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Flying help to remote areas on *WINGS OF HOPE*



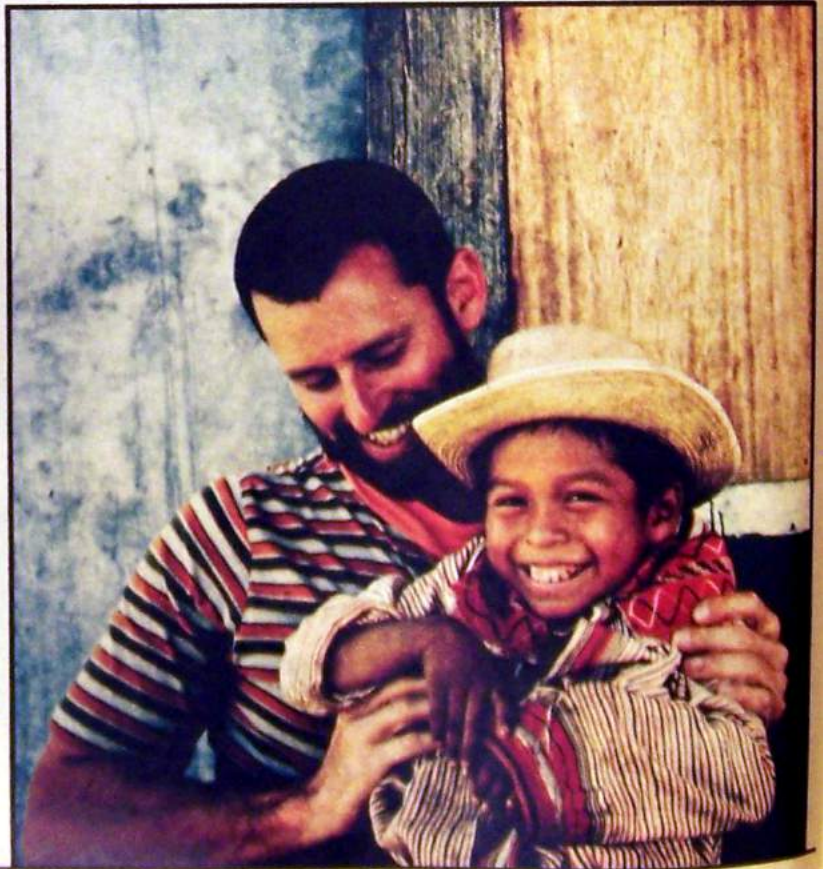
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A Wings of Hope plane, above, lands for refueling at Xalbal, Ixcán jungle, Guatemala. Bob Weninger is the volunteer pilot transporting supplies from one community to another. At right, another volunteer, Sink Manning, chief pilot in Guatemala, visits with a young Indian friend at Myalan.



Joseph G. Fabick, vice president of John Fabick Tractor Co. and president of the Wings of Hope board, on an inspection tour in Peru. Fabick, in white shirt, stands behind the children with Guy Gervais, a volunteer pilot.



Flying help to remote areas on *Wings of Hope*

St. Louis-based aviation group aids needy with planes, pilots and communications

By Mary Kimbrough

When "Sink" Manning lifted the Cessna 185 off the Weiss Airport runway on a recent winter's morning and turned south, he was guided by more than charts and compass. He was tracking an invisible thread which ties St. Louis to exotic, faraway places—from a crowded office on the city's southside to jungle huts and hardscrabble farms—and binds a fraternity of business executives and jaunty airmen to troubled strangers across the world.

"Sink"—short for Sinkler—was en route to Honduras where he will put wings on the feet of those who serve in the forgotten corners of the earth. The thread he followed is called, appropriately, Wings of Hope, and that's just what it is: help and hope carried to isolated peoples on the swift wings of airplanes.

Manning is one of the many volunteers serving in the unique, St. Louis-based philanthropy of the aviation industry. Its ancestry is a blend of jet and jenny for its participants include pioneer pilots as well as newcomers, airline captains, soldiers of fortune, executives and aviation writers and students, men and women of many ages and creeds.

