

Gero's Bush Diary #3

Duty Time at the Limit

As pilot, I am allowed to be planned for an 11-h duty day max. So I got sensitive when I heard from our office, that the planned duty time for the coming day would be 10 h 59 min.

Fortunately, in order to avoid unnecessary stress, I may fly up to 12 h, once the duty is commenced, but I would have to write a report to our Operations Manager.

That means, even some cows, leaving the airstrip too late, could cause this "paper zone" to be entered...

This very Saturday, I shall fly an MSF team (doctors without borders) to Pagil for a meeting, and after some other flights in between, I shall pick them up again.

6:41 Get up. Due to the critical duty time, I don't mind that I only arrive at the airport, after my passengers have already passed customs & immigration. This means no delay from that side. I am checking my plane, tell my "PAX" about the critical planning and ask for cooperation - time wise.

7:27 Rolling, off to Pieri.

9:18 Touch down in Pieri without cow delay. One more passenger, and some steel frames for latrines are to be loaded. They only fit into the cabin, so I am extra diligent with tie-down, to avoid accidents.

9:55 Take-Off towards Pagil, a 27 minutes flight. Again, no cow delay on landing.

Disembarking all passengers, the latrines continue to Lankjen. After only 11 minutes, in the air again.

10:59 Landing in Lankjen. Nils, a friendly German carpenter, welcomes me beneath dozens of villagers. He is helping out at that MSF station for some months. So many nice people here.

While we unload the steel frames - carefully, in order to not destroy the cabin lining - Nils cares for refueling from a 200 l drum.

A woman waits here already; she has an abscess at her neck, which can only be "operated" in Nasir, another MSF station close by. But don't expect a sterile OP theatre there...

I feel sorry for this black lady: she is literally covered in flies, who now take a free ride with my plane.

In the air again, I look back to my patient and her "sister" accompanying her; they look a bit insecure, as they have never ever flown before.

34 minutes later, we land in Nasir, and my passengers disembark, obviously relieved. Unfortunately, some of the flies remain and annoy me for the rest of the day.

Even in Nasir, you can see remains of years of civil war: an overgrown aircraft wreck marks the beginning of the runway, right at the edge of the river banks. Amongst others, a high minister lost his life.



African refueling: 1 holds the hose, 1 pumps, 4 know better

After another comfortably short ground time of 14 minutes (now, I wouldn't even mind a cow), I am on my way back to Pagil, to pick up my meeting friends.

12:59 Landing in Pagil. The airstrip is very short (550 m), undulated (on a previous landing, I had lost oil from my nose wheel strut) and unusable in the rainy season (black cotton soil turns into a very tough mud). Today, I only need 1/2 the length for landing, and even my oil stays inside.

My passengers are in time, as promised (which is not self-evident at all), but we have to load some unplanned cargo. Despite the short length, I am still in the limit weight-wise (max take off weight could be up to 3300 kg).

13:24 Take-Off to Juba.

14:55 I have my landing clearance, but just before touch down I notice a fire truck driving down the other end of the (fortunately very long) runway. I decide to still land, and the fire truck is off the runway again. But I complain with the tower crew.

The tower asks me to write a report about the incident. I will do it next week and send it to our Juba staff for delivery.

In Juba, it can take a bit of ground time, as it is rather busy there. Especially when you have to refuel. I am lucky, and the fuel truck (pre-informed by our Juba staff about my landing time) is parking in front of my plane while I shut the engine down.

Even my passengers, I don't have to accompany to the terminal, as their own car was allowed to the apron. They are gone within minutes.

15:25 After unbelievably short 29 minutes, I am on my way home.

16:41 Landing in Lokichoggio, "The best place to be". Time enough to empty the cockpit; I am off on Monday, and a colleague will fly my plane. In the MAF office, I enjoy an ice-cold Bitter Lemon.

Long before 18:00 I am at home and take Bono along while running the dry river bed.

A shower will prepare me for our Ethiopian evening with my Swedish Neighbors.

After much too much food and a phone call to Europe, I fall into my bed and note:

7h 8 min flying time, 9,9h duty time, 7 landings. Everything in the limit.

Nice sometimes, to have no delays ...

Once upon a time, there was an airplane...

