



AIR WORLD

Volume 31 Number 1 1979



Wings of Mercy, Wings of Hope

A new breed of barnstormer,
the missionary pilot, flies
the world's uncharted airways

by GEORGE E. HADDAWAY



Pilot Guy Gervais helps load litter patient from leprosarium near San Pablo on Amazon River, Peru, for flight to hospital in Iquitos.

Who says that adventure, excitement and drama in aviation are dead? Bosh and twaddle!

When aviation's colorful barnstorming era disappeared in the 1930's, a new band of flying adventurers appeared in the sky, spreading their wings into the remote corners of the earth. They were, and are, the missionary pilots.

GEORGE E. HADDAWAY is one of the most prominent spokesmen for general aviation in the U.S. He established *Flight* magazine (now *Flight Operations*) in 1934 and was its editor and publisher for 40 years. He is a past president of the Aviation/Space Writers Association, one of its few Honorary Life Members, and one of the six winners of its Lauren D. Lyman Award. He is active in many aviation organizations and is Chairman of the Board of Wings of Hope.

Until a few years ago, I was among those who believed there wasn't much adventure left in the flying game. Aviation had become big business with all the conventional trappings of commercialization, including computerization and super-regulation. The wild blue yonder was just for space men and fledgling military jet pilots, epitomized by such aerobatic teams as the Blue Angels, the Thunderbirds and the Red Arrows. The only color left in aviation seemed to be the black and red ink on financial statements.

That was before a group of movers and shakers out of St. Louis enlisted my help in funding an all-metal airplane to save a medical mission in the middle of an African desert. The mission, run by Catholic nuns of the Medical Missionaries of Mary, provided



Cessna 180 donated by American Airlines pilots for use in Guatemala is accepted by George Haddaway (right), Chairman of Wings of Hope, and pilot Sink Manning.

the only medical assistance available to a proud and peaceful tribe of nomads in the Turkhana desert of Kenya. Ten years of drought followed by catastrophic floods had isolated the mission.

A group of pilots in the Pacific Northwest had purchased and shipped a Super Cub to the mission. The Cub, flown by one of the Sisters, provided the life line to the supply city of Nairobi for a few months before hyenas sneaked in at night and devoured the fabric of the airplane, rendering it unflyable. That was in 1964.

It was then that the airline pilots sent out a desperate call for help to underwrite an all-metal craft. Their St. Louis and Texas friends helped raise the funds. On May 25, 1965, world-famous long-distance pilot Max Conrad took off in a shiny new Cessna Skywagon for Kenya—with a stopover in Rome to receive the Pope's blessing.

The all-metal, six-place Cessna actually saved the little medical mission and today remains the principal life line not only for supply but also for emergency transport in case of sickness or accidents the dispensary can't handle. And out of this original undertaking in 1965 a new flying charity was born, now known as Wings of Hope, Inc., with headquarters in St. Louis.

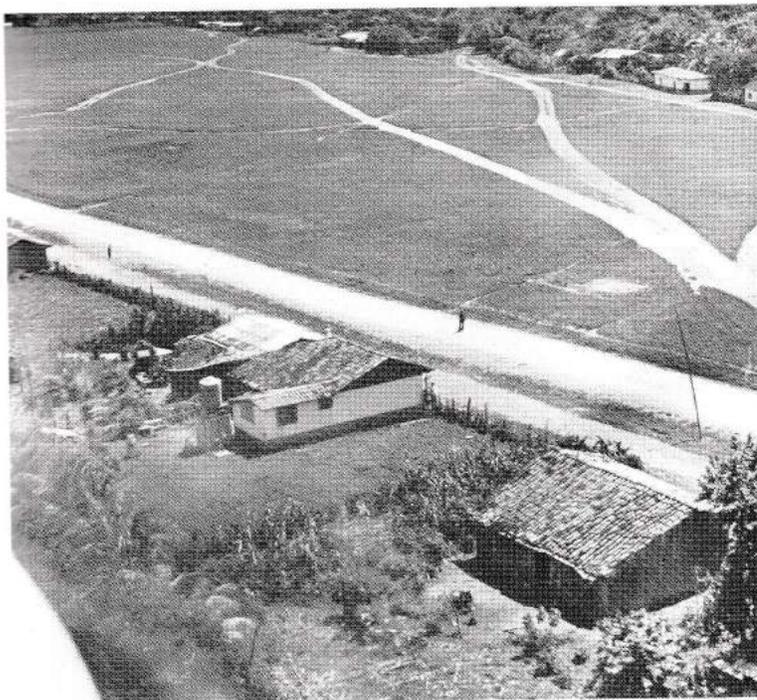
Word soon spread via "jungle telegraph" and other means of anonymous communication all over Africa that there was a U.S.-based outfit in the