Wings of Hope is an airborne delivery truck and taxi, an ambulance with propellers, a clearing house for Good Samaritans in the world's remotest outposts. It's disaster relief and danger-filled adventure, emergency aid and good neighborliness, run with the expertise of a corporation and the friendliness of the corner drugstore.

The loosely-knit, non-profit service provides planes, pilots and radio communications in isolated areas where man has never seen jet planes or railroads and where earth-bound trucks are no match for the rugged or sandy terrain. In the past decade, it has bought and sent or assisted with provision of more than 30 planes. There are 30 more requests waiting to be filled.

But the skies—weather permitting—are open and free and Wings of Hope planes fly across mountain and desert, telescoping time. A tortuous jour-



ney of many days or weeks by foot or horseback or dugout canoe can become a life-saving, airborne mission of only hours or minutes.

Wings of Hope planes transport supplies, technicians, medical equipment and medicines, emergency aid, crops, cargo. They land on the heels of disastrous earthquake or hurricane to help the victims.

They take the sick and injured to back country clinics or city hospitals and carry doctors and nurses to remote outposts. They transport families with their meager belongings from primitive villages to a new life of co-op farming; help support sound development programs.

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photography by
Dick Weddle



Two volunteer Wings of Hope pilots, Jerry Kaemmer and "Sink" Manning, above, check the map before Manning and his wife, Maria, seated in the plane, take off for Honduras. At left, Robert Bethel, research and development electrical engineer at McDonnell Douglas Corp. and Wings of Hope technical director for communications, makes a last-minute check of the manual as Kaemmer, kneeling, prepares to help load supplies into the plane.

WINGS OF HOPE

Medic and missionary, agronomist, Peace Corps personnel and other specialized volunteers serving behind the jungle curtain or in mountainous regions untouched by 20th century civilization, are welcome to call on Wings of Hope. If it's practical and possible, the call will be answered and there are no strings attached.

It all began in 1963 on the parched wasteland of Kenya's Turkana desert in East Africa. When the adjoining mountain land was ironically turned into a massive mudhole by raging rainstorms, food and medicine destined for the starved and dying desert people sat untouched in the immobilized trucks.

A Catholic missionary from there, visiting in St. Louis, related his tragic story to William D. Edwards, a manufacturer's representative. They agreed that a lightweight plane would answer the need but there was no money.

In that moment, Wings of Hope was born.

Edwards, seeking to help tribesmen he would never see, enlisted the aid of friends in aviation and related industries, such men as Joseph G. Fabick, vice president of John Fabick Tractor Co.; George E. Haddaway, publisher of Flight Magazine; John T. Tucker, president of Midcoast Aviation Services; Capt. Vernon H. Brown, retired American Airlines pilot; Paul J. Rodgers, senior vice president of Ozark Air Lines; J. Sheldon (Torch) Lewis, aviation writer.

Others who have assisted in the formation and development of Wings of Hope include E. Anthony DaRosa, Oliver L. Parks, D. Robert Werner, William Davidson, David W. Kratz, James O. Holton, John C. Mosby and the late Thomas J. McCarthy and Dr. John C. Versnel.

