

# X-RAY BRAVO ALPHA

## The Flight Home

**A**fter fond farewells to all our friends at Southend, the next adventure began. The trip home was to be a flight into history, with the 707 retracing some of the route it first took in 1959.

The routing was to be Southend-Dublin-Tenerife-Hamilton (Bermuda)-Orlando-Los Angeles-Honolulu-Nadi-Sydney, an exotic itinerary in anyone's eyes. This came to be called the Beach Route.

On board for the flight home were the 6 aircrew, Murray Warfield, Roger Walter, Brett Phoebe, Harry Hermans, Joe Plemenuk and Karen Glass. In the cabin were Peter Elliott, Denis Martin and Norman King, who were charged with keeping XBA functional along the way. Ken Cannane ensured all the regulations were observed, while two documentary makers, Jeff Watson and David Telfer recorded the flight for television and DVD documentary production.

The highlight of the trip home was a meeting in Orlando with XBA's sister ship, the only other flying 707-138B, belonging to that famous Qantas Ambassador-at-Large, actor John Travolta. We rendezvoused with him there on Monday, 11 December 2006, with all the hoop-la that goes with Hollywood stardom. And that was us, not Travolta! The cameras clicked for over three hours, with every possible combination of aeroplanes, actors and aviators combining for that treasured shot to show the grandchildren. The buzz of Dublin's welcome, the desultory Tenerife *mañana* attitude and even the delight of Bermuda's charm faded in the memory after exposure to this red carpet atmosphere that is uniquely American.

*The trip home was to be a flight into history...*

Following this highlight, Los Angeles, Honolulu and Nadi seemed quite routine. These cities were, after all, regular stops for most of the crew as well as XBA in its early days.

Then: the last sector. We were going home. At last, after so much blood, sweat and tears, this marvellous aeroplane on which there was so much hope riding, was going to return to the country whose travellers were brought so much closer to the other side of the world by its speed.

Our families would be invited to our welcome home reception and we would be once again in our own part of the world. For everyone, the culmination of years of hoping, planning and sheer hard work would soon be realised.

