

A Berlin Adventure

MHM FLUGPLATZ BERLIN-GATOW



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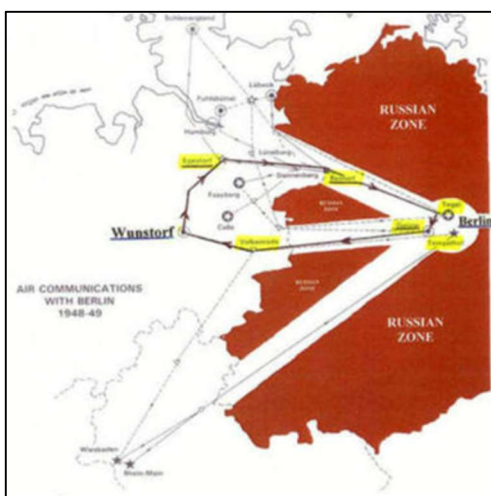
Summary

John Whitlock, 99 years old, RAF Veteran of WW2 and 356 Berlin Airlift missions, thrilled me by asking me to fly him to the 75th Anniversary Berlin Airlift Commemorations, in Berlin, on 11th and 12th May 2024. On 10th May 2024, we successfully flew him there, including taking his historic Airlift route and making it now 357 trips! By courtesy of the British Embassy in Berlin, we were afforded VIP treatment and attended the Commemorations on 12th May, where John was introduced to the German Minister of Defence, Boris Pistorius, by the Military Attache to the British Embassy in Berlin, Group Captain Mark Heffron. In addition, we attended two formal dinners. The combined age of our 3 'man' crew is 242 years!

The Berlin Blockade and Airlift

Through the belligerence of the Soviet Union, allegedly because of the introduction of the new Deutsche Mark currency in West Berlin, the railway, road and canal access to West Berlin was blocked by them on June 24th, 1948. In response, the Western Allies organised an amazing relief effort by air, suggested by Air Commodore Reginald Newham Waite, CB, CBE.

More than 500 relief missions were flown daily, carrying at first 3,500 tons of fuel and food. This amount more than doubled by the end of the airlift. Flights were operated from eight airfields in West Germany to three Berlin airfields and had defined routes to avoid conflict between outbound and returning aircraft. At the height of the airlift, aircraft arrived at Berlin every 30 seconds. John flew from the RAF base, Wunstorf, near Hannover to RAF Gatow in West Berlin, close to Tegel airfield, which itself was rapidly developed by the French to accommodate Airlift aircraft. Tempelhof airfield, in the American Sector of Berlin was the third airfield used.



The routes taken in support of the Berlin Airlift

Various aircraft types were used in the Berlin Airlift. The US used C-47 and C-54 transport aircraft and the British used Haltons (a civilianised Halifax), Sunderlands and Avro Yorks. Our John Whitlock flew his 356 missions in Avro York aircraft. In the air museum at Duxford is a York aircraft, MW232 which John flew in on the following occasions:

- 3 Aug 1948 Wunstorf to Gatow to Wunstorf
- 21 Aug 1948 Wunstorf to Lyneham
- 21 Oct 1948 Wunstorf to Gatow to Wunstorf
- 24 Dec 1948 Wunstorf to Lyneham



John boarding Avro York MW232 at Duxford after 75 years



Sitting again in his seat on MW232

On May 12th, 1949, the Soviets realised that their blockade efforts were futile and relinquished. However, the airlift continued until September 30th, 1949, in case the lifting of the blockade by the Russians was a ruse. In total, 2.3 million tons of supplies - of which 65% was coal - were delivered on 278,000 flights. Concurrently, Operation Little Vittles ran, in which candy-dropping aircraft (dubbed "raisin bombers") dropped sweets and generated much goodwill among German children.

