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A Brief History of Dow Field

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A BRIEF HISTORY OF DOW FIELD

The history of Dow Field dates back to August 19, 1923, when General "Billy" Mitchell and the entire United States Air Force landed on the F. F. Rich farm on the Cooper Road. The bombers and fighter planes were taking part in Mitchell's first maneuvers over the Eastern Seaboard, in the course of which he set out to prove that the entire coast could be defended from the air base at Langley Field, Virginia. This was only a couple of weeks before the famous bombing tests off the Virginia Capes, during which Mitchell's biplanes sank an obsolete battleship with bombs.

The fifteen Martin bombers and eleven DeHaviland scout planes which landed at Bangor were, Billy Mitchell told Bangor Rotarians, "the entire Air Force of the United States". Mitchell went on to say: "I see a great future for Bangor as an air base. It is a natural air center, and ideally suited as an airdrome".

In 1925, Edward R. Godfrey purchased the 87 acre Charles W. Morse farm on the Cooper Road, next to the Rich farm, expanding his holdings eventually to well over 800 acres in 1940, when he sold out to the City of Bangor. Various individuals operated flying services out of the airport. Northeast Airlines began regular flying in and out of the gradually developing field in 1933, after a summer's operation by Pan American Airways in 1931. Northeast Airlines has been using the field continuously since, after a first flight from Boston to Bangor with Amelia Earhart as a passenger.

From 1934 to 1937 considerable improvements were made in the airport, through the Civil Works Administration and other Federal and State agencies. In July 1940, work was started by the city to develop a large military and commercial airport at the present site, with the understanding that the city would supply the land and the Federal Government the money to build a Class IV Airport--equal in size to any in the United States.

Construction work on the runways was approved on August 15, 1940, and work started almost immediately. When construction began on the runways in 1940, German submarines were prowling along the Atlantic coast and along the searoutes to Europe, sinking American ships loaded with lend-lease material for Britain.

Dow Field, so named in January 1942, in honor of 2nd Lieut. James F. Dow of Houlton, killed in an airplane crash at Mitchel Field in June 17, 1940, was established for several purposes, the importance of which was due directly to the location of Bangor on the Great Circle route to Europe. The base was originally intended to serve as a forward airdrome for active defense against enemy forces attacking the United States from Europe, either by sea or by air, and was built to house a heavy bombardment group or a pursuit group, together with the supply, ordnance and air base units to support these tactical units.

The second function, not originally contemplated, proved to be of vital importance in the conduct of the war--the use of the air base by the Air Transport Command for the ferrying of tactical bombers, fighters and transport aircraft across the North Atlantic direct to the combat zones in Europe, Africa and Asia. Bangor is located on the Great Circle route to Europe, and the bulk of the trans-Atlantic traffic flies through or over the city, heading for Europe by way of Newfoundland or Labrador and then straight across to England or France; by way of Newfoundland or Labrador and Greenland and Iceland to Europe; or by way of Newfoundland and the Azores to either Europe or Africa, and through the Dark Continent to the inner depths of Asia.

Dow Field was used in 1941 for the training of the 43rd Bombardment Group, flying B-17 Flying Fortresses (and later B-24 Liberators) as one of the most important units of the 5th Air Force throughout the war in the South Pacific, and later in the Philippines and Japan itself. Victors of the battles of the Bismarck Sea, the Coral Sea, the air fights over the Jap stronghold at Rabaul, the conquest of New Guinea, the conquest of the Dutch East Indies, and the Liberation of the Philippines, they

contributed generously to the conquest of Japan. The 43rd Bomb Group, together with a number of affiliated units, left Dow Field in February, 1942.

During 1942, Dow Field was used as a Staging Area and final check up point for the combat planes of the powerful 8th Air Force--the first fighters and bombers to fly across the new North Atlantic Division route to Europe. The Air Transport Command, formerly the Ferrying Command, was organized in 1941, in order to combat the German submarine menace. The undersea craft were sinking a tremendously high percentage of the lend-lease planes being shipped to Britain to help defeat the Axis, and the aerial route across the Atlantic was decided upon as a means of meeting the Axis challenge.

