

Veteran Missionary Pilot Won't Let Age or Injury Ground Him

Jack Dyer has spent 26 years delivering food and medical supplies to remote regions in Honduras and India

The man known as "Papa Jack" to thousands of Miskito Indians has taken a break from his adventures after a nasty fall on a mountain trek. But just because he's 73 years old doesn't mean Church of God missionary Jack Dyer is considering retirement.

"I'm a perpetual motion machine," he told Charisma. "If I stop moving I'll die."

Dyer has been recuperating following that nearly fatal fall in the Himalayas in India last year. But that was just one of countless close calls he's had in his 26-year missionary career, most of it spent among the Miskito Indians of Honduras, where he used his plane to ferry medical supplies and people to remote clinics, among many other duties.

Dyer grew up in Baton Rouge, La., and became a successful engineer before experiencing the "anointing of the Holy Spirit," as he put it. He was a deacon and Sunday school teacher in a Baptist church but felt something working on him spiritually. "The Holy Spirit was touching me," Dyer said.

The turning point came when he heard a sermon on Revelation 18. "It tells them to get out of Babylon," he said. "God spoke to me just as clearly as I'm talking to you and said: 'That's you, Buddy. You're mine, but you live in Babylon.' And He said, 'Get out.'"

Dyer heeded the message and began selling his extensive properties, including an Arabian horse farm, using the money to fund his future mission work and other “spiritual endeavors” such as a church camp for wayward boys. He moved with his wife, Shirley, to Honduras to be a missionary bush pilot, working with the Church of God and an organization called Friends of the Americas.

Dyer describes his experiences in his unpublished memoirs, which he wrote in third person. “I don’t like people blowing their own horn, so I just didn’t put my name in the book,” he explained. “I just think it’s more interesting that way.”

In the book, he writes of his arrival at a refugee camp in Mocoron, Honduras, in 1981: “He soon realized he was in a situation like he had never seen before. There were some 11,000 people living in an open field. There was no clean drinking water, no sanitary facilities, almost no food and nothing but the crudest thatched roofed sheds to protect them from the torrential rains that fell intermittently. They were living in a sea of mud mixed with human excrement. The odor was almost more than his stomach could bear. For a moment he thought he would throw up.”

But Dyer said he adjusted to the living conditions and was soon busy helping, sometimes transporting too-heavy loads to save lives or landing on dangerous terrain.

His adventures didn’t end with the refugee crisis. The day-to-day routine of a jungle bush pilot keeps Dyer living on the edge. On more than one occasion he damaged his plane and nearly lost his life landing on remote jungle strips. But he said he felt that he was in God’s hands, which enabled him to

perform feats far beyond the limits of his own skills.

One such feat occurred when he decided to land on a sandbar in the Coco River. He scouted it out by air but saw it was covered with logs, so he sent an Indian friend upriver by canoe to clear it. Then he flew up to deliver Christmas boxes to the Miskitos. Dyer finessed the risky landing and handed out the boxes to grateful Indians.

Dyer was in his late 60s when he wrapped up his work in Honduras. But rather than retire to Baton Rouge to fish and dandle grandkids like an ordinary person, he set off to India for a new chapter in his missionary career. That led him on the trek that almost ended his life: He blacked out while hiking in the Himalayas and wound up at the bottom of a mountain. Doctors said a heart condition apparently caused the blackout.

Dyer returned “home” to Baton Rouge for medical treatment last year, but he made a monthlong trip to Honduras in November and planned another to India early this year. “I’m open to what God does with me,” he said. “I just want to be used.”

Ernest Herndon