

PERSONAL JOURNAL of Eric R. Willman

during the Technical Mission Trip to Africa

March 2001

EMAIL

Sent: Mon, 12 Feb 2001 03:12:57

Subject: Africa trip

I feel that I have been really blessed with being able to do so many things. Over the past year or so, I have had the need to evaluate what types of things really bring me joy and I have identified only 2 things. One is serving others, and the other is working on telephones. It is exciting when you can do both while serving the Lord and bringing Glory to Him.

As you may be aware, I went to Sentani, Irian Jaya, Indonesia last year on a mission trip to install a phone system at Hillcrest International School, at just about this time of year. I traveled with TechServe, a global ministry serving the technology needs of missions and missionaries all over the world. If you haven't seen the photos, you can find these on my web site at <http://www.WillmanTech.com/eric/MissionTrips.htm> (You can also find photos from a recent mission trip to Oklahoma as well.) I now have been offered the opportunity to go to Africa to do the same type of thing.

I will be leaving on Mar 5th for Kumbo, in the Republic of Cameroon, Africa. I will be one of 8 people that will give 3 weeks of time to install a new 165 station PBX telephone system. If you aren't aware, 165 stations (or telephones) is a very large system. I will be the chief system technician and will install, program, and train the personnel there on the system. They do not have a phone system now, so all the cabling, telephones, connections, and concepts will be brand new.

I will be at the Cameroon Baptist Convention, of which I know very little about. All I know for sure is that this mission performs some medical treatment for people of that area. Beyond that, I will learn first hand what it is all about. With 165 new phones, it must be a rather large camp. I have been told that there is not much that can prepare me for what I am going to see. Wes, Sr of TechServe, has told me that I will appreciate the modern facilities of the US upon my return.

TechServe is staffed with volunteers and one of the men has been in Africa since the middle of January working on 3 different jobs. The other volunteers will arrive in Cameroon on March 1st, but since they will be running cable and digging, I will arrive a few days later and begin the installation of the system.

I spent several hours and over 30 phone calls the other day just making plans for the trip, including immunization arrangements. The potential for illness is great when traveling to this area and while only required to have a yellow fever vaccine, I feel it prudent to get a few extra that may be of benefit now and in the future. I now have 4 band-aids on my arms and while the left arm is ok, the typhoid fever vaccine had a particular punch and is quite sore. I actually might go back for one or two more.

Below you will find a copy of my travel itinerary, which compared to the Indonesia trip should be a piece of cake. Last year it took 52 hours of airport/airplane time to get home. This trip shouldn't be too bad. Even the layovers are fairly short.

ERIC R WILLMAN

OUTBOUND ITINERARY 05MAR2001

DL5700	TOL	CVG	Dep	405P	Arr	502P	MILES	182	0.0	0.57	0.57
AF8885	CVG	CDG	Dep	650P	Arr	850A#1	MILES	4146	1.48	8.00	10.45
AF 846	CDG	DLA	Dep	1030A	Arr	510P	MILES	3129	1.40	6.40	19.05Hrs

RETURN ITINERARY 25MAR2001

AF 843	DLA CDG	Dep 1035P	Arr 605A#1	MILES 3129	0.0	6.30	6.30
AF8884	CDG CVG	Dep 1150A	Arr 220P	MILES 4146	5.45	9.30	21.45
DL5389	CVG TOL	Dep 535P	Arr 630P	MILES 182	3.15	0.55	25.55Hrs

TOL TOLEDO, OH
CVG CINCINNATI, OH
CDG PARIS/DEGAULLE
DLA DOUALA

A popular feature of last year's trip was my regular email updates of progress and adventures. I enjoyed getting to read all of the encouraging emails from my family and friends. I am not sure that I will have access to email on this trip. Wes has informed me that most messages have to be transmitted in and out of the area via ham radio.

If you would like to learn more about TechServe, you can find them on the web at <http://www.techserve.org>. While this email is NOT about money or support, if you have an interest in supporting this mission trip, let me know. The volunteers pay their own way to each job and this trip will cost over \$1800 for my travel, visa, and immunizations. I will carry all of my own tools to this site and will probably include some supplies as well. I have been blessed to be able to do these things, with both time and financial resources. Please keep me in your thoughts and prayers during this trip.

Serving Him,
Eric

EMAIL

Sent 4MAR2001
Subject: Pending departure.

I am up late making plans and packing for the upcoming departure. I am planning on leaving the house around 230pm for a 405pm departure out of Toledo Express Airport. Since the guy who checks you in and takes your tickets at the gate is usually the same guy who puts your bags in the cargo hold, I am not concerned about getting there too early. That is exactly the reason that I like to fly out of Toledo in the first place.

Things are looking good for the trip and I am rushing to get everything done before I leave. I am hoping to send you an email when I arrive and I will fill you in on the details of my email situation then.

Hope to see you all soon,
Eric

MON 5MAR2001

I left from home and went to Toledo Express airport on schedule. No major problems were experienced. I planned to meet Paul Kinley at the airport in Cincinnati. Since he was wearing a TechServe hat, I was able to spot him without any problems. Paul is full time staff with TechServe in Pennsylvania and will be joining us on this trip.

