

MEDEVAC TO MANILA

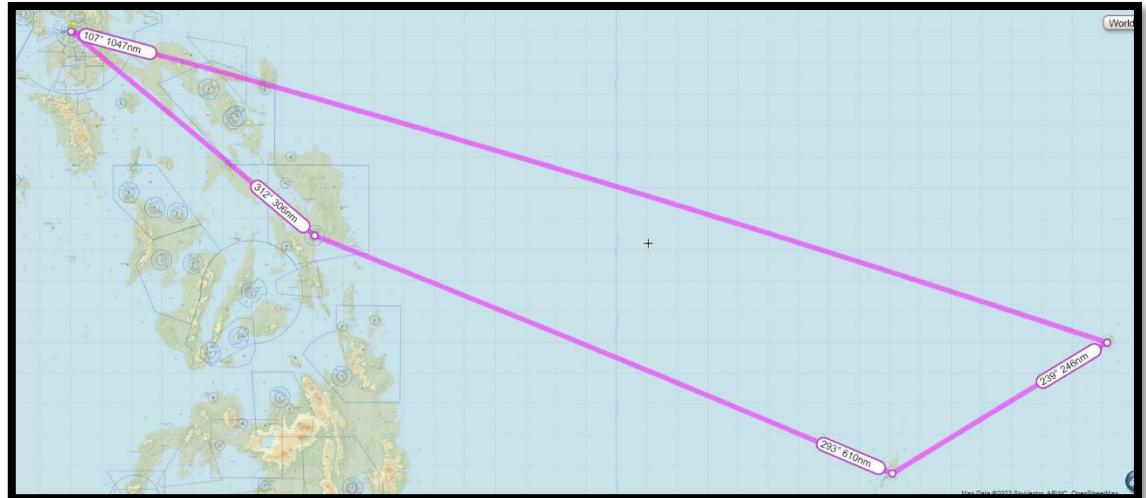
On Sunday, October 29, 2023, I had just returned home from driving the bus to drop off members from our PMF Church service at around 12:00 noon. I sat down on the couch and heard my phone ping with a message from Senator Mason Whipples in Palau. Mason was a friend whose construction company I had worked with when we built the hangar in Palau. His father had fallen the previous night and broken his femur. Mason had been looking for a way to get his father to Manila, but United could not do it very quickly and other air ambulances that Mason had used in the past were not very reliable. His brother, who is the sitting President of Palau, told him, "You should give PMA a call, they have their new planes which can reach Manila." So, Mason scrolled through his contacts and found my number and asked about the feasibility of getting his dad to Manila.

In 2019, when we started discussing upgrading our PMA fleet to King Air 200's, one of the primary uses, was to provide this region with a means of getting patients to Manila or Guam. This vast region of remote islands, and few means of transportation, makes it very difficult to move people quickly. In Yap, for example, we normally only have one commercial flight a week from Yap to Guam. United Airlines services these islands, but they require you to purchase 9 seats, and give them 72 hours advance notice. They really don't want to be in the medevac business.

Last year, PMA was awarded a grant from the U.S. Department of Interior in which we were able to purchase not only a new basic stretcher for our normal services to the outer islands of Yap, but also a brand new, state of the art, LifePort stretcher which plugs into the aircraft power and has oxygen bottles, an all the life support and monitoring equipment that air ambulances normally carry. This requires some aircraft modifications to install the wiring, and since it just arrived a couple of months ago, we have not yet had time to do the official installation on our aircraft.

When Mason texted me and asked me the question, I had to think fast. We had never done this before, but this was the ultimate goal that we had been heading towards with our flight operation. 1. We had the aircraft, which was capable of making the flight, 2. We had two pilots, fully capable and certified to fly the aircraft, 3. Our flight operation had met all the FAA requirements to be able to fly anywhere in the Pacific and Southeast Asia, 4. We had a hangar in Manila, with personnel who could support and receive this flight. 5. When our first King Air had been ferried across from the US to Yap, it went through Russia, Japan, and Manila and we had used a ground handler which handled all the paperwork. So we knew it could be done. The only major hurdle for us now was that we personally had never done such a flight before into a foreign country or major city such as Manila, Philippines. But some Pilots are wired to seek new challenges, and venture into the unknown, so I responded to Mason, "We can be there in 3 hours!"

Mason was not expecting that. He wasn't even sure if he could get his dad ready for transport in that short time. But he too was determined to make this happen, so we discussed a few details as I rapidly sent an email off to the ground handler in Manila with all our Aircraft info, Pilot data, and Insurance details. I texted our station manager in Palau, Brock Welge, to notify him of the flight and to ask for his assistance to get our entry cleared into Palau to pick up the patient. I also texted our other King Air Pilot, Paul Ciaramitaro, to notify him of the flight and to get the plane ready and flight plan filed. I then called our Yap staff members to head to the airport to assist.



By 1:30 PM we were at the airport fueling up the plane, installing the basic stretcher and preparing for departure. I continued to work with our secretary Grace Adgil, to answer emails from our ground handler in Manila to send them all the paperwork that they required. Brock informed me that there was a short-term volunteer nurse, Lydia Nolte, from Germany, who had just arrived the day before to visit our PMA operations in Palau. She had experience as a flight nurse and Brock recommended that we take her along to monitor the patient.

