

Wings of Hope

Rarely
have airplanes
been used
so well,
for so many,
so far away

by WILLIAM GARVEY/ AOPA 480899

■ ■ This story had its beginnings a dozen years ago in the parched wastelands of Kenya's Turkana Desert. The normally arid soil was baked hard by years of drought. The nomads who lived there were dying by the thousands, for the land would yield no food, and the starving people were easy prey to disease.

A cruel irony then transpired. The rains came, and came hard, but the water fell on the windward side of the mountains that bordered the desert, offering no relief to the barren lee. The food and medicine that was destined for the desert people sat untouched in trucks and lorries idled on the banks of raging rivers and axle-deep in mud.

It was then that a Catholic missionary journeyed to America to tell the Kenyan story. Bill Edwards, a Saint Louis manufacturer's representative, listened intently and asked how he could help.

"Give me an airplane" was the reply. An airplane could hurdle the flooded rivers and drenched, impassable mountain roads. An airplane could carry supplies and medicine to the nomadic camps spread across the desert in just a

few hours instead of weeks. Prayers were welcome, but an airplane was needed.

Edwards knew little about airplanes, so he turned to a friend who knew more. The friend was Joe Fabick, a pilot, and president of his own Saint Louis heavy equipment firm. Fabick and Edwards in turn enlisted the support of other aviation men like George Hadaway, publisher of *Flight* magazine, and Paul Rogers, vice president of Ozark Air Lines. Although not professional fund raisers or missionaries, these men did know about airplanes, and they felt they could help.

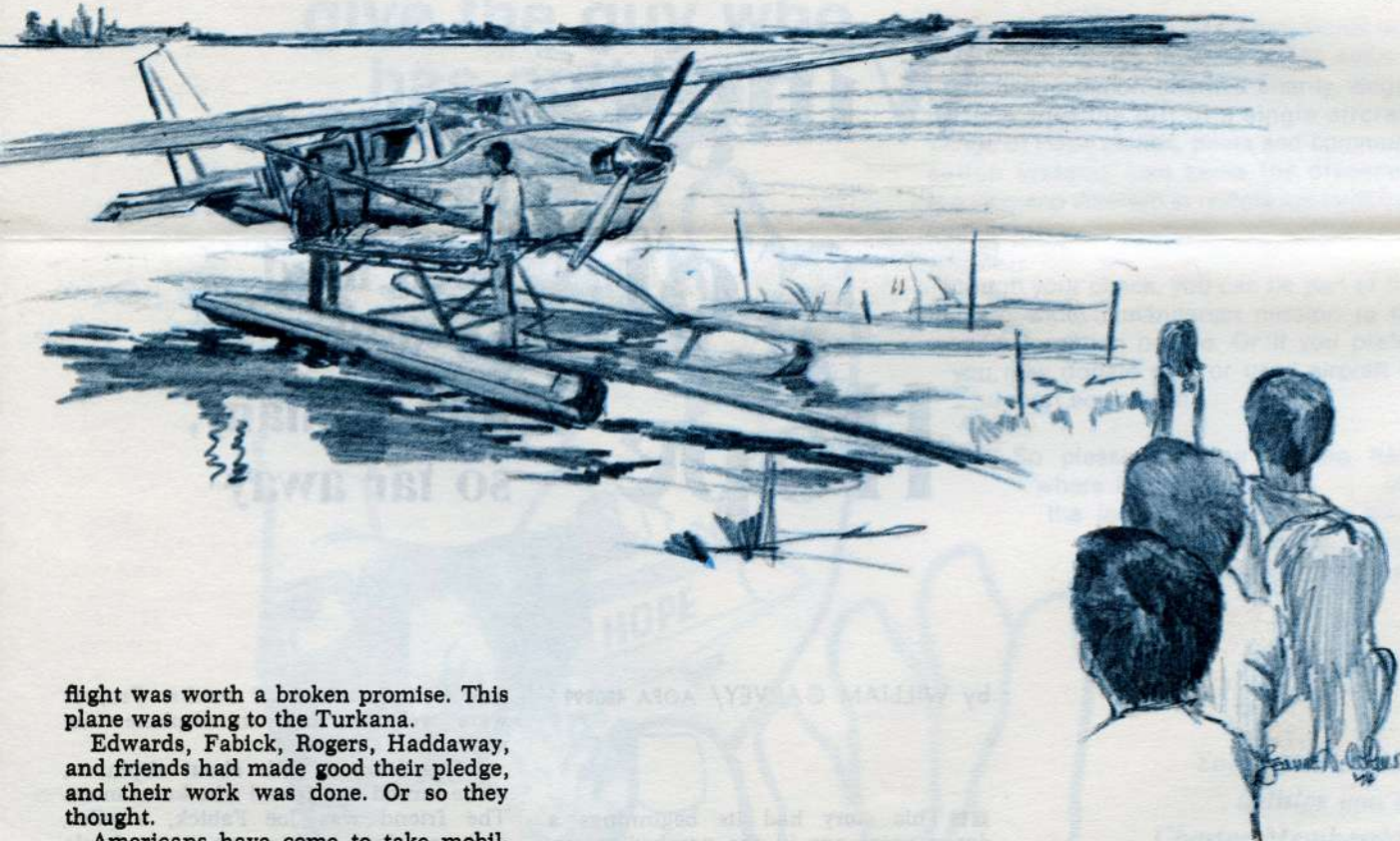
A major problem was that then, as now, not too many people were giving away brand-new airplanes, and enough cash donations were equally hard to come by. But Fabick hit upon a workable plan. He appealed to his associates in the heavy equipment field to donate used machinery. This equipment would be rebuilt and sold by Fabick's firm, and all the proceeds would go to the airplane fund. Tractors, trucks, generators—if they could be repaired and sold, Fabick would take them.

