

Mission Aviation Fellowship Celebrates 50 Years in Congo

Members

of the Congolese medical community joined church and mission leaders, relief workers and Congolese government officials in celebrating 50 years of Mission Aviation Fellowship service in the Democratic Republic of the Congo.

MAF is a Christian ministry organization that uses airplanes and other technologies to serve church and relief organizations in remote areas of the world.

During a gathering at the International Protestant Church of Kinshasa last month, Dr. Tony Karemere of the Institut National de Recherche Biomédicale commended MAF's commitment to sharing the gospel and providing access to medical care. Karemere emphasized MAF's work to combat Ebola epidemics in 1995 and 2007, as well as the measles outbreak that threatened the DRC this spring.

"MAF was the only aviation company who accepted this task—to fly international medical personnel and a mobile laboratory into the hot zone of the [Ebola] epidemic and to fly personnel out of that area," says Karemere. "In the recent measles outbreak, the areas that

were
affected were difficult to reach, and with MAF we were able to
get into
those areas and transport the needed vaccines.”

In the DRC, MAF operates from bases in Kinshasa, Bunia and
Lubumbashi.

MAF often conducts emergency medical evacuations and provides
support to
those working in refugee camps or assisting victims of militia
violence.

Dr. Makuma Booto Baudouin from the DRC Ministry of Health
remarked on
the vital role MAF plays in DRC: “Each year MAF transports
vaccinations
for 39,000 to 40,000 children in the Bandundu region. I thank
God for
MAF and their partnership now and into the future.”

MAF began serving in DRC in 1961 at the request of the
Protestant Relief
Agency. Following revolt and tribal warfare in the country in
1960, the medical situation was dire, with only 200 doctors in
the
entire country to care for millions of people. With the
assistance of
MAF, PRA initiated “Operation Doctor” to bring healthcare to
remote
villages. Initially using two planes, MAF flew five teams of
doctors
between remote clinics, where hundreds of people would
typically be
waiting to see the physicians.

Former U.S. Surgeon General C. Everett Koop was part of
“Operation
Doctor.” Koop, now 94, recalls flying with MAF pilots in the

early

1960s as they performed airdrops of medical supplies.

“They took off from the airport in Kinshasa, and they headed for

pre-arranged parachute drops,” says Koop. “It was said that there wasn’t

an aspirin tablet from coast to coast since the missionaries went home

... The MAF pilot took that stuff and dropped it, and thereafter there

was no trouble.”

Through the years, MAF’s presence in DRC has been marked by unique

challenges. Political unrest and threatening bush warfare have caused

several evacuations of MAF staff. In 2002, the MAF base at Nyankunde in

eastern DRC was destroyed during fighting by two tribal factions.

Fortunately, no MAF staff were killed, and the ministry still serves

east DRC from its Bunia base. [Click here](#) to read more about the Nyankunde

incident.

“Longevity in any area of ministry is difficult to achieve,” says John

Boyd, president and CEO of MAF-US. “Serving in the DRC is a calling that

MAF takes seriously and counts as a privilege.”