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USA April-May 2013 'The Airshows That Never Were' Tour Part I

Planning for this trip started early and was centered around two major airshows, at two of the top bases in the States, the main home of the B-52 at Barksdale and the main home of the F-22 at Langley, both being held over the same weekend in early May. Two months before this came the news of political deadlock and the now infamous 'sequestration' word, which meant major government cutbacks for the remaining financial year, including funding for military airshows from the 1st April. This was to have a devastating effect on the US airshow season in 2013 (as well as US military participation at shows overseas), with Langley cancelling their show almost immediately and Barksdale inevitably following suit a few weeks later. With some active flying units actually being grounded (including at these two bases) due to the cuts, obviously there would be no funding for 'luxury's' such as hosting airshows, which is understandable if things are that bad. On top of the major disappointment of it all, Langley was particularly bad news, being one of the shows that has gone to only being held every other year, and during the last show in 2011 the Raptors were grounded!

Deciding to continue with the trip, the itinerary would remain the same up to the few days at Barksdale, which has good photospots to shoot the B-52 movements, the main reason in visiting anyway (and which thankfully were still as busy as usual). From there, the remaining plans for Langley and the Washington area were cancelled, with an alternative plan to visit the Dallas area instead. This was originally to be done during a planned visit to the States in August, but with the airshow at Offutt also being cancelled, that whole August trip was cancelled. Having visited Dallas previously in the stifling mid-Summer, it was a better idea to do it around May anyway.

Starting with a few days in the Miami area, this is always a good place for 'chasing classics', including catching up with a couple of real old gems. From here there was a flight up to Jacksonville for a day in this area, mainly to visit the '707 haven' of nearby Brunswick. A flight to Memphis to visit the FedEx 'SuperHub' was next, mainly to catch some of the older types prior to their imminent retirement, as well as a visit to nearby Graceland. Can't say i am a fan of his music, but the 'redneck king' certainly had great taste in aircraft, with two of his private jets on display being more real gems. From here, the big roadtrip began, driving North from Tennessee up into Arkansas to visit the first of several airfields mainly used by companys in the 'aircraft salvage trade'. Not suprisingly, being quite remote, these are rarely visited and reported on, making them even more interesting. Then heading back South through Little Rock, a few more airfields with stored or derelict aircraft were visited, before continuing on into Louisiana to Barksdale. Finally, flying onto Texas for the second week of the trip, this was spent in the wider Dallas area, again covering a lot of road miles with many places of interest to visit, including plenty of time at NAS Fort Worth for some serious military.

DAY 1 THURSDAY 25TH APRIL

Starting as usual in Bahrain, first flight was BA124 to Heathrow, operated by B777-200 G-VIIY, departing at 0135 and landing 6.40 hours later at 0615L. Then connecting onto AA057 to Miami, operated by B777-200 N789AN, departure was at 1005, landing 9 hours later at 1405. This was only a short visit to Southern Florida of a day and a half, planned around catching up with a few certain aircraft, with the remainder of this first day spent at Opa Locka.

First though was another affect of the sequestration cuts, with less staff and of course longer queues at passport control. Thankfully, this was to be the worst occasion of processing through an airport on this trip, with over two hours taken to get through. The queuing system actually started with lines being formed outside the passport hall, which was full! Despite the apologetic notices, effectively blaming the government for the long wait, there were a lot of very angry people here, many of who were missing connecting flights (you have to clear even when connecting at MIA). Thankfully i didn't have to make a connection, though it was making me late for an important 'appointment'.

Now running late, after collecting the rental, i still hoped to quickly shoot a real classic i had seen on landing, with Travolta's 707 parked on the ramp near Commercial Jet's hangar. I found out later it was there on a C-Check, and was pulled back inside before i managed to get around there. Not a good start, though i've photographed it previously, this was the first of around half of the world's airworthy 707's to be seen on this trip! Further to N707JT, this had recently been grounded due to needing a new vertical stabilizer spar, which had to be manufactured (since none are no longer available), and has now

been fitted. Apparently it didn't fit at first so had to be re-worked, leading to an extended grounding, and typical rumours of the aircraft's fate!

So, heading straight up on the short drive to Opa Locka, i then had a charter booked with Wayman Aviation for a one hour aerial photo shoot over the airport to photograph the many vintage airliners parked there. Despite arriving 20 minutes late, thankfully the charter was still honoured. After doing a similar charter over Victorville etc recently (which is quite popular over the major storage yards), i wanted to give this a shot, which i've never seen anyone try before. Co-ordinating with ATC, we had clearance to work the circuit at 500ft, and with 'side-step to the left' approaches on runway 9R, effectively putting us between 9R and 9L, this was good to shoot the main parking areas. The ride for the charter was 1976-built Cessna 172N N906WA, with pilot Leuman Vilarino doing a great job in what i had requested, including the naughty 150ft pass on the last run!

After shooting most of the classics here (from the ground) previously, the highlight i was really after was B707-330B N88ZL of Iowa Ltd, which i had yet to shoot in the current colour scheme. Seeing this outside Commercial Jet at MIA shortly after some work and re-paint back in 2011, i was unable to photograph it then, and it wasn't long after that it arrived here for storage. Despite the reports that it has been permanently retired, i was fortunate enough to speak with the technician the next morning, who regularly visits to maintain the aircraft, including running the engines. He confirmed it was grounded due to a downturn in the VIP charter market, but was being maintained with a view to hopefully return to service in the near future. With the modern Stage 3 hush-kitted engines, recent check and paint, the owners see the aircraft as more than any old 'disposable' private jet, and are trying to keep the 33-seat VIP vintage jetliner alive. Lets hope so.

Other highlights, new here over the last couple of years, included B727-200 N342PA, which now retired in an all white scheme, was operated in full Pan Am colours from 2002-2007 by Boston-Maine Airways as 'Pan Am Clipper Connection', and is now registered to Airframe Acquisition LLC. Another B727-200 here is similarly owned N410BN, painted in a very nice Braniff-style colour scheme and named 'Mary Clare', while long-term parked B727-100(RE) N400RG ex MBI International & Partners named 'Al Bashaer' still lingers on. A more recent arrival is B737-300 PR-FLX of defunct Flex Linhas Aereas. Known as 'new Varig', this airline was formed by Varig's owners and operated from 2008 until ceasing operations in 2010. Another recent arrival is MD-83 N989PG of Pegasus Aviation, still in the colours of Leal Lineas Aereas after lease as LV-CSW, while of the resident propliners, nice turbo DC-3-65TP YV-2119 arrived last year, apparently being flown to the US to avoid confiscation in Venezuela.