Two years later, Max Conrad was eastbound over the Atlantic in a new Cessna Skywagon. He had earlier promised himself and his family that he would never again make an ocean crossing in a single-engine airplane, but this

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flight was worth a broken promise. This plane was going to the Turkana.

Edwards, Fabick, Rogers, Haddaway, and friends had made good their pledge, and their work was done. Or so they thought.

Americans have come to take mobility for granted. Interstates, airlines and Chevies are regarded by most of us as God given rights, not luxuries. But the world is filled with places without such "rights." Places where goat trails serve as highways, rivers are the throughways, and 10-horsepower outboards are the SSTs. Places where people die because help is days away—maybe 100 miles away.

Somehow the story of the Turkana Skywagon came to these areas, and Fabick and friends began receiving letters, postmarked in the hinterlands. All the letters bore the same appeal: "We, too, need an airplane. Please help us."

Such was the charter of Wings of Hope, Inc., a private, nonprofit, nonsectarian, nongovernmental, tax exempt, apolitical organization based in Saint Louis and devoted to getting air transportation to people who need it but can't afford it. Just over a decade old now, Wings of Hope has helped procure and deliver some 30 airplanes to the bush. Plus radios. Plus medicine. Plus pilots. Plus ground equipment.

Most of this machinery and materiel

has gone to missionaries because, as Edwards noted, "It just so happens that the missionaries are the front line troops" of humanitarian enterprise. But Wings of Hope is not a religious endeavor; rather, it's just a group of aviation people who want to help in a way they understand best. With airplanes.

The impact Wings of Hope has had is chronicled by those who ride and fly these planes.

Sink Manning, one of the half-dozen pilots actually subsidized by Wings of Hope, told of a recent incident in which a Guatemalan Indian had been struck by a tree he was felling. The man's head was split open to the skull and his shoulder crushed. At first it was believed the man was dead but, when he stirred, some of his neighbors carried him to the mission where Manning was spending the evening.

The injured man was gently loaded aboard Manning's plane. Then, while Indians marked the jungle strip with

hand-held torches, the Cessna 180 lifted off into the black Guatemalan night. No stars, no moon, no horizon, and mountains straight ahead. Manning climbed through the overcast and flew on to Guatemala City.

Manning wrote, "Just before takeoff from the strip . . . the man's eyes seemed to clear for a moment, and he reached up and touched me on the side of the face as if to say, 'Thank you for what you are trying to do.'"

Within an hour and a quarter after his arrival at the jungle strip, the wounded man was in a city hospital, where doctors performed a successful cranial operation. He later returned to his family in their jungle homestead. Alive, thanks to wings from America.

A 19-year-old Peruvian girl dying in childbirth, her frightened young husband at her side; two boatmen burned terribly when their outboard motorboat exploded during an Amazon passage; a young boy bitten by a poisonous snake;



WINGS OF HOPE *continued*

missionaries faced with slaughter in an African rebellion; a school teacher bound for a jungle village; a doctor coming to relieve long suffering—all of these have been riders on the Wings of Hope. And each one rode free, for all the organization's services come free of charge.

