

# Start at the South Pole

## A Logistics Challenge



Despite prior experience with both utility helicopters and Southern Ocean operations, the project to manage the flight of HL9470 was unlike any other. **Jonathan Lewinsky** reports.

## Antarctica to Indonesia with a Kamov 32 helicopter. Easy, right?

Without an earthquake, maybe.

The Projects department at World Air Ops is an interesting place to observe. In a given week, the variety of requests from all corners of the globe can be impressive. Not all requests turn into work though – but this was one the staff were keen to get involved with. The mission: oversee the safe traverse of a Russian-built heavy lifting helicopter, from the Korean Polar Research Institute (KRPI) Base at Terra Nova Bay, Victoria Land, Antarctica, across the South Pacific, to it's new home in tropical Papua, Indonesia. If you want a

challenge, this is going to do nicely.

### The Helicopter

The Kamov 32 is a civilian version of the Kamov 27, developed in the 1970's by the Russian Navy and originally introduced to service in 1982 as an anti-submarine warfare aircraft. Seating 16, and weighing in at a solid 12,000 kgs, the Ka-32 is now used worldwide in firefighting, SAR, and heavy lifting. It is unusual for its twin rotor design, creating extra downwash



compared to a more traditional single level design.

### The Journey

On paper, a pencil drawn great-circle line from Terra Nova to Merauke, Indonesia measures a neat 4,048 nm, and at 115 kts, would take just over 35 hrs. Of course, on a repositioning mission such as this, flying the helicopter isn't automatically the best choice – and in this case wasn't even an option. Planes, Trains and Automobiles



## Earthquake

No sooner had the helicopter arrived in New Zealand, than a massive earthquake struck: it's epicenter just 2 km away.

*Left: Kamov long-lining in Antarctica, and the damage to Lyttleton Port.*

becomes Helicopters, Trucks, and ... Ice Breakers.

## Icebreaker

The first move was a week long sailing trip from Antarctica, to Lyttleton Port, New Zealand. The Kamov was flown onto the deck of the Korean owned vessel R.V. Araon, a purpose built Icebreaker commissioned in 2010 to serve the requirements of the KRPI. While the helicopter was underway on the first leg of it's journey, World Air Ops was busy working out the formalities with the var-



ious authorities in New Zealand. Mark Zee, Operations Director at World Air Ops, explains the background. "The situation was unusual. We had a foreign-registered helicopter, arriving on board an Antarctic utility vessel, which we wanted to operate domestically within New Zealand. Ensuring the correct treatment and understanding of the mission by the government agencies is essential to maintain the schedule. We wanted to clear the helicopter, which would be viewed as cargo by NZ Customs, in Lyttleton – and from there fly it north across the country. In addition to talking with NZCS, we also had lengthy discussions with the Civil Aviation Authority in Wellington to ensure the correct operating permits and authorities were in place for the flight"

### 12.51pm, Tuesday.

Up to this point, the unconventional mission had been nonetheless uneventful. Shortly before lunchtime, on Tuesday 22<sup>nd</sup>

February, 2011, a devastating 6.3 magnitude earthquake struck the country – it's epicentre just 2 kilometers from the Kamov, where it had arrived just hours previously on board the Araon. The port of Lyttleton was badly hit, though the helicopter escaped any damage. However, it was immediately clear that everything had changed. John Clark, who was supervising in the Operations Centre that day, continues the story, "We were faced with a significant challenge. Almost every arrangement we had made for the Kamov – customs, fuel, supplementary crew, permits, ground handling – was now irrelevant. Once we established that all





“We need a helicopter pilot before lunchtime. In New Zealand.”

the team in New Zealand were safe and well, we set about making new arrangements”. Liaising closely with Lee Hyo-Cheol, the Flight Manager for Chang Woon Aviation – the helicopter operator – World Air Ops were presented with the first hurdle. The Araon, with the Kamov still safely aboard, was setting a new course for Dunedin, an area unaffected by the quake further south in the South Island.

John continues, “Because the crew normally operate in Korea, language proficiency and unfamiliarity with the local terrain means that a local assistant pilot is required. We had arranged a pilot from Heli-Pro in Christchurch for the original flight, but now that the helicopter was several hundred miles further south, it presented an issue. We first looked at flying him down to Dunedin, but the earthquake had effectively closed Christchurch Airport. We had to find someone else – and we were under time pressure because, with the Araon docked in Dunedin, it had offloaded the rest of its cargo and was waiting to leave”. A replacement pilot was needed – and quickly.