Meanwhile, Carlos Gomez of Florida Air Transport has been making changes recently, with C-54D N9015Q now parked away from their ramp after being sold to Jet One Express. DC-6A N70BF is now fitted with overwing spray gear, and will presumably follow C-54E N460WA out to California on oil dispersal contracts. As well as this, he is now also involved with new outfit Great Southern Airways, which is being set up to operate Convair's on cargo charters to the Bahamas etc. Their first aircraft present, after restoration, is CV-340 (C-131B) N145GT, which had been derelict here for years and looked doomed for the chop. Now looking very smart (still with no registration), interestingly it has been painted into a scheme similar to some of the ex US Navy Convair's also purchased for future use, which are still in storage at Davis Monthan. Apparently up to 9 have been acquired, with 5 for spares use and 4 to be made airworthy (N341GS to N344GS). I guess they had seen these and decided to go with the old US Navy-style scheme, so should hopefully be very nice to catch flying in the future.

Also with Convair's, based operator Miami Air Lease still have their CV-440 N41527 operational, with CV-240 (VT-29B) N150PA and CV-580F N581P both all white (ex Air Tahoma) taken care of on their ramp. Also here, inside their hangar is a bit of an oddball, the weird twin-pusher composite Oma Sud Skycar I-SKYI which was imported a few years ago and gets taken out for the Oshkosh shows etc. Finally on the old stuff here, still present are the three ex Jetstar Aviation Services Jetstars N275MD, N375MD & N777AY. All retired for a few years now, parked together outside, away from their old hangar, owner Michael Dezer had replaced these with Gulfstream 4 N823GA operated by Universal Jet, which sadly crash landed in France last year, killing the three on board. Obviously a big fan of the classic Jetstar, another of his aircraft is present in the nearby Dezer Collection museum, to be visited tomorrow.

Staying on at Opa Locka until dusk for shots, others of note photographed today included Perla Airlines MD-82 YV-335T (ex Alaskan N931AS) parked outside the busy Air One MRO facility, with an ex American Airlines MD-80 being worked on and a Surinam Airways B737-300 inside. Parked nearby is B737-300 N300VJ ex Swift Air, which had arrived back in 2010 as GOL PR-GLM for storage, while of the many biz-jets present, photographed were HS125-700A N118CD, Hawker 800XP N250GM and Hawker 800XP N860TM (ex NetJets CS-DNU) which was shot on finals, air-air from the Cessna! Others included nice silver and red Learjet 60 N160AJ and 1972-built Learjet 25C N252LJ, Permier 1 N1EG, nice silver CL604 N64UC and Beechjet 400A YV-2698. Finally, based USCG Miami HC-144A (CN-235's) 2302 & 2310, and MH-65C's 6511 & 6570 were present, and photographed for a change. All made for a pretty good first day, with another busy long day ahead tomorrow.

DAY 2 FRIDAY 26TH APRIL

With a hotel on the Northern perimeter at MIA, a look along this busy FBO/MRO side of the airport was the first job on sunrise. Big change along here is the new Centurion Cargo Center, built at the North East corner of the airfield (next to Commercial Jet). This big new facility also handles other carriers, with a Southern Air B747 present along with Cathay

Pacific Cargo B747-800F B-LJB. Quick shots are possible around here with discretion, though gone now is access to part of the fence line next to Commercial Jet, where again, quick shots were possible onto the ramp which is regularly used for parking/storage. Slightly further around, along the Eastern perimeter fence overlooking the same ramp, quick shots are still possible, with nice ex SBA Airlines B767-300ER N964PG parked close by, after arriving six months ago. Further along this Northern side, a lot of ex US Airways B737's are parked with titles and tail logos painted over (getting rid of the older stuff following the merger with American). Towards the Western end are the FedEx and UPS facilities, with the IFL ramp nearby. Convair 580F's N131FL & N181FL were photographed (the former WFU?), along with all white Sky King B737-400 N870AG (previously BMA's G-OBMG) parked nearby. Finally, biz-jets at the busy Landmark Aviation FBO are not so easy to shoot, with highlights being Cessna 525B XA-AVX and Gulf 5SP XA-EAJ, along with Gulf 5SP D-AJJK of Windrose Aviation.

Heading back to Opa Locka to finish shooting everything there in the nice morning sun light, others photographed included stored Magnicharters B737-300 XA-UNR and ex Avialeasing An-26B UK-26003 'The Sky's the limit', which now has new Colombian reg HK-4888X, so will presumably be leaving soon. A couple of older Gulfstreams were 1970-built Gulf 2SP N888YZ, and hush-kitted Gulf 3 N918BG, which may be WFU, while Falcon 20F N939CK of Alexa Air Charters may also have arrived for parking? Finally, visiting biz included 1977-built Gulf 2B N511TL with Stage 3 hushkits, Gulf 3 N975RG, Falcon 7X LX-TQJ of Global Jet, nice beige CL601 N411TJ, Westwind 1124 N710SA of Sun Air (Las Vegas), Cessna 525C N990H, Challenger 300 VP-CDV of Arven Ltd, and Gulf 695A Jetprop 1000 YV-2764.

From here it was the short drive to the Dezer Collection museum in North Miami. As mentioned, the owner, property developer Michael Dezer is obviously a big fan of the Jetstar having owned many, and wanted to keep one for his museum collection. Jetstar 2 N175MD was chosen, and after dismantling at Opa Locka and transportation here around two years ago, is now on display. But that is only part of the story, as also being a huge fan of James Bond, the museum also contains the largest collection of original Bond vehicles and props in the world. This includes six Aston Martins, a Soviet T-55 tank featured in Goldeneye, the golden gun itself and several aircraft including the BD-5 Microjet from Octopussy, Hiller UH-12C N780ND used in From Russia With Love, and Cessna 172P N54743 from License To Kill. As for the Jetstar, this now represents the Jetstar 1 N711Z as featured in Goldfinger, with vinyl (not paint) used to create a similar colour scheme to that worn back in 1964. The left side is in the 'Auric Enterprises' colours, with fake reg 'N711Z' (i presume they couldn't use N711Z), while the right side is in USAF-style colours as also shown in the film. Actually, the real N711Z (the second Jetstar built), is now on display at Andrews AFB as '89001'. A really amazing collection, that is only part of the museum, that i would have loved to have spent more time at. Just like the baddie, Auric Goldfinger, Mr Dezer is obviously a bit of a megalomaniac himself when it comes to Bond stuff, and although not the original, the Jetstar is awesome.