Some of the riders have had less urgent cause, but certainly they were no less in need. Like certain poor mountain people of Guatemala. These people were landless and without much hope until the government offered them the jungle for homesteading. There was virtually no way to enter the area on foot or by boat, but there was Wings of Hope.

Many of these Indians had never even seen an airplane, but there they were, with screaming babies, barking dogs, stinking pigs, and all they could carry, crammed into the cabin of a Cessna 180. They rode between mountain peaks and into the steaming, foreign jungle where they were to hack out their frontier home on land they could call their own.

Their government had given these pioneers a chance. Wings of Hope provided the Conestoga wagon. And that wagon returns time and again to haul their crops to market, their sick to in-

firmaries, and their missionaries to well-earned vacations.

And so the stories continue. From Surinam, Brazil, Mexico, Kenya, New Guinea—even Canada, Alaska, and New Mexico.

But Wings of Hope is more than a distributor of airplanes, pilots, and radios. It is primarily an aeronautical clearinghouse for humanitarian endeavors. This is the role it prefers. It doesn't want to be owner and operator of a fleet of small planes scattered throughout the world's jungles and deserts. Rather, it wants to get airplanes and equipment to those people already there and let them own and operate the craft.

Thus, if an established humanitarian group wants to buy a plane, hire a qualified pilot, overhaul an engine, set up a radio network or flight schedule, or just find insurance, Wings of Hope will help.

The aid this group has provided is quite diverse. It has purchased several aircraft on a joint-venture basis, with the plane going to the user group. It has acted as agent for a missionary organization that was given an Albatross (they were able to swap it for a more practical Cherokee Six). It has even paid the \$1,600 shipping charges on an overhauled engine bound for an air ambulance in New Guinea.

If a project means helping people through aviation, Wings of Hope is ready to serve.

However, the organization will not be party to ill-conceived adventures, even when proposed by the best-intentioned people. The success of an aviation operation hundreds of miles from civilization depends on many factors. You need qualified pilots, good machinery, good maintenance, good supply channels, good communications, government cooperation, and maximum utilization. When one of these components is missing, the operation may suffer or fail completely. Wings of Hope provides the expertise that can prevent such failure.

The need for these services and planes is growing. Fabick says, "Right now we have requests for nearly 30 aircraft in various areas of the world." To help fill these requests, Wings of Hope needs help.

In the past this help has come in many forms. Individuals have given cash and stocks. General aviation manufacturers and dealers have provided engines, radios, airplanes and service at reduced cost or completely free of charge. Pharmaceutical houses have given drugs. A group of Nashville businessmen donated a plane. So did some American Airlines pilots, while AA engineers rebuilt an engine during their off-duty hours. Students at Southern Illinois University have staged fund drives. And those heavy equipment dealers are still sending gear to Fabick to rebuild and resell for the cause.

Some people have given cars, boats, trucks, tools and, yes, even airplanes. "We're not a junk collector," explained Edwards, but if the item has value, Wings of Hope will accept it. If they can't use it, they'll sell it and put the cash into something they can use.

Then some people simply give of themselves. Pilots like Manning fly for a pittance. Fabick, Edwards, and the rest of the Wings of Hope staff work long and hard without salary or even an expense account. That's why Wings of Hope has been able to place over 90% of all its proceeds into actual humanitarian operations. It has almost no home-office expenses.

