

## Fresh Air Matters... with Capt. Yaw

John le Carre, the spy-novelist, once wrote that 'A desk is a dangerous place from which to view the world.', and I agree. I suffer from a lot of 'disorders' apart from not being good at sitting down and waiting; I classify myself as being almost 'citi-phobic and desk-phobic' – that is I really don't like cities (nor does John le Carre) and I don't like (especially sitting at) desks. I work hard to avoid them; in fact, I don't actually have a desk!

Many pilots find themselves doing more and more paperwork or being 'promoted' to a desk job. I do not want to fly a desk – leave me in my cockpit where I can see the big picture!

When John le Carre wrote the quip quoted above, I do not know whether he had my perspective of looking at the world from a 'higher plane'. Now, do not get confused, when we talk about flying in the cockpit, as opposed to flying the desk, there are two basic types of flying: VFR and IFR.

VFR is 'Visual Flight Rules' and 'IFR is Instrument Flight Rules'. In basic terms, the VFR pilot looks out of the window and remains in sight of the ground; and the IFR pilot looks at the instrument panel and can fly above the clouds. Airliners principally fly IFR; 'real aviators' prefer to fly VFR.

I avoid IFR flying – but I *love* VFR. You cannot imagine how it changes your perspective of towns, villages, fisherman, farmers and the rest when you see them from about two thousand feet, as you fly from one small aerodrome to another. Ghana is full of colour and the sight from the air is always changing. A few weeks ago, the nursery beds for the rice fields were almost luminescent green, inset on the brown, puddle splattered fields waiting for their turn to be 'painted'. Then the ladies collected the green young rice 'paint' and worked in their zig-zaggy organised and co-ordinated, yet somehow haphazard line, to dilute the green into the brown.

They bob along and then look up and wave to the barely-visible people in the cockpit overhead, on the off-chance they may just be observing them. I love to then put my hand out of the window and wave a really big aerial 'ayekoo' in order to see the animation of a dozen people waving and jumping with joy as they 'yayee' back. Now the fields are bright, full of the promise of a harvest to keep the farmers' children and grandchildren in school – perhaps to enter a career in aviation. I am glad that the young people of Ghana are keen to get an education because they make Flying VFR during term-time extra-special. I am sure that I have unintentionally disrupted many a class, and stimulated many a discussion in schools across rural Ghana.

Remember, I don't like cities, so I do all that I can to route the most rural and visually-satisfying routes. If the youngsters are in school, especially in the more rural areas, and they hear the gentle buzz of an engine within a five kilometre radius of their seat of learning, they can empty their classrooms quicker than I can eat a bar of chocolate – and that is fast! It happens in stages... First a curious little face appears at a door or window - especially in the unglazed schools that grace our many villages. Then a small fistful of fingers, with the index finger extended as if to make it leave the body, is ejected at the end of an arm, throwing an imaginary line at the aircraft above. No doubt an exchange occurs under the roof and out of sight of the aviators above – probably something like 'LOOK!' from

the child, 'WHERE?' from the class mates and 'SIT DOWN' from the teacher, followed by a mass exodus and a teacher shouting 'COME BACK'. The next phase is precious... Dressed in their uniforms, all the efforts of the parents and guardians paraded below in a *whoosh* of colours and energy; washed, pressed and there on their young wards backs - proud, harmonised and yet as individual as snowflakes, the pride of the community sprawl into the school yard and jump up and down with joy, waving and trying to follow, for just a few meters, the aerial perambulation that has punctuated their day.

Behind them follows the (somewhat exasperated) Educator, terse words upon their lips, imagining that the children are mistaking a soaring vulture for a high-up airliner. They too see the small aircraft and, without fail, catch the epidemic of pointing, waving and chasing. If the teachers can be seen to encourage actively I may make a turn or two and 'waggle' the wings to make the plane wave back to the spectators below.

The rest of the day (and perhaps some of the evening,) at the schools and in homes may be spent talking about aircraft, flying, engineering, engines and more. A random gift of inspiration given to a community that is far from ready access to such sights and sounds.

Whether I see the random palette of colours of a tro-tro station; the clean well-swept areas between the homes in remote hamlet-sized encampments composed entirely of thatched 'swish' houses; the docile meandering rope of a herd of cows following their symbolic Fulani herdsman, hands draped over the stick across his neck; a road under construction looking so fresh and inviting to land on should an emergency occur... I know that viewing the world from the VFR cockpit is special.

Due to the VFR-place I am privileged to view Ghana from, my eyes are opened to the real energy, hardworking and dedicated rural dwellers in communities that may only see a motorised vehicle a few times a year, if at all. I see their maize growing in remote, hard-to-reach and hard-to-farm areas, and I see their children walking to school. I wonder about their health care, but know that all countries have some people who are further from services than others.

Each week I see and feel, in a very real way, an energy that is absent from cities – but I am blessed, I can fly. I also know that those warm-smile adorned folks have every right, desire and reason to live in their location; we need them there growing cassava, pepper, corn and more to feed the hungry non-producers in the cities – those who may never see the producers, nor give them a thought – but I believe that they have something special that can never be found in a city or behind a desk.

As we go into the week, try to get above the day-to-day hustle and bustle, and look at the world from a different place – a place where we can see the big picture, if we just take our eyes off our IFR-style lives of computer screens and television, and take in the plethora of visual delights and social opportunities that can only be found if you are 'VFR' and remain in sight of the ground!

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