The next classic on the agenda is even more of a legendary aircraft, and something totally different. First though, on passing Fort Lauderdale International, a quick look around the perimeter was done, and although they have the very good spectators area here, there was no plan to stop for long on this occasion. Highlights photographed were ex Amerijet B727-200F N909PG, which is now parked here after storage at Opa Locka. The deal with SP Air Cargo as PR-SPC had fallen through, and now registered to Aeronautical Airmotive Modifications Inc, it retains the similar scheme to SP Air Cargo, but with the 'SP' removed and the logo re-painted in blue instead of orange. Looking like its going to be flying for somebody else now, its one that made it out of OPF. Nice BBJ1 N164RJ was also present, registered to WFBN Classic Air, the 'JR' logo on the fin gives away the real owner, Australian TV bigshot Reg Grundy and his wife Joy. Smaller biz included based Learjet 35A N33NJ of National Jets Inc and Challenger 300 N108LT, while nice Cessna 208 floatplane N366TA of Tropical Ocean also appears to be based.

Before leaving, on driving past the spectators area, i could see a couple of half decent things in the queue of taxiing departures, so made a quick stop. Another Challenger 300, N229BP was on its way out, along with Bahamas Air B737-500 C6-BFD (which they have had for nine months) and Silver Airways Saab 340B N417XJ. First shots of one of these, the airline was formed from based Gulfstream International at the end of 2011, bringing in the Saab's to compliment their Beech 1900D's. A productive little stop, the place doesn't look the same though without those old YS-11's, which were all auctioned and scrapped recently.

Moving on, next stop was just to the North of FLL, to visit the Boeing 307B 'plane-boat' NC19904. This amazing and unique thing is docked at the rear of a private residence, where i had arranged to visit. Named 'Cosmic Muffin', the history involved with this aircraft is legendary. One of only ten 307 Stratoliner's built, and one of only two surviving, the other being 'Clipper Flying Cloud' NC19903 at the Smithsonian Museum at Washington Dulles airport.

NC19904 was originally the personal aircraft of Howard Hughes, which he acquired as part of his purchase of TWA in 1939. The aircraft's interior was then converted to an executive office layout by famous designer Raymond Loewy (who also designed the Air Force One livery among many things), along with actress Rita Hayworth, who added her woman's touch to the interior décor. In 1949 the aircraft was sold to Houston oil man Glenn McCarthy, who named it 'The Shamrock', before later being sold to Florida Jet Research of Fort Lauderdale in 1962. Now named 'The Flying Penthouse' the aircraft was written off in 1964 after suffering serious damage during Hurricane Cleo, and after being derelict for five years was then purchased by Kenneth London, who attempted to restore it to airworthy condition. However, the damage was too severe, including to the tail fin, so London then decided to convert it to the 'plane-boat' it now is. Completed in 1974 and named

'The Londonaire', it was fitted with twin inboard V8 motors, controlled from the original aircraft cockpit controls. The interior was also restored, complete with a lounge and bar.

Then, in 1981, current owner Dave Drimmer purchased the 'houseboat' and completed a lot of work to improve the hull. The name 'Cosmic Muffin' was then given, in honour to its reference in Jimmy Buffets novel 'Where is Joe Merchant', and to date it has become famous after being featured in many TV shows etc. Currently, the Muffin is undergoing an external finish restoration, with the rear half stripped and being prepped for paint so far. The final paint scheme design is still to be confirmed, possibly pending a new 'life' and yet another episode in this amazing story...

And so, before returning to MIA to catch a flight out this evening, the rest of the afternoon was to be spent at nearby Fort Lauderdale Executive airport, for some serious biz'. Again, after classics, this place is always good for vintage types, including the friendly Jet Harbour MRO who specialize in Sabreliner work. Present today inside their hangar receiving work were Sabre 65's N69WU of 40 Degrees North LLC (reg just expired on 31st March), N74VC of Platinum 23 Leasing Co, and N921CC of Aeronet Consulting Corp. Parked outside were Venezuelan Sabre 65 YV-415T (ex N750CC) and Sabre 40 YV-2871 (ex YV-416T), both looking very smart, with the storage ramp further down containing five more as previously reported on. Also outside Jet Harbour was 1977-built Westwind 1124 N27TZ, while also inside were Hawker 800XP N721KY, Cessna S550 PT-OSM and an unidentified Falcon 20 having major work done.

Others then photographed around FXE included 1978-built Falcon 10 PR-CDF (previously I-CHIC, HB-VIX & F-GFHG), Falcon 200 N50MW of World Jet, Gulf 3 N83PP named 'Favor of God', Gulf 4SP N669BJ doing engine runs, CL601 N97SG of Rocky Mountain Bingo Ltd (Canada), Cessna 650 PT-XFG of Taxi Aero Marillia, Cessna 750 N619AT with winglets, Saab 340A N744BA of Tropical Transport Service (San Juan), previously operated by Air Sunshine at FLL, Metro III N672KS of Locair, Kodiak 100 N501KQ of Air Choini, Turbo Commander 690C YV-0149 and a couple of nice old cargo twins, EMB-110P1 C6-PDX of PDX Express (Package Delivery Express, the one time Jersey European G-BIBE) which departed, and based Beech D18S N737SW of Aztec Airways, which arrived.

From here it was straight back to MIA to return the rental, before checking in for AA3521 up to Jacksonville. Operated by American Eagle ERJ-145LR N686AE, the one hour flight was off at 2200. Then after collecting the rental it was straight to the airport hotel, before another early start.

DAY 3 SATURDAY 27TH APRIL

The one full day in this area was mainly to visit nearby Brunswick, though there are one or two other places of interest, especially Cecil Field. NAS Jacksonville with all its P-3's and P-8's etc would also certainly be worth a visit, but being a weekend it wasn't part of the plans this time. So, after a quick look around Jacksonville airport, with just a couple of local biz present, it was straight off to Brunswick, 62 miles to the North.

Stambaugh Aviation here is one of the few companies in the States that still do work on the classic Boeing 707 (the other being Commercial Jet at MIA). Being a huge fan of this aircraft, this is one place i have been wanting to get to for a while, with all the few remaining 707's in the States being regular visitors here. These days, that only includes the Omega Air tankers, Travolta's N707JT and the very elusive, heavily modified USAFSC/MIT N404PA (based at Hanscom). Also, being quite regular dealers in the remaining 707 market worldwide, Omega also bring aircraft bought here for parking (with others at their home base, San Antonio), prior to possibly entering service, or just being used for parts/engines. As well as the 707's, the company also does regular work on other older types, including the 727, along with more modern stuff. Apart from Stambaugh, Brunswick is fairly quiet with just the Gulfstream facility adding a bit more interest (more on this later). However, as well as catching any Stambaugh aircraft coming or going, you could be fortunate and catch the Omega 707's operating from here. Being one of the airports around the country that is used for the regular 'Omega 71' flights (presumably as they have the maintenance back-up here), these operate under contract for the US Navy & USMC, providing AAR services for their Hornets etc. I wasn't going to be that fortunate this time, though with no actual visit with the company arranged, thankfully it was still going to be a very worthwhile visit to Brunswick.

