

PRIDE OF EAGLES

A History of the Rhodesian Air Force



BERYL SALT

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A HISTORY OF THE RHODESIAN AIR FORCE

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30° South Publishers (Pty) Ltd



Helion & Company Ltd

Also by Beryl Salt:
The Valiant Years
A History of Rhodesia
Encyclopaedia of Rhodesia (co-authored)

First published in 2000 by Covos Day Books (ISBN 0-620-23759-7)
Second edition co-published in 2015 by:

HELION & COMPANY LTD
26 Willow Road
Solihull
West Midlands
B91 1UE
England
Tel. 0121 705 3393
Fax 0121 711 4075
email: info@helion.co.uk
website: www.helion.co.uk

and

30° SOUTH PUBLISHERS (PTY) LTD.
16 Ivy Road
Pinetown
Durban 3610
South Africa
www.30degreessouth.co.za

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Designed & typeset by SA Publishing Services (kerrincocks@gmail.com)
Cover design by SA Publishing Services, South Africa
Maps and diagrams by Genevieve Edwards

Printed in UK by Lightning Source, Milton Keynes, Buckinghamshire
Printed in South Africa by Pinetown Printers, Durban, KwaZulu-Natal

ISBN (UK) 978-1-908916-26-6
ISBN (South Africa) 978-1-920143-73-2

British Library Cataloguing-in-Publication Data
A catalogue record for this book is available from the British Library

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The publishers would like to express their special thanks to John Reid-Rowland for his mammoth effort with the indexing and proof-reading of this book. His immeasurable contribution, coupled with his encyclopedic knowledge of the subject, has ensured a book that is vastly improved on the original edition.

*To Dickie,
who painstakingly edited the earlier chapters and was always there to help and encourage me.
Thank you so very much. I am only sorry you were not here to see the end of the story.
Beryl*

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Glossary

A/A	Anti-aircraft
AK	Kalashnikov or AK-47. This was a Russian-designed weapon manufactured in Europe and China. It became a standard weapon for guerrilla movements world-wide. It was also used by the Rhodesian Security Forces. It was easy to use and could withstand bad treatment.
Ammo	Ammunition.
ANC	African National Congress (South Africa).
ANC	African National Council (Rhodesia).
AP	Anti-personnel land-mine.
ASP/ASAP	As soon as possible.
Avgas	Aviation fuel.
Bailiff	Member of the BSAP.
Blues	Army term for the air force.
Bok-bok	A game in which two teams compete. One team lines up, one behind the other. The first man in line holds onto a tree or other solid object; the rest bend down and hold the thighs of the man in front. The second team, one after the other, leap onto the backs of the first team, landing as far up the line as possible until all the members of the second team are sitting on the backs of the first team. The feet of the leapers must not touch the ground once they have landed. The object of the second team is to bring the first team to the ground.
Browns	Air force term for the army.
BSAP	British South Africa Police.
Bundu	Bush.
CAA	Central African Airways.
Call sign	A group of operators, each group with its own radio identification numbe.
Camo	Camouflage.
CAOS	Combined Air Observers' School and Airgunners' School.
casevac/ed	Casualty evacuation.
Chaminuka	A famous Shona spirit medium.
Chimurenga	A Shona word for the War of Liberation
CID	Criminal Investigation Department of the BSAP
CIO	Central Intelligence Organization.
CO	Commanding Officer
COIN	Counter Insurgency.
ComOps	Combined Operations, central planning and coordinating organization.
CT	Acronym for communist terrorist
DA	District Assistant—the black assistants who worked with district commissioners to administer black rural areas.
Dak	Dakota.
DFC	Distinguished Flying Cross.
DFM	Distinguished Flying Medal.

DR	Dead Reckoning.
DSO	Distinguished Service Order.
DZ	Dropping Zone.
EFTS	Elementary Flying Training School.
ETA	Estimated Time of Arrival.
FACP	Forward Air Force Command Post.
FAF	Forward Air Field.
Fireforce	Highly mobile group of troops ferried by helicopter direct to a contact with the enemy. Each flight of troop-carrying G-Cars was escorted by a K-Car, helicopter gunship.
Flak	Anti-aircraft fire.
FN	(Fabrique Nationale) Belgian-designed 7.62 semi-automatic and automatic NATO weapon on general issue to Rhodesia Security Forces.
Fred/Freddie	Nickname for Frelimo.
Frelimo	The Front for the Liberation of Mozambique.
G-Car	Troop-carrying Alouette helicopter.
Gee	Radar aid to navigation and target identification.
Gomo	Hill or mountain (Shona).
Gook	A term used for insurgents—originally used by Americans fighting in the Far East.
Hooterville	Air Force slang for Gwelo. Later used for Mabalauto, an airfield on the south-western border of the Gonarezhou game reserve.
Hot extraction	A lift out by helicopter under dangerous circumstances. A special winch and harness could be used so that the helicopter did not have to land.
Hot pursuit	Cross-border pursuit of the enemy.
IFF	Identification—friend or foe.
Indaba	Traditional meeting of African chiefs.
ITW	Initial Training Wing.
Jesse	Thick thorn bush.
JOC	Joint Operational Centre. A local military HQ where police, the army, the air force and special branch cooperated and pooled their intelligence.
K-Car	(Killing Car) A heavily armed Alouette.
Koppie	Hill.
Kraals	Groups of African huts.
Lemon	An operation that came to nothing.
Loc	Location.
Lynx	Cessna 337.
LZ	Landing Zone.
M/T	Motor transport.
MAP	Ministry of Aircraft Production.
Mayday	International distress call.
ME	Middle East.
MFC	Military Forces Commendation.
MNR	Mozambique National Resistance, an anti-Frelimo organization.
MP	Member of Parliament.

NATO	North Atlantic Treaty Organization.
NCO	Non-commissioned Officer.
NS	National Service/Serviceman.
OAU	Organization of African Unity.
OCTU	Operational Conversion Training Unit.
Op	Operation.
OP	Observation Post.
OTU	Operational Training Unit.
Pan	International emergency call.
ParaDak	Dakota-carrying paratroopers.
PATU	Police Anti-Terrorist Unit.
PF	Patriotic Front, an alliance between Robert Mugabe's ZANU and Joshua Nkomo's ZAPU.
PJI	Parachute Jumping Instructor.
POW	Prisoner of War.
Prang	Aircraft crash or attack, depending on context.
PRAW	Police Reserve Air Wing
PV	Protected Village. A fenced and heavily guarded area where villagers were resettled to prevent their giving aid to the insurgents.
R&R	Rest and recuperation.
R/T	Radio telephone.
RAAC	Rhodesian Air Askari Corp.
RAAF	Royal Australian Air Force.
RAF	Royal Air Force.
Rams	Radio Activated Marker System.
RANA	Rhodesian and Nyasaland Airways.
RAR	Rhodesian African Rifles.
Rat pack	Ration pack.
Recce	Reconnaissance.
RF	Rhodesian Front, a political party.
RLI	Rhodesian Light Infantry.
RPD	Portable light machine gun.
RPG-7	Rocket-propelled grenade
RR	Rhodesia Regiment (territorials).
RWS	Rhodesian Women's Service.
Sam	Surface-to-air missile, guided by infra-red. SA-7 was shoulder-launched.
SAP	South African Police.
SAS	Special Air Service (Rhodesian).
SB	Special Branch.
SCR	Silver Cross of Rhodesia.
SF	Security Forces.
Sidewinder	Air-to-air missile.
Sitrep	Situation report.
SKS	(Simonov) 7.62-millimetre semi-automatic carbine.
Sneb	White phosphorus air-to-ground rocket.

SOP	Standard Operational Procedure.
SS	Selous Scouts.
Strela/SAM-7	Soviet-manufactured heat-seeking missile.
Sunray	Leader.
Swapo	South West African People's Organization.
TA/TF	Territorial Army, Territorial Force.
Terr	Nickname for a terrorist, insurgent.
Troopie	A Rhodesian soldier.
TTL	Tribal Trust Land.
U/S	Unserviceable.
UANC	United African National Council (formerly ANC) of Bishop Abel Muzorewa.
UDI	Unilateral Declaration of Independence.
UN	United Nations.
Unimog	2.5-tonne Mercedes 4×4 truck.
VC	Victoria Cross.
VE Day	Victory in Europe.
Vlei	Marshy low-lying area.
WO	Warrant Officer.
WOP	Wireless Operator.
WVS	Women's Voluntary Service.
ZANLA	Zimbabwe African National Liberation Army, ZANU's military wing. Trained mainly by the Chinese.
ZANU	Zimbabwe African National Union of Robert Mugabe, the political wing.
ZAPU	Zimbabwe African People's Union of Joshua Nkomo, political wing.
ZIPRA	Zimbabwe People's Revolutionary Army, ZAPU's military wing. Trained mainly by Russians.

Author's notes and acknowledgments

The book which follows covers the proud history of an elite force from the time in 1920 when the idea of flying was an impossible dream for most people, until that day in 1980 when the Rhodesian Air Force ceased to be and became the Air Force of Zimbabwe.

The time period is 60 years. The idea of having a history of the force came into being in the early 1970s when the Rhodesian Air Force was considering celebrations for the 25th anniversary of its re-formation following World War II. Alan Cockle was then PRO and he suggested that a book covering the period would be an appropriate form of recognition. I was asked by Wing Commander Len Pink, to write this official history. As the project developed, there were long discussions about where we should begin. Obviously, the early history needed telling. The pre- World War II work to create an air force and the war-time exploits of the Rhodesian squadrons must be included. Finally, an appropriate date seemed to be that on which the first heavier-than-air machine landed on Rhodesian soil—1920—and the arrival of the *Silver Queen*.

So we had a starting date, and a closing date—November 1972—with a publication date set for 1975. However, by early 1973 the Bush War had escalated. The closing date of November 1972 was no longer the correct one. Every day new drama was being lived. My brief changed. Keep what you have—keep writing. I did.

The years passed and the battles raged. Then came the end. It soon became obvious that this book could not be published in Zimbabwe at that time in the way it had been written. In 1982, I left for Johannesburg carrying the book in various forms with me. In a new country, earning a living became the number one priority, and the years passed. Still I gathered information. It was beginning to look as though the book was destined to remain a manuscript. Then on a visit to Zimbabwe, I met Peter Cooke, who introduced me to Chris Cocks, and the rest—as they say—is history.

This is not the story of seven years of Bush War. It is the narrative of a fighting force, which grew from an ambitious idea in the minds of a few far-sighted men, through the crawling and toddling stages into a self-contained air force unique for its size. And more especially, it is the story of the men and women who dedicated themselves to that force and in some cases gave their lives.

So many people helped me in so many different ways that it is impossible to name you all and specify your particular contributions. Please accept my deepest thanks to all of you who gave so freely of your time and your memories to create this book, and know that it could not have been written without your help. My particular thanks go to Anne and Peter Cooke for their detailed work on the Roll of Honour and to Bill Sykes for tirelessly 'editing' and chasing up all the personal stories. Also particular thanks to Eric Smith, Archie Wilson, John Deall, Peter Petter-Bowyer, Chris Dams, Len Pink, Paul Hill, Charles Buchan, Tol Janeke and William Hunter Johnson.

Beryl Salt

Foreword

A wide range of authoritative books is in print regarding the contribution and sacrifice made by Rhodesian servicemen and women in support of king and country, and subsequently in the defence of their homeland. However, apart from that excellent narrative *Bush Horizons*, which portrays the progression of aviation in Rhodesia from 1896 to 1940, there exists no recognized publication that focuses specifically on the air force from its inception in October 1940 to 30th September 1980 when, with the advent of Zimbabwe, its name, purpose and direction changed, so ending a chapter of magnificence in the saga of a unique, highly motivated and cost-effective service.

This book, *A Pride of Eagles*, written by Beryl Salt, will go a long way to filling a void in the life and times of the Rhodesian Air Force. This story is a blend of historical facts and personal narratives, which combine to give an insight into the unsurpassed contribution, in proportion to the population, made by our airmen to the ultimate victory in the air battles of World War II. In addition to manning the three designated Rhodesian squadrons, a considerable number of our airmen served with distinction in Royal Air Force squadrons, operating in all the theatres of war in which these formations were engaged. Many never returned. I take the opportunity here to mention that this valuable manuscript would never have surfaced had it not been for the dedicated research, and collation of data, carried out by those two outstanding Rhodesians, Wing Commander Peter Cooke and his wife Anne. These two, together with their team of willing helpers and the enthusiasm of Beryl Salt, combined to bring this project to fruition. We owe them a debt of gratitude. I therefore feel honoured to have been invited to write the foreword to *A Pride of Eagles* and have great pleasure in doing so.

As I was a foundation member of the Southern Rhodesian Air Force from its inception in October 1939, and served through all its stages until my retirement in April 1973, there are two factors that I especially recall with pride. One such memory is that of the wonderful bond of comradeship and selfless cooperation that prevailed among our splendid security forces, whether operationally or in friendly inter-service rivalry on the sportsfield. This quality and hallmark of the Rhodesian psyche stems, no doubt, from that momentous day, 11th July 1890, when the Pioneer Column and their escort, a contingent of the British South Africa Company Police, each inspired by the all-pervading spirit of Cecil John Rhodes, the founder, crossed the Shashi River into Matabeleland. The other factor is the magnificent response of air force personnel, regular and reserve, in their determination to combat and overcome all facets of the repressive onset of international sanctions, imposed over 15 years following the Unilateral Declaration of Independence.

It had been predicted that our air force would be rendered ineffective in a matter of months. The assumption was that this would result from the absence of necessary spares and ordnance for our aircraft, with particular reference to the non-availability of starter cartridges, considered essential items for starting the engines of our jet aircraft. But how wrong they were! Thanks to the irrepressible spirit and expertise of all ranks, these hurdles were overcome by one means or another. Not only did the air force remain cost effective, but

also actually expanded its operational capability, including an improved radius of action in strike potential. Thus the redesign of the aircraft roundels, to include a centrepiece depicting our traditional military lion holding aloft a tusk in a gesture of defiance can be said, in retrospect, to have been singularly appropriate.

With Rhodesia facing, virtually alone, the unimpeded incursion of guerrilla factions on a large scale, the new generation of ground and aircrews was ready and professionally more than able to fulfil both its tactical and strategic roles with consummate success. *A Pride of Eagles* will perpetuate in print a tribute to Rhodesia's airmen who served their country gallantly on the ground and in the air, in war and in peace, and will remain a memorial to those who laid down their lives for a cause they believed in. I am proud to have been associated with such men.

Air Marshal A.O.G. Wilson, ICD, OBE, DFC (US), RhAF (Retd)
Queensland
Australia
14th May 2000

CHAPTER 1

First flights



It had been arranged that the day of the arrival of the first aeroplane should be a general holiday as from the time the warning guns were fired. When at 10 am on Friday the reports echoed through the town, all work stopped automatically and there was a general rush to the racecourse. The evacuation of the town was amazingly rapid and complete. Within half an hour of the signal, every shop and office and even banks and the post office were silent as on a Sunday. Not merely did the Europeans make haste to the aerodrome but the whole native population streamed there. (Bulawayo Chronicle)

It was 5th March 1920 when the first heavier-than-air machine made its appearance in the skies north of Bulawayo. In no time the grandstand at the racecourse was packed to overflowing while the Southern Rhodesia Volunteers band stood ready to provide a musical welcome, and mounted police under Major Tomlinson and Lieutenant MacLean endeavoured to keep the crowd clear of the actual landing area.

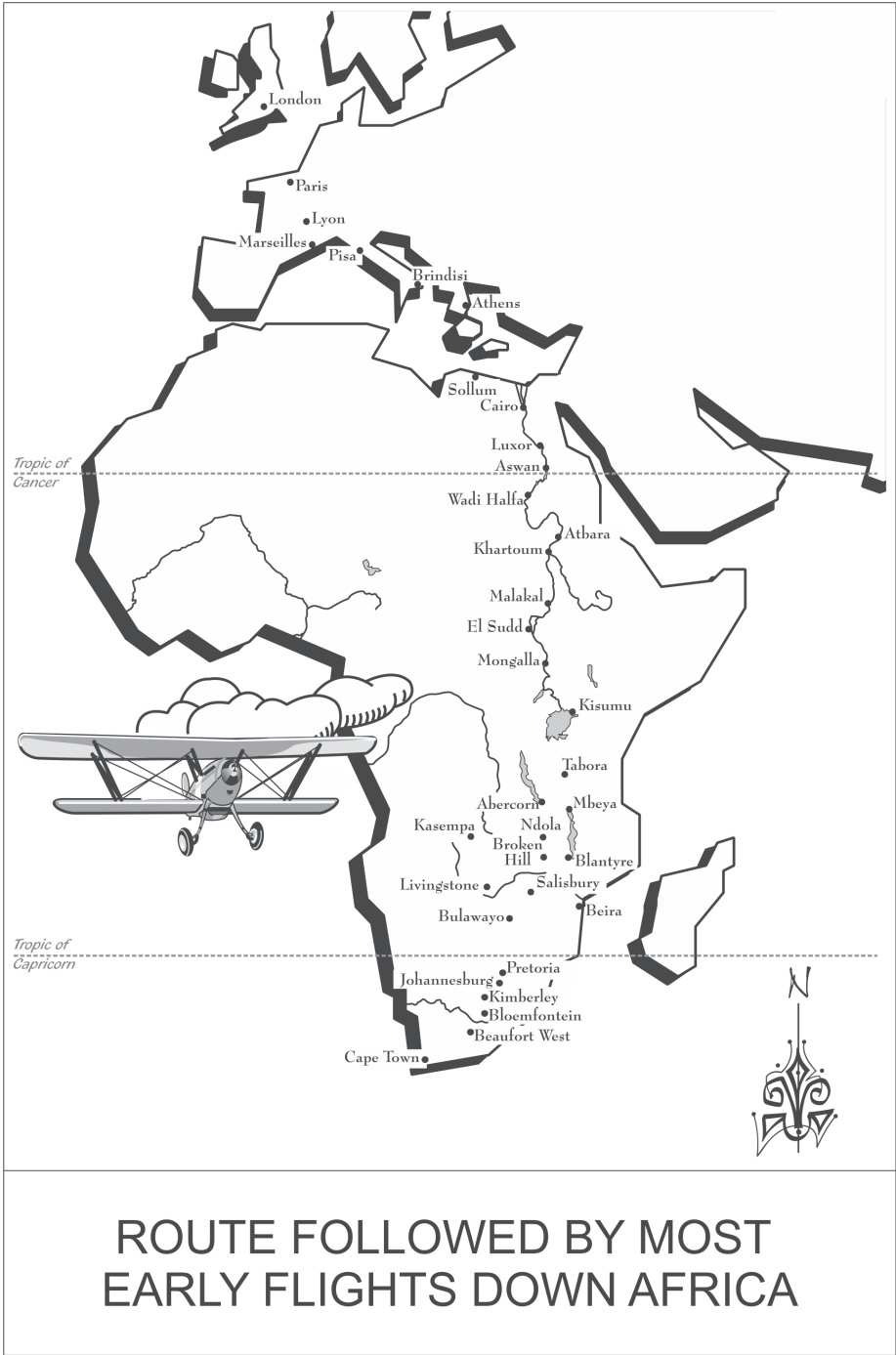
Among the crowds of natives there were numerous individuals who rejoiced at the prospect of proving that they were indeed the tellers of truth. These were boys who saw service in the East Africa Campaign and therefore had seen the wonderful 'great birds' in action. It appears that such tales as they had to tell were firmly rejected by the mass of the natives. Hence the satisfied expressions on the faces of the veterans.

The watchers were divided between admiration and apprehension as the machine began to descend in graceful spirals, its engines shut off. It lightly touched the ground and ran over the grass daintily; then swung round until it stopped in the centre of the ground facing the grandstands. (Bulawayo Chronicle)

The cheering crowd surged forward to greet the heroes of the moment—Pierre van Ryneveld and Christopher Quintin Brand as they stepped down from the oily *Silver Queen*.

Three other men vital to the enterprise, whose names are hardly ever mentioned, were the aircraft mechanics: Mr Burton from Rolls-Royce, Flight Sergeant Newman (who took over from Burton at Cairo) and Sergeant Sherratt. They flew in the *Silver Queen* to Bulawayo, then finished the trip to Cape Town by rail.

As so often happens, these backroom boys received little glory but it was their hard work and expertise that made this first London to South Africa flight possible. In fact the expedition had been plagued with mechanical problems and during one forced landing at Korosko, near Wadi Halfa, the aircraft ran into a pile of large boulders and the fuselage was irreparably damaged. A second Vimy was supplied by the Royal Air Force, Middle East at the request of the South African government.



Mr Burton was replaced by Flight Sergeant Newman and so it was the *Silver Queen II* that landed at Bulawayo. This plane had a new Vickers Vimy airframe but was powered by the two, still serviceable, 350 hp Rolls-Royce Eagle engines, and carried the long-range fuel tanks that came from the original aircraft.

Early on the morning of the following day, 6th March, spectators eager to witness the *Silver Queen's* take-off once more flocked to the racecourse. The aircraft's engines were tested for a full 30 minutes and at 07h55 the *Silver Queen* taxied out to the downwind extremity of her take-off path; the engines roared and the aircraft lumbered across the field. Her speed was agonizingly slow. The spectators held their breath as she laboured toward the tree line. There was a faint cheer as she lifted from the ground, her wheels brushing the bushes as she scrabbled for height. For what seemed an eternity her wheels dragged across the treetops and then she sank from sight and there came the horrifying sound of a grinding crash. The epic journey was over. Aston Redrup, a civil aviation pioneer, who was among the crowd that day, says that he believed her fuel load was too heavy. He remembers that after the crash the ground was awash with petrol and that numerous bystanders were happily lighting cigarettes and throwing their matches down. The aircraft was a total write-off but, fortunately, the crew escaped with only cuts and bruises.

The *Bulawayo Chronicle* spoke for everyone:

It is difficult to realize that the pitiful wreck is the remains of that thing of wondrous beauty that shot out of the northern sky on Friday and circled down to earth before the enraptured gaze of thousands.

That might have been the end of the first flight down Africa had it not been for the generosity of General Smuts, Prime Minister of the Union of South Africa. He had stepped in when the first crash occurred and organized the gift of *Silver Queen II* and now once more he came to the rescue, telegraphing that another aircraft would be made available. The replacement was a DH 9, named Voortrekker and it was this aircraft in which Van Ryneveld and Quintin Brand finally reached Cape Town on 20th March 45 days after leaving England. Many years later one of Van Ryneveld's sons and a nephew of Quintin Brand were both destined to serve with the Royal Air Force and continue a great tradition.

Forty-five days and three aircraft to cover the distance between London and Cape Town! The flight proved that such a journey was possible but it also demonstrated that air travel was unreliable, difficult and even downright dangerous; not to be undertaken lightly. However, despite all the obvious problems there were men in Rhodesia far-seeing enough to realize that the aeroplane was here to stay and that it had much to offer in a country of vast distances and bad roads. After all, in the 1920s it was a hazardous enough undertaking to stray outside the main centres in a car. Roads were little more than tracks through the bush, and tended to be sand traps or muddy bogs, while bridges were non-existent. One traveller writing during this period, complained in a letter to the newspaper about the number of farm gates that had to be opened and closed on the main road from Rhodesia to South Africa.

Pioneers in the air

However, long before the arrival of the *Silver Queen*, there were those who had an ambition to take to the skies. Among them Arthur Harris, late air marshal, who was living in Rhodesia at the outbreak of World War I in 1914. He joined the 1st Rhodesia Regiment but a year later transferred to the Royal Flying Corps. Another young man who once worked on a gold mine at Gatooma, Hazelton Nicholl, also rose to the rank of Air Vice-Marshal. While G.H. Hackwill, later to serve as member of parliament for the constituency of Lomagundi, earned

a place in the record books for the first unqualified victory at night in a combat between two aircraft. On the night of 28th/29th January 1918, he and Lieutenant Banks were on patrol in a pair of Sopwith Camels of No 44 Squadron, when they encountered a German raiding force heading towards London. Captain Hackwill succeeded in shooting one of the enemy Gotha aircraft down in flames. Quintin Brand also shot down a Gotha over Kent in 1918, the propeller of which is in his daughter-in-law's house in Harare.

Major Robert Hudson MC, Rhodesia's first minister of defence and later chief justice, commanded a squadron in France as did his brother Major Frank Hudson MC. During the war the idea of raising money to buy aircraft caught the public imagination. Five hundred pounds was donated in two weeks during July 1915. In all, Rhodesians donated enough to buy four aircraft at £1,500 each. Lieutenant A.R. Browne of Umvuma was killed in a dogfight in December 1915 while flying Gatooma No 1, an aircraft that had been purchased with money raised by the people of the Midlands town.

In all, Rhodesia contributed over £200,000 and nearly 6,000 men to the Allied war effort between 1914 and 1918 at a time when the total European population numbered fewer than 24,000. She could ill afford the 700 dead.

