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(Submitted photo)

## Pilot to Launch 'Trip of a Lifetime' from Western Pa.

By Eric Heyl

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A British engineer who works in Iraq will attempt to fly around the world in a journey that surprisingly will begin at a small airport north of Pittsburgh.

Ross Edmondson will take off in his single-engine Cessna on May 6 for the first of six-month-long flying trips. If he completes them successfully, he'll be one of just 200 small aircraft pilots to circumnavigate the globe.

"This idea has been in my mind probably since I was 14," he said recently via phone from Iraq. "I'm tremendously excited. I can't wait to get back to the U.S. and then begin that final feverish week of preparation before I begin."

Edmondson, 35, is a Shell Oil Company natural gas project engineer who was transferred to Pittsburgh in 2012 to work as part of the growing energy industry in Western Pennsylvania. A pilot since he was 21, Edmondson joined a local flying group – the Zelienople Condor Aero Club – soon after his arrival.

He kept his Cessna in Zelienople after being transferred to Iraq in 2017. He works one month on and one off, giving him time to frequently travel back to the Pittsburgh area to fly the plane.

Having extended periods of free time gave Edmondson the idea to finally make his dream trip a reality by breaking it into segments. He'll fly the Cessna to various locales each month, fly back to work for a month, then fly back to wherever he left the aircraft to resume the flight.

Edmondson's route will take him across the Atlantic to the United Kingdom and Europe, through the Middle East and India, and into southeast Asia. Then it's on to Australia and New Zealand before heading across the Pacific and back to the United States and, finally, Zelienople Municipal Airport, 30 miles north of Pittsburgh.

Edmondson said he is using the trip as an opportunity to raise money and awareness for African Promise, a charity supporting educational efforts in Kenya.

His Cessna is a 1981 model, but about the only part of the plane that old is its frame.

"I replaced the engine in 2014 and most of the instruments within the last year," he said. "I also had the aircraft modified to nearly triple its fuel capacity so it can make those long flights over the oceans."

The longest leg is one of those oceanic flights, a 17-hour journey from Hawaii to California spanning 2,400 miles. The lengthy Pacific and Atlantic flights likely will be the most daunting portions of Edmondson's adventure.

But having taken specialist training for water ditching, he is about as prepared as possible if something goes wrong over the water.

"There are these places that have a simulated aircraft suspended above a very large, deep pool on a giant winch," he said. "They can crash it in the water at whatever speed they choose and also have it flip upside down and have water flood through it. I've never ditched an aircraft before, but it seemed very much like what it would be like for real."

Edmondson should have much more scenic views during his flight than those provided by commercial airliners, which fly at altitudes of up to 40,000 feet and speeds of 500 mph. He'll be flying at altitudes between 2,000 and 12,000 feet and at a relatively slow speed of 150 mph.

"I'm looking forward to the Atlantic crossing, particularly the ice shelf over Greenland and Iceland," he said. "I'm also very much looking forward to flying over the Middle East, where I work right now."

Edmondson won't always get to enjoy the sights along the way. Flying at such low altitudes also leaves him more susceptible to bad weather conditions than airliners able to fly above most storms.

But the many challenges he expects to face over the next year don't faze him.

"I know it won't be easy, but I can't wait to get started," he said. "This is the trip of a lifetime."