With headquarters established at Presque Isle, Maine, the North Atlantic Wing of the ATC began operations, and supervised or cooperated in the building of huge air bases at Goose Bay, Labrador; Ungava Bay, Quebec; Frobisher Bay, Baffinland; Stephenville and Gander Lake, Newfoundland; Narsarsuaq, Sondrestromfjord and Ikroavik, Greenland; Meeks Field, Iceland; Kindley Field, Bermuda; and Santa Maria and Lajes in the Azores. Building these bases was a tremendous undertaking, involving the transportation of large numbers of men and huge quantities of material to out of the way places in the world where, in many cases, only explorers had gone before. It also involved the establishment of many weather and communications stations in unbelievably isolated locations, the developing of mass production methods of handling large numbers of aircraft, the development of long distance weather forecasting which had to be accurate, and the devising of search and rescue techniques to rescue flyers who were forced down or lost.

The flow of tactical combat aircraft began in the summer of 1942, with flight of the bombers and fighters of the 8th Air Force from Dow and Grenier Fields to Goose Bay, Labrador, and Gander Lake, Newfoundland. Eighty P-38's of the 1st Fighter Group, which later won 15 battle stars and three Presidential Citations, were stationed at Dow Field in May and June of 1942, and then proceeded northward

Goose Bay, Labrador. Escorted by the B-17's of the 97th Bomb Group, they made the first mass flight across the North Atlantic route, with stops at Greenland and Iceland. Their crossing demonstrated clearly that the use of the new route was successful. The 8th Air Force air echelons flew across the route that summer and fall, while the ground crews went to England by boat.

Before leaving Dow Field on their trans-Atlantic flight, the planes were modified by the skilled mechanics of the Sub-Depot; a minimum of thirty hours flying time (training and navigation) was given to each plane; and the pilots and crews were trained in formation flying, interception of enemy aircraft, and gunnery. The men were given all necessary clothing and supplies for the overseas hop, and the planes were put in perfect shape for the long flight. Before leaving Bangor, the crews were briefed on the weather which they might expect in the flight; the appearance and radio signals of their next destination; and any direction or other hazards they could expect to encounter, including anti-aircraft fire from Allied defense forces in restricted flying areas along the route.

Among the 8th Air Force Groups which staged at Dow Field in whole or in part during the summer of 1942, were the 1st Fighter Group, and the 91st, 92nd, 93rd, 97th, 303rd, 306th and 308th Bombardment Groups, all of which established enviable combat records overseas against the enemy. Dow Field was also used as an operating base for the 92nd Reconnaissance Group, flying A-29's on anti-submarine patrol along the Atlantic coast; as a training base for Quartermaster troops and officers for Air Corps units; as a training base for raw recruits, fresh out of Reception centers; and for the training of ordnance, service, signal, and other units for Air Corps combat groups.

In addition to the ever changing force of troops stationed at the base, was "a rapidly expanding force of civilian personnel, including not only office workers, but also a group of expert aircraft mechanics, sheet metal workers, electrical specialists and other technicians who rendered high quality technical service to

the planes passing through the base for maintenance and modification. Hundreds of these men and women were trained through the State of Maine Aircraft School, which was conducted as a function of the 332nd Sub-Depot, the unit of the base which handled the aircraft, and a large number of personnel trained in Bangor were sent to other bases at Presque Isle, Grenier Field, and other locations.

During 1942, the base was under the control of the First Air Force, although the tactical planes passing through were under the direct jurisdiction of the 8th Air Force and the Air Transport Command, once they had flown north from Dow Field.

The ferrying of tactical bombers came to a virtual halt during the winter of 1942-43, because the hazards of Arctic flying during the winter months had not been fully conquered. Transport aircraft, weather planes and other experimental planes were flown across the Atlantic during this period, testing out the techniques of navigation and flying under the most adverse weather conditions. Weather forecasting improved considerably over the North Atlantic route, and communications became infinitely more dependable as the operators gained more experience and familiarity with the system.

By the spring of 1943, the Air Transport Command was ready to use Dow Field on an even larger scale than before. With the base still operated by the First Air Force, an ATC detachment kept a steady flow of B-24's and B-17's moving eastward across the Atlantic, flying the planes north to Goose Bay or Gander, and then dispatching them across to England or Africa in non-stop hops.