The Plan

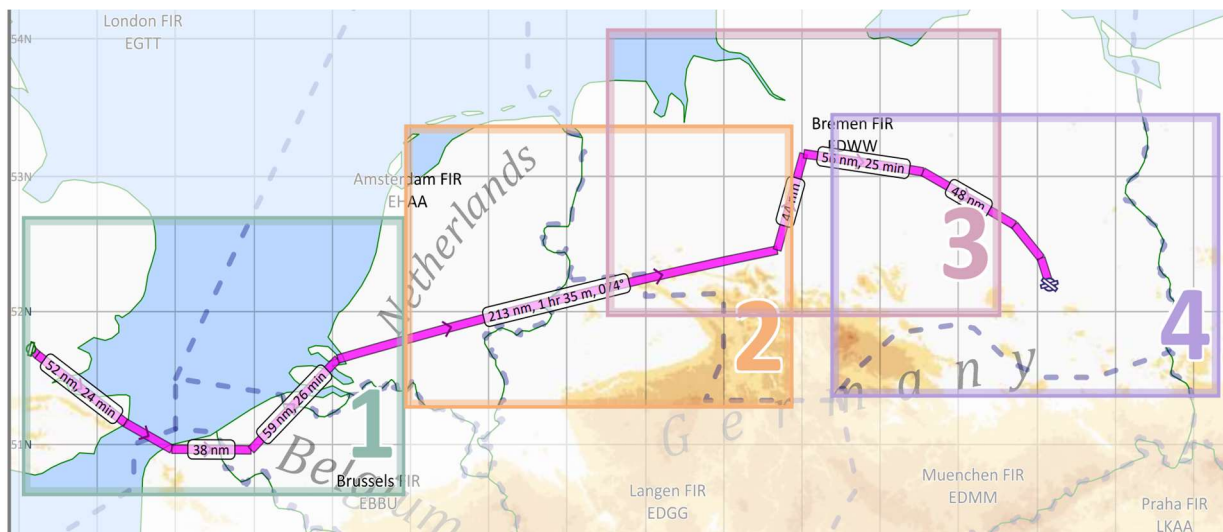
Our plan was to fly from our home base, North Weald, to Berlin on or about Friday May 10th, in order to be present in Berlin for the 75th Anniversary Commemorations of the Berlin Airlift, on May 11th and May 12th 2024.

Early in our considerations, we had the idea to fly the same Airlift route John had taken those 356 times before, for the last sector of our journey. That Airlift route was from RAF Wunstorf near Hannover to RAF Gatow, near Potsdam. Wunstorf was an RAF base up to 1957, until it was handed back to German control and is now a NATO military airfield. The destination airfield, Gatow, which was in British West Berlin, is no longer an operational airfield, but is retained as an interesting museum.

To fly the Airlift route, we would need permission to land at Wunstorf and Ian made contact with the British Embassy in Berlin who provided details to approach them. Wunstorf was very enthusiastic and granted us permission to land and asked if they could take photographs and produce a write up about our adventure.

Our main considerations for the flights were John's comfort and taking sufficient breaks, but there was also a need to make good progress to accomplish the journey and provide adequate opportunity for food intake for our wildcard photographer! Leaving the UK for Europe, we immediately lose an hour!

We planned the most direct but sensible route. A short channel crossing, then routing through Belgium, Holland and Germany to Wunstorf. Then we would take the Airlift route to Gatow and on to the friendly Berlin GA airfield, Schöenhagen, which is about 20nm Southwest of Berlin. Researching Berlin GA airfields, Schöenhagen had great SkyDemon reviews and offered on-airfield car hire and a good restaurant – both very useful elements for a not so mobile 99-year-old and a forever famished photographer!



Our outline planned route from North Weald to Berlin

Initially we tried to break the journey into about three even legs, but the requirement for speedy stops and hard runways (following heavy May rains), pointed us to Calais as the airport of Schengen entry. But then, about 10 days before our trip, Wunstorf said it would not be possible to land there after all, due to public holidays and airfield closure. (It makes you wonder how a NATO airfield can be closed for a week?!).

So, we looked at alternate airfields close by – Porta Westfalica, but it has take off restrictions if there is an easterly wind – Rinteln, but the runway is a little short (600m) and has lots of glider activity. In the end we went for Hannover – a large commercial airport, close to Wunstorf, GA friendly and agreeable for us to overfly and orbit Wunstorf on departure, in Class D airspace.

North Weald usually has a curfew until 08:40 local, but the airfield manager kindly consented for us to depart at 08:15. We planned to avoid most controlled airspace en-route and took it as a bonus if we obtained crossing clearances. Holland has quite a bit of controlled airspace, but one can thread nicely up the middle. In fact, our planned route avoiding controlled airspace was less than 10nm longer than the straight-line route between Calais and Hannover (302nm).

Because the Airlift Commemorations were fixed in time, we needed suitable weather on the day. This was not a trip we could choose to make when we wished. This was a trip with definite deadlines. We had everyone crossing fingers and praying in that respect! We were flying to attend specific events on specific days with only a very narrow window of opportunity.

We are indebted to Group Captain Mark Heffron of the British Embassy, Berlin, who arranged for us to attend the Commemoration events and receive splendid VIP treatment.

