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## Passenger tells of plane crash escape

**SARAH BREALEY**

06 August 2004 12:18

The passenger who escaped from a crash in actor Martin Shaw's vintage biplane told yesterday how he feared he would die as the aircraft burned around him.

Grandfather Ted Pheasant, 55, was looking forward to the flight, which was a birthday present from his three daughters.

But the gift nearly ended in tragedy as the plane crash-landed and burst into flames in a field at Old Buckenham, near Attleborough.

Mr Pheasant, who was back at work at FL Edge and Sons butchers in East Harling, near Thetford, said the experience was a terrifying one.

"It was frightening. I was hanging upside down, all harnessed in to the cockpit. I saw the corn was alight and I thought, I don't want to be here. I was worried that I wouldn't get out," he said.

"When you are sitting there and you see the flames you are a bit concerned, but your first thought is to try and get out."

He pressed the release button on his harness and was dragged out of harm's way by experienced pilot Phil Stead.

"I pushed the button and came down like a sack of spuds on the ground. I was lying there and you don't know which way to go. Then the pilot dragged me out of the way, because the corn was alight. It was a narrow escape."

Mr Pheasant said he planned to return to the airfield to thank Mr Stead, who helped to save him.

Mr Shaw, star of Judge John Deed and Anglia TV's The Chief, also praised the bravery of Mr Stead, who suffered minor injuries and was recovering at home yesterday.

Mr Pheasant has been celebrating his birthday, which was on Friday, with a family barbecue on Sunday before travelling to the airfield.

His wife, three daughters and four grandchildren, aged three and five, were among the crowd watching as the 1941 Boeing PT17 Stearman took off.

He said the engine had appeared to lose power soon after take-off.

"It took a long while to start the engine, five or ten minutes. It seemed alright as it went along the grass but as we left the ground it was sort of swaying from side to side and I thought, that doesn't seem right.

"The pilot said afterwards he was losing power so he cut the engine down and tried to land it. It all happened so quick. He tried to land it and as it came down it clipped the wheels off and it flipped the plane over.

"The pilot said, come on, we have got to get down from here. He was concerned about the plane exploding. It had been refueled just before we went up so all that could have gone up."

Mr Pheasant had not realised who owned the plane until Mr Shaw came over to ask if he was alright. "He shook my hand and that was when I recognised him. His wife said, I am going to have to give you a hug."

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Mr Shaw was at the airfield because he was due to go up in the plane himself. Had flights on Sunday not been delayed by mist, he would have been in the plane at the 4.45pm time of the accident.

Mr Shaw and his wife, TV presenter Vicky Kimm, have vowed to have the aircraft rebuilt. They said yesterday they did not want to comment further until the accident investigations had taken place.

Mr Pheasant, who had an equally lucky escape from a car accident when he was younger in which he was thrown out of the back window, said: "It hasn't really put me off. Things happen like that, anyway. I wouldn't mind going up again, though not at the moment."

He added: "It was a birthday present I shan't forget."

Nik Coleman, commercial manager at Old Buckenham airfield, said yesterday things were running as normal, with several take-offs yesterday.

He said: "The aircraft has been made safe and secured and has been effectively quarantined until the air accident investigators and insurance company look at it. We have checked the runway and so on and made sure there were no issues there."

"We will all now await the outcome of the accident investigation team's report, which can take up to a year. We remain thankful that nobody was injured."

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