

## **TOUR REPORT**

Destination on Day One was New York's Kennedy Airport aboard a British Airways Boeing 777 and on to a hotel for a two night stop.



The first of many museums to be visited during the following days was the retired aircraft carrier *USS Intrepid* on the waterfront in Manhattan. It had an impressive collection of aircraft on the flight deck including a rare Lockheed A-12 (pictured), the single seat CIA-operated predecessor to the better known SR-71. On display by the side of the ship is a former BA Concorde. New York was keen to have an example as the type's prime route was to the 'Big Apple'. It is perhaps ironic they wanted one, as for many years in the early days of Concorde the city fought long and hard to have the type banned from operating here!

After the museum the day was free to see the sights and savour the sounds of the city. Many of the group chose to have a river cruise along the Hudson.

Long Island and the American Air Power Museum was the first of two museums on the second full day in the USA. This location is on the airfield that once housed the mighty Republic Aviation factory, and as could be expected, types such as the F-84 and F-105 were on display.

On then to Brooklyn for the Historic Aircraft Restoration Project Museum at the now disused Floyd Bennett Field. In the vast hangar the volunteers work on such types as PBY Catalina, P-2 Neptune, A-4 Skyhawk, HU-16 Albatross and a Grumman Goose: the latter in NY Police colours. Outside, on the one day on the trip it rained, was the Boeing C-97 owned by the Berlin Airlift Historic Foundation (pictured) which is near the end of its restoration. It is planned that it will join the group's C-54 on the air show circuit. It was from this airfield that very nearly all of the American aircraft destined to fight in Europe set out on their long trans-Atlantic crossing to the U.K. in World War 2.



It was then a several hours drive to the state of Delaware to stay for one night.

Next day under a clear blue sky we visited the USAF Air Mobility Command Museum at Dover AFB and what a treat it was. As could be expected, it was mainly transport types, which included a Lockheed Lodestar, Convair C-131, Douglas C-47, C-54, C-124, C-133, C-9 and VC-9. This latter aircraft is in full VIP fit and used to fly the US Vice President about as well as many other dignitaries.

They have, next to each other, for size comparison a Lockheed C-141A and the stretched C-141B. The Lockheed Constellation on show is not in fact a military C-121 but a former L-1049 airliner rescued from the roof of a restaurant in Penndel PA in 1997 where it had been for 30 years. As well as the transports two classic century-series fighters are McDonnell F-101 Voodoo and Convair F-106 Delta Dart. It is an excellent collection and very well-spaced out for photography.

Driving south to Washington D.C. we arrive early afternoon, and spend the rest of the day, at the incredible National Air & Space Museum's "Steven Udvar-Hazy Centre" which is located on the perimeter of Dulles International Airport.

With everything from the B-29 'Enola Gay' to an F-35 via a Dornier 335 (pictured), a Concorde, a P-61 Black Widow and one of the original Space Shuttles, this is one of the best aviation collections in the world.



When it closed for the day we drove in to the very centre of Washington DC for our two night stay.

The next day was a free day to explore the nation's capital and most of the group went to the NASM's other site in the Mall. This features such historic aircraft as the Ryan NYP in which Charles Lindbergh did the first solo crossing of the Atlantic in 1927 and the Bell X-1 that Chuck Yeager flew through the sound barrier in 1947 as well as many, many more.

With the sun shining there was much to see in the city.



The following morning we set off for two different museums: first was the collection at Patuxent River NAS.

It features both the winner and losing entries for the 'Joint Strike Fighter' the former being the Lockheed-Martin X-35C and the latter the Boeing X-32: perhaps the ugliest aircraft ever built (pictured).

The other types on show were mainly modern jets ranging from an RA-5 Vigilante to an F-14 Tomcat - all in full colour markings.

It was a complete contrast to the afternoon's visit to the living history museum that is colonial Williamsburg.

Next day was a visit to the US Army Transport Museum at Fort Eustis with a range of some of the oddest items that have been devised to move people and equipment about as well as well-known helicopters and fixed wing types.

The afternoon was spent in Norfolk to see the battleship *USS Wisconsin* plus an optional boat trip around the area. It was a very hot afternoon with the temperature reaching 93°F.

Having now settled into five nights in our hotel in Virginia Beach for the rest of the tour, we set off the following day to visit Hampton Air Park, Virginia Air & Space Museum and ended the day with a tour of the dockyards at Norfolk NAS. Three aircraft carriers were in including the lead ship of the new Ford Class.

The next three days were spent at Virginia Beach Airport for the air show.

Friday was 'arrivals and rehearsals' and much flying took place in the hot sunshine. Warbirds that took to the air or arrived included FW-190, P-51 Mustang, P-61 King Cobra, Spitfire, P-40, Dauntless, Mosquito, Catalina and even a Curtiss C-46 Commando whose wing span was nearly as wide as the grass runway (pictured).



Day two at the show started bright and sunny and members of the group took the opportunity to fly in a B-25 Mitchell, P-51 Mustang and a Cornell. However in the late morning the clouds rolled in and a strong cross wind put an end to the days flying.



The last day, Sunday, saw high clouds and light winds and a full flying programme. The tree-lined background was ideal for pictures and the grass runway was quite close to the crowd line, but far enough away to keep the FAA inspectors, who were on hand, happy.

Monday was the day to travel home, but en-route we visited the US Marine Corps Museum at The Triangle. The aircraft in the well-lit atrium were well positioned for pictures but others were in positions that were quite impossible to even see properly, let alone think of taking a picture.

On then to Washington's Dulles Airport and a BA Boeing 747 Jumbo Jet to fly us back through the night to London.

A great time was had by all!