UAS

International Trip Support

UAS CASE STUDY

Babcock Mission Critical Services Mission

Italy to Mozambique, May 17-31, 2019

MISSION

The purpose of the mission to support Babcock's crew in the delivery of helicopter ECMHP from Milan, Italy to the port city of Pemba, Mozambique. The helicopter was destined for a private owner to help with humanitarian and relief missions to the people in Mozambique who were left devastated by Cyclone Idai.

THE CHALLENGE

The logistical challenge was to plan a trip that would see the crew work only within a small distance range of a maximum 400 NM between each station and a slow cruising speed of only 140 kt. The best possible routing was selected to take the Helicopter to Africa by entering through Morocco and flying all the way down on the western cost to Angola where they would leave the coastal area behind and route straight to Mozambique's eastern African coastline. The full covering distance was nearly close to 7,100 NM.

The mission also faced the usual route and schedule challenges associated with operating in Africa:

- Conflict zones
- Access difficulties
- Non-availability of services

THE CONCERNS

The client was concerned about whether it would be possible to fly into so many African airports, some of which were remote with limited operational information. Uncertainties regarding safety and security, adequate fuel availability, the presence of ground support, and obtaining the various permissions necessary to carry out such a mission were among the concerns.

As our client's partner, it was our responsibility to assure them that although these concerns were valid and genuine,UAS has the personnel, expertise, and experience to ensure these challenges are overcome.

THE PLANNING PHASE

UAS received Babcock's request in March 2019, its Dubai-based Ops team's previous experience made it keenly aware of the complexities of operating a helicopter mission in the region. However, this mission was different as it consisted of about 16 stops at various locations starting at Nouadhibou Airport (GQPP) and ending at Pemba Airport (FQPB).

Being aware of the likely challenges and difficulties with the territories, UAS was conscious that unforeseen challenges often spring up in these situations, so set about mitigating them.

1

In Depth Route Assessment

Firstly, UAS assessed the routes and all the planned stop locations to ensure it had the most accurate and up-to-date information about permit requirements for each country, fuel availability, airport operating hours, safety issues, and all existing restrictions. For this, it relied on data from its Station Manager network - on-the-ground VIP supervisors throughout the continent. UAS Station Managers were assigned to specific locations to gather the required details with each bringing their extensive expertise and experience to bear. This is how comprehensive operational route assessment was created

2

Identifying Problem Areas

Using the route assessment, UAS identified some of the potential problem areas. The most remarkable was Gabon, where it was recently made mandatory for any helicopter overflying or landing in Gabon territory to have an HF Radio installed. Most light aircraft do not have this equipment installed and so was EC-MPH. This equipment is expensive and cannot simply be installed overnight. An alternative would have been to avoid Gabon altogether, but it was not that simple. The strategic location of Gabon along the route and the unavailability of fuel at possible alternatives Ouésso Airport (FCOU) and Oyo Ollombo Airport (FCOD) in Congo all meant that landing in Gabon's Libreville Airport (FOOL) was vital.

Liaising with the client and Gabon CAA, UAS came up with a suggestion of a temporary hand-held option of the HF Radio which would cost less. However, Babcock preferred the a permanent option, and this put off the plans for over a month.

3

Obtaining Permits

Ensuring all the necessary overflight and landing permits required for this trip were obtained was central to the success of the mission. Typically, it is extremely challenging to obtain helicopter permits. Many African authorities are sensitive to foreign helicopter operations with some even considering them security risks because of the low flying altitudes and ability to land anywhere. Therefore, trip support procedures are different, the scrutiny of applications is more thorough, and, in some cases, must also be approved by Military authorities. So, where regular applications may take 72hours or less to process, it may take up to a week or more to process for helicopters.

MISSION EXECUTION

Babcock Crew: Capt Maurizo Lebet, Capt Luca Bonon & F/O Nobili Piergiovanni

On May 17, Capt. Maurizio Lebet and his five crew members set off from Bresso, Milan for the two-week mission to deliver the helicopter to Pemba, Mozambique.

