

We hope that Christmas was both enjoyable and a blessing for you and your families, and that there was time to relax and remember what, or rather, who, it is all about.

With the New Year upon us, we pray that you will have the resources to meet whatever challenges come your way, and the opportunity for grateful celebration during the easier times. May the latter greatly outnumber the former!

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View from the Sharp End

With myself and one other pilot away over Christmas there is only one Otter crew to cover both the Mount Hagen and Telefomin programmes. That's more than half of the area MAF-PNG serves.

One other crew in Goroka will cover all the eastern side.

Why the lack of interest from young Christian pilots to fly here? Even after the time we've been in PNG I still reckon this has to be at the top of the most interesting and fulfilling jobs aviation has to offer.

But there isn't a queue; only one new pilot is scheduled to come for the whole of 2012.

Our flight programmes must reflect the manpower available, but we share the pain of the isolated communities whose service is decreasing. Flights three days a week only a few years ago may now be down to once a week, or even once a fortnight.

In the west massive oil and mineral exploration and development is under way, but even here only a select few communities really see any benefit.

Politically the country is in something of a turmoil with a major power struggle going on at the moment. Next year there are general elections and we'll just have to wait and see what those bring.

However, in the midst of these challenges, there are some really good things happening. Read on to find out about a few ...



MAF-PNG is 60! This year was our 60th Anniversary. To celebrate and to take the anniversary out to the places we serve, Australian gospel singer, Steve Grace, was invited to give concerts at 6 remote communities. His tour finished off with a big celebration in Mount Hagen where national staff had the opportunity to go for flights over the town. For many of them it was their first trip in an aeroplane!

We had the chance to go to one of the concerts at Karimui in the Eastern Highlands. It rained all night, but the enthusiasm of the local people was undiminished as they sang and gave dramas of the first time their parents or grandparents saw an aircraft.



60th Anniversary photos. **Top:** Packed house at Karimui; Karimui Baptist Church's model of the first MAF aircraft to land; Steve Grace performing during the afternoon - before the rain started! **Bottom:** Some of the national staff and their families before their joy flight; trailer rides for the children; face painting for all ages.



Iropena village

Try to put yourself in the place of young mother, Penewan ...

After a difficult labour your baby is delivered, but then the tragic news - the child is dead. Further bad news follows: the placenta hasn't been passed. In remote Iropena, situated on a mountain ridge miles from anywhere, there are neither the skills nor the medicines to help you. MAF is called on the radio and a flight arranged for the morning - it's too late for today.

In the morning you hear the 'plane come overhead, it circles for a while, then the noise of the engine fades away. Cloud is covering the little airstrip and it cannot land.

Now comes the very real possibility: you could die. The placenta is still inside you and rapidly setting up an infection that is already making you feel weak and ill. What is going to happen?

You struggle through the day, feeling weaker and sicker all the time, and then through the next night. Is there going to be another flight? Will the little aeroplane be able to land if there is? "Will I make it?", you ask yourself.

Early in the morning you hear the sound of the aircraft again, and this time the cloud is lying just to one side of the ridge where the airstrip lies. The aircraft lands, you're carried to the airstrip and helped aboard, and you're soon on the way to treatment and life.

Whether these thoughts actually went through Penewan's mind, there's no way of knowing, but the story is real. After not landing the first time Michael changed his work schedule in order to make the attempt the next day. The loss of the baby was sad, but at least it wasn't a double tragedy.

... you hear the noise of the engine fade away ...

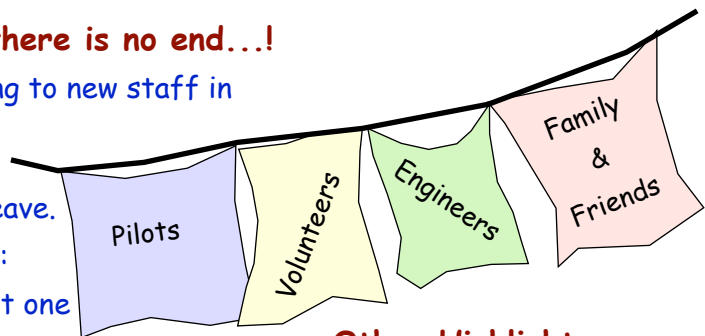
Of washing sheets and making beds there is no end...!