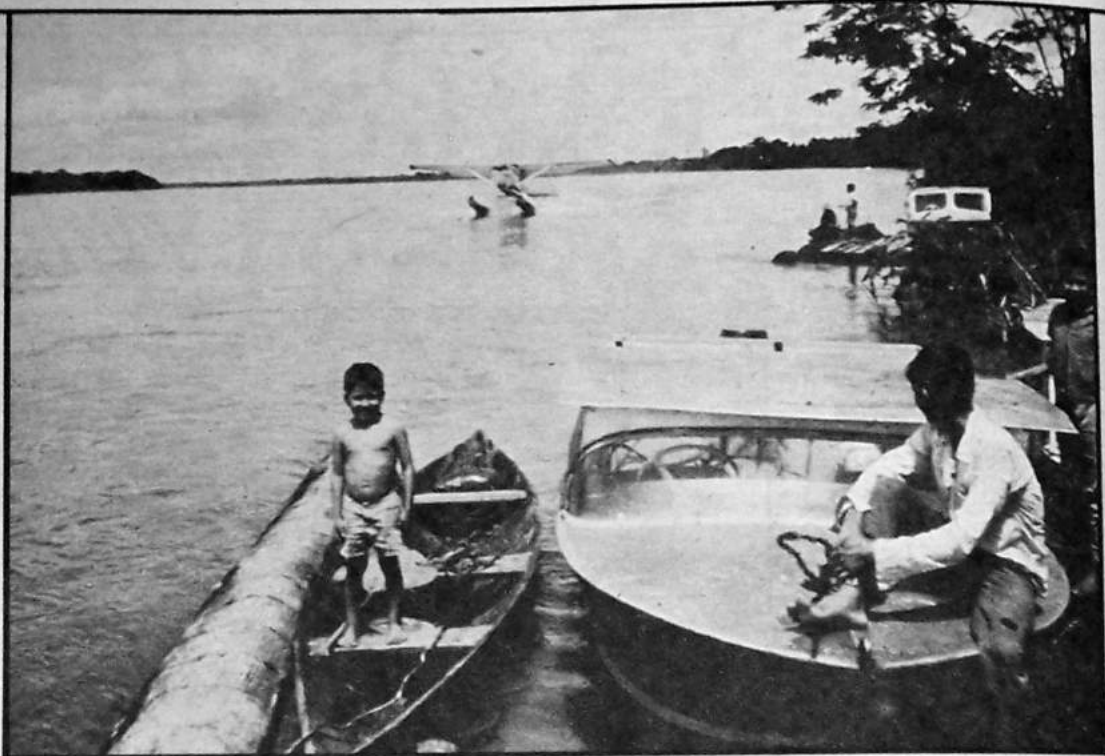
Two years later, the money had been raised and Max Conrad, the "flying grandfather," ferried the new Cessna Skywagon to Kenya. It was to be the first of thousands of mercy missions.

Conrad's memories of that journey are echoed in the words of "Sink" Manning and the other pilots who have followed his skypath into the rugged and desolate outposts of the world.

"A few nights ago," Conrad wrote his St. Louis friends, "I stayed at a mission out in the desert, where so many of the natives are starving.

"Far away I could hear a baby or a child crying. I followed the sound . . . into the open desert and found a baby, maybe 1½ or 2 years old. His arms and legs looked like toothpicks. . . . I picked him up and this native child clinging to me so desperately was the closest I've been to Heaven for a long time. . . . Let's fly!"

And fly they did. Other pilots, other planes, other people in need began to be linked by the invisible thread. News of the original gift brought other



A Wings of Hope float plane lands on the Amazon River at San Pablo, Peru, as residents wait for the arrival of medical staff and supplies destined for the leprosarium at San Pablo. At right, Stan Eschmann, a volunteer pilot from St. Louis, seated at left, and William D. Edwards, Wings of Hope executive director, go over a manual in the south St. Louis headquarters.



requests which were met as funds became available. The organization was strengthened and incorporated. Its service area over the years has been expanded from that little mission station in an African desert into North and South America and Australasia.

Statistics on personnel and equipment constantly change. Planes are taken out of service—some have been totalled on their precarious travels—and replaced with new ones. At present, there are seven planes in the field, flown and maintained by some 12 pilot-mechanic-radiomen. Wings of Hope also provides substantial assistance to at least a dozen other programs owning their own aircraft.

Fabick is president and Tucker is

chairman of the advisory board. Edwards, who formerly headed his own sales agency, has phased out his business career almost completely to give full time as executive secretary of Wings of Hope. His headquarters are at 2319 Hampton Ave., where he is a one-man dispatcher, operations manager and liaison between the board and the rest of the world.

"It's a golden opportunity," said Edwards, "to bring the gospel imperatives and the benefits of civilization to these forgotten people."

Obviously, men such as "Sink" Manning and Stan Eschmann and Jerry Kaemmer would agree. Each, for his own reasons, along with other trained pilots, opted for the life of a

Wings of Hope volunteer, turning his back on the lure and the comforts of more lucrative commercial aviation.

