

## A VISIT TO THE PARIS AIR SHOW

By

THOMAS L. SELDEN

DISAM Assistant Professor of Security Assistance Management

How can one describe experiences involving: 40 hours of walking, talking, listening, viewing, reading, and touching, etc.; an enormous display of almost 1,000 exhibitions ranging from the space shuttle "Enterprise" to "head-hunter" services; of 160 aircraft from 28 countries; a non-stop six-hour flight demonstration of 52 aircraft, ranging from World War I era biplanes to prototype supersonic military aircraft to NASA's 747 space shuttle? How can the substance of dialog with over 100 persons ranging from U.S. Government military and civilian personnel to foreign contractors and tourists be condensed into a few pages of words and a single dominant theme? How can one convey the feeling of just being present at the "super bowl" of the world's aerospace industry displays, competitions, and marketing efforts? It is the intent of this article to try to describe some of the features activities and under currents of the Paris Air Show.

The 35th Paris Air Show was held at Le Bourget Airport from 27 May to 5 June 1983. On Thursday, May 26, everything was in place and ready for the opening. Media representatives were invited to view the displays and interview the participants in an environment free from the view and attention of official guests and the general public. The Show officially opened on Friday, May 27. Saturday and Sunday would be dedicated to the general public. They would clog the highway from Paris, seven miles to the southwest, and affect traffic to and from Charles DeGaulle International Airport, approximately eight miles to the northeast.

Then on Monday, 30 May, when most Americans were honoring their fallen servicemen and taking a day's respite from their normal routine and problems, the serious competition, negotiation, and cooperation efforts began with vigor. These activities, which are bound to affect the world's cumulative aerospace effort for the remainder of this decade and beyond, would continue for the entire week and be broken only partially on Wednesday afternoon when the gates to the Le Bourget were thrown wide open to the public. On that day a great rush of Paris area school children would attack like swarms of bees everywhere and devour the trinkets, souvenirs, and promotional material that the exhibitors had carefully prepared and stocked. Of course these items had been intended for potential customers and advocates as reminders of the exhibitors' efforts, products, and companies. Finally on Saturday, June 4 -- as most of the corporate, industry, and government decision makers were making their way to Charles De Gaulle Airport and their home offices in a state of mild or severe exhaustion -- the Show closed with yet another frenzy of public display and demonstration.

The Paris Air Show has gained a worldwide reputation as the premiere event for the introduction, display, demonstration and marketing of the very newest and most technologically advanced hardware in the aerospace industry. As such, it attracts the buyers, sellers, agents, planners, and operators from many nations who have a professional interest in the areas of civil

aviation, military aviation, and the development and usage of the opportunities being discovered in outer space. In addition, the general public attend out of curiosity, for entertainment or to merely observe an event of historical significance.

The Show is produced and managed by the French Aerospace Industries Group (Groupement des Industries Francaises Aeronautiques et Spatiales or GIFAS). Quite naturally, there is a very distinct French flavor in the administration, number of entries, and placement of the displays. Le Bourget Airport was once the main air gateway to and from Paris and has considerable historical significance of itself. Lindbergh landed here in 1927, completing the first non-stop transatlantic flight from Long Island, New York. The French Air Museum is located at Le Bourget also, but today the airport is known primarily as the site of the biennial Paris Air Show which has been held there since 1953. During Air Show Week, its activities would overflow into the city itself and -- together with the French Open Tennis Tournament -- severely tax the hotel, transportation, and entertainment facilities of the French capital.

French exhibits, while dominant, were certainly not the only attractions of the Show. The official catalog lists over 900 exhibitors from 28 countries. German, British, Italian, Israeli, and American companies, professional trade organizations, and/or governments had numerous and major displays or demonstrations. The Soviet Union was scheduled to display several aircraft, but did not. There was much speculation concerning the reasons for the no-shows, and the Soviets merely said that they were not there. The Russians did, however, sponsor a walk-through, mock-up of the Salyut 7 space vehicle, which was one of the most popular displays at the show. They also showed model aircraft, visual displays, and distributed or sold literature, and souvenir items -- most commercially (not militarily) oriented. The Soviets also manned two of the many "chalets" or hospitality booths -- one by their Air Ministry, and one by their aviation trade organization, Aviaexport.

The United States effort was extensive and impressive. Like the Soviet Union, the United States had its own pavilion building. The pavilion was managed by the Commerce Department; and, unlike its spacious, underutilized Russian counterpart, was completely filled with over 130 individual industry, chamber of commerce, and some United States Government (USG) display booths. Individual American firms also had displays in the two main exhibit halls and on the flight line. The Gulfstream Peregrine, Douglas DC-8, Hughes AH-64, Northrop F-20, NASA QSRA (Quiet STOL Research Aircraft), and Boeing 767 aircraft participated in the flying demonstrations, performed well, and attracted attention.

