

BOOK REVIEW

Garth Lyder. *The Life and Times of the Boy from Tacarigua: An Autobiography*. Trinidad: Paria Publishing Company, 2010. 368p. ISBN 9789768226228. Reviewed by **Glenroy Taïtt**.

Boy from Tacarigua is the fascinating autobiography of Garth Lyder who was born in Trinidad in 1914. Although originally from the capital, Port of Spain, where he lived up to age fifteen, Lyder describes himself as a boy from Tacarigua because the subsequent period there was truly the formative years in his life. And what a long and remarkable life he had. Lyder wrote this book when he was ninety-seven.

Lyder's life can be divided into three parts: his early years in Trinidad up to 1938; his time in England up to 1950; and his subsequent career with the airline British West Indies Airways (BWIA) following his return home. Lyder was born into a staunch Methodist family. When he was six, his father died, leaving his mother to raise the family under difficult financial circumstances. One of the poignant reminiscences he shares is the family gathering where his mother was told - not asked - that her children would be shared among the extended family; this was to ease the strain on her, as she was now a single parent. Defiantly, she refused. Lyder attended Tranquility Intermediate, and then Trinidad New College in Belmont, run by none other than C.L.R. James. After school, he began working with Alstons, one of the large business establishments in Port of Spain. The ease with which he, being white, secured a job there reflects the advantages of class and ethnicity in Trinidad and Tobago. In his youth, Lyder developed a keen interest in aviation. So, in 1938, he left for England to study engineering and to learn to fly. In 1941, he joined the Royal Air Force, serving as a bomber pilot in the 180th Squadron, was shot down over Normandy in 1944, and was imprisoned in Germany until the arrival of the Russians in 1945.

Even if the book had been limited to Lyder's wartime exploits, it would still be enthralling; but unlike other books written by ex-servicemen and women from the Caribbean, *Boy from Tacarigua* covers more than the painful years of conflict. It is the story of an amazing life and a significant contribution to the history of aviation in Trinidad and Tobago. Lyder flew with the local aviation pioneer, Mikey Cipriani, whom he first met in 1932 at the newly established Piarco Aerodrome. He also discusses the many foreign pilots whom he met on stopovers in Trinidad in the 1930s. As previously mentioned, he was a wartime pilot in Britain. After the war, he even flew in the Berlin airlift. Fortunately, for us, Lyder also

documented the twenty-four years he spent as a pilot with BWIA. To date, his is the only detailed account by a member of the airline's staff. We therefore owe Lyder a debt of gratitude for having, at that late stage of his life, recorded his rich life for posterity.

Dr. Glenroy Taitt is a Senior Librarian at The Alma Jordan Library of The University of the West Indies. He is also Head of the West Indiana and Special Collections Unit.