

Fundamental Missionary Aviation in Alaska 2008

A personal report and challenge to Missionary Aviation Majors at BJU

by Brett Zukowski

Getting Started

For the previous 5 summers my family and I have had the privilege of leading the BJU Alaska Mission Team in the latter six weeks of the summer, typically consisting of 10 college students and my family of five. This summer the Lord opened an additional ministry opportunity for my family and me to serve with Mission Air Care (MAC) for the six weeks prior to the arrival of the BJU Alaska Mission Team, so we began deputation for this short term mission work. MAC is a fundamental church planting support services organization founded and directed by Earl Malpass. The goal of MAC is to provide a lifeline of logistical support to village church planting efforts via the tool of missionary aviation. MAC serves at least 15 missionary families who are planting and/or maintaining church planting activities in the Alaskan Bush. This ultimately involves flying various folks and cargo in and out of the bush: the missionary families themselves; their work teams, mission teams; Native teens to and from camp weeks; those on survey mission trips; visiting pastors; expediting goods into the village pastor; and providing assistance in the maintenance of small aircraft used by aviating missionary church planters so as to keep these tools in airworthy condition. MAC also provides a pulpit supply ministry on a limited basis and maintains a Piper Navajo equipped for Instrument Flight Rules (IFR) operations (capable of operations in poor weather).

For me, the summer ministry began with Navajo specific simulator training in May. Earl and I spent a week at Recurrent Flight Training (RTC) in Savoy, IL. This involved 12 hours of simulator training covering instrument operations with an emphasis on the use GPS/WAAS navigation equipment and emergency procedures as well as 18 hours of Navajo systems training. After arrival at Fairbanks I had 1.5 hours of flight training with a local Navajo pilot and flew a 4 hour flight with Earl to Selawik which served as Initial Operating Experience (IOE) with the MAC Navajo. There are some operational differences between Alaska and the lower 48 and this training plan proved profitable. Pilots, you never have flown a “cruise” clearance in the lower 48? It is extremely useful in parts of Alaska!

Serving with Mission Air Care

Over the next 6 weeks I flew about 10 hours including trips to Selawik and McGrath to return missionary families to those locations. Leaving McGrath I experienced a rough running left engine and was able to get it running smoothly on climb-out and thus continued the flight to Fairbanks for repairs. During the next 3 weeks myself, Earl, and local Navajo experts found a number of contributing factors to account for the left engine roughness. While the aircraft was down for maintenance we also repaired a number of other items found while troubleshooting the main problem. The last three weeks of the six was consumed by aircraft maintenance activities. In fact when my family and I left Fairbanks to join the college students of the BJU Alaska Mission Team in Sterling the Navajo still needed a cylinder replaced due to a bad exhaust valve and guide.

Combining MAC with Mission Team

The combination of the MAC ministry and the BJU Alaska Mission Team turned out to be a match made in, well, heaven of course! I was expecting 6 weeks with MAC in Fairbanks and then 6 weeks as in previous years with the BJU Alaska Mission Team. The Lord had a better plan. It turned out that we were able to have nearly a 12 week ministry with MAC and a normal six week ministry with the BJU Team as well! My family and I arrived about half way through the training week of Higher Ground Baptist Bible Camp and settled in. For the next week I spoke at HGBBC senior high camp and served with the team including canvassing and preaching at Calvary Baptist church of Ninilchik. Now it was time for the “Camp on Wings” ministry to start in Selawik with approximately half of the team.

Re-enter missionary aviation. Earl flew from Fairbanks to Soldotna and picked us all up. From there we all flew to Selawik where I was to be dropped off with the team. But there were nearby Point Hope teens needing to get to

Fairbanks for their camp week. So, Earl waited out bad Point Hope weather by sleeping in Selawik. Then, on Sunday, while the team helped Pastor Compton in the AM service, Earl and I flew to Kotzebue for fuel, then on to Point Hope to get the teens, back to Kotzebue for more fuel, and then to Selawik to get me inserted into the evening service for preaching (and in place to preach 5 nights of messages at the “Camp on Wings” ministry in Selawik). Earl then took the Point Hope teens to Fairbanks for their camp week. The neat thing was that because of the efficiency of keeping the airplane full of folks who were all contributing to fuel costs on all legs of the trip we were able to meet team budget in the face of rising full costs and have a higher margin of safety with 2 pilots on most of the legs! As well, I was getting no-cost Alaska familiarization flight training which would be very helpful later. As well, Earl had the benefit of an instructor-pilot on board so that he could maintain proficiency in basic flight procedures while enroute to get the next load of passengers. Meanwhile the BJU Alaska Mission Team (Selawik contingent) spent time visiting with the Compton family learning about village life and culture. Moreover, Robbie May (team member) preached the AM service for Pastor Compton. To me, this amounted to a 6 way win-win situation. God had provided a circumstance that met multiple needs of multiple folks all in a 24 hour period which covered 1600 miles of travel for less than the cost of airline travel (*even if it had been available*)!