Before ferrying Cessna to Kenya in 1965, Max Conrad bids farewell to Bill Edwards (left) and Joseph Fabick, who raised money for plane and later founded Wings of Hope.



Plane donated by equipment company in Kentucky operates into rough dirt strip in Guatemalan jungle.



Wings of Hope base at Santa Cruz del Quiché, Guatemala. Building in center is "bodega" (warehouse-office-residence) and open field across dirt road is landing strip.



Wings of Hope has aided missionaries in New Guinea, where natives help handle aircraft, including de Havilland Dragon-Rapide.

business of supplying aircraft and radio services to isolated humanitarian institutions in dire need of airlift. By the end of 1966, the organization was being flooded with requests for air support from the Arctic, Central and South America, and New Guinea. To date, Wings of Hope has helped establish services on all the continents, placing more than thirty aircraft with complete communications systems and trained volunteer personnel to carry out the missions.

Most people think of missionary aviation as composed largely of highly-motivated religious groups whose major purpose is to preach the gospel, baptize the heathen and save souls. This concept is in error. These far-flung flight operations do have strong religious motivation, but the humanitarian services rendered far outweigh the time, money and efforts spent in spreading the gospel.

Wings of Hope is completely non-sectarian; it does not preach or con-

vert. It provides vital transportation and radio communication services to isolated missions of all sects and denominations that have penetrated the deep jungles, scorching deserts and frozen wastes of the world where human suffering and bare subsistence are a way of life.

It is impossible to fulfill all the requests for services that pour into Wings of Hope headquarters. Because of limited funds, the establishment of new operations, even in highly quali-



Wings of Hope plane in Honduras.

Kent Furlow

fied and severe situations, must be on a priority basis.

What it Costs

Costs vary with location and geography, especially where fuel and other necessities require difficult, long and costly surface transport. Wings of Hope headquarters recently figured the basic costs of placing one aircraft and volunteer pilot into a Latin American jungle area. Here is the estimate, based on wholesale costs:

1978 model, six-place, all-metal aircraft	\$44,574
STOL system conversion	4,050
Speed control system, stall warning	234
Avionics package (Nav-Com radio, etc.)	5,478
Hull and liability insurance (one year)	3,278
Spare parts, tools	1,894
TOTAL	\$59,508

This does not include ferry costs, operating costs, pilot living costs, and unforeseen expenses, which may run from \$15,000 to over \$25,000. Should a sponsor or group of donors place one



Natives of New Guinea village help Wings of Hope pilot tow plane to end of grass runway so that it can take off downhill.

aircraft into service, Wings of Hope is budgeted to supply additional funds if required.

Guy Gervais, one of the world's most experienced and colorful bush pilots, serves as Director of Latin American Field Operations for Wings of Hope. He is a French Canadian with some 12,000 hours logged in bush opera-

tions in Peru, Brazil, Northern Canada, New Guinea, Surinam, Honduras and Guatemala. He speaks French, English, Spanish, Portuguese and the dialects of several New Guinea and Amazon River tribes.

This huge hulk of a man, a former hockey player in Canada, had originally studied for the priesthood. He

also had studied dentistry and, while on duty in the Amazon River jungles for Wings of Hope in the early 1970's, he made weekly visits to small native villages to pull teeth. He is Wings of Hope's most valuable asset and his reports from the field are masterpieces of reportorial art, brilliantly descriptive of the inherent drama of his daily flying experiences and filled with his deep compassion for the poverty-

stricken people he serves. (See box)

In addition to the flood of requests for air and radio services from every corner of the globe (with the exception of Communist countries), Wings of Hope headquarters receives a constant stream of letters from people who offer to work for little or no recompense.