The crews of these planes were given their final medical and dental check-ups; their personal affairs were settled (including the making out of wills, insurance papers, allotments, etc.); Arctic clothing and emergency supplies were issued; they were briefed in survival techniques, in the event of being forced down in the Arctic; and they were comfortably billeted, fed and entertained while waiting to fly north again.

Their planes were given complete mechanical checking and servicing, including the most methodical inspections that could possibly be given. All equipment was checked and inventoried, and missing items supplied. The planes and their instruments were put in perfect mechanical condition to fly the Atlantic, and finally were gassed and oiled for the big hop.

During the 1943 season, nearly 1200 bombers flew to the Old World through Dow Field, carrying over 12,000 highly trained crew members to the combat theaters which finally decided the course of the war. Most of the bombers went to England, but a large number of them were sent to the Mediterranean Theater for the assault on Fortress Europa from the south.

During this same period, nearly 5,000 Aviation Engineers trained at Dow Field, working with highly specialized construction equipment, building runways, roads, bridges, gun emplacements, camouflaged buildings, water and sewage systems, and every other type of construction necessary for a combat air base. One group of these engineers, the 924th Aviation Engineer Regiment, went to Europe, where they participated in the invasion of Europe, and built a large percentage of the air strips used in the forward surge of the Allied Forces. Another group, the 1905th Aviation Engineers, went to India and Burma, where they contributed materially to the building of the Ledo Road. Two other groups, the 1906th and the 1913th Aviation Engineers, went to New Guinea, and later participated in the invasion of the Philippines, contributing generously under rugged combat conditions to the winning of the islands from the Japs. They later went on to the Ryukyus and to Japan itself.

The training of the Aviation Engineers was of the most rugged type--since they lived and worked under simulated combat conditions at Dow Field. They built a combat air strip with all necessary installations at the Bombing Range at Greenfield, Maine, and made considerable physical improvements on the field. The Dow Field runways were gradually lengthened to 7,000 feet--making the landing

strips of the field among the longest in the entire United States.

During 1943, a continuous combat training program was carried on for the entire personnel of the base, including chemical warfare, the use of all weapons (including the carbine, rifle, sub-machine gun and machine gun), and specialized training in a wide variety of fields. There was a constant flow of individuals and groups to combat units leaving for overseas assignments.

In December 1943, the base was declared Temporarily Inactive for a three month period, when the flow of Air Transport Command bombers ceased. In March 1944, the North Atlantic Division of the Air Transport Command assumed full jurisdiction over the field, and made preparations for its most intensive flying activity--an activity which continued until December 31, 1945. Two large buildings were combined by a passageway, to become an elaborate processing center, a streamlined production system for putting combat crews through the necessary checking before going overseas. Men arriving at Dow Field for the flight over the North Atlantic, were routed through the Processing Center much as a car would be put through a production line. Through this modern method of handling the processing the time factor was cut down to practically nothing, and all necessary services were efficiently rendered.

The tactical aircraft were handled by the same systematic processes, and all necessary maintenance, inspection, checking of equipment, and servicing of the plane accomplished in a minimum amount of time. As rapidly as the airports up north (Goose Bay and Gander) would handle the load, the planes were dispatched on their way, with the crews getting all necessary weather, route and radio briefing from Dow Field Experts.

Complete billeting, messing, transportation and recreational facilities were provided for the transient combat crews going overseas. At times, there were as many as 140 four-motored bombers, with 1400 enlisted men and officers, waiting at Bangor to fly the Atlantic. Messing, billeting and supply services for this number of men required a sizeable number of personnel.

From April 1944, till V-J Day in August, 1945, the routing of tactical bombers through Dow Field was big business. The peak month was in July 1944, when over 700 combat aircraft were processed through the base and flew North. Two-motored aircraft, including B-25's, B-26's, A-20's, A-26's, C-47's and C-46's, were routed through Goose Bay, Greenland and Iceland. Four-motored aircraft were sent to either Goose Bay or Gander, whichever had the capacity to handle the aircraft, and flown directly over from there. The average traffic of trans-Atlantic tactical aircraft alone was well over 300 per month, good weather and bad, winter and summer, for a period of nearly a year and a half.

