

S2 E5 A Lifesaving Delivery-aup

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SPEAKERS

Enid Otun



Enid Otun 00:00

Hello, and welcome to season two of if women were meant to fly, the sky would be pink. Episode Five, a life saving delivery. I'm Enid Otun. In this episode, I will be telling a side story about a very special lifesaving flight that I was a part of early on in my career with Bristow helicopters. During one of the courses that I was undertaking at Redhill early on in my career with Bristow helicopters, I had the opportunity to bump into a helicopter Captain that I knew. He asked if I would like to come along on a special flight. He was scheduled to take it from London to Wales that very evening, I jumped at the chance, it would mean the opportunity to fly with him and the S76 Sikorsky executive helicopter. I'd agreed for that reason on its own, but I was obviously curious about the real purpose for the flight. Our mission was to collect a set of heart and lungs from a London hospital, and along with a medical team, fly the precious cargo to a hospital in Merthyr Tydfil in Wales. You hear about these life saving operations from afar, but you never expect to be a part of this extraordinary process. For me, at that time of my life and career, it was an opportunity of a lifetime, and a learning experience like no other. It really felt like an honor to be asked to assist. I reported to the airfield that night at around 2100 hours, (9pm) in order to attend the crew briefing, it would be the captain and myself acting a second officer. I had a very small amount of experience in helicopters, so this would be a steep learning curve. The helicopter was certified for single crew operation, so for me this would be a training flight. The mission was to depart Redhill at approximately 2200 hours (10pm), enroute to a London hospital to pick up a medical transplant team, along with the recently removed heart and lungs from a donor patient. All I knew about the donor was

that they had experienced a fatal accident and had been in the donor program. The recipient would be waiting at the Merthyr Tydfil hospital for delivery of the organs. For me, it would be a surreal experience, all of it. It would be a night of firsts and the opportunity to meet some amazing extraordinary people who save lives. The captain and I walked out to the S76 so that he could familiarize me with the aircraft and my duties. This majestic machine was still in the hangar being prepared and it always took my breath away. No matter how many times I saw it. It was sleek and fast, well it was in those days, and for some reason I loved it. Up until then, my experience of helicopters had been the Bell 212 out in Nigeria. This helicopter was the staple of helicopter operations out there and in many other places around the world supporting the oil industry. This was the civilian variant of the Huey family of helicopters that were used in the Vietnam War, and they were nothing if not robust workhorses that took a beating. The S76 was much more executive looking, and was used as such. We briefed on my duties, and on the understanding that if there was anything I didn't understand, I was to ask. I would be assisting with radio calls, our medical team and crew support. At approximately 2200 hours, (10pm). We received the call to position to the London Hospital, where we would wait to pick up the medical team. They had started the intricate operation to remove the organs and there was a finite time between removal and transportation. Our scheduled flight time was approximately 25 minutes, and as we started our engines, I felt this rush of adrenaline as well as a wave of sadness for the donor who'd passed away. but in doing so, ensure that a stranger would receive a new lease of life, What a tragic time for the donors family, but what a chance for the recipient and I hoped the donors family took comfort and pride in the way their loved one had made such a difference. Life and Death was a big thing for me at that time, and I was still processing my understanding of death amongst other things. This had in part been brought on by the death of my dear friend in a helicopter accident just months earlier. I didn't feel at that time that I was able to deal with his death, even then, having experienced more than my fair share of it, and in spite of the kind of job that I did, as a child. Some of the West African rituals around death and dying had been very traumatizing to me. Some of my wider family may have found them comforting, but I found them macarbe and shocking. Of course, in the case of my father's death, I was also dealing with powerful contradictory feelings of grief and relief that he could no longer hurt me. It was a very tumultuous time. Now I wrestled with a feeling that if for some reason I was to lose my life as part of my job, would I have done enough to justify my existence on Earth, I guess I was being forced to face my own mortality. And that was hard and frightening. Deep I know, but for some reason, it was a part of me that couldn't accept or contain. Perhaps, unsurprisingly, I was convinced that I would die in a plane crash. We landed 30 minutes later in London and shut down our engines to await further instructions from the team on the progress of the operation. It came sooner than expected, and we started up our engines again in preparation for the team's arrival. In all, we had a medical team of four as well as the special coolbox which was holding the

precious cargo on board. I cross checked the weight and balance calculations, and made sure that the team was secured for our one hour and 10 minute flight Merthyr. It was now past midnight, and as we headed west, the weather was starting to deteriorate as we edged closer to Merthyr Tydfil. We would be landing on a hill just East of the hospital where we would be met by an ambulance and crew. 10 minutes out and we had started to prepare for our arrival. This would also be a first for me, and it was exciting. The landing pad would be lit, which was just as well as the rain, wind and low cloud was making arrivals somewhat challenging. In the distance, I spotted our landing area. And as we continued our approach, I could see a number of people in the vicinity awaiting our arrival. The landing was uneventful given the deteriorating weather, and I was completely in awe of my captain's amazing skill. Although I knew he had done this many, many times before. We shut down and I exited to assist the medical team behind me. They transfer the coolbox to the waiting team, and we're gone in an instant. The second car was for us as we had to wait to bring the team back to London. We were taken to the hospitals canteen for a meal and a coffee as well as a debrief. I had learned so much and was still wide eyed, even though it was now inching past 2am. My thoughts were with the unnamed patient who was at this moment waiting to receive a heart lung transplant, and who would for us remain nameless. Two hours later at approximately 0400 (4am) we lifted off the hillside, and together with the London team, were heading back to our base in Redhill, where they would be picked up by car. After a quick debrief, I was dropped back at the company hotel at about 0530am. I was exhausted but almost too tired to sleep. I decided to stay awake and join the rest of my colleagues for 7am breakfast as they were not to be missed. Even though I'd only been the most insignificant cog in the wheel, I would always be eternally grateful for the experience. We read about it, we see it on television, and these days we live it alongside the patient in some of the most intrusive TV footage, highlighting how far modern technology has come. But back in the 1980s it was less like that. And it brought home to me the unsung heroes of this process as they selflessly tried to prolong human life. Thank you for listening. As always, your reviews and comments are very much appreciated. Thank you to Lucy Ashby for the editing of this episode. If you would like to ask a question or make a comment. Please do so on our social media sites. We're on Instagram, Facebook and Twitter or send us an email. Our email addresses is theskyispinkpilot@gmail.com or visit our website www.skyispink.co.uk In the next episode, I meet the Shell Training Captain and Operations Manager to discuss my Bristow Shell Command, A small ceremony is held to award me my four bars. I become a shell captain, the first woman to achieve this in Nigeria and I come up against the bureaucracy that tries to take away what it just gave you. Thank you And goodbye.