the mental torture Sumner Sewall endured during the next few minutes! It takes some time to fall three miles even at the top speed of a 220 H.P. motor. The downward motion kept the blaze away from him, but a backward glance informed him that the fire was eating up the entire length of his fuselage and that any moment he would be flung into space. And the same glance assured him that his merciless enemy was leaving nothing to Providence, but was determined to execute him himself. Streaks of flaming bullets passed his head, through his wings and around him on every side, as the Fokker pilot continued his target practice with poor Sewall as his mark. In spite of himself, he was compelled to try a little dodging to escape from so malignant an enemy.

Perhaps this very necessity saved Sewall's life. At any rate it provided a counter-irritant which took his mind off his frightful danger of burning alive. He executed a sudden maneuver when he was but a thousand feet above ground which moved him out of the range of the German. When he again looked around he discovered that the Hun had abandoned the chase, apparently satisfied that the Yank was doomed. And to his utter amazement he also discovered that the flames were now extinguished!

Sumner crashed a few hundred yards on the right side of No Man's Land. His skeleton of a Spad struck a shell hole, executed a somersault and came to rest at the bottom of another shell hole. Sumner crawled out of the wreckage and looked about him, too bewildered to realize that he was alive and on solid ground. Just at that instant a dull thud at his elbow brought him back to life.

He looked at the object at his feet-then at the wreck of his machine. There was no doubt about it. The substance which had made that thud was one of the wheels from his own machine!

The German had shot one of his wheels completely away. The fabric which covered the spokes had evidently caused it to swoop this way and that, and Sumner in his falling aeroplane had beaten it to earth!



Sumner Sewall and a Spad XIII. Note the 95th Aero Squadron logo on the side of the fuselage, i.e. a "Kicking Mule." The 94th Aero Squadron of the 1st Pursuit Group (Eddie Rickenbacker's squadron) was the famous "Hat in the Ring", while the 27th Aero Squadron, 1st Pursuit Group (Frank Luke's squadron) was the "Diving Eagle."

In other air combats, Sewall displayed cunning and aggressiveness in pursuit of the German air force. This daring quality continued to mark him as a pilot. In one such encounter in mid- October while out on patrol, he witnessed an American observation aircraft being attacked by several German aircraft. He immediately dived and pugnaciously attacked a Fokker fighter and shot it down as it closed in on the American craft. The others (part of a Jasta squadron-short for Jagdstaffeln or Hunting Squadron) flew off while he escorted the observation plane back to its base. This accomplishment earned him the title of Ace. He earned numerous medals and was officially cited by Major General Mason M. Patrick, Chief of the Air Service, for his meritorious service and by General John J. Pershing, General of the Army for his extraordinary heroism. He became a life-long friend of Eddie Rickenbacker, America's Ace of Aces.

After the Great War, Sumner Sewall returned to his home state and entered business. Unafraid as always to take a risk, he entered politics and eventually served as Maine's governor during World War II, providing valuable leadership during a period of great anxiety for Mainers. Sumner Sewall's military and political experience led to a post-World War II appointment as Military Governor of the German State of Wurtemberg Baden where he served under General Lucius Clay, Military Governor of Germany. Ironically, he was not far from that area of Europe where he made a name for himself so many years before as an American Ace.



Candidate for Maine Governor Sumner Sewall with his friend Eddie Rickenbacker standing on the wing root of an Eastern Airlines DC 2 at the Bangor Airport in June 1940.

Points of Interest

With the United States reluctantly but fully committed to the war effort, the year 1918 brings about major changes to the conflict on the ground and in the air. The tide shifts decidedly in favor of the Allied forces and before the year is out, armed conflict comes to an end. The following highlights a few of the events in the waning days of the war:

Feb. 1918 - The 95th Aero Squadron, the first all-American unit, arrives in France.

Apr. 1918 - The German Fokker D VII, becomes fully operational; it was considered the "Best Overall Performing" airplane of the war. In fact, as a condition of the Versailles Treaty, the Allies confiscated all D VII's from Germany as they considered it so advanced.

Apr. 1918 - Richthofen (the Red Baron) was shot down and killed; Ace of Aces, he was credited with 80 air-to-air victories.

May 1918 - The US air arm of the Signal Corps officially becomes the U.S. Army Air Service.

Nov. 1918 - A battlefield Armistice results in the end of the war.

