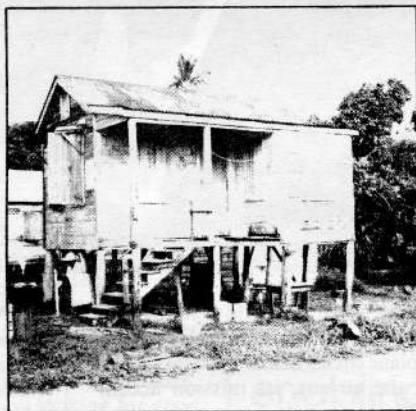


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THE

Balancing of Karma



Jack McManus, who thinks of himself as a gladiator and the courtroom as his arena—hot, cramped, weary after hours of flying over rugged jungle terrain. Without pay. Without fanfare. Without fuss. Can this be Madison's Jack McManus?

Belize, formerly British Honduras, is a country 200 miles long and 65 miles wide squeezed between Mexico and the sea on the eastern side of the Yucatan Peninsula. The jungle terrain is rugged, high mountains to the west, leveling off into coastal plain skirted by the clear turquoise waters and pristine beaches of the Caribbean Sea. English is the official language but much of the population speaks Creole, Spanish, or one of several Indian dialects. The names of its cities and towns are melodious, pretty, whimsical, reflecting the cultural mix: Punta Gorda, Dangriga, Belmopan, Orange Walk, Gallon Jug, San Ignacio.

The 120,000 inhabitants are warm and friendly despite their struggle with poverty and other problems common to an emerging third world nation. Many live in small, isolated villages, eking out a living through subsistence



farming or laboring in forestry. Jobs and money are scarce. Injury and disease can devastate the villagers, since resources for combating them are severely limited.

In Belize City, on the coast, is a wood-frame, two-story building. In the United States it would attract scant attention, and then only as a small, rundown house that rents cheap. For Belize, it's the country's only major hospital. The municipal airport, like the hospital, is the only one of consequence in the country. In the towns and villages in the outlying areas, landing strips are little more than cleared areas hacked out of the jungle, riddled with potholes and often covered by grazing livestock. But they are a vital link. By radio, missionaries and medical workers call into Belize Hospital when they have an emergency. The hospital in turn contacts a single-plane air service manned by a lone volunteer pilot, the only emergency medical transportation available to the poor.

This time the call is from a village where the nearest road is 50 miles upriver. A young woman is in the final hours of a pregnancy that's gone terribly awry. Bleeding heavily, slipping into shock, the hospital is the only hope for her and her emerging infant. A couple of hours later the plane descends out of the clouds. The woman is loaded on board. With her goes her husband, carrying bedding, clothing and food. The hospital cannot afford to supply these things. He will

also act as a nurse for his wife to supplement the meager staff at the hospital. An hour later the plane circles Belize City and touches down at the airport, its mission accomplished. The woman, face taut with pain, is eased out of the small plane on a stretcher and quickly placed inside the ambulance. As it pulls away the weary pilot turns and flexes muscles stiff from the cramped, hot cockpit. It's been his fourth flight of the day. He looks familiar but at first it doesn't click. Perhaps it's his dress—baseball cap and fatigue shorts. Perhaps it's the tattoos on arm and leg. Then, with a shock, recognition sets in: Jack McManus, Madison attorney.

Jack McManus. The same McManus who is seen in a local television commercial, clad nattily in suit, tie, cowboy boots and hat, shepherding a client inside the Dane County Courthouse. The same McManus who was often criticized by his legal peers as ruthless, flamboyant, noisy and even unsavory as he built a career as one of the best trial lawyers in the country. The same McManus who in a recent interview characterized the current legal system as a "dog choking on it's own vomit." The same McManus who thinks of himself as a gladiator and the courtroom as his arena. That Jack McManus—hot, cramped, weary after hours of flying over rugged jungle terrain. Without pay. Without fanfare. Without fuss.

How McManus got to Belize is one helluva story. But it's part of a larger one

that's also one helluva story in this era that's sometimes called the "me first" decade. It began about 30 years ago in the parched wastelands of Kenya's Turkana Desert. Years of drought had baked the arid soil hard, destroying the waterholes and pasture. The nomads who lived there, deprived of life-sustaining livestock, were dying by the thousands from starvation and disease. Finally, the rains came. But the water fell on the windward side of the mountains bordering the desert, bringing no relief to the barren lee. Emergency food and medical supplies had been brought to the area. But now, in a cruel twist of irony, flooding from the mountains made the roads impassable.

A missionary brought the Kenyan story to Bill Edwards, a Saint Louis manufacturer's representative. Prayers, he said, were welcome. But an airplane. If only they had an airplane. Edwards knew little about flying but he called upon a friend who did, Joe Fabick. The two men contacted mutual friends in aviation and in April of 1965, a six-place Cessna Skywagon was dispatched for service. A volunteer pilot flew the craft from America to Kenya. On arrival a local pilot took over and the food and supplies began to flow to the starving people.

