

PERSPECTIVE

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ON THE COVER:
PRODUCTION STILL
FROM *THE NUTCRACKER
AND THE FOUR
REALMS*, GUY HENDRIX
DYAS, PRODUCTION
DESIGNER, SHOWING
DROSSELMAYER'S
ENTRY HALL WITH ITS
18-FOOT CHRISTMAS
TREE. PHOTO BY LAURIE
SPARHAM.

The Craft of Aircraft in Cinema Art

BY PHILIP FAISS, SCROGGINS AVIATION

Working with aircraft in television and film is a complex undertaking that mixes real equipment with modified or custom elements that often need to integrate with special effects rigs and be enhanced with digital effects to get the final product. It is fairly common for Art Departments to rent a commercial plane interior and have the construction and set decoration departments prepare it for shooting in a corner of the stage. When more complex sequences are needed with specialized components and rigging, it is often best to reach out to a company that deals with aircraft elements exclusively.

A. A UH-60 BLACK HAWK BEING LIFTED IN A SCENE FOR THE MAKING OF *RAMPAGE*.

B. UH-60 BLACK HAWK WITH UPDATED COCKPIT PANEL MADE FOR *RAMPAGE*.

PHOTOS COURTESY OF SCROGGINS AVIATION.

Scroggins Aviation was founded by Doug Scroggins in Las Vegas in 2010, and has grown into a leading source for aircraft elements and parts to the film and television industry. The company got its start with the

television series *The Event*, which needed a crashed Boeing 767 to be filmed in The Pinnacles near China Lake, CA, a project so large that it put the effects shop on the map and was the foundation for many projects to come.

Art Director Mark Walters needed a number of aircraft and helicopters in *Rampage*, featuring Dwayne Johnson. One of the more challenging builds for that feature was the Apache AH-64. Scroggins sourced a real fuselage and then created working drawings to have additional elements made (i.e., cowls, chain gun and wings with rocket launchers). The front cockpit, where Johnson fired upon a large aquatic monster, was outfitted with modern panels and digital screens to match current Apache panels. The engine pylons were cut out of foam and painted. Wing sections were drafted and laser cut. These were all later assembled with the pylons, which housed the rocket launchers and Hellfire missiles.

Explains Mark, a pilot and Naval Academy alumni, “For *Rampage*, we required a total of five bucks. These included utilizing a UH-60 Black Hawk redressed as three different birds over the course of shooting, a C-17 Globemaster III cockpit, and an AS350 Astar that was used both on a motion base and then crashed into an outdoor set. Scroggins Aviation was able to provide all of these assets, as well as building out an AH-64 Apache and converting a Boeing 767 cockpit into a B-2 stealth bomber cockpit for us. Everything came set-ready with all instruments and screens rigged for playback which allowed us to concentrate on the visual content, rather than spending time building out the bucks to ‘fly’ on a motion base, or rigging electronics for playback. The quality of their aircraft and their functionality was just outstanding.”

Spider-Man: Homecoming needed a unique cockpit from the ground up. Brad Ricker, Supervising



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A. THE C-17 COCKPIT FROM *SPIDER-MAN: HOMECOMING*.

B. THE C-17 SETUP FOR SHOOTING FROM *SPIDER-MAN: HOMECOMING*.

C. SPITFIRE FROM *DUNKIRK* BEING FILMED AT FALLS LAKE AT UNIVERSAL STUDIOS. PHOTO WARNER BROS.

Art Director, details, “The story on *Spider-Man: Homecoming* originally opened with the hijacking of a C17 Cargo Transport. The Vulture was going to board the plane from the outside and enter the cockpit mid-flight. With due diligence, I looked through all the usual places for rental cockpits. They were disappointing to say the least—all very bad matches for a C17. Both in the window breakups and the electronics (if there were any at all). I felt that for

once, we should have an absolutely authentic cockpit and believed it was possible with Scroggins Aviation dedicated to the task. We made a plan. They started acquiring the necessary parts, the nose cockpit shell, consoles, all the existing parts. They were a couple of months into the work. Suddenly, the script changed—it was no longer a standard C17 but a more futuristic, Tony Stark version. Production Designer Oliver Scholl had to come up with a new design that was more than just a military transport. It had a sexier profile—sort of the Audi A8 of transports. But now we had to keep to the cockpit window breakup of a C17. Scroggins adjusted for us and added more custom instrument panel features, special touch pads and joysticks that we asked for. The Stark logo showed that it was Tony’s creation (and Oliver’s). Marvel was happy to know that the C17 cockpit could play as either a truly authentic version, which recurs in some of their other movies, or as the new, sleeker Stark Transport.”

In order to be historically accurate for *Dunkirk*, Nathan Crowley, Production Designer, and Kevin Ishioka, Supervising Art Director, requested a Spitfire mock-up with an additional authentic period instrument panel to be outfitted with gauges. Doug’s team first supplied a 1:1 scale Spitfire with an integrated steel structure to facilitate its mounting onto a motion base. This allowed for both a wild nose section and aft fuselage, which provided flexibility for camera angles, as well as the ability to mount a special effects rig to the mock-up. Scroggins also built an instrument panel using historic drawings, sourced period gauges, and even built a specific fuel gauge which was ultimately featured as the hero gauge in the cockpit.

The panel needed to resemble a Spitfire MK-1 panel, as it would be placed in the flyable Yak that played in the film. Doug Scroggins adds, “Supplying the full-size Spitfire and making the changes for this production was fun and challenging. We even made rivets and glued them to the sections of the skin behind the pilot and around the canopy frame for



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close-ups. For the MK-1 instrument panel, it was cut and engraved from material from the same time period for authenticity. As for the MK-1 Series fuel gauge (hero), we made two of them. Even the pros thought it was real! It's a great feeling when you provide high-quality components, and discerning viewers can suspend their disbelief."

Scroggins has provided a wide selection of studio-friendly assets. Most recently, they supplied a real CH-47 Chinook for *Deadpool 2*, the first time a Chinook was applied to a motion-base for filming. In addition to the Chinook, they have a real UH-60 Black Hawk mock-up. You will also see their UH-1H Huey in the rhino chase sequence from *Jumanji: Welcome to the Jungle*. Their EC135 and Astar too have served in various capacities on both television series and features, including *Captain America: Civil War*.

Hulu's *The First* required a futuristic version of the Orion space capsule on a 1:1 scale. The entire metal structure was completely fabricated and built with wild panels around the circumference of the capsule. Engineering was a top concern for this build due to its motion-base work, so the capsule could shoot in both vertical and horizontal attitudes. Hatches and doors were researched and installed for accuracy, as well as the seats and instrument panel. The overall structure was composed of steel, aluminum and several cast components, all laser cut or made with their in-house CNC machine.

For more information on using aircraft in production and additional examples from a wide number of productions, visit their website at www.scrogginsaviation.com.

A. A CH-47 CHINOOK ON A MOTION BASE FOR *DEADPOOL 2*.

B. A UH-1H HUEY HELICOPTER ON A MOTION BASE USED FOR *JUMANJI: WELCOME TO THE JUNGLE*.

C. A CH-47 CHINOOK DURING SHOOTING FOR *DEADPOOL 2*.

D. ORION SPACE CAPSULE FROM HULU'S *THE FIRST*.

PHOTOS COURTESY OF SCROGGINS AVIATION.

