



## **AS IT HAPPENED**

**BY**

**SANDY EDWARDS**

Late 1941 in New Zealand

Not true! Not true!

“Have you heard Pat? Sandy Edwards is dead. Crashed” exclaims a distressed friend on the Invercargill station platform one windy afternoon.

“I don’t believe it” says Pat, “It can’t be true”.

And it isn’t true. Sandy has crashed while pilot training and for four or five days doesn’t know anything or anyone. Fractured 2<sup>nd</sup> and chipped 3<sup>rd</sup> lumbar vertebrae and badly broken nose, cheek bones & teeth.

A week later, when my CFI visits, I mumble to him that I’ll be back flying soon. He doesn’t look as if he believes I will.

At this time I have no feeling from the bottom down and when pins are stuck in my legs I can’t feel them until they get to the big toes. So there is hope I’ll walk, but Mr. White, the orthopedic man, says, “You’re not likely to fly again”.

Two months later I’m out of plaster and able to stand up. The floor seems 16 instead of 6 feet away. What a relief to be able to sit on a toilet seat, but an embarrassment when my weak muscles mean I can’t stand up and the walls are all smooth.

Then sick leave and back home. My mum and dad, family and friends ask, “Will you fly again?” “Of course I will. I have no doubts.”

But no-one seems to believe me.

I have a medical every month, and when the specialists say “you won’t fly again.” I always answer, “I will.”

I learn something from all these medicals; something I’ve used ever since. Don’t mention anything negative for that’s all the listener retains.

This applies to specialists and to those officers who have the final say.

I do get back flying after ten long months And I do get through three more years of war.

And I do get to marry Pat.

At #11 OTU Westcott late 1943.

The Furious Farmer...

In our Wellington X R660 we've nearly completed a 4+hr cross country. As we want to complete our practice bombing for the course I call the range for clearance to make six bombing runs.

Weather is closing in. We get two away. Come down 1000 ft to avoid cloud. Can't escape though, so down another 1000 ft. Still no go. One more try. If the cloud foils us again, we'll go back to base. I'm tired and I know Andrew, my bomb aimer is too.

I'm turning in for the run when I hear Andrew say, "Bomb away!"

"No Andrew. Too soon. I haven't said we're running up yet." I exclaim.

"I heard you say so!" he replies with vigour.

"No, Andrew. Too late anyway. We're going home."

Soon on our radio we pick up a call from range control. "R Roger, Do you hear me? Have you just dropped?"

I don't reply. Best to say nothing. We are half way back to base when I hear again, "R.Roger, do you hear me? Did you just drop? There is a haystack on fire down here!"

I turn off the RT and fly home, almost cringing.

Back at base, they've had a call from the bombing range, saying R Roger has to be the culprit and that there is a really mad farmer there, pulling his hair out, and saying, "Someone's bombed my haystack!" and "The bloody stack should have been the target... then they wouldn't have hit it!"

Well, as it turns out he puts in a claim for 300 pounds and does it through Air Ministry. So it is official and there has to be a court of enquiry.

Andrew and I appear separately. It is in our favour that we both have good records.

"Don't let it happen again!" concludes our C/O, and I'm sure he's hiding a grin.

I wonder who else has bombed a haystack?

149 Squadron, Lakenheath June 1944.

Who needs an enemy?

In my Stirling III, V-EE953, we are returning after dropping mines between the Ile de Rey and La Rochelle. We do get fired at by the enemy and, we suspect, going and coming by our own side (All cats are grey in the dark, so they say).

No real problems though. We've been flying for about six hours, from dusk to dawn. We're somewhere down near Devises and all is going well. There is low cloud though. We'd been warned at briefing to expect this.

Does the dawn affect me? Or is it that the night has been a bit dull? Whatever the reason, I decide to do some low flying. I love this Stirling once she's airborne.

So, I fly at treetop height. But after doing this for some time, and yes, enjoying every moment, I take a go at one more belt of trees. And pull up just too late.

Is it possible a farmer down there thinks? "Oh, there's someone in trouble up there!" Yes, I know that I think just that.

There is a fire in the starboard outer motor, the trim is beggared and there's no airspeed indicator. I say to my crew. "Relax. Everything will be okay. She's hard to handle but there's an airfield over to our port. We'll land there if we have to." I feather the starboard outer and call the airfield. "We may have an emergency. May need to land. Will advise"

The craft is difficult to handle, but all can be well if only that fire will go out.

It does and I breathe a sigh of relief. I say to my crew, "We're going to go back to base." I call up our emergency airport and confirm this.

Coaxing our sick V Victor I'm thinking. "I know we can do it!" Back nearer base I call control to warn them we have an emergency. Lost an engine, have no airspeed, trim making control difficult, oil temps dangerously high and we're low on fuel.

Down there they get busy, and have waiting, just in case, fire tenders, ambulances and many anxious squadron friends.

Up here in the air, five of my crew are in danger positions while Ken, my engineer is worrying about oil pressure gauges showing red and we're already on emergency fuel. Then on the approach the flaps jam part way down and the undercart indicator refuses to show green.

On the first attempt we seem to be coming in too fast so I go around again. Yes, she does make it. With six other hearts pumping fast! Mine is too.

On the second attempt we touch down well but seem again to be too fast. "Don't pull the stick back Sandy." I'm saying to myself. But I do ease back slightly, and we're ballooning.

"Get down! Get down!" I think, "At least the undercart is holding." And it is holding, but we're going far too fast and the end of the runway is getting closer and closer. Now we're on the grass. There's a low flood drain in front of us.

We hit it. The undercarriage collapses. We slew around...and stop. I think, "Thank God!" I call my crew and say, 'Okay fellows. Get out.'" Then I look outside...and there they are, out already and moving fast away from this thing that they fear may blow up.

I feel wonderful relief. I feel like crying with joy.

Discipline takes control. I do my drill, and switch everything off. And then get out and join my crew.

I don't know about the others but I know I don't have my usual tarmac pee.

I say "Now listen before anyone else joins us." I tell them what I am going to report to my Wing Commander. " don't want you to talk to anyone now. And stick to my story...forever."

Transport comes. Everyone is quiet.

I talk with my W/C before going into the interrogation room. He says, "Give me a written report tomorrow."

I did. He reads it. "A well written report Edwards. Nice to have you home again. You won't hear another word about this."

And I didn't.