The mission was going according to plan until on day 3 of the flight, the helicopter encountered a technical issue on Las Palmas, one of the Gran Canary Islands. The technical delay lasted two days with the UAS team managing to make the it as comfortable as possible for Babcock while coordinating trips for the engineers and flight crew to the airport for test flights and repairs.

Las Palmas

After the helicopter was repaired, the mission progressed as planned until the stop at Malabo Airport (FGSL) where it faced massive challenges arriving and departing due to extremely bad weather conditions. Thankfully, the crew made it out with only minor delays and our handlers were accommodating and helpful, constantly updating UAS Ops with information.

Destination FGSL - Malabo

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METAR 260200Z 27004KT 230V300 9999 TS SCT010 SCT020CB BKN040 27/26 Q1011 NOSI
TAF   252300Z 2600/2706 24006KT 9999 TS BKN010 FEW018CB
        TEMPO 2600/2606 08025G38KT 3000 TSRA BKN008 SCT016CB
        BECMG 2609/2611 NSW SCT010 FEW020CB
        TEMPO 2618/2704 TS
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Before the departure to Namibia, the handling agent neglected to stamp the Gendec and this led to Namibia Customs and Immigration wanting to send the helicopter back to Angola before they could move forward to Zambia. Meanwhile, another issue surfaced when the fuel truck was delayed on the way to Rundu Airport (FYRU). The agent advised UAS that the bowser would only be arriving in the next 1-3 hours meaning a significant setback for crew flight duty periods.
DXB -OPS GA team utilized its contacts to arrange for the Gendec to stamped and signed as quickly as possible, thereby ensuring the helicopter didn't need to return to Angola.

After Namibian Immigration cleared the crew, they were able to depart for Zambia as planned. Unfortunately, the fuel bowser only arrived 90 minutes after the scheduled helicopter arrival time due to the opening hours at FYTP. At this point, little that could be done except pressure the supplier to proceed with as much haste as possible. However, there was a 90-minute delay, and this was clearly explained to the crew. UAS promptly followed up the service failure with a complaint and service recovery were measures activated. The result was the handler conceding 45% of the handling and fuel arrangement fees as compensation for the client.

Another unexpected issue regarding airport fees occurred at FWKI. The handler declined to pay the fees following a new directive that was only communicated less than an hour before departure. UAS' finance team in Johannesburg proceeded to contact the airport authority and take over payment procedure which allowed the flight to depart and a potential delay to be avoided.

Frequent changes to the schedule throughout the mission necessitated constant permit revalidation. This required a huge amount of liaising with the relevant CAAs who often expressed their frustration with our changing requests. However, thanks to the efforts of the DXB-OPS GA Team team, the support of the UAS African Station Manager network, and its strong relationships with the African CAAs, the mission experienced no permit issues except at FLHN where a minor omission caused a short delay.

On May 31, after an intense and pressurized trip, ECMHP landed safely in Pemba, Mozambique.

Babcock Crew after landing in Pemba

The success of this mission was due largely to the excellent teamwork and synergy between all the UAS Station Managers involved and the DXB-OPS GA team constantly keeping abreast of all services, changes, and new requests, as well as following up with the various CAAs and vendors and ensuring that all went perfectly at all the locations even where UAS was not physically present.

UAS Operations praised the role the Babcock Crew played in the success of this mission through their cooperation and positivity in challenging situations. A great bond was developed between the Babcock Crew and UAS Station Managers. Of the 15 locations where the flight touched down in Africa, the crew only came into physical contact with UAS Station Managers at GOBD, DIAP, DGAA, and FOOL. Throughout the remainder of the mission, communication between the crew and UAS was constant with the team pro-actively checking on next destinations, discussing possible issues, and remotely checking all other stations to ensure all services would be promptly delivered.

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