One of my MAF "hats" is to allocate housing to new staff in Mount Hagen. For three months I also arranged accommodation and meals for temporary visitors while someone was on leave.

The accommodation list is quite impressive:

- Most weeks 2 or 3 pilots spend at least one night a week in Mount Hagen. They may have management responsibilities, be helping the Hagen programme, or having their aircraft maintained.
- Two engineers from Gippsland and Lycoming (who build or GA8 Airvans) came for a few days to help sort out some problems we were having with the aircraft.
- A huge task in hand is resurveying all our airstrips. A volunteer came to help us and was an invaluable help. As well as working in the Hagen area he also surveyed airstrips from other bases.
- Another volunteer is helping with house refurbishment, repairs and redecoration. He's also done some work at other bases.
- Two more volunteers spent 2 days in Mount Hagen while they bought supplies to enable them to do repair work on the hydroelectricity generator at Telefomin.
- One of our engineers married a doctor from the Nazarene hospital at Kudjip. Their families were all put up in our houses for the wedding.
- Chad Tilley, pilot from MAF Bangladesh, stayed for a couple of nights after the pilots' meetings in November.
- A pastoral counsellor stayed for twelve nights as she visited all MAF staff and ran some excellent seminars.
- Particular friends of ours, Rob and June Head, have worked for SIL for nearly 50 years translating the New Testament in the four dialects of their language. June stayed over 4 weeks while Rob came and went to their village. Their major task was updating the audio New Testaments that they are distributing.

Along with washing sheets and towels goes the regular cleaning that would normally be done by a permanent resident. Two local househelps one morning a week enabled rooms to be made ready and beds made. As visitors make their own breakfasts (and sometimes lunches) then stocking up on supplies also had to be added to my own shopping lists.



Other Highlights



ATC student, Carmon Jalina, celebrates passing his Commercial Pilot flight test with fellow-student, Vanessa Nagul. Michael was Carmon's examiner.



Rev. Barry Slatter inspects the new Anglican church at Koinambe. (The ladder may not meet UK H&S standards!)



Children at Kuyol in Western Province with school supplies - delivered as part of an EU and local church project.

A Remarkable Lady

How do you manage in a remote community when your legs were paralysed by polio when you were a child? Jessie Bong was nearly killed after her father's death in an attempt to appease angry spirits. Later, she contracted polio and had to crawl around on all fours, but a missionary eventually took her back to Australia where she received medical treatment, and later became a Christian.

All this was in the 1960s and 1970s. Michael has flown Jessie quite a few times. Her home village of Eliptamin is in the next valley to the MAF base of Telefomin.

A Women's Resource Centre has been built at Eliptamin as a place where women can receive health training and bible teaching. All the building materials were flown in by MAF during the last three years. One afternoon when we were both in Telefomin for a week there was an opportunity to visit the centre, and Jessie was outside in her wheelchair. Tears rolled down her cheeks as she thanked us for



Nicki with Jessie

coming, and in particular for the way MAF had enabled the resource centre to be built.



The new Eliptamin Women's Resource Centre

Praise & Prayer Points

- Pray for the PNG government, and in particular that there will be the willpower to deal with the endemic corruption.
- Pray that the mineral boom will not lead to the destruction of local people's land and resources, and that PNG's amazing forests will not be devastated.
- Continue to pray for wisdom for MAF's leadership as they allocate resources.
- Pray that more pilots and engineers will want to join the team in PNG.
- Please pray for us as we spend more time in the UK during 2012 to help support Michael's mother.

Thank you for your faithful support, encouragement and prayers through 2011. We send you our best wishes for 2012.

Michael & Nicki



Duncalfes Online

Visit our website @ www.duncalfes.com

Contact details.

Address: MAF,

PO Box 273, Mount Hagen, WHP281, Papua New Guinea

Telephone: 675 5421409

E-mail: duncalfes@yahoo.co.uk

Website: www.duncalfes.com

UK address: 11 Winchester Way, Blackwater, Camberley, Surrey, GU17 0EZ **Telephone:** 01252 871159

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MAF-UK: Castle House, Castle Hill Avenue, FOLKESTONE, Kent, CT20 2TN **Tel:** 01303-850950

Website: www.maf-uk.org **Twitter:** <http://twitter.com/flying4life> **Facebook:** www.facebook.com/MAFUK