Manning, a North Carolinian, served several years in Guatemala before returning to the States to pick up the new plane and head for his pioneer station in Honduras. He took with him donated medical equipment and medicines to be delivered to St. Louisan Celine Vatterot, a volunteer who heads a clinic operated in Honduras by the Jesuits.

Eschmann, a St. Louisan now completing an avionics course at Southern Illinois University in Carbondale, will return soon to Guatemala where he worked two years as a pilot-mechanic.

Kaemmer, a Wisconsin pilot mar-



Chief Pilot Guy Gervais, at left in the photograph above, and a volunteer helper prepare to carry a young patient, to the San Pablo leprosarium. Gervais is a Canadian volunteer. At left, Stan Eschmann, volunteer pilot, transports Indian passengers and a load of corn from the Ixcan jungle.

seated desire began to form inside me to put some real meaning into my life.

"I prayed to God for guidance."

Like Manning, Eschmann was attracted by an ad which he read as he "bummed around" Weiss Airport. "I saw this as an opportunity to explore exotic places, a flying job, but, most important of all, it was the answer to my prayer. It was an opportunity to use whatever talents I had to help somebody else live a little better. I don't mean two cars in the garage 'better.' I mean not starving to death 'better.' Not dying of an infected leg wound because it takes a week of walking to get to medical help."

Three weeks later, Eschmann was in the jungles of Guatemala where for the next two years he "flew people, sick and healthy, pigs, goats, chickens, cats, dogs, calves, cement, aluminum roofing, sugar, medicine, salt, insecticide, machetes, technical specialists and just about anything else we could fit into a big six-place Cessna 185."

"I flew into and out of small jungle settlements isolated from civilization by days of walking through jungles and over mountains. Our 'bush' air service actually costs less for the people to use than a mule train over the same rough terrain. In late 1973, after a hurricane had devastated the coastal lands, I flew relief missions there to assist during the emergency."

With his fellow pilots, Eschmann has flown the mountains and valleys as low-lying clouds hid the view. They have landed by flashlight or burning kindling wood on runways crudely carved out of the rocky earth.

Their letters to St. Louis reflect the daily drama of their lives.

"A man about 30 was clearing his parcella of land," Manning wrote, "when one of the trees he was felling changed its course and came down directly on his head. Two of his neighbors found him crushed under the tree, pulled him out and carried him to his hut. They were sure he must be dead. . . . But, after several hours, he began to move."

"They put him on a makeshift treebark stretcher and hauled him through the jungles to the missionary clinic. . . . I decided to fly him to the city. All I had to do was to get clear of the field and then it's just a matter of dead reckoning parallel to the mountains until I have enough altitude to clear the peaks and then head on into Guatemala City."

"We loaded him into the Cessna 180. We were off! It was black out there, no horizon, no ground lights, no stars, no nothing. We finally broke through the overcast at 9,500 feet and found ourselves over a beautiful moonlit ocean of clouds. We made contact with Guatemala City approach control; they were very helpful and called an ambulance, which was waiting for us when we landed."

"Doctors performed a cranial operation and the man was back at work in three weeks."

After Hurricane Fifi, which killed

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ried to the former Joan Tobin of St. Louis, was loaned by Wings of Hope to a Dutch mission in Surinam, South America, where he was chief pilot and director of maintenance. They are now in the United States but expect to return to another Central America Wings of Hope station this year.

Although, as in Kaemmer's case, Wings of Hope often serves through church organizations, and though its own genesis was in a mission and many of its leaders are Catholic laymen, it has no church connection.

Need, not creed, it its criterion, says Edwards.

One plane sponsored by a Canadian religious group, he said, assists the Wycliffe Associates (including Jungle

Aviation and Radio Service), the Seventh Day Adventists and Roman Catholic medical missions on the same circuit.

"From the beginning, it has been ecumenical and non-sectarian. Our volunteers also have come from everywhere and represent many faiths. But they are all motivated by the same thing, a wish to help."

