



Air Serv flies highest

Air Serv extending a humanitarian hand to the region...

By Titus Kakembo

Air Serv Limited is a significant player in the Uganda's commercial aviation industry, specializing in "last mile" air transportation in support of humanitarian programs in East and Central Africa.

Air Serv Limited was established in 1995 to serve as a strategically located logistics and maintenance base for its U.S.-based not-for-profit humanitarian aviation owner, Air Serv International. Over the past two decades, Air Serv Limited has grown into one of the premiere air charter providers in East Africa with one of the region's best aviation safety records. Currently Air Serv's fleet of six, twelve passenger Cessna Caravans support humanitarian programs in four eastern DRC locations – Bunia, Bukavu, Lubumbashi and, most recently, Kalemie.

Air Serv began flight operations in Kalemie, DRC, this past January. Transporting aid workers, medicine, and other life-saving cargo, Air Serv offers a safe and affordable alternative to hazardous land travel to and from difficult-to-reach locations.

In 2015, Air Serv added a sixth Cessna Caravan to its growing fleet and, Air Serv hopes to add a seventh Caravan this year. Also in 2016 Air Serv will debut an innovative cell phone-based software and database to provide pilots with critical real time information such as weather conditions and security bulletins at remote back country airfields. Air Serv will make the technology available to all pilots and companies flying in the region.

In addition to flight operations, Air Serv's other lines of business include facilities and aircraft maintenance services for other aviation companies. Air Serv rents office space, container storage units, aircraft parking spots, and is close to completing construction of a second aircraft hangar which will double the company's hangarage capacity.

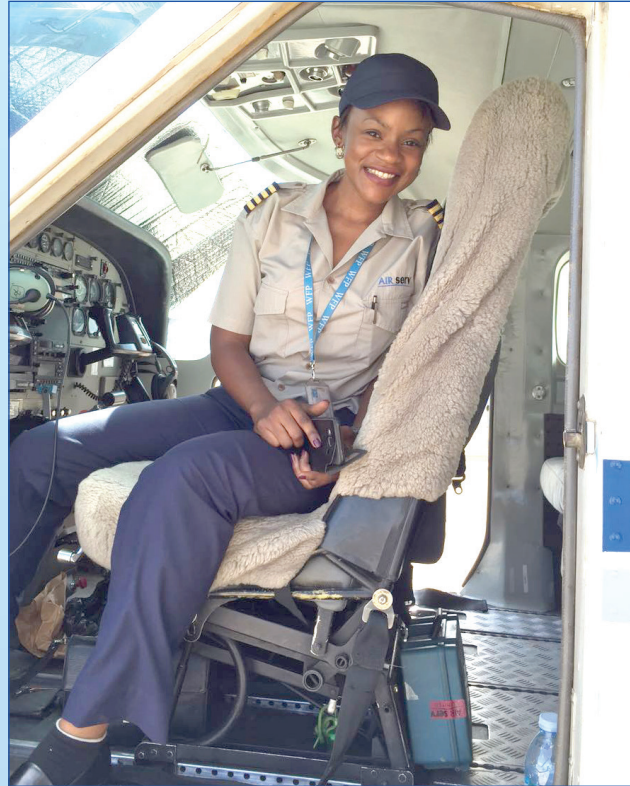
Air Serv invests heavily in its local staff's professional development. Recently four Air Serv mechanics were awarded aircraft engineer licenses or endorsements, and pilot Vanita Kayiwa became Air Serv's first African- female Captain.

As needs and opportunities arise, the company plans to broaden the geographic scope of its operations. From flying tourists on safari to track gorillas in Bwindi Impenetrable Forest to providing life-saving transport in places like South Sudan, Somalia, and the DRC, Air Serv Limited continues to reach for the sky.



Managing Director Troy H Conrey at Air Serv hangar

Q&A for Captain Vanita Kayiwa



Captain Vanita Kayiwa after landing a plane.

Q How is working in a male dominated field?

There are times it gets quiet challenging. This is because you have to work twice as hard, as the male counterparts, to prove yourself good enough. Surprisingly there are still people who are skeptical, in this century, about flying with female taking the controls. They are stuck in that archaic mindset, that believes, only men fly. Good enough, this perception is fast changing as more females join the competitive aviation job mart.

Q What inspired you to go into aviation?

I was lucky to grow up on Buziga hill in the neighborhood of Munyonyo. The place happens to be on the route where many commercial airplanes fly over before landing at International Airport Entebbe. Today when holding the navigation aid at Port Bell I know I am about to fly above home. Watching these airplanes, a love for sciences and geography paved the way for me in aviation.

