

A MAN TRAINED IN WAR WHO RETURNED HOME
TO BECOME A MAN OF PEACE AND MERCY

A BUSH PILOT'S LOGBOOK

**THE TRUE STORY OF
GORDON MARSHALL**

STEPHEN MARSHALL &
JOYCE SKLAR-CHIK



An Introduction to this Excerpt

A Bush Pilot's Logbook records the biography of a man whose life was extraordinary in many ways. As authors, we had no intention of making much of the man, but as we experienced the life and times of our dad, and heard him tell many exciting stories, we knew his life was worth sharing. Our express purpose in writing this book was to encourage other Christians with a story about God's faithfulness, love, protection and eternal presence in the life of a committed Christian. I believe as Christians we are "made alive in Christ" by His sacrifice of on the cross for our sin, and when we are prepared to give up our life's ambition to follow Him, our ensuing life story is worth telling.

In the Introduction of A Bush Pilot's Logbook I noted how Gordon "gave his life savings of £52 to his father and said: "Send me £2 a month Dad."" Only a few years later Gordon was able to donate £200 towards the purchase of a second hand De Havilland Rapide aircraft. MAF went through many hard times financially and in other ways, but God always provided enough. On page 94 of the chapter 'Living By Faith' I recorded what my dad said to me at my wedding: "He had a simple life style. On the day of Steve's wedding he said to Steve: "Tell me what you need, son, and I will tell you how to get along without it!' He lived by faith and God provided."

Let me tell you that, although he said that to provoke laughter at my wedding, I knew he meant it from the hard working and frugal life I had witnessed.



Gordon Marshall was born in 1927 in South Africa. He flew a total of 10 393 hours, the equivalent of 1 351 090 miles flown at 130 mph – Cessna 180 speed, or approximately 54 times around the world. He flew for the South African Air Force and Mission Aviation Fellowship. He married in 1954 and fathered four children. He passed on in 2004 in South Africa.

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GORDON MARSHALL'S TIMELINE

- 1927 Born in Senekal, Orange Free State, South Africa
- 1929 Brother John was born in Port Alfred
- 1933 Free-wheeled father Bertie's car downhill aged six, together with brother John, aged four
- 1935 Sister Priscilla was born 18 October
- 1937 Sister Joyce was born 30 July
- 1944 Ran against Paul Nash, South African 800 m champion, in Matric year at Boksburg
- 1945 Joined the SAAF and gained pilot's wings in September at age 17
- 1946 Learnt to drive a car after learning to fly a plane
- 1950 Posted to Korea with SAAF (Cheetah) Two Squadron
- 1951 Awarded the American DFC during the Korean War
- 1952 Resigned SAAF commission and joined MAF in the Sudan
- 1952 Sister Joyce died aged 14
- 1954 Married Jean Maxwell at Nasir, Sudan
- 1958 Floatplane introduced to Sudan programme for rainy seasons
- 1960 Moved to MAF Nairobi base
- 1969 Fellow MAF pilot Mike Melville was killed in air crash, Ngong Hills, Nairobi
- 1972 Moved to South Africa, then to Rhodesia (now Zimbabwe) on loan to MAF-US
- 1973 Furlough in Pietermaritzburg and survey of Namibia
- 1974 Moved to Rhodesia permanently, based at Karanda Mission Hospital
- 1981 Last MAF operational flight in Zimbabwe after 30 years in the field with MAF
- 1982 Director of MAF-SA headquarters in Edenvale, Johannesburg
- 1990 Last record in logbook (as second pilot) with Frank Scarabino as pilot
- 1991 Involved in the founding of Helping Out-of-work People in Edenvale (HOPE)
- 2004 Died in Edenvale, South Africa
- 2006 Wife Jean died

SUMMARY OF GORDON'S FLYING HISTORY

45 years of active flying:

- South African Air Force (SAAF): from 1945 to 1952
- Mission Aviation Fellowship (MAF - operational): from 1952 to 1981
- MAF - RSA head office (occasional ferries and support): from 1982 to 1990

Total Hours:

- 10,393 hours total flying time
- Equivalent of 1,351,090 miles flown (at 130 mph – Cessna 180 speed)
- Or approximately 54 times around the world
- 8,047 of those hours were on tail-draggers

Countries flown in or through:

Algeria	Italy	Mozambique	Tanzania
Botswana	Israel	Namibia	Tunisia
CAR/Chad	Japan	Nigeria	Uganda
Corsica	Kenya	Rwanda	UK
DRC	Korea	Sardinia	USA
Eqypt	Lebanon	Somalia	Zambia
Ethiopia	Lesotho	South Africa	Zimbabwe
France	Libya	South Sudan	
Greece	Malawi	Sudan	