The first commercial flights

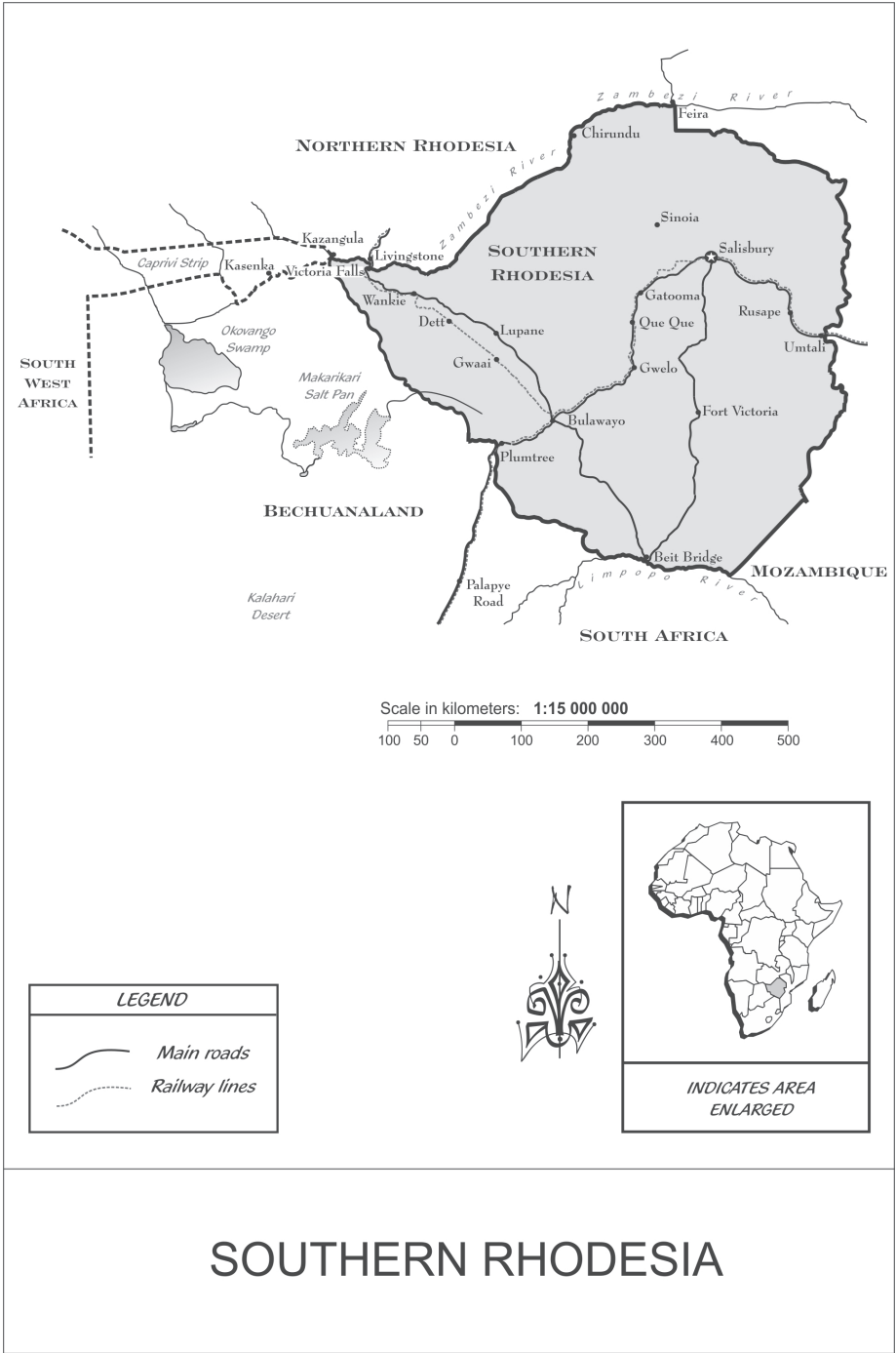
A little more than a month after the *Silver Queen's* arrival in Bulawayo the first flying company was registered in Rhodesia. It was titled Air Road Motors Ltd and did not actually own any vehicles or aircraft, but it was a beginning. The company acted as local agents for South African Aerial Transport Ltd and it was not long before the first appeared in the *Bulawayo Chronicle*.

Air-Road Motors have pleasure in announcing that they are booking flights per the 'Rhodesian Queen' during show week. Apply Aviation Manager, corner of Main Street and Fifth Avenue.

The aircraft, a Le Rhône Avro flown by Captain C.R.Thompson and Earle Rutherford, arrived in Bulawayo on Sunday 23rd May 1920. It was named the Rhodesia, and it was in this aircraft that hundreds of air-minded Bulawayo residents had their first flight. It moved on to become the first aircraft to land at Gwelo on 29th May and continued via Que Que and Gatooma to Salisbury, where it arrived on June 11th. For thousands of Rhodesians it was their first sight of a flying machine and hundreds took the opportunity of a flip, the cost being £3 per passenger per flight of ten minutes or £5 for 20 minutes.

One of the most active and enthusiastic pioneers of aviation in southern Africa was Major Allister Miller DSO who had served with the Royal Flying Corps in France during World War I. He had been the founder of South African Aerial Transports Ltd which unfortunately was dissolved soon after the Rhodesian tour, but he had obviously seen enough to believe that flying had a future because during the winter of 1922 he launched a new company: Rhodesian Aerial Tours. His plan was to establish regular flights between the larger centres and his aircraft was the main attraction at the Bulawayo Show in June that year. When two European prisoners escaped from a hard labour gang at the show ground, Major Miller joined the search. The prisoners finding there was nowhere much to go, eventually returned of their own accord, but Major Miller had made history, having undertaken the first aerial search in Rhodesia.

On July 5th, Major Miller took off from Bulawayo in Matabele with his first fare-paying passenger, Mr M.J. O'Donnell of P D Whisky fame. They flew via several towns in the Midlands to Salisbury for Show Week in August. All seemed to be going well until 13th August.



Major Miller left Salisbury on Sunday morning...with Mr Walker (mechanic) and Mr R. Markel, president of Rhodesian Maize Breeders Association as passengers. The plane made an excellent flight and rose to 11,000 feet before sighting Rusape.

Apparently they made an excellent landing but the pilot had to:

...take off on sandy ground, slightly uphill. The wind caused the plane to swerve into some small trees that caught the right wing and caused considerable damage. (Bulawayo Chronicle)

The Matabele never flew again, the company that had lost its only aircraft closed, and Major Miller returned to South Africa. Although it may have seemed at the time that the whole project was a complete waste of time and money, Major Miller had found time to lecture the cadets while he was in Bulawayo. These lectures and the thrill of seeing a flying machine and even of being able to ride in one must surely have stirred some young imaginations and that undoubtedly paid dividends later.

It was to be three years before any further air activity occurred; then in July 1925, two DH 9 aircraft flew from South Africa via Bulawayo to Livingstone. The pilots, members of the Union of South Africa Defence Force, were Lieutenant Tasker and Captain Charles Meredith (later to become Air Vice-Marshal Sir Charles Meredith), prime mover of the Empire Training Scheme and the establishment of the Rhodesian Air Training Group (RATG) during World War II.

Early in 1926, Sir Alan Cobham flying a DH 50 visited Bulawayo to survey a possible air route for Imperial Airways Ltd. The same year saw the first military flight through Rhodesia. Four Royal Air Force Fairey IIIDs under the command of Wing Commander C.W.H. Pulford OBE AFC, flew from Cairo to Cape Town and back calling at Bulawayo on the outward and return journeys. In later years this became an annual event and led to the establishment of close ties between Rhodesia and the Royal Air Force.

Another event of even greater significance occurred that same year. It was arranged with the Air Council in Britain that the Royal Air Force would accept two candidates each half year from Southern Rhodesia as apprentices and one candidate nominated by the governor for a cadetship at the Royal Air Force College at Cranwell. These men, trained by the Royal Air Force together with Royal Air Force personnel seconded to Rhodesia, were to provide the basis for Rhodesia's own air force.

The Rhodesian Aviation Syndicate Bulawayo Flying Scheme was the headline in *The Chronicle* on 9th August 1927.

Commercial aviation should be established in Bulawayo in definite form in a few days from now. A firm with the attractive title of The Rhodesian Aviation Syndicate has been formed. A de Havilland aeroplane is all but ready for flight; and Captain J.D. Mail AFC, a pilot with an excellent war record and 3,000 flying hours to his credit will make an experimental trip in a day or so. The venture has been chiefly financed by Mr Harry C. Stewart, a mine owner and rancher at Filabusi. The aeroplane, which is a three-seater, was at one time the property of Captain Mail. Messrs Stewart, A.G. Hay, Mail and Redrup are the members of the syndicate and Mr John Coghlan is acting in a legal capacity. (Bulawayo Chronicle)

Captain Mail had come from Natal, early in 1927, to join Cairns Motor and Cycle Supply Company, bringing his aeroplane, Baby Tank, with him. It was a World War I surplus DH 6 and it made the journey from Natal, somewhat ignominiously, by rail. With the assistance of Aston Redrup, the aircraft was unpacked, reassembled and by the middle of August was ready

for flight. The *Bulawayo Chronicle* carried a vivid description:

With a spluttering roar 'Baby Tank' left the racecourse and soared into the air on Sunday 14th afternoon for its first flight in Rhodesia. During the past year or two Bulawayo has welcomed quite a number of aeroplanes and airmen. But this, the first flight of the first machine of the Rhodesian Aviation Syndicate was something different, for it spoke of the initiative and determination of Rhodesians.

Captain Mail cabled the news to the manufacturers, de Havilland, in England. They were suitably impressed and cabled back:

We are very pleased and interested to receive your long cable of August 18th. We congratulate you heartily upon your enterprise in getting the old DH 6 into the air again. There must be very few DH 6s left in the world. (Bulawayo Chronicle)

Six weeks later came the first charter. The Duc de Nemours who had been invited to dine with the headmaster of Plumtree School, wished to travel the 60 miles (96km) from Bulawayo to Plumtree by air! At 16h30 on 20th September Baby Tank took to the air, watched by an enthusiastic crowd. To think that one could, in just a few minutes make a journey of so many miles! Sadly, on this occasion it was not to be. Just about eleven miles out Baby Tank developed engine trouble and her pilot was forced to make an emergency landing in a clearing.

The pilot and his passenger pushed the aircraft into a nearby ploughed field and a take-off was attempted but one of the wheels struck a tree stump, the aircraft slewed round and smashed into a tree. There was nothing to do but walk the five miles back to Bellevue and hitch a lift into town, which must have been more than a little humiliating. The aircraft was towed back to the Drill Hall for repairs but it was never to fly again.

It may seem that flying in Rhodesia was particularly hazardous but it must be remembered that the frames were little more than wood and canvas and the engines far from reliable. True, the first Atlantic crossing had been completed in 1919 but it was a feat not repeated until Charles Lindbergh achieved the impossible in this very year, 1927. Everyone said he was mad. This same month Great Britain won the Schneider Trophy and the event was reported in *The Chronicle* complete with the news that one competitor completed one lap at 299 mph—the highest speed ever reached by man!

At the time of Baby Tank's crash, Mr Hay was in London. In reply to urgent messages, he visited de Havilland and not only arranged the purchase of a Cirrus Moth Mark II, but also negotiated a franchise with the company, obtaining the agencies in Northern and Southern Rhodesia for de Havilland aircraft and Cirrus engines. These were the first such franchises obtained in southern Africa.

These negotiations took some time and the new aircraft, later named Bulawayo, did not arrive until 30th December 1927. By this time the people of Bulawayo had already seen a Cirrus Moth, piloted by Lieutenant R.R. Bentley of the SAAF on his record-breaking flight from England. He completed the journey in 26 days and still took time to thrill the citizens with a display of aerobatics during his stopover in November.

The first Moths were manufactured in 1925 and were powered by Cirrus engines developed on de Havilland's suggestion from war surplus Renault 8-cylinder engines then available for 25 shillings. The task of adapting these engines was undertaken by Major Frank B. Halford. Later de Havilland engineers designed their own engines for the famous Gipsy Moth. A further variation was the Leopard Moth, a luxury three-seater monoplane with a

high wing, with which de Havilland won the King's Cup Air Race in 1933.

On January 11th 1928, Bulawayo undertook its first private charter flight to Nantwich Ranch near Wankie and in February, Captain Mail delighted the crowds at Salisbury Racecourse with a display of aerobatics and took numerous passengers on flips. At the end of February, Douglas Mail left the Aviation Syndicate and his place was taken by Mr Wright. Only four days later, Wright with Major Newman as passenger, crashed close to Milton School in Bulawayo. The aircraft was a complete wreck.

So much, for the moment, for civil aviation but what about the military side? Well, things were stirring but painfully slowly. In 1928, Colonel Watson CMG DSO, the commandant of the Southern Rhodesia Defence Force, reported that one member of the territorial force was available with a Moth machine for use in emergencies. He hoped that more young men showing an interest in aviation would become available to the territorial force.

What they were to do once they became available is unclear, as there was no one on the staff of the defence force with any special interest in, or knowledge of, aviation matters. The defence force owned no aircraft and so far landing fields only existed at Bulawayo, Salisbury and Gwelo, although sites had been selected at Umtali, Gatooma and Que Que.

Horses, it appears from the records, were considered much more useful and reliable than the new-fangled flying machines! Horses, in fact, were taken on strength and struck off the roll with as much ceremony as territorial force officers with flying experience. The Permanent Staff Corps' orders for as late as 1935 still listed the names of riding horses, though their appointments were not promulgated.

What with the demise of the Aviation Syndicate's only aircraft, and a singular lack of interest from the Defence Department, 1928 was a year of no progress. However, interest in aviation was sustained by a series of visitors. Sir Alan Cobham returned in a borrowed Moth with the object of organizing a flying-boat service from England to the Cape via Livingstone. Lady Heath flew an Avro Avian solo from Cape Town to London, and the Honourable Lady Mary Bailey flew both ways, also solo, in a de Havilland Moth.

The third Royal Air Force flight from Cairo to Cape Town took place and the SAAF carried out its annual flight north. While in August, Lieutenant Pat Murdoch set up a new record of 13 days for the England to Cape Town flight using an Avro Avian powered by a Cirrus engine.

So 1928 came to a close and 1929 dawned. Perhaps this would prove a luckier year for Rhodesian aviation. Certainly it began on a more hopeful note. On 24th January a letter signed by Aston Redrup, then secretary of the Rhodesian Aviation Syndicate appeared in the *Bulawayo Chronicle*.

The Rhodesian Aviation Syndicate will shortly be absorbed by the Rhodesian Aviation Company, which will be affiliated with the Cobham Blackburn Airlines. Real credit is due to Mr Issels who in London recently attained the close cooperation of Cobham Blackburn Airlines, who have a large interest in the Rhodesian Aviation Company. Cobham Blackburn Airlines advise that an aeroplane and pilot will leave the U.K. next month. (Bulawayo Chronicle)

This pilot was Captain Benjamin Roxburgh-Smith DFC, who had farmed for a short time near Bulawayo, after a flying career during World War I. The aircraft was a Bluebird, single-engine, two-seater, open cockpit biplane. A second-hand Avro was to be purchased in South Africa and the company was scheduled to begin operations in June.

In February 1929, the Royal Air Force carried out its annual flight from Egypt to the Cape landing at Bulawayo on the way south. It so happened that Rhodesia Railways was on strike at the time and it was arranged that the RAF planes should carry mail from Victoria Falls to

Bulawayo at the normal rates. This must have been the first occasion on which letters were carried by air within Rhodesia.

On the return journey the RAF flight was accompanied by a South African Air Force flight. Both flights landed in Gwelo en route to Salisbury on 18th March and the people of Gwelo were thrilled by their first air force visit. Their delight turned to dismay, when during take-off one of the RAF machines crashed killing the pilot, Flying Officer Burnett and his passenger, Sergeant Turner. There was a further mishap at Salisbury when a South African Air Force machine suffered engine failure on take-off and finished up among the motor cars and spectators. Fortunately only a few spectators suffered minor injuries.

In April 1929, Colonel Watson relinquished command of the Southern Rhodesia Defence Force and was replaced by Colonel George Parson DSO, who appears to have taken more interest in air matters. His report for the year states that in his view the future of aviation depended largely on aerodrome facility development, which was in part a community enterprise. There seem to have been two officers on the reserve who held pilot's licences but there is no mention of their qualifications or whether they engaged in any kind of flying practice.

The most hopeful note for the future of military aviation in Rhodesia was the entry into Cranwell on 1st September 1929 of the first Southern Rhodesia governor's nominee, N.H. Jackson, who had been educated at Plumtree School.

The entry for 1930 was R.G. Watson. Then there seems to have been a break before the Northern Rhodesian nomination of A.M. Bentley (later Air Vice-Marshal) in 1934. Bentley was to return to Rhodesia in 1938 as a flying officer in command of a Wellesley Squadron. With his father as a passenger he flew down to Plumtree School to lecture the boys and so became the first old Prunitian to arrive there by air. In 1935, the nominee was A.D. Jackson who died in the Sudan as a result of malaria contracted while trying to recover his aircraft from a swamp.

Late in 1937 and early in 1938 the nominees were J.B. Holderness and E.M.C. Guest, both of whom would gain prominence later.

In 1933, Stanley Wilson was nominated by the governor for an apprenticeship at Halton. When he qualified as a fitter in 1938 he applied for secondment to the Southern Rhodesia Air Unit but unfortunately there were no vacancies.

Only a very few boys were fortunate enough to be accepted for training with the Royal Air Force; most young men interested in flying had no option but to turn to civil aviation.

In recognition of this fact, and in order to help the various flying clubs, the government offered grants to any club prepared to train pilots. Fifty pounds was payable for each ab initio pilot trained, up to a maximum of five per club per year. On reaching 'A' licence standard the club received a further £100 per pilot. Pilots trained under this scheme became members of the Defence Force Reserve. Up to the end of 1929, no claims had been submitted but things were to change in the very near future.

At the time of Sir Alan Cobham's flight in 1929, Imperial Airways and the Air Ministry were carrying out a joint survey beginning in South Africa and working north. This resulted in an agreement between the British government and Imperial Airways for a weekly service between Egypt and Cape Town. The route covered 5,600 miles (8,960km) with 27 aerodromes and 30 intermediate landing grounds. Many of the landing strips were unserviceable during the rainy season, the section between Khartoum and Nairobi being particularly difficult.

Early in November 1929, Captain Roxburgh-Smith returned from South Africa with a second Avro Avian. Aboard the aircraft was Daniel Sievwright Judson, known as Pat. He was the son of Dan Judson, famous in Rhodesia for his part in the rescue of a group of Europeans from the Mazoe Mine during the 1896 Mashona Rebellion. Pat had recently obtained his 'B'

Commercial Flying Licence and was to join the Rhodesian Aviation Company as an assistant pilot. Everyone connected with the company had great hopes, though its first year of activity showed a loss of £935, which was covered by grants from the Beit Railway Trustees and the Rhodesian government.

The first director of civil aviation

Even though flying in Rhodesia was still attempting to get airborne the government saw the need to introduce legislation that would control the creation and day-to-day running of airfields and provide standards for air navigation. The Aviation Act was promulgated in June 1929 and came into force in January 1930. In the main, this act was a copy of the United Kingdom legislation on the subject but there were two additional and interesting clauses. The first stated:

In time of war all aircraft, aerodromes and landing grounds etc. could be taken over, subject to payment of compensation.

and the second:

The government may out of moneys to be appropriated by parliament for the purpose, establish and maintain roads and aerodromes, and provide and maintain roads and approaches thereto and apparatus and equipment therefor, and may for the purpose acquire land and interests in and rights to and over land.

There was no mention of setting up a department of civil aviation as such, but in May the Government Gazette carried the following announcement:

It is hereby notified that His Excellency the Governor in Council has been pleased to approve the appointment of Lt Col George Parson DSO, as director of civil aviation with effect from 1st April 1930.

Colonel Parson was still commandant of the territorial forces and the only other paid official of the Department of Civil Aviation was the supervisor of aerodrome construction. The vote for Civil Aviation in the 1930/31 Budget was £5,660 out of a predicted national income of £2,371,500. No special allocation was made for military flying and it was clearly intended that use should be made of the few civil aircraft in case of emergency.

1931 saw the flight time from London to the Cape cut to six days eleven hours, this feat was performed by Lieutenant Commander Glen Kidston in a Lockheed Vega. Speed was becoming the most sought after attribute of an aircraft and Flight Lieutenant G.H. Stainforth exceeded the highest hopes of the manufacturers when he reached the (at that time) unbelievable speed of 407 mph in his Supermarine S 6B at Calshot. In February the first half of the London to Cape Town air route was opened with a service from Croydon Aerodrome to Mwanza on Lake Victoria.

A fatal accident

Flying was becoming, if not exactly commonplace, at least not quite such a headline affair. Among Pat Judson's pupils were Rhodesia's first woman pilot, Mrs F. Fiander and her one-armed husband. Pat was carrying out the dual tasks of pilot instructor and airman officer of the Territorial Force Reserve. He was doing a wonderful job pioneering flying throughout the Rhodesias and Nyasaland but sadly it was soon to end.

The Adjutant of the 1st Battalion Rhodesia Regiment was Lieutenant A.E. 'Jock' Speight. He was well known in sporting circles having played rugby for Rhodesia against the New Zealand All Blacks in 1928 and captained Rhodesia's cricket team against Percy Chapman's first official MCC touring team. Jock had learned to fly with the Salisbury Light Plane Club and held an 'A' licence but he had not flown for some time so it was decided that he needed a refresher flight before going solo again.

On 20th November 1931, Pat Judson and Jock Speight took off in the Rhodesian Aviation Company's Gipsy Moth VP-YAB. Speight was to perform some circuits and bumps but at a height of about 100 feet something went wrong. The aircraft, overshot, wobbled, rocked and then spun into a dive, crashing at the end of the runway. Pat Judson died instantly; Jock Speight died later in the afternoon.

Although the Board of Inquiry concluded that the aircraft had stalled, the opinion of the flying club members was that there had probably been a misunderstanding in the cockpit as to who 'had control' and in that split second things went wrong.

The official investigation of this crash was one of the first tasks of Major Dirk Cloete MC AFC, who had been engaged as inspector of aircraft with effect from April 1st 1931. Dirk Cloete had had a distinguished career during World War I and the years that followed. When the South African Air Force was formed, he was seconded from the RAF and made responsible for the layout of the first aerodromes in the Union and also for the training of the first SAAF pilots. From April 1st 1932 he was appointed technical adviser to the Department of Civil Aviation.

This accident appears to have been due to pilot error but two Puss Moths had also crashed in the Union of South Africa and as a result all Moths were grounded pending an inquiry. It was established later that the South African accidents were due to structural failure in the wing when the aircraft was flying in conditions of severe turbulence. A total of nine such accidents occurred worldwide before the problem was diagnosed and the defect rectified.

The grounding of their Puss Moths was yet another burden for the Aviation Company that had suffered a bad year. First, Imperial Airways had taken over the African interests of Cobham Blackburn Airlines and early in 1931 it was announced that they were withdrawing their support from the Rhodesian company. As a result Captain Roxburgh-Smith resigned in May. His place had been taken by Pat Judson until his tragic death in November.

On 9th December 1931, the second half of the London to Cape Town air route started experimentally when the de Havilland Hercules, City of Karachi, piloted by Captain H.W.C. Alger and Major H.G. Brackley—took Christmas mail through Rhodesia and Nyasaland arriving at Cape Town on 21st December. One of the ambitions of Imperial Airways was to run a regular airmail service between London and Cape Town. As with every endeavour there were teething troubles. On the first flight north the mail had to be carried by African porters for part of the way...but in true Royal Mail tradition they did get through. Each subsequent flight proved a little more reliable, until by the end of the year Imperial Airways mail service was running with 99% efficiency.

Sir Alfred Beit, whose money had until now been used mainly for the provision of railways in southern Africa was quick to see the value of air travel. On 10th February, in Bulawayo, he said: The principle duty of the Beit Trust is to improve all communications in Rhodesia and in Africa generally. Two weeks later it was announced that the Trust had made a grant of £50,000 for the facilitating of air transport in Southern Rhodesia and Northern Rhodesia on the imperial route. Facilities at Salisbury Aerodrome were to be improved and a hangar and runways were to be constructed at Broken Hill. The route ran Mbeya, Mpika, Broken Hill, Salisbury, Bulawayo, Pietersburg. For the peace of mind of the pilots flying the airmail route, two new landing-grounds were to be built and three already in existence were to be

enlarged. Along the route, wireless facilities were to be improved and it was suggested that work on the tarred strip road should be pushed ahead to offer another way out in case of an emergency. The aerodrome and landing-ground work was made the responsibility of the newly established Department of Aviation.

The beginning of the fight for an air unit

During this period, news carried in the local papers mostly concerned overseas events and for some time this information had been anything but cheerful. Periodically during 1932 there had been reports of a German rabble-rouser by the name of Adolf Hitler who seemed to spend his time swaggering around at the head of a motley army of thugs making impossible speeches. At least they seemed impossible to the rest of the world—but suddenly in January 1933, the world woke to the shock realization that Hitler had become Chancellor of the German Reich. In March 1933 he was granted dictatorial powers, ostensibly only until April 1937, but a few far-sighted people even in far-away Rhodesia began to realize that another world war was imminent.

However, to fight a war or even prepare for one, takes money and a great deal of it. During the Budget debate in May 1933, the Rhodesian government appeared hesitant about trying to form even a very small air force, believing that the cost would be prohibitive for a country the size of Southern Rhodesia.

In view of these financial constraints the Honourable R.A. Fletcher, member for Matopo, suggested that an increased subsidy should be given to the Rhodesian Aviation Company, which was in financial trouble as always, in return for their help in training pilots. Jack Keller, popular Labour member for Raylton and constant critic of the government, added his share to the debate.

