

Flying bugs the Baldwins

Max Pudney reports on an aviation family



Max Pudney

Richard Baldwin, owner of air2there airline with flagship Cessna Grand Caravan at Paraparaumu.

Just before WW2, Stanley Baldwin arrived in New Zealand. He had been a member of the RAF since the Great War and was an instrument specialist, a much sought-after profession and badly needed in the RNZAF.

He accepted a transfer and became a flight lieutenant, responsible for setting up training courses to teach instructors in the way of repairs and calibration of aircraft instruments.

Stanley Baldwin was a worldly man, brought up in London's tough dockland area. He worked his way through the ranks, having spent much of his time in the RAF at overseas bases. He spent two years in the same flight as AC Shaw (Lawrence of Arabia) in the Middle East and further afield, in Iraq and the Northwest Frontier where things were tough at that time — and still are!

He had seen a pilot of a crashed aircraft shot out of mercy when being burnt to death in the wreckage and unable to escape. No doubt he would have found life in New Zealand somewhat more sedate.

In 1953 he met Olive, and they married and had a family of three boys and a girl. There was a considerable age difference between Olive and Stanley. Number two son David says, "He sometimes seemed more like a grandfather figure. We didn't expect him to stand at the rugby field on cold winter mornings, but we were always happy to sit at home listening, wide-eyed, while he regaled us with exciting flying stories and life east of the Brahmaputra."

Although his discipline was sometimes exacting, Stanley Baldwin had a compassionate streak and he was a good sort. He was awarded the MBE for his work with the RNZAF and received an illuminated address signed by the Queen and Prince Philip. On retirement he became an aircraft accident inspector and died in 1986.

Olive Baldwin, the matriarch of the Baldwin clan, is not herself a flyer but has enjoyed many hours as passenger with her sons and grandsons and thoroughly enjoys hunting, fishing, shooting and climbing. Life in the South Westland area and bush cooking are among her passions.

She is also an accomplished author and historian with some dozen books to her name, covering such topics as *French Pass and d'Urville Island*, *Wilde Chef—New Zealand Outdoors*, and *The Great New Zealand Adventure*.

Richard, their eldest son, started learning to fly after school and gained his PPL in 1977 while working for the Fire Service. He bought an Auster J5B in need of some work. With the wings removed he towed the aeroplane, on its own wheels, a distance of 6km to Rotorua Airport. Finally the Auster was made airworthy and he flew it for several hundred hours before changing it for a Mooney M20F Executive, the model with a 25cm fuselage stretch and an extra cabin window on each side.

In 1996 he swapped the Mooney for a PA-31 Piper Navajo. With its two turbocharged 310hp Lycoming fuel injected piston engines it had a long-range cruising speed of 147kt and a service ceiling of 25,000ft.

Richard Baldwin is now the owner, managing director and CEO of the small regional airline and air charter company air2there which operates between Paraparaumu, Wellington, Nelson and Blenheim.

"We find ourselves today with five working aeroplanes," Richard says, "a Cessna 208 Grand Caravan carrying one pilot and up to 14 passengers; two Piper PA-31 Chieftains each with a maximum seating for 10 passengers; a Piper PA-34 Seneca with seating for six; and a Maule, which is just the office hack. The primary reason we have different aircraft is for business requirements. The Seneca is now on the market."

"The current business was started in 2004 and I was involved in a management sense. In 2008 we restructured and I am now the owner," Richard says, "but I am nothing without the people who surround me. We do our very best to satisfy our customers and we're moving 30,000 people a year."

He says they have a lot to do with each other in the family. "We refer to one another and we seek advice — that's what families are about. We find our own ways but we have similar goals, I suppose."

"My son Nathan flies for us on a part-time basis. He has a CPL with instrument and multi-engine ratings and works mainly for a big company in Gisborne. He is often overseas, flying Cresco turboprops involved in low-level geophysical survey and high-level aerial photography. He also ferries aircraft and flies for skydiving."

Number two son is David Baldwin, widely known among the aviation fraternity as Doctor Dave, author of *Healthy Bastards: A Bloke's Guide to Being Healthy*. He obtained a BSc at Massey and then went on to gain a medical degree at Otago University which he says qualifies him as a "brainy bastard".

