CIVIL AIR PATROL SUPPORTS NHS

Friday 10 April, 2020

The UK Civil Air Patrol is a charity best known for its fleet of light aircraft, including autogyros, which may be called upon for a multitude of roles including air observation, air search and air to ground photography in support of the ‘blue light’ emergency services and local government civil contingencies units. Now, a new role, in response to the COVID-19 pandemic, is the ‘pony express’ rapid courier service to deliver urgent medical supplies for the NHS with the minimum of delay, using aircraft with a higher cruising speed and a good radius of action.
One such aircraft in the charity’s fleet is the Van’s RV-7 which cruises at 140 knots, (160 mph) and has an un-refuelled radius of action of 300 miles, a return journey of 600 miles, with reserve fuel to deal with any contingencies. Moreover, with a crew of one, the pilot, the aircraft is fully compliant with the Government's instructions on ‘social distancing’. The charity has updated its operations manual to reflect the government’s rules and regulations with regard to COVID-19.

On Sunday, 5 April, at the height of the coronavirus lock-down, UK Civil Air Patrol pilot, Paul Stone, a former member of the Royal Navy Fleet Air Arm, responded to a request from his Local Resilience Forum in Lancashire to transport a critical piece of health equipment, a printed circuit board for a medical ventilator, from Oxford to Kingston upon Hull. The request for assistance required immediate action because the ventilator was required the next morning in Birmingham. After accepting the request for assistance and after obtaining authority to complete the sortie, Paul flew his Van’s RV-7 from his base at Blackpool to Oxford to collect the required electrical component and then flew to the grass landing strip at Beverley airfield, home of the Hull Aero Club whose former members included aviatrix, Amy Johnson. Humberside Airport was unfortunately closed. From the point where the request was made to delivering the component took just 3 hours and 30 minutes. After returning to Blackpool Paul made the comment, “*This* was an incredible piece of teamwork. Today would not have been possible without the exceptional support of colleagues at Blackpool, the enroute air traffic control services at *Manchester, Birmingham, Doncaster and Oxford and Colin Hazel at Beverley airfield who opened his airfield at such short notice*.”
With a minimum number of people required to operate a light aircraft, often just one person, the Civil Air Patrol fleet is a cost effective and efficient way of supporting the COVID-19 national emergency, complementing the role of military and other specialist aircraft that are in high demand during these unprecedented times. Paul added, *“I think this provides the Government with another solution on how to transport smaller loads around the country at pace.”*
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