

Adventist Medical Aviation

Gospel Ministries International 2013



From Funeral to Friendship

By: Clifton Brooks



I'll never forget that day... I had been out to Chenaweng just a few days earlier when the village Toshao (captain) had asked me to make a special flight, returning a body to their village from the morgue in Georgetown. Now I had a half-full cargo flight headed to a nearby village, so I called the Ministry of Amerindian Affairs to pick up the body.

The hearse was on time. Loading the body was hard. Dead flesh wrapped in trash bags doesn't move easily. I tried to be respectful while the sweat dripped from my face and arms onto the plastic. The heat of the day was typical and my shirt was soaked by the time we finished.

The husband of the deceased came along on the flight to accompany the body and to return home. He was a strong, young man and I identified with him immediately. He was composed, but I knew he was hurting. We spoke little throughout the next hour. It wasn't the first time that I lost myself in the rumbling drone of a six-foot prop and 230 horses.

There usually isn't much of interest at the Chenaweng airstrip, but that day the entire village must have been there. I overflew the crowd on landing, and they parted for me as I taxied back and shut down the engine. I looked at the crowd. It was easy to identify the closest family members and friends. They were face down, flat on the ground, beating the grass and dirt with their fists, and wailing uncontrollably. That's when the husband lost control and stumbled out of the plane, collapsing into the arms of family.

Unloading the body seemed harder than loading it. I was caught up in the grief that surrounded me. More than sweat dripped onto the plastic. Someone had hammered a few boards together to make a rough box just big enough. Four men hoisted it to their shoulders and began the slow walk towards the resting place. *Oh when, my heart cried, when will Christ return to end all this misery?*

"Thank you, Thank you!" The captain's gratitude was simple and sincere. The Toshao was so grateful for our help to his village in this time of deep hurt and need. These are the moments when bonding takes place.

As I headed on my way, I found myself hoping that this flight would help develop a closer friendship with this animistic village, opening another door for God's light to shine.

Table of Contents:

- 01 From Funeral to Friendship
- 02 Clocking in on God's Time
- 03 A Ride to Remember
- 04 More Than I Imagined
- 04 For a Little Child
- 05 A Medevac Made Possible
- 06 More Ways Than One
- 06 A Plane and a Promise
- 07 Opportunities Extended to Remote Island
- 08 Why Fly When You Could Walk?



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David and Sarah Macomber have recently joined AMA Chad. David, a pilot/EMT from Colorado, is a great asset to the growing aviation program. His wife Sarah, a registered dietician from upstate New York, is assisting at the nutrition center in Bere. Keep posted for future updates from these new team members. *For more information, please visit www.goingwherehesendsus.wordpress.com*

Clocking in on God's Time

By: Steven Wilson

Helen and I hadn't planned on being gone so long; we had packed only one change of clothes. I planned to fly my wife and a new volunteer couple from Santa Cruz to an orphanage in the town of Rurrenabaque (Rurre). The couple wanted to meet the staff that afternoon, and we planned to fly back the next morning.

As could be expected, the new volunteers wanted to see and learn more than could be done in a few hours. They asked if we could delay our return trip another day. No flights were pending for the next few days, so I agreed. My extra change of clothes could be worn another day—it wasn't the first time I had done that.

Late the next morning we received news that a Bolivian volunteer had cut his hand badly with a machete while collecting Brazil nuts in the jungle. My wife and I flew to Cobija, a town in northern Bolivia, to pick him up and bring him back to Rurre, where he could be closer to family and receive better medical care.

In the middle of our second night in Rurre, someone knocked on our door and told us that three girls had been riding on a motorcycle and had been run over by a truck. The unlighted airstrip prevented us from leaving immediately. Early the next morning, as I was performing the pre-flight inspection, I noticed a small fuel leak. Thankfully, I was able to fix it, though our departure was further delayed. Finally airborne, I flew the girls to Santa Cruz where ambulances were already waiting on the tarmac.

Quickly I ran over to file a return flight plan. While in the office, the meteorologist told me that a cold front would soon arrive with a line of thunderstorms. When finished, I walked out onto the ramp and saw the black wall of storms approaching the airport sooner than predicted.



I jumped into the plane and taxied to the fuel pumps, hoping to beat the storm. After fueling, I taxied to the end of the runway and was the last plane to take off. I arrived safely in Rurre, but the weather front settled in and caused us to spend a third night.

