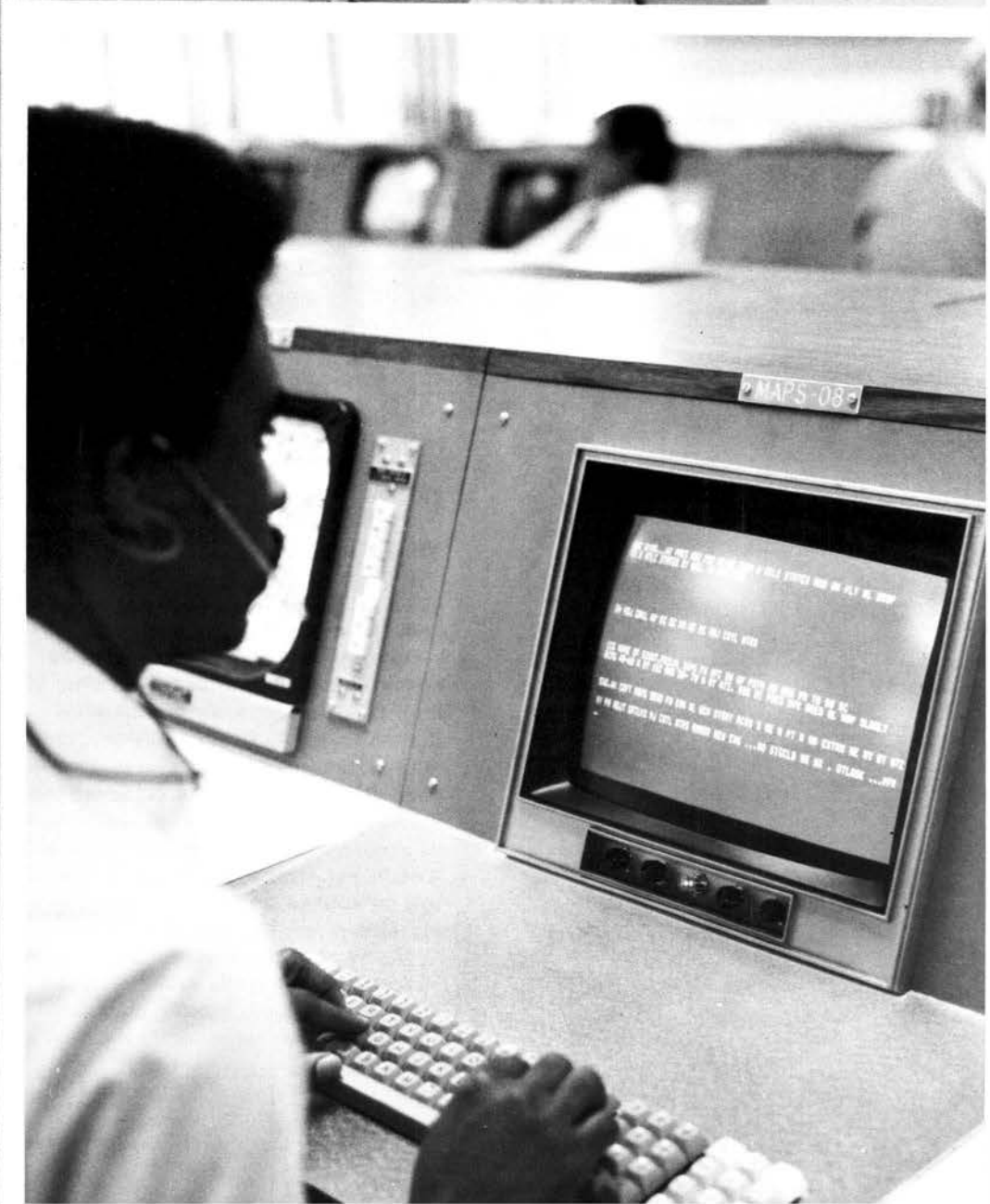
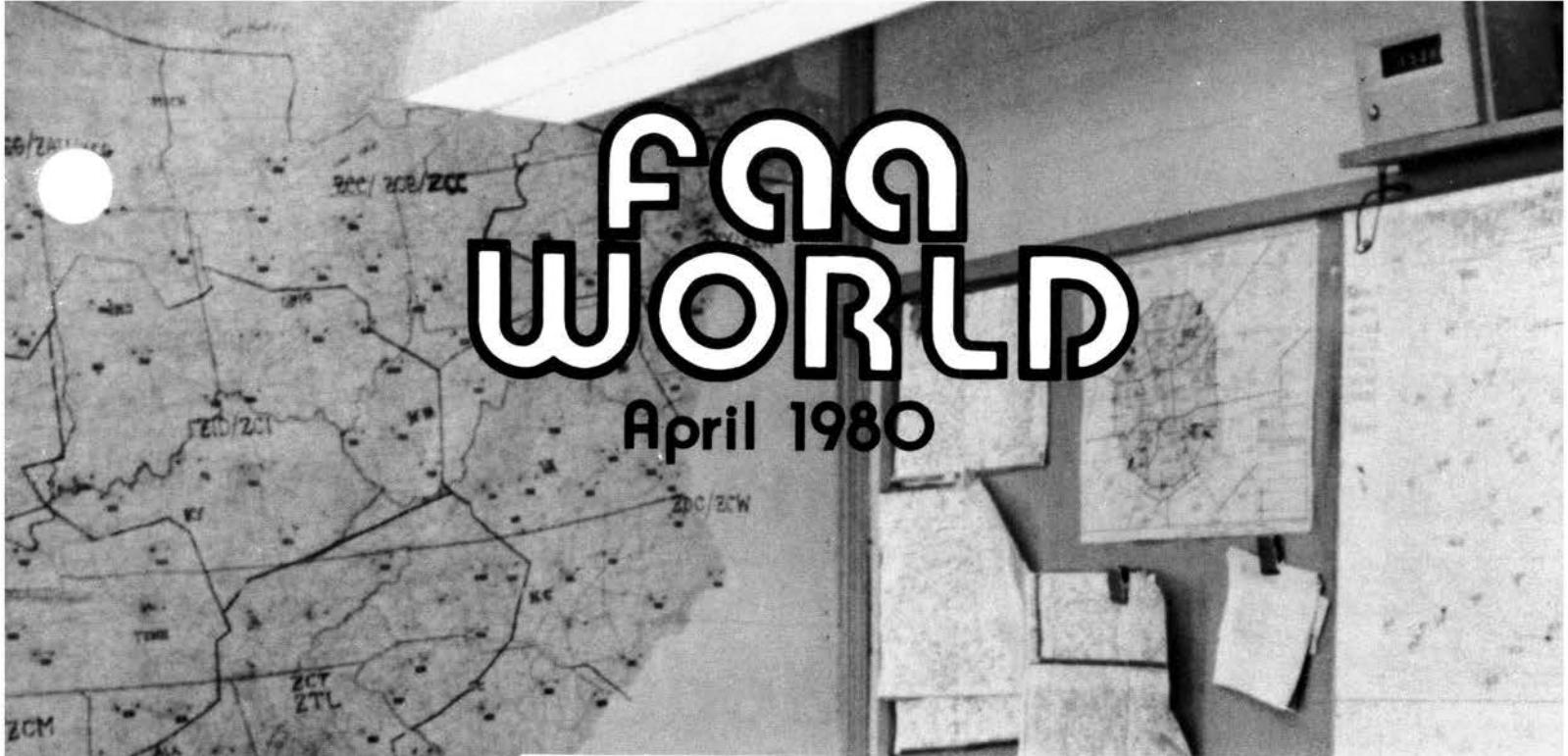


