

# Jimmy Stewart's old Cessna returned to airport for restoration

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by RANDY WELLS

A 54-year-old worn-and-weary airplane arrived at the Indiana County/Jimmy Stewart Airport Monday. But since it is long past its airworthy days, it came in pieces on two trailers behind pickup trucks. Still, it arrived with significant provenance.



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The plane — a Cessna C-310 twin-engine craft — until last week had been sitting and rusting, perhaps for 15 years, at Dallas Executive Airport, in Texas. Its most recent owner years ago abandoned the plane at the airport, moved away and died. The Cessna's engines and some other parts apparently had been scavenged, perhaps as training aids for aircraft mechanics.

Because of the years of neglect, the Federal Aviation Administration deregistered the plane, blocking it from flying again without extensive rebuilding.

John Hurn, a longtime fixture at the Dallas airport, recognized the Cessna was doomed to be sent soon to the scrap yard.

But Hurn, 75, is also a retired U.S. Navy rescue helicopter pilot who accumulated more than 1,400 hours of combat time in the Vietnam War. When he learned the Cessna was once owned by another American combat aviator, he knew the plane deserved better than to be cut up for scrap.

In 1961, the Cessna was purchased new by film star Jimmy Stewart.

"I've hauled Marines into the jungles and picked up the wounded," Hurn said. "I've been there," just as Stewart had "been there" in the pilot's seat of B-24 bombers over Europe in 1944. Hurn said that out of respect for Stewart he was going to help save the old plane and get it to the movie star and war hero's hometown.

The back story on this particular C-310 also has a California connection. Charles Jessen, of Mill Valley, Calif., had been doing research for an article on Stewart for "Twin Cessna Flyer" magazine when he identified the Cessna as one of Stewart's personal planes.

Jessen contacted Tom Robertson, manager of the Indiana County/Jimmy Stewart Airport, and Robertson passed the news on to Harold Wood, secretary of the Experimental Aircraft Association Chapter 993 at the airport. The EAA is an international association of aviation enthusiasts, some of whom assemble their own aircraft.

"We have some experience" in building small planes, Wood said of the 25 members in the Indiana chapter, and the group agreed to restore the Cessna as a chapter project.

On April 8, EAA members Wood, Sean Fullner, Keith Rearick, Tip Ruffner and Ivan Stefanik, with assistance from Bob Neese — drove to Dallas in two pickup trucks with trailers and over two long days disassembled the plane (there were 22 rusty bolts alone holding each wing in place), loaded the

components and hauled them back to Indiana. Wood estimated the Cessna, which is missing its two engines and propellers, weighs about 2,800 pounds.

The goal now, Wood said, is for the chapter members to restore the plane as a static display and erect it on a pedestal near the airport terminal. The work, including repainting the plane in its original colors, may take two years and cost \$50,000. Donations to help buy missing parts and materials for the restoration may be sent to EAA Chapter 993, P.O. Box 202, Indiana, PA 15701, with the reference "Jimmy Stewart."

"It's an ambitious project" for the chapter, Wood said, but he hopes the restoration will rejuvenate the local group and attract some new members.

Wood also said he hopes to track down the Cessna's log book. That could add greatly to the provenance of the old plane and probably provide fascinating details about where it traveled with its world-famous owner and pilot.

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