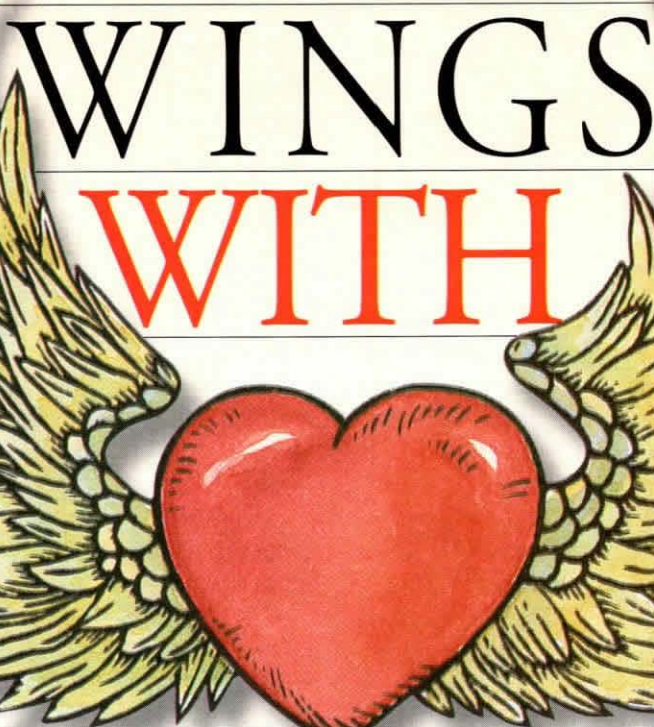


Craig O'Mara was cruising 9,000 feet above the trackless Sahara, a long way from home—indeed, a long way from anywhere. Grinding southward at less than 180 miles an hour, he had at least another three hours to go before alighting on the broiling tarmac at Luxor, Egypt. He was used to the small discomforts of flights in little airplanes like the Cessna 206 he was flying. What caused him exceeding discomfort, however, is what happened next. The engine—his only engine—began to sputter.

Had he the chance to reflect on his situation, O'Mara might have sided with colleagues who regarded the flight as a foolhardy mission. O'Mara quickly switched from the unexpectedly empty ferry tank to his mains and held his breath. He knew what was at hand. If air had entered the fuel lines during the sudden interruption of fuel flow, the engine stoppage might be irrevocable and a landing in the desert inevitable. "The longest 15 seconds of my life" passed before he got the engine running smoothly again. The desert was denied the airplane and its temerarious captain.

Adventurer? Daredevil? Soldier of fortune? Hardly. O'Mara is a husband, father, taxpayer, homeowner, and no-nonsense company man. A United Boeing 737 captain and a major in the Air



WINGS WITH HEART

Force Reserve, O'Mara loves his work and feels obliged to share his good fortune.

"There are problems in the world, and I'd love to be smart enough to solve them," he says, "but I can't. All I know is how to fly airplanes." And so several times a year, O'Mara does what he can to solve at least a few of those problems by doing what he knows best.

Sometimes he serves as one of the volunteer crew members aboard a C-130 Hercules cargo plane operated by Feed the Hungry, a South Bend, Indiana, relief organization. Stuffed with food and emergency supplies, the big bird delivers help when and where it's needed most.

Other times he volunteers as an air ambulance pilot in Central America. Still other times he ferries

airplanes to medical and relief groups operating in some of the most remote places on earth. It was in this last role that he found himself in the sputtering Cessna above the Sahara. Two days later, O'Mara turned over the airplane to a young Catholic priest pilot from Michigan who now uses it as a flying clinic and ambulance to service bush country natives in East Africa.

As O'Mara is quick to note, he's just one among thousands of aviation people, professionals and avid amateurs alike, who volunteer their wings to carry and comfort those in need near and afar.

For example, O'Mara's African flight was made on behalf of Wings of Hope, a unique institution based in St. Louis, Missouri. Hope's

volunteer corps of mechanics, electricians, aviation managers, and pilots combine their skills to find, refurbish, and deliver airplanes virtually free of charge to doctors, nurses, and missionaries dedicated to relieving the suffering of unfortunate people. The more than 100 airplanes and helicopters sent out by Hope's helpers so far are at work in Africa, Asia, Latin America, and the South Pacific.

Another program heavily supported by aviation people and their companies is ORBIS International. A teaching hospital dedicated to eye care, ORBIS is housed within a specially converted DC-10 airliner where volunteer visiting ophthalmologists conduct free, hands-on surgical training programs for doctors and nurses throughout the world. Although headquartered in New York City, ORBIS operates exclusively outside the United States, frequenting those Third World areas where eye disease is most prevalent.

During UN-sanctioned sessions, visiting and local doctors work together in the ORBIS hospital aircraft. Thousands of patients long blinded by cataracts and other eye diseases have had their sight restored since ORBIS took flight in 1982. ORBIS multiplies its effectiveness by providing in-country medical →