Lawrence John Walter Keller* had a quick brain and an equally quick tongue, which he was not afraid to use. He believed in modern methods, particularly in the use of the aeroplane, which, as he pointed out, could also be used for riot control. Later in the debate, R.A. Fletcher also spoke out in favour of an air force as an integral part of the defence force.

So the year 1933 passed with no concrete moves being made towards the establishment of an air unit. In the civilian field, however, there was progress. The Honourable St V. Norman was appointed technical adviser to the Beit Trustees and resulting from his report, a new company was formed in October. It was called Rhodesia and Nyasaland Airways Ltd (RANA) and had an authorized capital of £25,000. The principal shareholders were Imperial Airways (Africa) Ltd and the Beit Railway Trustees Ltd who took over the assets of both the Rhodesian Aviation Co. Ltd and Christowitz Air Services, which had operated between Salisbury and Nyasaland since 1932. At this time RANA owned four DH Puss Moths and a DH Fox Moth. The company's first main commercial air route joined Blantyre, Salisbury, Bulawayo, Victoria Falls, Lusaka, Broken Hill and Ndola. The total number of aircraft then registered in Southern Rhodesia was 12. Early in the following year 1934, the de Havilland Aircraft Company (Rhodesia) Ltd was formed in Salisbury, its main purpose being to service aircraft and train pilots.

On 25th April 1934, nearly a year after his last speech on the subject, Jack Keller, once again pushed for an air unit. Knowing there was to be an offer of aid for imperial defence, he rose to his feet during the introduction of a motion on the Compulsory Defence System. His suggestion, based on notes supplied by Douglas Mail, called for the creation of one flight consisting of four aircraft. The planes, which could be obtained at a cost of £1,500 each, were to be flown by volunteers who would come from the defence force and from the civilian

* Every effort has been made to establish the first names of Rhodesians mentioned in the book.



population. His estimate of the cost of purchasing the aircraft and running the Air Arm for one year, was £12,850.

Today this sum sounds ludicrously small but Jack Keller's figures were very close to the amount finally agreed on for setting up the air unit.

The member for Raylton went on to detail the uses that could be made of this air unit: aiding training at the annual defence force camps, locust extermination, riot control, rescue, showing the flag and transport for government officials. Finally, he gave a brief description of the method of training reserve pilots used by the Royal Air Force and then went on to say:

We have something better than that in Southern Rhodesia—this gentleman (Captain Mail) has received an invitation from the military authorities in Bulawayo to give a series of lectures on the technical and flying side of aviation. He tells me that there are a number of officers, attached to the defence force today, who, for the purpose of attaining that technical and flying knowledge which they desire, are perfectly willing to pay their own expenses week in and week out if the government will provide the plane.

Lieutenant Colonel Guest answered, and supported by Colonel Brady, staunchly (but perhaps blimpishly) maintained that for defence there must be men on the ground, and that an air arm would be purely complementary, the gilt on the gingerbread so to speak. Jack Keller listened glumly. In fact the resolution which was finally adopted stated that:

This house respectfully requests the government to make an annual contribution to the Royal Navy and that such annual contribution be not less than one penny in the pound calculated on the revenue of the Colony.

In 1934 this worked out to about £10,000—very nearly the amount needed to set up the air scheme. Colonel Nangle made one final appeal for the air arm:

It is impossible to have a training ship on the Makabusi but we would like to see a wing of the Royal Air Force established here, or brought here once a year on an extended visit.*

He closed by moving an amendment:

That this House respectfully requests the government to consider an annual contribution to the Royal Navy or other branch of imperial defence, in consultation with the British government.

This motion was accepted. It was not what Jack Keller had hoped for but it was a move in the right direction. Some progress had been made but it was pitifully small when measured against Hitler's creation in October 1934 of a German air force and his urgent expansion of the German army and navy.

Few people seemed to realize the menace—but in November of the same year Winston Churchill, speaking in the House of Commons, warned of the threat created by Germany's rearmament policy—particularly by his armament in the air.

* The Makabusi, the butt of many jokes, is a very small stream that runs through Salisbury.

CHAPTER 2

Small beginnings



In March 1935 the disarmament clauses of the Versailles treaty were repudiated by Germany and conscription was reintroduced in that country. The European powers took the hint and in April, Britain, France and Italy held a conference aimed at establishing a common front against possible German aggression.

In the face of a worsening world situation, with Japan also rearming and in possession of considerable tracts of China, the Rhodesian parliament met on 2nd May to discuss the estimates of expenditure for the coming year. Almost unbelievably, before considering the estimates for defence, Lieutenant Colonel Guest suggested that the House consider the establishment of a defence force brass band, at the approximate cost of £6,000 (half the amount required to form an air unit!)

Predictably, Jack Keller sailed into battle. He repeated his report of the previous year and added:

I have always said in the House and I maintain it, that the first thing the government will do, in the case of serious trouble, will be to send frantic wires to Pretoria to send up their aeroplanes, because that will be the only adequate defence...

Jack Keller's impassioned plea for more modern thinking on defence was opposed by Major, the Honourable, R.J. Hudson, Lieutenant Colonel Guest (who was later to give so dearly for the air force and who was to become the first minister for the Air) and Colonel Brady. The debate concluded without any resolution being passed either on the formation of an air unit or to what use the £10,000 offered the previous year was to be put. It seemed that once more little or nothing had been achieved.

Meanwhile civil aviation continued to expand. Southern Rhodesia now boasted three aerodromes and 27 landing grounds in addition to 20 private landing fields. Colonel Parson still acted as commandant of the territorial forces as well as director of civil aviation. RANA was receiving a subsidy of £1,500 a year and provision had been made to pay the Air Ministry £300 for ground engineering services.

Royal Air Force visits continued and in 1935 the visit coincided with a period of rioting on the Copperbelt in Northern Rhodesia (now Zambia), so the Royal Air Force pilots were able to give a convincing demonstration of their ability to deploy police reinforcements speedily into a problem area.

Meanwhile, despite the fact that nothing had apparently been decided regarding the air unit, official inquiries were made in June as to the possibility of using the municipal airport in Salisbury for training military pilots. Negotiations were begun for hangar accommodation etc. but when the municipality requested a reasonable contribution from the government towards

the upkeep of the aerodrome, it was decided that a separate military aerodrome was a necessity. It was stated that pilots under instruction might prove a danger to commercial flying.

The air section is established

Then came the bombshell. In November, Government Notice No 765 established the air section of the territorial force and on November 1st, flying training began under the supervision of de Havilland's instructors at Belvedere Airport. The air unit had beaten the brass band, but how?

There was no financial provision for the undertaking so presumably the money came from the territorial force and cadet vote. There was no question of buying aircraft as yet—therefore the amount required was small and it would appear that the 1st Battalion Rhodesia Regiment went ahead on its own. Sir Ernest Lucas Guest said later that the air unit was begun as a force complementary to the ground forces, simply to be the eyes of the army and was primarily for local use as part of the 1st Battalion. The officers and men taking part in the flying training were to come under the officer commanding 1st Battalion for administration and discipline. In later years, Colonel N.S. Ferris who was their commanding officer, liked to say that he could claim the distinction of being the first air officer commanding.

So after all the argument the air section came into being almost unnoticed. The pupil pilots used Belvedere, Salisbury's civil airport and were trained by de Havilland instructors on Tiger Moth aircraft. Scott Robertson was the first instructor and one of the first six pupil pilots was John Holderness whose log-book shows that he actually began flying on Friday 13th November 1935. Training continued into the new year 1936.

In March, a young group captain was sent out from the Air Ministry in London to advise on the development of the air unit. He was born in England but emigrated to Rhodesia when he was 18 and at the outbreak of World War I in 1914 enlisted in the 1st Rhodesia Regiment and served in South West Africa. His name was Arthur Harris, later to become commander in chief of Bomber Command. One of the suggestions he made was to cause great furor in the Legislative Assembly but at the time he came and went with little publicity.

On the world scene the last months of 1935 and the first part of 1936 presented a picture of mounting chaos. Vicious anti-Jewish laws had been passed in Germany and the swastika had become the official flag. Italy had invaded Abyssinia in October 1935 and little had been done by the League of Nations, except to impose half-hearted sanctions. In January, Japan walked out of a naval conference in London having previously rejected all naval agreements. Early in March, German troops entered the Rhineland showing blatant disregard for all previous agreements and later in that same month the Nazis won 99% of the vote in the German elections.

In July, army units in Spanish Morocco revolted and proclaimed General Franco head of the Spanish State. A civil war resulted, which lasted two years and led to Spain becoming an ideological battleground. Russia sent advisers to the socialist government; opponents of fascism organized an international brigade, while Germany provided air power for General Franco, using the opportunity to perfect techniques of dive-bombing.

Against this background of gathering gloom, the Governor of Southern Rhodesia, His Excellency Sir Herbert Stanley opened a new parliament on 16th March 1936. He told members that a Council of Defence was being set up to advise on matters concerning the Colony's system of defence. Deep sorrow was expressed in the House at the death of His Majesty King George V, and the Colony's loyalty to His Majesty King Edward VIII was affirmed.

Once again, Budget time had come round. Expenditure for the year 1936/7 was, for the first time in the Colony's history expected to top the £3,000,000 mark, but only just. The European population was then just over 50,000.

The Minister of Finance, the Honourable H. Smit, in his estimates of expenditure, allowed £58,000 for defence, a net increase of £18,500 over that of the previous year. This amount, he said was to be expended on the establishment of an air unit, at a cost of £13,724 and to provide for more intensive training of the territorial active force.

This news stirred a violent attack from the anti-air force brigade. Major G.H. Walker (Salisbury South, Labour Member) said that the country could not afford the force, that the aircraft being obtained from the United Kingdom were reconditioned and would be obsolete in no time, and anyway, Against whom are these aircraft to fight!

On the following day, Prime Minister Godfrey Huggins, replied. He said that the air unit had been started as the Colony's contribution to imperial defence. He emphatically denied the suggestion that it would be inefficient and he pointed out that Germany was requesting the return of her ex-colony Tanganyika. He concluded, If that happens we might very well have an enemy only too close!

One interesting point is that in this budget there is a cut in the amount to be spent on civil aviation of £3,000. The decrease is due, the minister reported, to the non-repetition of the provision of £5,000 made last year for the imperial defence scheme provision for the Military Air Unit now being made under Vote 21. In other words the government had got round the money situation in the previous year by voting extra funds to civil aviation. At any rate, now everything was out in the open and the way was clear for the foundation of an air unit with its own aircraft.

On 1st April 1936, Dirk Cloete became staff officer Air Services and director of Civil Aviation replacing Colonel Parson who had retired.

So far so good—but on 9th April flying training, which had been in operation since the previous November, came to an abrupt halt. Five of the six men involved were returned to battalion duties. This news stirred a hornets' nest in the House. The explanation, when it came, revolved around the visit of Group Captain Harris. It seemed that until his arrival in the Colony it was believed that almost anyone could learn to fly. In March, Harris had disabused the military authorities in no uncertain terms. He made it emphatically clear that military pilots needed at least matriculation or a near equivalent.

The point was confirmed by the acting director of Education, when he saw the RAF standard syllabus. As a result, an air selection board was set up on April 20th to inquire into the qualifications of all candidates for the air unit. Only John Holderness and Roger Cazalet had the necessary educational standard so, rather than incur further expense, all training was stopped. It was, however, suggested that the other pilots, who had been training for five months and had reached the solo flying stage, should be allowed to qualify for the Civil Pilots' 'A' licence without further expense to themselves.

The next attack by the anti-air brigade was led, once again, by Major Walker. In a speech at a meeting of the ratepayers held at the Grand Hotel on 26th May, he deplored the choice of site for the new military aerodrome. It was, he said, a large and beautiful area of woodland that was a favourite picnic spot. In fact the land at Hillside was commonage, which the government had repossessed from Salisbury Council. Despite the major's efforts, work began on the clearing of trees and the construction of the military airfield that was later to be called Cranborne.

On 17th July 1936, the Government Gazette announced the official formation of an air unit, which was to be titled Air Section, Southern Rhodesia Defence Force.

The first six apprentices

Just four days later, on 21st July 1936, six boys set out on a great adventure. They were 16 years old and had been chosen from a large number of applicants to be inducted into the Permanent

Staff Corps of the Royal Air Force at Halton for a three-year course of training as mechanics. They looked very young as they said their goodbyes to family and friends and boarded the train at Salisbury Station for the start of their journey to Cape Town and the great overseas! One of the boys, Ralph Parry, remembered coming from Bulawayo to Salisbury where he was met at the station by members of the BSAP and taken in a mule cart to the police camp for his interview and medical. The other five boys in this intake were R.G. (Ron) Boswell, B. (Mick) Gibbon, S.R. (Stan) Young,* F.J. (Otto) Gericke and R.A. (Ron) Cashel. An item in the *Rhodesia Herald* on July 20th reports the boys' departure and goes on to say:

Several Rhodesians are at present in the RAF and others have been through training courses and are now in civil aviation in the Union. Mr A.M. Bentley is at Cranwell College and Mr R.N. Stidolph holds a short service commission in the RAF; both these men attended Plumtree School, Bulawayo.

Even though the air section was now an established fact, Major Cloete was taking an extremely depressed view of matters. On 23rd July, writing to the officer commanding Southern Rhodesia Forces, he complained of the attitude adopted by those in authority in the 1st Battalion Rhodesia Regiment who he alleged had attempted to frustrate the organization of the air section on proper lines. He complained that a very large majority of the youths of the Colony were not physically fit and suggested that because of these difficulties no contract should be signed with the de Havilland Company for flying training until the selection of suitable persons for training as pilots is completed. He was being overly pessimistic, both in the short and the long term, as 21 men with the necessary qualifications applied for the first entry and during five years of war, Rhodesia would supply over a thousand young men of aircrew standard.

A meeting was held at defence headquarters to agree the contract with de Havilland. A minimum of six pilots per year were to be put through a three year training course and brought to RAF pilot specifications. Nobody at that meeting realized that before the first course was complete Rhodesian pilots would be asked to move to battle stations.

Southern Rhodesia's first full-scale air rally was staged on 13th August 1936. It was organized by the Bulawayo Light Plane Club with flying under the control of Major Cloete, and Captain Rod Douglas as announcer. Two days earlier Major Cloete and Lieutenant J.B. Holderness had flown to Wankie to welcome the Royal Air Force flight, which had come from Heliopolis in Egypt to take part in the air display. Between 3,000 and 4,000 people watched the formation flying and aerobatics of the 25 aircraft that included local machines as well as the planes from South Africa and Britain. Two days later the show was repeated at Salisbury Airport in front of an estimated crowd of 20,000, which must have included just about the entire population of Salisbury.

A *Rhodesia Herald* report commented, Never before in the history of the Colony have so many people been brought together in one area by one event.

Perhaps it was the excitement of the rally or the pressure of the worsening world situation but on the Monday following the rally the *Rhodesia Herald*, in its leader, offered a £60 scholarship for the training of a pilot under the direction of de Havilland and Company at Salisbury. The paper received 200 applications.

No 1 Pilots' Course

Meanwhile the search was on for the six men who would have the honour of being the

* Stan Young later took a pilot's course and was killed in November 1942.

first pilots to be trained under the government scheme. Entry was open to citizens between the ages of 18 and 25. The education standard required for flying duties was matric or its equivalent. (Junior Cambridge being considered sufficient for ground duties!) Candidates had to be British subjects and were required to serve for five years on the active list and five years on the reserve. The uniform of the force was to be the same as that of 1st Battalion Rhodesia Regiment.

Eventually a choice was made: J.B. Holderness and A.B.T. Cazalet (the two men who had been members of the ill-fated course of the previous year); R.M. Marshall; G.A. (Graham) Smith;* E.T. (Eric) Smith (all members of the 1st Battalion Rhodesia Regiment) and M.C. Barber who had been a detective sergeant in the British South Africa Police and was transferred to the Permanent Staff Corps on six months' probation for duties as a staff officer with Air Services Staff. He had attested for 12 years and was appointed acting sergeant!

According to Eric Smith's log-book, he began flying on October 6th 1936. The training was organized by de Havilland at Belvedere, and because all the pupil pilots were in full-time employment, it had to take place early in the morning, late in the afternoon and at the weekends.

The air section had no aircraft of its own and the pilots were trained on de Havilland machines. A report carried in *The Herald* at the end of November states that de Havilland had four training machines then, two Tiger Moths and two Major Moths. One of the Tiger Moths, however, had to be stationed at Bulawayo for pilot training there. The Tiger Moth was the standard trainer used by the RAF and was satisfactory from that point of view but obviously an air section had to have aircraft of its own. First official mention of this happy event came from the Prime Minister, Sir Godfrey Huggins, at the St Andrew's Night Banquet on 30th November: "We have started a small air force in this Colony and before the end of the year with the assistance of the Imperial Government, we shall have six Hawker Hart machines for training our air unit." The prime minister was being optimistic; it was to be almost a year before the Harts flew in Rhodesia.

On a more cheerful note, Salisbury was in holiday mood that Christmas and a popular place to visit was the aerodrome where,

Joy-flippers are now allowed to handle the controls themselves under reliable supervision. Yesterday large numbers of people went for flips or stayed earthbound to watch a stunting aeroplane. (Rhodesia Herald)

This mixture of joy-flippers and military pupil pilots worried the aerodrome superintendent who tabled a somewhat acid report at the end of the year:

It would appear that the danger has been overlooked as the de Havilland School has contracted with the government to train the cadets of the air unit at the municipal airport. I beg you to submit that the instruction work should be carried out at the military aerodrome.†

By new year 1937 Germany and Italy had recognized General Franco's government in Spain and were giving his rebel army their open support. Even in Rhodesia, the newspapers were full of accounts of the aerial bombardment of Spanish cities complete with harrowing details of the dead and wounded. Air warfare had assumed horrifying proportions in the

* Graham Smith, who actually came in as a replacement for Mike Curry who had to drop out because of law examinations, had done some flying at university and so came in with previous experience.

† This of course was not ready yet.

imagination. To some strategists it appeared that no city could withstand heavy attack from the air, a belief that was to influence military tactics throughout the coming war.

On 9th March 1937, the governor of Southern Rhodesia opened the 8th Parliament, saying:

In the difficult and dangerous times through which the world is passing, there rests upon each part of the Empire an obligation to take such measures as its circumstances allow, to defend itself and thus to contribute to the defence of the whole. My ministers are not unmindful of the obligation. Arrangements have been made to increase the number of men in training in the active force with effect from October 1st.

Following the governor's speech the *Rhodesia Herald* suggested in a leading article, that more pupils should be trained, even if the standard was considerably lower.

On 23rd March came the Budget and a provision of £22,358 for the air unit. This was to cover salaries and allowances for five instructors and ground staff and the purchase of six Hawker Harts at £700 each as well as the running and maintenance costs and payment to de Havilland for pilot training. Provision was also made for the employment of two corporal clerks and the secondment from the Royal Air Force of five personnel (one flight lieutenant, one flying officer, one flight sergeant and two sergeants). These men were to start arriving in the Colony in August. Incidentally during the budget debate the subject of the brass band was raised again. A promise was made that the Colony would have its brass band within 12 months!

Meanwhile Mr D. de Waal had arrived from Pretoria to join the staff at de Havilland as a pilot instructor and during March he indulged in some formation flying over Salisbury in company with Graham Smith and C.S. Style, who was chairman of Salisbury's newly formed flying club. The *Rhodesia Herald* reported the event:

Considering the fact that Mr Style and Mr Smith have not had much opportunity of practising formation flying for some considerable time, the attempt was highly successful and it aroused a great deal of curiosity amongst those below who were disturbed by the unusual drone of three aeroplanes overhead.

To some extent the air unit was now marking time, waiting firstly for the new aircraft to arrive and then for expert help in unpacking and assembling them.

On 24th August, there stepped from the Bulawayo train, four men who were (with one other) to be the midwives, instructors and moulders of Southern Rhodesia's air force. They were: Flight Lieutenant J.A. (Jimmy) Powell, Flight Sergeant A. Greenwood and Sergeants V.J. Royce and C.P. Horton. They had been seconded from the Royal Air Force and their first task was to unpack and assemble the Hawker Hart aircraft, which had arrived in packing cases and were being stored at the BSAP depot.

The Hawker Harts take to the air

To the people of Salisbury, who were anxious to see the new aircraft flying, this task seemed to take an unconscionable time. Towards the middle of September, the Honourable R.C. Tredgold, Minister of Justice and Defence, was asked about the non-appearance of the aircraft. He replied:

We hope to have the first of the SR force machines ready to take to the air by the end of October or early November. This machine will be dual controlled. While the other machines are being assembled and tested, instruction will be carried out in this one. The machines have been packed

for two years and have to be thoroughly inspected. Even the fabric covering the wings is being taken off and examined for flaws. Meanwhile, additional accommodation for the machines has to be provided. The military aerodrome at Salisbury is usable at the moment but needs to have a good deal of work done on it.

He also mentioned the possibility that in future, mechanics might be trained in Rhodesia but said that he hoped that members of the Royal Air Force would always be available. He also referred to the possibility that Rhodesians serving with the RAF might return to work with the air unit and said that Acting Pilot Officer H.G. McDonald, who had been killed in an accident the previous weekend had been considered.

Towards the end of September the first Hawker Hart made its maiden appearance lumbering ignominiously behind a mule team as it was towed in a partially assembled state from police headquarters to the military airfield at Cranborne.

Early in the following month, the fifth member of the RAF team arrived. He was Flying Officer V.E. Maxwell, who was later to become the first officer commanding of No 237 Squadron. And in the same month the second course of six pupil pilots was commissioned as second lieutenants in the air section. They were R.J.D. Christie, A.T.R. Hutchinson, E.W.S. Jacklin, H.C. Peyton, E.E. Spence and N.S.F. Tyas. Two men from this group were to win particular places in Rhodesian Air Force history. Peyton, tragically was one of the first two Rhodesian Air Force casualties in the Second World War, and Ted Jacklin was to be the first Rhodesian chief of Air Staff and founder of Rhodesia's postwar air force.

During the previous six months, newspapers had been regularly reporting Italian and German bombing attacks on Spanish cities and so it was no surprise that Britain should consider an Air Raid Precaution Bill, but the timing, 5th November, Guy Fawkes Day, displayed a certain macabre humour. On the following day, Italy joined Germany and Japan in an anti-communist pact. Lord Halifax, who was the British government's appointee with special responsibility for foreign affairs, visited Hitler in an attempt to settle European problems but merely set a pattern of appeasement, which was to send the world staggering from crisis to crisis.

In Rhodesia two runways, hangars, workshops and offices were nearing completion at the Cranborne Aerodrome and two Hawker Harts, SR 1 and SR 2 had been assembled; so by the middle of December 1937, everything was ready for an official inspection by Colonel J.S. Morris, Officer Commanding the Southern Rhodesia Forces.

The parade of members of the air unit, was drawn up by the new hangar and offices and in front of two of the Hawker Hart machines numbered SR 1 and SR 2. The parade was under the command of Flight Lieutenant J.A. Powell of the RAF. With him was Flight Lieutenant V.E. Maxwell also of the RAF. The new aircraft were taken up by the two RAF pilots, Colonel Morris accompanying Flight Lieutenant Powell. (Rhodesia Herald)

These Hawker Harts together with the later Audax were to be in use by the air unit for the next three years including the campaign against the Italians in Abyssinia.

According to Squadron Leader N.V. Phillips writing in *Bush Horizons*:

The flying students of the air unit soon came to admire the skill, and hang upon the utterances, of the two RAF flying instructors Powell and Maxwell. Powell was in command of the military aerodrome. He was an excellent squadron man and a brilliant pilot, slightly built but very wiry; about five foot ten inches in height, he carried himself as a typical regular officer. Off duty he loved a good party, but he was strict and tough on duty. He got the respect he demanded. He

referred to the students as 'bograts' to their faces, but he did not spare himself in the furthering of their air force education or the standard of flying. Had it not been for Jimmie Powell the pilots of the air unit would not have achieved the meticulous standard he demanded, and which they in turn were to pass on until the reputation of Rhodesians as airmen was rarely doubted. Jimmie's forte was aerobatics. Maxwell was more of the solid, quietly spoken and staid type. He was responsible for the ground training of the students and Maxie, as he later became known, acted as their adviser and father confessor. On many occasions he made peace between Jimmie and the bograts when discipline became too tough or had been breached. Maxie delighted in a rough and tumble at times, and on the rugby field this short, stocky man was an excellent hooker. Maxie was a steady pilot. Among other skills required by a pilot he excelled in instrument flying and picking up messages. Both these men were masters of improvisation and did the best job possible with the limited equipment but, what is more important, they maintained the tremendous enthusiasm of the air unit throughout their stay in Rhodesia.

Maxie was later to marry a Rhodesian girl but, unfortunately, he was killed by a German flying bomb in London on 23rd February 1944. Squadron Leader Powell was to do an extremely fine job on operations, until his death on a long-range bombing mission in northern Italy while holding the rank of group captain, with the DSO and OBE.