We knew before we left home that the equipment (the phone system, all the wire, and all the phones and supplies) had not arrived at the hospital yet. It was stuck in the wrong country, compliments of Air France. AF didn't really know how to get it to where it was supposed to go because the shipment had to go back to Paris and be transferred. After all this was done, the shipment still had to clear customs. We knew that only limited work could be completed without this material, and if it were delayed by much, the whole trip could become a complete waste.

With all of this movement around, the chance that the equipment could be damaged became greater by the day. We really didn't know much about it, other than it was not there yet. We were hoping that everything would arrive ok (or at least the best that could be hoped for.) This added some stress to the whole trip since we were going to install a telephone system that was 1000 miles from where it was supposed to be.

TUE 6MAR2001

It should be considered a crime to call the seats on the flight "reclining." Anyone over 5ft 8inches would be cramped in his or her seat. I am sure that we will have that same cramped aircraft to ride home in. Most of the flight was with the seat belts sign turned on which left us a prisoner in our seats. The pilot said that we were going to experience moderate to severe turbulence, but I didn't see anything that was that big a deal. Nonetheless, I played along and stayed in my seat. The galley was quite large and it was nice to be able to stand up for awhile when we could.

We arrived at the airport in Douala and proceeded through customs. We did not have any problems getting through customs. We walked to the curb to look for our ride. There were swarms of folks trying to carry our bags and "help" us. Of course, they really wanted our money and we couldn't really get rid of them, no matter how hard we tried. It did not appear as though anyone was around to pick us up. We waited for quite some time and I began to get a little worried. Paul was trying to think about whom to call and decided to call back to the US to locate somebody. I thought it seemed rather worthless to call the US, and that proved to be true.

After an hour or so of waiting and making calls, we finally hooked up with the local police at the airport and they attempted to assist us. There was a person waiting at the curb who seemed to know the CBC and the people there. He used his cell phone to make a few calls for us. You do not know whom you can trust in this country. Even the police can be corrupt and could lead you the wrong direction. We found out later that the man helping us was known to be "a robber." He took us somewhere to exchange some money and they treated us fairly and we didn't have any problems.

We finally found someone that could come and get us. Since we had waited almost 4 hours, it was now dark and making the trip to Bango was not recommended. We were delivered to a missionary "rest house" and were given a room for the night. This proved to be very comfortable and we were glad to have finally found a friendly place to stay and be safe.

The equipment shipment had been delivered to the airport in Douala and was waiting for customs to clear the shipment. It was hoped that this would be a very short period of time. Tim was the one who met us at the airport and he was going to go to customs the next morning to try and get the shipment released. The total weight of the shipment was 2300 pounds. The shipment would then have to then be delivered to Bango Baptist Hospital (BBH).

WED 7MAR2001

We were allowed to sleep in till 7am and breakfast was served. It consisted of several pieces of bread and 3 pieces of lunchmeat for the 3 of us. There was also jelly and butter for the bread. We were told that the trip to Bango was an 8-hour drive by truck/ambulance. We waited around the rest house grounds and the time had passed to 1pm. Since we didn't get a very early start, this would mean that it will be well after dark before reaching the hospital. The total trip is about 400KM. Most of the road was paved, until the last 80KM. From there, the trip ranged between 10KM/h and 90KM/h, dodging potholes and bumps. It seemed like this trip was taking forever. Just as I thought we were getting close, Peter, our driver, announced that there was only 30KM left. Averaging about 20KM/h, this was still going to be a long drive. We did finally make it to BBH about 9pm and it was pretty much straight to bed. The drive really takes a lot out of you.

THURS 8MAR2001

Early in the morning, we found out that the shipment had cleared customs and was being shipped by the "night bus." This meant that the shipment should be in the village early in the morning. After some further checking and arrangements, the shipment arrived around 10am. It consisted of many rolls of wire and 15 boxes containing everything from little parts, to the telephone switch and 150 telephones. The boxes were inspected and loaded into a semi trailer type storage container. I had the telephone switch boxes taken up to the switch room and began the process of carefully checking everything out. It appeared as though everything made the trip in good shape. No visible damage or problems were detected.

Now that the equipment had arrived, we could really get down to work. The backboard was the first real thing to start taking shape. The wiring blocks were spaced and mounted to the board and Rick, my assistant, was laying out cables and getting things marked and ready for that portion. The outside crew had already had most of the trenches dug, so all that was needed was the cable and then the soil could be backfilled.

Conditions here at the hospital are difficult to explain. There are people everywhere. There are almost 30 buildings that serve the different services of the hospital. A men's and women's ward and a pediatric ward, a surgical area, pharmacy, lab, dentist, optometry, exam rooms and services/maintenance areas. When a family member is admitted, the rest of the family live somewhere on-site and tend to the needs of their family member. Some have boarding house accommodations, while others just sleep on the sidewalks and grass. Like a normal hospital, there is always something going on here.

Dinner was at Pastor Tangwa's house. He and his wife had prepared a real "African adventure" for our dinner. Chicken, rice, a spinach like vegetable, and other things hit the spot very nicely. The pastor was very excited to have us working at BBH and that we would come over for dinner with them. He told us about the corruption in the country and how our coming to do work was more important than money that is sent to the mission.