During the winter of 1944-45, traffic in four-motored aircraft across the North Atlantic did not slow down, although all two-motored aircraft were routed through the South Atlantic Division of the ATC. Dow Field kept functioning every day during the bitter winter season, with the planes coming and going all the time.

During this period, when there were important calls for particular planes in a tremendous rush, many long distance flights were made from Dow Field, including non-stop flights from Bangor to Prestwick, Scotland; from Bangor non-stop to the Azores, flying over the Newfoundland bases; and finally from Bangor non-stop to Marrakech, North Africa, a tremendous distance.

These flights were made with a high degree of safety. Although there were numerous minor accidents, and several serious ones, there has been only one fatal ~~crash~~ in landing or takeoff at Dow Field since flying first began in 1923. In the summer of 1944, an A-26 attack bomber crashed on takeoff for Goose Bay, with both pilot and co-pilot being killed instantly.

Through the Priorities and Traffic Section, each bomber Bound for Europe was loaded to the limit of weight capacity with mail destined for the soldiers at the various fronts. Sacks of mail were crammed into any accessible corner of the big bombers, and millions of pounds of mail was sent overseas. Much of this was in

the form of vehicle tags, making possible the sending of many cases the normal number of letters in that abbreviated form.

In the fall of 1944, a fleet of 13 C-46 Commando transports was moved from Presque Isle to Dow Field, augmented later with two converted B-17 bombers which were used as cargo and personnel transports. The C-46 fleet was used to supply all of the bases of the North Atlantic Division with high priority materiel and personnel, including the bases in Newfoundland, Labrador, Quebec, Baffinland, Greenland, Iceland and the Azores, as well as the continental bases at Presque Isle, Grenier Field, LaGuardia Field, and Newark Army Air Base. After V-E Day, the C-46 transport operation was transferred to another base, but during the months in which it operated, millions of pounds of cargo and personnel were carried quickly where they were vitally needed.

In the summer of 1944, Dow Field was used as a Staging Area by the Air Transport Command for the screening, training and assignment of 2,500 new men transferred from other branches of the Air Corps. These men were housed, fed and rendered every service by Dow Field, while they were interviewed, screened, classified, and finally shipped to various overseas stations all over the world.

In November 1944, the headquarters of the 135th Army Airways Communication System Squadron moved to Dow Field, with its complete staff and office personnel. Administering the communications network over a vast territory reaching from Winnipeg, Manitoba to Bangor, and from Manchester, New Hampshire to remote River Clyde, 700 miles beyond the Arctic Circle in northern Baffinland, the 135th AACS Squadron had men stationed in 27 different air bases, weather stations, and communications posts. Through their headquarters moved all of the personnel coming from and going to all of these outlying detachments, as well as all the administrative and other messages pertaining to this vast communications system.

A three month training school for Aircraft Mechanics was held at Dow Field during 1944 and 1945, where a number of men with clerical and other non-mechanical

backgrounds were given schooling and on-the-job training for specialized work on aircraft. At the conclusion of the school taught by department supervisors on the base, these men were given the rating of skilled aircraft mechanics, and sent all over the world to the bases where their skills were most needed.

Dow Field was used as a training base for one week in 1944 by 100 Civil Air Patrol Cadets from every important city in Maine, working under their own officers. The base was used for a two week encampment by the C.A.P. Cadets during the summer of 1945, as well as for a weekend training course for Civil Air Patrol officers from all over the State of Maine. The Maine State Guard used the base for a weekend encampment during the fall of 1945, with hundreds of men participating.

Dow Field was used as a weather alternate in 1944 and 1945 for the Big four-motored C-54 transports which flew the regular runs from the United States to Europe. Whenever bad weather or mechanical difficulty forced one of the C-54's down at Bangor, full customs and intelligence clearance service was rendered; the passengers were billeted and fed; mechanical and gas service was given; and navigation, weather and route briefing was furnished for the crews. As many as ten C-54's loaded with passengers, have landed within a couple of hours.