For Edwards and his friends, it was a job well done. And it was over. Or so they thought. But in the months that followed letters began to arrive, postmarked from all over the world. They told of remote villages

where roads were little more than goat trails and rivers were the only highways. Places where people would die of sickness and injury because help was days away through the jungle. But only hours if by air. Is there any way that they too might have an airplane? For Edwards and the others it was obvious that the job they felt was finished had only just begun.

Such was the charter for one of the most unique charitable organizations in the world, Wings of Hope. Still based in St. Louis, still headed by Bill Edwards, Wings of Hope is a private, nonsectarian, nonprofit, nongovernmental, apolitical organization devoted to providing air transportation to people who can't afford it in isolated parts of the world. The mission is multifaceted but it still operates on the basis of the first operation some 30 years ago in Kenya. Rather than trying to use one set fashion for every circumstance, it tries to tailor its unique capabilities to fit specific needs. To that end it has helped to purchase and deliver utility airplanes and communications equipment to more than 30 countries around the globe for humanitarian services. Where possible these planes are manned by the groups who have received them. But since this is not always possible another important function of Wings of Hope is the recruitment of mechanics and bush pilots for its airplanes. And that's how the story comes back to Jack McManus.

feet from his law office outside of Oregon.

McManus was first contacted about flying for Wings of Hope through Dick Wagner (see sidebar), owner of Wag Aero, an aviation supply company in Lyons, Wisconsin. Wings of Hope is always looking for good bush pilots and McManus filled the bill.

McManus admits that flying for Wings of Hope appealed to him at first largely because of his love of adventure. "There's no question that that type of flying challenged all my ability," he says.

But it wasn't long before he realized that his actions were touching the lives of the less fortunate in a profound way. And their response struck a chord in the attorney that some who know him would find well, unMcManus-like.

"I loved the flying," he says. "But in time the greatest satisfaction would be what I was accomplishing. Then a woman comes up with her new born baby and tells you that without your flight that baby wouldn't be alive, you can't help but feel good about it. I like to think that maybe wherever the score is kept that I might have got a few gold stars to counteract some of the things that I didn't do so good. The balancing of karma and all that."

McManus flew for five weeks in Belize, enabling the regular Wings of Hope pilot to get some badly needed time off. He spent more than 75 hours in the air. As the only air medical evacuation operation available

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Besides being a top-notch attorney, McManus is also an ace bush pilot. In fact, the 58-year-old lawyer has probably spent as much time in the air as he has in the courtroom.

"I joined the Marine Corps when I was 16, in 1945," he recalls. "I got put in a tactical air control party stationed in China. It was basically a courier job. I spent all my time riding all over in China in small

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for the poor, both pilot and the six-passenger Cessna are on call from dawn to dusk, seven days a week. The typical flying day is a strenuous one, made up of numerous short trips, landing and taking off under conditions that are less than ideal. "The FAA would have a heart attack down there," McManus says. "Rain squalls are constantly moving in from the mountains. Your ceiling drops to 50 or 100 feet, with only a fourth to an eighth mile visibility. The plane can hold six and often it has to. We load in survival gear, medical gear, personal baggage, and then the patients. With the throt-

airplanes. At that time, communications in the country were virtually non-existent. It was all done by air. I'd fly all over with a bag handcuffed to my wrist picking up and delivering officer mail. I had passes that allowed me to cross Communist lines. I had passes that allowed me to cross Nationalist lines. I had a Marine Corps pass which allowed me to commandeer any available transportation to deliver the messages. I had a top secret clearance. And, since I loved flying, I had a lot of fun."

With his enlistment over, McManus returned with thoughts of flying as a career. But first there was college, during which his idea of commercial flying was set aside in favor of the law. But he didn't forsake flying. By 1952 he'd obtained his pilot's license and an airplane. And he's been flying ever since.

With McManus, flying is not just a hobby. It's more like an extension of his life style. For 18 years he owned a hotel and home in the Cayman Islands south of Cuba, flying there for frequent breaks from the rigors of a burgeoning law practice. It wasn't unusual to pick up a couple of Cuban MIGs as escorts when flying over Cuban air space. Once a year he still flies to the Arctic Circle on his annual fishing and camping trip. Since the 1950s, he's owned one or more airplanes. The current tally is five, and on any given day a couple of them can be found parked on his private airstrip located just

tle full forward we roll down the strip, the engine laboring to its utmost. We'd get into the air just before we run out of strip."

Finding the tiny jungle landing strips was no picnic either.

"Sometimes when I'd fly down the coast the destination would be buried in clouds. I'd fly out to sea for about five miles. Using the LORAN I'd get a bearing where the strip should be. Then I'd head back, coming in lower and lower, squeezing in at 100 feet, trying to see the runway. Sometimes it wouldn't be there. So I'd pour the power to the plane and climb through the soup, using instruments. Finally I'd break out into the sunshine, turn back and fly out over the ocean again and repeat the whole procedure. One of those times I'd see the strip. Down you go, upwind, downwind, it doesn't make a damn bit of difference."

