

# Delivering Wings of Hope to Tanzania

By Karen Cernich, Features Editor | Posted: Wednesday, July 16, 2014 12:30 am

Donald Hoerstkamp is getting ready to deliver a C-182 airplane to Ecuador for the nonprofit organization Wings of Hope, but compared to his last international trip for the charity, “this one will feel local,” he joked.

A 1965 graduate of Washington High School, Hoerstkamp, who now lives in Wildwood, spent six weeks this spring flying a Cessna 206 from the Wings of Hope headquarters at Spirit of St. Louis airport in Chesterfield to Tanzania on the east coast of Africa.

“It was a rare opportunity,” said Hoerstkamp, which is why he volunteered to make the trip. “You don’t get a chance to make a trip like this very often,” he remarked. “But it also was a lot of work, and it was a long time.”

Within a week of its delivery, the plane was being used by a mission group that Wings of Hope works with to fly doctors and nurses daily to clinics in the savannah where they mostly provide prenatal care to women and vaccinations to children in the Masaai tribe, said Hoerstkamp. They also treat more emergent care, like snake bites and injuries from accidents.

It had been three or four months since the mission in Tanzania had an operational airplane, which meant the clinics had not been open that long. The first clinic they set up using the new Cessna 206 was in excess of 200 people because the people had been waiting for the clinics to start up again, said Hoerstkamp.

## Wings of Hope

Delivery of planes to places like Tanzania is only one aspect of what Wings of Hope does. The organization, which was founded in 1962 by four St. Louis businessmen and now has 157 bases in 47 countries around the world, “delivers humanitarian programs to the impoverished, to achieve a more peaceful world.

“We do whatever is needed, from guidance on requested subjects/services to providing and managing tangible resources designed to enable the poor and needy, or any marginalized citizens, to become active and productive participants in their societies,” the Wings of Hope website reads.

Programs include health and education systems, sustainable food and water processes, opportunities for family income, community-building and human conflict resolution at regional and international



Sunrise Over the Mid-North Atlantic Ocean

levels.

Wings of Hope also is known across the United States for its MAT (medical relief and air transport) program, which delivers advanced health care to children with massive birth defects or who are dying from rare illnesses.

“We make sure they can access the medical care they need, as many times as they need. We also provide transportation to this medical care as often as required,” the website reads. “We operate a fleet of Medical Air Ambulances, outfitted with equipment and Certified Airborne Medical Crews – all totally free of cost.”

Very often how a family connects with Wings of Hope is through a phone call to say a relative is suffering with some serious medical condition and they don’t know how to find a doctor to treat it, said Hoerstkamp, who, as a volunteer pilot for Wings of Hope, mostly works in the MAT program. The organization’s researchers get to work to find the information the family needs and then helps them get to the treatment center, he said.

“We have relationships with every medical facility in the USA and know how to get things done,” the website notes.

Hoerstkamp, who has been volunteering with Wings of Hope for the last three years, typically flies two trips a week for the organization. Most of his flights are one-day trips. Rarely are they overnight. Flying is what Hoerstkamp has always loved to do, and as a child it was the only job he ever aspired to.

After graduating from WHS, Hoerstkamp enlisted in the U.S. Air Force, where he served from 1966-’70, before launching a career in aviation that has covered all aspects of the field, from pilot to flight instructor to manager of an FBO (fixed base operator).

### **Not an Easy Trip to Make, or Plan**

Planning for the trip to Tanzania began three or four months before Hoerstkamp ever took off from Spirit airport.

“I had a rough idea of the route,” said Hoerstkamp. “I knew I would hit the Azores (nearly 1,000 miles off the coast of Portugal), after that everything was up in the air.”

There also was a good amount of paperwork to complete and permits to obtain from the many countries he would be flying over and landing in.

“Because the plane was tanked, that added to the requirements as far as the other countries were concerned,” Hoerstkamp noted.

There were handlers all along the way, and everything had to be coordinated.

Delays brought on by maintenance issues that came up along the trip led to changes in the schedule which meant permits would expire and new ones had to be issued.

Other major issues Hoerstkamp had to consider were operating hours for the airports where he would be landing and taking off from — “They are not like here in America, where airports are always open essentially. If you hit an airport 10 minutes before it opens or 10 minutes after it closes, I think in the Azores it’s like \$1,800” — and whether these airports had the type of fuel the plane needed, 100 octane fuel, which is becoming more and more difficult to find in countries outside of the United States.

“So the first thing you have to check is the airport hours so that you hit it at the right time,” said Hoerstkamp. “You have to check that it’s an airport of entry. Then you have to check that it has 100 octane. Then you have to check that they really do have 100 octane . . . and you have to coordinate with the handler who is physically on the field who can say, ‘Yes, we are not out. We do have it.’ ”

The plane Hoerstkamp delivered was a 1974 Cessna 206, which is configured for six people — two in front, four in back.

