

The Story of the First Rainbow Flight

SOS Village – 25th October.

The first Rainbow flight was planned for weekend 18th October 2004 and all the necessary arrangements were put in place. Mike was tasked to flight planning and weather checks while I handled the logistics of getting the nutritional products delivered and stored until expected departure date. Part of Mike's flight planning duties involved deciding how much each plane could carry and making sure that the loading strategy was correct for each aircraft.



The weather was not playing ball and Mike called the mission off due to the cold fronts moving across the country bringing extensive summer rains and high winds. We re-planned for the 25th October. The aircraft were refueled and loaded the night before and a 0530 zulu departure from Grand Central ensued. Our route took us via RD, WDV, Escort and Umtata. Except for an isolated CB in the Himeville/Bergville area and some mountain turbulence, the conditions at Flight Level 105 could not have been better with a healthy tail-wind cutting 20 mins off our estimated flight times. Both aircraft touched down in Umtata safely.

Mike had to endure losing all electric power short of touchdown and executed his first real procedure approach without communications. The SOS Village Personnel were at hand to take delivery of the 450 kg of supplies. A visit to their Umtata Village followed with Mike doubling as photographer to try a capture some of the special moments. Both Mike and I were impressed with the village housing just on 200 Aids orphans. An important factor in the whole concept was being able to trust the recipient's ability to distribute the aid in a responsible way - SOS demonstrated just why we chose them in the first place and a second mission is definitely on the cards.





Umtata folk showed hospitality by assisting us in sorting out the 172 electrical problems and offering accommodation. Once organized, we settled into the country club pub to watch World Cup Rugby and enjoy a few well-earned beers. The return trip on Sunday was uneventful with the 172 getting airborne ahead of me in case of further electrical problems. We stayed in radio contact and arrived home to enjoy Sunday lunch. On touchdown Mike expressed his absolute excitement at completing his first real away flight and breaking new ground in terms of aviation experience and at the same time assisting those in need. For me, as we all know every flight is a new experience and it was time to blow out the cobwebs and give the 182 a good run.

Thank you to our sponsors, Profile Media and Targa Graphics who assisted with our logo and brochure design, Dischem who contributed nutritional product, Air BP who assisted with fuel, and Central Flying Academy who assisted with aircraft hire.

Ernie Alexander