One such offer came from a physician who had done volunteer work in

Nigeria and Nicaragua. Her husband is a pilot with a helicopter rating who was a medic in the military service and has an Emergency Medical Technician certificate. They are typical of the kind of dedicated people willing to get involved in missionary flying and they have the ideal combination of medical experience and flying ability.

Should Wings of Hope encourage this fine couple to come aboard, they

Reports from Missionary Pilots



Cessna donated by equipment company in Louisiana gets maintenance check in Guatemala by volunteers, including pilots Gervais (right) and Johnsen (second from right).

Roy Johnsen is volunteer pilot in charge of a Wings of Hope operation in Honduras, where people from a city slum are being resettled on new agricultural lands carved out of roadless jungle. This is an excerpt from one of his recent reports:

We're in the peak of the rice harvest and I've been stuffing rice in every nook and cranny of the bird. Just today one of the Co-ops sold their rice for 2,837 lempiras. They're quite excited for this is their first marketing of their crops.

Yesterday I flew 16 flights and moved nearly 10,000 lb. of rice in addition to 22 people and their goods. I snapped a gear box main truss on a landing. A chuck hole in our new strip administered the awful blow. I hung the broken truss in the Bodega at Patuca after showing it to the local committee. Haven't had a day since without energetic work on the runway!

P.S. The woman who suffered a snakebite two weeks ago returned by air to her family today. No need to ask what

our airplane means to that family! I'm privileged to be part of the scene.

In one recent report from Guatemala, Guy Gervais, Director of Latin American Field Operations, wrote:

Our radio stations in the area of Quiché-Huehuetenango and the jungle 90 miles north were reporting good weather. Four flights in and out were planned. We calculate that under normal conditions a trip from Quiché to the jungle and back takes two hours—landing, refuelling, loading, paper work, and a good five minutes to listen to recommendations of the farmers and to tell them a joke—even a spiritual comment on the virtue of patience. One is king of his soul and of many friends if one is patient.

That day I made three flights. Operation normal. At 3 P.M., I left Huehuetenango for Delores. The 10-11,000-ft. mountain range had a lot of build-ups and local storms. So I decided to fly my three adult passengers and one baby on top on instruments. When I decided to

let down and tried to throttle back, I still had 20 manifold pressure at 12 gallons an hour. Throttle and mixture don't work. I have real problems. I'll have to make a dead-stick landing.

The passengers hadn't noticed anything and I did not pick up the mike and tell them: "This is your captain speaking. We will make an emergency landing!" So I began to let down but the inoperative throttle kept me at 23 manifold pressure and 12 gallons an hour, no lean. With no ADF available for instrument approach, I decided on the 2,500-ft. airstrip at Xalbal.

Checked my seat belt and those of my passengers. Told the lady to hold tight the small newborn baby and thought: "Good Lord! You are just born and you are already mixed up with a technical aircraft problem."

We whistled in like a glider... too much speed for my taste, though. At ten feet above the ground, I applied full left rudder. I am sidewise to the airstrip to lose speed. We stalled in then, right rudder, and touched to a smooth landing with flaps down and full brake to the end of the strip.

I removed the cowl and found the troublemaker. Both throttle and mixture control cables had come loose. The following morning I made a "Bush Gervais" attachment with nuts and safety wire and flew to Guatemala City empty. N1092F was due to visit the U.S. for major overhaul after 1,350 hours of jungle flying.

In another report, Gervais wrote:

My log for the past six months shows 547.5 hours flown. The medical emergencies were numerous. Our daily book of operation indicates 168 seriously ill or injured in addition to 243 people who went in and out for medical attention.

Teams of doctors, nurses and malaria control personnel were able to work because of our aircraft. An average of six teachers were flown in and out of our 14 airstrips with N1092F every three months. We have flown sufficient sugar, salt and other staples for the survival of the isolated resettled families. Everybody is happy.



Patient on crude stretcher was flown by Gervais to Santa Cruz del Quiché from strip in jungle.

first would be sent to the School of Aviation Technology of Southern Illinois University at Carbondale, where a genius by the name of Tony DaRosa would check them out as bush pilots. He has had some 30 years of experience training bush pilots and mechanics. Those who learn to fly under his direction are also qualified mechanics in every phase of aviation.