We considered the following risks and their mitigations:

RISK	MITIGATION
John's vulnerability	Use steps to board aircraft. Transit chair to avoid long walks. Frequent checks that he is comfortable. Sick bags and a 'little John'. Comprehensive travel insurance.
Suitable Weather	Window of opportunity only plus or minus one day
Fuel availability	Ensure fuel available at landing airfields. Full fuel on departure. W&B checked.
Aircraft serviceability	Test flights before trip to ensure aircraft functioning properly. Fuel flow/speed checks. Cleaning of manifold pressure sensor, which has given problems in the past
Availability of food	Ensure food available at landing airfields
Soggy grass runways	Choose airfields with hard runways
Crew health	Try and avoid contact with third parties in days prior to the trip

John does have a few medical problems, as you would expect for someone his age. When seeking travel insurance on-line, we often had the amusing response, "Invalid date of birth". However, the company, 'Stay Sure', did provide insurance for him.

It can be no surprise that we extol the virtues of SkyDemon for flight planning. It is a wonderful and comprehensive tool. On our adventure, we met several European pilots and they all seemed familiar with and very positive about SkyDemon.

While our entry into this competition primarily concerns the flight to Berlin, planning other aspects were also very important, including hotel, transportation, the itinerary while in Berlin and the return journey.

The Crew

John Whitlock, age 99

John was born and brought up in South London. He recalls as a boy of about 10 years old, travelling on an open top bus with his parents, near London Airport, which was Croydon in those days. A Dragon Rapide noisily flew very low over them and landed. From then on, all he wanted to do was to fly.

As soon as he could, John joined the RAF as an apprentice, aged 16, in 1941. He trained as a Wireless Operator Mechanic (WOM) Air Gunner. In 1943 he was assigned to assist New Zealand Squadron 490, operating Sunderland Flying Boats out of Bathurst (now Banjul) in The Gambia. John flew anti-submarine patrols over the Atlantic Ocean off the West Coast of Africa, totalling 414 hours by the end of the war.

John was then sent to Lyneham and joined 99 Squadron to retrain with Transport Command on Avro York aircraft. He flew supply and personnel repatriation missions to the various British outposts in the days when Britain had an Empire. Typically, he would fly a 5-day mission to Singapore, routing Malta, Hubbaniyah in Iraq, Karachi in India (as it was then) and on to Singapore.

A mere 10 days after the start of the Berlin Blockade, John was posted to Wunstorf, Germany. He flew supply missions to Gatow whenever weather allowed, day and night and often two round trips a day. He was part of a crew of 4 – Pilot, Navigator, Wireless Operator Mechanic and Loadmaster. John was responsible for VHF communications, which then only worked over a short range and were used for take-off and landing. Transmitter and receiver equipment aboard was used for Morse code messages in flight and had a much greater range. John flew 356 times from Wunstorf to Gatow in support of the Berlin Airlift.



Sgt John Whitlock Air Gunner



John (L) with crew beside a York aircraft at Gatow

After the airlift John returned to Transport Command duties, rising to the rank of Warrant Officer, until his service with the RAF finished in 1950. In the RAF he had flown the following aircraft:

Oxford	20 hrs
Anson	36 hrs
Dakota	89 hrs
Sunderland	414 hrs
York	1224 hrs

After his RAF service, John worked in local government, but his flying career was not over. In 1985 he gained his PPL on a Piper PA28 at Stapleford Airfield and he continued to fly for 25 years until the age of 85.

SEP	301 hrs
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John was an active participant in the British Berlin Airlift Association (BBAA) until its demise after Covid. With that organisation he went on many historical trips to Germany and to previous Berlin Airlift Commemorations.

John has some difficulties now with sight and hearing and uses an electric mobility scooter, when necessary. We attempted to put the scooter into the aircraft, but it took too much room on a passenger seat, so we took a transit chair in the hold instead, which worked perfectly.

Ian Brierley, age 74

Always interested in model aircraft and flying from an early age, Ian made the common mistake of pursuing a career elsewhere! His first flight, aged ten, was in a Bristol Freighter from Southend to Calais. His interest lay dormant during high school and university years but then the enthusiasm resurfaced and he obtained his PPL in the USA in 1980. He has subsequently flown 2500 hours on single engine piston light aircraft – mostly Cessnas and shared his passion with many Air Cadet youths, friends and Air Force Veterans, through various volunteer bodies.

Project Propeller was one such body and it is through his volunteer work with them that Ian met John Whitlock in 2011. Project Propeller was an annual reunion for ex-World War II Aircrew held at airfield locations throughout the UK. Its unique feature was that the veterans were ferried to and from the venue from all over the UK in light aircraft flown by volunteer pilots. The participants were treated to a street-party lunch, entertained by live, 1940's style music and variously given talks by notable aviation heroes, including Eric 'Winkle' Brown, Raymond Baxter and Peter Twiss.