Types of aircraft flown:

AIR FORCE	MISSION AVIATION FELLOWSHIP		
	Cessna:	Piper:	Other:
Avro Ansen	Cessna 150	J3C-65S Cub seaplane	Auster V
De Havilland Devon	Cessna 170	PA-11 Cub	Auster J/1A Autocrat
De Havilland Tiger Moth	Cessna 172	PA-12 Super Cruiser	Auster J/5G Autocar
De Havilland Vampire	Cessna 180	PA-14 Cruiser	Beechcraft Twin Bo-nanza
Douglas Dakota DC-3	Cessna 180 amphibian	PA 18 Super Cub	Beechcraft King Air
Lockheed Ventura PV-1 (B34)	Cessna 182	PA-20 Pacer	Consul
North American Harvard Mk IIA & III	Cessna 185	PA-22 Tri-Pacer	De Havilland Dove
North American Mustang F-51d	Cessna 185 amphibian	PA-27 Aztec	De Havilland Rapide
Short Sunderland Mk V (Seaplane)	Cessna 205	PA-28-140 Cherokee	Maule Rocket
Supermarine Spitfire Mk IX	Cessna 206	PA-28-180 Cherokee	Mooney
	Cessna 207	PA-28-235 Cherokee	Pilatus PC6
	Cessna 210	PA-31-350 Chieftain	Stinson
	Cessna Caravan	PA-32 Cherokee Six	Twin Otter
		PA-33 Comanche	

PROLOGUE

- Joyce -

‘The Scriptures, simply by virtue of their narrative form, draw us into a reality in which we find ourselves in touch with the very stuff of our humanity; what we sense in our bones counts.

It is a story large with the sense of God, a world suffused with God, a world permeated with God’s spoken and unspoken word, his unseen and perceived presence, in such a way that we know that it is the world we were made for, the world in which we most truly belong.

It isn’t long before we find ourselves entering the story, taking our place in the plot, and following Jesus.’

Eugene Peterson¹

This is a true story. It is the story of how Gordon Marshall left the battlefields of North Korea, entered the story, took his place in the plot, and followed Jesus in South Sudan and East Africa, and then into war-torn Rhodesia (now Zimbabwe), before he led the Mission Aviation Fellowship programme in South Africa into his retirement and his last battle with Alzheimer’s disease.

If I were to elucidate the themes of our father’s life, they would be war and peace, serving humanity, excellence in work, resilience in times of trial and testing; and underlying it all a living faith in the resurrected Christ. We have not needed to change any names or circumstances, as Gordon had no enemies. He loved people and people loved him.

We are telling this story as his four children (Joyce, Mary, Stephen, Ruth) and son-in-law Gavin, not as research historians.

For the historical insights, we are indebted to MAF founder Stuart Sendall-King² and veteran Steve Stevens (who died on 5 June 2016 - Stephen visited him in April of that year).

We have dedicated this story to

Jean – his life partner;

Gordon's grandchildren – Benjie, Lauren, Kristine, Janice, Harold, Melody, James, Mark, Leanne – that they would know their heritage in deeper ways through this story;

MAF pilots around the world working in rural, lonely, arduous and dangerous places; networking with other mission and church groups to take the good news of Jesus to all nations;

The South African MAF office, sending out pilots since 1960. Maxine Holman and her team, who are envisioning and implementing new projects, like Flying for Life in Limpopo.

The original MAF logo in the 1960s was 'MAF – servant of missions'. Gordon was a servant. If this book can inspire in you a longing to join the story, find your place in the plot and follow Jesus, we shall be hugely grateful.

INTRODUCTION

- Stephen -

My father was the blue-eyed boy of his family – strong, handsome and brave, oh, sometimes so foolishly brave. Taking on a fully grown Egyptian cobra in Sudan, Kenya or Rhodesia, or capturing an angry Skaapstekker at home with his father for Fitzsimmond's Snake Park in Durban, was just the sort of challenge that energised him. He didn't shrink back from many things, and I think it was this quality, along with his positive attitude to the work at hand with Mission Aviation Fellowship (MAF) that made him the man he was.

Of course, you could also say he was just an ordinary man of his time (1927 – 2004), who did his duty for his country, and followed his calling into a life of service to God that made him what he was. Those who grew up in the depression and the war years had to be hard working and very brave. His life of devotion and service to God through MAF, and later 'Helping Out-of-work People' (HOPE) in Edenvale, was most definitely how God forged and wrought the character of the man, whom I am privileged to have called my father. Dianne (Powell) Hawkins in her book 'Ordinary people in God's hands'³ captures the stories of many missionaries she worked with; they may seem ordinary to some, but accomplished great things over a lifetime committed to Him - the Christ who gave us salvation is building His church and is coming back again.