FRI 9MAR2001

Work began on the tedious process of punching down the hundreds of wires that would connect to the telephone switch. There were literally over 1000 wires that all had to be placed before anything else would happen. I started the process and before long I had folks looking over my shoulder. It is real important that the local folks know how to service their equipment. Moses is one of the technicians here and I showed him how the telephone color code works. After he left to continue some outside work, Hans was soon in the room. I showed him the color code and gave him a demonstration of how the wires connect in the terminals. Following the demo, I let him try. He seemed to be a natural. He picked it up very fast. As I attempted to sit back down and continue, he asked if he could continue and do more terminations. I said sure and watched closely.

Hans was the first person that I have trained that acted like he had been doing this for a long time. You could see the excitement in his face, as he knew he had learned a new skill. He spent the next 6 hours finishing all the connections to the telephone system. He was eager to learn and the excitement for me watching him work was indescribable.

Since Hans had finished with the system terminations, we were able to try a power up of the system. It was about 430pm and we were all tired, but the prospect of turning the system on was just too much to let go for tomorrow. However, our excitement soon turned down as the system blew fuses in each of its two power supplies. The power supplies in this system are particularly troublesome and as a result, a spare supply was shipped with the system just in case one of the units failed. It was not expected, however, that both units would fail.

Hans was sent to the village to find some replacement fuses and we tried again, with no success. We made a phone call to the US to try and get 2 power supplies sent to us. The only good news was that the spare supply worked and the system could be half powered up.

Tonight as I write this, the power is so low that I cannot get the system to power up now. The 120-volt system is only producing 100 volts at this time. It is typical that the power is low at night, since lights are being used and cause a drain on the power systems of the country. Most third world regions experience a good deal of power problems as the norm. I hope that tomorrow the power will be up and the system will start ok.

The day has been long, but good. The crew is getting a lot accomplished and we are feeling that things are progressing at a better than expected rate, given the fact that we were delayed by almost 8 days by not having materials to work with.

SAT 10MAR2001

Saturday is another day of work for all of us. The hospital is open from 7am to noon every Saturday. We will continue to work after that to get things accomplished. I am still pestering Jerry for cable pair assignments that I need to begin the next portion of my work in the switchroom. I need to get started and have gone as far as I can with out this information. There are 150 pairs of outside plant wiring coming into the switchroom that will get connected to the system to feed telephones on the compound.

Not having the system fully powered up, I began to look for ways to continue the programming in spite of the failure. I quickly learned how to tell the system that more cards were installed and the system reported that it couldn't find them. Even with this, I was able to do some programming and have things ready when the power supplies arrive.

SUN 11MAR2001

I woke up not feeling real well. I was really tired last night, so I went to bed rather early. My stomach was just churning inside and I didn't feel quite right. I was in the bathroom several times this morning, and with no water, that added some stress to the whole situation. I was going to go to church with the group, but they decided that they didn't want to wait for me to finish in the bathroom and they left.

Our house servant, Rose, goes to church right here on the compound and Paul and Dr Cole were going to go there. She had talked them into "singing" in the choir with her other friends and so they said that I would fit in too. I marched in on the processional and took a seat with the choir. I had no idea what was going on, so I just bluffed my way through the process. By the time the service was half over, the church was packed. At this place, the ushers don't just give you a program, they make sure that you are sitting close to next person to make room for others. They filled every available seat in the place.

By half way though I was beginning to feel a little worse, so I made a quick quiet exit out the back. I felt like I had just overslept and was feeling groggy. I decided that I needed to work some, so after lunch I went up to the admin bldg to do some work. I got tired around 3 but pushed on to 4. By the time I made it back to the rest house, I was sick. I felt like I had the flu and was hurting all over and exhausted.

I summoned for Dr Cole around 5pm and she came in and gave me some antibiotics that would help. All I could think about was having Malaria. If I would have thought rationally about it, it was very unlikely that I had that. I laid in bed like I was going to die and all I could think about was what it would be like to be put in one of the wards here. I would rather stay in bed and die here than go to the hospital.

About 130am, I woke up feeling great, done sleeping and ready for work. Now I had to pass the last 5 hours that I would have to stay in bed.

MON 12MAR2001

In the morning, I felt about 90% and by the end of the day, everything was back to normal. The others think that I ate something that caused this to come on, but I think it was because I brushed my teeth with water

that I shouldn't have. There is so many bacteria and the like here that our bodies are not used to, any new thing could have caused a problem. It could have been anything.

It was back to the switchroom to continue programming and getting things ready. I am still missing the needed power supply but am working around it. Progress is good and we all are pleased with the way things are coming together.

TUE 13MAR2001

Since I had been invited to come into the OR and witness some procedures, I thought today would make a great day. Tues, Weds, and Thurs are the big days for surgery. I got changed into my scrubs and was ready for whatever might happen today. Dr Helen Schmidt was my host and has been here for many years, since 1969. We started the day with an 18 year old, known HIV female who had severe vaginal lesions. It took Helen almost 45 minutes to cut these lesions off with the cautery machine. Following that was a complete hysterectomy to a staff member from Younde. Most all procedures are performed with a spinal block and the patient is awake and alert during the procedure. I don't think I would like to be cut open while awake and able to talk to the surgeon.

