

Sidney A Dyke

Born to fly

In 1967 the Bethel Airport was renamed Col Dyke Field to honor the enthusiasm and energy that Lt Col Sidney Dyke, US Air Force Retired, had devoted to expanding airport facilities making the airport more attractive to general aviation and give those who aspired to fly encouragement by having a place to begin.

Sidney Dyke was born December 21, 1912 in Blue Hill, Maine. He was the son of Oscar Sidney and Annie Grindle Dyke. His grandfather, Orrin Sidney Dyke, was born in Kingfield. He was raised in several communities in Maine and Massachusetts before coming to live with his father in Hanover. In 1934 he married Verna Sinclair Berry, daughter of Ralph and Helen Eldredge Berry of Bethel. The couple had two children, Sylvia, born in 1936 and Sidney Alan born in 1938.



Sidney Dyke: 1941 photo accompanying news about his leaving for Canada

From 1937 to 1939 Sidney Dyke had an American Eagle biplane (open cockpit) stationed at the West Bethel airfield. He left Bethel in 1939 to join the Royal Canadian Air Force. [1] In 1942 he was commissioned 2nd Lt. U. S. Army Air Corps. He was subsequently assigned to the China Burma India Theater where he flew in the military supply life-line known as “flying the Hump”. [2]

Newspaper article reported that Mr. Dyke had received his training and instruction at the Hightstown and Moorestown, N. J., airports and had ground training at the Camden airport. He received his license at the Berlin, N.H., airport and since coming to Bethel about two years ago (1937) he has done considerable flying with his American Eagle plane which he has kept in the hangar at the West Bethel field. Some sources say that he flew as much as possible to accumulate 100 hours on his flight records.

In November 1944, Captain Dyke was back in the U.S. en-route to Homestead Base in Florida, where he was scheduled to take a transition (training in newer aircraft) course. [3]

About a year after World War II he was assigned to Westover AFB in Massachusetts. While there he had a Taylorcraft monoplane based at the Bethel Airport and commuted back and forth from Westover Field. [4]



Captain Sidney Dyke while assigned to the China Burma India Theater

After the war he was assigned to Germany for three years and flew

in

the Berlin Airlift. He had duties as flight instructor, test pilot and maintenance officer. Other assignments in the U.S. included stationing at McConnell Air Force Base in Wichita, Kansas and Chennault Air Force Base in Louisiana.

He retired in grade of Lt. Col. In 1962. Returning to Bethel he continued flying plus devoted much time and effort building up Bethel Airport facilities. He gave flying lessons, had a new underground fueling system installed plus he was able to obtain Town of Bethel maintenance for the runway in 1964 and 65. Besides Dyke's airport work he had a partner of similar interests in Merrit Bean of Errol, NH, a contractor. Together they were able to round up additional business support for improving airport conditions. A small airport terminal building was constructed between the first hangar and the airport parking area.

Col. Dyke is credited with obtaining aeronautical licensing by the Maine Aeronautics Commission in 1964 and saw the airport become included in the National Airport Plan in 1965. All this was due not only to his setting sights on making a better airport but also to cashing in on his knowledge of aeronautical administration and from his military service and experience. [5]

Airport fun days: Ivory Currier, one of Bethel's own, had become a true airport fan. One day word got around that Sid Dyke was going to give Ivory a plane ride and show him a few stunts (and see if he could take it). As I remember it quite a crowd had gathered at the airport to watch their plane take off. As their plane gained altitude over the airport we watched from the ground as their plane did spins, rolls, stalls and wing overs. Everyone waited to see how Ivory took all these aerobatics. The plane landed; Col Dyke had a big smile. Ivory climbed out of the plane with a big smile too but he looked a little dizzy and he had to steady himself before trying to walk away. "I made it!", he said.

In an unfortunate flying accident on April 23, 1966 Sidney Dyke was killed in when his plane crashed in the Northwest Bethel area. His passenger, Ormand Andrews of Bryant Pond, also died in the crash. After surviving many, many hazardous flying missions, Colonel Dyke died while on a short flight to see if ice was out in nearby streams and smelts were running.

Sidney Dyke is buried at Riverside Cemetery. His gravestone inscription reads: Sidney A Dyke, Maine Lt Col US Air Force Ret, World War II AM, Dec 21, 1912 – April 23, 1966

NOTES: - see next page.



Col Dyke later in his Air Force flying career. Photo copied from a special 2003 brochure prepared by the Town of Bethel

Bethel Maine History – Sidney A. Dyke

1. Eva Bean wrote that he left for Canadian air service in 1939. Undated news clipping with inked in date of Jan 25, 1941 said he was leaving the first of next week. (Bethel Historical Society collection)

2. The “Hump” was the tag name attached to hazardous military transport flying over the eastern end of the Himalayan Mountains from India to China. The strategic mission was to supply Chiang Kai-shek’s Chinese Army fighting the Japanese invasion of China. Japanese forces had taken control of the land supply routes. Flying the

3. Bethel Citizen Nov. 30, 1944. CAPTAIN DYKE HONOR GUEST AT DINNER PARTY A dinner party was given for Capt. Sydney Dyke Sunday at the home of his wife’s parents , Mr. and Mrs. Ralph Berry. Those present were Private Francis Berry, Durham, N.H., Miss Mary Lou Chapman, Mr. and Mrs. Charles Freeman, Judith, Mark, Gerald and Lorenda Freeman, Mr. and Mrs. Rallph Berry, Glencye and Claire Berry, Capt. and Mrs. Sidney Dyke, Sylvia and Alan Dyke. Capt. Dyke left Sunday night for Homestead Fla. where he will take a short course in Transition School.

4. Eva Bean, *East Bethel Road*

5. Col Dyke’s role in the history and development of Bethel’s airport comes mostly from a town brochure prepared in 2003 for the celebration and ribbon cutting when the airport’s newly expanded runway was opened.

Early accounts of Sidney Dyke’s flying experience and interest come from Eva Bean’s 1959 book, *East Bethel Road*. The photo of Sidney Dyke in uniform and wearing the shoulder patch of the China, Burma, India Theater is from the Bethel Historical Society collections.

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Additional material welcome