I don't want to make my father out to be something he was not; he was not perfect, he did not have all the answers, he made mistakes, and fellow MAF staff did not always agree with him. However, his attitude



SUDAN

In the last days the mountain of the Lord's temple will be established as the highest of the mountains; it will be exalted above the hills, and all nations will stream to it.

Many peoples will come and say, "Come, let us go up to the mountain of the Lord, to the temple of the God of Jacob. He will teach us his ways, so that we may walk in his paths..." He will judge between the nations and will settle disputes for many peoples. They will beat their swords into plough shares and their spears into pruning hooks...Come, descendants of Jacob, let us walk in the light of the Lord.

Isaiah 2:2-5

FROM THE KAROO TO KHARTOUM

- Joyce -

Out of the destruction and devastation of two world wars and other local wars (e.g., the Korean War), there was kindled a new fire in the hearts of that generation of young people in the 1940s and 1950s, who had seen military conflict, been all over the world, and engaged with people who had never heard of Jesus Christ. This generation stood up and said: 'Let us turn our swords into plough shares, and our spears into pruning hooks'.

In 1952, as Steve has recounted, Gordon caught a ride on a commercial plane flown by a friend of his from Rand Airport in Germiston, landing in Khartoum with one suitcase. He and Steve Stevens were two of many airmen around the world, who had set their hearts to serve God and their fellow mankind, with the skills they had acquired in war. These aviators came together in conversation and fellowship around their love of Jesus Christ, and a global organisation was formed – Mission Aviation Fellowship (MAF). Their original motto was: ‘The servant of missions’.

They were starting from scratch – Stuart Sendall-King and Jack Hemmings had completed the initial MAF survey of Central Africa in 1948, flying a Miles Gemini. The Gemini did not return to England, but Stuart and Jack made it back, and their report was sent to the mission societies contacted during the survey. The mission societies working in the South Sudan from early in the twentieth century among the local tribes-people of the area, including the Nuer, Dinka, Shilluk, Mabaan and many others, realised that transport was one of their biggest problems.

River boats on the Nile were the most efficient form of travel. Although the concept of air travel was very attractive, not all the mission societies embraced the idea as practical initially. The Presbyterians working mainly in the South Sudan were optimistic about the use of an airplane and were the first to agree to MAF establishing a service for them.

They needed to find an appropriate airplane. A second-hand De Havilland Rapide was available in England, and after much prayer and preparation, Stuart King and Jack Hemmings delivered the plane to Khartoum in April 1950, where Steve Stevens from South Africa was called to become the first operational pilot for MAF in the Sudan.

The stories of these early MAF days are best read in more detail in Steve Stevens' books *Wings of War and Peace*, *Early Wings Over Africa*, and Stuart King's excellent book, *Hope Has Wings* (the official dramatic and inspirational story of MAF). Between April 1950 and March 1952, Steve and Stuart opened up the flying routes into the deep south of the Sudan, from Khartoum. They started to understand the missionaries' needs, and the challenges that would face MAF in helping them. It was very early in 1952 that Steve was grounded, due to the loss of vision in his right eye, and then wrote to Gordon, asking him to join MAF. The two boys who had met in the South African Karoo were soon flying together in Khartoum, although, not for long, as Steve's vision was never corrected sufficiently for him to regain his pilot's licence.

- Stephen -

Our story continues after Gordon arrived in the Sudan on 21 March 1952, and I delve into his now fading, handwritten logbooks for some of his interesting stories:

One evening in Cape Town in April 2015, I was watching a programme called 'Voetspore' on the television, with my visiting nephew Mark, Gordon's grandson. 'Voetspore' is an Afrikaans programme and could be directly translated 'footprints', or more appropriately to the show 'Tracks through Africa'. The programme features a team of intrepid modern-day explorers, who drive three 4 X 4 vehicles through Africa from south to north, and sometimes back again, assisted of course by modern Satnav and radio aids. Despite the new technology, their routes are still incredibly challenging, and the show makes for excellent reality television, if you are in any way adventurous.