They are only allowed to play Christian or classical music in the OR and Dr Helen asked me to send them any CD's that I might have laying around. They are always excited to have new music to play. I would like to put together a care package to send back here with many good CD's that they can have. They have been so nice to me with letting me visit.

I got down on my hands and knees today and cleaned up all the scrap wire off the floor in the switchroom. It sure looks nice in there and I took a few photos of the progress.

We got water back today at the rest house and it was much appreciated since we had finished all of our drinking water.

EMAIL

Sent: Tuesday, March 13, 2001 9:03 PM
Subject: Progress being made

Sorry it has taken so long to get an email, but it is a big hike up the mountain to get to a computer that has email access. Email is a difficult task here, and it costs a fair clip of money because you need to make a long distance call to the other side of the country. ISP's are not very plentiful here.

We live in a "rest house" and we have not had any water for the last 2 days. Today was the end of our drinking water. They thought things would be fixed by tonight, but we just don't know. We have alternate facilities for showers, but it is a good hike to get there. We have been averaging about 2 showers a week.

If you knew that the equipment had not arrived here yet, it finally arrived Thurs last week. That was a good thing because we were out of things to do without it. The entire shipment, all 2300 pounds of it, arrived and was in pretty good shape, considering it was delivered to the wrong country for starters. The telephone system made the trip well, however, it takes 2 power supplies to run the entire system and both of them were bad when we powered it up. They did ship a spare, but that only helped half. They have sent 2 more power supplies from the US via FedEx and it should be here within another day or so. There is a courier waiting in Douala for the package and will bring it here. I would say that we are ahead of schedule and are very pleased with the way things are going here. This is a very large compound, 250 beds and 29 buildings. I have also pitched in to help them with one of their radios as well.

The 8 hour drive here was rather intense. Coming by truck/ambulance was almost more than I could take, so, I have arranged for a plane to take us back to Douala. 8 hours by truck... 1 ½ hours by light wing aircraft... you figure it out. Everything that they need here is couriered by truck. I got real sick on Sun, I

think I introduced my system to some bacteria that it really didn't like. I feel much better today and was able to work all day with no worries. It was a rather light day for me though.

The power here is real bad, typical of a third world country and the telephone system does not like this kind of power. The commercial power was off most of the day today, so the entire compound was running on the generator. That power wasn't the best either. We decided to turn off the telephone system until we get a better power source, either tomorrow or Wed. They are going to set up an inverter-battery system that will run the system on clean filtered power 24/7.

With the break for me, I have asked (and been granted) permission to observe several surgical procedures. I may see a procedure to a child's lip, a prostate procedure, and maybe one or two ovarian exploratory procedures. I am quite excited about tomorrow. I will be at the OR at 8am and be ready to go from there.

Now I wish that I had brought my computer because I would be able to write a custom computer program for their hospital. With the new phone system, they would like to have a better system of billing patients/visitors for the use of the phone. They have a central "phone booth" that has two phones in it and that is the only place that you can make an outgoing call. They currently use some kind of antiquated system that counts "impulses" that they use for billing. I am going to merge 2 programs that I have already written and give them a system to print an itemized bill for each phone call. I will be able to finish the program and email it to their computer technician and he will finish the system. As a result, I have had to learn their phone company's system of billing. All calls cost money and are based on time and distance. I will also have to cover ALL international calls as well.

I hope this finds you doing well and I am really looking forward to coming home. I think I was having delusions yesterday, because I thought I was sent home early. I am not able receive email here without going into one of the big cities. If you really NEED to send me something you can reply to this address, or else I will look forward to reading all your comments upon a trip to the big city. My server will store all the messages and I WILL read them all. Take care and I look forward to seeing you real soon.

In His Service,
Eric

WED 14MAR2001

This morning was chapel where all the staff gathers to praise and have a mini church service. It lasted about 25 minutes. It is very hard to understand some of the talk since their english is so much different than ours.

While connecting wires in the switchroom, I came up with an idea that I thought would be good to suggest. For chapel next week, we should have a shortened version and gather all the staff in the yard in front of the phone booth. The administrator will make a ceremonial "first call" and have one of the pastors officially bless the phone system for the ministry here. I suggested it to the administrator and she loved the idea. They are busy making plans for the ceremony next week. I couldn't be more excited. This phone system is a real step forward for this hospital and they should be excited about it. I decided that with not much to do, I would prepare for another trip to the OR. I would use the excuse of testing and labeling their phones as my reason for doing this. I expected to just spend an hour or so and be ready to leave by 10am tea time. The morning looked to have just some standard cases. Dr Helen had another hysterectomy to perform and Dr Fokum, the other surgeon and Chief Medical Officer, was removing a cyst on a uterus. The cyst was about the same size as the uterus and definitely needed to be removed.

As I considering leaving, Dr Helen told me to stick around and get my camera. There was a small baby coming in that has a growth behind its left ear and that was going to get removed. This would be a good photo op according to her. Before this patient was prepped, it was determined that the baby was being nursed by the mother and the procedure should wait. The next case was another cyst on an ovary of a female patient. This cyst was allowed to grow for quite some time and it was unsure exactly how big the cyst really was. One of the nurses began to open the patient while Dr Helen was scrubbing. By the way,

there was no water in the OR again today so I was the “tap” who assisted Dr Helen with water that was dipped out of a bucket. I looked at the patient and thought that it was a man. The face was very tough looking and on the operating table there was no real sign of male or female. As we opened the patient, it became apparent that this was a very large cyst. The incision grew longer and longer. By the time it was done, the cyst was larger than a basketball and weighed over 10 kilos, which is about 23 pounds. It was unbelievable what I had just seen. It looked like a special effect in a movie and it was something that you would probably never see in the US.