Over 400 wounded and sick soldiers, evacuated through the North Atlantic Division by air, spent their first night in the United States in the Dow Field Hospital. Taken off litter planes, in weather as cold as 20 degrees below zero, they were given excellent care and temporary treatment, and shipped by air to Mitchel Field as soon as possible--generally the next day. These evacuated wounded soldiers were entertained generously by Bangor people, through the USO, the Grey Ladies, and the Nurses Aides. As many as six C-54's loaded with wounded, have landed in one day.

In July 1945, the first of a contingent of approximately 400 German Prisoners of War arrived at Dow Field, built a barbed wire stockade on the Union Street

side of the base, and set up the buildings for the remainder of the prisoners. They worked throughout the summer and fall picking peas, beans and other vegetables, working in canneries processing these vegetables, and harvesting the potato crop. When work became slack in Maine fields, they were given work at the base, for which no American help was authorized.

Late in July 1945, over 2,000 officers and enlisted men of the 451st Bombardment Group and the 525th Air Service Group, arrived at Dow Field for processing and ultimate assignment to other North Atlantic Division bases. The 451st Bomb Group, with three Presidential Citations, flew for 18 months with the 15th Air Force in the Mediterranean Theater of Operations, raiding enemy installations in Italy, France, Austria, Germany, Poland, Luxembourg, Yugoslavia, Albania and Greece. The 525th Air Service Group was composed of men who had seen at least 30 months of overseas combat service, starting shortly after the invasion of North Africa.

These men were indoctrinated in Air Transport Command methods and practices, interviewed, screened, and reassigned to other bases of the North Atlantic wing at Presque Isle, Grenier Field, LaGuardia Field, and Washington National Airport.

Large numbers of specialists in various fields, trained at Dow Field in Air Transport Command jobs, including skilled civilians, were sent overseas to bases all over the world where they were needed--particularly to the Pacific area in the spring and summer of 1945. Their places were taken by combat veterans and ATC soldiers rotated from Africa, India, and various points in the Arctic.

Beginning in May 1945, and continuing through August of that year, thousands of redeploying bombers and transport aircraft of the 8th, 9th and 15th Air Forces were redeployed through the air routed of the North Atlantic wing, flying to their destinations at Bradley Field, Connecticut. The bombers were heavily loaded with as many passengers as were in the original crew of the plane, and made the hop to the United States with stops at Greenland, Iceland, Labrador and Newfoundland.

Hundreds of these planes made their first stop in the United States at Dow Field, landing at Bangor for gasoline, mechanical attention, or because of overcrowding or bad weather further south.

On one day during this redeployment period, nearly 2000 airmen landed from Europe, nearly delirious in their joy at returning to the United States. These men were billeted, fed and entertained until they were able to proceed to their destination at Bradley Field, generally staying only one night. Complete mechanical and gas services were provided for all of these redeploying bombers, many of which were in bad condition and necessitated extensive repairs and servicing. A large percentage of the bombers had flown east through Dow Field, so the crews were doubly glad to return.

Throughout its four and a half year history, Dow Field has furnished numerous services for Army and Navy installations throughout central Maine, including Finance services (payment of bills and troops); commissary privileges for the families of all military and naval personnel in Maine; Post Exchange service with branches at all military installations in the area; engineering and maintenance services for all of the Prisoner of War Camps in Maine, as well as many other military installations; supply and commissary functions for a great many military installations; hospital service for all installations in this area, as well as for all military or naval personnel home on furlough; and cooperation and liaison with the Maine State Guard, the United States Navy, and all other branches of the Army.

During the course of the war, the North Atlantic Wing of the ATC ferried more than 18,700 fighters and bomber aircraft to and from the United States. Of the approximately 14,000 aircraft ferried east from the United States, nearly 6,500 of them were processed through Dow Field. The remainder went through Presque Isle and Grenier Field.

These aircraft were flown not only to England, Italy and North Africa, but

were flown as far as the interior of China. An entire Chinese B-24 Bomb Group was processed through Dow Field, with the Chinese crews riding as passengers until the planes were finally turned over to them deep in the heart of China. Ferrying Division crews flew the planes to China.