Many times I have seen that God is the best dispatcher. Delays and changes of plans may be frustrating at the time, but I am learning that God arranges events for the good of others. I have also been learning patience—slowly. In this instance, the multiple delays and changes of plans enabled us to quickly respond to both of these medical emergencies. You just wouldn't want to stand downwind of me after four days in the tropics with only one change of clothes.



Steven and Helen Wilson are stationed in Santa Cruz, Bolivia. For more information, please visit

www.stevenhelenmissions.blogspot.com.

A Ride to Remember

By: Gary Roberts

It was a beautiful day for flying. The sky was blue and clear without the typical dusty haze that blows down from the Sahara, sometimes reducing visibility to less than a quarter mile. My flight took me to within 50 miles of the heart of Africa, to look at a potential site to build a school. When I landed on the dirt runway at the edge of the village, the children (and adults) swarmed around like bees. Airplanes are a rare occurrence in this village, so this was the most excitement they had had in ages.

As I was trying to secure the airplane amid the 200 or more children, I noticed a young boy of about 10 years with a much defined cleft lip. Being a nurse, I knew that if the palate was not also involved, a relatively simple surgery could greatly improve this boy's appearance. When the boy saw me heading his direction, he tried to get away. Finally, I was able to convince him that I would like to help, and he came over and shyly



to let me examine the lip. Fortunately, the palate wasn't involved, so I called a surgeon friend at the hospital in my home village and asked if he would be willing to help this boy out. Of course he was willing and so I told the boy that I would take him to have surgery that afternoon. After finishing my business in the village and a bit of politics convincing the local medical authorities that the surgery would be a success, I returned to the airplane to find the boy and his uncle ready to travel.

The surgery went well, the recovery was quick, and the boy returned home ten days later. I hope that instead of being known as the boy with the cleft lip, he's now known as the first boy from his village to fly!



Gary and Wendy Roberts and their daughter are based in Bere, Chad. For more information, please visit

www.africamedicalaviation.blogspot.com.





More Than I Imagined

By: Herman Gonzalez

Mission flying is mostly about others' needs: moving the sick and injured, carrying supplies, transporting missionaries, and everything in between. However, the Lord also knows about His pilots' specific needs.

About a year ago, I was flying north from Bolivia and stopped for the night in Georgetown, Guyana, on my way to the States. On my stopover, I spent the night at another mission pilot's house. As I was eating breakfast the next morning, a lovely young lady walked through the front door. She had a very missionary-like flair and a gentle, caring attitude.

Little did I know that within a few months we would be married! It took giving up a lifestyle of worldly pleasure-seeking, a move to the mission field, and the dedication of my life as a mission pilot to find the person the Lord wanted me to marry. I am thankful for everything the Lord has provided, and it is my desire to serve Him with everything that I have. I owe it all to Him.



Herman Gonzalez writes from Santa Cruz, Bolivia where he and his wife, Saray, are making their home.

For more information, visit www.hermanbolivia.blogspot.com.

For a Little Child

By: Clifton Brooks



The call came in about mid-morning. The tipsy toddler had fallen down twelve steps, landing face-down on the concrete pad. The blood, missing front teeth, and the massive swelling on the child's head sent our health worker, Monisa, running for the HF radio. She was mostly concerned with the head trauma and the possibility of broken bones. The best option was to call for the medevac flight as no doctors, x-ray machines, or emergency care facilities were available within 200 miles.

In times like these, we praise God for the airplane. In a region with no telephones, internet, or roads, an airplane is really the only connection that Amerindians living in these remote jungle villages in Western Guyana have

to the outside world. Since most of our flights include medevac service of some kind, the plane is an imperative lifeline.

I picked up this toddler and her mother with the plane two hours after the call came in. First, we flew to the regional clinic downriver, doing in twenty minutes what would have taken all day in the boat. Once at the clinic, the toddler was quickly assessed and referred on to Georgetown. There she could receive treatment at a better equipped facility.

In a few short days, I would fly this mom and her little one back to their village. In a few short years, adult teeth would replace the gaps in her mouth. The only records of the incident would be fading memories and a God-written entry in my logbook.



Clifton Brooks writes from Paruima, Guyana, where he, his wife Cynthia, and their

children spent the last year. For more information, visit www.davisindian.org



A Medevac Made Possible

By: James Ash

It had already been a very long day. I had been up at 3:50 a.m. to do a “double” trip into the Paruima village, a 2 hour flight from Georgetown. It had been a scorcher of a day, and to add insult to injury, my rear seat had given me no end of grief when I tried to reinstall it after the first trip. By 3:30 p.m. I was hurriedly offloading my second trip’s cargo so I could get back in the air and beat the sun to the horizon.