A collage of nine Project Propeller excursions with John and other delightful Veteran Gentlemen

Ian had been participating in Project Propeller from almost its inception in 1999, but that year it was held at North Weald, his home airbase, so nowhere to fly to! Subsequently, he flew veterans every year (when the weather permitted). John Whitlock joined Eddie Collins and Peter Wilkinson in 2011 to venture to Wickenby for the reunion and every year subsequently. Sadly, Eddie and Peter are no longer alive and indeed, the whole Project ceased after 2022 with the demise of so many of the former aircrew. But John has continued to fly with Ian and quickly saw the Cessna as an accessible means for him to attend the Berlin Commemorations.

Ian was a volunteer Civilian Instructor with the RAF Air Cadets for 20 years and provided voluntary Air Experience Flights to the Cadets throughout that time. He flew 187 cadets and 76 staff for a total of 507 flying hours logged. He took his aircraft to Summer Camps at or near RAF airbases and flew Cadets during that time, notably from RAF Waddington and from Brunton, nearby RAF Boulmer. On 17 August 1997, with three Air Cadets, he flew to the Pooleys fly-in at Glenrothes, where Robert Pooley awarded him and his crew the Furthest Travelled prize.

Ian also shares his passion for flying through Wingly and has taken 34 charming passengers via that scheme.

Ian owned a Cessna 172 from 1991 until 2017, when he sold it to a gentleman in Slovenia and upgraded to a Cessna 182. Ian ferried the Cessna 172 from the UK to Slovenia, which was a wonderful trip in its own right.



Ian's Cessna 172 Model N, 1978



Ian's Cessna 182 Model T, 2008

Cheryl Prax, age 69

Cheryl very much enjoys the passions of photography and flying. She attends events in the UK and Oshkosh USA in the pursuit of wonderful images. Her old school camera back in the day was an Olympus OM10, but she graduated to a Canon 600D when digital cameras appeared. Her camera of choice now is the Fujifilm XT30 which combines very sharp images with vivid colours in an ultralight body with retro dials. 'What's not to love', she says! Her other claim to fame was starring with Ann Margret in the film "Tommy".

Cheryl keeps quite busy with her photography assignments, particularly covering many community events in London at weekends. She will readily give you her take on most things and very much enjoys being a wildcard conversationalist. Her verbal and photographic output are verbose – she took 10,000 pictures on her last trip to Oshkosh. But although that sounds a lot, it's only the same as the number of aircraft that fly in!

Our famished photographer writes: *The video was the hardest part of the project for me. My previous experience of editing was sticking two reels of 3-minute Super 8 film together with Sellotape. No fancy editing, adding words, choosing transitions from one scene to the next, adding music etc. This was a whole new ballgame. My son's girlfriend suggested CapCut as an editing tool loved by Tik Tok users. Since I mainly use a desktop and not a mobile phone, she could not help me much. There was no time to read a manual – is there one?? So I Googled every stage, as and when needed. I spent days adding and tweaking. Not a Tic Tok masterpiece but hopefully I have captured the gist of our trip!*

The Aircraft

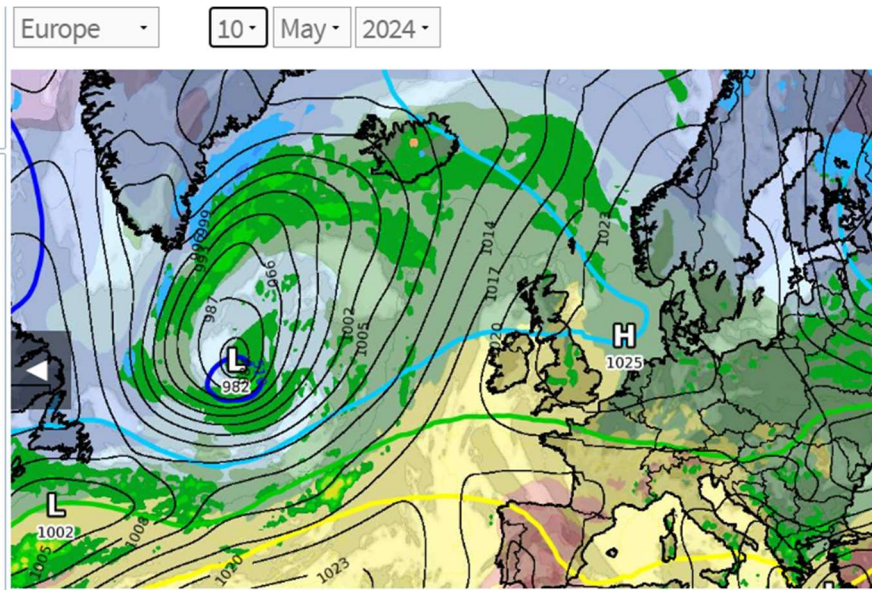
One advantage of the Cessna aircraft is the high wing affording easier access for elderly passengers and a clear view down for taking photographs. It also has two doors! The Cessna 182 has good load carrying capacity and is a very versatile aircraft. It holds a large amount of fuel (348L) and could have an endurance of 8 hours, if one's bladder or embarrassment allowed! Ours is fitted with Garmin G1000Nxi 'glass' panel instrumentation, which makes for safe, enjoyable and informed flight.