McManus calls it a type of calculated risk flying. On the one hand is the pressure of the emergency situation and on the other hand is the knowledge that there's no benefit to be gained by the destruction of the plane, pilot and passengers. A grim reminder of the need for balance is the relatively common sight of wrecked aircraft scattered nearby many of the landing strips.

Flying conditions aren't the only thing that's bad. The Wings of Hope flight is reserved for emergencies and they're indicative of the conditions under which much of the population lives. Many of the trips in-

Wings of Hope

Dick Wagner is a retired airline captain who formerly flew for Republic Airlines. For 36 years he's been associated with aviation. The last 26 years he's operated Wag Aero, located in Lyons, Wisconsin, a company that manufactures and supports aircraft throughout the world. His involvement with Wings of Hope began about three years ago when the organization needed some hanger space to store airplanes. Wagner offered his hanger at Burlington and it turned into a steady stream of aircraft refurbishing, using volunteer time.

Wings of Hope works primarily in the aviation field, getting donations of cash, airplanes, related parts and services. Or it will take most anything it can get its hands on that can be turned into cash. The end result is a steady flow of aircraft that are either sold, traded or put into service depending on the best utilization for the organization. Wagner and his operation are one of several resources the organization has to perform volunteer aircraft servicing. Operations include motor overhauls, general maintenance and painting.

For those planes Wings of Hope decides to put into service, further modifications are done in St. Louis. Changes include large tires for shorter, rougher runways and extra fuel tanks for ferrying the aircraft to their destinations. Even as you read this, a Wings of Hope single-engine aircraft is heading across the Pacific Ocean to New Guinea, traveling over 1,900 miles of open water at a persistent 110 miles per hour. A couple of weeks ago another craft left Wagner's hanger and flew to Newfoundland, the Azores, and then on to Africa where it's now at work ferrying food and medical supplies.

Wagner says the high point for him is the fact that with Wings of Hope his efforts translate into direct help. "Typically the average charity takes 40 cents out of every dollar for administration. The total paid staff for Wings of Hope consists of one administrator, one secretary, and one mechanic. That means about 98 cents out of every dollar generated through donations of money or equipment ends up helping people in the field."

Also important to Wagner is the idea that that help is free of politics or other implications. Last February he and a government administrator traveled to

a tiny village on the Belize-Guatemala border by dugout canoe and by foot, to see about opening a landing strip. The trip took 18 hours. By air, it will take 55 minutes, saving critical time in an emergency.

"It was typical of the areas we try and serve," Wagner reports. "This village had a Mennonite mission operated by a Mennonite family. At another village, it may be a Maryknoll missionary. Yet another may have the Peace Corps or some other government program. We base our decision on need, rather than on politics or religion."

Concerning recommending the sometimes flamboyant McManus to the Wings of Hope board, Wagner says he had no worries.

"I've known Jack for some time. He comes across like a gruff old bear but underneath all that he's a very sincere and dedicated individual. The board was impressed both with his pilot credentials and also with his sincerity. He did an excellent job for us in Belize."

Wagner says anyone interested in donating cash, equipment or services to Wings of Hope can contact Bill Edwards at: Wings of Hope, 2319 Hampton Avenue, St. Louis, Missouri, 63139. Telephone (314) 647-5631.

volve pregnant women with maternity problems. For the men, arms and legs badly slashed by machetes are common. Other frequent injuries are caused by falling trees. Those few hospitals and clinics in Belize labor under a constant shortage of supplies and personnel. When patients arrive, they bring a relative to act as a nurse. They also supply their own food and bedding. One result is an almost festive air in the open wards, with brightly colored quilts and blankets covering the beds, the spicy smells of cooked food wafting on the air. But still present are the pain and suffering found with patients everywhere. For McManus it brought home a realization that in America

there's much to be thankful for.

"Back home I just took it for granted, the medical care we have. Down there it sometimes reminded me of those hospital scenes you see in movies about our Civil War. It's that primitive. But it's not because of ignorance or a lack of commitment on the part of the people. The native doctors and nurses labor for incredibly long hours at low pay. I have the utmost respect for their efforts. What the country lacks is equipment and facilities, both to train more medical people and to care for the patients. If a lawyer my age can go there and use what skills he has to help out, I can't help but think there must be some doctors and nurses who'd also be willing to donate some time using their medical skills."

McManus already has plans to return to Central America as a Wings of Hope relief pilot later in the year. He's also talked to the board about flying in New Guinea or Zaire. In typical McManus fashion he says it all appeals to his spirit of adventure, the challenge it holds for his flying abilities. But then the exuberance leaves, his voice softens reflectively. "You can't help but feel good about it," he says. "We Americans should be very appreciative of what we have." ■

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Many missions involve pregnant women with problems.

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