

The morning of September 29, 1940 began like any other morning in country New South Wales, but an event occurred a little before midday that is still remembered today, almost seventy years later.

Two Avro Ansons from No. 2 S.F.T.S. based at Wagga were on a cross country training flight at an altitude of 3,000 feet when they collided above the town of Brocklesbury and has become known as the 'Pick-a-back Anson Crash'. The lower aircraft was piloted by L.A.C. Jack Hewson, with L.A.C. Hugh Fraser as his Observer with the upper machine crewed by L.A.C. Leonard Fuller as pilot and L.A.C. Ian Sinclair in the Observer role.

There is still speculation as to the cause of the collision (The Court of Inquiry did find L.A.C. Fuller to be at fault), but the first inkling L.A.C. Hewson had that things weren't right was when the shadow of the other aircraft filled his cockpit. Knowing that a collision was unavoidable he instinctively undid his harness, vacated the pilot's seat, and sought the safety of the floor next to the seat as the two aircraft crunched together turning the cabin of the lower aircraft into a mass of twisted metal. From the floor L.A.C. Hewson advanced his throttles to full power, and locked his controls with the seat harness, thus keeping the two aircraft stable and flying straight and level, albeit slowly losing height but preventing them from spiraling out of control. It was this action that made it possible for Hugh Fraser and Ian Sinclair to bale out from their respective aircraft, Fraser through the floor hatch of the lower aircraft and Sinclair from the port side door of the upper aircraft. At the time of the collision none of the four airmen were wearing their parachutes and these had to be donned prior to their jumping to safety. The engines of the upper aircraft had been rendered unusable when its propellers cut into the rear cowlings of the lower aircraft's engines.

Before leaving the lower aircraft Hugh Fraser was able to pass the second parachute through the wreckage of the cabin to Jack Hewson who then had to buckle the parachute on in the very confined space amongst the wreckage of his cockpit. He then had to break some of the jagged perspex of the side transparency to climb onto the wing and slide off to what he thought was safety.

By the time Jack Hewson was able to leave his aircraft the two had descended to an altitude of around 900 feet. After pulling his ripcord he found to his dismay that in the haste and confined space he had connected his parachute harness straps incorrectly and found himself inverted with his legs entangled in the parachute which prevented it from opening fully. Finally at around 100 feet he was able to get the parachute to fully open but from such a low level he slammed into the ground so hard that the soles of his boots split open, he was knocked unconscious and temporarily paralysed.

Meanwhile L.A.C. Fuller found that with the power from the lower aircraft's engines, which did eventually sieze up at around 500 feet, keeping the two aircraft airborne, he was able to use his own controls to line the aircraft up on a large paddock about 3-4 miles from the township of Brocklesbury and bring them in to a crunching but safe and very unconventional landing.

As a result of his injuries L.A.C. Hewson spent four months in Randwick Hospital but resumed flying at the beginning of February 1941, completing his training and receiving the much coveted wings. The inquiry found that the actions he took when the aircraft came together was the main factor in enabling the other crewmen to safely bale out. Instead of going on to Canada for continuation training and then to the U.K. as did most of the others on the course, he was singled out to become a flying instructor as he was also assessed as having the rare ability to teach. After short stints as a staff pilot at No. 1 S.F.T.S. Point Cook and No. 1 A.O.S. at Cootamundra to build his hours he was sent to the Central Flying School at Camden to train on Avro Cadets as an instructor. Upon completion of this training a few months after his 20th birthday he joined No.10 E.F.T.S at Temora as a flying instructor on DH-82s and later rejoined No. 1 S.F.T.S. as an instructor on the Beam Approach flying Airspeed Oxfords. He finished the war as a C-47 Captain with 38 Squadron having flown a total of just under 2,500 hours. Sadly he was to lose his life in a motor accident in March 1963.

As to the other three airmen involved in the incident, none were to have long lives. Hugh Fraser was killed in an accident in a Lockheed Hudson in Northern Ireland in early 1942. Leonard Fuller after flying Wellingtons in North Africa returned to Australia and died when he was knocked from his bicycle by a bus at Sale in 1944 and Ian Sinclair died of illness in Northern New South Wales sometime in the 1950s.