For the trip to Tanzania, however, the back seats were disassembled and stored in a cargo pod underneath the plane to make room for a fuel tank that was needed to get Hoerstkamp from Halifax, Nova Scotia, to the Azores.

“That was the biggest distance, about 17 hours,” he said.

### **The Route**

Hoerstkamp created a flight plan that made each leg as long as possible, taking into account the airport hours where he was taking off and landing.

“Every time you land it costs money, plus an overnight stay and all that,” he said. “The shortest leg was maybe seven or eight hours.”

From St. Louis, Hoerstkamp flew to Bangor, Maine, where the plane received some maintenance work. This also created the longest delay in the trip (12 days) because parts had to be shipped and the Fixed Base Operator didn’t work on weekends.

Next he stopped in Halifax, Nova Scotia, mainly for safety purposes.

“The airplane was slower than anticipated and the winds weren’t as strong as they were supposed to be,” said Hoerstkamp.

There also was a concern about icing over the North Atlantic, which the Cessna 206 airplane can’t handle.

After Nova Scotia, Hoerstkamp flew across the Atlantic Ocean landing at Santa Maria in Azores,

Portugal, and from there to Rebat, Morocco; to Malta; across the Mediterranean Sea to Aqaba, Jordan; to Djibouti, Djibouti, the capital city of a tiny African country situated near the strait between the Red Sea and the Gulf of Aden.

From Djibouti, Hoerstkamp flew to Nairobi, Kenya, where he spent five days getting the plane “detanked” and removing an oiling system that had been installed so Hoerstkamp could add oil from the cockpit.

Here the airplane, because Hoerstkamp had put so many hours on it getting it to its destination, was given a 100-hour inspection.

From Nairobi, Hoerstkamp flew the plane to the airport at Mount Kilimanjaro where he could get a visa to stay in Tanzania for a week working with their flight department.

And from Mount Kilimanjaro, Hoerstkamp flew to Arusha, Tanzania, to deliver the plane. He returned home to America aboard commercial flights.

The route was a little different than initially planned, mainly due to terrorism threats.

“Kenya wanted me to fly at 14,000 feet, which the airplane I was in, at the weight I was flying it . . . and with the outside air temperatures, I just couldn’t get it to 14,000 feet,” said Hoerstkamp. “So we had to not get the Yemen overfly but instead cross the Red Sea and come down to Eritrea because they would allow us to fly lower.

“I later found out that the reason for the no overfly . . . was because of shoulder-launched rockets which have a ceiling of about 12,000 or 12,500 feet . . . So I was glad I went to Eritrea.”

Political unrest also was one of the reasons why Hoerstkamp didn’t fly down through Sudan and stay overnight in Khartoum, as originally planned.

“In Nairobi, they had the mall bombings while I was going,” said Hoerstkamp. “In Djibouti, it didn’t make the press here, but they had a bombing, it might have been while I was there or the day before or after I left.”

### **Fueling Up in Djibouti**

Hoerstkamp didn’t need any reminders about how different things can be from America in other parts of the world, but a scenario that unfolded as he was getting the plane refueled in Djibouti drove it home.

First, it was a Saturday, which meant getting someone in who could fuel the plane was the first challenge.

After some phone calls, Hoerstkamp is told someone will meet him at the airport, but when he arrives, there is no one.

“And it’s like 100 degrees out on the ramp. It was winter in Nairobi but in Djibouti, because it’s on the coast, it was 20 degrees hotter,” he recalled.

“Finally, out comes a truck pulling behind it a cart with two barrels of gas and a hand pump. You could not buy gas by the gallon, only by the barrel, and I believe each barrel was like 100 liters.”

Hoerstkamp, who had figured out the night before how many liters he would need, found out that it was just a little bit more than one barrel — still, he would have to buy two.

“The price was about \$6 or \$7 per liter, so close to \$30 a gallon for fuel,” he recalled.

At first the men operating the hand pump seemed to be taking it slow, but they sped up the process when Hoerstkamp offered to help.

“It was just so much different than what we are used to here in the States,” he remarked. “We really are blessed in this country. We forget that, but that sure drove it home for me.”

### **‘Interesting Trip’**

Hoerstkamp had never been to parts of Africa before this trip.

“It was an interesting trip,” he said.

“I sure met a wide variety of people, and everyone was helpful at all of the airports.”

One of the sights Hoerstkamp was hopeful to see were the pyramids. He flew over a corner of Egypt and might have had a chance, but there was an undercast that day so they weren’t visible.

Hoerstkamp said he tried to be prepared for whatever could happen to him on the trip. He carried with him both maritime and desert survival equipment.

On at least one occasion, he felt adventurous too at the dining table.

“I had a piece of meat in Morocco that still to this day I have no idea what it was,” Hoerstkamp said with a grin. “They said it was beef, but it was not beef.”

For more information on Wings of Hope, a Nobel Peace prize nominee, including how to donate to the charity, people can visit [www.wings-of-hope.org](http://www.wings-of-hope.org).