



Spreading the Word by TURBINE GOONEY

HOW MISSIONARY FLIGHTS INTERNATIONAL LEARNED THAT THE ONLY REPLACEMENT FOR A DC-3 WAS A TURBINE DC-3! / BY RALPH M. PETTERSEN

Missionary Flights International (MFI) recently added a third turbine-powered DC-3C-65TP to its fleet after completing a year-long refurbishment of the aircraft in Lanseria, South Africa. The veteran transport arrived safely in Fort Pierce, Florida, on 16 May 2017 after completing an epic six-day, 9800-mile ferry flight from South Africa. It will undergo a complete restoration by MFI mechanics in Fort Pierce prior to entering service with MFI.

MFI's mission statement reads, "To spread the Good News of Jesus Christ in partnership with Bible-centered missions by providing reliable transportation and logistical services." To fulfill its mission, MFI transports personnel and goods for Christian missionary organizations from its Fort Pierce headquarters to countries in the Caribbean with limited freight service such as Haiti, the Dominican Republic, and the Bahamas. MFI is also a first responder to natural disasters such as the 2010 Haitian earthquake and more recently when Hurricane Matthew struck Haiti and the Bahamas in October 2016. I



Prior to being acquired by MFI, N300MF was registered 5Y-RDS and saw service with the International Committee of the Red Cross flying relief missions in Africa. The aircraft is seen stored in Lanseria. (MFI)

toured MFI headquarters in early June 2017 and sat down with MFI's Director of Communications Kevin Stratton to learn more about the organization and the recent arrival of its new aircraft from South Africa.

MFI was founded by Reverend Don Beldin on 14 February 1964 with a Twin Navion. Originally based in modest facilities at West Palm Beach Airport, MFI moved to its current headquarters at Treasure Coast International Airport in Ft. Pierce in 2006. The Fort Pierce facility features modern office space, a dedicated mail room and two spacious hangars. In addition, MFI recently dedicated an expansive new facility in Port au Prince, Haiti, which is located adjacent to the airport and triples the space previously available in the old facility.



As improbable as it seems, MFI's first aircraft was a Twin Navion. Basically, these were standard single-engine Navions modified into twin configuration by several companies. Today, the type is strictly *rara avis*. The aircraft illustrated is not the MFI example.

Every March, MFI holds a Family Day open house and the Gooney Birds fly non-stop from 10 am to 5 pm, giving rides to friends and families.



After a year-long restoration effort, N300MF waits on the ramp at Lanseria, for the start of its journey to Florida. Note the former "ICRC" titles — which someone had modified to read "IORO" with just a few strokes of the paint brush. The "ICRC" titles on the left side of the fuselage were simply painted over. (Ken Stratton).



N300MF was greeted by a traditional water salute when it safely arrived at MFI headquarters on 16 May. (Kevin Stratton)

While not an airline, MFI operates under the strict guidelines stipulated in FAA Part 125, with only members of affiliated missionary organizations and their associates carried on the flights. Organizations wanting to use the services of MFI pay an annual affiliation fee which allows them to utilize MFI's aircraft for transporting personnel, cargo, supplies and mail. MFI currently operates two turbine DC-3C-65TPs and a Cessna 310 with nine pilots on staff. The two DC-3C-65TP aircraft normally fly Tuesdays and Thursdays and complete about 200 roundtrip flights a year. MFI aircraft adhere to a formal maintenance plan with inspections scheduled every 100-hrs of flight time. The inspections are normally performed between flights thus allowing the aircraft to maintain their Tuesday/Thursday flight schedule. The addition of a third turbine DC-3 will increase flexibility of flight operations allowing an aircraft to be temporarily based at a remote location while the other two continue their regular flights to Haiti and the Dominican Republic.



Pilots Ray Oostdyk, Ian Hengst, and Kevin Stratton pose for a portrait while *en route* from Angola to Ghana. Most of the flight segments were conducted at 12,000-ft, thus the need for sweaters and jackets. (Kevin Stratton)

DC-3C-65TP N200MF was MFI's first turbine DC-3 and was acquired in 2003. It had been converted by the South African Air Force in 1990 and passed through Dodson Aviation before joining MFI.