The day we watched the programme together, the team had just arrived in Wadi Halfa in the Sudan, after many weeks of travelling,

and were loading their vehicles onto a ferry to cross Lake Nubia and drive through Egypt to Alexandria – their final destination. I said to Mark: 'I'm sure your grandfather landed there on his many travels'. So, we got his logbooks out and sure enough, it was exactly sixty-two years before the Voetspore team arrived in Wadi Halfa that Gordon had first landed there. Below are the logbook entries of the trip that started in Kleiat and ended back in Khartoum:

11 Apr 1953	<i>De Havilland Rapide</i>	G-AGOR	<i>Pilot Gordon 2nd Pilot Stuart King</i>	<i>Kleiat (Lebanon) - Jerusalem</i>
13 Apr 1953	<i>De Havilland Rapide</i>	G-AGOR	<i>Pilot Gordon 2nd Pilot Stuart King</i>	<i>Jerusalem - Aqaba - Luxor - Wadi Halfa</i>
14 Apr 1953	<i>De Havilland Rapide</i>	G-AGOR	<i>Pilot Gordon 2nd Pilot Stuart King</i>	<i>Wadi Halfa - Atba- ra - Wadi Seidna - Khartoum</i>

The story of the MAF trip from Kleiat to Khartoum in 1953 is interesting, because Stuart King and Gordon had gone to Lebanon to collect a good used De Havilland Rapide, which they purchased from the Iraq Petroleum Company (IPC). The previous aircraft MAF was using had just failed its annual inspection; and was grounded as unserviceable due to wear and tear in the aggressive environment of the Sudan. All the planes MAF used in those early days, the Rapide, Auster and Tri-Pacer, were made of wood and fabric and the ever-changing hot and wet climate played havoc with these aircraft in the long term. The IPC asking price of this Rapide was £5,000. MAF made an offer of £600, two hundred each from Stuart King, Steve Stevens and Gordon Marshall; this was all they could afford and it came from their personal savings. According to Steve Stevens' account of the story, much prayer accompanied this offer, and a month later,

they received a telegram to say their offer had been accepted. Stuart and Gordon found the Rapide in immaculate condition in Lebanon, and ferried the plane back to the Sudan via Israel and Egypt, so the fledgling work of MAF could continue.

A comment by Gordon found written in his logbook next to that trip reads:

‘Delivery flight of new MAF Rapide purchased by Stuart, Steve and myself from the Iraq Petroleum Company of Tripoli Lebanon for £600 Sterling. A venture in faith and blessed of God.’

Stuart and Gordon spent a day in Jerusalem on their return journey, and Gordon’s journals speak of visiting General Gordon’s Garden Tomb and being deeply moved by the experience of tracing Jesus’ suffering for us in a very probable location.

There was one problem, however, with buying this Rapide from the IPC, even though it was in great condition and cost so little, and that was that its annual major overhaul was due in four months, with only approximately 100 hours flying time left. This meant more costs and down time for MAF, who at this point were very frustrated with the stop-start type of operations that were affecting them in these early years. In the greater scheme of things, the timing of this purchase was God’s timing, and probably His way of saying to the team ‘slow down, there are some things we need to take care of.’

The new Rapide G-AGOR was re-registered VP-KLB for flying in the Sudan and used up its last 100 hours of flying time during the months of April to July 1953. By this time, Steve Stevens was in need of an operation to correct his detached retina; and his wife Kay who was due to give birth to their son in a few short months was not doing well.

In addition, the growing MAF organisation in Sudan was in need of a home-base to provide logistical and financial support. Stuart King had the 'God-inspired' idea of flying the Rapide back to the UK with the whole MAF team (excluding Alistair MacDonald, who had gone to Thailand on another MAF survey) to his home town of Cardiff. There, the Rapide could be overhauled and inspected and all the other needs of the team could be taken care of. After six days flying along a northern Mediterranean route, and forty hours and twenty minutes of flying time, they landed in Cardiff. Gordon's logbook recorded their route:

3 Aug 1953	<i>De Havilland Rapide</i>	VP- KLB	<i>Pilot Gordon; Stuart, Phyl- lis, Steve, Kay, Pam, Colleen</i>	<i>Khartoum - Atbara - Wadi Halfa - Luxor</i>
4 Aug 1953	"	"	"	<i>Luxor - Aqaba - Bei- rut - Nicosia</i>
5 Aug 1953	"	"	"	<i>Nicosia - Rhodes - Athens</i>
6 Aug 1953	"	"	"	<i>Athens - Araxos - Brindisi - Rome (Urbe)</i>
7 Aug 1953	"	"	"	<i>Rome - Nice</i>
8 Aug 1953	"	"	"	<i>Nice - Lyon - Toussous le Noble (Paris) - Lymgne - Cardiff</i>

Today that flight would be one hop of no more than seven hours on a modern airliner.