For this trip, the aircraft was about 10 hours out of its annual inspection, so any maintenance induced bugs had been ironed out. We carried out a couple of test flights to monitor fuel flow against power settings and we cleaned the orifice of the manifold pressure sensor, which has a tendency to clog slowly over time. We weighed everything to ensure we were within the weight and balance envelope.

Our famished photographer writes: *Ian meticulously weighed everything that was going into the aircraft, including us and our luggage. Since my usual weekend luggage is over 20kg I could see this would be a problem! I didn't want to go on a diet, so I had to be ruthless with the luggage! The clothes had to go, but my thinned down first aid kit and makeup were a must have! Ian had a dry run with the equipment needed by John. His electric wheelchair would not fit through the door of the hold, but it would fit on the back seat. However, this was not ideal as it meant John did not have any spare room. We decided to leave it behind. I pulled out an old folding transit chair I had at home and Ian brought it back to life. It proved invaluable for trips round the museums. My photography step ladder made an ideal step for John to get into the aircraft.*

Execution of the plan

For at least a week in advance, we used all the tools at our disposal to get a feel of what the weather would be doing. Netweather purports to give up to 14 days of forecasts and Windy and the Met Office give shorter and probably more accurate prognoses. We were lucky - a large high-pressure system was across the UK and Central Europe, but slowly in decline. We decided we could get there OK and worry later about the return.



On the morning of the day before departure, we were fairly confident that we could make the outbound trip to schedule. We refuelled and loaded the aircraft with luggage in the hold and flight plans in the Garmin. Our luggage included aircraft tie-downs, chocks, a Cambrai cover, spare oil, spare batteries for the noise cancelling headsets, the transit chair for John and our overnight bags.

Later that day, Ian checked NOTAMS for the entire route, submitted the outbound GAR to UK and French authorities, checked the TAFs and submitted flight plans through the AFPEX platform, for all the 3 legs. SkyDemon routes were checked and PLOGs and maps printed for each crew member.

High pressure brings the possibility of the temperature-dew point spread being small in the cool early morning and the subsequent likelihood of mist. This was the case, but within the 1500m VFR limit.

Leg 1 North Weald to Calais 84nm 45min

We rose early on Friday May 10th and arrived at North Weald in good time to put overnight bags in the aircraft and complete final checks. We donned lifejackets for the overwater crossing to Calais.



Pre-departure 06:45Z North Weald

The early morning visibility was about 3000m and forecast to improve quickly. We boarded and achieved our concessionary take off time at 08:17 local. Our route took us directly across Southend Class D airspace – we could avoid it if necessary – but it wasn't, because Southend were obliging and gave us clearance direct to Dover VOR, not above 3400'. After DVR we proceeded to the West of the cross channel Temporary Restricted Areas that have a minimum transit height of 2500' and began a descent from 3200' to arrive at the French coast at 1000'.

Calais tower was manned and we were quickly given runway 06 as in use. Visibility was about 6000m and we spotted the runway late, but not too late and landed successfully after 45 minutes of flight.

Calais was our point of entry into Schengen Land and the French Customs Officers were waiting and expecting us, as per the Calais form that they like to receive, which Ian submitted the day before. We refreshed on small espresso coffees and chocolate croissants before heading back to the aircraft. The Calais Airport restaurant is going through resurgent times and is very good.



Leg 1 North Weald to Calais

Leg 2 Calais to Hannover 308nm 2hr38min

Our 'quick' stop at Calais to enter Schengen, refresh and get airborne again took an hour! Very soon we headed east towards nearby Belgium and called Ostende Approach. They immediately cleared us through Koksider and Ostende airspace, direct to the Dutch border and we flew at 2000'. For our photographer, the lower the altitude, the better. But she has to compromise on this because higher is smoother. The visibility was still very reduced and although we were close to the coast at times, it was hard to see the sea!



