

If Women Were Meant To Fly, The Sky Would Be Pink...!!

2020, Enid Otun
If Women were meant to fly the sky would be pink

Transcript

[0:00] Hello and welcome to the next episode of, If women were meant to fly, the sky would be pink, Back To Basics, I'm Enid Otun. In this episode, I take the opportunity to use my flight instructors licence at the resurrected Lagos Flying Club. Seniority brings its perks and I finally have a social life, who would have thought.

[0:26] Music.

[0:56] Time waits for no Woman and I hit the ground running with my new secondment. I missed my Bristol colleagues but I made sure to visit regularly to keep up-to-date with all the goings-on. On several occasions we would cross paths down route and catch up then. Nothing had changed much with the general workday and my passengers were still surprised on occasion to see a woman up at the sharp pointy end, but I dealt with them the same way I had dealt with my other passengers a firm yes I am sure I'm in the right place, yes I do touch things on the aircraft, and yes I am old enough. Ugh, it was tedious and the staring, I heard myself saying on several occasions, look no matter how hard you stare, I will not magically turn into a small framed man.

[1:52] Shortly after I started my secondment I was contacted by one of the directors from the Lagos flying club. Now this club held the special position in my heart due to the fact that I had begun my first flights here and it had launched my career aspirations. I had always said that when I had the time and space to do so, I would be happy to do some flight instructing for the club, that was really exciting to be asked. The club itself had been relocated from the main Lagos Airport to a newly purpose-built airstrip at a place called Magbon airfield which was approximately 30 miles away by road.

[2:31] In those days there was a central Expressway which was called the Lagos Badagry Expressway, and even though it was a straight run it was a lonely stretch of road with a few villages here and there, there were frequent accidents and it had a reputation for armed robbery incidents, so I had a lot to think about, not least my safety. There was also a lot that needed doing, the club still had two training aircraft, a two-seater Cessna 152 with the registration Five November alpha whisky, and an older Cessna 150 two-seater aerobatic trainer with the registration Five November alpha whiskey Lima. There was one senior engineer who had been with a club for a long time, and there was a need to oversee the construction of the clubhouse, toilets and outdoor spaces, along with the final review of the tarmac runway which was basic and rudimentary. Parking areas also had to be thought out due to heavy rain and the possibility of the aircraft getting stuck. I secretly relished the challenge, not least because the club that started my journey but also because I wanted aspiring young pilots to be able to get good solids safe training and we needed the right environment for that. There was a lot of work to do and it would mean that I would be doing very little else, but I reasoned that it was worth it.

[3:58] My first trip out to the airfield was an eye-opener they had not had a chief flying instructor for a while, and needed some direction and structure. I was itching to use my instructors licence, and it was soon quite evident that in order to provide a private pilot's licence course known as the PPL, we would have to raise the bar. I had enjoyed the opportunity whilst I was in the United States and I needed to use that experience to build on here. My first tasks were to survey the site so armed with a disposable camera there were no camera phones in those days, arrived at Magbon airfield early one Saturday morning. I had the next three or so days off from my secondment as I was preparing to travel to Toronto Canada for my flight simulator training. It was as I had suspected, a bit of a building site. There was a main building consisting of three sections, an office, a larger space which could be used as a ground training classroom and a kitchen. A toilet block and an open seating area with a thatched roof and bar to watch the planes was further up. There was certainly a lot to do, not least to make sure we had running water and electricity, but for the time being the area was off-grid and we had to make do with a large generator to provide power for all the systems.

[5:20] One of my first tasks that day was to make sure that the runway was fit for use, even though I knew it had been used before, everything had to be done by the book and that was my mindset, it had served me well and I didn't like cutting corners, I still don't.

[5:25] Equipped with a handheld radio so I could hear any aircraft on our local frequency, we didn't have a tower but we had an allocated frequency where aircraft could report their position in relation to the airfield, and we would acknowledge traffic and airfield conditions on the hand-held unit manned by our volunteer Radio officer. I walked with our senior aircraft engineer as he explained how much work we still had to do to get the airfield operational for both our single engine trainers, as well as some privately-owned microlight aircraft.

[6:07] The tarmac had been laid some time ago and then not used, so we had a layer of hard tarmac with layers of stone and Sand mix. It was a rough surface but usable and with certain procedures to put into place for operating from the airstrip, we would be in good shape. Having started to put improvements in motion it was time to fly the two aircraft out to the airstrip from where they were stored at the International Airport.

[6:32] Music.

[6:46] It been a while since I'd flown either of the clubs trainers, but it would be a pleasure since they were both the aircraft I flew to obtain my private pilot's licence. Once they had been checked I set a date for the ferry flight. We had decided to do this very early one Saturday morning, to miss all the main traffic transiting through the International Airport.

