

Greenhouse Patter

A Wing and a Prayer

When I was a tad the popular parental-guidance-recommended stories were not about Italians, Polacks or Texas Aggies. Missionaries and cannibals were the main entree (no pun intended) and magazines like the *New Yorker*, *Ballyhoo* and the original *Life* often carried cartoons depicting missionaries being fricasseed in a huge pot while savages danced madly around the cauldron and came up with earthy one liners such as "King Tubutu says that last batch was too salty."

The humor was sick by today's yardsticks, but the subliminal impression left with young fry was that missionaries were some kind of nuts who sailed off to African jungles only to end up on a cannibal's skewer. Therefore they had to be, as a unit, slightly teched in the head.

Over the next several decades, thanks to vastly improved communications, it was discovered that these primitive citizens were also people. People who could laugh, love, suffer pain, sickness and all the other adversities that beset higher cultures. In 1964, a small segment of the U.S. aviation community created Wings of Hope, a non-sectarian, non-profit humanitarian organization founded to assist persons struck by natural catastrophes in remote areas of Central and South America, Africa and New Guinea. Its profit lies in the gratitude of thousands of affected residents of these countries to whom Wings of Hope means life itself.

Paul Rodgers, senior vice president of both Ozark Airlines and Wings of Hope, says that "Wings of Hope is the U.S. aviation community's own group charity." It is based in St. Louis and its main objective is to relieve suffering and human misery by providing medical assistance, food and clothing, social and educational services, and more importantly hope, to people in remote areas of Southeast Asia, the Amazon and the deserts of Africa."

This super-worthy service organization is privately supported and is staffed mainly by nonpaid volunteers. George Haddaway, former publisher of *Flight*, is chairman of Wings of Hope.

More than 95 percent of the funds donated to Wings of Hope have been spent for supplying aircraft and the services necessary to support them. The planes carry doctors and teachers. They transport the sick and injured to

BY TORCH LEWIS



hospitals, and supply food and medicine to people struck by natural catastrophes. Wings of Hope offers its services to any legitimate humanitarian enterprise regardless of affiliation—all free. They do not fly clergy into the Amazon to whip religion onto the backwater tribes; they bring in needed services of health, education and physical aid.

Typical of the dramas occurring everyday is the following, reported to Wings of Hope headquarters by Sink Manning, chief pilot, stationed in Guatemala.

"A man about 30 was clearing his parcel of land when one of the trees he was felling changed its course and came down directly on his head. Two of his neighbors passing by found him crushed under the tree, pulled him out and carried him to his hut. They were sure that he must be dead; his head was split wide open to the skull and his shoulder was crushed. But, after several hours he began to move. They put him on a makeshift tree bark stretcher and hauled him through the jungles to the missionary clinic. The Indian in charge of the clinic did not think that he was up to stitching the man; neither did I. I decided to fly him to the City. All I had to do was to get clear of the field and then it's 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 light, no stars, no nothing. We finally broke through the overcast at 9500 feet and

found ourselves over a beautiful moonlit ocean of clouds. We made contact with Guatemala City approach control and requested a waiting ambulance.

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

Many new ideas have sprung up in the organization. In areas inaccessible to aircraft, parachuting can serve people's needs. Native doctors are being trained to supply basic first-aid instruction to the inhabitants of remote villages served by Wings of Hope. Parachutes and equipment have been donated for this venture and personnel have been trained in the maintenance and repair of equipment.

One of the tragic situations that Wings of Hope seeks to overcome is children dying of infectious disease in Central America, when the medicines and antibiotics that could save their lives are stored in a warehouse in Guatemala City. As these words are being written, Wings of Hope has no fewer than 20 urgent requests for assistance from suffering people on four continents.

In the aftermath of Hurricane Fifi, which killed 5000 Guatemalans, ruined crops, contaminated water systems and created a perfect situation to level the populace with typhoid fever, Wings of Hope flew around the clock delivering milk, medicine, typhoid shots, food and medical teams to remote areas cut off from communication with the outside world. The weather was marginal, the terrain hazardous and the country was a desolate swamp. In short, things were an unbelievable mess. The aid and assistance rendered by Wings of Hope accomplished more good for the United States than any government giveaway could ever achieve.

Tax deductible contributions from the aviation community may be in several forms. Cash, of course, is great, but they seek new or used airplanes, engines, avionics, medicine, tools, real estate, boats, good used cars or trucks, heavy equipment tools and the hundreds of items necessary to lessen human misery on four continents. Wings of Hope headquarters is at 2319 Hampton Avenue, St. Louis, Missouri 63139. American Airline pilots chipped in and bought Wings of Hope a Cessna 180 Skywagon. The American business and commercial aviation community can do far more if they only will. **B/CA**