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### History Lands At Dynamic

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BRIDGEWATER — A piece of aviation and presidential history circled the town several times Wednesday afternoon before gliding into Bridgewater Airpark.

**Columbine II**, the aircraft that once carried President Dwight Eisenhower around the world and was the first to be called "Air Force One," landed on the airstrip used by Dynamic Aviation at around 2:10 p.m. The Bridgewater

company bought the deteriorating relic and repaired it in Arizona before having it flown east for restoration.

Hundreds of people, many holding cellphones aloft to capture the moment, gathered at the airpark to see the 1948 Lockheed C-121 Constellation land. The crowd broke into applause as it touched down and rolled along the runway, and people cheered flight crew members as they disembarked.

Karl Stoltzfus, founder and chairman of Dynamic Aviation's board of directors and the main figure behind the project, said seeing the plane land in Bridgewater after more than a year of repairs "gave me a big, big emotion of relief because it was such a complicated process, getting it from sitting in a desert in Arizona to Bridgewater, Va."

Stoltzfus wasn't the only person who enjoyed seeing the aircraft make its way to the area.

"It was great. It was great," 88-year-old Roy Simmers of Mount Crawford said after seeing the four-engine propeller plane arrive at its new home. "I really enjoyed it."

Added his nephew, Gary Simmers of Mount Crawford: "I'm glad they brought it back to the Valley."

#### Auction Find

The **Columbine II** left Marana Regional Airport in Marana, Ariz., on Monday and flew to Mount Pleasant, Texas, a scheduled stop. The plane was supposed to resume its trip Tuesday morning, but Lockie Christler, who piloted the aircraft for the entire journey, said it took the better part of a day to replace a leaking gasket and make some other repairs, delaying the arrival by a day.

"This is too valuable to history to take a chance with it," said Christler, whose father Mel bought the **Columbine II** and four other aircraft at a U.S. Air Force auction in 1970 and didn't know until 10 years later that it had been Eisenhower's Air Force One.

He said he knew the plane would fly but "wondered how the mechanical end of it would hold up."

While the arrival was a milestone in the plane's rebirth process, Brian Miklos, the Dynamic Aviation employee who led the **Columbine II** repair team, said it wasn't the most thrilling moment for him. That came over the weekend in Marana.

"When it took off on a test flight Saturday, that was probably the most overwhelming experience," said Miklos, who rode in the chase plane to Texas but was aboard the **Columbine II** for the final leg of the trip. "I was actually weeping, truly crying."

It was "pretty cool" to sit at a desk Eisenhower used, he said, and the ride home was a smooth one.

"It accelerates amazingly quick," said Miklos, who lives outside Bridgewater. "Once it's up she's just graceful, and she wants to go."

#### Air Show Future

The **Columbine II** was known to air traffic controllers as Air Force 8610 when Eisenhower became its primary passenger, but confusion over the plane and Eastern Airlines Flight 8610 in the same airspace prompted the decision to recognize the aircraft as "Air Force One."

Despite several published reports that the confusion occurred over New York City, 89th Airlift Wing historian Robert Spiers recently noted that occurred over Richmond as Eisenhower was returning from an appearance in Charlotte, N.C. He learned about the incident firsthand in a 2012 interview with retired Col. William Thomas, the co-pilot that day.

Stoltzfus, who agreed that the incident occurred over Richmond, said Wednesday's arrival in Bridgewater represented the third step of an "epic journey" to restore the **Columbine II**.

The first was its purchase — he says he paid a bit less than the \$1.5 million asking price — followed by its repair to return it to flying condition. Getting the aircraft to Bridgewater allows the larger restoration effort to commence.

Once restored, Stoltzfus plans to put the plane on the air show circuit and make it available to schoolchildren to spark their interest in 1950s-era American history. He also plans to make it available to the public often.

Christler said selling the plane was "bittersweet" for his family, but its upkeep became too costly. If it had to sell, though, they were glad it was Stoltzfus who bought it.

"Everything Karl does, he does it right," Christler said, "him and his team."

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**Caption: The Columbine II, a 1948 Lockheed C-121 Constellation and the first aircraft known as "Air Force One," lands at Dynamic Aviation on Wednesday in Bridgewater. (Photos by Austin Bachand / DN-R)**

**Karl Stoltzfus (left) and his son Michael speak to the crowd after the landing of the Columbine II at Dynamic Aviation on Wednesday. The aircraft was purchased by Karl Stoltzfus for restoration and preservation.**

**The Columbine II taxis down the runway at Dynamic Aviation on Wednesday.**

**A crowd gathers under the Columbine II.**

**A crowd inspects the underside of the Columbine II on Wednesday. Dynamic Aviation bought the deteriorating relic and repaired it in Arizona before having it flown east for restoration.**

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