Q What are the job prospects in the aviation industry for females in Uganda?

The aviation industry has gone under immense pressure due to the global economic shocks witnessed during the credit crunch. Good enough, the future is bright. Trends indicate that air transport is growing very fast on the entire continent. This is a plus for more females. Times have changed. There is more in aviation. There are those who load the airplane and engineers besides being in the cockpit. The aviation school has a discount for citizens who are interested.

Q What is your message to girls who want to join the field?

In aviation even the sky is never the limit. It is so wonderful but take heed it takes hard work, determination, self motivation and dedication. If you want to come on board, do not let any obstacle halt you. It was determination that had me elevated



Captain Vanita Kayiwa with Air Serv Chief Pilot and her mentor

to Captain. The family support also comes in handy. To cut the long story short, aviation and flying are very exciting. To pursue it, you have got to love it, dream it and live it because it can be challenging for women especially in the beginning. But with time it dawned on me that "yes we (women) can do it" if I am to borrow President Barack Obama's campaign slogan.

Q What has been your best day in aviation?

There is what they call going solo. That is when my instructor gave me double thumbs up to fly on my own. This is no mean achievement. It reminds me of that popular phrase coined centuries ago. It goes "for once you have tested flying, you will walk the earth with your eyes turned skywards for there you have been and there you will long to return." I have longed to fly ever since I flew kites as a kid. Yes, I think my first practical flying lesson was the best day in aviation life.

Q Where did you train from?

It was at the East African Civil Aviation Academy in Soroti. We had Cessna 172s and Cessna 310s. These single and twin engines respectively come after you have been acclimatized by the ground instructors in a simulator which feels like being in the clouds. Taking off and landing are a thriller once you have mastered the controls. The instructor will tell you to go for the center line only to see the nose sway from the right to the left like a ballet dancer. And yet you have seen him do it while instructing you.

Q How long does a flying course take?

It takes a grueling three years but before you know it the days have vanished in thin air. Then you take stock of weather you got the desired hours, a Private Pilot's License (CPL) a Commercial Pilot's License (CPL) – I now know nothing in life comes easy. This is because the selection process at Air Serv is not a walk through. They have to measure to the requirements of Civil Aviation Authority (CAA) and International Civil Aviation Organization (ICAO)

Q What is, so far, your worst day in flying?

I have not had one as yet. This is because even if I have a difficult day, I use it learn and empower myself to brave the next hurdle. For most aviators it is when a medical check tells you to cut weight or risk losing your license. Every part of the body counts when it comes to flying. You need your eyes, limbs and mind set to make decision pretty fast. A good breakfast/meal is recommended before flying.

Q What are your ambitions?

For now, I want to grow more and more in my new position as Captain. Learning in aviation is a continuous process. There are various challenges that come along the way. New jets are coming off the production lines. But like any aviator I dream of flying a bigger machine in future. I dream of visiting some of the world's 10 aviation museums.

Recognition

In November 2015, at the annual aviation safety conference in Geneva, Switzerland, the United Nations World Food Programme recognised Paul Ogwang, Air Serv's Director of Maintenance, for "his exceptional contribution to the international humanitarian community."

Air Serv hired Mr. Ogwang in 1987 as a gardener but quickly recognized his technical aptitude and leadership potential. The company underwrote his training in South Africa as an aircraft mechanic, and subsequently sponsored his schooling in the U.S. for FAA licensure and Inspection Authorization certification.

"For almost three decades Mr. Ogwang has served humanitarian aviation in Africa through personally hazardous deployments to disease-ravaged and war-torn areas in the Democratic Republic of the Congo (DRC), Liberia, Sudan, South Sudan, and Chad.

As Air Serv's Entebbe-based Director of Maintenance Mr. Ogwang leads and mentors a team of fifteen engineers, assistants, and interns servicing aircraft that fly for the World Food Programme (WFP) and Medecins Sans Frontieres in South Sudan and the DRC.

Captain Samir Rajet, a UAE-based WFP Regional Aviation Safety Officer, describes Mr. Ogwang as "a humanitarian aviation leader with courage and integrity."

"Paul's professionalism and devotion to duty set the standard for safety and excellence in humanitarian aviation in Uganda, East Africa, and abroad," said Troy Conrey, Air Serv's Uganda-based Managing Director.

With a fleet of six Cessna Caravans, Air Serv specialises in "last mile" air transportation in support of East African humanitarian programmes. Air Serv also provides commercial air charter, facility, and aircraft maintenance services.



Paul Ogwang, Air Serv's Director of Maintenance