The end of my day was mercifully in sight. That is, until someone informed me that there was a medevac patient waiting for me 15 minutes over the mountains in the village of Kaikan. I knew that I wouldn’t make the sunset deadline if I picked up the patient, but I also knew that the lady in Kaikan really needed medical attention. What could I do?

Immediately after I launched from Paruima, I called my wife on the airplane’s HF radio and asked her to call the Control Tower and request



permission to land up to 15 minutes after sunset. She called back shortly and said that I had permission. Even with this grace period, I knew that it would be close.

On the flight from Kaikan back to Georgetown, I kept the throttle pushed in and was constantly checking my GPS to make sure that I would arrive in time. About half way back, I noticed a storm looming in the distance, directly in my flight path. Usually storms aren’t

a big deal, but every mile deviated would increase my flight time. I flew straight toward the storm, hoping to skirt around the edge.

About two miles away from the storm, I noticed that it appeared to be dissipating. I watched as it literally dissolved ahead me, and I flew through the entire area without a single drop of rain on the aircraft! While I was experiencing this, the words of the hymn, “Under His Wings, I am Safely Abiding,” came to mind.

Halfway through the storm, the clouds on my left parted, revealing a triangle of sunshine and the most brilliant rainbow. I know it may sound like small coincidence, but I’m convinced that there is an infinite God who cares about little things and that He takes great delight in opening the way before us. Isn’t that what Proverbs 3:6 promises? “...And He shall direct your path.”



James and Joy Ash, along with their two daughters, are based in Georgetown, Guyana. For more information, visit

www.guyanaaviationevangelism.blogspot.com



A Plane and a Promise

By: Jeff Sutton

It had been a long day and I needed to make it back to Santa Cruz that evening. As I was preparing to leave around 5:00 p.m., I received a local call requesting that I transport a recently deceased military official to Trinidad, a city located half-way between my current location and Santa Cruz. Burials in one's hometown are a very important part of the culture, and I delayed my departure to accommodate the request.

As I loaded the body into the plane, a civil aviation inspector remarked at my courage to take a dead man by myself at night. I was able to share with him that it didn't bother me at all; I serve a God bigger than death.

I noticed the military official's family waiting beside the runway as I shot the approach into Trinidad. Still distraught over the recent death of their loved one, but grateful to have his body, they wanted to do all they could to show their gratitude.

"How much do we owe you?" they asked me several times.

"Really, you don't owe me anything. It was right on my way," I replied. The last embers of daylight faded over the horizon as I fueled up the plane for my final flight. I took off and began the climb out, looking down just as the airport lights turned off below me. I flew into the darkness for another hour and a half, the engine droning on. I thought about how glad I was to have had the opportunity to share God's victory over death and His resurrection promise.



Jeff and Fawna Sutton and their children spent several years volunteering in Bolivia and are currently building MOVE, a missionary training center, in Belize. For more information, visit www.movetraining.org and www.jeffandfawna.blogspot.com.

More Ways Than One

By: Dwayne Harris

We flew across the river that morning to a remote village in the mountains where a missionary grade-school teacher needed some help building his house. As we were finishing lunch, we heard on the radio about a local man that had malaria back in our home village. He had been treated with several different medications, none of which were working. Finally, the nurse gave him the last treatment available, regrettably known to have bad side effects. The medication seemed to work, but the man's mind went nearly crazy. He was breaking all kinds of things and threatening people with a machete. He had gone to his house and scared off his family. No one in the village dared to get close for fear he would attack them. I wasn't sure what we could do to help, but I kept thinking about it as I went back to work on the house.

A few minutes later, I realized that I needed another tool to continue the job. I decided to jump in the helicopter and quickly pick up the tool at the airbase. The crazy man lived right on the way,

so I offered to drop down close to his house and provide some distraction while others could come up behind him and subdue him.

The scenario worked perfectly! I came into a hover about 50 feet away from the man and had his full attention. I watched as the agriculture director ran up behind him and locked him in a bear hug while others removed the machete from the man's hands. Thankfully, within a few days, the medicine wore off and the man returned to normal.