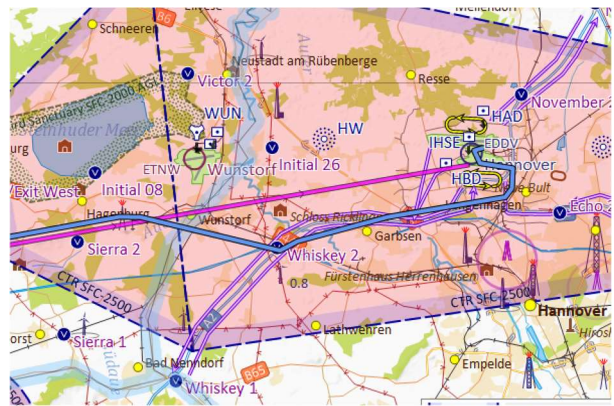
Bruges in the mist

We overflew Bruges and in 20 minutes were at the Dutch border and transferred to Dutch Mil on the radio. They are a Flight Information Service and are there to answer any questions on controlled or restricted airspace and any airspace activity we may need to be aware of. For our flight they advised of parachuting at Seppe, but our route took us well clear of that. We crossed Westerschelde water, Zeeland and Oosterschelde at 2000' but still with limited visibility.

Proceeding northeast through Holland, we climbed to clearer air at 3200' and passed the bridges at Nijmegen on the river Rhine (Waal branch), infamous through operation Market Garden. Further on, SkyDemon warns of gliding activity and we did indeed see one glider – the only traffic we saw on this leg of the trip. A few minutes more and we were in Germany. We received a Flight Information Service and squawk from Langen Information but heard very little from them.



Busy railway junction at Osnabrück

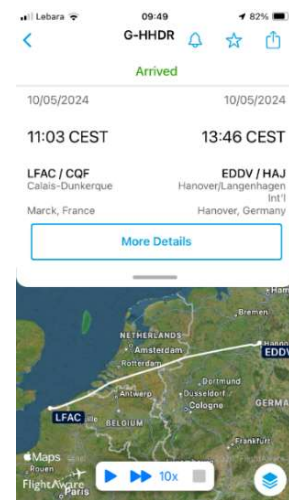


Whiskey 2 arrival at Hannover

As we approached Osnabrück we spotted our planned airfield stop for the return journey and then overflew the town. A further 30 minutes on, through flat featureless countryside, we could see Steinhuder Meer – the large lake immediately to the west of Wunstorf airfield. We headed directly towards it and called Hannover for entry clearance. They told us to route via Whiskey 2 and we received an early clearance to land on runway 27L.



Leg 2 Calais to Hannover



Leg 3 Hannover to Schöenhagen 242nm 2hr02min

As an additional element to our adventure, we took along a symbolic bag of flour for John to carry from Wunstorf to Berlin, just as he had carried sacks of it in York aircraft, 75 years earlier.



John taking symbolic flour from Hannover



Historic flour bag in Gatow museum



John passing flour to a West Berliner



John aboard York aircraft MW232 with flour cargo



Return to Wunstorf

Our famished photographer writes: *Originally, we planned to land at Wunstorf Air Base (Military Airfield) but when permission was rescinded, we had to choose another airfield. We eventually settled on Hannover, even though we were worried about the distance from the aircraft to the terminal, in order to find food. We were right about the distance and in the end we just had snacks at the small General Aviation reception and held off our hunger until our final stop in Berlin.*

Landing at Hannover was an incredible experience as we poodled past the big boys on our way to refuelling. On checking the arrivals board, it showed we were sandwiched between an EC145 helicopter and a Flemish Boeing 737 of Corendon Airlines. Taking off was also an experience. We taxied to the holding point at the middle section of runway 27L and awaited our turn. We waited there whilst a TUI B737 took off, followed by an Austrian Embraer 195, until finally it was our turn. We tentatively made our way onto the runway ensuring it was all clear. After take-off, I glanced back to check, just in case a jet was catching up with us!!

With permission from Hannover ATC, we headed west towards Wunstorf, a distance of 9nm. We circled the airfield at low level for John to see if he could recall the features there. Our photographer took lots of pictures and some video. Wunstorf is now a NATO airbase and we could see 15 Airbus A400 transport aircraft on the ramp.

We then embarked on the journey John took 356 times previously. The distance by this route from Wunstorf to Gatow is 182nm, whereas the straight-line distance is 137nm. We headed north for 27nm to Walsrode, a small town in very rural countryside and then turned northeast for 25nm towards Egestorf – another small town turning point. From there, retracing the airlift route, we headed east past extensive woodland until we intersected the Elbe River.



