

# A personal 'window' into Russian Aviation History

By Nick Vince 1956-1961

## Introduction

My working life as an apprentice began in September 1956 at the de Havilland Aeronautical Technical School, Astwick Manor. At the time, nobody could have predicted that 40 years on I would be working in the wonderful city of Moscow. Further, nobody would have anticipated that I would eventually make three visits to the Russian Air Force Museum at Monino North East of the capital; the first visit 41 years and 1 day since I entered Astwick Manor.

As it so happened, during my two years in Moscow I saw Russia draw 2-2 with Brazil in a full International football match at the Moscow Dynamo stadium. However, this article is neither about my time in Russia, nor my working life. Also, although I have had a lifetime's interest in aviation, I would not dream of writing in any depth about Russian Aviation History, fascinating and interesting as I have found it to be. What I set out here are synopses, with a selection of my own photographs covering the five aircraft at Monino that impressed me in particular. You will see through my choice that I have used the word "aircraft" in its widest possible interpretation but all five in my selection flew.

I hope you find the photographs interesting and convey a feel of the kind of atmosphere Monino generates. If so, may I recommend the book MONINO: The Russian Air Force Museum by Colin W. Prentice; ISBN 1 85310 898 7 published by Airlife Publishing Limited.

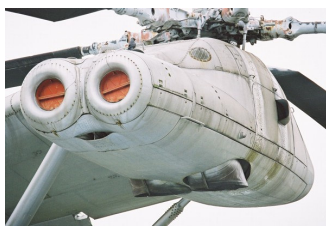
It is packed with lots of good quality photos with captions at a minimum. They were taken over two visits, the first in November 1994, pre-dating my own photos by less than three



years.

## 1. The Colossal Mil-V12 "Homer"

On arrival at Monino one just cannot miss, towering above the main fence, this magnificent helicopter. Performance figures for this aircraft include being able to reach a height of 2,255m (7,398ft) with a payload of 40,204.5kg (88,635lb) due to its four Mi-6 engines and twin rotors. At that time this set a World lifting record for helicopters. However, the V-12 project was abandoned because the Mi-26 "Halo" was even better. Large aircraft are always a great sight as I well remember the Saunders-Roe Princess Flying Boat at



Farnborough in 1953 eliciting appreciative gasps from spectators as it flew at "zero feet" approaching

the airfield from the legendary Black Sheds end at this iconic venue.

## 2. The Amazing ANT-25 (replica)

This reproduction of the large, stately, 1930s monoplane represents a significant place in Russian Aviation History. A World Record-breaking flight in July 1937 from Moscow to San Jacinto, California South East of LA; 10,148km (6,306 miles) in 62hrs 17min. The Museum at Monino has exposition halls on the other side of the aerodrome to where the ANT-25 replica is housed; the smaller aircraft under the port wing of the ANT-25 replica is an ANT-2. These halls, appropriately insulated from harsh winters, contain a cornucopia of exhibits and mementoes comprising weapons systems, models, photographs, paintings, wall charts and



memorabilia (engines, bombs, devices, etc.). This is why I have included the museum's display map showing various journeys made by the real ANT-25 including

the route of the famous 1937 flight. The record flight took the ANT-25 directly over the North Pole, a common enough event nowadays, as shown by this interesting map.



During my time in Moscow, on behalf of my employers, I made a business trip directly from Moscow to New York. It soon dawned on me that the distance between New York and Moscow is similar to that between Moscow and Vladivostok; approximately 1/3<sup>rd</sup> of the way round the globe.

Standing alongside the ANT-25 replica, the original coming out of the Tupolev stable as a result of work on developing long-range bombers, gives one a real impression of its size. It



makes one think about the aircraft only having one, albeit large, engine to depend on. Modesty prevents inclusion of photographic proof of me being dwarfed alongside a replica of this most magnificent of aircraft. The record exploits of the ANT-25 may deserve a place in World Aviation History because they stand out in Russia's own aviation achievements.

### 3. The Elegant Tu-114 “Cleat”

This aircraft is most beautiful in design and of impressive size, however, the Tu-114 at Monino, registration ID USSR-

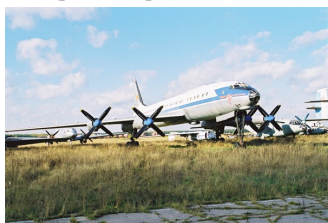


L5611, is famous in itself. It flew the nation’s Prime Minister, Mr Nikolai Krushchev, directly from Moscow into New York on September 15<sup>th</sup> 1959 for his memorable bravura appearance at the UN. There is an atmospheric photograph of this aircraft, taken possibly at Orly whilst it visited the 1959 Paris Air Show, with a backdrop of DC3s plus a Bristol Wayfarer and a DC6. This nostalgic view of late 1950s aircraft and basic airport facilities should be a delight for seasoned aircraft recognition luminaries such as Nigel Price. I met Nigel through my time with 220 squadron of the ATC and also worked with him at Hatfield on technical illustration assignments.

The fine lines of the Tu-114 are impressive not only as one approaches this aircraft but also as one gets even closer to its slim-line engine nacelles. The Tu-114 has



a 167ft 8ins wing span, a 177ft 6ins length and weighs 376,990lb (171,000kg). Along with a cruising speed of 478mph (769kph) at 29,500ft (8,992m) and a range of 3,850



miles (6,196km), the Tu-114 basic “stats” are impressive for this late 1950s airliner. Russian aviation has many firsts and records to its name but were you aware the Tu-114 “pioneered” the

idea of holding the galley plus associated equipment below the cabin floor; something, of course, standard in today’s wide-bodied airliners.

