

## What is a Missionary Pilot

*Story by Mike DeLorenzo from Africa Inland Mission*

It's hot, it's tiring, it's a foreign landscape unfolding before you at a hundred and fifty miles per hour. It's noise and vibration, a heavy load and an aching back from loading it. It's dusty and turbulent. It's wrinkled maps and a bag lunch under the seat, a missionary family asleep in the back, exhausted but tranquilized by the cool air at ten thousand feet. It's realizing that you carry these precious servants of God in your airplane, that you are a lifeline to them, spanning the void between their place of calling and the rest of civilization.

It's a tiny airstrip carved out of the open Savannah, Zebra grazing nonchalantly on your runway, a Land Rover in the distance making it's way to this place where the sky touches earth, the missionaries anticipating your landing, waiting and waving as you taxi in. It's being expected and appreciated. It's being the answer to a prayer, the bearer of mail and good news, or the bringer of a life saving drug or a needed load of supplies. It's witnessing a tearful reunion of parents with their kids who reside at a boarding school some 400 miles away. It's a tearful good-bye, a worried prayer over a sick and delusional African friend needing a hospital and this ambulance with wings.

It's about being a professional in the pilot's seat, imposing Western standards of time and safety on another culture. It's about being a servant to the "least of these," discarding the cultural stereotype of machoism often associated with flying. It's pulling the gold bars off your shoulders and spending some time on your knees, under a truck, in a ditch, or at the side of a filthy child. It's about flying and fixing airplanes, mastering them and making them useful tools. And it's about opening your heart to things beyond your control - being, at times, afraid or discouraged. It is tedious work, sharing in the hardships of the missionaries who make your job look easy. It's realizing that you have a part in their triumphs too, seeing the glory of God where you might least expect it.

It's all the adventure of Africa, all the thrills of flying, all the frustration of the third world, all the camaraderie of a military platoon, all the grace of the Church, and all the joy of serving. It's about being a missionary... who happens to be a pilot or mechanic. It's about being a servant to the servants of a people of no reputation. It's a great job.