On 14th January 1938, the *Rhodesia Herald* took a look at the new military aerodrome:

The hangar is complete and includes a lecture room, an operations room, workshops and complete office accommodation. An area 1,000 yards square has been cleared and two runways 1,000 by 15,000 yards at right angles to each other are in use. The first year is to be spent in ab initio training in de Havilland Tiger Moths and it is only when they have completed 80 hours in these machines that they are to be taught to fly the Hawker Harts. (Rhodesia Herald)

On completing 20 hours solo in Harts and passing various examinations, the pupil pilots were to qualify for their wings. *The Herald* noted that training could be given in bombing and gunnery as the aircraft were equipped with one camera gun and moving target bombsights. The Harts also carried two wireless sets, one of which is a two-way telephonic and telegraphic radio. The pupil pilots, who were on the verge of going solo were still only part-time airmen. Their flying was done between 06h00 and 08h00 and between 16h30 and 18h00, added to which they had to find time for four lectures a week.

Early in the New Year 1938, a suggestion was made that the air unit should be used to carry out photographic survey work in the Sabi River area. This was agreed provided that it did not interfere with the training and these surveys became a regular part of the unit's activities during 1938.

A highlight of February was a visit by Lord Trenchard, the grand old man of the RAF and in the same month the first contingent of Rhodesians to be selected for short service commissions with the RAF left Rhodesia. They were Arthur Macdonald Imrie, Keith D'Alroy Taute, C.A.J. MacNamara, Robert Duncan S. Olver, Jack Elliot Thomas, Spencer Ritchie Peacock-Edwards, William John Alexander (Susie) Wilson, N.G. MacFarlane, G.R. Gunner, Duncan Frank Hyland Smith and Thomas Cedric Cundill. These men were to complete four years' active service and seven years in reserve and they were all destined to see a great deal of active service, with the exception of Thomas who was unfortunately killed in an air crash on 30th January 1939. Robert Duncan Olver was one of the crew of the only all-Rhodesian-manned Lancaster which was shot down on May 8th 1942.

With the world situation growing daily more tense, the *Rhodesia Herald* again put forward the suggestion that a greater number of pilots should be trained to a lower standard. At the

same time, Sir James MacDonald (president of the Bulawayo Light Plane Club), appealed for government subsidies to pilots with 'A' licence, so that they could increase their proficiency. Neither suggestion was taken up but on February 21st 1938, the Southern Rhodesia Air Unit received another precious aircraft, a Tiger Moth bearing RAF markings, which was flown from Johannesburg by Mr J. Finnis, the de Havilland instructor in Salisbury. The machine was fitted out for night-flying and for instruction in blind-flying.

On the safety side, Sergeant Maurice Barber was sent on a parachute-packing course to the South African Air Force at Roberts Heights. On his return he became responsible for parachute safety. During this period, no one—pilot, observer or casual passenger—was allowed to fly without one.

CHAPTER 3

A time to prepare



The 1st April 1938 was a special day for the air unit. This was the date on which the baby began to grow up, separating from the territorial force, and taking the official title of the Southern Rhodesia Air Unit. The commanding officer was Jimmie Powell and the staff officer of Air Services was Major Dirk Cloete, who also held the post of director of civil aviation.

For Umtali the real celebration came ten days later when at 16h00 the three Hawker Harts appeared skimming low over the tops of the Vumba Range, descending in a formation dive and then soaring away up into the clouds. The occasion was Umtali's Air Display, which marked the official opening of the gliding club. The Prime Minister, Sir Godfrey Huggins, flew down in a Hornet Moth piloted by Dirk Cloete. The Minister of Justice and Defence, R.C. Tredgold and Colonel J.S. Morris, commanding Southern Rhodesia Forces travelled in two air unit machines, piloted by Powell and Maxwell, while Lieutenant J.B. Holderness piloted the third air unit machine.

Saturday afternoon featured a gliding display with a civic dinner in the evening, and then on Sunday morning it was the turn of the members of the air unit to show their paces. According to reports, Powell and Maxwell gave an outstanding display.

1937 had been a good year for Rhodesia. Transport and communications had improved and the economy had received a boost with the arrival of more than 300 immigrants. Unfortunately events in the rest of the world were not so happy. In February 1938, the dictator Adolf Hitler had assumed supreme military command in Germany. In Austria the majority of German-speaking people wished to unite with Germany. This union had been forbidden under the terms of the Treaty of Versailles. Demands for union or *anschluss*, as it was known, had increased following Hitler's rise to power in Germany. In March 1938 Hitler demanded and received the resignation of the Austrian Chancellor. A Nazi supporter, Seyss-Inquart became the new Chancellor and he invited the German army to occupy Austria on 12th March, and on the following day Austria's union with Germany was officially proclaimed.

Not unnaturally with these disturbing developments occurring in Europe, the 1938 Rhodesian Budget showed an increased spending on defence; £38,700 in an overall budget of three and a half million. The opposition in the Southern Rhodesian Assembly suggested a greater defence expenditure but the resources of the Colony with its population of only 50,000 Europeans, precluded over-generosity. The problem was where the available manpower could be used to the greatest effect.

The minister of defence, replying to the Budget debate was forced to appeal to members to keep their emotions in check. While the position in Europe was serious it did not justify becoming hysterical and making impossible gestures, however magnificent. He reminded the assembly that Rhodesia had limited resources and was obliged to make the best possible use of what she had. With reference to the air unit he said:

The time may come when campaigns are fought out in the air but at the present time we must recognize the fact that, despite its great power of inflicting casualties and its enormous range, the air arm is only one arm of the military machine. If we over-develop that arm at the expense of our ground forces we are developing a machine that is unsound and one-sided.

Continuing, the minister said that training pilots to a point where they were fully qualified military pilots was a long term process but he believed that this was the way to make a valuable contribution to imperial defence. It had been suggested that Rhodesia could train 5,000 pilots, but to produce 5,000 military pilots would cost somewhere between £5,000,000 and £8,000,000, at an estimated cost of between £1,000 and £1,400 for each pilot. To send half-trained pilots into battle would be a tragedy. He concluded by saying that it was intended to increase the number of pupil pilots from six to 12 a year.

Pilots of the first course receive their Wings

12th May 1938 was the proudest day to date for the air unit. The members of the first course of six pilots (plus Captain Style) received their flying badges (Wings) from the Governor, Sir Herbert Stanley. They were granted commissions in equivalent ranks in the RAF Reserve. These were the men who had commenced their training in October 1936—Holderness, Cazalet, Marshall, Barber and the two Smiths, Eric and Graham. The flying badge was similar to the RAF badge but in place of the letters RAF was a miniature of the coat of arms of Southern Rhodesia. This later became the badge of the RRAF except that the King's Crown (Tudor) was replaced by the Queen's Crown (Edwardian).

The Travelling Flying School

Just over a week later the Midlands Flying Club held an air rally, which was attended by members of the air unit. During an informal meeting on Sunday morning 22nd May, Dirk Cloete made the first official mention of a new scheme: a Travelling Flying School to be sponsored by the government. The plan was that the school would visit centres where there were sufficient pupils for a month, during which time the trainees would be put through their air licence. The school would return after about six months so that new pupils could take their licence and the pilots already qualified could do a refresher course.

In Umtali a few days later, Major Cloete gave more details:

What is aimed at is to give an equal opportunity to all who are willing to learn to fly. They (the government) will supply the instructors and the ground engineers and will help the local organizing committee to keep down overhead expenses, trying to work the schools at a cost of £2 per flying hour.

The scheme, aimed at improving civil aviation in Southern Rhodesia, was to be financed by the government and Sir Abe Bailey's Trust, a coronation gift of £3,500. On May 30th 1938, the RAF boxing team arrived in Salisbury, flying from Durban in a SAAF Airspeed Envoy. The boxers were seen in action on June 1st with a convincing win against the Rhodesians who lost four bouts out of seven. Just a week later came the news that the SAAF aircraft carrying four members of the team between Bulawayo and Pietersburg was missing.

The search for the missing machine began early this morning (Tuesday 7th) and two Rhodesian Air Force Hawker Harts, piloted by Flight Lieutenant J.A. Powell and Flight Lieutenant V.E. Maxwell left Salisbury shortly after sun up, arriving at Bulawayo about 08h20.
(Rhodesia Herald)

One interesting point here is that this is the first use of the term Rhodesian Air Force. Powell and Maxwell began their search after arranging refuelling facilities near the Transvaal border. The missing plane was eventually sighted by the South African Air Force 25 miles north of Pont Drift on the Limpopo River just south-west of its junction with the Shashi. A land party was sent out from Pretoria but did not reach the scene of the crash until Wednesday 8th June. All those aboard had died in the crash. The *Rhodesia Herald* commented:

A surprising feature of the disaster has been the time needed to reach the scene once the plane had been located. The rescue party were engaged two days in making their way through the thick bush in rough country over a distance that is covered in a few minutes by air.

This episode demonstrated in a dramatic way the fact that Rhodesia had large tracts of wild country where the only means of fast travel was by air.

In July 1938, Maxwell and Powell took time to carry out photographic surveys of the eastern border area and of the Gwai, Mangwe and Ingwezi river systems in the south-western areas of the country. These surveys were invaluable for planning water supplies and for map-making.

The air unit was now a well-knit group. The message picking-up team was led by Maxwell. John Holderness excelled at aerobatics and the formation flying team consisted of Powell, the leader, Holderness and Graham Smith. The unit's first jolly in July was to take part in an air rally at Gatooma. One of the most popular parts of these displays was the feat of picking up messages. These messages were suspended on a rope between two posts about five feet (1.5 metres) above the ground. The aim was to catch the message with a hook, which was let down from underneath the aircraft. The air unit team became so polished at this operation that they could perform it without a hitch—even flying in formation!

During the year, members of the unit had built themselves a mess at Cranborne using the packing cases in which the Harts had arrived. Apparently as the last nail went home, a party started that was to set the tone for later festivities...continuing as it did well into the early hours. Graham Smith (then Flying Adjutant) described the mess as just the job. It consisted of a large room about 24 feet (eight metres) by 16 feet (five metres) with a small partitioned area that acted as a bar. One of the first items of furniture presented to the mess was a beautiful table. It received its blooding at the hands of some of the members of the MCC team that visited Rhodesia at the end of 1938. The cricketers autographed the table and the signatures were then carved into the wood, most noticeable being that of Tom Goddard. This table was later to stand proudly in the officers' mess at New Sarum. Along with the table, the mess began collecting silver under the direction of Jimmie Powell, who had been promoted substantive squadron leader in August 1938.

The 11th August saw the commencement of night flying, an activity that was remembered with nostalgia by all who took part:

In those days (night flying) had a tang to the occasion, which the electrically-illuminated, air-conditioned airman of today misses. The black smoke from paraffin-filled gooseneck flares wafting across the landing path, the dust, and, my dear, the ghastly smell of petrol! All savoured from an open cockpit; heaven on earth, and at most times closer to the former than you really should be. (Bush Horizons)

Sometime earlier, Dirk Cloete had left for the United Kingdom to collect a Dragon Rapide for the Southern Rhodesian government. While he was in England he consulted with the Air Council on the best ways of developing Rhodesia's air strength, and it was recommended

that a complete front-line squadron be formed. To this end, the Air Ministry agreed to sell Rhodesia six Hawker Audaxes and three Gloster Gauntlets at a nominal cost.

Returning to Rhodesia in the Rapide, irreverently known as the Gin Palace because it had VIP fittings that included a cocktail cabinet, Cloete had as passengers two new RAF airmen on secondment. They were leading aircraftmen A. Higham and Martin Madders (who was to retain his contact with aviation in Rhodesia for the rest of his career, eventually becoming director of civil aviation). The DH Dragon Rapide was a twin-engine, six-seater development of the Moth and shared with the Dakota the distinction of being the most reliable, useful and easily maintained aeroplane of its class. When in production the Rapide sold for just under £4,000.

The Harts go round Rhodesia

On 1st September 1938, a flight of five Hawker Harts set out on the first round Rhodesia trip. This jaunt was partly to show off the new aircraft and partly to give the young pilots experience in cross-country flying. The Harts left Salisbury at 08h30 arriving at Bulawayo in midmorning. From there they flew to the Victoria Falls for lunch. After a night's rest they continued to Wankie where they gave an exhibition of flying on the Friday afternoon; then back to Bulawayo on Saturday morning to prepare for a display on Sunday. Always the most popular events were the aerobatics and the demonstration of message collection.

In fact, during the message picking-up display at Bulawayo Airport on the Sunday, messages were collected without fault on three successive occasions, a feat that had not even been seen at the Hendon Air Display during the previous nine years!

On the following weekend it was the turn of Fort Victoria to host the air unit.

This visit was eagerly welcomed, as few people in Fort Victoria have seen the air unit before. After circling the aerodrome, the machines broke formation with Squadron Leader Powell leading, and landed. The other members who arrived were Captain Style, Flight Lieutenant Maxwell and Lieutenants Barber and Smith. (Rhodesia Herald)

There were the usual aerobatics and picking-up of messages, which thrilled the crowd, but the highlight of the afternoon was probably when Graham Smith buzzed the VIP tent where the prime minister was having tea and collected festoons of bunting. Graham's comment on the subject was: Well, Jimmie Powell always said, "If you're going to fly low...fly low!"

The air unit does its first training with territorials

During the following week came the camp for territorial troops at Gwelo. At the end of August 1938, members of the Bulawayo Light Plane Club had taken part in military manoeuvres staged by the 2nd Battalion, Rhodesia Regiment in the Umzingwane area. However, the camp in Gwelo was the first time that the air unit had taken part in a training session with the territorials.

The troops marched to Gum Tree Drift, about three miles from the camp. There a mobile loudspeaker outfit enabled Squadron Leader Powell of the air unit to tell the troops exactly what manoeuvres an air unit Hawker Hart, flown by Flight Lieutenant Maxwell was performing. First the aeroplane demonstrated a dive attack coming from a height of 1,000 feet or more above the heads of the troops, who deployed over the open veld. Then the machine disappeared and Squadron Leader Powell explained that it would demonstrate a low-flying attack on a transport train composed of army lorries. Cleverly making use of cover to conceal his approach and drown the noise of his engines, Flight Lieutenant Maxwell came suddenly over the tops of the trees 100 yards from the troops who were taken completely by surprise. (Rhodesia Herald)

The troops were given a lecture on signalling aircraft by means of white strips laid on the ground and Maxwell gave a demonstration of message dropping and collection. According to the *Rhodesia Herald*:

It is understood unofficially that one of the messages gathered by the plane...was concerned with lunchtime beer! Marching back to camp with the band playing...the column had just passed over the now notorious Gum Tree Drift, when with a roar of engines and the shriek of the wind through the rigging, the two aeroplanes suddenly appeared flying low over the trees and swooped down on the column. Not sure whether this was business or exhibition flying, the troops were a trifle slow in seeking cover.

While the Gwelo Camp may have seemed like play-acting, events in Europe had taken on a deadly serious quality. Czechoslovakia, a republic created in 1918 from the western provinces of Austria-Hungary including Sudetenland, had a large German-speaking population. Sudeten Germans had been agitating since 1935 to join Germany. Following Austria's union with Germany in March, their demands grew more insistent.

It was in the middle of September 1938—in fact the very day that Rhodesian troops were receiving their first lecture on aerial tactics—that Neville Chamberlain, the British Prime Minister, and the French and Italian premiers met Hitler in Munich to discuss the problem of Czechoslovakia. The first meeting took place in September and the Munich Agreement was signed on 29th September. Under this settlement 10,000 square miles of Czechoslovakia were to be ceded to Germany and another 6,000 square miles to Poland and Hungary. In effect this transferred one third of the Czech population to German rule. In return the four powers represented at Munich guaranteed what was left of Czechoslovakia against unprovoked aggression.

Many people in Britain and France welcomed this agreement because they believed it had prevented a European war. Chamberlain himself said, I believe that it is peace in our time. Few of the men involved with imperial defence shared his optimism. On the day following the signing of the Munich Agreement, Sir Robert Brooke-Popham, Air Chief Marshal and Governor of Kenya wrote to the governor of Southern Rhodesia:

Sir, I have the honour to inform you that I received information from the Colonial Office to the effect that in the event of war it is probable that the squadron from Southern Rhodesia would be sent to Kenya and be placed under my orders for operations. I should be glad to know whether this information is correct. In the event of your reply being in the affirmative I should be glad if I could be supplied with the following information:

- a) The time that would probably elapse between the declaration of the precautionary stage or of the opening of hostilities and the arrival of the squadron in Kenya.*
- b) The number of aeroplanes that will be sent and the strength of personnel, officers and men.*
- c) The type of aeroplanes and engines and the nature of petrol and oil required. As regards petrol, the particular information required is whether the engines require leaded fuel or whether they can use only unleaded petrol.*
- d) The type of bombs that the aeroplanes can carry.*
- e) The general position regarding spare parts.*
- f) The number of reserve pilots, aeroplanes and engines.*

In the event of the squadron being sent I presume that part of the personnel would be sent up by air using civil aircraft and that the remainder would travel with the heavy kit by sea. The duties for which the squadron would be required depend upon our enemies. Should we be engaged with Germany alone and Italy definitely neutral, the proposed duties of the squadron would be

mainly coast reconnaissance from Mombasa and the possible attack on commerce, destroyers or submarines. Should Italy be hostile or a doubtful neutral, part or the whole squadron would be employed on the reconnaissance for the KAR (Kings African Rifles) on the northern and eastern frontiers of Kenya. (Signed R. Brooke-Popham)

Rhodesia's delay in beginning pilot training made it impossible for her to accept this challenge. To date only seven pilots had their wings, although another six were nearing the end of their first year's training and only six aircraft were available. So the reply had to be: This government is not in a position to give an assurance that the Southern Rhodesia Air Unit will be available for service in Kenya on the outbreak of war. One more year was to make all the difference.

No 3 Pilots' Course

With October came the new intake: Course No 3 of the Air Unit Pilot Training Scheme. In 1938 the scheme was extended: six pilots were taken on in Salisbury and six in Bulawayo. The six selected in Salisbury were Peter Fletcher, Stan Flett, Sandy MacIntyre, Les Olver, Colin Palmer and Cyril Sindall. The six pilots taken on in Bulawayo were H. Baron, Paul Holdengarde, E.P. Kleynhans, Geoff Robinson, J. Wrathall and Brian White.

As the size of the air unit increased so, inevitably, did the work and Hugh Peyton, later to die in tragic circumstances, was seconded to the permanent staff to help out. Hugh did not get on too well with income tax returns and such like and he was returned to his own department at the end of the year when his place was taken by Ted Jacklin. Ted was to prove the best possible man for this and almost any other job to do with the young air force. He had already made his mark on the rugby field representing Rhodesia against Sam Walker's British Isles XV, which toured Rhodesia and South Africa.

The Flying Circus

October also saw the start of the unique Travelling Flying School known off the record as the Flying Circus. The schedule for 1938/39 was Que Que from 23rd October to 18th December, Shabani for six weeks, followed by Gatooma from 29th January to 12th March, Umtali from 18th March to 13th May, Fort Victoria from 8th July and Wankie starting on 19th August.

The first team on the Flying Circus circuit comprised Charles Prince as the flying instructor and Hugh Gundry as ground engineer. Unit equipment consisted of a Tiger Moth, a personal motor car and Hugh's box of tools. Later D.D. Longmore took over from Charles Prince and Chummy Page from Hugh Gundry. Flying was done mainly in the early morning and late afternoon to meet climatic conditions and the demands of the students' normal employment. If there was a shed on the airfield, it became the office of the chief flying instructor and chief engineer. In the move from one town to another, one of the team would pilot the car and the other the aircraft.

Back at Belvedere, Jack Finnis was tutoring the students of the second course, who were by this time well advanced in the elementary flying stage. The only mishap of the year occurred in December while the air unit was on a visit to Rusape. A cog on the magneto of Graham Smith's machine stripped and the pilot made a forced landing. No damage was done.

Just before Christmas 1938 a conference of military representatives from the African colonies was held in Nairobi. Squadron Leader Powell attended on behalf of Southern Rhodesia.

Obviously, the subject of the possibility of moving Rhodesia's air unit to Kenya in the event of hostilities was still being considered because the inspector general in his year-end report to the secretary of State for the Colonies remarked:

In view of the constitutional position of Southern Rhodesia I do not think it is practicable for this flight to be dispatched during the precautionary stage. I am informed by the staff officer Air Services that if it is constitutionally possible it is essential that this move would take place during the stage referred to above. It is understood the Nairobi squadron will move at this stage and Kenya will be left without any aircraft for reconnaissance purposes. In the Southern Rhodesia Air Section are a number of territorials. Difficulties arise if they are to be called up for service before the war stage. These difficulties could however be overcome providing the personnel consent in advance to serve when called on to do so at any time before the outbreak of hostilities. I anticipate they will be agreeable to do this.

From future events it seems that they all were quite willing.

At the end of the year, Dirk Cloete resigned as director of civil aviation and officer in charge of the air section leaving to take a high position in South Africa. The air unit lost a good but somewhat austere commander who always displayed sound judgement in air matters.

Strength of the air unit at the close of 1938

Under Major Dirk Cloete—43 men.

One squadron leader: J.A. Powell

One flight lieutenant: V.E. Maxwell

One captain: C.S. Style

Six lieutenants: M.C.H. Barber, A.B.T. Cazalet, J. Holderness, R.M. Marshall, E. Smith, G. Smith

Eighteen second lieutenants: R.J.D. Christie, E.W.S. Jacklin, A.T.R. Hutchinson, H.C. Peyton, E.E. Spence, N.S.F. Tyas, P. Fletcher, S. Flett, A. MacIntyre, L.R. Olver, C. Palmer, C. Sindall, J. Wrathall, H. Baron, P. Holdengarde, E.P. Kleynhans, G. Robinson, B. White

Five airmen ground staff—seconded from RAF:

Flight Sergeant A. Greenwood, Sergeant C.P. Horton, Sergeant V.J. Royce, Corporal A. Higham, Leading Aircraftman M. Madders

Southern Rhodesia Permanent Force:

NCO Corporal A.B.P. Simpson

Four photographers: Aircraftmen S.L. Wilson, R.C. Palgrave, R.H. Krahner, D.R. Allen

Captain C.W. Robertson was appointed to the air unit as honorary medical officer.

There were also six apprentices at RAF Halton.

CHAPTER 4

The first in the field



The first ferry

It was in February 1939 that welcome news was received. The Audax aircraft were ready to be collected and so Jimmie Powell, Captain Claude Style, John Holderness and Eric Smith together with Sergeant Charles Horton set out for Cairo. The journey was made in the Rhodesian government Rapide and took a week, including two days in Nairobi.

However, on arrival at the RAF base in Heliopolis, it was found that the Audaxes were still in their crates, so with Jimmie Powell in the lead, the five men set off on a tour of the Holy Land. Eric Smith remembers: Jimmie Powell had £500 that he thought would cover expenses but travelling and subsistence came to only about one pound a day and the use of all the money took a deal of explaining! The Rhodesians had a good time seeing the sights of the Middle East, quite an eye-opener to young men who had never been out of Rhodesia.

In Cairo the members of the flight met Air Vice-Marshal H.R. Nicoll, Air Officer Commanding Middle East, and in Palestine they met Air Commodore A.T. (Bomber) Harris. Both these men had lived in Rhodesia and gave the visitors a warm welcome. All too soon the aircraft had been assembled and the members of the air unit left Heliopolis for Luxor on 11th March 1939.

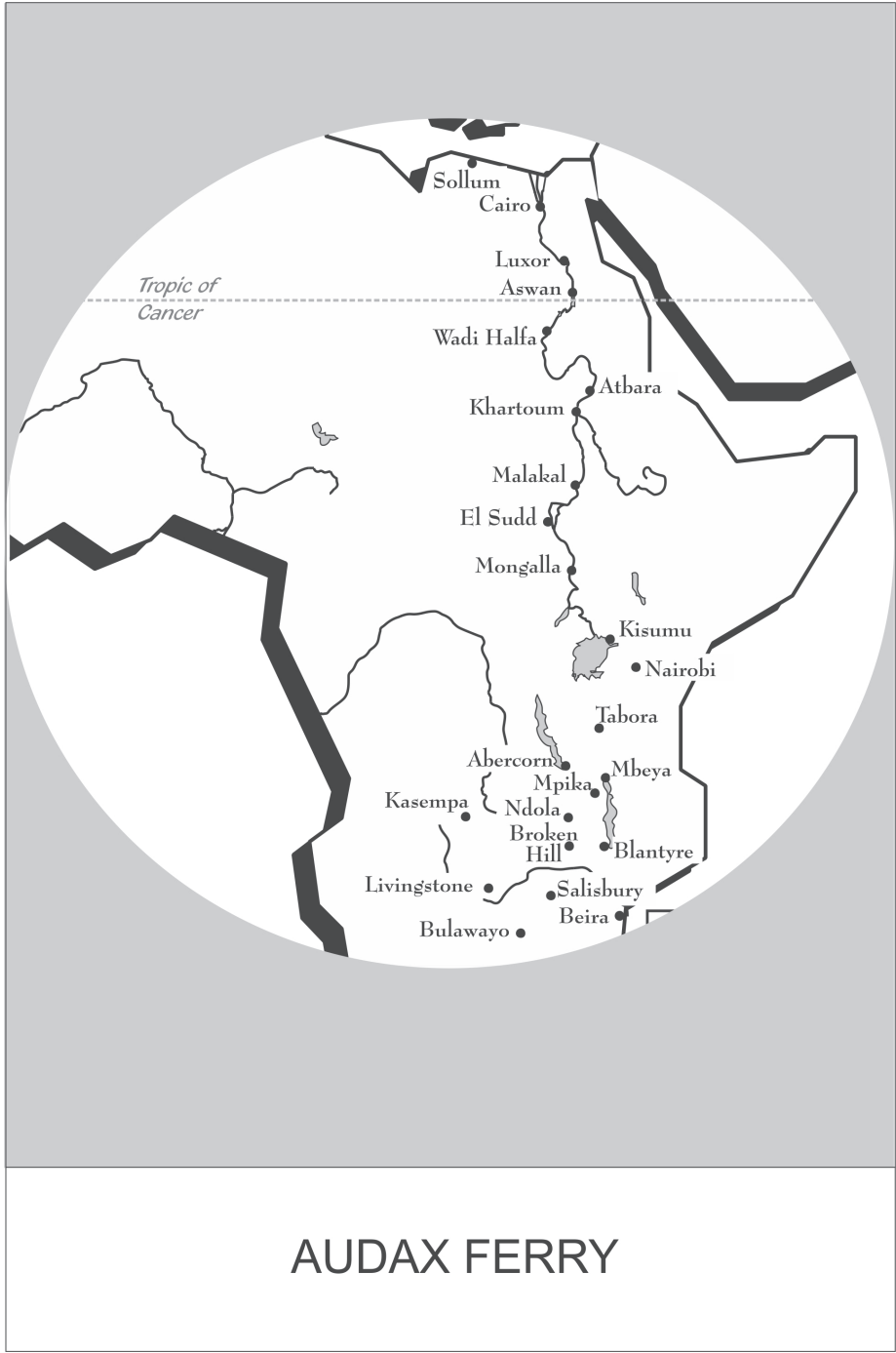
The flight back gave the Rhodesian pilots their first taste of flying in open cockpits under desert conditions with heat and poor visibility owing to sandstorms. The first real problem occurred at Malakal on the Nile when Captain Style's aircraft suffered damage while landing. The Audax was left at Malakal.