More efficiency for MAC, BJU, and Point Hope Teens

On the Saturday after the “Camp on Wings” ministry Earl brought six Inupiaq teens back with him from their camp week near Fairbanks enroute to Point Hope, Alaska, 90+ minutes northwest of Selawik on the Arctic Ocean. Alaska can be as unforgiving as it is beautiful and two pilots can create a greater margin of safety in bad weather. The plan was to pick me up at Selawik while the BJU team finished packing. I would help Earl get the Point Hope teens back to their home in deteriorating weather conditions by functioning as co-pilot (standard operating practice at airlines).

After I hopped aboard the Navajo in Selawik we flew with the teens to Kotzebue to get fuel. Fuel planning in Alaska is a degree more critical than in the lower 48 as aviation fuel is not available but in a few select villages. Becoming stranded on a remote airstrip after a precautionary landing waiting to be found and/or having fuel delivered by another aircraft is a very real possibility in Alaska. You must get fuel at every opportunity. After Kotzebue, the flight was completed to Point Hope. GPS (Global Positioning System) instrument approaches were flown at each location as the rain and fog continued to worsen to a ragged 500 foot ceiling and 2 miles visibility. Once again the Lord made the weather manageable. Point Hope is notorious for a nasty combination of *simultaneous* wind, fog, rain, and ice that makes many flights – or transportation of any kind – impossible. In fact, in Point Hope the runway ends at the beach on either end as the airport is on a narrow peninsula that juts out into the Arctic Ocean and during the colder portions of the year the wind will push ice flows up onto the beach at the runway ends creating seasonal obstacles for pilots of up to 75 feet!

After dropping the Point Hope teens off with their pastor and making a quick exit away from the Arctic Ocean airport Earl and I made the return IFR (Instrument Flight Rules) flight via Kotzebue for more fuel and then picked up the BJU team at Selawik. Headwinds enroute back to Fairbanks created the need for a precautionary diversion to Galena for fuel and then finally on to Fairbanks. Local forest fires created very poor visibility aloft on this leg of the flight. I flew these last to legs so Earl could get a little rest in preparation for a busy day at MAC. From Fairbanks Earl drove home to attend to MAC priorities in North, Pole, AK, and I flew the Navajo and team past Denali and Anchorage to a landing at Soldotna on the Kenai Peninsula near Higher Ground Baptist Bible Camp (HGBBC). The “Camp on Wings” team now had rejoined the rest of the team at HGBBC where they would all again serve as camp counselors or staff the following week. This flight crew arrangement also allowed me to stage the aircraft near camp and gain significant advantages for both MAC and the BJU Mission Team. The next interior ministry week (Fort Yukon) would be the week after next and I could perform maintenance for a week while the team staffed and counseled at HGBBC. The aircraft needed both engine oil and filters changed, the de-ice equipment on the leading edges of wings and props repaired, new prop de-ice brushes and some avionics repairs. Then, a ready aircraft would be available to me to take the team to Fort Yukon for a VBS without the extra round trip (and fuel expenses) of Earl coming from Fairbanks to pick up the team. The beauty of the arrangement is that more work was done for less money and man hours, the team was able to come in on budget in the face of rising fuel costs, and MAC director and founder (Earl) could attend to some urgent management

duties at MAC instead of flying and performing aircraft maintenance. So, in a very real sense, the combination of the MAC and BJU Alaska Mission Team ministries' allowed a highly efficient use of time and finances. As well, Nick Risk, a BJU Aviation student and BJU Alaska Mission Team member, did not mind getting some flight time from the right seat of the Navajo on the way home with one of his aviation teachers. And yes, it is a special privilege to fly with my students, students whom I hope will become pilots, mechanics, and preachers on various mission fields for God's glory!