The Stambaugh Aviation facility is alone on the Western side of the airfield, with its own access road, and being a weekend, the office building was quiet, although i could see some people around airside. Eventually gaining access, i was able to photograph the following in the nice morning sunlight... B707-338C N623RH of Omega Air, ex RAAF A20-623 (all grey with markings painted out). This was retired in 2007 and flown here in 2011, and is now parked outside awaiting a check/modification and re-paint prior to entering service. Similar B707-338C N624RH of Omega Air was also present outside, receiving some work, with part of the engine cowlings removed. Also ex RAAF (A20-624), this was retired in 2008 before being flown here in 2011, and has been in service for a while now, in the full colours with the underwing AAR pods. Also present were four B727's, with the Zero Gravity Corp B727-200F N794AJ 'G-Force One' receiving some attention outside, Cargojet Airways B727-200F C-GUJC inside after re-paint completion, with B727-100 P4-FLY of Aviation Connections (thought to be PWFU) and B727-200 N894AA ex Planet Airways (who ceased operations in 2005) outside, certainly grounded and looking ready for scrap. Finally, two others present were Xtra Airways B737-400 N42XA, getting ready to depart (ex Bahamasair lease), and a Laser Airlines MD-82 painted but without registration. This is one of three ex American Airlines MD-82's here (out of six on order?), being prepared for the Venezuelan operator, with two others parked on the main Eastern side of the airfield, with titles and logos (kind of) removed. One of these being N461AA.

Also parked on the East side, were two other B707's, purchased by Omega Air, with ex Mali Government B707-3L6B N707BN (ex TZ-TAC), last photographed at Manston just before being flown here on 13th December last year, and ex Romavia/Romanian Government B707-3K1C N707GF (ex YR-ABB named 'Carpati'), which arrived last September. Both of these were obviously kept in very good condition, so it will be interesting to see if they are actually put into service with Omega, especially N707BN with its Stage 3 hush-kits fitted (none of the others in the Omega fleet have these).

Finally for Brunswick, as mentioned there is also a Gulfstream facility here, for interior completion work. Nothing exciting though, with just NetJets Gulf 4SP N428QS photographed, out of a couple outside. Being extremely happy with how that went, it was back South to the Jacksonville area, before catching a flight out later in the evening. Knowing Cecil Field was certainly worth spending time at, in fact, the rest of the afternoon was to be spent here, being suprisingly active for a weekend.

This large, former Naval Air Station, closed as such by BRAC in 1999, still has a busy military presence, as well as the large MRO facilities of Boeing, Northrop Grumman and Flightstar Aircraft Services. Highlight here are the resident specialized P-3 Orions of the US Customs and Border Protection, with five aircraft present of differing configuration, used for maritime patrol and counter-narcotic operations. Present today were two P-3AEW's N144CS & N149CS with the traditional AWACS rotodome antenna, P-3AEW N145CS the first seen with the more modern fixed dorsal antenna ('ironing board'), as on the B737 Wedgetail etc (though considerably smaller), and two P-3LRT's (Long Range Tracker) N741SK & N769SK. Known as 'Slicks', these don't have the AEW antennas, but instead an optical sensor turret above the cockpit windows and large tracking radar under the forward fuselage, among other mods. Having only seen the one P-3AEW previously (at an Oshkosh show), these are quite elusive to catch, and with security here suprisingly being quite relaxed, this is certainly the best place to catch them.

Operating from a ramp opposite these today were a large bunch of around 25-30 US Navy/Marines T-45A/C Goshawk's, including aircraft on detachment from VT-7/TW-1 & VT-9/TW-1 at NAS Meridian and VT-21/TW-2 at NAS Kingsville. Some of these have 'Navy' titles, while others have 'Marines', with one aircraft, 165609/A-167 also having a 'T-45 150th' logo on the upper fuselage. Other military photographed was a pair of US Navy C-2A's 162147/45 and 162165/40 of VRC-40 (NAS Norfolk), which made a very quick engine-running stop and go, to drop off a bunch of sailors, while inside the Boeing Hornet PDM hangar was F/A-18A+ 162849/VW-07 of VMFA-314 (MCAS Miramar), stripped of some major parts (PWFU?), while outside in a yard was the fuselage of an unidentified F/A-18A of VFA-204 (NAS New Orleans JRB), which was definitely retired, propped up on concrete blocks.

Of the civil stuff present, ex FedEx Express B727-100F N153FE was parked on the ramp also used by the T-45's. Looking quite smart, painted in a white & blue scheme, it has 'fscj.edu' on the engine cowlings, for the Florida State College at Jacksonville, who presumably use it as a training airframe. Donating their old 727's to educational groups is certainly something FedEx like to do, with quite a few seen, and more on this trip. Finally, the large facility of Flightstar is further down, and had quite a few aircraft parked out on their ramp. Highlight had to be the 'new' B757-200F(WL) N556CM of Air Transport International, first seen in their smart new colour scheme. This is one of the first of six ATN are getting converted to combi/freighters to replace their DC-8's, which are being retired this year. Delivered over two years ago, the winglets were fitted to this one when operted by Sun Express as TC-SNC, and has been on a check/mod/paint since! The other 757's are coming from the merger with Capitol Cargo and the one from National Airlines. As well as a few ex AirTran B717's, also parked at Flightstar were ex Martinair B767-300ER N328MP (ex PH-MCM) in basic colours, ex Mexicana Click B717-200 N926ME still in full colours (ex storage at Victorville), another ex Mexicana Click B717-200 now in full Volotea (Spain) colours awaiting delivery, thought to be N921ME (also ex storage at Victorville), along with two unidentified MD-80's, one bare metal after being paint stripped and another in ex Japan Air System colours.

Again, really happy with the visit here, photography is quite easy, as usual with a bit of discretion. Then, heading back to Jacksonville and returning the rental, it was onto US Air to Memphis. First flight was US3190 to Charlotte, operated by a Republic ERJ-170, off at 2000 and landing 1.10 hours later at 2110, connecting onto US2669 to Memphis, operated by a Mesa CRJ-900, off at 2245 and landing 45 minutes later at 2330. Picking up the rental for the next 7 days, i had gone for something decent, with the Kia Sorento SUV ideal for the lot of driving ahead. Then it was the short distance to the Days Inn Graceland for the next two nights.