The next five months in England was a period of recovery (for Kay Stevens especially), and Tim's birth in October 1953. It was also a time of strategising about moving the MAF Sudan base to Malakal instead of Doro, speaking to churches in England about supporting the MAF work and setting up Steve and Kay Stevens to run the MAF home office in the UK. Steve was still hopeful that his eye operation would be a success, and that he would eventually be able to fly again after a period of rehabilitation, but sadly for him that did not happen. Steve effectively remained blind in his right eye for the rest of his life. He and Kay threw themselves into the work of raising funds for MAF, speaking to supporting churches, and mentoring prospective candidate pilots and engineers for the work in Africa. For the next seventeen years from 1953 to 1970, Steve and Kay worked behind the scenes, making sure that the MAF effort could expand as it did all over Central Africa.

By early January 1954, the Rapide and the MAF team were ready for their return to the Sudan. Leaving the Stevens family behind in England in the dead of winter, Gordon, Stuart and Phyllis travelled a North-African route back to Khartoum:

12 Jan 1954	<i>De Havilland Rapide</i>	<i>VP-KLB</i>	<i>Pilot Gordon, Stuart, Phyllis</i>	<i>Cardiff - Cherbourg - Bordeaux</i>
13 Jan 1954	"	"	"	<i>Bordeaux - Mari- gnane - Ajaccio - Cagliari</i>

14 Jan 1954	“	“	“	<i>Cagliari - Tunis - Idris (Tripoli)</i>
15 Jan 1954	“	“	“	<i>Idris - Marble Arch - Benina (now Beng- hazi) - ElAdem</i>
16 Jan 1954	“	“	“	<i>ElAdem - Mersa- Matruh - El Maza (Cairo)</i>
18 Jan 1954	“	“	“	<i>El Maza - Luxor - Wadi Halfa</i>
19 Jan 1954	“	“	“	<i>Wadi Halfa - Atbara - Khartoum</i>

The returning MAF team were met at Khartoum airfield and welcomed 'home' by Gordon's fiancé: Jean Maxwell of the American Mission. Gordon and Jean were to be married just over a month later, at the American Mission's association meetings in Nasir.

Alistair MacDonald had completed his survey of Laos, Thailand and Borneo, while the rest of the team was in England. In Thailand, Alistair had purchased a Piper Tri-Pacer from a departing missionary, and had met and married an American missionary by the name of Margaret Aldridge. The Laotian and Thai authorities eventually declined the mission's request for an air service, and so uncle Mac, as we MKs affectionately called him, returned to the Sudan to assist Gordon and Stuart with the expanding work there. Margaret and Mac's two-week epic trip in the Tri-Pacer, from Bangkok back to Khartoum, could probably have produced a book of stories on its own. They arrived in February 1954, only a few weeks after the newly overhauled Rapide had arrived back in Khartoum.

The MAF base was moved to the town of Malakal on the White Nile in South Sudan. They erected the Kingstrand prefabricated homes, and an office that had been shipped out from England, one of Steve's first procurement projects in London. The story of how they acquired the land on which to build the houses is told here: from Steve's book *Wings of War and Peace*:

'It was while doing the administration that Alastair was especially aware that people were praying for MAF. He has many stories to tell of remarkable chains of "coincidences". Getting private homes in the newly independent Sudan was a complicated process. The government had to agree to release a suitable piece of land. There was no local objection, but approval had to come from Khartoum. After several months, on a flight to Khartoum, Alastair and Gordon visited the relevant ministry.

The helpful young official explained his problem. He took them to an adjacent room that had a very big table covered with papers: these were all requests for approval by his boss. He said: 'If you can find your application, then I'll get it on its way'. So, Gordon and Alastair got busy and managed to find it. Success! Well, partly. When the approval reached Malakal, it was for five plots of land to be sold by auction and MAF needed three of them.

They knew that some Greek merchants, and the local Member of Parliament, wanted plots. What chance did they have bidding against people like these who had influence and money? The auction was set for one morning in the District Commissioner's office. That night, there was a great storm with torrential rain. Unusually, the heavy rain continued into the morning, and at 09h40, Gordon and Alastair set out for the office on their motor scooter, arriving like the proverbial drowned rats.

At 10h00, the Commissioner stood up and announced to the two of them, 'Gentlemen, it's time for the auction to begin, but I know that the MP and others are interested. Owing to the weather, I will wait for another ten minutes'. About five minutes later, an Arab merchant wandered in, but he didn't want land for himself.