He then joined the RNZAF Officers' Training Course and graduated to become the Base Medical Officer at Ohakea, thereby combining his two loves — medicine and aviation.

David attributes his love of flying to his father. "It was a huge knowledge base and it's all rubbed off on us!"

After leaving the RNZAF he began organising a medical centre at Bulls, the small rural town in Manawatu close to Base Ohakea. He attends there two-and-a-half days a week and spends the rest of his time running the unique Bulls Flying Doctor Service, specifically directed towards medicals for flying personnel in remote locations throughout New Zealand.

To enable David to accomplish this, he has been studying and working to develop his flying abilities over the past 10 years and now has a CPL and instrument rating. His aircraft is dedicated to his medical work, a Cessna 172 Hawk XP2, powered by a 210hp Continental engine with a CSU.

ZK-RJG is fully IFR with HF radio and a satellite tracking unit. It has good STOL capabilities and an autopilot which helps to reduce fatigue on long flights. With his medical practice, many hours of flying and other associated duties, he frequently works around 15 hours a day.

David describes a typical flight to the South Island. "I would depart from our base at Palmerston North Airport at 5 o'clock on a Sunday morning and fly direct to Hokitika, then on to Jackson Bay for lunch — crayfish and things like that. Then Stewart Island and stay the night. Next morning, Invercargill early, then Ranfurly, Oamaru, Mount Hutt, Hokitika again, Motueka and home."



Max Pudney

Olive Baldwin, mother of the Flying Baldwins.



Olive Baldwin collection

FLt Lt Stanley Baldwin MBE.

The following week may see him flying up the east coast of the North Island. At each stop, which may be at an airfield or a farm airstrip, he conducts appropriate medical examinations according to the pilots' licence expiry dates. He visits over 20 remote airstrips every month on a regular schedule.

David's son Marc, age 22, is also a director of the Flying Doctor Service. Although busy flying his Robinson 44 helicopter, for which he has a CPL and an instructor's rating, he also keeps control of the extensive computer booking service for the 1700 pilots (20 percent of all New Zealand pilots) on the service's books. This enables Doctor Dave to fly away on his rounds confident that all arrangements are in place.

Marc's interest in helicopters developed some time ago when hunting down south with his father and grandmother. "Climbing the steep ridges and thick bush took much time and energy, a task that could be carried out in a couple of seconds with a helicopter," he said. "Andrew's accident is always in the back of my mind, but I don't think about it — you've just got to do what you want to do, and make the most of it."

Andrew, son number three, another flier, a helicopter pilot, ran his own company from Paraparaumu. On 5 May 1998 he telephoned his mother and told her he was doing a freebie for a chap he knew. It involved transferring some punga logs from the woods near Waikanae, just a short distance to a truck which was unable to get any closer. He signed off, "I love you Mum."

Olive recalls, "I heard over the news at 2 o'clock there had been a helicopter crash. I knew in my heart it was Andrew, he was such a lovely person. We went up to his place, calling out for Andrew but there was no one there. Then we went to Richard's place and Josie (Andrew's wife) arrived. She was in a terrible state of shock — then the police arrived and announced ..."

The accident report gives details of the helicopter, a Hughes 269C, which had valid docu-



via David Baldwin

Dr David Baldwin (left) and his son Marc in front of the Flying Doctor base at Palmerston North airport.

mentation and was being operated normally up to the time of the accident. The pilot was appropriately licensed, rated and experienced for the task. The job called for a sling and 40ft of rope and chain, instead of the usual 22ft.

The investigation suggests the sling probably snagged momentarily in a tree or some other obstruction, the elasticity of the rope component of the sling then catapulting the chain forwards and upwards into the main rotor. The helicopter was quite low, coming in to land and about 40ft up, but the report says "the resulting collision with the ground was not survivable".

Elizabeth Baldwin is the only daughter in the family and the only member who does not fly. She says, "My brothers get their thrills through flying and I get mine through performing, as an actor. I give them all my sisterly support and I'm behind them all the way!"

"I have three children and when they are old enough I shall give them the chance to experience flying, to see if they have the bug too."

Ardmore Airfield, Auckland
Ph: +64-9-2981373
sales@avionics.co.nz



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