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By JAMES HORNICK

Cobourg, Dec. 20 (Staff).—Buffeted across Lake Ontario by the worst storm in the pilot's memory, its radio mast shattered, its wings sheathed with ice, fuel dangerously low and one engine disabled, a fully loaded American airliner crash-landed this morning in the knee-deep snow of a farmer's field half a mile west of here.

A combination of good luck and pilot's skill saved the lives of 47 persons—44 passengers and three crewmen—when the twin-engined C-46 Curtis Commando hobbled over the Lake Ontario shoreline, roared past the farmhouse of Charles Wilson, clipped one strand of electric fence and slithered to rest on an acre of smooth pasture-land.

The pilot, 35, a veteran of more than 10,000 hours in the air, said:

"It was only an act of God that brought us down safely. In all my flying experience I've never seen anything so miraculous as this."

Major Air Coach Inc., an unscheduled airline with headquarters at Burbank, Calif., was making arrangements tonight to obtain emergency transportation for its customers. In the meantime, most of them were comfortably bedded down in the RCAF hospital at Trenton.

The big, whale-shaped Commando took off last night from Burbank for Newark, N.J. After an early morning refuelling stop at Chicago, it pressed on for Newark. But somewhere along the route—the pilot knows not where—winds of gale-like velocity swung the airliner seriously off course. Long before they knew it, the passengers were headed for Canada.

Pilot Bruce Smelser and Copilot Edgar O'Leary took turns at the controls. Their fuel gauges signalled trouble ahead. The gyro compass twirled madly. Despite the latest in de-icing equipment, ice began forming on wing and tail surfaces. A sudden gust ripped the radio mast completely off. One engine began spluttering and then stopped altogether. The airliner began losing altitude and the crewmen began praying.

"It was the most terrifying experience of my career," said Pilot Smelser. "The altimeter reading kept dropping. To the best of our knowledge we were still over water. I thought if we kept on going in the same general direction we'd soon reach land. Luckily, we did."

In the passenger compartment there was no panic.

"Everybody was wonderful," said Stewardess Sandy Daine. "There were women and children in there. But no one raised his voice, no

## 47 Unscathed In Belly Landing

one got out of his seat. I told them to tighten their safety-belts. And they did, without comment."

A few hundred yards over the shoreline, the Commando was down to a few thousand feet, and losing altitude rapidly. The one functioning engine was unable to support weight and combat the storm at the same time. Pilot Smelser decided on a quick landing.

Just a week previously, at Elizabeth, N.J., another non-scheduled C-46 encountered similar trouble. It lost one engine on take-off. Fifty-eight persons were killed in the ensuing crash.

Directly below, between Lake Ontario and No. 2 Highway, lay a rolling expanse of farmland. The storm was heavy and becoming

heavier by the minute. The Commando's fuel reserves were nearing the point of exhaustion.

Pilot Smelser nosed his machine downward, swept over trees and fence lines and nursed the faltering aircraft toward the safest-looking stretch of land in the area. There was a barely noticeable click as the propellers connected with a strand of fencing, then the streamlined underbelly settled softly into the deep snow, plowing as straight a furrow as has ever adorned the Wilson farm.

"They started jumping out as soon as the plane stopped," said Mrs. Wilson. "It was a three-foot drop from the door. But they

seemed anxious to get away. Maybe they were afraid there would be a fire. Then they started walking up toward the house."

Mr. Wilson was downtown in Cobourg at the time. He had been gunning his half-ton truck out of the long driveway as the airliner approached. The noise of his racing engine and spinning wheels obscured the sound of the unexpected visitor. It was not until a half hour later, when he was in town, that a friend stopped him to announce the strange news. Wilson hurried home to help with the coffee and tea.

"We had folks lined up to the door," said Mrs. Wilson. "A few of the ladies had babies with them. The stewardess went back to the plane for some cocoa and coffee and paper cups. I'm afraid we weren't ready for so much company."

Transportation from the scene was provided by the RCAF. Cars and buses carried the passengers to the warmth of Station Trenton. Pilot Smelser and his two fellow crew members registered at a Cobourg hotel to be near the aircraft.

Transport Department investigators from Toronto and U.S. Embassy officials from Ottawa drove here to examine the airliner and to study ways of removing it from its present snowbound resting place.

The plane is only slightly damaged. Tips of both propellers were bent in the wheels-up landing. But the structure is intact, the control surfaces workable and the engines no worse than when they came to earth.

RCAF salvage experts say the Commando will probably have to be skidded out of the field and hauled down the highway to Trenton before it can leave for the U.S. under its own power. Trenton is the nearest suitable airport.

Smelser took over the plane at Chicago. The co-pilot, Eddie O'Leary, 37, of Fresno, Calif., had made the trip from Burbank as had the stewardess, Sandy Daine of New York City. The crash-landing was made on Miss Daine's birthday—"I think she's 22, but she won't tell us," said Smelser.

In landing in the 50-acre Wilson pasture, the plane barely missed dropping into Lake Ontario, less than a half-mile to the south.

One engine "conked out" as the C-46 was flying across Lake Ontario, Smelser said. Just as the second went dead "we spotted land."

The snow was the first Mrs. Matthew Thompson of Santa Ana, Calif., had seen. She said:

"Now when I know my baby and myself are safe I've had time to look around and it certainly is pretty."