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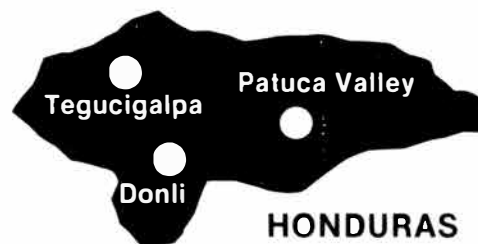
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FSS Modernization
on the Move

One Can Make a Difference

By Patricia Calise



It was 1978, and Roy Johnsen was whisking along on a smooth highway east of Tegucigalpa, Honduras, in an air-conditioned Mercedes Benz bus. This modern environment made him wonder why he was taking a year's leave of absence from his job as a general aviation operations inspector at the Albany, N.Y., GADO, purportedly on a mission of mercy in the jungle.

He had volunteered to participate in "Wings of Hope," a non-sectarian, non-profit and non-political aviation-oriented organization committed to providing medical rescue, communications and economic development services to the needy in remote areas of the world.

Soon, the road ended, though, and Johnsen transferred to a smaller bus that lurched along a dirt road, hitting more potholes than it missed.

The signs of modern technology had faded, and each passing mile took him nearer to the environment he expected.

Suddenly the road disappeared and he joined a line up of trucks facing a raging river that blocked their way. It was three days before the waters subsided.

Santa Maria, his destination, was a picture-postcard collection of tiled roofs and whitewashed adobe and mud houses encircling a 20-acre pasture—an air force emergency field. Five- and six-thousand-foot mountains formed a horseshoe around the town, pointedly indicating that there was no road past—just burro trails and foot paths into the jungle and the Patuca Valley beyond.