THUR 15MAR2001

I gave the list of extensions to George, their computer technician to type into an Excel spreadsheet. He has had all morning and only has it half completed. After lunch I decided to give it a whirl and I finished it in about 30 minutes. It is nice to have the typed list as I can sort the list in any order. I worked late at night and finally figured out how to print the list in multiple columns to make it fit on only one page.

We have not had any water at the resthouse in the last 3 days and it is beginning to take its toll on most of us. Drinking water is getting hard to come by. I work every night to have a liter of water that I can put in my bottle and freeze overnight. This way I have cold water all day and as it melts, it is my cue to drink it. That really helps me to stay on top of the water situation. By the end of the day, I need to have an empty bottle to take home and fill again.

Promise, the bursar or accountant, took Garry and I down to the village to buy some cloth for making clothes. He knew the right spots to buy and showed us where that was. The African wax prints are very pretty and make nice clothes. One of the nurses working in the OR was a tailor before coming here and he can make any type of clothing item by just looking at you and telling him what you want. His price to custom make a garment is very reasonable.

FRI 16MAR2001

The week has been going along rather well. Things are really beginning to take shape. My work in the switchroom is just about completed except for the power supply that is still missing. It was shipped via FedEx, but we have yet to hear where it is. I have all the programming completed and when the new supply arrives, it is just a matter of plugging it in.

We seem to have the power situation stabilized for the switch. The inverter is running fine and the batteries seem to be fully charged now and are holding good voltage. That is a big load off my mind because I have been somewhat concerned about losing the last power supply to bad power.

I asked Dr Helen who I would need to talk to about getting to see a C-section or child delivery. Dr Fokum was the one and he said it was no problem. He even checked the schedule to see if anyone was in labor now and would be delivering soon. No luck on that, but people come in all the time and I hope to get called for one of those. I hooked up the phone in the resthouse to make it easy to get a hold of me in the event something goes down.

I had a training session with Emmanuel and George today on programming in the switch. George caught on real fast, not surprising, and Emmanuel struggled but appeared to be getting it slowly. These two are going to be the guys who need to know all about the switch. There really won't be much that they need to do, but they need to learn anyway. I think with the book, they should do fine.

We got measured today for special jumpers, aka shirts, that are going to be made for us. Apparently the hospital is going to give us a jumper to take home as a gift for our work here. They want to have the shirts done for us before the dedication next Wed. They seem real excited about the dedication and are inviting some dignitaries for the occasion.

I tried real hard to get access to my email today with no luck. It was the most frustrated that I have been on the whole trip. I really want to get access to my messages and see what people have sent me. George and I are going to try again tomorrow with another computer.

SAT 17MAR2001

I was up until almost 230am last night. There was an emergency operation to perform last night. I followed Dr Helen to the OR and again there was no water in the building, so I was the "tap" and poured water for scrubbing. We had an older man that had an obstructed bowel and needed immediate surgery to clear that. As the incision was made, the man's intestines erupted like a balloon leaving a confined space. The procedure took almost 3 hours to complete and there were several situations that arose during the procedure. Dr Helen was rather perturbed that the assistants only prepared a small "set" for the operation. It was unknown what might be encountered and a full compliment of tools should have been available.

About half way through, the nurse that scrubbed in began to feel sick. Seems he had not eaten all day and was having a hard time staying alert. Helen immediately told the other nurse to scrub in and that left no one to care for the patient and monitor. I ended up taking BP's several times during the procedure when no one else was available. The patient had a hard time with the procedure. For about 30 minutes, we could not get a detectable blood pressure. We had a rapid pulse, but the BP could not be heard. Fixing the heart monitor, the suction machine and various fetching of supplies and tools was a norm for me last night.

I spent a good part of the afternoon trying to connect to the internet for email access. The phone lines and services here are so bad that I didn't have any success with it at all.

You can tell that everyone is getting pretty testy right about now. Patience is running short and we are all getting tired of being here and being around each other. I have been getting along real well with several of the people, but a few others I try to avoid.

Tomorrow I am going to take a plane to one of the outposts that is being started and see what is going on there. There was room for 3 of us to go and it is only a 20 minute flight. I would take 2 hours by truck. It should give me a good chance to take some photos and see what is going on elsewhere. I have really not been off the compound except for the trip to the village the other day. It has been pretty much the same everyday with getting up at 630 and starting work. I can usually go until about 930 at night and then it is to bed. I'm surprised that I made it as long as I did last night. I think staying busy and feeling a sense of need helped.

SUN 18MAR2001

There was going to be a special dedication ceremony for a new medical outpost that was affiliated with BBH. The outpost was 2 hours by truck and only 20 minutes by airplane. One of the officials at BBH had chartered the plane and had room for 3 more people. I was one of the group of 3 that decided to go. It was going to cost 15,000cfa (\$23.00) to fly and that seemed like a good deal to get a ride in the plane. We were supposed to leave at 830am. The pilot was going to pick us up. When I woke up at 650am, I was told that the pilot was going to be there at 730 instead of 830. He arrived at 705am. I ate a quick breakfast and loaded up to go.