It was at Mpika, in Northern Rhodesia that the flight began to experience typical tropical summer weather. Eric Smith recalls:

There was also a heavy storm at Mpika. Flying with no navigational aids, we were forced right down near Lusaka, but luckily came out of the low cloud where the ground was comparatively flat. We took off from Lusaka the first time on 17th (March) climbed to 20,000 feet to try to fly above the storm but couldn't so landed and took off again the following day, the 18th. This time we flew under the storm and literally round the Matusadonna Mountains to reach Salisbury. Jimmie was ok in the covered Rapide. The rest of us were in open cockpits. Flying through hail over the Umvukwes was not funny!

Assessing the value of the flight Jimmie Powell said:

Contact was made with the RAF at a number of stations, including Nairobi, Khartoum and Cairo, while experience of flying over as diversified territory as the 10,000 foot mountains of Kenya and the flat desert country of the Sudan and Egypt was of particular value.



Within Rhodesia, air unit training was continuing. Aircraftmen Freddie Kimpton, John Gray, John Oliver Ross Collins, Griffiths, Payne, Lucas and Johnson were gaining experience as mechanics while some members of 1st Battalion Rhodesia Regiment were learning to be airgunners, a skill that was to be put to good use before long.

World wide, governments were talking peace but preparing for war. In January 1939 the United States increased her defence budget. On 26th January, General Franco's troops aided by the Italians entered Barcelona and the following day Franco's rebel regime was recognized by Britain and France. To all intents and purposes the Spanish Civil War was over.

On 15th March, Hitler showed exactly what he thought of the Munich Agreement when he ordered the German army into Prague and declared that Czechoslovakia had ceased to exist. Two days later, Chamberlain accused Hitler of breaking his word but otherwise no action was taken. On 22nd March, German troops occupied the old German city of Memel in Lithuania. Danzig in Poland had also once been part of Germany and the Polish government recognizing the parallel, announced, on March 28th that any German attempt to alter Danzig's status without Polish consent would result in war. On March 31st Britain unilaterally guaranteed Poland's sovereignty.

For some time, British, French and Soviet discussions about a possible alliance had been in progress. Russia believed, quite rightly, that Poland could not be defended without Russian cooperation and on 18th April the Russian foreign minister proposed a ten-year alliance with Britain and France. Meanwhile Germany was also having secret talks with Russia and on 28th April Hitler cancelled the non-aggression agreement that had been signed with Poland in 1934.

On 5th April Italy invaded Albania. War clouds were gathering and Africa would not remain uninvolved. Should Italy be drawn into a European war on the side of the Germans there would be a major threat in East Africa.

Rhodesia commits to East African defence

5th April 1939

From: Air Marshal W.G.S. Mitchell, Air Officer Commanding, Middle East

To: the Governor, SR Salisbury

Your Excellency, I have the honour to inform Your Excellency that in my capacity as coordinating authority for air operations in the Middle East I have received instructions from the Air Ministry to communicate directly with you regarding the cooperation of the SR Air Unit in the event of war. I understand from the Air Ministry that Your Excellency is already aware that it is hoped in the event of war that the SR government will provide all possible air assistance and will agree to move such aircraft as can be made available to Kenya for operations in that area. I should inform Your Excellency that the situation as at present appreciated indicates that the major threat from Italian East Africa would in the first place develop in the Sudan and on this account our plan provides for the withdrawal of the RAF Squadron at present at Nairobi to the Sudan in the initial stages. It is important therefore that such air forces as can be made available from SR should move to Kenya as soon as possible after the emergency arises. Subject to Your Excellency's approval I propose that the SR Air Unit should come under the Royal Air Force station commander, Nairobi and be employed in cooperation with the KAR. The primary role of the Hart and Audax aircraft would be reconnaissance designed to give early information of enemy advance into Kenya and to take such action as circumstances permitted.

This letter goes on to say that all RAF personnel might have to be removed. Southern Rhodesia would, therefore, have to provide technical personnel who were to be civilian volunteers if necessary. Spare parts for the aircraft would also be a problem but a suggestion from Southern Rhodesia offered a solution:

...the best solution from our point of view would be for the RAF Middle East to hold the necessary technical stores at Nairobi for the use of the SR flight as the supply held in this colony is extremely small and insufficient to be split up. Arrangements have been made with Rhodesian and Nyasaland Airways Ltd, to provide aircraft at 24 hours' notice within the limits of their fleet for the conveyance of personnel and aircraft spare parts from Salisbury or elsewhere to such destinations as may be decided on at the time in the event of war.

(From Acting Sec Dept Justice to P.M. 18th April 1939)

Second ferry

Now that the air unit was committed there were two major priorities, one was to get as many pilots trained as possible; the other was to have more aircraft available. Four Audaxes had been flown to Rhodesia in March but two were still with the RAF in Heliopolis. Graham Smith, who was holidaying in England, received a request to return via Heliopolis and collect one of them. The other was to be flown out by Jimmie Powell who would fly up in the Rapide with Eric Smith.

On this second flight it was Graham Smith who suffered a mishap. The brakes of his aircraft began giving trouble at Kisumu. When he landed at Lusaka, the tail wheel swivelled causing the aircraft to flip. Graham Smith released his harness and promptly fell out on his head; his fellow pilots remarked afterwards that he never fully recovered from the incident!

This flight was scheduled to bring back three aircraft: two from Cairo, and the Audax that had been left at Malakal on the previous trip. However, only two reached Salisbury because Graham Smith's machine had to be left in Lusaka.

Two further Audax planes arrived at Salisbury shortly before five o'clock yesterday evening (26th April) for the Southern Rhodesia Air Section. They were accompanied by the Dragon Rapide plane that had taken the personnel of the flight to Cairo to take over the machines. The three planes were met on nearing Salisbury by a flight of five Harts and escorted by them to the military aerodrome, the eight planes flying over the city in formation...The pilots were accompanied by Lieutenant W.J. James of the BSAP. (Rhodesia Herald, 27th April 1939)

Meanwhile the country was catching war fever. A course of lectures on air raid precautions began on 24th April. This was arranged by Colonel W.H. Ralston who had been designated ARP officer for the Colony. It may seem laughable, when we look back, but at least it showed a spirit of preparedness.

With all due pomp and ceremony, parliament was opened on 3rd May. The governor announced that a commission which had been appointed to consider closer cooperation among Southern Rhodesia, Northern Rhodesia (Zambia) and Nyasaland (Malawi) had reported back favourably. Unfortunately, the idea was to be placed on hold and by the time it was re-examined the political climate had changed out of all recognition. An expansion of the air unit was announced and the following day came the Budget, estimated expenditure being £3,779,210—about £100,000 more than the estimated income. But this amount was to be met out of the previous year's surplus with no rise in the level of taxation, which showed that Rhodesia's finances were healthy. Defence and police votes were to be increased to a total of £600,000.

Members of No 2 Pilots' Course receive their Wings

Ten days later, on 13th May, the second intake of pilots received their Wings. These were Ted Jacklin, Eric Spence, Tickey Tyas, Hugh Peyton, R.J.D. Christie and A.T.R. Hutchinson. A description of the ceremony was carried in the *Rhodesia Herald*:

The parade of pilots and other ranks was drawn up in front of the line of Audax, Hart and other machines and on the arrival of His Excellency, gave the Royal salute that was sounded by the trumpeters of the BSAP. Following the ceremony, the governor received tea in the officers' mess and inspected the recent additions to the facilities, which included a large new hangar. Meanwhile five of the machines had taken to the air and carried out formation flying.

Suddenly the need for pilots seemed to catch the Colony's imagination. A correspondent to the letters page of *The Herald* suggested that more flying scholarships should be made available. The writer offered to provide two himself and a third when 12 others were given.

During the last weekend in May, 31 aeroplanes from all over the country gathered in Umtali for an Air Rally. Once again there were polished displays by the air unit of message picking-up, formation-flying and aerobatics.

Unfortunately, flying training carries risks and on June 2nd came the news that Hugh Salisbury James had been killed in a flying accident near Lincoln, in England. Hugh James had taken up a short service commission with the RAF in February 1938. Pallbearers at the funeral were Pilot Officers Kane, N.G. MacFarlane, Thomas C. Cundill and Arthur M. Imrie, Rhodesians from among the 13 who had joined the RAF the previous year.

Two weeks later, a new director of civil aviation and officer commanding the air section was appointed. He was Lieutenant Colonel Charles Warburton Meredith AFC who had been commanding officer of the Aircraft and Artillery Depot at Roberts Heights, now known as Voortrekkerhoogte in South Africa. Shortly after taking up his new position he made his strong feelings known: there was to be no more talk of air sections and air units, the thrust would be towards the establishment of an autonomous air force!

Towards the end of June, almost casually during an address by the Secretary of State for Air to the Empire Press Union in London, came mention of a plan that was to lead to Rhodesia's greatest single contribution to the war effort. This plan that was already under way was to set up training facilities in territories such as the Middle East, Far East, Ceylon, Hong Kong, Southern Rhodesia, Kenya, West Africa and Malta. This was the first mention of what was to become The Empire Air Training Scheme in which The Rhodesia Air Training Group was to play such a prominent role.

The air unit's first 'cruise' outside the Colony

July 1939 proved an exciting month. First, *The Herald* was able to announce that owing to public support eleven more flying scholarships were now available. Secondly, six more RAF ground instructors arrived: Sergeant F.G. Tipping (armament), Sergeant F. Moss (photographic section), Sergeant H. Clark (radio), Corporal J.T. Jones, Leading Aircraftmen, D.M. Hutchinson, V.A. Frost, and J.F. Ridgeway. But most exciting of all was the occasion of the air unit's first cruise outside the borders of the Colony.

At 06h15 on 14th July, five aircraft of the unit left Salisbury to take part in the Royal Air Force Day at Nairobi. Their route took them via Lusaka, Mpika, Mbeya, Dodoma, Dar es Salaam, Zanzibar and Mombasa to Nairobi. The flight was led by V.E. Maxwell, who was accompanied by Charles Meredith. The pilots were Lieutenants John Holderness, Graham Smith, Hugh Peyton and Eric Spence. The RAF lent a helping hand in the shape of Sergeant Vic Royce and Corporal Alec Higham, Aircraftman Freddie Kimpton and Corporal Ivor de B.C. Fynn who went along to man the radio.

The unit made quite an impression with its aerobatics and ability to pick up messages. The display was, however, marred by a tragic accident when a RAF Vickers Wellesley piloted by Lieutenant C.F. Camp of the South African Air Force crashed killing the pilot.

John Holderness had the dubious honour of flying Charles Meredith back to Salisbury

and he later confirmed the following story. Apparently, the engine developed a fault and the aircraft began to lose height. John decided that he could reach base. The engine became rougher and more height was lost. John, have you got the situation under control? asked the colonel. Yes, sir, came the reply. Meredith sat back and never touched the controls, even though he had vastly more experience than the man at the controls, and by virtue of his command, was empowered to take over. He relaxed and seemed quite happy as John Holderness battled on losing more and more height, eventually dragging the aircraft over the trees onto the airfield. Holderness remarked later how much he appreciated the colonel's restraint.

All in all, everybody seemed very satisfied with the air unit's first official showing outside the Colony. The other members of the air unit were keeping busy surveying the country. By August the Shabani district from Fort Victoria to Filabusi had been photographed ready for map-making.

That same month the flying circus arrived in Fort Victoria but its fame had spread much further afield as an article in the Newsletter of British Aircraft Constructors showed:

Southern Rhodesia has the world's First Travelling Flying school. Faced with the difficulty of providing air instruction in several different centres, not one of which appeared large enough to support a local unit, the progressive Colony decided to establish a school that could move from town to town. Since last October the unit has trained more than one dozen pilots at Que Que and Gatooma to the stage of qualifying as 'A' pilots. The equipment used consists of a Tiger Moth, a tent, a box of tools, some spares, six helmets, earphones and goggles.

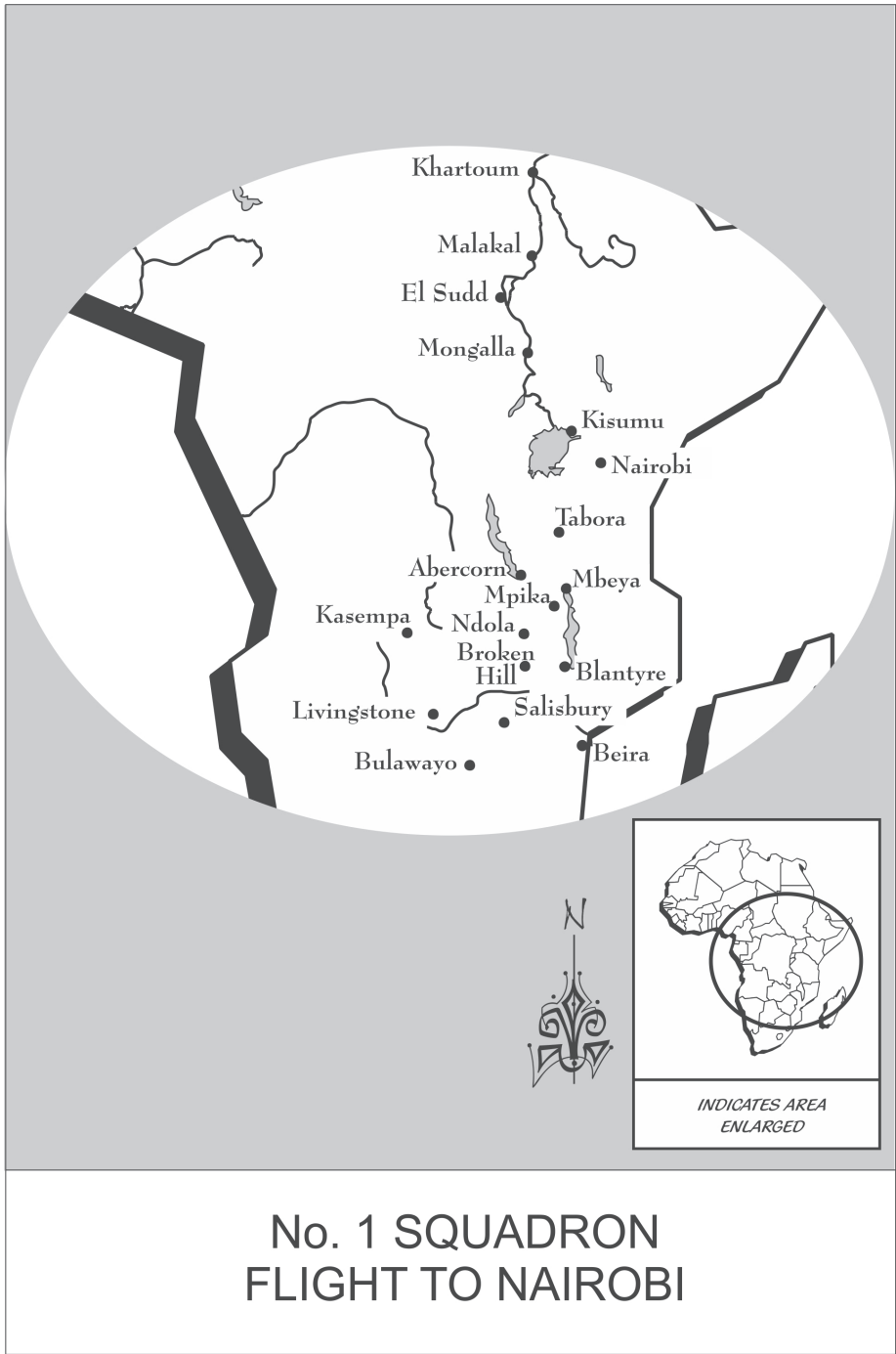
(Newsletter of British Aircraft Constructors)

Probably owing to the influence of Charles Meredith, increasing reference was being made at this time to the Southern Rhodesia Air Force. Maxie Maxwell was even signing pilots' log-books as commanding officer No 1 Squadron, SR Air Force, though there had as yet been no official notification of a change in title.

Winter 1939, war clouds might be looming heavy on the horizon but the Salisbury Agricultural Show must go on. The opening day, Wednesday 16th August, and one of the first points to visit, for the small boys in the crowd, was the air unit Hawker Hart and Audax, which had been flown to the civilian aerodrome at Belvedere and towed into position in the showground. Perhaps it was the interest caused by this exhibit that caused a *Rhodesia Herald* reporter to visit the military aerodrome:

There has been a fair amount of building activity at the military aerodrome during the past two or three months. A new hangar and a storehouse for technical equipment have been added to the accommodation available as well as workshops for wireless, photographic and armament sections. Quarters for non-commissioned officers and airmen are now in the course of erection. The area of the aerodrome has also been increased to approximately 200 acres.

Back in May, Italy and Germany had signed the Pact of Steel. This had been expected. But then came startling news. Russia and Germany had signed a non-aggression pact. What was even worse but was unknown at the time was a secret annexure, which divided Eastern Europe between Germany and the Soviet Union. The British government, which had also been negotiating with the Soviet Union, replied by warning Germany that Britain would fulfil her guarantees to Poland. Hitler, believing that Britain would back down again, as it had done the year before over Czechoslovakia, scheduled his attack on Poland for 26th August, only to have his plans thwarted by Mussolini who said Italy was not ready for war. Hitler delayed his attack for a few days.



The air unit moves north

Meanwhile on 23rd August, the secretary of state in London telegraphed the government in Salisbury:

In view of movement of RAF squadron to war stations in Sudan, SR asked to take any preliminary steps desirable to facilitate expeditious movements SR Troops and air unit to Kenya in accordance with co-ordination scheme.

On the following day the War Diary, Southern Rhodesia reads:

It was decided that arrangements should be made for the move of a contingent of SRAF to Nairobi.

The secretary of state in London was informed that the SR Air Unit could move within 24 hours from the receipt of a request to do so. Next day the request arrived:

We should be glad if the SR Air Unit could move to Kenya at earliest possible moment.

Jimmie Powell was in London where he had gone with the Prime Minister, Sir Godfrey Huggins, so Maxwell was in command in Salisbury. Accordingly it was Maxwell who received the historic order to move north:

August 26th 1939

To: Squadron Leader V.E. Maxwell

From: Colonel H.M. Watson

*You are to leave for Nairobi at 06h00 on 27th August 1939 with personnel and aircraft as shown in Annexures A & B.**

Eric Smith remembers:

It all began on Saturday morning 26th August 1939 when we were summoned to headquarters, kept hanging around till 3 pm and curtly told we were leaving for Kenya at 6 am next morning. We were then packed off, lunchless, to Cranborne to overload our Audax and Harts with essential spares and equipment. Our first experience of the proverbial 'flap' kept us going until about 7 pm that evening. As there was no hope of settling any of our private and civilian affairs we did the next best thing and assembled at Meikles Hotel, attending a hilarious ball and finishing at the Ace of Spades just in time to discard evening dress, don uniforms and present ourselves for take-off. Our ragged kangaroo-like departures went unnoticed by the small group of emotional misty-eyed and uncritical spectators.

Martin Madders who was ground crew ex RAF, says that it was a rush job to get the aircraft ready, particularly SR 6 which had been cannibalized to repair other aircraft. Ground crew were divided, some accompanying the flight to Nairobi, some, unlucky ones, remaining in Salisbury. Arthur Greenwood, Vic Royce and Martin Madders were among those left behind to help with future training. Madders remembers that there was such a shortage of ground crew that all garage mechanics and private aircraft workers—in fact anyone who knew anything about machinery and engines—were recruited.

So the air unit took to the air on their way to battle stations. Eric Smith was flying in Audax SR 12 and Graham Smith was in SR 3. Eric, reporting on the flight, said:

At Mpika Graham Smith's aircraft gave trouble with the carburettor. The Rolls-Royce carburettor was fastened in with scores of bolts. The ground crew worked in the dark most of the night, lost bolts and eventually gave it up till the morning. Nobby Clark was in Graham's plane, so a case of tools was left for him to work with and the rest took off leaving me to keep Graham company. They got the plane going in the morning and took off from Mpika. Now we were on our own. I didn't have any maps but I had flown the route twice before and knew the general direction. Graham took off first. His compass was giving trouble and he took off on a course 30 degrees from the correct one. I tried but I couldn't catch him. I was too heavily loaded with tools. Luckily Graham spotted a river that was where it should not have been and realizing he was off course circled to allow me to catch up. From then on we didn't have too much trouble. Incidentally, Sergeant Charles (Darky) Horton who was flying with me, grew so attached to the Rhodesian squadron that he refused a commission in order to stay with us and eventually was commissioned in the squadron.

Owing to the problems experienced by Graham, the squadron had to make an extra night stop at Moshi, and arrived in Nairobi at 08h30 on 29th August. Their arrival made headline news in the newspapers and on the radio. There was no strict security blackout—but then the war had not started yet. It was a matter of days!

While the air unit was on its way north, the Southern Rhodesia Parliament, at a special sitting, which lasted only 80 minutes, passed the Emergency Powers (Defence) Bill through all its stages. This bill gave the government power to govern by regulation in the event of war. As Sir Godfrey Huggins had not yet returned from Britain the Honourable Percy Finn acted as prime minister.

Within 24 hours of its arrival in Nairobi, the air unit was at work patrolling the Somaliland border from forward bases with scratch RAF ground crews. Eric Smith remembered:

'A' flight under the command of Flight Lieutenant Graham Smith patrolled the northern sector as far as the Abyssinian border and 'B' flight under my command, patrolled the southern sector down to the coast. Immediately an intense if friendly rivalry sprang up between the flights and continued throughout the whole of the East African Campaign.

The Rhodesian press published a report that was calculated to lay fears to rest:

It should be made clear that it is a section of the Colony's air force that has gone to Kenya. The rest of the unit remains in the Colony.

That sounds encouraging but Meredith was to write later:

The aircraft and equipment required for the unit left only four Harts and about eight light aircraft in Rhodesia and war having been declared, the absolute maximum war effort that could have been expected would have been the replacement of aircrew wastage in the unit in Kenya. Even this would have been on a partially trained basis and wholly contingent on the availability of replacement aircraft, spares and equipment. For this contingency no provision had been made and no planning was in existence.

A few days later than he had originally planned, Hitler ordered his attack on Poland. It was September 1st. The time was 04h45 hours. Without any declaration of war, the German army swept across the Polish border. This ended any hope of peace but the French still clung to the vain hope that war could be avoided. While the bombs rained down on Warsaw and

the panzer divisions rolled forward, Chamberlain delayed issuing an ultimatum. At last on September 2nd he told Hitler that unless German troops were withdrawn, Germany must consider herself at war with Britain. Hitler ignored the ultimatum. Britain and Germany were at war.

Budget 1939

The air unit was to receive an estimated £33,177; additional aircraft were to be purchased for £3,900 and the establishment of manpower was to be increased. Provision was made for the inclusion of a sergeant armourer, a wireless operator, five more aircraftmen and a storeman.