Yet more efficiency for MAC & BJU in Fort Yukon

By the end of Junior week at HGBBC I had the Navajo in Soldotna, maintenance done, staged for flights to get the Fort Yukon contingent of the BJU Alaska Mission Team to the Fort Yukon VBS ministry 500 miles north of camp over the Northern Alaska Range and White Mountains. Fort Yukon is an Athabascan village 150 miles north of Fairbanks and just a few miles north of the Arctic Circle which is accessible only by aircraft or occasionally by barge down the Yukon River. April, Missy, Megan, Austin, Matt and I were all headed for Fort Yukon to hold a VBS in that village with the Craig family. Janine would join us in Fairbanks as she was just rejoining the team after two weeks in Galena and Talkeetna working VBS ministries in those villages. The team had to split up to meet needs in two other different ministry locations as well. Mrs. Z, Emily, Hannah, and Nick remained at Higher Ground Baptist Bible Camp (HGBBC) in Sterling to help staff and counsel during primary week (2nd and 3rd graders). Robbie and Jessica would fly with me from camp to Fairbanks and then drive nearly 2 hours to Camp Challenge with Bryan Graham to help staff this ministry of Hamilton Acres Baptist Church. As well, a church team from the lower 48 needed to get to Selawik from Fairbanks to help the Comptons with their VBS ministry. These are the logistics of a missionary pilot!

To get this done I flew 7 students in the Navajo from HGBBC in Sterling to Fairbanks on Saturday morning where BJU students spent the afternoon with Mr. and Mrs. Earl Barnett (retired veteran Alaskan missionaries). In the meantime, I flew the round trip for Mission Air Care (MAC) to take the church team to Selawik to help with that VBS. I returned to Fairbanks about five hours later, said farewell to Robbie and Jessica as they headed for Camp Challenge, ate supper and refueled the airplane, and loaded up the Fort Yukon team again and headed to Fort Yukon, arriving about 8 PM. *MAC equipment made the timely staging and coordination of 4 groups to 3 new locations in rainy and icy instrument weather all possible in one day at less expense to missionaries and passengers than charter and/or airlines (which are not available in many instances)!* This is missionary aviation at work – thanks to the Lord's work in Earl Malpass and MAC!

After getting settled at Fort Yukon, preparations were made for music and preaching the next day. On Sunday, I preached in the AM and PM services and Matt taught Sunday school. The team had a part in special music as well. Well, after the Sunday service in Fort Yukon I learned that a second missionary aviation aircraft out of Fairbanks was scheduled to pick up 6 Fort Yukon Teens and fly them back to Fairbanks right after the Sunday morning service so they could then drive to Camp Challenge for the camp week. The weather turned rainy and cold Sunday morning and the CE-207 operated by another missionary could not safely get over the White Mountains to Fort Yukon. Tongue in cheek, Pastor Craig came to me and said, "Anyone know of an eight seat mission aircraft (like maybe a Navajo?) that can fly instruments to Fairbanks with a load of camp teens?" Smiling, I said something like, "I think we might be able to dig one up somewhere!" On Monday I flew Pastor Craig and the teens in the MAC Navajo to Fairbanks and then Pastor Craig drove us to camp challenge in a van while the BJU students helped Mrs. Craig back in Fort Yukon with the first day of VBS. BJU Mission Team members Robbie and Jessica, working at Camp Challenge that week were very surprised to see me and the Fort Yukon teens at camp! We all had lunch together at camp and the return trip was uneventful. I worked with the Fort Yukon Team for the remaining 4 days of the VBS in Fort Yukon and flew the team back to Fairbanks where we picked up Earl and flew to Soldotna. Earl needed to stage the Navajo back in Fairbanks the next week to be able to retrieve the church group out of Selawik that I had delivered there the week before. Robbie and Jessica gave good reports to the rest of the team about the camp Challenge ministry and the work accomplished there. God was working in camper's hearts as well as those of the VBS in Fort Yukon. Several decisions were made by campers and VBS'ers. God was at work! Matt and Austin, Missionary Aviation Majors on the team, were able to observe from the co-pilot seat on some of the legs of these flights – a valuable addition to the list of benefits gained by a close association of MAC and the BJU Alaska Mission Team. This brings up another subject.

Where is the next generation of Fundamental Missionary Pilots and Aviating Missionaries?

I did not even make a dent in the amount of ministry work needing to be done in Alaska this summer, no less the rest of the world (I do sense that I did the work I was called to do). *Where is the next generation of Fundamental Missionary Pilots and Aviating Missionaries?* Missionary Aviation can be defined many ways. A pilot flying in support of remote church planting activity or a mechanic supporting the pilot who supports the missionary church planting activity is a common conception. As well, a combination pilot/aircraft mechanic who supports church planting efforts is common. These folk generally live in the larger towns or cities adjacent to the village. Not so well publicized though is the aviating missionary. He is a man who is pilot/aircraft mechanic/preacher/church planter. His primary goal is to plant Bible believing churches in remote areas and he uses the tool of aviation to get supplies and to have itinerant meetings in nearby villages. He lives among the people. He uses aviation only inasmuch as it furthers the church planting goals under his sphere of influence. He may also fly for other more traditional church planters in the area in an emergency or time of need. But his main goal is that of planting the church, turning it over to nationals, and starting a new work using the aircraft for transportation in an area with no cheaper effective mode.