[7:07] Getting back into Five November alpha Lima whisky, brought back memories of the many flights I completed out to the coast, southwest of Lagos which was our training area up to 2000 feet. On this morning we were airborne quickly having completed all our engine runs, it was a beautiful clear and smooth day as we climbed through a 1000 ft to turn right towards the coast. Once cleared I climbed further to 1500 feet for the short cruise to Magbon. Almost as soon as I lowered the nose to level off, the engine coughed and lost power, just my luck the first time I decide to fly a single engine machine for quite a while and it will decide to become a glider. I immediately looked for signs of an imminent engine failure, which would be signalled by low oil pressure with a corresponding rise in the oil temperature. But the gauges look steady and good, but she was struggling as I applied more power to maintain height. I suspected as did my engineer that we had picked up some fuel contamination, and it was now flowing from the wing tanks above our heads through the carburettor. This probably sounds like a terrifying situation but in fact things like this happen fairly frequently and to me, it didn't feel like a particularly big deal. I was curious as to why my engineer in the seat next to me, had begun sweating and gripping the edge of his seat. Oh well.

[8:29] The aircraft had been fuel the night before out of 200 barrels which held the blue coloured avgas 100 low lead fuel for this type of engine. Part of my pre-flight checks consisted of taking a sample of fuel from beneath each wing and looking for signs of water contamination. Since water is heavier than the fuel, it would sink to the Bottom by Gravity naturally towards the sump where the sample can be taken. Unless it was severely contaminated, the contamination should disappear after a few samples. I had drained only a couple of samples with only a couple of globules of water, and then it was clear.

[9:08] The engine continue to run rough as I scoped the area for a suitable emergency landing spot should it be needed. Since most of that area was built up or swamp land, I headed to the beach where I knew I could land if need be. Once over the coast and having advised the Lagos Tower that I had some engine issues, I tried to clear the problem but lima whisky wasn't going to play nice. I stayed high as Magbon airfield came into view off to my right. My plan was to fly overhead and allow myself height and time to land if the engine eventually failed.

[9:41] But we landed uneventfully on the rough surface and I held the nose off to prevent stone damage. On surfaces like this it was easier on the tires and the brakes, if you let the aircraft roll out at idle power and slow down naturally rather than slamming on the brakes. We taxied onto the grass and shutdown. My poor engineer was sweating profusely and almost hung himself on the seat harness he forgot to release as he exited the aircraft, desperate to kiss terra firma. I had forgotten that he was not that keen on flying. I left him to remove the engine Cowling and check out the engine as I raced off back to Lagos by car to pick up the second aircraft. The second ferry flight was uneventful. As I was taxiing whisky whisky into park, I noticed a large crowd of people had gathered at the main gate. Our security guard was gesticulating wildly trying to maintain order, it seemed that the arrival of two aircraft into the airfield had brought out the whole village of Magbon.

[10:43] I was all in favour of letting them in to see the aircraft up close for, for them it was a rare occurrence to have so much activity, and I wanted the community to see us being there as an advantage and not a threat.

[10:56] When we had parked, we let the villagers into the compound to look at the plane. It was mostly kids who gathered round chattering excitedly, can I fly it, they exclaimed as we gave them all cokes and let them take turns to sit in the cockpit. Now that my weekends were going to be taken up with flight instructing, I decided that I needed to have an outlet of some description and get me a social life. It wasn't that I didn't have friends, it was just that I was so focused on flying that I couldn't think of anything else, and I realised that I couldn't hold a conversation without it relating to flying, and not everyone I knew lived and breathed Aviation. I decided to host my first party. I really got into it in a big way. Once the invitations had gone out, I threw myself into the catering with full force, in other words I hired someone to do the cooking.

[11:49] The best I could do is provide copious quantities of alcohol and only the best would do, yes the time had come for me to hit the local market for imported wine and beer.

[12:01] Now the beer was easy, we had two breweries that time and both created great African beers, Star Beer and Gulder. several boxes of each were procured. Now for the wine, I went to a recommended shop who had the very best imported wine, what a choice. Liebfraumilch, Blue nun, Babycham, Mateus rosé and Cinzano Bianco. I mean come on this was a high falutin party and only the best would do.

[12:34] Liebfraumilch was my favourite at that time, (stop laughing it was the early 80s) and so I was determined to have plenty.

[12:43] Ugh, when I look back on my taste of that time I am surprised I was able to digest it all. But, my guests were happy and that was a main thing, with my radio cassette recorder turned up to the maximum volume, Kool and the gang and Shalimar were given free rein to assault the ears. I don't remember much, but I do remember insisting that my very drunk guests take at least 2 bottles of warm Blue Nun home, just to remember how posh Enid's parties really were. Thank you for listening, as always your reviews and comments are very much appreciated. Thank you to Lucy Ashby for the editing of this episode. If you want to ask a question or make a comment please do so on our social media sites, Instagram, Facebook and Twitter, or contact us on our email theskypinkpilot@gmail.com, that's the kyspinkpilot@gmail.com. You can also find us on our website which is www.skypink.co.uk. In the next episode, the Lagos flying club takes shape and I take on students at the weekend, more interesting tales from my secondment as I travel to Canada for my Twin Otter simulator training, and I learn valuable lessons on what not to do as a pilot. Thank you and goodbye.

[14:12] Music.