Rural forest eastbound



The Elba river

The protuberances from the banks of the river are wing dams – structures built to encourage the flow of the river down the middle of the channel, to avoid erosion of the banks and consequent build-up of sediment in the main channel.

We headed southeast towards Heningsdorf for a further 69nm, at which point we were quite close to Berlin and turned in a southerly direction towards Gatow. We had excellent views of Tegel airfield on our left, which was in the French sector and Gatow airfield to our right, which was in the British sector.



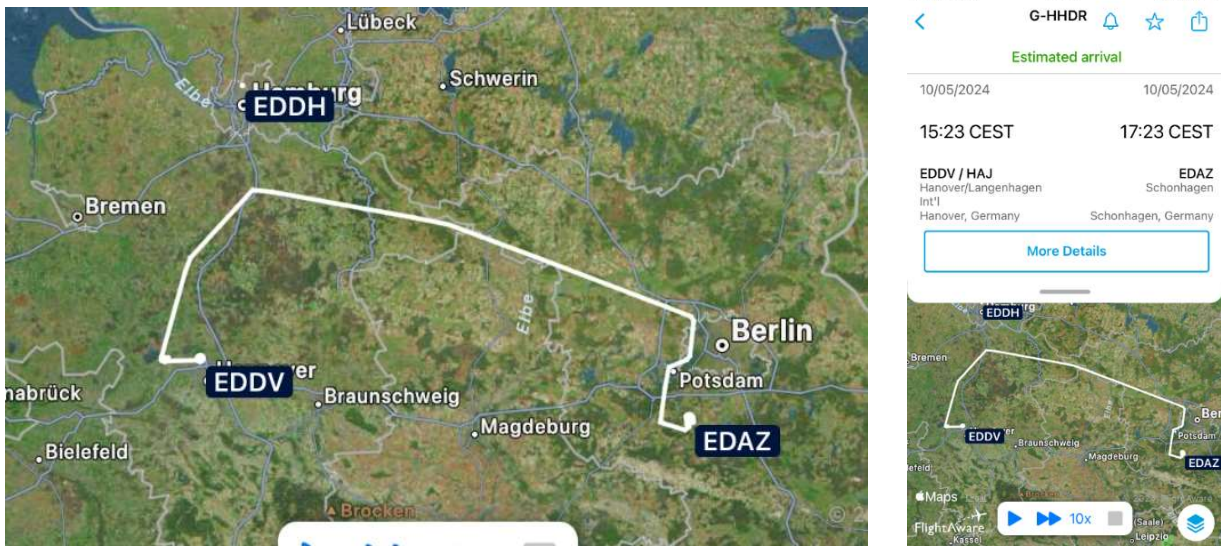
Tegel airfield



Gatow airfield

Flying the route John took from Wunstorf to Gatow was emotional for us all. John remarked that the scenery today was very different to when he last flew that route, 75 years ago!

From Gatow we flew over Potsdam, then south to avoid the main Berlin Brandenburg airport airspace, to Schöenhagen, where we landed smoothly.



Leg 3 Hannover to Schöenhagen

Successful Completion of the Flights

The flights were completed successfully as planned, on Friday 10th May 2024. As an indication of how lucky we were with the weather, the QNH on departure was 1025, at Calais 1024, at Hannover on arrival, 1024, on departure 1023 and on arrival at Schöenhagen, 1022. The FlightRadar24 images included here, have the times of the flights and the routes flown.



The crew taking well-earned refreshments at Berlin, Schöenhagen



The crew subsequently at Gatow Airfield

Subsequent Events

Saturday Activities

Well rested from our flights on the previous day, we made our way to the Airlift Memorial at Tempelhof Plaza in the morning. This was an opportunity to reflect on the amazing achievement of the Berlin Airlift before the busy Commemorations the following day. We viewed the interesting temporary display assembled in front of the airport terminal and then proceeded to Gatow Airfield Museum, close to Potsdam. The museum has a fine collection of original hangars and buildings filled with aircraft and artefacts of the period. Outside, is an extensive collection of cold war jet aircraft, UK, US and Soviet.

For our cover photo we grabbed a young passer-by, with his son in a pushchair, to take a picture of the three of us. He turned out to be an ex US jet fighter pilot and on hearing our story, asked if we could send him a copy of the finished project. Many people at Gatow shook John's hand and we recounted to their children what John had done.