The auction started at ten past, with only the merchant bidding against them, so they got the three plots at a very low price, and the merchant bought the other two. Shortly after, they had signed the necessary documents - the door banged open and the MP entered. He was furious that the Commissioner had not waited for him, but pragmatically, he quickly did business with the merchant. It was several days later before they discovered why the main opposition, the wealthy Greek merchants, had not arrived. Each independently had reckoned that the auction would be postponed because of the weather - none had thought to pick up a telephone and find out.'

The MAF work consisted of flights to outlying mission stations for routine clinic visits – transportation of missionaries and local people. The Sudanese government officials soon realised the benefits of using the aircraft and were frequent flyers too. Some of the regular locations flown to in the Sudan were: Akobo, Abaiat, Banjang, Bor, Chali-el-fil, Doro, Juba, Kosti, Ler, Nasir, Pibor, Pochalla, Renk; and across the border in nearby Ethiopia: Assosa, Gambella, Dembi Dollo, Jimma, Misan-Teferi and Pokwo.

When an epidemic of Kala-azar broke out in the Wadege area of the South Sudan, the government doctor and lab technician were picked up in Kurmuk and flown in to diagnose the disease by microscope before issuing medicines:

10 Sep 1956	Autocar	SN-ABF	Pilot: Gordon; Passengers: Dr Saitti, Lab tech Abdel Gadir, Bill van Mierlo	Kurmuk - Wadega
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The prescribed medicines were later due to be dropped off at Wadega on 15 September, but the following is what actually happened:

15 Sep 1956	Autocar	SN-ABF	Pilot: Gordon; Bill van Mierlo	Malakal - Maiak - Doro -Malakal
<p><i>"Note: Aimed to land at Wadega - airstrip was U/S - continued to Maiak, leaving medicines there for journey by mule."</i></p>				

Life for all in the South Sudan was difficult and always held surprises. The strip at Wadega had been waterlogged from heavy rains, and was unserviceable, so the lifesaving medicines had to take the slow route on mule-back from the nearest dry strip.

One morning at Doro in those early years, the MAF team came out to the airstrip and found with surprise that goats had started chewing the fabric of the fuselage. A hasty repair had to be done before take-off, but fortunately, the fabric was relatively simple to patch-repair on the old wooden aircraft. Another day at the new base in Malakal, a strong wind-storm flipped the plane on its back, putting more than just a few teeth marks through the fabric.



RHODESIA

**The Lord is my light and my salvation – whom shall I fear? The
Lord is the stronghold of my life – of whom shall I be afraid?**

Psalm 27:1

MARY AND JOSEPH WENT FLYING

- Stephen -

Gordon's parents' in-law, Mary and Joseph Maxwell, were missionaries from 1920-1933 in Egypt, Sudan and Ethiopia. There was no MAF in those days, and so they travelled up and down the Nile River by steam boat and later, motor launches, and when not on the river, on foot and by mule. It was slow, very hot and they were subjected to all the various insects on order in those countries, particularly mosquitos and the deadly Malaria, which they carried.

On 19 March 1974, however, Gordon was flying a different Mary and Joseph from TEAM's Karanda Hospital in what was then called Rhodesia. Mary Sigu was a local medical assistant trained at the Karanda Nursing School, and Joseph Sithole was an evangelist from the Karanda church. This was supposed to be a typical day that would show the benefits of a mission support group like MAF, making life easier and quicker. The MAF plane had already flown two return trips between Karanda and Mt Darwin, the nearest local town with tarmac roads connecting to the capital Salisbury with its cargo of staff and students. There was still time in the day to visit two clinics, and so the group of four: Mary, Joseph, Dr Fiona Burslem and dad, set off for the first clinic at Mavuradona, at about ten o'clock in the morning. This pro-gramme for one day's mission work included only one hour of flying time, which would have normally taken a week in a Land Rover, with all kinds of other risks added to the trip. On top of that was the issue of security. The Rhodesian Bush War was in full swing in the 1970s and such a trip would not have even been possible over roads that had been land-mined, along with the possibility of being ambushed.

The first leg of their journey from Karanda to Mavuradona in the north-eastern corner of Rhodesia was uneventful. The six-seater Cessna 180¹¹, registered as N91462 (November nine-one-four-six-two, as they would say in radio terminology), bounced around the turbulent African sky in predictable fashion. Large clouds were building all around, but nothing that would impede their short twenty-five minutes' flight to Mavuradona. Pilots and seasoned flyers of these small planes would be used to this weather and the normal 'bumps' in the sky. But the first-time passengers Mary and Joseph were a little uneasy with this stomach-in-throat feeling, and probably wondered whether this airplane with its thin aluminium skin would last the distance.