We took off from Yap at 2:30 PM and arrived in Palau at 3:45 PM (Yap time) which was 2:45 PM Palau time. This was 45 minutes later than I had told Mason, due to delays in getting all the paperwork for entering the Philippines. While we were flying, Grace continued to send all the necessary paperwork including our health declarations, arranging the ambulance in Manila and ordering our fuel.



In Palau, we arrived, refueled the plane and waited for the patient to arrive at the airport. When he arrived, he was accompanied, by his son, who was the President of Palau. Mason was there as well, and they all helped us load their father onto the aircraft. Our flight nurse Lydia got all the necessary information from the ambulance who brought the patient. Evidently the patient's hemoglobin was very low, and he would need to be on oxygen for the duration of the flight. At first the ambulance driver would not allow us to take the portable oxygen bottle from him

because it was property of the Palauan Government, but when he turned around and saw the President standing there, he seemed to get all the authorization that he needed to release the bottle to us.

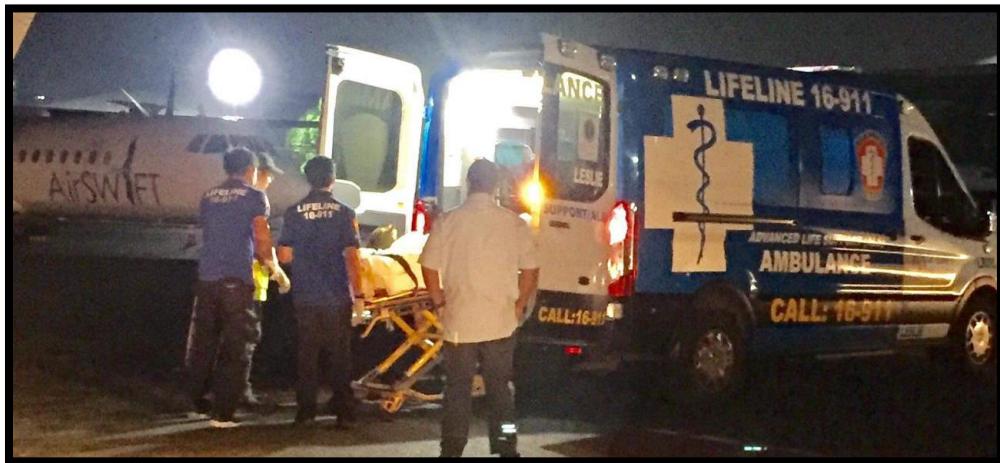
We took off from Palau at 4:55 (Yap Time). About 2 hours into the flight as the sun was setting and we were approaching landfall in the Philippines, Lydia came up and told us that the portable bottle was running low and that we needed another source. Since Paul was flying, I climbed to the back of the plane, where there is a medical oxygen mask in the ceiling for just such an event as this. The mask was too short to reach the patient, but I borrowed an extra line from Lydia, and I rigged a connection from the port in the ceiling to the tubes that patients wear in their nostrils. Then I turned the switch on, and Lydia was satisfied with the supply of oxygen.



As we entered the airspace in the Philippines, it became more challenging to understand the accent and the terminology they used. As they gave us our arrival sequence, we loaded the routes into our GPS and planned for our final approach. The Manila airport gave us high priority since we were a medevac and we touched down in Manila at 9:00 PM (Yap Time) which was only 7:00 PM in Manila. This was 6.5 hours from when we departed Yap, and 9 hours from when we first received the call.



Everything in Manila worked out as well as anyone could have hoped. The ground handler had everything arranged for entry permits, the Palauan embassy had assisted in getting the ambulance into the airport, the fuel truck was there ready to fuel, and our teammates in the Philippines, helped drive us to dinner and then to our hotel. Brock in Palau and Grace in Yap as well as our PMA team in Manila had stayed on duty throughout our whole flight and made all the necessary arrangements so that everything was in place for our arrival. Mason was just blown away at how quickly and simply the whole process had gone. He kept telling me over and over that when he got back to Palau, he was going to tell everyone he knew about this service that PMA could provide to their country. He told me to get ready for an uptick in requests for similar medical evacuations.



The next morning, we got up early and were in the plane with engines running by 7:00 AM. We flew direct from Manila back to Yap, which is 1000 miles, and it took us 5 hours. When we landed at 2:00 PM, we loaded the plane for our normal Monday run to the outer islands where Paul picked up another critical patient and brought him back to the hospital in Yap.

We were so encouraged by the success of this medevac. I was so proud of our entire PMA team who worked together to make it all happen. Not everything was done perfectly, but overall, it was a success and we learned a lot about what is involved in this and how we can improve for the next time. We were thrilled that we were able to get the patient to a hospital so quickly, he got his surgery the next day and two weeks later was back home in Palau. We feel so blessed that God has brought PMA to such a place, through the gifting of these aircraft from Samaritan's Purse, to be able to provide these kinds of services to this region. To God be the Glory!

<https://flightaware.com/live/flight/N875SP/history/20231029/0615Z/PTRO/RPLL>