Manning, he recalled, saw a Wings of Hope ad in an aviation magazine in the Seattle, Wash. public library five years ago and immediately offered to join up.

"He said that ad just leaped out at him," Edwards continued, "and that he wanted to dedicate a part of his life to helping suffering humanity."

Eschmann, a 1967 graduate of Bishop DuBourg High School, shares that feeling.

"I consider myself a Christian," he said, and his words held not even a shadow of self-righteousness. "I just want to do something to help others."

Certainly, in the rugged terrain and primitive culture of Guatemala, Wings of Hope granted his wish.

After obtaining his B.S. degree, his private pilot's and Airframe and Power Plant Mechanic's license from Parks College, he qualified for his commercial license with instrument rating and a flight instructor's license at Embry Riddle Aeronautical University in Daytona Beach, Fla.

"During this time," he said, "a deep

Wings of HOPE

5,000 Hondurians, Edwards said, Wings of Hope flew around the clock delivering milk, medicine, drugs and medical teams.

On Feb. 4, 1976, out of the dust and devastation of a Guatemala earthquake, came this report from Guy Gervais, chief pilot and field director in that area:

"There was no visibility and I had the strange impression of being thrown six inches in the air and then sideways . . . Outside . . . there was a smell of dust and smoke and we could hear the crying of the people, the shouting, and the dogs barking everywhere . . .

"Bricks and mortar were on the street . . . At last we arrived near the Cessna 185 and the hangar . . . I opened the door of the plane, and the family of Rosario climbed in with some blankets to spend the rest of the night . . . A new kind of intimate fraternity had begun that tragic morning. We had all shared the same fright, grief, fear and cold . . .

"At 8:30 a.m. I made the first take-off from Santa Cruz del Quiche to commence five days of emergency flying and rescue services . . .

"What a tragic sight awaited us at Joyabaj . . . the scene caused one to think of a massacre. Upon official requests, I agreed to concentrate my efforts to serve the desperate needs of the people at Joyabaj. On successive trips we carried portable water, food and supplies from CARE and Catholic Relief Services, members of the Peace Corps, doctors, nurses, engineers and various government officials . . ."

Thus, each of the volunteer pilots becomes a blend of soldier of fortune and missionary without prayerbook, of hard-nosed technicians and soft-hearted neighbor.

But for genial Bill Edwards, grounded in his crowded St. Louis office, there's another aspect — the budget book. His calculations back up those humanitarian efforts.

More than 90 percent of all donations during the first decade went directly into field service and operations, Edwards said. At least 85 percent is earmarked for operations in the second decade, Edwards said.

But Wings of Hope is a business-like operation, and its Board is concerned with efficient use of its funds.

A flying missionary in Peru, Edwards points out, reported after a six-year study that the average volunteer professional working in the jungle spends 50 to 90 per cent of his time unable to function efficiently, standing around because of inadequate transportation and communication.

"This missionary says he has increased the effectiveness of his specialist unit 20 or 30 times with management know-how and planes provided by Wings of Hope," Edwards adds.

"So many world organizations send personnel out into the field, and then



Because of Wings of Hope, doctor from Lima, Peru, are able to reach patients in the leprosarium quickly and provide needed medical service. The agency also placed the first radio in the hospital. At left, "Sink" Manning checks the oil in his Cessna plane at Weiss Airport before taking off for his post in Honduras

they can't get around as they should. We give them wings," he stresses. "We have access to the top technical expertise which means we can resolve almost any problem with planes, communications, spare parts, power units, synthetics, electronics, education, nutrition or whatever else is needed to help these people in the back country.

"An airplane is like a magnet. We can serve as a means of bringing together and energizing the efficiency of these important people."

Wings of Hope is supported by gifts of money or planes or medicines and equipment. Heavy equipment dealers, at Fabick's request, send used machinery to his firm to be rebuilt and resold, with the proceeds to go into

the airplane fund.

"If we can't use it," says Edwards, "we'll sell it or swap it and buy the equipment we need."

"That way, we can serve even more people out there in those remote outposts."

"For them, we're a lifeline."

Which is another word for that invisible thread. □