

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

I was recently invited to attend an event related to Ghana's outstanding and selfless response to the tragedy in Haiti. The event was put together at short notice, because the earthquake itself gave no great notice of its intentions, magnitude or effect. The attendance of people from a wide cross-section of our society – Ghanaian, Haitian and many other nationalities brought home the widespread impact this event has had, and will have for many years to come.

One of the speakers was KSM. Although jokes were sparse during his 'sermon', he spoke clearly and eloquently with the tones and combinations of personal and corporate emotions. He also made a reference to a nugget of wisdom from his youth. This nugget has weaselled its way deep into my mind and germinated a host of new outlooks. The words of apparent wisdom are simple, but potent: *'In order to get the right answers, we need to ask the right questions.'*

It was pointed out to the multi-cultural ensemble that it is not appropriate to ask, 'Why did God allow this to happen?' It is simply the wrong question. The right question is, 'What can I do to make this situation better?'. Which question will yield the most results...?

This catastrophic event has woken up many philanthropists, good Samaritans, etc., and they have responded with actions. More power to their collective elbows for being proactive, instead of hanging their heads and shaking them as they furrow their brows saying, 'Why, oh why?'. In situations like this, it is the rapid response to needs that saves lives and resources, positioning all for a recovery with less turmoil than with inaction and delays. In today's world, we must all be aware that the rapid response to support the folk in need, at the point of need, is in part the work of the aviation enablers.

As in war-time, when 'air-superiority' is the key, in times of need and distress, aviation is essential to successfully resolving issues in a timely, effective and appropriate manner – and to saving lives. The ability to respond without delay, establish accurately the situation, and provide appropriate solutions, is synonymous with air-borne activities.

Airliners move the rescue teams in; relief flights are carried out by the armed forces, transport companies, private aircraft, helicopters, etc; and the flocks of metal birds arrive in record time to rescue, repair, heal, save, rebuild and support. Whether in Haiti or elsewhere, having aircraft of a variety of shapes, sizes and types within rapid-response range is essential to the reduction of negative impact from cataclysms.

The workhorse for the recent events in the news has been the C17 Globemaster. There are photos of the cargo area packed with refugees; a sight that makes even the hardest heart soften. But what about the private aircraft 'on loan' to the cause? Sheiks in the emirates have responded with jets, and private aircraft-owners with small personal means are out there with two- and four-seat machines – working together to reduce the impact of the blow that nature has unleashed upon those who cannot afford such equipment themselves.

Ghana's apparent acquisition of four C27J aircraft seems more appropriate when we consider the lack of aircraft in our region that can respond in the manner of the C27J. It is a 'baby' Globemaster, capable of off-airport operations, Short Take-Off and Landing (STOL), and able to be used in a variety of roles related to disaster relief. Questions were raised over 'can we afford this equipment' in the

Press a few months ago. Today, in the wake of the calamity affecting our distant relatives on an island in the Caribbean, we should be glad that we consider equipping ourselves appropriately. We are a long way from the big-relief-birds such as the Globemaster and Hercules which play a crucial role in emergencies, and the very presence of suitable aircraft such as the C27J could make all the difference for so many of the people in our Region, should disaster strike. As should the activity of air-ambulances and flying-doctor planes being built in Ghana.

Disaster will strike. That is a simple fact that we all too often ignore. There is no point in being ostriches and planting our heads in the sand, saying 'we are a blessed nation and nothing will happen here'. It is a fact that all nations will face a disaster. This is about asking the right questions. What will we do when we have the next earthquake, flood, famine, plague, etc? They will happen, and they will happen here; it is just a question of when. Never assume that we are immune. As I was once told, 'those who assume only make an ASS out of U and ME'.

This sounds extreme; but planning for 'worst-case scenarios', and asking the right questions, form the basis of good flying. Student pilots from very early on are trained to consider 'what to do when things go wrong'. The right question to ask is, 'Where will I land if I need to make an emergency landing now?', and not so much 'Why is the earth getting closer to me?'. We drill to always consider the possible (albeit extreme) calamities that could befall the machine – and how to respond, what to do, etc...

Basically, when you are learning to fly, the idea of the engine stopping is one that would focus the mind more than most others. We practise for the event - during training, after qualifying, and we consider it constantly as we travel. It would be a foolish pilot who considered him/herself so blessed that he/she need not worry about a problem in flight. Likewise, we would be foolish in our homes not to consider how we would deal with fire, earthquakes, famine, flood, etc from time-to-time.

When you plan for a disaster, you are more able to deal with it, should it come along. How many of our communities have a community safety plan, assembly points, etc? Do we have them for our offices? I once asked in an office if they had done a fire drill recently; the answer was 'that is a good idea' – they have still not done one.

Fire Drills, evacuation plans, simulated emergencies – at personal, corporate and community level - are probably more important on a day-to-day basis than the big, countrywide things. You are more likely to have to deal with a fire yourself, send a friend to hospital, dress a wound, administer care to a snake-bite victim, or handle an incident in your car, than there be an earthquake. However, such plans become part of a national response – your local plan to tackle an evacuation of the office becomes a part of a national response in times of major turmoil.

Like the pilot plans for the 'highly unlikely' in the plane, perhaps we should focus on making sure that we have our personal plans and systems in place, in order to ensure that we are ready to respond on a micro-, macro- and mega-level when disaster strikes.... because it surely will... one day.