DAY 4 SUNDAY 28TH APRIL

As well as the two classics at Graceland, for now Memphis is also the home of some older classics still flying with FedEx Express. Due to be retired over the next year or two, there are still around 17 B727-200F's in service, along with around 63 MD-10F's, in addition to other older types such as the A300F, A310F and MD-11F. With over a hundred B757F's and 43 B777F's due, along with the first of 50 B767F's this September, these are the future. Of course, with Memphis being the Global SuperHub of FedEx, this place is amazing, with the Northern part of the airfield housing their immense facility. The stats are of course impressive, with around 1,250 flights per week helping to feed the up to 500,000 packages per hour across the 42 miles of conveyor belt, dealt with by the 31,500 'team members' employed in the area. The busiest day on record was 10th December 2012, when 19 million packages were moved through the network, at more than 200 packages per second. Actually, another major stat was the company just hitting their 40th anniversary, after commencing operations

here in April 1973, with a fleet of Falcon 20's. Next time you see G-FFRA, G-FRAH, G-FRAJ, G-FRAL, G-FRAO, G-FRAP or G-FRAR, consider where it came from!

It may surprise many to discover that FedEx is not just a 'night time operation' here, with this visit on a Sunday planned as it was known to be one of the busy day time aircraft movement days. With around 55 flights due in the morning arrival slot (between 0745-1215) and around 80 flights due to depart in the afternoon slot (between 1400-1745), obviously the hope was for plenty of chances to shoot the older stuff especially. However, Memphis is not the easiest place for photography, with movements spread over three runways, two North-South and the one East-West next to the FedEx facility. You would think FedEx would mainly use the latter, but no, with all three used to varying degrees. Also, photospots around the runway ends are not so easy to find, which was known about, after contacting one US photographer, with only a couple of half decent options available, with discretion. Actually, security here can be quite tight, with one of the better photospots along the Western perimeter having occasional patrols. The land along this perimeter was purchased by FedEx, with the 'low cost' housing being demolished and replaced by landscaping and trees, effectively creating a park, though with no parking notices everywhere. Thankfully, on this Sunday visit, there were few patrols, and with some families parking and watching the afternoon departure slot, i didn't stand out like a sore thumb. The day started with not that much success, with not that many great shots from the morning arrivals. With the weather improving, the afternoon was going to be much better, with runway 36L along the Western perimeter used for a lot of the departures. At least a few MD-10F's were caught in the morning, but no B727F movements, and i couldn't see any parked up either! One retired aircraft, a B727-100F in basic colours with reg and titles/logos painted out is located very close to the NE perimeter fence, presumably used as a trainer, with full rear fuselage/tail docking in place.

As for the passenger airline scene here, there are quite a lot of flights, but just the usual US domestic stuff, so nothing much of interest. An AirTran B717 was about as exciting as those got! As for military, none of the resident USAF Tennessee ANG C-5A's or C-17A's moved today, which are parked close to the Southern/Eastern perimeter road, though USAF KC-135T 58-0071 of the 22ARW 'McConnell' arrived and departed. Also, around mid-day, a flight of two, followed by a flight of three USMC AH-1W's cut across the airfield at very low level from West to East. They included 160744/CA-28, 165288/CA-30 and 165392/CA-27 of HMLA-467 based at MCAS Cherry Point. Awesome sound.

And so, after a quick look around the private FBO's located at the NW of the airport, with resident Sabreliner 65 N465BC being the highlight, it was to the Western perimeter for the afternoon departures. A lot more MD-10F's were then worked, lifting off, along with the other types, but again no B727F's! Actually, the one did depart, but from 9R, so too far for a decent shot. I guess with not that many left in service, after effectively being replaced by the 'Sticks', these are no longer really part of the day time movements here now, at least on a Sunday! Shame, but at least the other classic 3-holers didn't dissappoint. With the FedEx departure slot finished and the weather still great, i decided to head off to nearby West Memphis airport, where shots were better at this time of day. Just a small GA field, this place has a few things of interest present, including ex FedEx B727-200F N267FE 'Jolene'. Apparently this was only moved here recently, after being donated to the Mid-South Community College. Parked on the edge of the airfield, it is without engines or tailerons, but still in full colours. Still on with these donated 727's, another found out about after returning from the trip, is at Millington airport, not that far to the NE of Memphis (B727-100F N144FE is used by the Fire Dep there, in basic colours).

Also at West Memphis, there are a few old cargo twins lying around, belonging to based McNeely Charter Service, with Shorts C-23A N262AG still in the old USAF camo scheme, possibly still active. This was a familiar sight around the UK in the second half of the 80's when operated as 84-0473. A few Merlins/Metroliners present are Merlin IV N120SC (with the MCS logo) and all white Metro III N320MC, both of which may not have flown for a while now? Merlin IV N427SP is certainly grounded, after making an accidental gear up landing here in 2010 following a flight from Opa Locka, when registered under the companys previous name, River City Aviation. Now derelict, with engines removed and other damage visible, the reg is officially cancelled as 'exported to Canada'. Also belonging to McNeely here is Cessna 208B N212SA, which may be active? Finally, one visiting biz was Premier 1 N808L of Frank Fletcher (Auto Group) based at Little Rock, which arrived from Joplin, MO.

From here it was back to the hotel, prior to the first look at the Graceland aircraft, for some shots in the 'blue hour' just after sundown. On display outside Elvis Presley's Graceland Mansion, right next to Elvis Presley Blvd are two of the aircraft previously used by 'The King'. Convair 880 N880EP is named 'Lisa Marie' and was known as 'Hound Dog One', along with early production Jetstar 6 N777EP (the 4th built) known as 'Hound Dog II'. Both are actually still current and registered to OKC Partnership, painted in similar colour schemes with 'TCB' on the fin ('Taking Care of Business'). The Convair was of course his main aircraft, named after his daughter, and was purchased in 1975 after a deal for a B707 fell through. The ex Delta aircraft (ex N8809E) was refurbished at Fort Worth Meacham, and after completion of the VIP interior etc, total cost was over \$1 Million. Following the death of Elvis, the 880 flew some of its final flights, heading to California to bring ex wife Priscilla, Lisa Marie and family friend, George Hamilton to Memphis for the funeral. Then after returning them, flew back to Memphis on 19th August 1977. After being sold to International Airmotive Inc, the aircraft was later purchased back by a group involved with Graceland, and flown back to Memphis from Fort Lauderdale on its very final flight on 6th February 1984, before being moved here by road for display.