The World Air Ops team was up to the challenge. Within hours, Hamish Mosley, the newest member of the Kamov Crew, was in a taxi en-route to the port, and later that day, the Ka 32 was

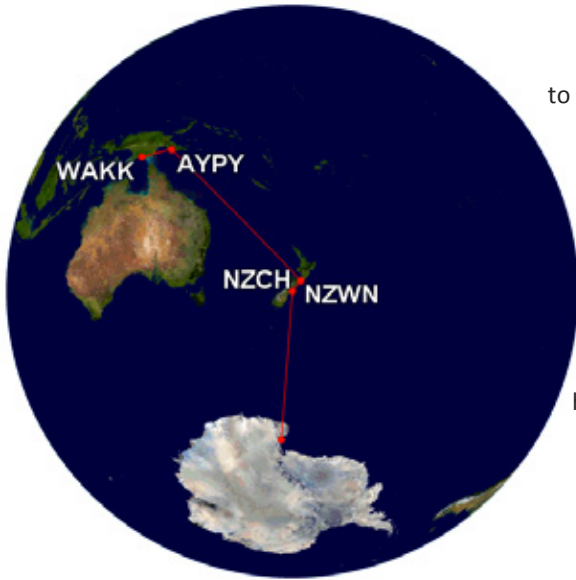
safely on the ground at Dunedin Airport. As the Araon sailed away, the next leg of the trip was already being planned.

## To Wellington

The destination was Wellington – at the bottom of the North Island, and the location from which the helicopter would sail once again – this time disassembled.

The plans had been put in place. A days flying would take the Kamov from Dunedin, a fuel stop in Christchurch, and into the port area. On the day of departure though, the weather was not co-operating. A warm front had created unfavourable conditions, and the crew were forced to put down for an unscheduled night in Ashburton, a small airfield some 40km south of the intended fuel stop at Christchurch. “Once again, plans had to be changed to accommodate”, says Philip Degare, Senior Operations Officer, “but that’s all part of it. That’s what we’re here for; in aviation, very little happens exactly as planned.”

To fit with the Port Schedule in Wellington, the crew made an early start the following day, airborne shortly after 7am enroute



The planned route of HL9470 from Antarctica to Indonesia. Image: GCMAP.com

to Wellington. Co-ordinating between flight crew, operator, and Port Authority, a successful landing was made beside the M.V. Pacific Resolution, the vessel that would take HL9470 to its next destination: Port Moresby, Papua New Guinea.

## Disassembly

Put under pressure by the delayed arrival, the Shin-Jo Logitech Co., the Korean logistics company contracted to supervise the transition from land to sea, worked quickly to remove and crate the helicopter blades, and package the helicopter for travel. The next day, the cargo was underway to PNG.



The crew pose on arrival at windy Wellington. Image: Hamish Mosley

“World Air Ops indeed: Helicopters, Trucks, and Ice Breakers”



Wellington Port, New Zealand. The Kamov's huge blades are removed prior to being loaded onto the M.V. Pacific Resolution to Papua New Guinea. Photo: Sigit H Samsu, BMS.

## The biggest test - bureaucracy

Sailing north, the Kamov left behind it's fair share of adventure in New Zealand. For World Air Ops, though, the most difficult challenge of the trip was yet to come. Mark Zee: “Our responsibility to the client means assessing the options available to them from a logistics perspective, and not just advising, but also actioning, the best choice for each step along the way. Port Moresby, PNG, can fairly be described as a difficult operating environment. To begin with, the terrain and lack of development mean that the capital is isolated from the rest of the country – there are essentially no roads out of the city. This makes local trucking transport very expensive.”

The one situation that had to be avoided was trucking the helicopter cargo from the Port to Jacksons Airport where it would fly onwards to Indonesia. “Not just the cost, but also the high crime rate in Port Moresby had to be taken into consideration. It just wasn't something we, or the operator, wanted to happen”.

Convincing the Civil Aviation Safety Authority in PNG, and the Port Authority, though, was a different matter. Mark continues, “We made a request to fly the helicopter straight out of the port. The initial answer from both, was a polite, but very firm, ‘No’. They were concerned about downwash and disrupting port operations. However, our mandate was to secure the best possible option for the client, and so simply accepting

the first response as a given is not good management” There followed several days of phone calls, discussions, maps, plans, and suggestions. Ultimately, approval was gained, and following assembly, HL9470 was airborne once again for the final leg of the trip. “Our satisfaction in knowing that we had done the best possible job for the client was tremendous. After successfully overcoming chain of difficult events in New Zealand, this was the icing on the cake”.

“Most of all though, we enjoyed working on the trip immensely. We were constantly in contact with the operator, Chang Woon Aviation, and the helicopter owners, BMS – Sigit Samsu and Vicoas Amalo; as well all the other parties involved: Heli-Pro Christchurch, Wellington Port Authority, Shin-Jo Logitech, Mainland Air, Helifix PNG, and Kershaw Aviation. It was a team effort that made for a very rewarding experience.”



A historic moment as Ka-32 HL9470 lifts off from Port Moresby Port. This was the first aircraft ever to do so, thanks to sustained efforts from World Air Ops.

Picture: Sigit H Samsu.

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