

IN RECORD TIME

By Richard L. Bairett Jr.

Only with the Lord's help could I get home in time for my daughter's baptism.



My daughter had just turned eight and was excited for me to baptize her. Her grandparents were also coming for the special occasion, which added to her excitement and anticipation. However, as the big day drew close, it looked like I might not be at the baptism.

My job as a military aircraft pilot and squadron assistant operations officer was rarely boring, but the pace became even more intense when my operations (ops) officer left on another assignment. I was dealing

with wave after wave of airlift missions. To produce the required number of flight crews, I was forced to cancel training, suspend some squadron functions, and cancel vacations that had been planned for months.

Aircrews were departing on 21-day flight orders with little chance of returning home early. And when my ops officer and another assistant ops officer returned, it became difficult to justify my staying behind for a family event. How could I hang back when I had required sacrifices of so many others?

I felt torn in half. I always tried to put my family ahead of my career, but I also had a duty to serve my country. My ops officer, while not a member of the Church, understood the importance of this event to my family and allowed me to make the decision myself. After much prayer and family discussion, I did what I felt was right and scheduled myself on the next mission out.

When my crew was alerted for a mission to begin on Monday morning, it didn't look like there was any

chance I'd be back for my daughter's baptism on Saturday. We were to fly to a cargo pickup location, then to a staging base on the East Coast of the United States, where we would be required to enter crew rest before flying again. Later we would fly to Europe and rest, then deliver cargo to a Middle East location, and on the return flight, stop for yet another crew rest, return to Europe, stop for another crew rest, and return to the United States to collect more cargo and cycle back through. It normally took at least seven days to complete this circuit just once, but I knew my family was praying to have me back. Their faith and prayers helped me to have faith, and it quickly became apparent that this wasn't going to be a typical mission.

First, instead of stopping on the East Coast for a day or two, our mission was assigned to air-refuel and continue non-stop to Europe. Then, after the minimum legal crew rest period, we were alerted to fly a different mission out-and-back to the distant cargo delivery location. The equipment offload and ground-refueling at our destination went uncharacteristically well, and after another bare-minimum crew rest period, we were amazed when we were alerted to return directly to our home base. We were going home for a day or so!

Calling from the plane, I was elated to tell my family I was nearly home. My wife told me the baptismal service had just been moved from 5:00 p.m. to 2:00 p.m. to accommodate a youth activity. I next called our airlift stage manager and explained my situation. After a pause, he replied that he could delay our alert until 5:00 p.m. on Saturday—the time the baptismal service had originally been scheduled to begin!

As we cleared the mountain range near my home, I saw that I had one more trial of faith remaining: the city lights below were blanketed in fog. This would be the worst visibility I'd ever flown an approach in. We quickly put together a plan to divert to another airfield if necessary, completed our checklists, and flew down to take a look.

As we sped toward the runway at 200 feet (60 m) above ground level, we were completely shrouded in fog. Suddenly, passing 120 feet (37 m), there was a lighted runway in front of us, and a few seconds later we were safely on the ground. Everyone exhaled in relief.

An unprecedented string of seeming coincidences had enabled my crew to make a multi-stage trip to the other side of the world and back in record time, and I was able to be home for a brief window that

coincided with my daughter's baptism. With the Lord's help I was able to fulfill my duty to my country, to my squadron, and most of all, to my family. While life would have gone on if we needed to reschedule our daughter's baptism, Heavenly Father was letting us know that He loved us and heard our prayers. He gave my daughter the memory of those miraculous events as a witness that He loves her, and my wife and I both gained a stronger witness that "whatsoever ye shall ask the Father in my name, which is right, believing that ye shall receive, behold it shall be given unto you" (3 Nephi 18:20). ■

The author lived in California, USA, at the time of this experience.