Finally, as a postscript to this mention of the Tu-114, the photos included of this aircraft are exemplars of the typical weather one gets in Moscow towards the end of summer.

### 4. The Intriguing Beriev VVA-14 Ekranoplan

By June 1997 I had been made aware that there was an aviation museum at Monino but early indications were that I would not be allowed to visit the site. It seemed that access was very limited and to visit one needed an official letter from the appropriate ministry. With the help of the Russian Nationals with whom I worked, the necessary letter was acquired. When I set off for my first visit I still did not know if I would be allowed to take any photographs and, if so, if it might involve me paying a bribe to realise that ambition.

Fortunately, there were no problems about this and armed with my, at the time, state-of-the-art Casio digital camera plus a throw-away Kodak, I quickly used up my available picture capacity; I therefore vowed that I would return. On my first visit I did not get near to, let alone photograph, this



remarkable aircraft which clearly looks like a pile of old junk. Fortunately, by the time I made my second visit I had bought a 35mm Olympus 300 SLR camera and a copy of the Colin Prentice book [1]. This served three valuable uses: planning ahead exhibits to photograph as a priority, seeking out an official of the museum to cement Anglo-Russian relations by presenting a copy of Colin’s book, and making sure I identified, and took some photos of, this intriguing aircraft even though the one on display was badly wrecked.

Before I flew back to Moscow over a two day period I did some searching on the web regarding ekranoplans; this hooked me on the subject. “Two days” you may well ask? My interconnecting KLM 737 flight from Schiphol Airport



was cancelled due to lack of passengers so, after an overnight stay in Amsterdam, the delayed passengers were accommodated in that day’s regular KLM

767-300 flight to Sheremeteyvo. If you want a taste of ekranoplans in general and their many variants in particular then have a look at

[www.fiveprime.org/hivemind/tags/ekranoplan](http://www.fiveprime.org/hivemind/tags/ekranoplan); the “World’s best photos of Ekranoplans” website. If you get the kind of bug I got when I found out about ekranoplans then you will find the Sergey Komissarov & Yefim Gordon book Soviet and Russian Ekranoplans ; ISBN 978 1 857803 32 7 published by Midland Publishing provides detailed text in support of many excellent photos including Beriev VVA-14’s in flight and true wing in ground effect mode over the Caspian Sea out of Baku.

As with the other four aircraft in this article, I have not provided too many statistics, as these can be easily acquired on the web. However, in terms of ekranoplans, the Soviet Union and today’s Russia undoubtedly led the World developing such imaginative, multi-role aircraft.

## 5. The Fearsome Sukhoi T-4/Su-100

Despite being exposed to the elements at Monino already for some 15 years, when I first saw this fascinating aircraft, the T-4 sent a shiver down my spine. Despite its continual corrosion, this supersonic bomber has a real “presence” of power, strength and deadly intent, making it, for me, the Monino exhibit that remains most clearly in my memory. There were only two T-4s built, a static test aircraft and the one at Monino. By the time it first flew on August 22<sup>nd</sup> 1972,



it had already “passed its sell-buy date”. This “all engines and fuel” beast first flew 8 years after the first flight of the North American XB-70A Valkyrie (September 21<sup>st</sup> 1964 just six days before the BAC TSR.2 first took to the skies). Such obsolescence was no surprise, not least to the Russian



military. Of course, the T-4’s lowerable nose section brings to mind Concorde from a Western perspective and therefore the famous Tu-144 “Concordski”, a sample of which is on display at Monino. With Russian Aviation History in mind, the Tu-144 first flew and went into service before Concorde. I mention this because the irony is that the Tu-144 outlasted Concorde even being used by NASA for supersonic flight tests after Concorde ceased to remain in service. Most of its BA/Air France fleets have now been re-located throughout the World. The fine Sensheim Museum display of a Concorde and a Tu-144, mounted in tandem up on high on the roof of the main building, is very



dramatic. By the way, you may not be aware that the penchant for people to add “ski” to a word to make it sound Russian is poetic license; “ski” is merely a trait of Polish linguistics. As a postscript for those of you with a feeling of nostalgia, I hope that mention of TSR.2 and Concorde, or indeed the Saunders-Roe Princess, does not bring tears to eyes or lumps to throats.

### Some de Havilland links

**Twin Boom Aircraft:** There are two such aircraft of this genre at Monino; a Myasishcheyev M-17 Stratosphera “Mystic A”

reconnaissance platform and a PZL M-15 Belphegor for agriculture applications. Not much evidence as to how far the Russian Aviation Industry explored the twin boom configuration concept but the M-15 is the World’s only purely jet-powered biplane; another triumph for Russian Aviation?

**DH look-alikes:** In the airliners area at Monino there is a YAK-42 “Clobber” masquerading as a DH 121 in faded Aeroflot livery. The only other aircraft that reminded me of a classic DH marquee is the Petlyakov Pe-2 “Buck”. This well preserved Mosquito look-alike, thanks to the controlled environment of the museum’s WWII exposition hall, is not made predominantly of wood. There is only one “Mossie”.

**Offset Pilot’s Canopy:** I found it interesting there were no fighter aircraft at Monino that had their pilot’s canopy offset *a la* DH 110; I wonder why?

### Acknowledgement

On my second of three visits to Monino I met Vladimir Kazashvili the Curator of the Museum. On this visit I was accompanied by an American Civil Aviation pilot and his wife. Vladimir gave us a personal tour of the Museum indoor and outdoor areas and was a charming host. He was an ex-fighter pilot and flying instructor with 1,000s of hours flying time to his name and oozed pride in his service & dedication to, and love of, Russia. Thank you Vladimir.