We got to the airport and waited while he prepared the plane and then we took off. The airport was a grass airstrip on the top of a hill. We were all belted in and enjoyed to country scenery. As we approached the outpost, the pilot indicated something was wrong. They had built their temporary ceremony structure right on the end of the airstrip. We circled twice and he informed us that he could land, but there was not enough room to turn around and take off again. Our trip to the outpost was cut rather short as we turned it around and headed toward home.

Sunday was a good day to rest and that is exactly what I did. A nap of several hours in the afternoon felt pretty good. Later in the afternoon they came and got me to tell me that the power supplies that we had

been waiting for so long had finally arrived. We arranged for the driver to bring the package to the resthouse and I immediately went up to the switchroom to test and install the units. Both units tested fine and I installed the unit and programmed the equipment for being completely powered up. All the alarms cleared and things were looking pretty good.

Rick came up after dinner and together we figured out that we were going to have some problems getting the equipment to handle some types of calls. International calls presented the greatest challenge and we tried many different programming ideas and nothing seemed to work very well. We finally decided that it was going to have to stay the way it was.

MON 19MAR2001

Today was the day that we had decided that CamTel would come to finish the connection of the outside lines. I didn't realize, because I didn't think about it, that today would have to be the day for the cut. I was not mentally prepared for everything that was going to happen today. As a result, it was a very hard day for me. I was already tired and the added stress and everyone wanting something just seemed to wear on me pretty good. I decided that I was going to just keep my mouth shut so nothing bad would come out. That seemed to work pretty well and everyone knew that I was stressed. I think I was harder on myself than anyone else because no one else really knew what to expect. The phone system was all new to them and they were used to phone outages (among other things) so it didn't really seem to phase them much. I was down on myself because I didn't really think things through. In the long run, everything was fine and things are running pretty good now. I had to make some last minute changes, but it really was ok.

I am still really tired and I would like to get some email sent, but just don't have the energy to walk up the hill and do it. Hopefully tomorrow.

I had also planned to take a stroll thru the village today and I was upset that I couldn't do that earlier in the day. I did get a chance to do that about 4pm. I ended up walking down the mountain and got down to the village and realized that I didn't really know the way back. To boot, it started to pour down rain and I really didn't want to get that wet. It would be one thing if I knew where I was going, but since I did not, I thought it best to hail a taxi and have them drive me home. Besides, I wanted that experience anyway.

As I dropped my body into the back seat, I quickly learned that it was cloth over plywood. The thing was a beat up mess, as most of the taxis are. I told the driver where I wanted to go and agreed on a price upfront as advised. It was 500cfa, or about 75 cents. A small price to pay to stay dry. I got back just in time for dinner. We still don't have enough water pressure to take a shower, so it will be another bucket bath tonight. I am looking forward to getting into bed.

TUE 20MAR2001

I spent the morning in the OR. I got a call at about 745am that there was going to be a c-section performed and I had asked to be able to observe that procedure. I made it there in plenty of time and was able to get dressed and ready before the patient arrived. The procedure was very fast and baby was in good shape.

As I was walking out of the theater, they told me that another was on the way. It was about 815am when the next patient arrived. This one was much more messy and it took some time for the baby to begin breathing on its own. When it did, it was obvious that it had good lungs and was crying quite loudly. I decided to stay around for a little while and I got to observe 2 protactomys. Both of these cases were higher risk because the patients were over 90 years old. Dr Schmidt has been having problems with her cautery machine for some time now. It appeared that a bad connection was causing the unit to alarm indicating that the patient is not properly connected. I called down to the switchroom for a few tools and I tightened the connections to fix the unit.

The second case ran late, so I had to leave at about 1220pm if I wanted to eat lunch. I haven't missed any meals here and I didn't want to start now. Lunch was good. After lunch Paul and I walked down to the

market to buy some material and see a seamstress about making some clothes. On the way we stopped at the school and visited the blind children and observed the classrooms of the other school. A typical classroom has between 60 to 90 students in a room with no electricity or lights. The children are really packed together. The classroom is about the same size as a typical American classroom that would hold 20-25 students. We are going to go back to the blind school tomorrow for a more detailed visit.

After dinner I went up to visit with Dr Schmidt at her house. I had intended to send some email, but I never got around to it. Rick had told me that her CD player was not working and asked if I could look at it. I took my tools to check for a power supply problem. Everything looked good and so I decided to take it apart and see if there was any detectable problem. Upon taking it apart I noticed that it had been repaired before. Something struck me as odd, but it took several minutes for it to sink in. I noticed that the transformer had 240volts stamped on it. I realized that the unit had been converted to 240 volts and that she was running it on 110. After fixing her power regulator too, we plugged it in and everything played nice. She was very excited and commented how nice it was to have someone who is able to fix things. I really enjoyed serving her. She has been so nice to me and I just felt a real sense of comfort in talking with her. I never did the email, we just sat and talked for awhile. When I got back to the rest house, our shirts for the next day's ceremony had been delivered and looked great.