DAY 5 MONDAY 29TH APRIL

Following the night shots, i was taking the tour of the aircraft at Graceland on opening this morning. Before that, there was time for a quick look around Memphis airport for the final time, with DHL/ABX Air B767-200F N794AX good for a shot in the nice early morning sun. And so, after getting all the external and interior shots of the 'Hound Dogs', along with the 880 t-shirt and mug, it was time to leave Memphis, and Tennessee, for the start of the big road trip around Arkansas. Wanting to do Memphis and Barksdale on the same trip, getting between them was not so easy, with flights VERY expensive. Looking at the map, there are a few very interesting airfields, not exactly en route, but not that far out that driving would be too much. Also, as mentioned, being quite remote, these are places rarely visited by photographers, and the only way to do them all is by road.

With the weather set to be perfect for the next few days, i set off for the first stop, Blytheville 'Arkansas International Airport', 75 miles to the North, with the plan to reach Little Rock by the end of the day. Blytheville airport has effectively been taken over by MRO outfit ART (Aviation Repair Technologies), who specialize in checks and services mainly for commuter types up to B737 size, as well as storage and parting-out of (older) airliners. The airport offers several large hangars and large ramp space for all this, which dates back to the Blytheville AFB days (more on this later), with major clients including Executive Airlines (part of American Eagle), with ART being the exclusive heavy maintenance provider for the largest ATR-72 operator in the world, and Delta Airlines, with a parting-out service for old MD-80 aircraft, purchased for the engines and other parts, to supply to the large Delta fleet. This currently involves old SAS MD-80's retired for salvage, with six present including MD-82's LN-ROX (officially registered N496DN) and SE-DIL (N477DN), which arrived last December, and appear to have everything of use removed now. In addition to a couple inside, there is one more outside in a similar state, along with more recent arrival SE-DIS (N480DN), which reportedly arrived 12 days earlier, and already had the engines removed. With Delta planning on keeping their MD-80's in service for longer than American, the large AAL fleet of 'mad dogs' could be a major supply of parts, with two of these present, N9302B and N9304C, both of which arrived in February from storage at Roswell.

Also in a similar state, presumably for a similar supply, are two MD-90-30's last operated by Lion Airlines, with N458BC/PK-LIM and N459BC/PK-LIK (N501DN) both still showing evidence of their time in Indonesia (including flags), and ex Midwest Airlines MD-81 N813ME which was retired here in 2009, and now also has the forward fuselage now removed. Others salvaged for parts are ex Sunworld International B727-200 N282US, which is still in full colours with only the engines, radome and winglets removed (re-cycling winglets!) and ex China United B737-700 N594SH (ex B-2663). Given up for scrap after only 14 years of service, this now has the forward fuselage, fin and engines removed, painted all white. Also, just starting this process is B737-300 PR-BRB, with engines now removed. Painted all white, with a Brazilian flag, this was thought to have been stored for several years after not entering service with OceanAir, before arriving here.

Other aircraft present, include the largest to have landed here (in recent years), B767-200 N767VA of Vision Air. With a VIP interior, it is here for open storage, after previously being parked at Louisville. Also temporarily stored is EMB-145EP N359AD of ADI (Aerodynamics Inc), which arrived from its base at Manistee, MI in February. Previously Eastern Airways G-CCLD, this is now (or was) a corporate shuttle. Of the ATR's here, two nice Isair ATR-42-300's are stored and for sale by Regional One. Still in full colours, 4X-ATM and 4X-ATN are sealed up, though after 25 years of service maybe their days are over? American Eagle/Executive Airlines ATR-72-200's present included N355AT and N431AT, both sealed up with titles painted over, these are thought to be following N425MJ out of the fleet. This was WFU and arrived here from Miami for storage last November, and now freshly painted all white, is going to Island Air of Hawaii (being leased from 14th May). Finally, a few old FedEx Feeder Cessna 208B's are parked inside here, for disposal, including N977FE which was operated by West Air.

Quite a good haul of interesting stuff there, the folks at ART couldn't have been friendlier, giving full access for photography (as well as a t-shirt and cap!), with the Senior Vice Pres himself then insisting on taking me over to the old SAC alert ramp across the other side of the airfield. During the 60's when Blytheville AFB, this place had a major role with SAC, when B-52G's and their KC-135A support were based. In 1962 during the height of the Cuban missile crisis, the B-52's maintained airborne alert from here, carrying nuclear and cruise missiles during the DEFCON II state. Later, after participating in the Vietnam and Gulf wars, the last B-52 left the then named Eaker AFB in 1992 as the base was closed by BRAC. Today, a lot of the old SAC buildings remain, by the old alert ramp, as of course does the huge 11,600ft runway.

From Blytheville it was 78 miles West, across the flatlands of Arkansas, with crop dusters doing their aerobatic-like manouvers, to Walnut Ridge airport. This place was until recently used by aircraft salvage company UAM (Universal Asset Management), who then moved out, down to Tupelo, MS. Aircraft and remains left behind are ex Northwest Cargo B747-200F N643NW, still in full colours with engines and undercarriage missing. This was the first B747 to arrive here for parting out, at the end of 2009, and remains mostly intact. Another was the last aircraft to arrive for UAM, ex Saudi Arabian Airlines/Air Atlanta Icelandic B747-300 TF-ATJ, which now sits in a similar state, after arriving from Jeddah at the start of 2011.

In addition, three cockpit sections in this area are ex Champion Air B727-200 N676MG, along with ex United Airlines B737-300's N333UA and N348UA, while another salvaged airframe on the airfield is ex Varig B777-200 N703BA (ex PP-VRD), which is notable as being the first B777 to be scrapped. Originally delivered to BA as G-ZZZE in 1996, it arrived here at the end of 2006, with the 'clean' fuselage now resting on metal frames in a field at the edge of the airfield. A request to go closer for shots was denied, as it is 'leased by the government for training' (you can speculate for what). However, shots

from the public road nearby are still possible. Also, one more old airliner is here, which also met a different fate. Southwest Airlines retired B737-200 N86SW back in 2004, before it presumably arrived here for scrapping. However, the wings were cut off and it was then stuck on the side of the Parachute Inn, to be used as part of the café/bar (now closed?). Finally, a couple of old timers present were T-28A N91535 of Brothers Aviation, in US Army markings as 49-1535, parked next to the Parachute Inn, and an unidentified bare metal Beech 18 without wings or tail fin.

