

fieldreport

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AIM AIR



FROM THE MANAGER

Dear Friends of AIM AIR,
Some weeks ago in May I found myself racing to the airport. My flight from Washington D.C. to Amsterdam was leaving in about four hours, but I was expecting a very important call in the next few minutes. As I drove my rental car into the Dulles Airport, I found a "cell phone waiting area." Perfect. Pulling into the parking lot, I found a quiet spot and put it in park. Four minutes passed and I answered a call from KLUP, A.M.

930 radio in San Antonio for a cross-country telephone interview about a location halfway around the world—my place of ministry in East Africa.

Part way through the radio show, the host said "Matt, you are married. While you are flying around Africa, what is it like for your wife? How does she handle what you do?" It was a great question and one that often doesn't get asked. The answer came easily.

Being a missionary pilot with AIM AIR is probably one of the best jobs on the planet. Being a missionary pilot's wife is possibly one of the toughest. While we are out flying, seeing all that God is doing through the various Christian organizations we serve, our wives (and the wives of most all our staff members) are at home in a chaotic, dirty, crime ridden third-world city. They live behind walls and iron bars and under the watch of security companies.

AIM AIR has about thirty expatriate families living in East Africa. Significant violent crime events have hit about half of us, most involving armed robbers. Living here can be tough duty. While we are out "saving the world," many of our wives spend the majority of their time within gated compounds, day in and day out, raising children, often alone several nights each week.

The interview ended and a few hours later I was on my way home – home to my wife and children who had remained in Nairobi. Yes, my wife has a difficult job. However, she understands that where she lives and how she lives is for a cause greater than all others. Our wives sacrifice because they understand they are part of the AIM AIR team, bringing the Gospel and love of Jesus Christ to some of the most needy people in the world.

Our spouses often see their role as just one among many different kinds of support to the specific calling of missionary aviation. Truth is, they are the foundation.

Matt Olson

The Volunteers

by Mike DeLorenzo

Every year about this time, AIM AIR picks up the pace to accommodate the flight requests of numerous summer “mission teams.” It is a busy, and blessed time.



From the four corners of the globe to the mysterious reaches of East and Central Africa... Professionals, students, moms, and every variety of church lay-people pack their bags and brave the vaccinations. They come to Africa on a mission. For some it is a repeat journey, but for most it is the very first time. Their mission is often well planned, but what lies ahead is pretty much unknown. Maybe that's part of what draws them here each summer, the teams of volunteers, coming to give something of themselves to a land they know very little about. The uncertainty, the apprehension, and lack of control are part of the package. But, even at the onset, there is a suspicion that what a person takes away from two weeks in Africa will be much more than what he leaves behind.

If there is any doubt about what to leave behind, however, the general consensus is... A LOT. Medical teams bring hundreds of pounds of medicines. Work teams carry enough tools to start a small ACE hardware out in the bush. If they are working with kids, then eighteen suitcases of candy should suffice. In addition, it's apparently customary to bring stuff for the missionaries on location. Myself, having been one of those missionary hosts who appreciates a small blessing from WalMart, I have no particular objection to twelve pounds of OREO cookies. (Neither do my kids.)

These overstuffed suitcases, humorous at first sight, are simply manifestations of overflowing hearts, and at that, I can only smile. Packed in and around all the stuff team-members bring for their work are just a few personal belongings, which they will probably leave behind as well. And of course, enough bug repellent to last a year.

At some point in time, all of the planning and packing comes to a juncture on the ramp at Wilson Airport in Nairobi – as the team circles around the plane for a group photo, and the bags (minus the three that British Airways sent to Australia) are weighed. The team will gather here bewildered and jet-lagged, so far from home, but so excited for what's ahead. It's a mix of joy, fatigue, and some small concern that the pilot for this harrowing flight into the African bush looks like he's sixteen and just got his pilot's license yesterday.

As I meet them at the plane, the tool of my ministry, I introduce them to the idea of a pilot who is really a missionary. We work together to get all the baggage aboard while I entertain questions. In the process I find out that they are from a church in west Texas, or are students from different schools across the country brought together for this trip. I discover that some of them are still a little apprehensive, and I try putting their fears to rest with a confident word and a pre-flight prayer. The copilot seat is then offered up, as a bonus of sorts, to someone in the group who has always wanted to learn to fly, or to the one most unsettled about small airplanes perhaps. The front-seater gets a photo at the controls, a headset, and a pilot's perspective on missions in Africa.

I am optimistic for these new acquaintances and kindred hearts because I know some things that they do not yet know. For instance, I know that the plane will indeed pick them up in two weeks from the little unreachable corner of Kenya or Sudan that we drop them off at. And I know that they will most likely come back a different person. They will be appalled, and amazed at what they see there. They will lose some sleep under a mosquito net, imagining every manner of crawling thing in God's creation. They will sit with lifelong missionaries and discover that they are not all that different from themselves. They will come to love the African people there, and the children will especially capture their hearts. Some will cry at the reality of the world these children have to grow up in – for the first time in their lives having a picture of “what it means” – What it means to be in need, what it means to suffer, what it means to fear. They will take a moment sometime in those weeks to examine their own lives and their own faith. And they will inevitably fall short.

After fourteen days or so, the airplane will arrive overhead a mixed blessing. For it is the sound of relief... the sound of a good meal, a hot shower, and a decent night's rest. But it is also the signal that this is goodbye. In sweat and time and love they have given everything they had to give. And now they know for sure that they could never give enough.

The flight back to the city is always different from the one out. My passengers are looking tired. Most are quiet; gazing out the windows, writing in a journal, or fast asleep. One is up front with me on the headsets again. I query him about the trip and am encouraged. And then I hear him say it – words I have heard so many times, in so many ways... “I come away with so much more than I gave.” I smile and nod and think, “I know what you mean.”

Some say that short-term missionaries really don't make much of a difference. That these “weekend warriors” of foreign missions spend massive amounts of money on a minimal return for the investment. I guess that some people have different ways of measuring a return, because I see something else from the left seat of the airplane. From here I see God working a compounding miracle. In the short-term teams He is bringing more hands to the task and more support to the missionaries on the ground, all the while secretly engaging in one of the most effective recruitment schemes ever known. Because nobody goes home unchanged... and some come back to Africa to stay.