*** Orders for the move to Kenya**

26th August 1939

To: Squadron Leader V.E. Maxwell

From: Colonel H.M. Watson

- 1) *You are to leave for Nairobi at 06h00 on 27th August 1939 with personnel and aircraft as shown in annexures A and B and on arriving you are to report to the officer commanding Royal Air Force Station Nairobi. Should there be no station commander at that point you are to report to the general officer commanding in chief, East African Forces, and request that officer to notify the air officer commanding in chief Middle East of your arrival, and thereafter you are to await instructions as to whose command you will fall under.*
- 2) *Personnel*
 - a) *Officers. Lieutenants Martin Pearce, Arthur Downing and Reg Bourlay have been commissioned in the territorial forces and called up for duty for the purpose of flying Rapide aircraft. Their expenses are to be met by you from your imprest fund in the same manner as for your remaining personnel.*
 - b) *Other ranks. On arrival at Dodoma, wireless operators shown in annexure A are to be deplaned and instructed to report to the officer commanding Kings African Rifles at that centre or if there is no such officer then the provincial commissioner. Deputy assistant adjutant general is preparing instructions for transmission by these personnel. Corporal Alec Higham at present in Nairobi should be taken on your strength.*
- 3) *Aircraft*
 - a) *The two Rapides shown in annexure B with civil registration marks have been chartered from RANA and other than in exceptional circumstances are not to be flown by other than RANA pilots. Lieutenant Pearce is the senior of these pilots attached for duty and the allocation of aircraft should be delegated to him.*
 - b) *On arrival at Nairobi, arrangements are to be made to send the three Rapides back to Salisbury. Lieutenant Pearce should be detailed to fly SR 8; that officer should be instructed to detail pilots for the RANA aircraft.*
- 4) *Route and times*
 - a) *The route to be followed and the estimated times of departure are set out in annexure C.*
 - b) *Return: The three Rapides SR 8, VP-YBJ and VP-YBT are to return by the same route as on the forward journey unless in your discretion circumstances necessitate alteration. They should be dispatched from Nairobi after allowing one clear day after arrival and if you adhere to your itinerary this will be Wednesday 30th August 1939. Should there be any delay in forward itinerary or in preparing the Rapides for the return flight they should be dispatched as early as possible. You are to place Lieutenant Pearce in charge of the flight and provide him with adequate written instructions in regards to the return journey.*

You are also to provide him from your imprest account with sufficient money to meet the expenses of the crews on the return journey and include in your instructions details of the method of accounting for the money on his arrival in Salisbury.

5) *Safety at aerodrome*

As it is possible that landing grounds at Mbeya, Dodoma and Mushi may be unsafe for landing, signals have been made requesting that you be informed before commencing any one leg that the aerodrome at which you intend to land is safe. In case of a breakdown in these arrangements and in any event you are to exercise caution before landing and to institute a system whereby if any aerodrome appears unsafe one aircraft only is to land and the pilot having satisfied himself by inspection that the control of the aerodrome is in safe hands is to make a pre-arranged permissive signal for the remainder of the flight to land. Should the pilot of the first aircraft to land make a negative signal, or be attacked or captured you are to use your discretion as to whether to institute an air attack and also as to the point at which you will land the remainder of the aircraft.

6) *Intercommunications*

All arrivals and departures signals are to be addressed to Aviation Salisbury. The administrations of the territories through which you pass have been informed that the flight will be operating on 900 metres with a call sign SR 9 and have been requested to keep watch for the flight.

7) *Administration arrangements for arms and ammunition equipment*

Harts and Audaxes are to be fitted with front and rear guns and to carry 250 rounds of ammunition each for the front gun, three drums for the rear gun. In addition, each aircraft will be provided with one rifle and 20 rounds of ammunition.

8) *Fuel and oil*

Arrangements have been made with Shell Company for sufficient supplies of fuel and oil to be available at all landing points for both forward and return journeys and in this connection it should be noted that the chartered Rapides are to draw supplies on both journeys on government account.

9) *Stores, equipment etc.*

In accordance with discussions you have included in these loads to be carried by air such items as you can conveniently stow and will require.

10) *Imprest account*

An imprest account of £50 has been arranged by the paymaster and is to be accounted for in terms of instructions issued by that officer.

11) *Discipline*

For disciplinary purposes, all Royal Air Force personnel have been granted local ranks in SR Air Force equal to Royal Air Force ranks held. The extent of disciplinary powers thus conferred on the Royal Air Force personnel and SR personnel is under consideration but generally will be in terms of the SR Defence Act.

12) *Guard*

A request for the provision of a guard at Mbeya has been transmitted to the officer commanding 7 Brigade Kings African Rifles. Personnel records with which you are provided are to be handed to the officer to whom you report at Nairobi.

Nominal roll of persons accompanying SR flight

Officers

Flying Personnel

Squadron Leader Maxie Maxwell (RAF)

Lieutenant Ron Marshall

Lieutenant Graham Smith
Lieutenant Eric Smith
Second Lieutenant Hugh Peyton
Second Lieutenant Eric Spence
Second Lieutenant Alec Hutchinson
Second Lieutenant Ron Christie
Second Lieutenant Ted Jacklin
Second Lieutenant Tickey Tyas
Lieutenant Martin Pearce RANA
Lieutenant Reg Bourlay RANA
Lieutenant Arthur Downing RANA

Medical personnel

One medical officer

Captain C.W. Robertson MO

Other ranks

Fitters

Sergeant C.P. Horton RAF
Corporal Alec Higham RAF Nairobi
Corporal V.A. Frost RAF
Aircraftman Walter Pollard

Riggers (Aero)

Corporal J.F. Ridgeway RAF
Aircraftman W.J. Lucas

Armourer

Sergeant G. Tipping RAF

Wireless operator/mechanic

Sergeant H. Clark RAF

Wireless operators

Sergeant Ken Murrell
Corporal H.L. (Mollie) Maltas
T.J. MacDonald

Posts and telegraphs

B. Coulson
C.F. Lindeque (to be deplaned at Dodoma seconded from KAR)

Four airgunners

Aircraftman Alan Burl
Aircraftman Oliver Ross Collins
Aircraftman John Gray
Aircraftman Freddie Kimpton

One clerk

Corporal Alan Simpson (ex army and police stores)

Aircraft

Audax SR 10, SR 11, SR 12, SR 13
Harts SR 3, SR 6
Rapides SR 8, VP-YBJ, VP-YBT (The last two are on charter from RANA)

CHAPTER 5

The phoney war



Britain declared war on Germany on 3rd September 1939. On the following day this notice appeared in the *Rhodesia Herald*:

*Southern Rhodesia Defence Force
Recruits are urgently required
Reserve called to report
Recruiting offices opened.*

And on another page:

Warning: Prohibition of transactions in respect of Southern Rhodesia aircraft and parts of aircraft. All owners and possessors of Southern Rhodesia aircraft are hereby notified that under legislation to become effective from the outbreak of war, the sanction of the minister of defence is required for the sale, transfer, letting or hire and changing of an aircraft registered in the Colony.

According to a *Rhodesia Herald* report:

In Salisbury the young men rushed to the state lotteries hall to enlist. There was a lottery draw on that afternoon and a number of ladies hopeful of winning the jackpot were in attendance; but the menfolk stripped to the waist and not heeding the revolving wheels and dancing balls, went past for their medical examinations. There was such a rush at the recruiting station that some men waited all day in queues for examination. (Rhodesia Herald)

The air unit becomes No 1 Squadron

On 6th September a discussion was held with the minister of defence. It was agreed that Middle East should be informed that the name of the Southern Rhodesia Air Unit was to be changed to No 1 Squadron, Southern Rhodesia Air Force and that the Colony was prepared to build the squadron to full strength. It was also agreed that RANA would be taken over and converted into a Communications Squadron.

The Prime Minister, Sir Godfrey Huggins, was in London when war broke out and so was the Minister of Defence, the Honourable R.C. Tredgold who gave a statement on the Colony's defence position on 11th September.

The training section of the air unit has been greatly expanded to meet war conditions and it will soon be possible to train a large number of recruits in Salisbury...Recruits who are prepared to serve either in the Rhodesian Air Section or the RAF will be accepted on the same general basis.

Their medical, educational and general fitness will be examined and then they will be called up as and when required. Again each case will be considered by the local tribunal.

Three days later, the Southern Rhodesia Air Force recruiting drive went into full gear with a front page centre advertisement in the *Rhodesia Herald*:

Air Force

Applications are invited from citizens who are desirous of being considered for service in the air force on flying and ground duties.

The following basic conditions are essential:

- a) Male, British, European*
- b) Over 18 and under 25 years of age*
- c) Willing to:*
 - 1) Train and/or serve beyond the borders of the Colony as may be required*
 - 2) Attend interview if required and medical examination*

Personnel already serving, NO MATTER IN WHAT UNIT, must without exception submit applications through their commanding officers.

With reference to this last stipulation, the number of men wishing to transfer from other units was to be a major bone of contention.

The response to the recruiting campaign was overwhelming: 499 applications were received in 12 days. One of the first organizations to be hit by this rush to join the air force was RANA that lost nearly all their technical staff. RANA, therefore, appealed through the pages of the newspaper for women and men who were too old or not fit enough for military service to help the company out by taking positions such as bookkeeping, storekeeping and office work. They also needed people who were prepared to clean plugs, spray paint, stitch fabric and carry out any other of the many tasks needed to keep aircraft in the air. They also appealed for any women who had even an elementary knowledge of the internal combustion engine to come forward.

On 25th September, defence headquarters issued a memorandum confirming that Lieutenant Colonel Meredith was to continue as both officer commanding the air force and director of civil aviation, stating that in future the military aerodrome would be known as Cranborne Air Station. Obviously more office accommodation was required for headquarters and a house in Montagu Avenue was acquired. Squadron Leader Powell now back in the Colony was soon busy speeding up the training of ground and aircrew. Martin Madders talking about this time says:

When Powell returned from the UK he ordered every aircraft to be got ready to fly by the following day. Crews were named. They took off at the crack of dawn, armed with toilet rolls and scientifically 'bombed' the drill hall. The army was not amused.

Sir Godfrey Huggins had also returned to the Colony and on 2nd October in a broadcast to the country reported:

More than two thirds of what was considered to be the Colony's available manpower for military service has already volunteered, in spite of the fact that those engaged in mining, farming and transportation have been warned that they should not enlist at present...In regard to the Rhodesia Air Force, the recruitment campaign which was only started on September 15th indicates that our ability to help in the air and with the necessary ground staff is much greater than was expected. This, of course, will be one of our most valuable contributions.

Accommodation problems

There were some enormous problems, however, one of the greatest being a shortage of accommodation. Public Works were doing their best but in the meantime tents and other temporary housing were being utilized.

Madders remarks that there was no accommodation for the sudden influx that occurred with the outbreak of war. A hangar was cleared of aircraft and filled with beds. Mrs Madders (as she was later to become) cooked the first meal in the sergeants' mess. One of the men was unfortunate enough to have his bed under the hoist. The boys came back late one night, fixed the four corners of the bed to the hoist and lifted him off the ground complete with bed.

A further problem was the shortage of equipment. By the 2nd October there were 30 pilots, ten airgunners and 15 mechanics under training. Appeals had been made to the Air Ministry for aircraft but no action had been taken as yet. The control of de Havilland had been taken over and without exception the personnel joined the air force. Certain problems had come up as far as the takeover of RANA was concerned and that had been postponed until 1st November 1939.

Discussions with the third civil flying company, Flights Ltd were still in progress. It was estimated that the Rhodesian Government Flying School would have a full capacity of 100 trainees with an output of 30 every six weeks. In his letter to Commandant Southern Rhodesia Forces, Colonel Meredith remarks that No 1 Squadron in Kenya still required 19 aircrew to bring it up to strength and that these men would be ready by 6th November. As far as ground personnel were concerned, it was hoped to send 90 men north in batches of 30 from the middle of December.

Apprentices arrive back

As for ground crew instructors, the six men who had trained with the Royal Air Force: Ron Boswell, Ron Cashel, F.G. (Otto) Gericke, Brynmor Hyla (Mick) Gibbons, Ralph Mays Parry and Stanley Ryder Young had arrived back in the Colony and started duty with the Southern Rhodesia Air Force on 5th October. These men had come back by sea, sailing across the Atlantic to the American coast and then back to the Cape, presumably to dodge the powerfully armed, German pocket battleship, the Graf Spee, which was reported to be in the South Atlantic. More would be heard of this craft in the near future. Parry remembers being taken straight to Cranborne on his arrival, shown a big box and told: There's an aircraft. Build it. These were the Gloster Gladiators that had been purchased from the RAF.

Meanwhile the situation at Cranborne Air Station had become chaotic. There were inadequate cooking facilities and off duty rooms. It was decided that no further men would be called up until proper messing arrangements could be made. On 20th October 1939, the *Rhodesia Herald* printed a long article about the air force reporting that six weeks' initial flying in DH Tiger Moths was to be followed by training on Hawker Harts and Audaxes that would include night flying. The pilots would then be awarded their wings, which would be the equivalent of a 'B' licence. There was also a description of Cranborne Air Station:

Cut from the bush is a great flying field, bounded on the west by the hangars and living quarters. At present the recruits are housed in tents but shortly they will have moved into new barrack huts, which are being built among the trees to the north. To the north-west are the NCO's quarters built of brick. These were started before the war; and to the north-east is the CO's house. South of this are the officers' quarters. Provision has been made for extension of all these new quarters. (Rhodesia Herald)

Which was just as well as it turned out!

Pilot training continued, with the men and equipment available until the end of March 1940, when Southern Rhodesia's air force training ceased. By that time the school had trained 15 pilots through intermediate and advanced stages, passed 62 pilots through elementary stage, trained nine airgunners and three flying instructors, together with a number of fitters, riggers and photographers. (Archives s800 Notes prepared for visit of Inspector General Oct 1942)

At the end of October 1939, Meredith travelled to London by way of Broken Hill in Northern Rhodesia. His aim was to obtain supplies of aircraft and equipment in order to extend Rhodesia's air training facilities. His ideas were received with enthusiasm in London because the Air Ministry realized that there was a necessity to get initial air training out of Britain where it was vulnerable to both air attack and the possibility of a German invasion. So it was that the discussions developed along the lines of a much larger scheme than Meredith had envisaged. It was to involve not only Rhodesians but also men from Britain, the Empire and its allies. Meanwhile many young Rhodesians were not waiting for the scheme to get off the ground. Those that were in Britain at the outbreak of war had already volunteered straight away; many others made their way by the fastest route to the United Kingdom. According to the *Rhodesia Herald's* correspondent in the United Kingdom:

During a second special tour organized by the Air Ministry, I witnessed youthful Rhodesians and South Africans undergoing training as officer pilots at one of the numerous stations 'somewhere in England'...Of the 50 pupils undergoing advanced squadron training, there are 16 South Africans and Rhodesians, who were highly praised to me by their instructors. (Rhodesia Herald)

On the world front, the various parts of the British Empire had followed Britain's lead and declared war on Germany. Australia and New Zealand on September 3rd, South Africa on the 6th, and Canada on the 10th, the day on which the British Expeditionary Force began crossing the Channel to reinforce the French army.

In Poland the Germans were giving the world its first taste of the blitzkrieg, with its tactics of speed and shock. It was a fresh approach to war and its overwhelming success surprised not only the Poles but also the Germans themselves. Never before had a nation's military capacity been so utterly annihilated in so short a time with so little loss to the attacking force. The basic principle, which had been developed by a British First World War officer, Liddell Hart, was to attack where it was least expected and to move fast, using armoured vehicles to cut supply lines and disrupt communications. Hitler's forces conquered Poland in 18 days.

Seeing the way things were going and wanting her share of the plunder, the Soviet Union joined in on 17th September 1939, attacking from the east. Warsaw surrendered officially on 27th September and a Polish government in exile was established in Paris, while Poland was divided between the victors.

For Britain, the war at sea was going as badly as the war on land. The aircraft carrier, HMS *Courageous* had been torpedoed in September, and on October 14th *The Royal Oak* was sunk while at anchor in Scapa Flow with the loss of 833 lives.

The Italians had so far shown no signs of entering the war and so life for No 1 Squadron at first consisted of rather monotonous patrol work. Then in the middle of November came a report that a small tanker had been sunk off Ponta Zavora, 180 miles (288km) north-east of Lourenço Marques. It appeared that this ship had fallen prey to the German raider *Graf Spee*, which had rounded the Cape and was now operating in the Indian Ocean. Eric Smith remembered:

I was asked to report with one pilot to Nairobi. We were given sealed orders to report to the naval commander, Mombasa. The commander was named Blunt. Orders were to seek and destroy the

'Graf Spee'. Patrols immediately set out. Blunt reported that an oil slick had been spotted north of Mombasa near Malindi. "Go and seek and clobber" we were told. We hunted all over the place but couldn't find it. We reported back to Blunt who remarked, "It was a good job you didn't. It was His Majesty's submarine 'Cyclops'!" Our long range reconnaissance aircraft, Puss Moths and Rapides of the Civilian East African Airways were frantically searching the Indian Ocean and we were equally frantically practising our strike under the personal direction of the officer commanding, East Africa Air Force, Wing Commander Shaw. This was to approach at sea level, pushing with both feet on the dash board, go into a steep climb, stalling off at the top and neatly dropping the single 500 pounder down the 'Graf Spee's' funnel. When we had acquired some precision in the manoeuvre, we timidly inquired about the break away. Curtly he replied, "Don't worry about that," and softened the remark by adding, "but you will put Rhodesia on the map." Praise be the 'Graf Spee' was by then half way across the Atlantic. (Eric Smith)

In fact, immediately after sinking the *Africa Shell*, Captain Hans Langsdorff had taken the *Graf Spee* back round the Cape. For the moment the excitement was over.

In Kenya, Colonel W.H.A. Bishop GSO at HQ East Africa Force had only praise for the instant response with which Southern Rhodesia met the war situation:

We had expected that there would be a little delay between the outbreak of war and the dispatch of the air force but there was no delay at all. The response was immediate.

Reinforcements go north overland

Arrangements were meanwhile being made to reinforce No 1 Squadron of the Southern Rhodesia Air Force. The 90 men were to make the move north by train and road. The logistics involved were a nightmare. Below is an example of the rations involved for five days:

Quantities in pounds:

Biscuits, ship 340

Preserved meat 340

Tinned vegetables 115, or dried vegetables 60

Meat extract 15 or MB ration in tins 450 tins

Tinned bacon 70 or tinned ham 70 or meat loaf 85 or pork and beans 225

Tinned cheese 30

Fresh fruit 115

Coffee 55

Dried fruit 15

Sugar 100

Margarine 345, marmalade 30

Tinned milk 60

Mustard 5, Pepper 5, Salt 10

Rice or oatmeal 15

Curry powder 5

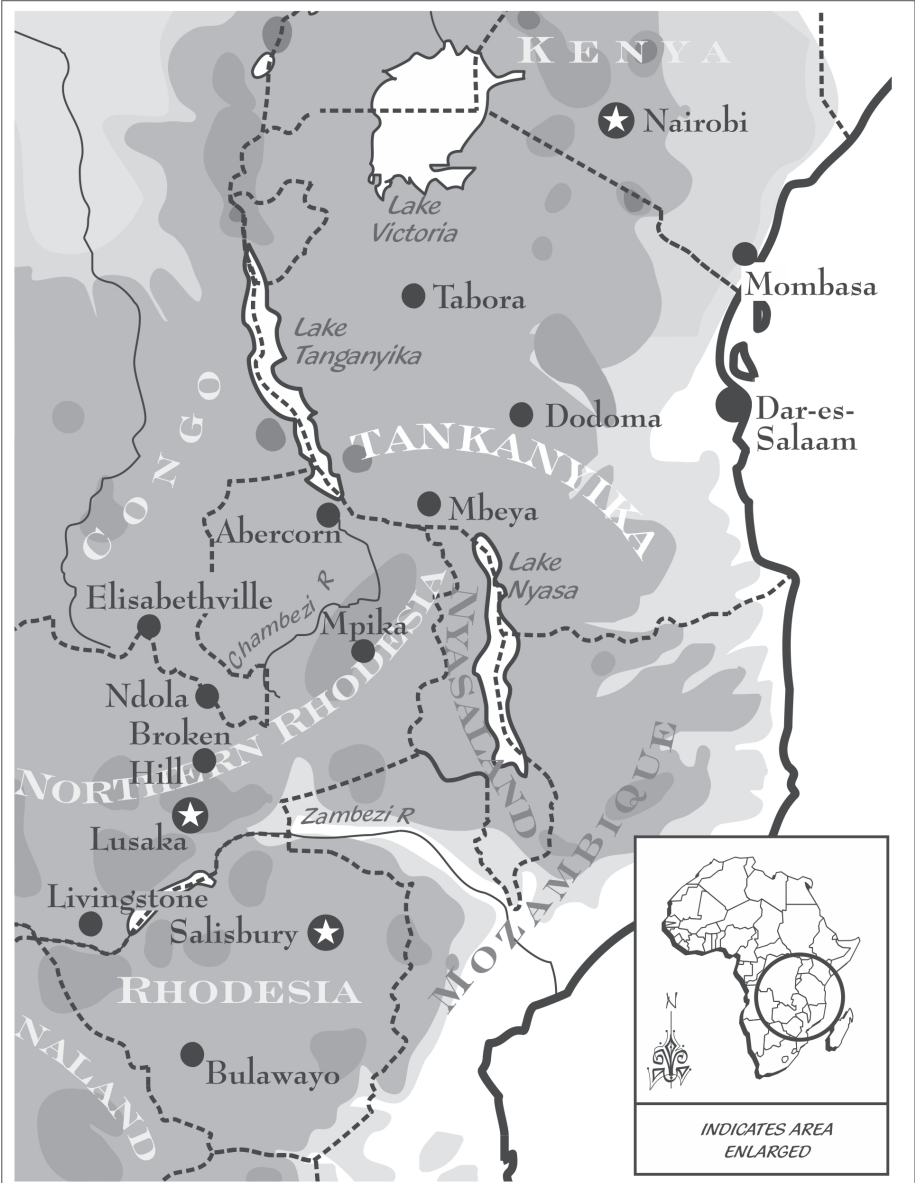
Cooking fat 30

Tinned salmon or herring 160

Also 147 cases of petrol and 49 gallons of lubricating oil.

The basic number of men was later raised to 20 officers and 90 other ranks, all Europeans, and it was arranged that eight ambulances should accompany the force.*

The platform at Salisbury railway station was packed with wives, parents, friends and



GROUND CONVOY GOES NORTH

relations on 19th November as the train carrying the airmen puffed out. The detachment arrived without hitch at Broken Hill at 05h15 on 22nd November. There the men de-trained and climbed into their lorries for the long journey north. The convoy under the command of Adjutant Flight Lieutenant William Francis Bryanton reached Nairobi 3rd December eleven days after leaving Broken Hill. It was in fact a masterpiece of efficiency, considering that the distance covered was over 1,000 miles and the conditions were primitive in the extreme. Incredibly, only one casualty occurred and this man was able to rejoin the squadron on 14th December. This detachment brought the strength of No 1 squadron up to 133 all ranks.

It was now possible to form a 'C' flight under the command of Flight Lieutenant Tickey Tyas who was later to be killed at Keren in Eritrea.

The squadron still had only the seven aircraft that they had brought from Rhodesia so the aircraft situation was critical. However, RAF headquarters Middle East promised to help with eight Hind aircraft together with spares sufficient for nine months' operations. Another problem was uniforms. Stocks of SRAF uniforms were not held in Nairobi and this led to all kinds of difficulties. Eric Smith says that at one stage the squadron personnel got so browned off with the situation that they turned up on parade for the air officer commanding, Middle East wearing hockey boots, red socks and any other oddments they could find.

Early in November, Colonel Meredith travelled via Cairo to London to discuss defence matters. There were three major discussion points as far as the Southern Rhodesia Air Force was concerned. These were the costs involved in maintaining the squadron in Nairobi, the possibility of creating two further Rhodesian squadrons and the establishment of an air-training scheme in Rhodesia itself.

Obviously as discussions went ahead, Meredith was keeping the Rhodesian government informed through Mr Lannigan O'Keefe, Southern Rhodesia's high commissioner in London. The points of discussion were then passed on to the prime minister in Salisbury:

It is a principle that a squadron will be granted full national designation only if total cost including equipment is borne by the country concerned.

It was financially out of the question for Southern Rhodesia to provide aircraft for three complete squadrons so the high commissioner suggested that:

Personnel for the three squadrons should be posted to the RAF carrying the designation 'Rhodesia' in the Royal Air Force title. The effect will be that personnel and aircraft will be paid by the Air Ministry and therefore saving will accrue to us, which the Air Ministry will suggest should be added to our proposed contribution to the training scheme.

(Letter from High Commissioner to P.M., 18th December 1939)

It was finally agreed that the squadron already serving in Kenya should be given an RAF number but should carry the name Rhodesia in the title and that it should undertake army cooperation duties. It was further agreed that Rhodesia would provide personnel for this and two other squadrons. Rhodesians serving in other RAF squadrons would be allowed to transfer if they wished.

The air-training scheme

It was also decided that training in Rhodesia should begin with one initial training wing through which pupils would pass to three elementary flying training schools and three service flying training schools. This programme was quite beyond the technical and manpower resources of the Southern Rhodesia government and would require provision by Air Ministry

in London, of aircraft, equipment and personnel. It also required the establishment of six air stations, which would have to be built using local resources. On the matter of who was to finance the scheme, the Air Ministry's attitude was one of indifference. The matter was one of top priority and Meredith was told, to buzz off and get air training going because the Canadian scheme is bogged down in apples! The Canadian Treasury Department wanted to set apple exports against their share of the expenses, hence the reference to apples!

Colonel Meredith had no authority to commit Rhodesia financially although he did have the authority to agree to the establishment of the schools on Rhodesian soil. In reply to his query about finances, Meredith was told to get whatever you want from the Southern Rhodesian government and we will settle up later. So Colonel Meredith left London on 26th December 1939 with a blank cheque which, to the delight of the Southern Rhodesian Treasury, was honoured immediately and without question.*

At this point, the Rhodesian government had already agreed to far-reaching building plans at a cost of £12,000 for Cranborne alone. However, accommodation was still a major problem at Cranborne with aircraft packed into one end of a hangar, the rest of the space being used for sleeping quarters. During December, one further Hornet Moth had been acquired making a total of 16 aircraft available for training purposes and one aircraft for transport. The strength of officers and other ranks at the Air Station was 137. A further six men were taken on in the aircraft and engine repair depot raising the strength to 13, excluding the officer commanding.†

One interesting point is that the Rapide used for transport retained its civil markings throughout the war as it was used for trips to Mozambique, which of course remained neutral.