George Dee and his wife were the TEAM missionaries stationed at Mavuradona, and loved to hear the MAF plane coming in. George was a typical American, very enthusiastic about life and his work in Africa. They would walk down to the dirt airstrip to welcome the team, often giving Gordon a bear hug on arrival, as was George's American habit. Mavuradona is a very sparsely populated area of Zimbabwe, probably due to its lack of water and remote location. There was a school and a clinic at the Mavuradona village that the TEAM mission served, and within an hour or two, Mary and Fiona would have seen to all the patients. There was always enough time in Africa for a Gospel message, which Joseph gave and prayers to be said, and then the foursome were off to their second clinic of the day in the Hunyani Valley.

Leaving Mavuradona in the early afternoon, the flight was much smoother due to the fact the weather had clouded in. The cumulonim-bus clouds were no longer forming, which had given rise to the bumpy morning flight. The clouds were now building up into solid banks as though they may give some welcome rain. They flew west under the cloud and around the Mavuradona mountain range and then north into the Hunyani Valley. The cloud base was lowering all the time, but knowing that the weather in this area never really closed in, they continued on route. Hugging the cloud base now at 500-foot AGL (above ground level), the engine suddenly gave a loud bang, coughed, spluttered and died. From 500-foot with no power in a fully loaded Cessna 180, you don't have more than two minutes, and you will be on the ground. This section of the Hunyani Valley was densely forested with no sign of anywhere to land. Trees crowded to the edge of the Kadsu River directly below in the valley, without even a sand bank on the river visible.

That morning back at Karanda Hospital, where MAF was based, Jean was manning the radio as she always did, when the plane was out. This was one of the tasks often done by the MAF pilot's wives around the world, particularly in remote operational areas. MAF planes would report to the nearest air traffic control on take-off and landing, but due to their operations in such remote locations, they could not expect the same support as their commercial counterparts in case of an emergency. The MAF planes in those early days would normally be flying outside of radar range anyway, and satellite tracking was still something in the future. Therefore, it became standard practice for MAF to keep track of their aircraft at all times. Gordon had radioed in on arrival at Mavuradona, and again on departing, giving an ETA (Estimated Time of Arrival) for arrival at Hunyani.

There was no time for radioing their emergency situation right now, though. Gordon had his hands full looking for a suitable space to force land. Putting the Cessna into its glide ratio and keeping the airspeed correct was the most important task at hand. Suddenly, a grass patch adjacent to the Kadsji River came into view below. Gordon had to perform a 180 degree turn and aim for this space, as there was only going to be one chance. As he approached the patch of grass, he realised his speed was way too fast for landing, and there were only seconds left. Airbrakes were not fitted to planes this small, so the only option Gordon had was to get the plane onto the ground, and brake as hard as possible to bleed the speed off before the trees provided a head-on stop!

The 'patch of grass' turned out to be elephant grass six foot tall and the plane almost disappeared before touching down. In the next second, there was another loud bang and the Cessna dropped onto its belly and skidded to a stop with less than twenty metres to spare before hitting

the Mopani trees. All four passengers scrambled out with not even a scratch. The four-point shoulder harnesses that MAF insisted for all their seats had done their job.

N91462's undercarriage had been ripped off by a donga (deep ditch) running right across the path of the landing, but made invisible from the air by the elephant grass. If the donga had not been there, the plane would have collided with the trees and resulted in major damage to both the occupants and the plane itself. If Gordon had got his landing speed correct, there would not have been enough speed to tear out the landing gear and the donga would have caused the plane to nose dive forward into the opposite bank, also causing major damage and injuries. There is no doubt in my mind that Mary, Joseph, Fiona and Gordon had been spared serious injury in a completely remote area with no roads or emergency services, and so, in the heat of the afternoon under the wing of N91462, they all bowed their heads and gave thanks to God.

N91462 would fly another day, despite Gordon's rough treatment of the landing gear, but not today. The task at hand now was to try and make radio contact with the outside world, as they knew they were in enemy infiltrated territory. As much as these four intrepid travellers were completely neutral in this war, you never knew how you would be treated, if the wrong people came along. The radios in N91462 seemed to be in serviceable order and crackled into life when switched back on. The nearest town to their estimated crash location was Centenary, about a hundred kilometres further south-south-east. This was well within an HF radio's range, although Gordon knew that reaching Jean at Karanda would be doubtful due to the Mavuradona mountain range between them. Gordon called regularly at fifteen-minute intervals so as not to waste battery life, but nobody seemed to be on the airwaves that afternoon.

