

SpySites

Espionage in and Around Washington, D.C.



Please Note: Some of these sites are privately owned. Please respect the rights of property owners when visiting.

Smithsonian Institution Castle—

On the National Mall in Washington. During the Civil War, Union sentries were positioned in the Castle's towers to keep track of Confederate troops, primarily those stationed at the important railroad hubs of Centreville and Manassas, located across the Potomac River in the Confederacy's most important state. www.si.edu/visit/infocenter/sicastle.htm

National Air and Space Museum Grounds—

On the National Mall in Washington. Here, Professor Thaddeus Lowe of New Hampshire rose to a height of 500 feet in a tethered balloon, demonstrating to President Lincoln the value of aerial reconnaissance. During the June 18, 1861 ascent, the pioneering aeronaut telegraphically transmitted the first air-to-ground message.

National Air and Space Museum—

On the National Mall in Washington. Among its thousands of intriguing exhibits, America's favorite museum is home to the Corona spy camera model that once belonged to the CIA (it's now part of the "Space Race" exhibit), and memorabilia representing the aerial reconnaissance undertakings of Professor Thaddeus Lowe and Cold War spy pilot Francis Gary Powers. www.nasm.si.edu

National Air and Space Museum Stephen F. Udvar-Hazy Center—

Located on the grounds of Dulles International Airport in Chantilly, Virginia. Featured aircraft at this amazing complex include an SR-71 spy plane and the Enterprise, America's first space shuttle. www.nasm.si.edu/udvarhazy

J. Edgar Hoover Residence—

4936 30th Place, NW, Washington. The FBI's most famous director installed bulletproof windows in the house, where he maintained files on a variety of political and military leaders.

OSS Headquarters (and First CIA Headquarters)—

2430 E. Street, NW, Washington. Office of Strategic Services founder William J. Donovan maintained his office here, as did several early CIA directors. Known as the E Street Complex, the buildings are still under Federal control; they are not open to public. The expansive site is clearly visible from the Kennedy Center and its vantage point on the Potomac River.

Ford's Theatre—

511 10th Street, NW, Washington. Best known as the place where President Lincoln was shot and for its impressive theatrical productions, the building also served as headquarters of the OSS Topographical Model Section during World War II. www.fordstheatre.org

City Home of OSS Director, William J. Donovan—

2920 R Street, NW, Washington. Donovan held numerous confidential meetings at this impressive Georgetown residence, necessitating a move by his wife to their farm in Berryville, Virginia.

Mailbox Code-named SMILE—

37th and R Streets, NW, Washington. The notorious turncoat Aldrich Ames would leave a chalk mark on the original mailbox located at this site, signaling to his Soviet handlers that he needed to meet with them.

International Spy Museum—

Located in the Gallery Place neighborhood of Washington, DC at 800 F Street, NW (at the corner of 8th & F Streets, NW). This hugely popular attraction is accessible via Metrorail (Washington, DC's subway system) at Gallery Place/Chinatown Station on the Red, Yellow, and Green lines. The Museum also hosts a variety of spy-related speakers, programs, and films. www.spymuseum.org

Mount Vernon—

3200 Mount Vernon Memorial Highway, Mount Vernon, Virginia. Home of America's first spymaster, the newly opened and expanded visitors' complex offers several short films showcasing different aspects of Washington's life and service. Make sure to view the one detailing some of his espionage activities. www.mountvernon.org

The Pentagon—

Located just outside the Nation's Capital in Arlington, Virginia. The Department of Defense offers hour-long escorted tours through an open area of the world's largest federal office building. www.pentagon.afis.osd.mil/tours.html



Vint Hill (formerly Vint Hill Farms Station)—

4263 Aiken Drive, Warrenton, Virginia. Once a thriving Fauquier County farm, Vint Hill served as an important electronic monitoring station and cryptographic school during World War II. Many of the codebreakers secretly worked in refurbished barns and outbuildings. Closed as an Army installation in 1996, the historic site is now managed by the Vint Hill Economic Development Authority, which is converting the area into a mixed-use village of commercial offices and residential housing. www.vinthill.com

