

## February 6 to February 13

It was strange going through the airport in Doula. Immigration was the usual nightmare. I had my passport taken by them and told to go sit in the police office until they went over my visa. After a half hour which I will never get back, they stamped my passport and I was picked up by Mercy Ships crew. I then went through a mass of people wanting to carry my bag and begging. It was very hard to ignore them knowing the poverty they live in.

I noticed while waiting in the immigration line that most Africans are lean and not extravagant. There were some on my plane though who were flashing gold and jewels and with a real attitude to other Africans. They were also very overweight. I don't know how they came into their money, but I can only guess when I saw the poverty in the streets on the way to the m/v Africa Mercy ( AFM ).

It was about 8pm during the ride to the AFM and very dark. No streetlights to be seen and if there were any, they weren't working. There were so many people of Cameroon sitting on the edge of the road that I wondered what was going on. I was informed by one of my friends that because their house/shacks had no electricity, there was more light outside than inside even on this dark night. As we got into the port, there were lines of trucks carrying newly cut down logs of hardwood. I don't know what wood it was, only that the logs had a reddish tint to it and were about 3-4 feet in diameter. There must of been 50 trucks with 4-5 logs on them. Apparently they were going to be loaded on a Chinese ship. Every week they say a Chinese ship comes in to take them to China. So much for sustainable growth. Apparently, China only gives lip service to environmental issues.

Next two days I spent wandering in the engine room. Hard to trace lines out when everything disappears under the deck plates. The AFM was a rail ferry named "Dronning Ingrid" ( named for Danish Queen Ingrid ) before Mercy Ships converted it so all machinery is on deck one and stretches across eight engine rooms from the bow to stern. For some reason, there are no manifolds for ballast, bilge or fuel transfer, but only valves scattered all over the place. It makes it very hard to figure it out.

Started watches 0800-1600 on Friday, Saturday and Sunday. I was on watch with Emmanuel ( Sierra Leone ) who showed me a lot. Jordy, Elvis and Bertrand who are Africans also were with us as assistants. Emmanuel is taking an e-learning course so he can sit for his engineer's license in the U.K. He asked if I could help him with combustion that he is studying and is having trouble understanding it. I told I would be happy to since he helped me. We plan on doing it next week during our four midnight to 0800 watches.

On weekends there is no lunch served so the stewards can get a break. You have to make a sandwich during breakfast if you want lunch. On Saturday, my watch mates asked if I wanted some African food for lunch. They had made it up in the crew galley. Jordy and Elvis went and got it for us. It was better than the crappy sandwich I had made so I gladly said yes. They came back down with a large plate of white rice and a bowl of meat mixed in with a peanut sauce vegetable mix. I had to ask them what the meat was as I didn't want any bush meat. It turned out to be fried fish. I could only eat about half of what they brought only because the quantity was large. It was very good and I thanked them for it. They are all very fit and ate the large quantity they brought without any problem.

The activities engine ratings ( QMED ) which I am this time, include the following; pumping bilges, pumping ballast, transferring fuel, checking water temperatures and levels, checking lube oil in the engines, air pressures, sound fuel tanks and drain tanks and monitoring everything else. We have to keep a slight list to port ( 1/2 deg) to get lines to drain right. The

watch standers check it and transfer ballast on their own from tanks designated by the chief engineer. We also transfer fuel at 1000 everyday from the bunker tanks to the settlers. The purifier then takes it from the settlers to the service tank where the excess overflows back to the settlers. We are burning Heavy Fuel Oil #6 ( HFO ) in the generators. The MAN diesels run very well burning HFO. There is an incinerator on board that the watch-standers operate for our engine room trash and the hospital medical waste. Usually the watch-standers have assistants who handle that chore. It's not something I want to handle.

On Saturday we had to keep switching over the plate coolers for the 30 deg C water for the generators. They kept getting barnacles and other crap in the strainers. The water in Douala is very dirty. We eventually had to back flush the coolers to get them clean enough to keep everything cool. The water here is 32.8 deg C ( 91 F ). The engine rooms where the generators are were 42 C ( 108 F ) today. Douala is Lat 4 deg north or about 250 miles from the equator. I monitor my drinking water consumption. My water bottle is 750 ml and I emptied it 3 times on watch ( 2.2 l ). I guess I sweat it out.

If you have been ever on a ship you know there are several emergency signals. Continuous sounding of the general alarm and whistle for 8-10 seconds is fire and emergency and is one of them. More than 7 short blasts on whistle and general alarm is abandon ship and muster at the lifeboats. Well, on Friday at 0130 the general alarm sounded for 10 seconds and the PA announced "engine room 5 FOB ( fire on board ). Emergency teams to your stations." Engine room 5 has 2 of the 1000 kw diesel generators. I was not on an emergency team due to my temporary position on the AFM. I did however get dressed to await the next signal. You should not go in the passageways asking what was going on, as it interferes with the emergency teams, so I stayed in my cabin. Soon we got the order to stand down. When I went on watch that morning, I found out the belts on the general service compressor burned up and set off the fire detector. It was out of commission and we crossed over to the air starting compressor.

When Mercy Ships comes into a country, they make a contract with the government that invites them. Part of the contract specifies security, dockage potable water, fuel and hourly labor rates negotiated for the local people that are hired to help out. The people hired are about 30-50 in number and varies during the stay, and are referred as day workers. They help out painting and cleaning and assisting in the engineering watches. There are several in the engineering spaces chipping deck plates painting them and re-laying them. They are paid in local currency ( CFA Central African Franc ) equivalent to about \$12/ hour. It is good pay for Cameroon. It is just another way Mercy Ships is trying to make a positive impact on the country they are invited to.

Spiritual life is all around every part of the AFM. At the end of every watch, the watch-standers gather in the control room to pray. We thank the Lord for keeping us safe and working together as a team and we are thankful for giving us the opportunity to serve. Engineering spaces are dangerous areas. I am particularly having trouble dealing with low hanging steel pipes referred to as "Head bangers". When you are bald they really hurt.

Every morning after breakfast there are meetings. The schedule is as follows;

Monday 0745 - AFM Community Gathering - Praise songs, prayer and news important to the crew

Monday 0815 - Engineering Dept Prayer and business

Tuesday 0745 - Engineering Devotions

Wednesday 0745 - Deck and Engineering Depts DVD series ( currently Francis Chan )

Thursday 0745 - Deck and Engineering Depts Devotions outside on Deck 7 port side. My favorite with praise songs accompanied with guitar and African Drums.  
Thursday 1930 - AFM Community Gathering

Friday 0745 - Engineering Prayer and Business Meeting

Sunday 1900 - AFM Worship

Since Ash Wednesday is this week there is a service at 0730 - 0800.

Photos (10)

From left to right and then down

Photo 1 the Africa Mercy profile view

Photo 2 the Africa Mercy alongside in Douala Cameroon

Photo 3 & 4. Soccer game on the dock between Engineering & Hospital.

Photo 5 Bertrand taking 1000 log readings off of control panel in control room

Photo 6 part of electrical switchboard

Photo 7 Diesel Generator 2. MAN 5 cylinder 1000kw bore 210mm stroke 310mm

Photo 8 ship service compressor that gave a 0130 wakeup call

Photo 9 2 of the main engines on port side B & W Alphas 16 cylinder twin turbo 4050 hp each

Photo 10 looking down from engine room #6 to engine room #1