On the war front, British shipping was increasingly falling prey to German submarines and magnetic mines. On the last day of November, Russia invaded Finland and towards the middle of December came the Battle of the River Plate. The Graf Spee had been responsible for the sinking of nine British ships when she was cornered by three British destroyers off the coast of the River Plate. A running fight developed. The British vessels were outgunned but kept attacking until they drove the German ship to take shelter in Montevideo harbour. The Uruguayan authorities denied permission for the German battleship to remain in this neutral harbour and on 18th December 1939, the German crew cleared harbour and scuttled their ship. The effect on British morale, starved of victories, was out of all proportion to the size of the achievement, but it did bring a little peace of mind to the authorities in southern and East Africa.

★ **Officers with the Nairobi draft—22nd November 1939**

William Francis Bryanton, squadron adjutant

A.E. Stringer, camp commandant

H.A.O. Wootton

Pilots

Stan Edward Flett

Paul Holdengarde

Evert Phillip (Boop) Kleynhans

A.S. (Sandy) MacIntyre—later commander No 266 Rhodesia Squadron

L.P. (Les) Olver

Colin Murray (Fatty) Palmer

Graham Michael Robinson

★ Memo on RATG Rhodesiana No 28.

† Monthly report, Defence HQ Archives

Cyril Leonard Sindall

Brian Domley White

John William James (Jack) Taylor—KIA

Miles Andrew Johnson—KIA

C.P. (Cyril) Chilvers

Herbert Spencer (Farmer) Hales—later commander No 208 Rhodesia Squadron

J. (John) Walmisley—later commander No 237 Rhodesia Squadron

The rest were all aircraftmen except Leading Aircraftman Roderick Henned Trollope

Coates-Palgrave (photographer)

Sergeant W.A.B. Maxwell—medical orderly

Corporal R.G. Keeling—medical orderly

Eighteen officers and 87 other ranks with Southern Rhodesia Air Force

One officer and four other ranks with Southern Rhodesia Medical Corps

One officer Permanent Staff Corps. (Archives S 730/51 1–24)

CHAPTER 6

First loss in the desert



New year 1940 dawned with nothing much happening. Hitler was consolidating his gains in eastern Europe and Italy was still sitting on the fence. This inactivity in the land war meant that the Southern Rhodesia Air Force squadron stationed in Kenya could prepare for its new role of army cooperation. The training, which was carried out with 22 Mountain Battery, Royal Artillery and the 2nd Battalion Kings African Rifles, provided the Rhodesian airmen with experience in air gunnery and low-level bombing. The squadron also took part in operations with 1st East African Light Battery and tactical reconnaissance exercises with 1st and 2nd East African Brigades. Two-way wireless telegraphy training, low-level flying and dive-bombing with 2nd Battalion Kings African Rifles was followed by practice target spotting for ack-ack batteries. All of which would prove highly useful in time to come.

By the end of January the strength of the squadron was 27 officers and 110 other ranks. One hundred and ninety flying hours were logged for the month of January. During February a ground party went on detachment to Isiolo for division exercises while two groups of pilots left for the Middle East to collect some very welcome Hawker Hardys from 102 Maintenance Unit.

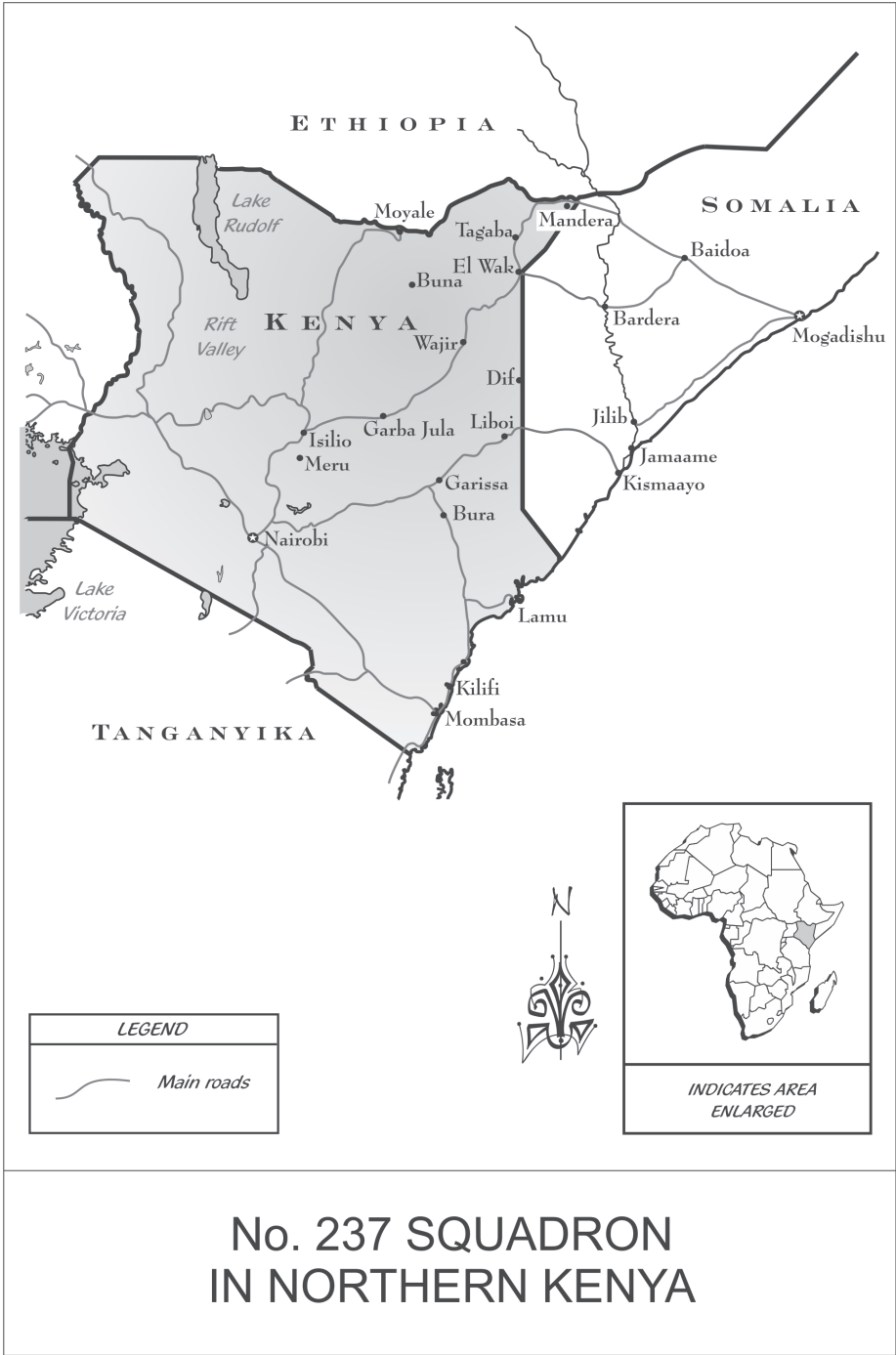
Alec Hutchinson remembers:

Left in a Valencia from Nairobi on 11th February. Flew to Khartoum. Then on a river boat to Wadi Halfa. Brought back eight Hardys. Arrived back in Nairobi on 7th March. Then because there was not much doing went off on 14 days' leave.

The monotony was broken in the middle of February when a draft of 20 pupil pilots passed through Nairobi on their way to the Middle East for training. They were given a warm welcome and shown the sights. Meanwhile the men of the large December draft were nearing the end of their training and were ready to pass out.

On 7th March eight new Hardys arrived and on the same day the ground detachment arrived back from Isiolo. The training had been extremely useful and there had only been one mishap when Audax SR 11 piloted by Hugh Chinnery Peyton crashed. The pilot and his passenger, Corporal J.F. Ridgeway, (RAF) had only minor cuts and bruises but the aircraft was extensively damaged. Apparently, Hugh Peyton had attempted a forced-landing on rough ground and the aircraft cartwheeled. The way in which the squadron dealt with this aircraft set a pattern, waste not want not being the motto. The Audax was dismantled and transported back to Nairobi from Isiolo so that the engine and airframe could be salvaged. The SRAF technicians were already proving themselves past masters at making do and mending.

One of the first official ceremonies staged by the squadron was a flypast for General Wavell, General Officer Commanding Chief Middle East when he visited Nairobi on 14th



March. This was the first occasion on which the squadron had been able to put nine aircraft in the air. A week later squadron numbers were swelled by the arrival of Flying Officer Theodosiou and a further 96 airmen. They had travelled the long way round, Salisbury to Durban by rail, Durban to Mombasa by sea and Mombasa to Nairobi by rail. They were accompanied by Flying Officer Greenslade, a grand old man who had served in the Royal Flying Corps during the First World War, and did not want to be left out of this one. So by the end of March, the strength of No 1 Squadron SRAF had risen to 28 officers and 209 other ranks, while flying time was now in the region of 250 hours a month.

A name change for the squadron

April 1st 1940 brought a change that was not popular with the squadron. No 1 Squadron Southern Rhodesia Air Force was officially redesignated No 237 (Rhodesia) Squadron Royal Air Force. It was a title of which the members were to become very proud but at first there was deep resentment about dropping the old name. At the same time the motto *Primum Agmen in Caelo*—The First Force in the Sky or First in the Field was adopted. There were changes in administration as well. By arrangement with the secretary of state in London, the squadron became a RAF responsibility as far as maintenance costs and pay were concerned.

In Europe the so-called phoney war ended abruptly with Germany's invasion of Denmark and Norway on 9th April. Hitler had been preparing his attack for some time and Britain had in fact dispatched troops and air support to Norway two days before the invasion began but the British forces arrived too late to be of much help. One Rhodesian airman who fought in this campaign was Caesar Barrand Hull. Born in Shangani he enlisted with the RAF in September 1935. He was wounded during the defence of Norway but recovered in time to take part in the Battle of Britain, during which he was killed while commanding No 43 Squadron RAF. The Norwegians resisted gallantly, holding out until 10th June but once again the German blitzkrieg proved invincible. The lull was over. Hitler had begun his move west.

Up to this point, Italy had shown a great reluctance to become involved but at any moment that might change. No 237 Squadron was placed on stand-by, all personnel on leave were recalled and further leave was cancelled. 'B' flight prepared to proceed on detachment to Malindi while on 2nd May 'A' flight ground party left for Isiolo. Despite the stand-by, time was found for a rugby match in Nairobi during which Graham Smith, who was captaining the side, slipped a cartilage and had to leave the field while Ted Jacklin showed brilliant form and was an inspiration to his side. (*Rhodesia Herald*)

'B' flight left for Malindi on 12th May by which time 'A' flight was carrying out reconnaissance flights along the Garissa/Liboi road.

Peyton and Kimpton go missing

Early on the morning of 16th May, Hardy K5914, with Flying Officer Hugh Peyton as pilot and Corporal Freddie Kimpton as gunner took off on a routine reconnaissance of the Garissa/Liboi road. They did not return. Aircraft carrying out sorties in the area were requested to search for the missing aircraft. At dusk the search was suspended but on the following day 'A' flight again flew search and rescue missions. Eric Smith says:

The area we were working was almost without landmarks. Even the roads were mere tracks winding through featureless scrub. At this stage there were instructions that military aircraft must not fly within 20 miles of the Italian border. Peyton may have gone further north than he*

* This order had been given because Italy was still officially neutral and the British authorities did not wish to give the Italians any excuse to join on the German side.

should and missed the track he was looking for. It would seem that he reached the border and for some reason turned south and followed the boundary until he ran out of petrol. The plane was eventually found just inside the Italian border. Apparently Hugh broke his arm at the time of landing. They stayed with the plane for three days; then they began to walk. Kimpton refused to leave his pilot, staying with the injured man until he died six or seven days later. Kimpton then continued alone for another three miles, chewing bark to help his thirst, until he collapsed. Their bodies were eventually found by the South Africans when they advanced a year later. Had the aerial search been pushed closer to the border they might have been found but Maxwell obeying orders refused to allow his pilots to search within 20 miles [32km] of the border. (Eric Smith)

It is possible that some of the bad feeling towards Maxwell, which came to a head later, dated from this episode. It was to be a year before the truth was known—meanwhile the search continued. A total of seven aircraft took part and the hunt went on for five days. Hope was abandoned on 22nd May by which time 125 flying hours had been expended and an area of 21,000 square miles covered. Obviously, this first loss depressed the whole squadron.

The month of May ended with Operations Records reporting day after day:

Normal routine patrols by aircraft from Wajir, Garissa and Malindi.

The squadron strength was now 27 officers and 208 other ranks. Flying time for May had been 378 hours 10 minutes.

Italy enters the war

On 3rd June 'C' flight ground party left for Garissa and on the following day 'C' flight air party joined them. This allowed the two aircraft that had been at Garissa on detachment from 'B' flight to return to Malindi. During the first weeks of June routine patrols were flown by 'A' flight from Wajir, 'C' flight from Garissa and 'B' flight from Malindi.

Operations Record June 10th 1940:

Italy declares war on the Allies. All flights warned to stand by for war sorties.

The disposition of the squadron:

'A' flight—four aircraft at Wajir

'B' flight—four aircraft at Malindi

'C' flight—four aircraft at Garissa

Headquarters and seven reserve aircraft at Nairobi. Task in general allocated to squadron by East Africa Force headquarters is to report enemy movements into Kenya from Italian East Africa.

Each flight was allotted a specific area as listed below with the requirement that all pilots should report any enemy movement along the roads in the particular area allocated.

'A' Flight—Wajir—Area ZZ1

Wajir—Buna—Moyale—halfway Buna-Tagaba—Wajir

Z2 Wajir—El Wak plus 45 miles and return

Z3 Wajir—Bor-Gerile road—junction roads Gerile to Bardera and El Wak to Bardera and return Wajir direct

Z4 Wajir—Dif to within 20 miles of Afmadu. Return

Z5 Wajir—Dif to a point 20 miles along the Afmadu road. Gerile to a point 20 miles along the road. Gerile to Bardera and return Wajir direct

'B' Flight—Malindi—Area X

X1—Malindi—Hindi Ijara—Malindi

'C' Flight—Garissa—Area Y

Y1—Garissa—Liboi—Geldeza and return

Y2—Garissa—Liboi—Dif—Wajir and return

Y3—Garissa—Garba Jula—Liboi—Garissa

Y4—Garissa—Galma Galla—Kolbio and return.

A typical day's flying would be:

Operations Record 11th June:

Dawn sorties as under were carried out:

Hardy K4055 Pilot Fg Off Spence—A/C Stowe

Audax K7548 Pilot Fg Off Miles Johnson—A/C Burl

Audax K7540 Pilot Fg Off Holdengarde—A/C Bell

Audax K7546 Pilot Fg Off Christie—A/C Marshal

Audax K7545 Pilot Fg Off White—Sergeant Murrell

Audax K7534 Pilot Fg Off Olver—A/C Horobin

Areas patrolled X1, Y1, Y3, Y4, Z1, Z2, Z5 No movement seen.

Afternoon sorties:

Hardy K4319 Pilot Fg Off Spence—A/C Hall

Audax K7546 Pilot Fg Off John Walmisley—A/C Strickland

Hardy K4055 Pilot F/Lt Smith—LAC Morton

Areas patrolled X1, Y1, Y3, Y4, Z2, Z2, Z5, Z5 No Movement seen.

On 13th June movement was seen and felt. The story as told in the *Rhodesia Herald* went like this:

First contact was made with the enemy in a most undignified manner. A number of men were sleeping, because of the heat, on the roofs of native shops in Wajir and that morning they were awakened by three Italian bombers roaring down on them. The men jumped the 15 feet to the ground and, clad in pyjamas and one of them in a sarong that he lost in the rush, dived into trenches. The place was pestered up pretty badly and the squadron lost its petrol dump.

(*Rhodesia Herald*)

The squadron Operations Record tells the story in less dramatic terms:

Wajir attacked by three Caproni 133s. Approximately 30 high explosive and incendiary bombs dropped and aircraft and personnel machine-gunned. Fg Off R.J.D. Christie and Cpl J.H. Killner slightly injured by bomb splinters. All petrol and oil stocks destroyed. Audax 7531 holed in the radiator by machine gun bullet. Fresh supplies of petrol and oil conveyed to Wajir by air from Nairobi and by road from Nanyuki and sorties not interrupted. Dawn sorties were X1, Y1 and Z1. During last sortie the Italian police post at El Wak was bombed and machine-gunned by Audax K7546—Pilot Fg Off Sindall—A/C Ron Marshall. Approximately 50 native police observed at Italian El Wak. Police station attacked by dropping 2 x 20-lb bombs and machine-gunned. Visibility poor. Weather fair.

So at last No 237 (Rhodesia) Squadron had tasted battle. The 14th June was quiet but on the 15th the Italians struck again:

Wajir attacked by two Caproni 133s. Bombs were dropped from 5,000 feet and no damage done.

The greatest problem facing the men guarding the northern frontier of Kenya was one of supply. The countryside was covered with bush and small thorn trees with few roads. It was hot and unfriendly and waterless, except for those months when it rained and then movement became almost impossible as the countryside became a quagmire. All supplies had to be carried nearly 400 miles (640km) from the nearest railhead and transport, which was acutely scarce, sustained severe punishment on what passed for roads.

By the middle of June a pattern had developed of daily sorties at dawn and in the early afternoon. Most of these flights drew a blank but there was the excitement of the odd tip-and-run raid on Italian transport.

A column of four armoured cars, eight lorries and about 150 troops was located eight miles north of Moyale. The column was attacked with bombs, and machine-gunned. Two armoured cars, one lorry and one machine gun were destroyed and the troops dispersed. In addition to the above sortie, two aircraft of 'A' flight carried out a search at El Wak and Osman Dille for two of the South African Air Force Hartbees that had failed to return to Wajir on the evening of June 15th after carrying out a bombing raid on Bardera. (Operations Record June 16)

One of these aircraft was in fact located by Flying Officer Miles Johnson who made a supply drop. At dawn on Tuesday 18th June the Kings African Rifles, supported by No 237 Squadron mounted an attack across the Italian Somaliland frontier on the post at El Wak. The enemy, taken by surprise, withdrew but soon regrouped and counter-attacked forcing the British troops to pull back across the border, leaving the Italian fort in flames. During this operation an aircraft K7546 of 'A' flight flying low to deliver a message was holed in the radiator and the pilot was forced to land when the engine seized. Fortunately Flying Officer John Walmisley managed to bring the aircraft down on the British side of the border and neither he nor his gunner, Aircraftman Marshal was injured.

A strong force of Italians had pursued the retreating British troops across the border and the army commander told Walmisley that his forces were pulling out. The Rhodesians were not about to allow a repairable aircraft to fall into enemy hands so the wings were removed and an attempt was made to tow the disabled plane to safety. However, the undercarriage collapsed after the plane had been towed over the rough terrain for about ten miles. The army commander agreed to allow the Rhodesians one hour to strip what they could from the now immobile aircraft after which it was set on fire.

The rest of the month passed with sorties and attacks by No 237 Squadron on Italian forts, troops and transport while in return the Italian air force carried out raids on Garissa, Moyale and Wajir.

The Italian ground forces continued their advance and by the beginning of July Moyale was under siege. The Rhodesians supported the ground forces by bombing and machine-gunning the artillery positions round the town. Flying Officer Alec Hutchinson, with Aircraftman Rhodes William Horobin as gunner, was piloting Audax SR 109. He was returning from one of these sorties when he spotted a European with two Somalis and a camel walking along the road towards Garissa. Hutchinson says:

I came down low and dropped a message, 'Signal if you need help'. The white man, the Somalis and the camel all lay down and waved their arms and legs at me. It turned out that it was Major Preller of the SAAF. He had crash-landed in a Fairey Battle after taking part in a raid on

Afmadu. I dropped a message in a military encampment at Shaya Nuna asking for a lorry to be sent to collect him. A ground force was also sent out to collect his crew who had stayed with the aircraft.

Again and again, the Harts and Audax of the Rhodesian squadron flew sorties in support of Moyale's hard-pressed garrison. In return the Italians had a couple of goes at Wajir without doing much damage but the odds were too high and eventually the British were forced to withdraw leaving some wounded behind.

'A' flight came under attack again at their advanced landing ground at Bura where they had moved to cooperate with 2nd East African Infantry Brigade. Some equipment was destroyed but there were no casualties. During the attack Italian aircraft dived to within 50 feet of the ground to machine-gun British positions. Audax K7549 was damaged during these attacks and rendered unserviceable. This aircraft was subsequently transported by road to Nairobi for repair. It was calculated that about 120 bombs were dropped on Bura that day. The remaining two serviceable aircraft were flown out to Wajir at dusk.

Following this attack, there was a general reorganization. 'A' flight withdrew to Nairobi. 'B' flight, which had been helping out at Wajir, returned to Bura and 'C' flight reassembled at Garissa. The East African ground forces were also regrouped and a second Infantry Division was formed. No 237 Squadron was allocated to 1st African Infantry Division, which had its headquarters at Mitubiri.

Operations Record July 27:

A nomadic Somali arrived at Garissa with news of Hardy K5914 that failed to return from a sortie on May 16th 1940. (This was Hugh Peyton's machine). He, the Somali, was closely interrogated by army and police intelligence officers, and the location of the aircraft roughly established from his statements. The Somali brought into Garissa the flying helmet of the crew of the aircraft and a pad of forms 790 that had been found underneath a tree near the aircraft. The following message written and signed by the airgunner of the aircraft was on the form 790. 'This was our camp from 16/5/40 – 18/5/40. When we set out on foot for places unknown'. The remains tell the story.

Hutchinson says:

We went out to look for the aircraft and bombed the track with flour bombs to mark the spot. They sent out a recce unit and Gold Coast engineers who salvaged the engine, which they brought back on a three-ton truck. The plane was actually just on the wrong side of the Italian border.

The Operations Record places the aircraft at a spot two miles (3.2km) east of the border and five miles (8km) north-east of Jara Jila.

During the month of July, the squadron received four more precious aircraft and a reinforcing draft of 53 airmen who arrived by road in five three-ton trucks and a light van. These vehicles were taken over by the squadron as part of its initial mechanical transport. The minister of defence visited the squadron on August 25th and on the same day six Hardy aircraft arrived from 102 Maintenance Unit. Almost as though the Italians had scented the new aircraft, Garissa was attacked on 27th and 28th August. Neither raid did any real damage and August ended on a quiet note with cloudy weather and bad visibility.

At the beginning of September, the squadron received instructions to prepare for a move to the Sudan. With this end in view 'A' flight returned to Nairobi on 3rd September and on 7th

September 'B' flight came in from Bura. Almost as though they were bidding the squadron farewell, three Italian CA 133s attacked Garissa at 18h15 on 8th September, diving from 4,000 feet to drop seven salvos of bombs, which hit a short distance from the south edge of the landing ground. They followed this attack by machine-gunning the landing field but no damage was done. Two days later 'C' flight left Garissa without too much regret and on that same day, two Harts and one Audax aircraft that had flown up a year before, left Nairobi to return to Salisbury.

The next three days were spent packing in readiness for the move to the Sudan and on 17th September, the first convoy of six vehicles rolled out towards Khartoum, carrying three officers and 37 other ranks. For No 237 Squadron the first phase was over. They had tasted battle and were ready for whatever lay ahead.

CHAPTER 7

The home front



On 12th January 1940, the Government Gazette announced that a separate Department of Air would come into being and that uniformed personnel would carry air force ranks:

The Department of Air is now completely separate from that of Defence. All administration and command of the air force will eventually be undertaken by RAF and SRAF personnel.
(Government Gazette)

Colonel, the Honourable E. Lucas Guest was appointed minister for Air. Lieutenant Colonel Meredith, with the rank of group captain was to form and command the Rhodesian Air Training Group (RATG) as well as being secretary for Air. This was an economy measure as there was no point in having a civilian secretary for Air who would merely duplicate paper work already performed by RATG headquarters, particularly as RATG controlled its own finances both capital and recurrent.

At this stage, in early January 1940, the staff consisted of, in addition to Group Captain Meredith, two territorial officers and a typist. With a heavy building programme ahead, the priority was to obtain staff that could handle layouts, design and construction, organize supplies of building materials and control finance and accounting.

Major C.W. Glass, an architect by profession who had been released from his civilian employment with the Public Works Department to join the army, agreed to transfer to the air force with the rank of squadron leader, later wing commander with the title: Director of Works and Buildings. His section was responsible for the layout of air stations and the design and construction of buildings. His staff consisted of architects, quantity surveyors and draughtsmen as well as non-professional staff. The actual building was done by civilian contractors and at one stage, virtually every builder in the Salisbury, Bulawayo and Gwelo areas was employed on RATG work. The finance and accounts section was handled by Mr C.E.M. (later Sir) Cornelius who was attached to the air force as treasury representative and he was joined by an accountant, A. James, who held the rank of flight lieutenant. James was killed in an aircraft accident quite early on and his place was taken by Flying Officer G. Ellman-Brown, also an accountant in civilian life, who had been recruited by Flight Lieutenant James. Ellman-Brown was the principal finance officer (RATG) and his final rank was that of group captain. The finance section had complete control of all funds, which came from the Air Ministry in London and from the Southern Rhodesia government.