From here it was the long haul down to Little Rock, with the 190 mile drive through several state wildlife parks. At least it was all highway this time, so I could get my foot down, with no sign of any Buford T Justice types laying in wait! First, was a quick stop at North Little Rock airport, to shoot the resident Dak. DC-3C (C-47B) N116SA is registered to Robert Partyka, and has been grounded here for several years, still in partial Bradley Air Services colours (ex C-FTVL). In April 2008, a tornado ripped through the airport, dragging the Dak around 1,500ft and coming to a rest sat on top of a crushed Cherokee, obviously picking up a bit of damage itself. The aircraft has been for sale for years, and its easy to think it will probably end its days here. A resident Convair was also damaged back in 2008, but unfortunately is now long gone now after being broken up for scrap.

Onto Little Rock 'Bill and Hillary Clinton National Airport' (really), for a quick look around before sundown, with an airport hotel booked. Not a massive amount of interest here, with a few FBO's providing a handful of biz, and a typical regional airport selection of US domestic airliners, including Southwest. However, there is a lot more interest in the large Dassault Aircraft Services facility, at the NE corner of the airfield. This is infact the largest Dassault facility in the world, consisting of a service centre as well as being the main completion centre for all Falcon jets worldwide. New Falcons are flown here 'green' for exterior and internal completion etc, with four Falcon 7X's photographed outside today being: F-WWUG in primer, F-WWZO (189) all white, OE-IRR (196) paint finished, and one more paint finished (red and grey lines on fuselage and fin) with no id visible (due to missing engine cowlings).

DAY 6-8 TUESDAY 30TH APRIL TO THURSDAY 2ND MAY

With a lot more road miles ahead today, the plan to visit the airfield at Stuttgart was dropped. This is (or was) another place used for aircraft salvage, but was only thought to have a handful of aircraft present (mostly Southwest?), so not really worth the detour of maybe 100 miles to fit it in. So, from Little Rock, the first stop now was Hot Springs, 60 miles to the SW. Memorial Field is mainly a GA airport, with just a Seaport service to Memphis & Dallas with Cessna Caravans. However, the main interest here has been the large amount of stored ASA (Atlantic Southeast Airlines) Brasilias. Previously, around 15 were stored, along with some CRJ's and ERJ's, though now there are just the three Brasilias left, with the others returned to service or sold. Eight of these Brasilias were sold to Air Turks & Caicos, including these three, all EMB-120RT's: N232AS still in old ASA colours, and N504AS & N505AS in Delta Connection colours. Its not known if all the eight, including these three, will be refurbished and put into service, or some used for parts. While here, also photographed were three water bombers of the Western Pilot Service: 1985-built piston PZL M-18 Dromader N498WP/498, and more modern turbo powered AT-802A N512LA/897 & AT-802 N896WP/896.

From here, the next leg was 77 miles West to Mena. This was certainly the most scenic drive of the trip, passing through the mountains of the Ouachita National Forrest, past various peaks and lakes with recreational areas and log cabins etc, this is obviously a popular tourist area. Mena Intermountain Municipal airport was of interest for a few B727's and DC-3's of large international aircraft parts company, Dodson, with some old commuter types present being a bonus. B727-100 N706JP registered to Dodson Services Inc, is for sale, and still carries the logo of previous owner 'Petters Group Worldwide'. Told I could look inside, it has a typical VIP interior with TV lounge and bedroom etc, and is in good condition. Unfortunately for the previous owner, Tom Petters, he now has to put up with less luxurious surroundings, after being given 50 years in the pen in 2010 for massive fraud (which had also lead to the demise of Sun Country Airlines). B727-100C N2688Z registered to Kando Jet LLC, was also previously owned by Dodson Aviation (South Africa), and is not in such good condition, with engines and other parts missing. The last B727-100 series built, it still has the cheatlines of CF Airfreight, from when operated by them in the late 80's. More recently it spent several years parked at Dodson's Wonderboom base in South Africa (where it was last photographed), before ending up here in November 2007 (didn't expect to see that one again!). The South African connection doesn't end there, with all three Daks present being ex South African AF, converted to DC-3-65TP Turbo, and now registered to Dodson International Parts Inc. N192RD is ex SAAF 6820 and is fully intact apart from engines and flaps, while N193RD is ex SAAF 6857 and without engines, outer wings and tail fin among other bits. Both of these are in civil-style colours, while N332RD is ex SAAF 6870 and without engines, rudder and flaps, and is still in the original two-tone pale blue camo, with SAAF markings including the 35 Squadron badge (Ysterplaat AFB, Cape Town) and the name 'Vega' on the nose. Of these, N193RD has an interesting history, when operated by 25 Squadron as a VIP aircraft in a bare metal/white top scheme, was the regular transport of the then President PW Botha.

After photographing these in the great weather, other stuff then found elsewhere on the airfield included three Jetstream 41's in open storage, sealed up with engines missing. N301UE and N328UE ex United Express/Atlantic Coast Airlines, along with interesting N153KM in Origin Pacific Airways colours (ex ZK-JSN). This was due to go to European Executive Express as SE-LJE, but was ntu. Then, inside a hangar being worked on, was ex Delta Connection/ASA EMB-120RT N286AS, still in full colours, which is another of those previously stored at Hot Springs, being prepared for Air Turks & Caicos. Also there was a

Learjet (35A) stripped to bare metal, getting major work done. The id plate in the cockpit appeared to have 'N316NW', though no sign of that being registered.

Leaving Mena on the final long haul to Barksdale, one quick stop en route was made at Texarkana, 104 miles to the South. As well as a few biz and twins, a couple of interest were Jet Provost T4 N219JP still in its original RAF camo scheme as XS219/06 (ex 1TWU/79Sq at Brawdy), and Beech G18S N931GM. This was last operated by May Air Xpress, and can be best described as being derelict, with wings, tail fin, engines and nose cone missing (after the reg expired in 2011). And so, from here it was a further 80 miles South to Barksdale AFB, where the weather was still fine, with the resident B-52's starting to recover from morning launches.