Such superb training must go hand in hand with the missionary spirit. Without it, the road is paved with certain disaster.

Source of Funds

The members of Wings of Hope's small, but hard-working, Board of Directors believe that money, men and machines are where you find them. Aviation companies and people in aviation provide the major support, but Wings of Hope fund raising is not limited to that industry. Its president, Joe Fabick, of St. Louis, is an executive of one of the country's largest heavy machinery dealerships. His company can take a worn-out earth mover and make it over into an almost new piece of equipment. Some years ago, Joe started asking his fellow equipment dealers to donate used equipment for Wings of Hope to sell to raise money.

Another source of funds is grants from charitable foundations. The first such grant came last year from Lilly Endowment, Inc., of Indianapolis. Its parent concern, Eli Lilly & Co., had donated medicine in various emergencies for Wings of Hope bush operations. The endowment's generous gift has gone to establish a desperately needed service in an isolated area of Paraguay and Brazil.

Aviation sources have donated aircraft and engines, instruments and

avionics, and even test equipment. These gifts, all tax-deductible, are in two categories: those that can actually be used by Wings of Hope and those that can be fixed up and sold. The largest group of supporters, "Membership-Donors," mail in checks from \$5 to \$5,000 each year.

Wings of Hope prides itself on its efficiency. With one paid managing director, Bill Edwards, and no frills, the organization has been able to put 90 per cent of all income into direct field operations. This is somewhat of a record among U.S. charities, whose cost of doing business often seems excessive.

Edwards was in the original group which secured that first airplane for the Medical Missionaries of Mary. He is one of those dynamic managers who thinks that a workday should average about 10 to 12 hours. His knowledge of the technical aspects and requirements of bush flying is amazing. He is especially appreciated by the scores of other missionary flying operations to which Wings of Hope has been able to provide assistance, particularly in logistical support and consultant services—which is rapidly becoming one of the group's major activities.

In recent years, Wings of Hope has built up communication and "mutual aid" pacts with many missionary groups. It has moved more and more into assisting operations already in existence to secure equipment and locate dedicated, properly-trained personnel. It also draws upon its own experience to help flying brethren cut through the government red tape that seems to plague the importation of anything aeronautical anywhere.

As a result of this cooperation, a movement is on foot to create a more homogeneous, though loosely-knit, or-

ganization that can accomplish things such as mass purchasing, expediting shipments, expediting overhauls done in the U.S., and creating a pool of competent trained personnel. Some missionary leaders believe that such cooperation might contribute to greatly improved safety in a field of aviation that has traditionally been known for its extremely high accident rate.

Operating as they do in remote areas where there is nothing except what they themselves can create, such as landing strips and meager maintenance facilities, missionary aviation people survive mainly on faith, nerve and ingenuity. They have only themselves to depend on for the basics of successful aerial conquest of the bush.

Wings of Hope has sponsored missionary operations, or has assisted projects run by others, in Alaska, Arizona and New Mexico, Brazil and Paraguay, Canada, Guatemala and Honduras, Indonesia, Kenya, Liberia, Mexico, New Guinea, Nigeria, Peru, Surinam, Tanzania, and Zambia.

When the catastrophic 1976 earthquake hit Guatemala, killing some 14,000 people and injuring thousands of others, the missionary airplanes based there by several American groups, including Wings of Hope, turned out to be a major vital link in the massive effort to bring lifesupport services to the stricken towns and villages left without transport.

Huge military and civilian aircraft managed to bring thousands of tons of medicine, field hospitals, food and other disaster-relief supplies and personnel into the useable Guatemala City airline airport. It remained for the legion of missionary aircraft to fan out and provide the major life line to the smaller towns and communities isolated by destroyed roads and bridges.

Many official citations of gratitude were distributed to these dedicated airmen. But there was no way to measure how much human life was saved and how much suffering was alleviated by this massive light-plane airlift flown by the modern barnstormers—the colorful and adventurous missionary pilots on wings of mercy. They are surely today's unsung heroes of aviation.

Additional information on the services available from Wings of Hope, or on its need for contributions, can be obtained from: William D. Edwards, Wings of Hope, Inc., 2319 Hampton Avenue, St. Louis, MO 63139, U.S.A.