Jul. 1919 - The Treaty of Versailles was signed marking "official" peace; it also placed harsh conditions of Germany, to include the infamous "guilt clause." This was President Wilson's second term.

- The British Sopwith Camel F. 1 is declared the fastest airplane cruising at 180 mph (the notable pre-war French Bleriot XI could cruise at 47 mph)
- At the outbreak of the war in 1914, France and Great Britain's combined front line combat aircraft count was 251. At the end of the conflict in 1918, Allied combat aircraft numbered nearly 10,000.
- The loss of aircraft (shot down, crashed or severely damaged) is listed at 116,250 for France, Great Britain, and Germany combined.
- US planes played no pivotal role at the front, but at home the Curtiss JN-4 (the Jenny) became the mainstay for pilot training. By the war's end, 10,000 Jennies had been produced in various models (the most of any aircraft type in WWI and powered by the War Department designed "Liberty Motor"). The Jennies were slow and reliable but not "state of the art" for combat. However, this aircraft spurred on the post-war "barnstorming" era of the 1920s especially at war surplus prices often as low as \$500.
- The "War to End All Wars" had a devastating cost to all those involved. Statistics even 100 years later vary, but here are some representative ones: between 9 and 15 million died in battle (nearly 117,000 Americans); 20 to 21 million were wounded; and, 7 million civilians were casualties. And the peace conditions imposed on Germany for its role in the Great War (WWI), planted the seeds for even a Greater War (WWII).

Previously Unrecognized Deaths of MAHS Members

- **Stan Smith of Bucksport, Maine; 1932 - 2017; (member #427)**
- **Jim McCarthy of Dallas, Texas; 1921 - 2017; (member #394)**

Stan and Jim are to be recognized for their long careers in aviation; and honored for their membership and contributions to MAHS and MAM.

- **James B. Power, Jr., of Veazie, Maine; 1925 - 2018**

James Power was not a MAHS member; but is recognized for his historic paintings of WWII aircraft hanging in the Pilot's Grill display at the museum.

NEW EXHIBIT FOR 2018 SEASON



New for our 2018 season, is the WWI display which Dave Bergquist (right) and Bob Umberger (left) worked on over the winter. The display finally came together so that it would be ready for the museum's opening day, June 2nd! It will be a key focal point for the museum this year, the 100th anniversary of the end of WWI. More specifically, the display honors the WWI aviators from Maine or those that have been identified as having a strong connection to Maine, as do the current and past two issues of the *Dirigo Flyer*. We should all look for opportunities to promote this exhibit, which should bring in additional visitors much like when we added the Amelia Earhart display a few years ago. The museum just gets better and better, so let's spread the word!

CONFERENCE ON THE 50TH ANNIVERSARY OF THE CLOSING OF DOW AIR FORCE BASE

On April 5, 1968, a B-52 named the "City of Bangor" and a KC-135 named the "City of Brewer" took off from Dow Air Force Base and tipped their wings in salute to a thousand by-standers below as they winged their way east over the twin cities. They were the last two Air Force aircraft to leave the base prior to its closing on June 30th, ending nearly thirty years of being a vital part of the Bangor and Central Maine community. To commemorate this milestone in the area's history, the University of Maine at Augusta sponsored a conference titled "Bangor and the Base, 50 Years Later." The program consisted of several distinct presentations as follows:

Connect, Create, Command: Dow Field and Wartime Bangor, Dr. David H. Bergquist, historian;

Home Base: The Air force in Bangor, 1950-1968, Dr. Tom McCord, Adjunct Assistant Professor of History at the University of Maine at Augusta (UMA);

