

'I hope the US is going to be sympathetic to a rather one-off English eccentric...'

THE fate of Flying Vet Maurice Kirk was today uncertain as he remained in a psychiatric hospital after he landed his aeroplane near President George Bush's ranch.

The eccentric pilot from the Vale of Glamorgan, known as the Flying Vet, has been undergoing psychiatric assessment at Austin State Hospital, Texas, since he landed the aircraft outside the prohibited zone near the ranch on Friday.

It is thought security at the ranch had been stepped up recently because the President's daughter Jenna is due to marry there in less than two weeks.

McLennan County deputy sheriff Randy Plemons said last night Mr Kirk would be questioned once he was released from hospital.

Staff at the hospital, formerly known as the State Lunatic Asylum, have declined to comment on Mr Kirk's treatment or when he might be released.

Mr Kirk's wife, Kirstie, originally understood he was to appear before a judge today. But later she said she wasn't sure.

"I don't know what is happening or if he is to be charged. It will all work out in the end."

The Foreign Office said it had no official confirmation of any court appearance.

Mr Kirk was taken to the hospital after being arrested on the approach road to the ranch where he was planning to thank the President for help provided by

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Americans still cling on to Captain Kirk

the country's coastguards when his plane crash-landed in the Caribbean Sea last February.

While most people who know father-of-four Mr Kirk in the Vale of Glamorgan are amused but not

FLYING VET: Maurice Kirk had hoped to meet President Bush

surprised by his latest antic, there is growing concern that the US authorities will not be quite so willing to see the funny side.

Mrs Kirk, writing on the Flying Vet website, said it appeared "the situation is becoming more serious".

She said authorities in Texas believed 62-year-old Mr Kirk was trying to land on the President's lawn but was not able to because of bad weather. She believed this was unlikely as he was a "very proficient aviator". Mrs Kirk, who said she was unable to contact her

husband, believed he has been questioned by the United States Secret Service.

Ken Sury, community editor at the *Waco Tribune-Herald*, in Texas, said security at the ranch had been tightened because of the wedding, due to take place on Saturday, May 10.

He said: "No one gets to walk very close to the gates of the ranch. The Secret Service take a very active stance on that."

"There's always Secret Service around here, and with one of the President's twin daughters getting married there soon, I imagine they are being particularly vigilant."

The Foreign Office is providing consular assistance to Mr Kirk and had spoken to him about his situation. A spokeswoman said this would include hospital visits and informing his family of legal and other developments.

"We are adopting more of a hands-off approach than we might in a similar situation in places where we were less content with the judicial process. But we will be monitoring the situation."

Mrs Kirk said her husband, a father of four, previously visited Sir Edmund Hillary during a flight around New Zealand, and met John Howard, then prime minister of Australia, on another occasion.

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