Barksdale is of course the main home of the iconic B-52H 'Buff', with three active squadrons of the 2BW, the 11BS (BD) and the 20BS & 96BS (LA). In addition, the AFRC 307BW has the 93BS (BD), while also based is the AFRC 442FW with the 47FS (BD) flying the A-10C. Its thought the 47th may be due for disbandment in the next few years, as part of the A-10 unit restructuring. After last years visit to the airshow here, which included photographing the Buffs from the perimeter, this was a return visit for more of the same, with the rest of this afternoon and the following two days to be spent working these classics. The sight and sound of Buffs in the circuit is hard to beat, and with good photospots known around the Northern end of the runway, the hope was for plenty more shots to add to the collection. There are usually lots of chances for this, with most returning missions concluded with multiple approaches before a full stop. The rest of today was good, with plenty of action onto Runway 15, before a change in the wind meant a runway change later on the Wednesday. The Northerly wind meant a switch to Runway 33, which was then going to be used for the rest of Wednesday and Thursday. The change in the wind was also bringing a change in the weather, and by Thursday the conditions had turned nasty, with storms in the area followed by low cloud and heavy rain. Photospots for '33 are difficult, with a park area obscured by trees and the edge of a housing estate not exactly being discreet. Staying at the '15 end for take off and go-around shots was an option, but the grey Buffs don't exactly look their best in grimey conditions!

And so, over the two and a half days here, the following 14 B-52H's were photographed flying (some several times): 60-0001/LA, 60-0002/LA, 60-0003/BD, 60-0013/LA, 60-0015/BD, 60-0045/BD, 60-0051/BD, 60-0052/LA, 61-0011/BD, 61-0013/LA, 61-0015/LA, 61-0021/BD, 61-0029/BD and 61-0031/BD. In addition, 61-0010/LA '343BS' was photographed on the ramp where some have been noted WFU, though looking complete, along with another, which going by the engine covers was 60-0016 (LA). This had the tail fin removed, along with all the markings on the nose, including the serial.

Finally, surprisingly no visitors over the few days, apart from one, and what a beauty! Arriving on the 2nd, was USAF E-4B 75-0125 of the 1ACCS/55Wg at Offutt AFB. Anyone visiting the Eighth Air Force Museum here over the next few days would have a great view of this highly modified and secretive B747, parked just 'the other side of the fence'. Barksdale is designated as one of the NEACP's (National Emergency Airborne Command Post) deployment bases, though why it was here, who knows. What is known, is after parking, it didn't shut down, but sat there strobing until dark.

DAY 9 FRIDAY 3RD MAY

The last day in Louisiana before heading onto to Texas, and what a change in the weather, from the shocking day yesterday, today was to clear into glorious sunshine. It wasn't the intention to not spend any time at Barksdale today, but as 'certain events' took over, that's how things turned out. After missing a USA Jet DC-9-30 at nearby Shreveport yesterday (which routed from its Willow Run base to Mexico), on checking flightaware this morning i could see another nice visitor due this morning. A Kalitta Charters Falcon 20 was en route to Shreveport from Hamilton, so deciding to head down and catch it landing, 1970-built Falcon 20DC N226CK arrived as planned as KFS44.

Also flight planned, was another old classic, a Westwind, going into nearby Shreveport Downtwon airport. I never bothered visiting this place when last here, thinking it was just a small GA field... though was in for a surprise or two! First thing seen, on driving in, was yet another old FedEx Express B727! B727-200F N270FE was donated to the Southern University of Shreveport, Louisiana, and is complete (apart from the missing number 1 & 3 engines), still in the full FedEx colours, but with a large SUSLA logo on the forward fuselage (over the FedEx logo). Another surprise was a B-17 sat on the ramp! B-17G N7227C is operated by the Commemorative Air Force Gulf Coast Wing, based at Spring (NNW of Houston), and is painted as USAAF 44-83872/VP-X 'Texas Raiders'. Due to be displayed at the Barksdale show, despite the cancellation, the CAF had decided to still head to the area, and spend the weekend here in Shreveport, to offer rides to the public. Good effort. Being a smaller GA airfield with less security paranoia, the friendly S3 FBO were letting people walk out to look at the B-17 and talk with the crew. Of course, this also made photographing the other aircraft present and movements very easy. These included the (based) Westwind 1124 N949CC of S3 Aviation, Cessna 550 Bravo N412BT of Northern Air, Beech 350 N42ED of Eldorado Resorts and PC-12 N652CR. Apparently, Shreveport is quite a big casino town, with stretched limos waiting for 'clients' coming off the 350 & 550.

And so to the climax of this first part of the trip. To make the most of the B-17 in town, i had enquired about chartering a Cessna to do some air-air photography. The first company i asked could offer a 172, but after speaking with the B-17 crew and putting the idea forward, the 172 would not be fast enough to keep up (130 knots). A pilot at the S3 FBO, overhearing this, then suggested their turbocharged Skylane. Err... OK, thanks! With plenty of time before the B-17 was due to depart at 1600, this had now taken over the days plans, and there was a further twist to come. A USAF B-52 navigator, who is also

involved with media work at Barksdale, then became involved in the charter plan. As it turned out, the 1600 departure was actually a surprise flight for a retiring 8th Air Force Colonel, with the B-17 heading to nearby Barksdale for a reception. Asking if he could join me in the Cessna, to also photograph the flight, i was more than happy, especially as he would then not only finalise the arrangements with the B-17 captain, but also gain authorization from Barksdale to follow the B-17 all the way, entering the highly restricted circuit, to shadow the B-17 on finals and fly the overhead. This is too much! As the time neared, S3 Aviation Cessna T182T N2199D was towed over... OK, lets go! With a spare seat going, a girl from the FBO took her chance and jumped in, before we taxied out, with the B-17 having all four engines fired up. Taking off, it was a quick circuit and orbit, to run in and shadow the rotating B-17. The agreement was to keep a 500ft minimum, as the B-17 made some manouvers over downtown Shreveport, before heading to Barksdale. Keeping in formation was certainly a challenge, with visual contact even lost at times... 'he's underneath us'! Very quickly we were alongside the B-17 on finals at Barksdale, with some of the best photo ops, after a lot of hectic manouvers had me wondering if i had any decent shots, getting thrown around so much! Also at this point, i think the girl in the back had some major regrets! After touchdown of the B-17, we continued overhead, passing low over the rows of resident B-52's and A-10's under their shelters... AND the E-4B, before heading back to Downtown! What an awesome experience, with our pilot, who did a fantastic job, being so pleased with the chance to do all that, then refusing to take any payment! Back down to earth, in more ways than one, there was still a few hours of great sunlight left, so decided to return to Shreveport Regional. Sat getting landing shots until the sun went, FedEx Express B757-200F N997FD came in on FDX543 from Memphis, followed by a Delta Connection CRJ, a couple of USAF Academy Cessna 150's, and based Gulf 690D Jetprop 900 N927SM of Shammach Air inbound from Johnson County, Kansas. Finally, returning to Downtown for some night shots of the now returned B-17 (as well as the B727 etc), a new visitor was MU-2B N322TA. And that was it, time to catch some sleep, before an early flight to Dallas the next morning.

USA April-May 2013 Part I





Pictures to follow...