

Gero's Bush Diary #2

Detours to Nairobi

Yesterday, after a long flying day, starting in Lokj(choggio), I stayed overnight in Juba, our sub-base in Southern Sudan. Today I shall fly my colleagues to Nairobi, but first, another flight inside Sudan.

Our flying schedule changes usually more frequently than my shirt. After moving to Lokj a few days ago, there was no time yet to getting settled; now again, several days away from home.

The route today is Juba-Walgak-Akobo-Juba, and then to our fellowship day in Nairobi, together with our Juba and Lokj staff.

7:00 Check-In at our town office. Even 7:30, 6 passengers don't show up, so we leave to the airport without them. Yesterday, the fuel truck was empty, so he promised us to be the first ones this morning.

8:30 5 of the missing passengers show up right at the airplane without passing security control. They refuse to go back to the terminal for that. Instead, they want to take a different 6th person along. But our manifest had been delivered and stamped yesterday evening, no changes possible. After a short discussion, they accept it, we move 30 kg of cargo back for weight & balance reasons, and take off only 1 h delayed. Some headwind delays us further during the first flight.

10:54 Touch down in Walgak, which has recently been extended. Many people are standing around 1000 food bags of the WFP (world food program of the UN); today it is this village's turn.

I drop 5 passengers. The villagers want some "sick" people to board instead, but I have to pick up more booked passengers later. So I have to calculate - and to discuss! The hope for a ride in this magic silver bird lets a lot of people suddenly be "sick". Therefore I usually ask for some kind of "fare", which doesn't even come close to cover the costs. In case of an honestly sick person, the villagers are usually willing to collect the "fare".

After telling them the "fare", only 1 sick person is left. Another villager gives me at least 40% of my "fare", and I strap him in.

11:38 We continue with 3 passengers and 250 of food items for Akobo.

In Akobo, I expect 6 passengers, but there are 7 people! Luckily, one is a child who can sit between 2 adults on the rear bench (there are 3 seat belts, but the weight limit restricts usually to 2 small adults).

12:30 Safety announcements, start-up, back to Juba. As expected, now we have a nice tailwind and land 7 minutes early at 13:48.

My passengers have to wait for our MAF Landcruiser to be brought to the terminal, as the driver has to deal with some other difficulties: for our following flight to Nairobi, our Sudanese staff need to apply for leaving the country in writing! It reminds me a bit in the prison-like life in former GDR (German "Democratic" Republic), before the wall came down.

I try to use my waiting time with refueling, loading, and installing some extra seat rows. On this flight, we will have the luxury of Business Class legroom, as there are less than usual seats, and no freight.



Shade's always welcome; left side is the runway

1 h later, still nobody in sight. It is already too late for me to do the Nairobi flight, as we will come into the night; so a colleague will have to take over in Lokj (I am not yet allowed for night flights in MAF).

With open doors and some wind, it is comfortable on the rear bench, even with 97°F. I am writing my diary.

15:30 No sign of my colleagues. Now it is getting tight: Nairobi-Wilson City airport closes at 20:30 sharp, after that, we would have to go to the far away Jomo-Kenyatta airport, and our cars are at Wilson.

15:50 We are complete! I redo my seating arrangement due to a crying child who wants to sit next to his father (but he should have been the Copilot), and 16:03 we start rolling.

17:22 Landing in Lokj. Now we have to hurry with immigration paperwork, visa, and some more seats are to be installed.

My colleague is about to start-up, as I rush to the plane with the last passengers. Doors closed, he starts up, I do the safety announcements during our taxiing to the runway; 17:55 airborne.

The rear bench is now mine, where I enjoy MP3 worship through my noise canceling headsets: First Class for the humble.

From this position, I can see the wing spoilers are a bit offset. I take some pictures as evidence for our engineering director in Nairobi.

According to GPS, arrival NBI-Wilson 20:35. That is too late.

45 minutes after departure, the sun has set. Africa is pretty dark then, even on the ground.

From about 1/2 way to Nairobi, we are getting some nice tailwind, and land in NBI-Wilson 20:25!

Short stop at the terminal, then we continue to the MAF hangar. Plane unloaded & locked, paperwork left in the office, jump in the cars.

Today would be Men's evening, but my day was long enough, and Bono is waiting in my hosts' garden (he will move to Lokj next week).

Relaxing with an ice cold Bitter Lemon, my hosts are arriving soon (our finance manager and his wife, my former neighbors).

After a small talk I fall into my bed and note:

A man plans his course, but the LORD determines his steps!