WED 21MAR2001

The chapel service this morning was great. Most all the staff attend this time each week and it is a time of praise and worship and rejoicing. It is a real blessing to hear these people sing and praise with such loud and joyous voices.

They called us up and thanked us publicly and prayed for all of us. We were all dressed in our shirts and looked like a real team. Jerry gave away hats to 9 of the people who really helped us. I gave up my hat so someone here could have it. I really hadn't worn it at all. You could tell that they were just as touched as we were. I gave a short presentation on how to do a couple of real simple things with the telephones. I also took the opportunity to thank them and tell them how much they have changed our lives too. It was a real powerful time and well worth it.

I am down to my last 4 photos in the camera and want to make everyone count from now on. I talked to Dr Schmidt and she told me that she has some rolls of film in the freezer that we could have. I might buy a roll or send her a replacement later. Paul has a camera that can use the film.

After lunch I laid down and ended up taking a 2 hour nap. It felt pretty good since I have felt a little behind on sleep. There are not a whole lot of things that need to get done today and everyone is feeling the ease in pressure.

Jerry and Harold are going to Mbingo tomorrow and our group will be going to the tea plantation to see how tea is harvested and processed. I have no idea what to expect there but I understand this is a neat process to watch. Dr Schmidt also showed me some suction pumps that need some repair and I might look at those in the morning.

THU 22MAR2001

Finding things to do with the phone system is becoming a struggle. Things seem to be under control. The last of the details seem to be the paperwork and getting everything labeled.

I ended up going back to bed after breakfast and the extra sleep felt very nice. I have been tired that last few days since the work has really died down. I am going to finish the records in the computer and call this one done.

Paul and I went to the blind school this morning to spend some time with the children. He taught them some new songs and you could see how much fun they were having. To listen to them sing was a real treat. Their teacher said that they "are blind to the physical things but not blind to their soul."

They learn to read and write in Braille and learning how to “see” things with their hands. The kids seem to enjoy their school. Some of these children have been abandoned by their parents. They live in a dorm style room on the compound and their bed consists of a 3 inch foam rubber pad. There are about 12 children in a room the size of a standard bedroom in the US. It really takes you some time to understand and comprehend what things must be like everyday here. Today I will officially take my tools back to the resthouse to prepare for packing. I have to have my bag ready to go on Saturday and then three of us will leave by plane on Sunday.

We went to the tea estate and when we arrived it was closed. The driver told us that it was on 5KM to the estate. But with the roads being so bad, and the fact that it was really closer to 20KM, it ended up taking about an hour to drive there. There were 12 of us packed in a LandRover and on the way I sure was glad that we were taking the plane back to Douala.

With taking the plane, the weight is a big deal. The pilot can carry 750 pounds of cargo and the three of us makes it real close. It should be ok and the final arrangements are being made. I ran into Dr Schmidt right before dinner and she told me that she had to go back to the OR tonight to perform an emergency surgery on a baby that has to have his intestines checked and an obstruction corrected. I can't remember the exact name of the procedure, but it when the bowels slip inside of themselves.

This little boy must have been about 4-5 months old. Very early on in the procedure the boy's airway became obstructed and for about 10 minutes it was touch and go as to whether we could keep him alive. Things were real tense for a while. It became apparent that lack of good, proper fitting equipment and supplies was causing a problem. They do the best with what they have and they do a fabulous job at it, but the right size airway would have been a huge help. We were able to keep everything going and the boy is doing fine now. I was able to comfort and relax the child following the procedure and it was very fulfilling to be there at that time. Knowing that a successful procedure was completed and the boy will be back with his mother soon was nice.

EMAIL

Sent Thurs 22MAR2001
Subject: Still here!!

Getting to the computer after a long day of work is just a hard thing to do. Most of the computers that we have access to are at the top of a large hill and I just don't want to hike the hill more than required.

Everything here is going great. The telephone system is basically finished and we are finalizing the training for the local people to maintain it. This morning at chapel was a special service to dedicate the phone system to the Lord and for them to say thanks to us. It was a great time and I got to get up and give some instructions and thanks on behalf of the team. Tomorrow we are going to a tea plantation to see how tea is processed here. If the morning goes well I will take some time to repair some items that are used in the healthcare portion of the hospital. Dr Schmidt, a surgeon here, has asked me to look at some equipment and I will give a try at repairing it. They are in need of this equipment and it has been sitting around for some time now.

I have had a great time hanging out with Dr Schmidt and observing in her OR. I am not even going to start to tell you what I have seen here, but some of it has been pretty extraordinary. I even have some photos of the most interesting procedure (only for those of you who like that stuff). Several things would never be seen in the US.

I am looking forward to coming back and sharing my photos with all of you. Hopefully we can have a large meeting like the last time. I will (hopefully) have over 100 photos and we are going to pool all of our photos together so I can present a really cool and representative slide show of my trip. I have also been writing a journal that I will publish as well. So far it is over 10 pages in the computer. All of this will be on my website after the big meeting.

We tried to connect several computers to the internet so I could read my email. We spent 2 days trying and the phone connections are so bad that it proved to be a big waste of time. Those were 2 of the most frustrating days so far. I really want to read my email from all of you and I am looking forward to getting back to Douala because I think I can read them there. Know that I WILL read every one of your comments and I appreciate anything that you may have sent. Overall, I have done pretty well leaving cyberspace cold turkey. No major withdrawal signs other than being a little fussy.

The weather has been very nice and mild. We are just starting into the rainy season, so it has started to rain on a daily basis here. They need the rain desperately. We went 7 out of 8 days without water in the rest house. That is really tough if you aren't used to it. The timing was great because we had finished most of the outside work prior to the rains coming. I was here 2 weeks before it rained at all.

Most of the crew will be leaving on Saturday for Douala and will spend the night there. 3 of us, including myself, will be chartering a plane to fly to Douala. If you know me, after an 8 hour trip by truck, my attitude is "been there, done that" and the price of the plane is a good buy. It will only take us less than 2 hours to fly. That will also be an awesome way to see the country from a unique perspective.

This will probably be the last email from Bansa Baptist Hospital. Things here are definitely different now that the phones are in and working. What a site to see people communicating in ways that they never had before. Thank you for your prayers and your thoughts during this trip, hopefully you will hear from me in Douala and I look forward to seeing you back in the US.

With His Love,
Eric

FRI 23MAR2001

Today was a pretty lazy day. There were still several things to do but we didn't need to do them because the local people were going to finish things up. This would give them a chance to test their training and we could watch and be here to help, only as a last resort. Emmanuel commented that he likes the "American way of training" because he gets to do things and likes that. Overall, I was very impressed with the way that they handled everything today. They installed and programmed 3 last minute telephone extensions with no help at all. There were also 2 phones that needed repair and they handled that too.

I got a tour of central pharmacy today and I must say that I was impressed. They produce all of the IV solutions here and have a special sterile room that does the production. Before a worker can even enter the room, they are required to shower and clean. I thought they wanted to show me the facilities, but in reality they wanted to pick my brain. Right now the production process is totally manual and they would like to automate. I explained to them how a Programmable Logic Controller (PLC) works and how it would interface to the whole system. Before we left the area, they opened one of the machines, the machine that seals the IV bags, and there was a PLC in living color. Now they could see exactly what I was talking about and you could see their understanding. I explained that they might be able to expand/network that PLC to the rest of the process and they are already started. They asked me to come back and help them do this at a later date. That certainly is a possibility. The administrator also planned a good-by thank you party for us at the 10am tea time. They had cakes and pops for all of us and they said their final thank you's. It was a real neat time. It almost seems hard to leave since you can see so many things that could/needs to be completed.

We gave Rose, our housekeeper and cook a special bonus gratuity today and you could tell that it meant a lot to her. She told us that some people are not very gracious when they come here but we were a real treat. In reality, she was the real treat. She made us 3 fabulous meals a day, on time everyday and took care of everything in the resthouse. We are very grateful to have help like that. It made our work much easier to do.

SAT 24MAR2001

I finished a little paperwork and spent some time with George, their computer technician. He would like to build a computer network and I gave him some help laying it out on paper. Some category 5 network cable and a little optical fiber would be just what this place needs to really streamline to the next step. So many processes are done manually and a computer network would help them out, not to mention save them money with connection costs to access email. I suggested that they set up a server type machine that collects and sends email for everyone on the compound twice a day. This would save the time and expense of each individual making a long distance call for email. Setting up this type of thing would be very easy and I think George is capable of doing that.

Only the three of us remain and there is not much to do. The rest of the crew left and are headed for Douala. Since I turned in my keys to the administration building before the office closed at noon, there really was no way to do anything. That meant that we could just hang around the resthouse and wait for the morning when we would fly out.

EMAIL

Sent: Mon, 26 Mar 2001 23:10:37

Subject: Home at last

I am finally home and so tired I can barely sit up. I went the entire 3 weeks with no news, no email, and working everyday. I tried to get access to email in Douala and apparently there is no access anywhere on Sunday because I tried several places and they were all down. I tried to get access in Paris and I don't have some type of platinum membership card so they wouldn't let me at a computer. I thought I could do it in Cincinnati, but that starts a whole new set of problems.

With no access to US news, I had no way of knowing that ComAir pilots went on strike. I was able to secure an exit row seat on the way home from Paris and I really enjoyed that flight. We left Paris about 30 minutes late but ended up being 25 minutes early to Cinci. I checked the timetable and determined that if I got through immigration, got my bag fast and breezed through customs, I could make an earlier flight back to Toledo. That went up in smoke when I arrived in Cinci and my bag didn't. As of right now, no one knows where it is. I think it is in Paris and it might come home on a later flight.

Then I walked to the ticket counter to see about that earlier flight and I was told they were ALL cancelled. WHY?? A STRIKE?!?

Oh well, I ended up getting scheduled for a US Airways flight but I had to go to Pittsburgh and change planes again. That put me into Toledo 4+ hours later than originally scheduled. I ended up renting a car and driving home from Cinci. That worked ok and I ended up staying awake fine and I got home at around 8pm today. The house was in good shape and I am READY for bed.

That's all for now, hopefully my bag will arrive in the next 24-36 hours.

Stay tuned for more from these stations...

Eric

WED 28MAR2001

Well my bag did finally arrive and Delta Airlines had it delivered right to the house. The bag had been opened, but I expected that since it had to go through customs when entering the US. Everything appeared to be intact and the story ends.