Our famished photographer was keen to eat by now, but the catering facilities available were not up to the requirements of John, so instead we found a very pleasant Italian restaurant overlooking the lake. After eating huge pizzas (and pasta for John) we received a call from the Group Captain, inviting us to the formal dinner at the Rotes Rathaus - Berlin Town Hall - with the Mayor, in three hours time! We attended the splendid dinner and met other Veterans and their families.



Formal dinner in the Town Hall



The Group Captain and John

Sunday Commemoration Events

The formal Commemoration Service event took place on Sunday morning 12th May 2024 in Tempelhof Plaza. Security was tight because it was attended by a number of dignitaries, including the German Minister of Defence, Boris Pistorius. It was a very well choreographed occasion, including speeches, wreath laying and accompanying band music. John was introduced to the Minister of Defence who was taken by surprise on learning John had travelled by light aircraft from the UK, via Wunstorf and Gatow.



John meeting the German Minister of Defence, Boris Pistorius Boris taken by surprise learning of John's arrival by Cessna

Our photographer writes: *At the commemoration service we had front row seats and shook the hands of many dignitaries. I was allowed to mingle and felt like I was on a film set, not knowing who was a real general and who was a '1940s' actor. People posed for me regardless! Meanwhile the real paparazzi were roped off in a small section far away, behind the speakers, missing much of the action! One lady approached John and thanked him on behalf of her relatives, who were in Berlin at the time of the blockade. I took their photo. We met many colourful characters each with a story to tell.*

At the Commemoration we wanted John to hand over our bag of flour as a symbol of what he had accomplished throughout the Berlin airlift. We were looking for a Berliner dressed in 1940s clothing and Ian spied a likely looking chap and easily persuaded him to take the flour and pose for us. He then told us that he was playing in the jazz band later. It transpired that he had also played at the farewell dinner for Veterans in 2019, on the 70th anniversary of the Berlin Airlift, in the Royal Albert Hall, London!

The formal Commemoration Service was followed by a generous buffet lunch in the Tempelhof Airport check-in area. The airport is retained for its historical interest and it was amazing to sit there, where so many famous and infamous individuals had passed before.



Lunch in the Tempelhof Airport check-in area



Music and dancing outside the airport building

Monday return

Although this competition entry is concerned with the flights to Berlin on Friday May 10th, 2024, it is worth mentioning our return journey. The stable high-pressure system was in the process of waning and heavy thunderstorms over a wide area of Holland were forecast for Monday afternoon. We were prepared to stay extra days in Berlin, if necessary, but we could see there was a general deterioration in the forecast weather for the coming week. Our initial return plan was to fly a couple of hours West from Berlin and stop at Osnabrüeck , a friendly GA airfield near Muenster, for a break and for lunch. But that would have put us over Holland at the time of the thunderstorms.

In this dilemma, Ian had a flash of inspiration – fly direct from Berlin to Calais ahead of the weather. And so it was. We got up very early, completed everything, were airborne by 10:00 local time and had a wonderful, smooth flight direct to Calais at 4200'. It took 3hr40min and we were all fine on the journey, arriving in plenty of time for a great lunch at the Vol au Vent restaurant at Calais airport. Fully refreshed, we took off for the short hop back across the English Channel.

Arriving at North Weald we were greeted by three burly Border Force Agents from Luton. After scrutinising our passports, they casually asked if we had just been to France for lunch and if we had any souvenirs from Calais! Cheryl told them we had actually come from Berlin and that we were so busy we did not have a single chance to buy anything! She then sprang into raconteur mode and told them our amazing story, which took them by surprise.

Conclusion

They say in life one makes one's own luck, but it would be hard to claim any credit for the luck we had with the weather. This was an all or nothing trip and providence shone upon us.

We do take credit for careful planning. We did that over several weeks and consider the smooth execution of the trip was down to much of that careful planning. It is hard to think of any sudden adrenalin inducing bad moments. We had a most enjoyable time, making many new friends and creating an abundance of happy memories. It is difficult to think what we should have done differently. We had an accessibility issue with the chosen hotel and are attempting to resolve that with them. The flights, the aircraft and the aircrew all behaved themselves. It is great to undertake a trip like this and air traffic control in Europe is more joined up than in the UK. Germany makes sensible use of class E airspace and has a coherent policy on TMZs and listening squawks.

It was a pleasure and a privilege to undertake this trip and we just wonder how we can come up with a better entry theme for next time?!

Cheryl writes: *The whole project was never a given. Anything could happen! There were so many variables that could stop us - health or weather just to name a couple. When we left the white cliffs of Dover behind us, we knew this was it. We had done it!* (Ian: that was a bit presumptuous!)