Mount Weather Emergency Operations Center—

Located approximately 17 miles west of Leesburg, Virginia, off Route 7 in the Blue Ridge Mountains on the boundary dividing Clarke and Loudoun Counties. Look for the directional sign on Route 7 that reads "Mount Weather EOC" and make the left onto Blue Mountain Road. Drive approximately five miles; the secured Federal enclave is distinguished by its chain link fence and "No Trespassing" signs on either side of Blue Mountain Road. During the Cold War, the site served as clandestine reservation designed to house government officials in the event of a nuclear attack. The veil of secrecy lifted, it is now operated by the Federal Emergency Management Agency.

FEMA coordinates a variety of disaster preparedness and response activities from the facility; other government agencies also use it for training exercises and conferences. The compound is not open to the public.

A WORD OF WARNING: DO NOT ATTEMPT TO DRIVE UP MOUNT WEATHER DURING ANY KIND OF INCLEMENT WEATHER, ESPECIALLY FOG. IT IS EXTREMELY HAZARDOUS. Blue Mountain Road is paved, but it is very narrow; in addition, there are numerous signs warning of sharp curves on steep grades. All this is made more challenging by fog or precipitation, which hang in the mountain, restricting visibility to a white-knuckle level.

Prince William Forest Park—

18100 Park Headquarters Road, Triangle, Virginia. Now a popular recreational area, Prince William Forest Park served as a schooling site for OSS operatives during World War II. Many of the cabins used by the trainees are still in evidence. Some OSS veterans groups have held their reunions in the very building where they first learned to blow-up buildings and scramble communications. Park functions are conducted in the larger facility. The public may rent selected cabins for outings and meetings. www.nps.gov/prwi

Fort Hunt Park—

George Washington Memorial Parkway, Fort Hunt Road, Alexandria, Virginia. This bucolic locale was once the site of an interrogation center for captured German U-boat commanders and sailors. Unfortunately, all 150 buildings associated with the top-secret (and probably illegal) enterprise have long since vanished. www.nps.gov/archive/qwmp/fohu

Signal Hill Park—

Signal View Drive, Manassas Park, Virginia. This memorial commemorate America's first battlefield telecommunication—a wig-wagged message warning the Confederates of a flanking Union column at the First Battle of Manassas. Start with an informative visit to the Manassas Museum, which can be located by following the signs from I-66.

www.ManassasMuseum.org

"Mosby's Confederacy"—

Virginia—Leesburg to Warrenton to Fairfax Courthouse. While there are numerous signs describing John Singleton Mosby's exploits throughout Northern Virginia, the day-long bus tours made famous by the Stuart-Mosby Historical Society are a recommended way to experience something of the Gray Ghost. Of special interest are Mosby's raid on Fairfax Courthouse, where he captured Union General Edwin Stoughton and 100 soldiers, and the Rebel raider's gravesite in Warrenton Cemetery. A fee is charged and reservations are required. www.stuart-mosby.org

Taylor's Tavern Site—

Falls Church, Virginia, near the intersection of Routes 50 and 7. In addition to the protective Union battery posted here, this location was also the site of America's first military aerial reconnaissance flight. Over June 24-25 1861, Professor Thaddeus Lowe made several tethered ascents in his observation balloon, reporting on Confederate cavalry positions situated in the Falls Church area. Professor Lowe's achievements are denoted by a Virginia Civil War Trails marker.

www.civilwartrails.org

John Wilkes Booth Escape Route—

Washington, Maryland, and Virginia. This multi-faceted adventure is best experienced by registering for one of the day-long bus tours offered through the Surratt Society of Clinton, Maryland. These outings follow the path of infamy now identified with the presidential assassin. One of the featured stops is the home and tavern owned by Mary Surratt, who became the first woman executed by the Federal government for her alleged role in the plot to kill the president.

