



Plane Parts From "Flight" to "Iron Man 3" An Overview of Scroggins Aviation

By Marjorie Galas



Scroggins Aviation has provided airplane parts and guidance on films including "FLIGHT," featuring Denzel Washington as alcohol-abusing pilot Whip Whitaker. Photo courtesy of: Paramount Pictures

When pulling apart a plane for a film or television production, one must use extreme care. Running through its shafts and walls are toxic materials that can burn through eyes and flesh. Douglas Scroggins, of Scroggins Aviation, as a master at handling these situations and is quickly becoming a go-to expert for the industry.

"I treat it with surgical care," said Scroggins, whose work as an aircraft mechanic led to his expertise. "After the material is removed, a licensed team disposes of it per code."

Scroggins earliest forays into production were much less volatile. In the early nineties he found work as a camera operator and worked his way up the ladder to cinematographer. However, his devotion to aviation was constantly with him. His grandfather, a World War II fighter pilot, had been a Pan Am captain. As a boy he was always around aircrafts and developed an intellectual curiosity about their inner workings. As a young man he began to research crashes and became fascinated by the individuals who sifted through wreckage to find victim's personal items in order to provide closure for grieving loved ones.

In the late 90s Scroggins shifted his attention from cinematography to starting an aviation company that is qualified to remove plane wrecks: one of the handfuls of companies who perform this task. While this service continues to be a staple of Scroggins Aviation, he began to expand into acquiring "junkyard jets" that he was able to dismantle. He found a use for the parts in production.

"I enjoyed getting back into the industry," said Scroggins. "I started with selling parts. One day I brought a jet liner in the Mojave. Now I have 125-150 airplanes that I have parted out."

The first production he supplied a completed aircraft for was the television series "The Event." He disassembled a 767 at his Mojave yard, and then reassembled it on a studio set. His expertise was then used on additional television shows, such as Pan Am, where he used a 53' long flatbed to transport a

very rare cockpit and cabin. In addition to providing parts, Scroggins also worked with the VFX team and set decorator to provide information pertaining to the cabin interiors and details

“Seats, coffers, ports, the arrangement of the airplanes of the period, they were very technical,” said Scroggins. “I enjoy working with all the members of the production crew. The set decorators really do their homework and (VFX company) Stargate did some extremely nice CG.”

Scroggins particularly enjoys working on productions that involve a plane crash, whether supplying parts, mockups or technical advice. For last year’s feature “FLIGHT,” Scroggins received notes from director Robert Zemeckis as to the very specific way the plane crash had to occur. His first order of business was to determine where the breaks in the aircraft should be. He then pitched to Zemeckis the benefits of cutting up a plane and setting up the parts on a soundstage. Scroggins then supplied the cockpit, which was cut at the passenger entry, as well as the passenger cabin and the fuselage.

“We refigured and repainted it and made all the pieces to put it back together,” said Scroggins. “There’s more realism when using a real plane. It was a team effort; everyone worked to make it come together.”

Scroggins also offered technical advice for the crash sequence. For the plane used in the angle it was flying, the wings would rip off, the air current passing through the metal would start a fire, and the titanium would get so hot the rivets would ignite. Providing these types of details is a passion for Scroggins.

“Every crash is unique. They all have different characteristics, such as losing fuel or specific damage, that will affect impact,” said Scroggins. “If it is a soft hit there will be a soft hit but the airplane will give. There is a challenge to dealing with fresh wrecks. I like to have respect to those who lost lives, and focus on the science aspect of the crash.”

Most recently Scroggins Aviation has provide aviation parts for films including “OBLIVION” and “Iron Man 3.” He takes particular joy in helping the productions save money by fabricating portions of the aircraft, both large and small. His company is also happy to remove the parts once the production has wrapped.

“They get recycled, and the parts get reused,” said Scroggins. “They get another form of life. It’s great fun!”

For more information about Scroggins Aviation, please visit: www.ScrogginsAviation.com

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