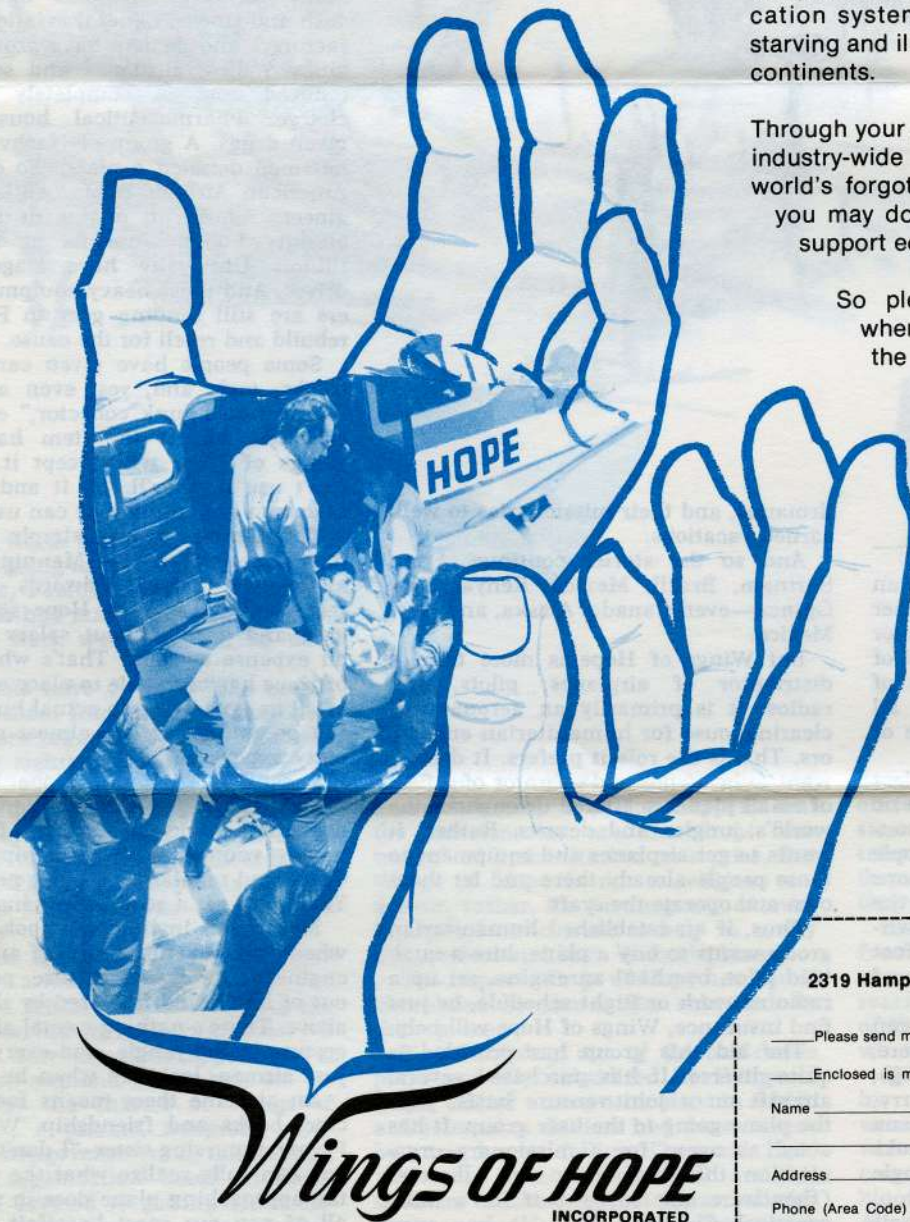
Recently, Wings of Hope began a membership drive. Contributions are tax deductible, and in return for your money you get a membership card, a decal, and regular issues of a newsletter. You'll also get a good feeling inside.

Most pilots instinctively look skyward when they hear the sound of an aircraft engine. It's a casual gesture, performed out of habit, and triggered by the sound above. There's nothing casual about that gesture in the jungle, and everyone, not just airmen, looks up when he hears it.

An airplane there means food, medicine, books and friendship. Wrote one Peruvian nursing sister, "I don't imagine you can fully realize what the sound of the approaching plane does to us. . . To all of you our most heartfelt and sincere thanks." □

Inquiries regarding Wings of Hope should be addressed to: Wings of Hope, Inc., 2319 Hampton Ave., St. Louis, Mo. 63139.

What do you give the guy who has nothing?



Wings of HOPE
INCORPORATED

. . . A helping hand!

In this day of "the guy who has everything", much of the joy has gone out of gift giving. Now, however, thanks to the generosity of a number of industry leaders, we in the aviation community have an opportunity to give a gift which can mean the difference between life and death to thousands of people in all parts of the world. That gift is Wings of Hope.

Fully non-profit, non-denominational and tax exempt, Wings of Hope is the nation's first totally aviation oriented charity. Begun in 1966 with the gift of a single aircraft, Wings of Hope planes, pilots and communication systems now serve the diseased, starving and illiterate in remote areas of four continents.

Through your check, you can be part of this industry-wide humanitarian mission to the world's forgotten people. Or if you prefer, you may donate new or used aircraft or support equipment.

So please. Lend a helping hand where it is needed most . . . and the joy of giving will be yours to keep at no extra charge. Give today to Wings of Hope.

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Wings of Hope, Inc.

2319 Hampton Avenue • St. Louis, Mo. 63139

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