The position of Director of Supplies whose department was responsible for the location and purchase of all building materials and equipment, was taken by a Bulawayo businessman, Squadron Leader W.H. Eastwood.

These three sections formed the nucleus of the RATG headquarters and their urgent task

was to establish the air sections. A timetable, giving opening dates was drawn up, based on units of six weeks so that pupil pilots would be able to pass from one phase to the next without delay. Meredith writing in 1970 commented: It is to the credit of all concerned—both local and overseas—that opening dates were adhered to and the pupil unit phase of six weeks was not disrupted.

The Stables

Obviously more accommodation was required for headquarters and The Stables was offered to Charles Meredith by the prime minister. Meredith, not realizing what the buildings were, replied that he needed something larger than a stable! But he followed Sir Godfrey Huggins's advice and took a look. The Stables had been erected in 1911 on Jameson Avenue between Third and Fourth Streets, and had been due for demolition long before but no one had got around to it. The building was now empty except for one or two civil servants tucked away at the south-western end. The fabric was in a bad state of repair and there were no water or sewerage facilities. The only good thing about the area was that there was plenty of space. RATG took over the buildings, whitewashed, repaired, renovated, added bits and handed them back in 1945 in shipshape condition; in fact, sections of the old Stables were still in use in 2000.

The training scheme gets underway

The official beginning of the training scheme was 23rd January 1940. Two days after this, the monthly Defence Report stated that Cranborne Air Station had four serviceable Harts, one Audax awaiting rebuilding, eight training aircraft (Tiger Moths and others), one Tiger Moth undergoing repair and two Hornet Moths available for transport and training. The Communications Squadron had six Dragon Rapides serviceable, one DH Dragon undergoing overhaul and three Leopard Moths serviceable. Not much but it was an infinitely better situation than that of three months earlier.

Recruiting for ground forces had been temporarily suspended so that reorganization could take place. Despite some bad feeling among the army types, it was agreed that applications for transfer from ground to air forces would be considered, though increasingly the army felt that a man should make up his mind at the beginning which service he wished to join.

It was 5th February when construction began on the first RATG Flying School and it was ready for occupation on May 24th, an incredible achievement only made possible by the hard work and cooperation of everyone involved. The building operations were carried out on a labour plus 20% basis with one buyer for all materials. This may not have been the cheapest method but it was the easiest and fastest. Lucas Guest announced on 21st February that three complete air training schools were to be established in Rhodesia. Bulawayo and Salisbury were the obvious choices for two—the site of the third was still to be officially announced. This created argument among the other centres as each pushed its special claims. Gwelo and Umtali were particularly insistent, with Gwelo representatives even visiting Salisbury to ensure that their views were known. By the middle of March, the number of flying schools to be established in the Colony had risen to six.

And before the end of March the invasion had begun as reported in the *Rhodesia Herald*:

About 100 officers, pilots and technicians of the RAF, who will lay the foundations of Southern Rhodesia's part in the Empire Air Training Scheme passed through Bulawayo by special train this afternoon (24th March) and will arrive in Salisbury tomorrow morning. They brought their wives and children with them. (Rhodesia Herald)

The first party led by Squadron Leader T.W.G. Eady, started their duties on Tuesday 26th

March. Temporary billets were found for their wives and families in Salisbury. The question of accommodation was to become a trying one and, during the following years, there was to be a constant stream of letters to the paper complaining about the lack of suitable homes, particularly for families with young children. A further source of friction was the effort made by the RAF officers to get the local men to sign on again with the RAF. The six SRAF men who had been trained at Halton stood firm, maintaining that they had signed on for 15 years with the Rhodesia Staff Corps and did not wish to re-sign with the RAF. They were called in to the commanding officer's office and told they must sign. They still refused even though threats were made. They approached a lawyer who took up their case with the authorities and nothing further was heard about the matter. (Ralph Parry)

The men were beginning to arrive, the airfields were being prepared but what of the aircraft? These were to be of three types: de Havilland Tiger Moths for elementary training and North American Harvard and Airspeed Oxford machines for intermediate and advanced training. The Harvard was an American single-engined high-speed trainer, while the Oxford was a twin-engined training aircraft.

The final flying course of the SRAF was completed at Cranborne on 6th April 1940, leaving a gap before the opening of the RAF schools. During this period, Rhodesian pupil pilots were sent either to England or to Habbaniya in Iraq for training. The first contingent to go to Britain left early in March and travelled via Durban.

Meanwhile work on the new buildings was proceeding with speed and on 12th April, Lucas Guest was present at a roof-wetting ceremony for a new hangar at Belvedere. In this same week, the first of the new Harvards arrived. They had been assembled in South Africa and were flown to Salisbury via Bulawayo by Rhodesian pilots.

One side effect of the arrival of so many RAF personnel was the fillip it gave to local sport. In the middle of April, there was a soccer match between the Royal Air Force and the Postal Sports Club, which Postals won by eight goals to one but according to the *Rhodesia Herald* the visitors were not disgraced!

During the war years not only was the Rhodesian government to make enormous contributions to the war effort but individual citizens were to collect amazing amounts of money for the purchase of aircraft. The first such gift of enough money to purchase a training aircraft, came in mid-April from Mr J. MacAllister Smith and the Inez Mine, Gatooma. There were many others and one Spitfire was actually paid for with money raised entirely by Rhodesia's African population.

30th April 1940 was Budget day. Obviously, money would have to be raised to pay for the war effort and an amount of £1,339,249 was set aside for war expenditure from a total revenue of almost £5,000,000. In other words, a quarter of the total revenue was to be spent on the war effort. The Rhodesian government offered to meet the full cost of the air force headquarters establishment and the cost of barrack equipment. Thereafter Southern Rhodesia would contribute £80,000 a year towards the cost of maintenance and operation of the training schools. The government also offered to bear the full capital cost of fixed assets required in connection with the scheme. (See end of chapter)

On 2nd May, much to the annoyance of the people of Umtali, the government announced that Gwelo had been chosen as the site for the third flying school. It was possibly felt that Umtali with its surrounding mountains might prove too dangerous for pilot training.

In Europe the war had been going all Germany's way. Norway and Denmark had fallen with lightning speed and on 10th May 1940, Hitler's armies attacked Holland, Belgium and Luxembourg. The British Prime Minister, Neville Chamberlain, resigned and Winston Churchill took over. Nothing, it seemed could halt or even hinder the German advance. Once again, the Blitzkrieg ran like clockwork. With vicious precision the Luftwaffe screamed

down on The Hague and Rotterdam, while German land forces cut through Belgium and rounded the end of the Maginot line into north-eastern France. The Dutch capitulated on 15th May. Rommel's tanks broke through the French lines at Sedan and raced for the Channel reaching the coast on 20th May, cutting the Allied armies in two. The Belgian army capitulated on 27th May.

Then almost inexplicably the German advance slowed, allowing Operation Dynamo, the evacuation of the Allied troops from the Dunkirk beaches to be completed successfully. Between 27th May and 4th June, over 200,000 British and 120,000 French troops were evacuated from the beaches at Dunkirk. More than 850 vessels took part in the evacuation, half of them small craft that braved the miraculously benign waters of the Channel to bring the men home. All the heavy equipment had to be abandoned.

With the battles in western Europe came news of Rhodesian casualties. Anthony Booth, attached to Coastal Command, was shot down into the sea during the Dunkirk evacuation but though reported missing at the time, turned up in a prisoner of war camp. Leading Aircraftman W. Palmer was not so fortunate, as he was killed in action during the retreat.

The first school opens

Back in Rhodesia a further contingent of 260 RAF ground staff consisting of wireless operators, mechanics and recruits arrived in the middle of May. The first school, No 25 Elementary Flying Training School at Belvedere Air Station was officially opened, on 24th May, by Air Chief Marshal Sir Robert Brooke-Popham. Writing after the war Meredith said:

This was a notable achievement in a matter of fewer than five months starting with nothing. It was also notable in that the opening preceded by some weeks the opening of the first of the schools in the Empire Air Training Scheme in Canada, which had been planned before the war began. Although the Canadian scheme had been planned weeks before the war and much earlier than Rhodesia's, because of the enthusiasm and support generated in Rhodesia, the first of the RATG stations, Belvedere, was opened on 24th May 1940 several weeks before the first Canadian station became operative. The RATG was not only Southern Rhodesia's main contribution to World War II, but was also one of the most important happenings in Rhodesian history... It led to development during a period that otherwise might have been a depression. The total local amount spent on the scheme greatly exceeded the annual Southern Rhodesian budget at the time and there were 150 separate non-public accounts (messes, canteens etc.) with an annual turn over of £350,000. But, most important, the RATG proved in the long term to be a most successful immigration scheme since many of the staff and trainees returned to settle in Rhodesia after the war, some of them becoming leading citizens in the land. (Meredith memo)*

With a scheme the size of the RATG, accidents were bound to occur and on 20th June RATG recorded its first casualty when a pupil pilot, Sergeant Ivan Campbell, crashed a few miles outside Salisbury close to the Gatooma road. He was buried with full military honours in Salisbury cemetery. The second flying training school, at Cranborne, opened on 10th July and in August the first Link Trainers were installed at No 25 Elementary Flying Training School (EFTS) and No 20 Service Flying Training School.

On 16th August came the opening of the first school at Guinea Fowl (Gwelo), No 26 EFTS. This was a notable achievement, taking only 12 weeks from bare veld to the commencement of flying training. The construction included special sole-use arrangements for water supplies,

* The total amount is a little exaggerated, though expenditure on the scheme did rise to over £4,000,000 by 1943.

water-borne sewerage and a rail siding for the train that conveyed personnel from Cape Town. The speed with which everything was completed far outstripped Belvedere. As an instance of slick timing, Sir Charles relates that early in the morning of the very day that Guinea Fowl was due to open, the special train from Cape Town drew into the siding with 500 or more future trainees. Without a hitch they were given a breakfast of bacon, eggs and sausages.

Meanwhile further agreements had been completed between the governments of Southern Rhodesia and Britain, covering the opening of a fourth elementary flying training school and a fourth service flying training school. Work went ahead immediately, the sites chosen being Mount Hampden near Salisbury and Heany in Bulawayo.

At the same time, the general public was contributing generously to the Speed the Planes fund, which now stood at the almost unbelievable amount of £37,000. On the war front, the evacuation of Allied troops from France had been unbelievably successful, and the battered remains of two armies had landed safely in the United Kingdom. Mussolini, who had delayed his entry into the war, saw the ease with which western Europe had fallen to the Germans and decided that Italy should join the winning side. On 10th June, Italy declared war on the Allies. Four days later German troops entered Paris, and, ten days after that, hostilities ceased in France. General De Gaulle flew to London. He was recognized as the leader of the Free French Forces and set up a government in exile in West Africa. On the last day of June, the Germans occupied the Channel Islands. Heavy aerial attacks on the British Isles began on 10th July when 70 German aircraft carried out a raid on dockyards in South Wales. Six days later Hitler ordered preparations to begin for the invasion of the United Kingdom, with the provisional date set for the middle of August 1940.

Rhodesians in Britain

Britain had become an embattled island and reports from the capital were appearing regularly in the *Rhodesia Herald*:

The first Empire troops to come to this country from Africa—a contingent of Southern Rhodesian airmen—have arrived. The contingent represents part of the technical and maintenance personnel of a Rhodesian bomber and fighter squadron to be established in Britain, and is the first to come under the British government scheme to form squadrons composed entirely of men from the Empire. It was learned tonight that from Southern Rhodesia already about 40 men have joined the RAF at their own expense and five of those have been awarded the DFC, one of them being credited with bringing down six Messerschmitts.
(Rhodesia Herald, 7th Aug. 1940)

A report from *The Herald*'s UK correspondent describes the arrival of this first contingent:

I travelled to a Scottish port to see the first contingent of these enthusiastic young men arrive. It was, I thought, a pleasant unexpected ceremony that was staged for them. Their drably painted ship emerged from a rainsquall to find herself in an anchorage patterned with craft of all kinds and sizes, from British warships to Norwegian tramp steamers. "I didn't think there were so many ships in the world," one of the Rhodesians said to me. Cruising among them was an admiral's barge with high officers of the Royal Navy and the RAF, the mayor of the port city and Mr Lanigan O'Keeffe, Rhodesia's High Commissioner, waiting to greet the first official contingent of airmen from Southern Rhodesia. Following the barge was a pilot's launch filled with journalists and photographers from all parts of Britain. The Rhodesians, who will provide ground staff for the Rhodesian bomber and fighter squadron now forming in Britain, crowded the shoreward side of the vessel to respond to our first wave and cheer of welcome. Hundreds of

Rhodesians who had mustered in rank on a ferry also waved and cheered the newcomers, as did the residents ashore, who left their dining tables to crowd the windows of their houses. Crews and passengers on nearby ships joined in the spontaneous welcome. The Rhodesians, many of whom were getting their first sight of Britain in the grey twilight of a cloud-smothered sky, were greatly heartened by the warmth of this welcome. The rainsquall passed as we climbed aboard to take part in the official welcome of the Rhodesians, who had mustered in rank on the well deck. Their bronzed faces were turned eagerly to the upper deck where an admiral and a RAF group captain gave them messages from the Dominion secretary and the Air Ministry. Then Mr O'Keeffe spoke to them in friendly, fatherly terms and they cheered mightily when he told them that of the 40 flying Rhodesian volunteers serving in the RAF, five had already won the DFC—a remarkable proportion. The mayor too, was informal and amusing and he called forth a great laugh of pleasure when he pulled a pouch out of his pocket and told them that it contained the only tobacco he ever smoked—Rhodesian! Some in smasher hats and khaki shorts, the Rhodesians buttoned up their greatcoats as the chilly evening breezes blew across the bay. (Rhodesia Herald, 16th Sept. 1940)

Before long, the Rhodesians had settled down in their new homes and were decorating their doorsteps with Rhodesian crests, Zimbabwe birds and Matabele elephants. Meanwhile the second contingent had arrived safely at a north-east port and been greeted by the high commissioner. Gifts of money were pouring in from the Colony.

Will you please convey to the Southern Rhodesia Tobacco Industry my heartfelt gratitude for the contribution made towards the aircraft production of this country. Coming in a week when we have welcomed the second contingent of Rhodesian airmen to our shore, this most generous gift brings yet another striking proof of the single-minded determination of our Empire to see this struggle through to victory. (Lord Beaverbrook, Minister of Aircraft Production quoted in the Rhodesia Herald, 26th Aug. 1940)

RATG comes to Bulawayo

In Rhodesia another school, No 21 Service Flying Training School, at Kumalo on the old Bulawayo Municipal Airport, opened on 8th September. One of the many young men taking enthusiastically to the air was Peter Sutton who kept a vivid record of the training in his diary:

12th September. *Nearly everything is easier on Harvards actually and they are grand kites. The only difficulty is the vast numbers of instruments and controls to worry about. At first, I could never find the right knob, lever or instrument when I wanted it in a hurry, and all the various cockpit checks were an awful trial. Now that everything is more nearly a matter of habit it makes flying a lot easier and far less harassing.*

23rd September. *Oh! Dear! I'm thinking it's high time I made my will! I was doing some low flying this morning—real low flying, not the official 100 feet up stunt. Approaching a rather large gum tree whilst turning, I decided to change the direction of the turn to fly round it. Unfortunately, I rather misjudged a few details, such as my speed and the momentum of the kite and didn't turn quickly enough. The tree seemed to rush at me at 170 mph and, although I made a last minute effort to lift one wing over it by applying bank, it was too late. There was a lovely 'crump' and the kite shuddered a bit and carried on. Dead silence for some moments. Then a gentle voice over the intercom. (I was flying dual) "Have you seen your wing tip?" It was quite an effort to bring my eyes round as far as that wing tip, and then I quickly averted them. I said, "Crumbs, I am sorry, sir!" We flew back and landed safely at Cranborne. Then we had a look at the damage. About two feet of the wing tip was hopelessly buckled and torn, with*

jagged bits of metal here and there, and part of the leading edge of the main wing was dented too. Luckily, though, the fitters decided the wing could stay on, and after knocking out some of the dents, merely fitted a new wing tip. I hung round apologetically in the background and they roped me in to screw up some of the 64 bolts that hold the wing tip on. I am still flying the same plane and always have that shiny new wing tip, and the dents in the wing covered roughly with grey paint, to reproach me. Then there was the beastly written report to concoct—‘Sir, I beg to report that ...’ It was a bit awkward to make up, especially as low flying should be done 100 feet above the tree tops. However, we managed something by saying that although I was at 100 feet, I lost height in an erratic turn and touched the top of a tall tree on rising ground. Not bad? I feel sorry for the instructor though as he was in charge of the kite, and only hope no one asks too many awkward questions. He has been really decent to me about it all and doesn’t seem to bear me any ill-will at all. He says it was his fault as much as mine and just passes it off with a shrug and a ‘such is life’. I really think it’s awfully sporting of him. I only hope I manage to get *Above Average* in my assessment to repay him slightly.

2nd October. I have a free morning. I have been up since 06h30 (it is now 09h00) in a large formation looking for a bloke who got lost on night flying the night before last. There were eleven of us in line abreast searching for him from Bromley north to Shamva and Mrewa and east as far as Mtoko and Headlands. The eleven kites (each about ten miles apart) covered the ground pretty thoroughly but there was no sign of the chap. I wonder what has happened to him. They had searching planes out all yesterday morning and afternoon, too, and I suppose they will continue all this morning and over the weekend until they find him. He’s costing us quite a lot in petrol, and in instructors’ and pupils’ time wasted. Still I expect a pilot is worth it—provided they do eventually find him.

7th November. Since writing last, two things have made me devilishly keen to get cracking at the Hun. One is that I have done my first dive-bombing with practice bombs and fired a Browning in the air for the first time at Inkomo yesterday. I don’t think my scores were particularly brilliant but I am not worrying unduly as I seem to have started slowly at everything I have learned in flying. Anyway, I had bags of fun and still have another 60 bombs and countless rounds of ammunition to use up in the near future. Soon we begin flying from Inkomo landing ground...
16th November. I’ve come to the conclusion I’m a menace... I’ve just finished off my third wing tip, and incidentally an oleo-leg as well, in a glorious twizzle right in the middle of the ‘drome. I was coming in nicely, determined to show the instructor, for whom I was safety pilot, that I could land well, when about ten feet up and just checking, the kite suddenly hit an air disturbance of some sort and dropped like a stone. It hit slightly sideways and went straight round in an unstoppable twizzle. The strain was too great on the undercarriage and one oleo-leg was bent, although luckily it didn’t break off...

17th November. A very sad thing has happened. JF—a bloke I knew well on our course—was killed on night flying last night. He was on cross-country to Gatooma and crashed into the deck quite heavily. There are various reports of the accident, ranging from engine failure to his having inadvertently fired his Very pistol inside the cockpit. Two pupils on the same cross-country noticed it...one heard a faint R/T message about someone going down and another saw an explosion on the ground near Beatrice, which must have been the crash. Whatever the cause, it is a darn shame—old Jack was one of the best and well liked by all of us. He was the last chap, I should say, to do anything stupid or to lose his head, so goodness knows what did happen. They aren’t likely to find out either, I don’t think, as the kite is a complete wreck...

19th November. I know it is awfully easy to get into all sorts of queer positions at night and not to know about it. Last night was pitch black—I did a cross-country myself—and there was not a sign of the horizon on which to keep straight, and owing to thick cloud you couldn’t see any lights on the ground that might have given you a clue where you were, or whether you were the right way up.

Perhaps I panicked and trusted his senses rather than the instruments until it was too late. Gosh, it's a poor show that we should lose two blokes on two successive flying nights. They say these things always go in threes—I wonder who's next? Yes, it's a bad business. It wouldn't be a bad thing at all to be in some nice safe job like the Paratroops! (Part of a diary kept by a Rhodesian pupil pilot Peter Sutton who subsequently served with No 237 Squadron and died in Italy.)

It was on 8th October that Lieutenant Colonel Lucas Guest welcomed the first RAF men to be stationed in Bulawayo. The same day came the first of many stories of courage and cooperation between trainee pilots and the local population. An aircraft crashed at Ruwa and burst into flames. The pilot of a second aircraft, which landed next to the crash, appealed for help to a number of Africans. Only one, Pasirayi was prepared to approach the burning machine. He helped drag the pilot clear. In July of the following year, the prime minister presented him with a bicycle in recognition of his courageous act.

On 2nd November the first pilots to be trained by the RATG passed out at Cranborne Station. Five of these men were Rhodesians and they were probably the first pilots to complete their training under the Empire Training Scheme.

Meanwhile yet another school was getting under way. On 9th November, Sergeant G.E. Tolmay, accompanied by Mr Campbell the superintendent of the Roads Department, arrived at the site of Heany Camp, and, after a search of the bundu found peg No 40 (later the site of the station headquarters flag staff). The campsite was surveyed and it was discovered that one borehole was operating. Four days later, the first 500 labourers arrived to prepare the ground for construction. A grass hut situated in the vicinity of what was to be the golf-club house accommodated the administration office, ration store and hospital. From that date workmen arrived at a rate of 300 a week until a peak of 4,000 was reached.

By December the housing scheme at Belvedere was complete, making life considerably more comfortable for the married members of the RAF and in the same month the first Rhodesian bomb was manufactured, not for use against the enemy but for training air crew.

Squadron badges

In the middle of December 1940, the Rhodesian public was asked to suggest suitable designs for squadron badges. There were some irreverent comments about some of the suggestions: The Zimbabwe soapstone bird is trying to fly. Rhodesians in all parts of the country are trying to have him incorporated into one or other of the designs for the Rhodesian squadrons of the RAF. Whether they succeed or not remains to be seen.

The Zimbabwe bird met with keen competition from sable, kudu, springbok, eagles, assegais, mine stamps and even the humble mosquito. Qualities were found for all of these to suit the spirit of a fighter or bomber squadron. One humorist at Shamva suggested the mosquito for the fighter squadron, the Zimbabwe bird for the bomber squadron and the locust for the army cooperation squadron. He added the following remarks: Mosquito—if the Pasteur Institute cannot supply a really vicious specimen there are innumerable specimens to be obtained at Shamva. Soapstone bird—I have always felt this broody-looking fowl was on the point of laying an egg. Locust—though not fast in flight, this farmer's friend can do a lot of damage in a very short time. For mottoes he suggested local language equivalents of My bite is death for the mosquito. We fling the thunderbolt for the soapstone bird and Where we have gathered they are destroyed for the locust. No 237 (Rhodesia) Squadron, then at battle station in the Sudan put through a request that no decision be made until the members had been given a chance to submit their own ideas.

During those final months of the year 1940, the thoughts of Rhodesians had been with family and friends in the United Kingdom. First there had been the Battle of Britain won at

a terrible cost in aircrew. Then the threat of invasion, which had diminished as autumn drew on, followed by the winter of the bombs when night after night German bombers thundered overhead to drop their loads of death and destruction on London, Coventry, Southampton and many other cities. During the month of October, 6,334 civilians were killed and 8,695 injured in air raids but as far as breaking the spirit of the people was concerned, they were as ineffectual as raids on Germany were to be later in the war.

Budget report—4th May 1940

Southern Rhodesia war bill in 1940 – 41 is estimated to amount to £2,502,203 of which £1,422,203 will be defrayed from revenue funds and £1,080,000 from loan funds. Building for air training absorbed the bulk of the £1,080,000. £810,000 for air stations and bombing ranges and £250,000 for quarters. £1,060,000 in all. The estimate includes £5,000 for the acquisition of commercial aviation concerns and £15,000 for the buildings for military forces. Of the £1,422,203 of war expenses to be defrayed from revenue funds, £877,900 will be absorbed by air training. A sum of £25,000 is allotted as the cost of winding up the local training scheme and service squadron prior to absorption into the Empire Air Training scheme in the RAF. Barrack equipment £52,000 and contribution to the maintenance and operating costs of the training school, make up the £852,000 allotted to the air training scheme. The estimate of air force HQ costs £29,300 in pay and allowances. (*Rhodesia Herald*)

Report prepared for Inspector General—11th October 1942

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Rhodesia Air Training Group

Times taken for construction of stations.

School Station	Commenced	Opened
25 EFTS Belvedere	4.3.40	24.5.40
20 SFTS Cranborne	4.3.40	19.7.40
26 EFTS Guinea Fowl	24.5.40	16.8.40
21 SFTS Kumalo	25.3.40	20.9.40
27 EFTS Induna	15.8.40	17.1.41
22 SFTS Thornhill	5.10.40	4.4.41
24 CAOS Moffat	14.12.40	7.41
23 SFTS Heany	1.12.40	1.6.41
28 EFTS Mt Hampden	16.11.40	4.4.41

Lists of RATG Units for Southern Rhodesia

Disposal Depot, Bulawayo

Central Maintenance Unit, Bulawayo

No 31 Aircraft Repair Depot, Cranborne

No 32 Aircraft Repair Depot, Heany

Rhodesian Air Askari Corps, Belvedere

Communications Squadron (SRAF) Belvedere

No 20 Service Flying Training School, Cranborne

No 21 Service Flying Training School, Kumalo

No 22 Service Flying Training School, Thornhill

No 23 Service Flying Training School, Heany

No 24 Combined Air Observers School, Moffat (also includes Elementary Air Observers