

# An Aviator in Africa

Flying for a mission offers variety, challenge, and joy



Shopping for supplies, organizing mail and cash, practicing short-notice hospitality, and unloading containers of supplies from the U.S... Are these normal activities for a pilot? Yes! In Africa.

I fly in Banso, the mountainous Northwest Province of Cameroon. Fellow pilot Eric Wolf and I operate one Helio Courier airplane and one R44 helicopter. We serve translators who work in about 30 of the 60 languages in this region. In some of these areas, trekking is the only alternative to aviation.

Serving as a mission pilot, in contrast to a secular one, involves an incredible variety of tasks. One of the most significant in terms of time is our routine maintenance—of airplane, hangar, shop equipment, and parts inventory, plus occasional major maintenance, such as engine changes.

While “on the road” we often oversee grass cutting, and erosion and termite control on runways. Thankfully, our runways are much shorter than many U.S. ones, due



to the capabilities of our aircraft for short take-off and landing. Since our aviation program in Northwest Cameroon is still fairly new, we spend a considerable amount of time working to obtain government approval for new runways and helping with their actual construction.

Flying into these remote airstrips requires vigilance, not only watching for people, but for animals and other unexpected objects. These grassy strips sometimes become soccer fields with goals!

A major aspect of flying in Cameroon is the isolation. Not only do we fly single-pilot, but it’s not

unusual to fly an hour without seeing a suitable landing site or speaking to someone on the radio.

Besides assisting translators, we also work in partnership with the Cameroon Baptist Convention, which operates a number of missionary hospitals and clinics. Our medevac flights bring critically ill patients to the hospitals. Also, doctors, lab technicians, and pharmacists make regular, quick visits to surrounding village clinics via our aircraft.

One of the greatest privileges of our work is flying people in for a Bible dedication. Last year I witnessed the celebration of the Mofu-Gudur New Testament (see *Rev. 7*, summer 2008). I was touched as I listened to the first public reading of God's Word in that language, while hundreds of people followed along in their own copies of the Scriptures.

Alongside my work, I have enjoyed discipling Fiacre Bugingo, a Rwandan refugee. He came to

know the Lord through our study of God's Word and has continued to grow spiritually. After completing a one-year Bible study by correspondence, he is now attending a local evangelical seminary. He hopes to get Rwandan Bible study materials so he can start ministering to fellow Rwandans here in Cameroon.

Serving God through aviation was a natural fit for me. I was first introduced to mission aviation by my dad, also a mission pilot. He took me on my first flight in the Philippines when I was three days old. God's clear call to missions came while in college, and I completed my flight and maintenance training at Moody Aviation, then in Elizabethton, Tennessee, which specializes in training mission aviators.

Adapting to flying in Africa has required a considerable transition. There are certainly challenges and inconveniences here compared to flying in the U.S., but I find great joy in being where God has called me and count it a significant privilege to be involved in Bible translation. ♦

—*Rob Peterson*

*Rob Peterson has served as a pilot in Cameroon since 2006.*



From top: Rob working on runway at Lus; a "medical safari"—doctors and nurses ready to fly to a clinic; it's time for an engine change on the Cessna 206; Rob and Fiacre, celebrating Fiacre's baptism