The ETA for their second clinic had now come and gone, and Jean, expecting a report back, started calling Gordon at regular intervals, also with no response. She knew from many years of experience in Africa and with MAF that they could have had an emergency at Mavuradona in the clinic, and were still on the ground there, the plane may have had a flat-tyre or they could be trying to get the cattle off the runway so they could take-off. All of these had happened in the past and many other scenarios were possible.

As the sun started to fade in the afternoon sky, Gordon had convinced the party of four to stay together. Sending one person off on their own to look for help, no matter how dependable they may be, is often the worst thing to do in these situations. His air force training was invaluable in keeping a calm head and knowing that you should always stay together. He checked the battery located behind the last row of seats to make sure that it was not overheating, and still had water, then he checked the antennae – it all looked fine. More calls of ‘Mayday, Mayday, aircraft down in the Hunyani Valley’ went on deaf ears. Finally, one last thought to check the connections behind the firewall, where the radio cables and antennae coaxial cable plugged in, rewarded them with renewed hope. The coaxial plug connecting the radio to its antennae was not inserted fully, probably coming loose on the crash landing, and was preventing the mayday calls from being transmitted.

Within minutes of the cable being properly plugged in, the air force radio operator in Centenary replied to Gordon’s call and confirmed their location. An Allouette helicopter from the Rhodesian Air Force would be airborne in minutes, and was only twenty minutes’ flying time away. They had been on standby for the last hour after Jean had called Salisbury ATC to inform them of the missing MAF plane. With the ELT (emergency location transmitter) having been installed recently

in N91462, the helicopter was able to find them easily, and by sunset, they were leaving the red and white MAF plane to a night on its own in the valley.

Mary and Joseph now certainly had some stories to tell their grandchildren one day. They had had their first flight in a Cessna, first crash landing and first flight in a helicopter all in one day! I can only think that Mary and Joseph must have been longing for more peaceful days, when they could get back into the 'safer' Land Rover, to get to their clinics and churches, or donkey?

The crash story does not end there. Knowing the value of N91462 to the MAF operations, Gordon and Dave Voetmann, the other MAF pilot in Rhodesia at the time, organised a team to go back into the valley by land and disassemble the plane into two separate wings and a fuselage, which could then be hauled out of the valley by road. Fortunately, there was a friendly farmer in the area who agreed to loan them a tractor and trailer, with his driver and a crew of labourers. The plane was salvaged with many hands that helped to carry the fuselage and wings through the trees, and onto the trailer for their ride back to civilisation. This is typical of the way things worked in Africa in those days. When a lorry got stuck in the wet clay soil of the South Sudan in 1955, everyone got out and pushed, pulled and dug their way out of the mud until they were on solid ground again. Then they would pile back into the lorry covered in mud, but with great big smiles on their faces congratulating each other, chanting and singing, only too happy to be riding in the lorry.

The old faithful N91462 was given a new undercarriage and some flashy new thin aluminium skin, painted up red and white by Jim Stack (the multi-talented aeronautical engineer who had worked with Gordon in

Nairobi in the 1960s) and was back in the air on 21 October 1974, do-ing the Salisbury-Mt. Darwin-Karanda route again. Her sister N9013M had been doing double time, while N91462 was grounded and now returned to its more normal pace flying the western programme to Sessami and Sanyati Hospital.

To read the full story of Gordon Marshall's amazing life, order your copy at www.mafsa.co.za/shop.

- Prayer -

Lord, Your Word says that You require mercy, not sacrifice.

Gordon Marshall gave You both.

Thank You for his legacy.

END NOTES

Prologue

¹Peterson, Eugene: Eat this book – the art of spiritual reading. C 2006 Hodder and Stoughton

²King, Stuart: Hope Has Wings, Eighth edition. 2014 Mission Aviation Fellowship UK

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⁹Horsfall, Tony: Working from a Place of Rest, 2010 (Latest Edition), Bible Reading Fellowship

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Chapter 5

¹¹The first six versions of Cessna's 180 models were four-seater aircraft with a gross weight of 2 650 lb. From 1963, Cessna upgraded the seventh version of their 180 to a six-seater, and gross weight of 2 800 lb.

¹²Powell Hawkins, Diane: Ordinary people in God's hands. 2005 Xulon Press pages 29,30

¹³Powell Hawkins, Diane: Ordinary people in God's hands. 2005 Xulon Press page 33

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¹⁵Hüigel, John: Partnering with the King – study the Gospel of Matthew and become a disciple. c 2013 Paraclete Press

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9. Tony Horsfall, Working from a Place of Rest, Bible Reading Fellowship, c 2010 (Latest Edition)
10. Exeley, In Search of the Missionary, Amazon, c 1970
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