www.surratt.org

Congressional Country Club—

8500 River Road, Bethesda, Maryland. A training site for OSS Operational Groups (OGs) during World War II, "Club Jed", as it was affectionately known, hosted both male and female OSS trainees. Designated Area F, recruits were schooled in guerrilla warfare and similar unconventional combat techniques. Rows of tents ringed the clubhouse, which served as the facility's headquarters; the golf course was converted into an obstacle course. www.ccclub.org



Cabin John Regional Park—

7400 Tuckerman Lane, Rockville, Maryland. In 1982, Navy photographer Glenn Michael Souther used the park, better known for its ice skating rink, as a dead drop site, surreptitiously collecting money from his Soviet contacts as payment for the highly classified satellite imagery he had supplied them. www.mc-mncppc.org/parks

National Cryptologic Museum—

Located on the grounds of the National Security Agency, Fort Meade, Maryland. The National Cryptologic Museum is one of the very few publicly accessible “spy” museums hosted by a Federal entity. Here visitors can learn all about the history and use of codes; many one-of-a-kind artifacts are featured. www.nsa.gov/museum

Former Ramada Inn Building—

(Presently occupied by a Best Western) 1251 W. Montgomery Ave., Rockville, Maryland (intersections of Routes 270 and 28). Here on May 20, 1985, the FBI apprehended former Navy warrant officer John Walker (now known as “Johnny Walker Red”) after an 18-year spying effort that targeted and compromised sophisticated naval communications. Into this treachery, he recruited his brother, son, and best friend.

Along the Underground Railroad Station—

Sandy Spring, Maryland. Settled in 1725, residents of this Quaker community surreptitiously aided hundreds of fleeing slaves before and during the Civil War. To learn more, begin with a visit to the Sandy Spring Museum, which features exhibits highlighting the town’s role in the abolitionist movement. www.sandyspringmuseum.org

The Greenbrier—

300 West Main Street, White Sulphur Springs, West Virginia. Below this grand and gracious resort lies a formidable bunker complex designed to house and protect members of Congress during a nuclear attack. Code-named “Project Greek Island,” the rather romantic moniker belied the sparse and egalitarian accommodations characterizing the site, which was publicly exposed in 1992. It is open for tours and theme parties. www.greenbrier.com

National Women’s History Museum—

While Congress debates the innumerable merits of allowing this evolving attraction to locate in a government-owned building on the National Mall in Washington, D.C., enjoy learning about women’s contributions to American history by way of the Museum’s Web page. Organizers have produced several fascinating cyber displays that visitors can enjoy in a virtual medium. Try the one featuring female spies called Clandestine Women. Everyone will find these true but overlooked stories extremely captivating. www.nwhm.org/spies/1.htm

The Cold War Museum—

This coming international tourist destination will showcase the Cold War’s many facets and those who served during the tense period. Founded by the son of U-2 pilot Francis Gary Powers, the Museum will be located on the site of a former Nike missile reservation in Fairfax County, Virginia. www.coldwar.org

For Souvenirs of Your Spy Site Tour—

Visit Cassel’s Sports and Awards , 14000 Park Center Road, Herndon, Virginia Walk past the store’s expansive selection of sporting goods and find the not-so-secret section devoted to shirts, mugs, and other assorted spy souvenirs featuring the CIA and FBI logos. www.virginia-sports-awards-promotionalproducts.com

Did you know...

The “U” in U-2 stands for “utility”. This was an attempt by its designers to mask the plane’s real function, which was secret overhead reconnaissance.

Did you know...

Because of his extensive use of espionage agents and operations, George Washington is considered the nation’s first DCI—Director of Central Intelligence. The individual serving as DCI today heads a variety of American intelligence services, including the CIA..

“ There is nothing more necessary than good intelligence to frustrate a designing enemy, and nothing that requires greater pains to obtain.” - George Washington, 1756

Did you know...

Abolitionist Harriet Tubman, who used knowledge she gained while helping to supervise the Underground Railroad in the South to scout and spy for the Union Army, is considered the first recorded African-American woman to serve in the military.