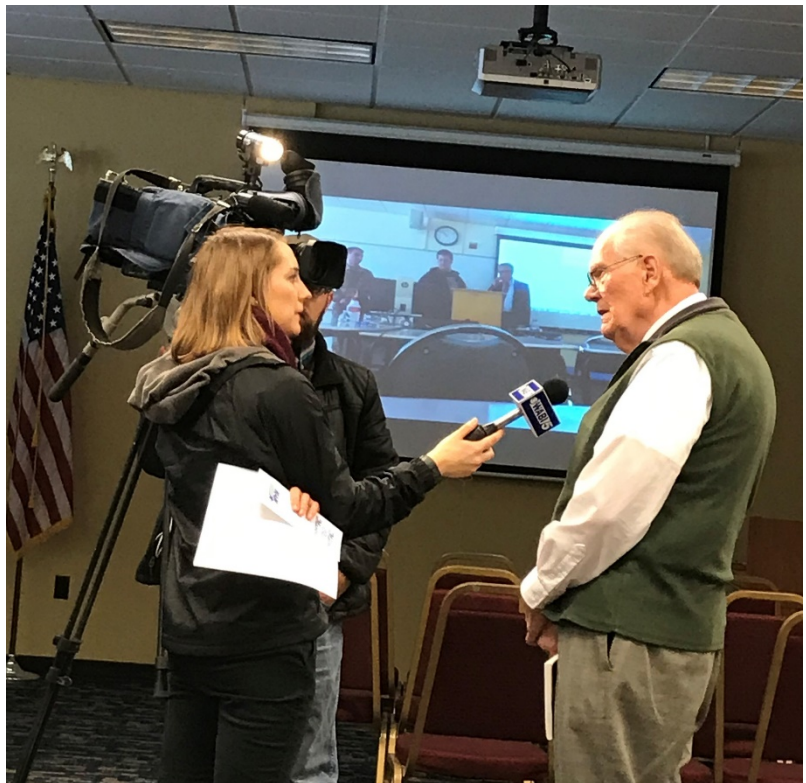
From Base to University, Colleen Coffey, Learning Support Specialist, and Haley Brown, Library Specialist, UMA, Bangor;

From Base to International Airport, Anthony P. Caruso, Jr., Director, Bangor International Airport; and,

The Base and the Guard, Captain Jonathan D. Bratten, Command Historian, Maine Army National Guard.

Nearly 100 people attended the event from 9:00 am to 1:00 pm at Eastport Hall on Friday, March 30, 2018. Bob Littlefield and Bob Umberger of the Maine Air Museum manned a table in the break room and spoke to many attendees about the activities and displays of the air museum.

Dr. Tom McCord of UMA's history department and other faculty and staff at the college provided the initiative for organizing this commemoration.

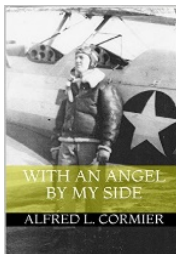


MAM/MAHS Director and conference presenter, David Bergquist, being interviewed by WABI channel 5, a local TV station, for the evening news

BOOKS AVAILABLE AT THE MUSEUM AND BY MAIL

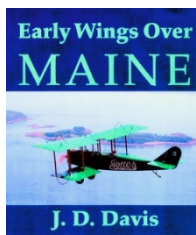
Now also available on Amazon.com:

WITH AN ANGEL BY MY SIDE



In this revised edition, MAM member, the late Alfred Cormier, recounts a life of flying by a member of the Greatest Generation. It starts with a boyhood plane ride with Amelia Earhart, recalls 88 combat missions over China, and tells so much more. Available in Kindle or paperback versions at Amazon.com, the book has a new format and lower price.

Available through the museum for \$16.00. (plus \$4.00 postage and handling).



Early wings over Maine by John Davis

Price \$24.95

Shipping \$4.00

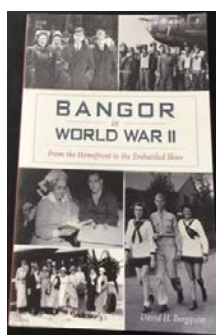
In stock and ready for delivery

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

by John Garbinski.

Another exclusive book from the Maine Aviation Historical Society. Softbound, 134 pages, 151 illustrations.

\$5.00 (plus \$4.00 postage and handling).



David Bergquist has written an historic novel describing the strategic importance of the Bangor, Maine area as the nation braced for entry into World War II.

\$18.00 (plus \$4.00 postage and handling).



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

Annual membership includes quarterly newsletters

Mail payment to:

Maine Aviation Historical Society
PO Box 2641
Bangor, ME 04402-2641

**Maine Aviation Historical Society
Maine Air Museum * Membership Form**

Name: _____

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City, State, Zip: _____

Special Interests: _____

Phone: _____ Email: _____

Membership	Dues	Benefits
Regular	\$25 annual	Newsletter, Museum Admission
Family	\$35 annual	Newsletter, Museum Admission
Corporate	\$100 annual	Newsletter, Museum Admission
Supporting	\$100 annual	Newsletter, Museum Admission
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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