So here are at least 3 models of missionary aviation. First, there is a need for the professional pilot, mechanic, or pilot/mechanic who serves multiple church plants in an area and is positioned to provide a wide range of support services. Such is Mission Air Care. Two, there exists the need for the aviating missionary who is primarily a church planter who must use the airplane as a work vehicle because no other means of transportation is viable. Third, there is a need for some combination of the first two, as in a church planting missionary who uses his aircraft primarily for his own church planting work yet who is willing to help other nearby church planters to some limited degree – assumedly only to a degree that does not appreciably distract him from his own work. As well, there may be many variations to these three categories which could be designed to fit the needs of an area.

Alaska is in need of all three types of missionary aviation. Presumably, so is the Amazon, New Guinea, Africa and countless other remote and inaccessible locations around the world. The type of individual and method of operation is dependent upon the area and goal of the operation. Missionary families in a bush environment are daily faced with challenges well beyond the magnitude of church planters on the road system. Perhaps a network of aviating missionary-church-planters placed strategically in villages across Alaska would be a successful model. These men would serve their home village church plant and some very nearby villages. They would be assisted and augmented by the traditional missionary aviation concept such as Mission Air Care. Together, these men could plant churches and assist conventional church planters and thus fulfill the great commission in Alaska. But first, we need men called of God to fill these roles.

The kind of man that can fill these roles must be a man of Christ-like character whose vision extends far beyond the joys of flight. He must be a selfless lover of God and man, full of faith in Christ, a sweet separatist, doctrinally grounded, fluid in the scriptures, eager to apply its principles via personal convictions and standards, submissive to authority, culturally sensitive, evangelistic, apt to preach, *likely to preach* when given opportunity, experienced in church ministry as a whole, able to relate well with people, technically qualified and experienced in aviation sufficient for the flying at hand, physically healthy and *thoroughly motivated* to achieve whatever God will allow. He must be single, or be married to a woman with the same vision - a woman capable of being content away from Wal-Mart, shopping malls, and extended family. This woman must be able and willing to home-school children, often cook from scratch in a basic and practical home environment, *and be content therein supporting her husband and ministering among village woman.*

A plea to Missionary Aviation Majors at BJU

To you young men who have entered the missionary aviation major at school, do you understand the degree of preparation you will need to accomplish this task? Do you understand that you might be 30 years of age before you have obtained all the needed character, education, experience, finances, prayer support, and spouse for some of these ministries ***if you redeem every minute of you life right now??*** You must redeem the time! Put away video games. Put away entertainment and play except for a few hours a week to refresh your mind. Start

becoming preachers, local church workers, servants, seasoned pilots, and experienced aircraft mechanics. Serve every chance you can in every legitimate ministry opportunity you can find but not just for the experience – stretch your spiritual muscles now so that when you are given an opportunity in missionary aviation you can endure through the difficulties with a joyous spirit! Some of you cannot even endure school with a joyous spirit! How will you achieve your God given goals before you are too old to function if you do not fully redeem the time now? Be in class and alert all day. Study hard and work hard during the evening. Find work that serves to prepare you. Serve in ministry events on the weekends, especially those that require you to organize people and events, and speak publicly. Be consistent in reading the scriptures. If you will not do these things now with an intensity level commensurate with your goals then change majors because you will not be prepared to work in missionary aviation later!

However, if you fully redeem the time now, learn from every opportunity that God provides, and become a man of God with unimpeachable character, you can be prepared for any of the missionary aviation ministries that God sovereignty brings across your path. Then, you will look back and be glad you spent your time on activities of everlasting value rather than vanity and vexation of spirit! Then you will be successful in your calling!

Only be thou strong and very courageous, that thou mayest observe to do according to all the law, which Moses my servant commanded thee: turn not from it to the right hand or to the left, that thou mayest prosper whithersoever thou goest. This book of the law shall not depart out of thy mouth; but thou shalt meditate therein day and night, that thou mayest observe to do according to all that is written therein: for then thou shalt make thy way prosperous, and then thou shalt have good success. Have not I commanded thee? Be strong and of a good courage; be not afraid, neither be thou dismayed: for the LORD thy God is with thee whithersoever thou goest.

Joshua 1:7-9: