



"Wings for Peace" at work: Pilot and aide load patient on plane for flight to hospital with surgical facilities.

# 365 DAYS OF MERCY

by Sid Ross and Herbert Kupferberg

DAYTON, OHIO  
**T**o Mike Stimac and a small band of American pilots in East Africa, Christmas is a day of peace, goodwill, and help to fellow men. But so is every other day of the year. Mike, a 44-year-old former Ohio high school teacher, has for four years been operating a private, voluntary, flying "peace corps," designed to bring medical aid, food, and emergency assistance to Africans otherwise beyond the reach of help.

Stimac calls his airborne mercy fleet UMATT — United Missions Air Training and Transport, Inc. It includes nine single-engined planes, all flown by volunteers, most of them Americans. The first native African airman recently joined its ranks. Support for UMATT, whose headquarters are at 300 College Park Avenue, Dayton, Ohio, comes from various foundations, philanthropic organizations and individuals, who believe that helping others is a natural human endeavor, and that the job cannot be left entirely to governments. UMATT, which is also known as "Wings for Peace," is one of the shining examples of direct people-to-people contact in the world today.

Its purpose is simple — to provide the missing link of swift transportation in a continent where vast and impenetrable distances are often a barrier between those who need help and those who can provide it. In Uganda, an 11-year-old

girl, the daughter of white missionaries, was recently carried into a small mission hospital with a crushed forehead, the victim of a Land Rover car accident. Dr. Peter Cox, the physician in charge, knew she would die unless she could be taken swiftly to the modern Kenyatta Hospital in Nairobi, Kenya. He also knew that a UMATT plane, piloted by Mike Stimac, was in the vicinity. Alerted to the emergency, Mike swiftly loaded both the little girl and Dr. Cox into his plane, radioed ahead to Nairobi, was met at the airport by an ambulance, and saw the child safely to the hospital. A week later she was off the critical list, and on

her way to recovery.

In many cases, UMATT pilots reverse the flow of aid, carrying doctors and medical help to patients who are unable to be moved. In the Turkana Desert, stricken by famine, special camps were set up recently to provide primitive housing for victims. To these compounds Stimac and his fellow pilots flew countless sacks of grain, providing subsistence to hundreds of hunger-bloated children.

UMATT furnishes regular transportation for doctors operating from the larger cities, enabling them to visit four or five hospitals a week in the outlying bush; it transports blood plasma to

mission hospitals; it takes bright young Africans to school examination centers they otherwise could not reach; it brings medical supplies to a remote tribe noted for its fine basketweaving, and on the flight out transports a small cargo of products ready for sale in the handicraft market of Nairobi. Through six African lands — Ethiopia, Uganda, Kenya, Tanzania, Malawi and Zambia — UMATT provides an aerial lifeline of hope and help.

Mike Stimac had no thought of building such a far-flung and vital organization when he first went to Africa in 1961 to teach high school science in the Kenya Reserve, the heart of the Mau-Mau country. A native of Cleveland, he had taught science and math courses at high schools in Puerto Rico as well as in his hometown, learning to fly and getting a commercial pilot's license on the side.

He accepted a job in East Africa, he says, because he felt "there was something to accomplish" in terms of bringing modern ideas and educational methods to a primitive area. But then, he says, "I got my education — I found the Africans were bright, intelligent people. All you had to do was put tools in these kids' hands and they could use them."

Among the tools Stimac wanted to introduce was aviation. So he had his schoolboys build a small airstrip, and he also received the use of a plane from a group of white safari hunters. Soon missionary groups were "borrowing" his plane and his services to fly in and out of famine camp locations in northern Kenya. Other church groups put on a drive among American businessmen to buy a plane to fly full-time mercy missions to the famine camps and other remote centers of need. Soon Mike was presented with his own airplane — a Cessna six-seat Skywagon. This was the start of UMATT, with Mike flying 160 hours a month in a struggle to keep up with the demands that poured in on him to transport missionaries, doctors and technical-aid people as well as food and medical supplies. Eventually, as word spread of the lifegiving plane with a white dove painted on its tail, more aircraft were donated or loaned, funds began to arrive and, most important of all, volunteers flocked in. Today, with UMATT's white dove a symbol of friendship throughout East Africa, Stimac hopes to extend his "Wings for Peace" idea to Asia and to Latin America.

"We're not hampered by bureaucratic absentee control or beholden to government," he says. "We can do things that governments can't. We can do things from the heart — as human beings, as private American citizens wanting to share our knowledge and technology with other peoples, in the framework of their culture and aspirations.

"America stands to gain in enabling other peoples to solve their own problems in their own way — not as recipients of charity, but as full-fledged partners in the world of today."



African mercy air fleet has headquarters in Ohio. Above are UMATT's president Mike Stimac and assistant Jane Hamilton.