The "star of the show" in the opinion of many people was the U.S. space shuttle "Enterprise" with its Boeing 747 carrier. The "Enterprise" turned heads whenever, wherever, and however it was displayed. For a few days, the NASA exhibit was situated in the middle of the flight line; and, while it was there, it attracted crowds of spectators like a huge magnet, away from the many other aircraft on display. On the several occasions that it took off or landed on a flight around (but not directly over) Paris, or departed for or arrived from its short trip to Rome, almost all activity -- at Le Bourget, in the parking lots, and on the nearby highways -- slowed or stopped to watch it. When only "Enterprise" was visible among the rows of

hangar buildings on the far side of the Air Show's runway from the displays and chalets, people enroute to and from the parking lots and seated on the chalet patios stared in awe at its visibility so far away, gasped at its size, and remarked of their amazement at its appearance and technological implications. The 747 crew members were heard on several occasions to state their surprise and indeed shock at the extent and warmth of their welcome in Paris.

To the casual observer, the Paris Air Show would probably be remembered in the realm of a grand-scale carnival, state fair, or exposition with a decided emphasis on aircraft, both fixed and rotary wing. To a potential buyer interested in a straight purchase (no coproduction or offset arrangements) with or without financing, the Show might be compared to a giant automobile or boat show -- the major models would be on display and appropriate brochures, descriptions of capabilities, and cost data would be available. Skilled professional sales personnel would be willing and able to address any request and provide any related service. Top company test pilots would put the aircraft impressively through their paces in flight demonstrations although a "test drive" by the purchaser would not be appropriate.

These aspects were not, however, the sole or perhaps even the dominant ones of "Le Bourget - 83!" Missing from the public face of the Show was the continuous, frenetic activity among the exhibitors striving to negotiate cooperative arrangements with other suppliers, prime contractors, industry associations, governments, and consortia. This characteristic may very well have been the main thread of the Show's fabric and is certainly representative of the environment in which the western world's aerospace industry operates today.

The arrangements are complex and multi-tiered. They involve component suppliers, engine manufacturers, weapon system producers, air frame builders, trade associations, quasi-governmental marketing organizations, governments themselves, and international treaty groups. They take the forms of offset purchase agreements, production licenses, teaming arrangements and the establishment of limited "holding" and marketing corporations, and wholly or partially owned subsidiary companies in other nations.

They are so numerous and so much the dominant aspect of business in the aerospace industry that the determination of the spectrum of participating firms in a major aircraft weapon system would be very difficult indeed. They are so vital to corporate economic viability that their negotiation and maintenance probably consume a majority of top management's time and effort. A current example of this environment is the following one; it pertains to a commercial aircraft sale, but its principles apply to the military arena as well:

Libya has indicated a desire to purchase four Airbus A310s and six Airbus A300s.[1] Airbus aircraft are produced and marketed by Airbus Industrie, a limited corporation headquartered in France, made up of Aero-spaciale (France), Deutsche Airbus (MBB) (a wholly owned subsidiary of West Germany's Messerschmitt-Bolkow-Blohm), British Aerospace Public Limited Company (United Kingdom), and Spain's Construcciones Aeronauticas S.A. (or CASA). Both models contain components produced by Fokker (Netherlands) and by Italian firms, and are powered by American General Electric or Pratt and Whitney engines.[2] This last factor is critical to the sale, as U.S.

export regulations can preclude the sale of these engines to Libya. A solution being discussed is to have Britain's Rolls-Royce adapt its RB211 524 engines to the A-300/A-310 for the Libyan sale, but even this would not bypass American controls as this Rolls-Royce engine contains fan blades and starter motors of U.S. manufacture.[3]

I have spoken to many U.S. and foreign manufacturing representatives and several industrial organization and government spokesmen and found that situations such as the one detailed above are the norm in the aerospace market today. I suspect they prevail in any high technology international market area. The May 30, 1983 issue of Aviation Week and Space Technology (distributed in the American Pavilion at the Air Show) has taken as its theme "International Cooperation" and details throughout its pages so many examples of interlocking arrangements that no reasonable doubt can remain as to the dominant role they play in the aerospace industry. A vice president of a U.S. manufacturing firm was reminded in the middle of a conversation with me that he had an appointment shortly with a representative of another firm in his area. When I asked him if the other firm wasn't his competitor, he replied "on some projects we are in direct competition; on others we are partners." I submit that the real theme of the 1983 Paris Air Show was "The Aerospace Industry in 1983 -- International Competition and Cooperation."

#### ENDNOTES

1. Middle East Economic Digest, 10 June 1983, p. 14.
2. Jane's All The World's Aircraft 1982-1983, p. 98.
3. Middle East Economic Digest, 10 June 1983, p. 14.

#### ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Mr. Selden has been a member of the DISAM faculty since 1977 as a specialist in foreign military sales, international programs, and logistics. A graduate of the U.S. Naval Academy, Mr. Selden also holds a Master of Arts degree in Political Science from St. John's University in Jamaica, New York. He has a diverse background in the U.S. Navy Supply Corps and has worked with the USAF AFLC-ILC on many aircraft delivery projects, the HO-51 systems, and other management information systems.