With 20 years of flying experience, Johnsen had flown every type of aircraft—from helicopters to aircraft-carrier jet fighters during the Vietnam War. It was then going to be no problem for him to pilot a Cessna 185 from village to village in the Patuca Valley.



Medical personnel unload a sick Patuca Valley resident from the Cessna 185 at the provincial capital of Donli, as Johnsen leans into the plane to guide the rear of the stretcher.

His home-base airstrip was to be that 20-acre pasture in Santa Maria. A couple of local youths, whom Johnsen called "cowboys," managed cows and horses that kept the grass short on the airstrip and cleared the animals off during takeoffs and landings. Similarly, a word from Johnsen about the height of grass along the dirt strips in the valley produced a crew of men with machetes to cut the grass. They were all only too happy to please this man who flies the big silver bird into their villages carrying the sick and supplies of medicine, food and tools.

Johnsen soon found poignant examples of the value of his stint in the

Honduran jungle. He saw it in the eyes of a young man standing by the side of the runway, his collarbone shattered from a fall from a horse and protruding through his skin. The sweat of a two-mile walk still soaked his clothes. It would have been a four- to seven-day walk to the "outside" for a healthy man, and the two miles had already drained him, but in less than an hour he was in the hands of doctors—a lifetime away but a short flight near.

An Indian in the Upper Patuca River Valley had never heard the sound of the silver bird, but he had heard through the jungle telegraph of a man and a metal bird that took sick people away and

brought them back restored. He had to find the bird or die, for tropical ulcers were eating away at him. His right arm hung limp and his left could barely raise food to his mouth; walking was an effort. He gathered his family and their few possessions and set out.

For 20 days, they struggled along muddy jungle trails and hacked out new trails with a machete. His 15-year-old son, suffering from malnutrition and parasites, had not the strength to carry him, so the trip was slow and painful.

Johnsen found the family waiting on an airstrip one day. The man could no longer stand and was sick with fever. Compassionate farmers had doled out funds to support the family until the airplane's arrival.

Wonder and hope barely suppressed the terror welling within the sick man as he was lifted into the plane and the engine started. As Johnsen revved the

engine and started taxiing, the man's family fled in fear into the protective jungle. Twenty minutes later, the Indian's arm was being swabbed by doctors.

Weeks later, the lung-deep holes in his chest, once filled with banana leaves and native herbs, were healing. His left arm was completely functional and he could feel strength returning to his right arm. Johnsen flew him back to his family.

Johnsen spent a year flying people, salt, tools, hardware, food staples and barbed wire and administering the program. The expertise he brought both as a pilot and as an operations inspector led Wings of Hope to cite him for "consolidating [the program] into the well-run professional operation which is functioning there now."

"It was the most memorable year of my life," Johnsen said. "This place grows on you. But there are the realities of life to return to, and there's only one of me."



Roy Johnsen

SURVIVAL continued from page 16

As crews of FAA aircraft that regularly check the worldwide system of navigational aids, all fly in hostile climates at times. Only one flight inspection aircraft has been lost, and that one was at sea off Recife, Brazil, in which one crewman died. That loss led to survival training for all flight inspection crew members.

In CAMI's cold chamber, the crew is given the same emergency equipment that they could expect to find in the Sabreliners and Jet Commanders they normally fly. In fact, they simulate evacuation from remnants of these very planes. In this laboratory, which can drop the temperature to -30 degrees F., the airmen worked at lighting survival lamps with the spark of a storage battery and cotton balls or other material that might be found in a wrecked aircraft. In this case, none of the crew was able to start a fire until instructor Joe Nix

stepped into the leader's role and showed them how.

"I don't want to tell someone that something will save his life unless I know for certain that it will," said Nix, an expert in survival and physiology. He counts Air Force and FAA fliers and astronauts among his students.

He recalls his horror at discovering that regulation survival equipment aboard an Air Force plane was all but useless. Insulated survival clothing stored in the plane was so tightly packaged that it took inspectors three hours to remove the wrapper and several hours for it to fluff up enough to be usable. also, in cutting the wrapper away, the contents were cut.

FAA's survival course includes tips on how to find water and shelter at sea, in the Arctic or in the desert, on first aid and on signaling to attract rescuers. Of course, part of any survival course

involves learning what to eat and what to leave alone.

In ditching-at-sea instructions, Nix loads the students into the nearly wingless fuselages of a Sabreliner that never flew and a Jet Commander that had crashed. The crewmen take the same seats they would in operational planes when on inspection flights, and the fuselages are hoisted into the water-filled survival tank. The hoist also keeps the planes from sinking.

In preparation for this exercise, Nix told his students, "Okay, change into your flight suits. When we come back from shooting the flare guns, you can get in your airplanes and crash."