Regularly schedules east and west bound North Atlantic crossings of transport aircraft totalled 24,500, including more than 12,300 eastbound and 12,200 westbound flights. The peak month was recorded in June 1945, when the redeployment of troops was heaviest. During that 30 day period, there were more than 2,000 east and west bound Atlantic crossings of the big four-motored C-54's. The great bulk of these crossings was made by planes flying the Great Circle route and flying in and out of, or over, Bangor. Dow Field is one of the direction points of the Great Circle route.

A total of 357,000 passengers were carried by the transport planes of the North Atlantic Division, and of that total, 50,000 were wounded and ailing troops, flown from Africa, Europe and Asia for treatment and recuperation back home. A large percentage of this total flew over Bangor, and only a relatively small percentage were landed at Dow Field, which served as an alternate base only for this transport traffic.

Total air lift flown by the North Atlantic Wing throughout the war amounted to more than 209 million pounds, including 357,900 passengers, 81,900,000 pounds of cargo, and 49,015,000 pounds of mail. Because Dow Field's mission was basically concerned with the movement of tactical bombers, her part in the transport operations of the Wing was relatively small, but the total contribution was large. The C-46 transport fleet handled an important and inspiring total of cargo, mail, and passengers, destined for all points in the Wing.

During the course of the war, nearly a hundred thousand combat crew members have passed through Dow Field with their aircraft, either en route to or returning from the War Theaters. The strength of the base has varied from a low of

around 1200 officers and men, to almost 6,000 officers and men and 1000 civilian employees, all engaged in performing an important service for the war effort. Thousands of members of combat organizations, which trained as units in Bangor, have gone from Dow Field into combat all over the world, and acquitted themselves heroically. Many thousands of other men who have been stationed at Dow Field, were later assigned to service units in combat areas, where they have carried on the behind-the-scenes work which supports the actual combat outfits.

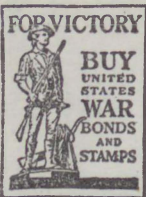
Other thousands of Dow Field soldiers, experts in various phases of Air Transport Command work, have been assigned to outlandishly remote ATC stations in the Arctic, in the Southwest Pacific, in the South Atlantic, in the deserts of Africa and in the jungles of Burma, to keep the planes flying which have carried the supplies and personnel and bombs which were needed to win the war.

Actually military expenditures on Dow Field runways and buildings are slightly in excess of \$9,500,000. Other expenditures on the airport, not included in the above, totalled \$700,000 in W.P.A. funds, \$184,000 in C.A.A. funds, \$80,999 in State funds, and \$75,000 from the City of Bangor, an additional total of \$1,063,746. This represents capital expenditure alone, and does not include the cost of removable equipment.

Dow Field's contribution to the War Effort, measured in terms of the achievements of its combat units, and the individuals assigned to other combat organizations; in terms of the thousands of vitally needed planes ferried over to Europe, Africa and Asia, and placed in combat at critically strategic times; in terms of the millions of pounds of vitally needed cargo flown by Dow Field planes; in terms of the evacuated wounded who made Bangor their first stop in the United States; in terms of the services furnished for all military and naval installations in the State of Maine; has indeed justified the effort and expense of operating the base.

The establishment of the North Atlantic air route and the ferrying of tactical bombers by that route, defeated the menace of the submarine, and permitted American air power to unleash its full force on a powerful enemy. To the fulfillment of that mission, Dow Field personnel, military and civilian, has given every possible bit of energy through the war years.

by First Lieut. A.G. Thompson
Historical Officer
Dow Field



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BANGOR, MAINE

L. FELIX RANLETT, LIBRARIAN

February 12, 1946

Lt. A. G. Thompson says that copies of the large, complete history of Dow Field, which is not available to the Bangor Public Library because it contains secret and confidential documents, are on file, as follows:

- (1) Historical Section
Army Air Forces
Washington, D.C.
- (1) Headquarters, North Atlantic Division
Air Transport Command
Westover Field, Massachusetts
(The location of this headquarters may change)
- (2) Headquarters, First Service Command
Boston, Massachusetts
(These copies are in dead storage)
- (1) Dow Field
Bangor, Maine