Having a helicopter to work in the jungle-covered mountains of the Philippines is a never-ending blessing! You never can tell what you might use an aircraft for in the mission field!



Dwayne and Wendy Harris are currently based in Quirino, northern Luzon, Philippines. For more information, visit www.pamasmission.org



Opportunities Extended to Remote Island

By: Sean Knapp

The mayor of Mapun Island, located 150 miles southwest of our Palawan airbase, had recently invited us to fly in and meet with him. The possibility of extending our medical evacuation services to this small island excited us. We chose to go on a sunny Thursday in April.

The beautiful grass runway beneath us seemed smooth in comparison to the wave-laden waters of the Sulu Sea we had just flown over. Once on the ground, Filipino Air Force officers reached our plane before we had a chance to unbuckle our seat belts. They scolded our failure to contact them before coming, but they let us go because the mayor's personal envoy was there ready to escort us to his house.

A wonderful meal was served as we met with the mayor and many of his political supporters. When I shared our desire to help his island with medical air support, the whole room broke into

cheering. Although they would like to have a regular commuter air service (which hasn't happened since 1975), we let them know that we would only be able to provide medical emergency transport.

While in Mapun, we also visited Tawi-Tawi Adventist Academy. The principle told us that he had been praying and praying for an airplane to provide air support for the school and the island. As we shared what we could

do, tears came to his eyes and he said, "Praise the Lord!"

Everybody we met had faces glowing with joy and appreciation for the emergency air support that one little Cessna and a few missionaries had to offer. In looking back, I now realize why the Lord was opening these doors in Mapun. They are yet another channel to show the Tawi-Tawi people how much He cares for them and that He is a God that answers earnest, selfless prayers.



Sean and Pris Knapp are based on the Palawan region of the Philippines. For more information, please visit www.pamasmission.org.



Todd and Cas Anderson, along with their energetic kids, Millie and Sam, are a part of the AMA Guyana team. The Andersons spent nearly a year in the deep jungles assisting at an industrial school and have recently moved to Georgetown. Todd, a pilot/mechanic, is doing maintenance on the mission plane and Cas continues working with her kids and in public relations. For more information, please visit www.athomewithmillieandsam.blogspot.com



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Why Fly When You Could Walk?

By: DJ Knott

In the spring of 2009, I had the unique opportunity to learn, by experience, the difference between flying over and walking through a tropical rainforest. I had arrived in the deep jungles of Guyana, South America on the mission plane to attend a church dedication with David Gates. Participating in the celebration was a group of young people from a mission school, a two day walk away. They invited me to join them on their hike home and I gladly accepted.



I had a lot of time to think as my feet skidded across muddy jungle floors and crunched over sandy savannahs, following a path flattered to bear the name "trail." I distinctly remember



the small and vulnerable feeling I had as the mission plane passed overhead on its 15 min. flight above the same territory. It was a small speck in the vast sky, oblivious to my sore feet, aching shoulders, and longing stare. Is it really true, I wondered, that our appreciation of the ground we travel is inversely proportional to our speed? At my seemingly inefficient pace, however, I was changed by the miracle of an orchid, softened by the blessing of rain, and awed by the untouched beauty around me. Caught up in the acceleration of their journey, the airborne travelers missed the preparation that enabled me to see the marks of paradise on the verdant valley at the end of my quest.

Two years later, I was back in Guyana with Jodi. The need for dependable aircraft to carry on the medical, educational, and Bible work became a burden on our hearts. After many hours in prayer, an impression came to ask specifically for two Cessna 182s. Over the next 18 months, Jodi and I prayed this prayer diligently

and worked to prepare the way for its answer. By June of 2013, we realized that God had slowly been opening our eyes to the global needs of all our mission aviation projects, not just the ones in Guyana. We asked God for a new prayer that would do justice to the broader vision He was giving us, even though we had yet to see the fruit of our first prayer.

Spiritual journeys like these teach us the precious lessons of faith and trust that can be learned only at ground level. There is no easy way out, no way to short-cut the experience, no way to flag down the airplane. We must simply put one foot in front of the other, taking time to look with wonder on the beauty of God's miracles all around us, trusting Him to bring us to a paradise of conclusion in due time.

Please join us in prayer for the addition of five Cessna 182 mission aircraft to the fleet by the end of January 2014. May the journey prepare us to more fully appreciate the destination.



DJ and Jodi Knott are currently based in the United States, continuing their work with the aviation projects in South America. Please visit

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