



Canberra B.2s of No. 5 Squadron; under-nose rocket rails are a local mod.

The Royal Rhodesian Air Force

by K. F. Smy

THE ROYAL RHODESIAN Air Force had its beginnings in 1934, when the Government of Southern Rhodesia voted a sum of money to form and maintain an Air Unit as a contribution to the defence of the Empire. An Air Section was formed as part of the Defence Force, and in November 1935 flying training was commenced. Instruction was carried out at Belvedere Airfield, Salisbury, and undertaken initially by instructors of the de Havilland Co., using the Gipsy and Tiger Moths of their Flying School.

In 1936 six apprentices were sent to

Halton Royal Air Force Station for technical training and on their return became the nucleus of the ground crew of the Air Section.

The first aircraft arrived in April 1937, in the form of six Hawker Hart day bombers, one of which was converted for dual control. These aircraft were the first to carry Southern Rhodesian serials, SR-1 to SR-6. They were taken to the new airfield being built at Cranborne, a few miles south-east of Salisbury which had, by mid-December, offices and hangars completed and two 1,000-yd. runways laid.

August 1937 saw the arrival of regular Royal Air Force personnel who had been seconded to the Air Section, one of the

officers, F/Lt. J. A. Powell, becoming the first C.O. Training continued under these officers and on 12th May 1938 the first six pilots received their wings. These incorporated the Southern Rhodesian coat of arms and are still the pilot's insignia in the Royal Rhodesian Air Force today. Six officers were posted to the Air Unit from the Territorial Active Force every year for flying training, others being sent to the United Kingdom on short-service commissions.

The strength of the Air Unit was increased in September 1938 by the purchase of six Hawker Audax army co-operation biplanes, followed in April 1939 by three Gloster Gauntlet single-seat fighters.

War stations

On 1st August 1939 Territorial Forces members were called up for full-time service and on the 28th of the same month two Flights of Harts and Audaxes, with ten pilots, were despatched to Nairobi, where they took over duties from No. 233 Squadron, R.A.F., which had been transferred to the Sudan. On 30th August "B" Flight was posted to Garissa, "A" Flight going to Isiolo in the Northern Frontier District. After spending a fruitless month detached to Mombasa, searching for the German pocket-battleship *Graf Spee*, the

Pembroke C.1 SR133 displays the national marking, with three assegais, introduced after W.W.II but changed when the Federation was dissolved



latter were moved up to Wajir. Newly formed "C" Flight was posted to Buna, near the Ethiopian frontier, in November.

On 19th September 1939 the Air Unit became known as the Southern Rhodesian Air Force, and the Flights on active service in Kenya were then designated No. 1 Squadron, S.R.A.F. In April 1940 this squadron was re-designated No. 237 (Rhodesia) Squadron, and the personnel and aircraft were absorbed into the R.A.F.

The Prime Minister of Southern Rhodesia, Mr. Huggins, announced on the 4th January 1940 the formation of the Rhodesian Air Training Group which would train aircrew under the Empire Training Scheme. Equipment was to be supplied from the U.K. and the first school, No. 25 E.F.T.S., was formed at Belvedere in May 1940, followed within a year by three others, No. 26 E.F.T.S. at Gwelo, No. 27 at Induna, Bulawayo, and No. 28 at Mount Hampden, Salisbury. A Flying Instructors' School was formed at Norton early in 1943.

Meanwhile the Government had taken over Rhodesia and Nyasaland Airways and their aircraft were impressed into the Southern Rhodesian Air Force to form a communications squadron as well as operating the routes of R.A.N.A. at a reduced frequency.

East African campaign

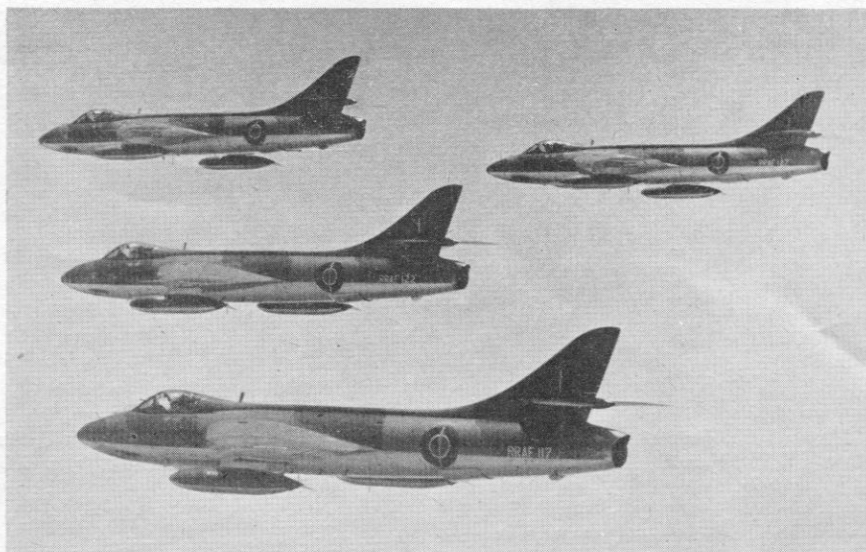
When Italy entered the war in June 1940, No. 237 Squadron, "A" Flight was given the task of supporting "C" Company of the 1st K.A.R., which was holding the northern fort of Moyale, just on the frontier of Ethiopia, but was withdrawn when Italian forces overran Moyale and the territory north of Wajir. "B" and "C" Flights were employed on border patrols along the Somaliland frontier.

No. 237 received Hawker Hardys at about this time, but most of them were destroyed in a raid by Italian aircraft before they could be put into action. In September the squadron moved to Khartoum, where it was re-equipped with Westland Lysanders two months later, one of the Flights receiving Gloster Gladiators in March the following year.

The squadron moved to Asmara on the surrender of the town in April, and further moves took place to Wadi Halfa in June and Kasfareet in August, when the squadron was engaged in patrols over the Libyan Desert.

In November 1941, No. 237 Squadron moved to the Western Desert and, now equipped with Hurricanes, remained there until February 1942, when it moved to Ismailia, in Egypt. The following year was spent in Iraq and Persia, the squadron being respectively stationed at Mosul, Kermanshah and Kirkuk. The squadron returned to the Canal Zone in March 1943, and a long spell of fighter reconnaissance operations followed in the Eastern Mediterranean and North African area, the squadron operating from Benghazi, Idku, Bersia and various landing grounds.

By April 1944 Spitfires had replaced



Hunter FGA.9s of No. 1 Squadron, based at Thornhill, Gwelo. Note the current national marking which has only one (larger) assegai

the Hurricanes, and No. 237 had moved yet again, this time across the sea, to a base near Serragia in Corsica. In July another move, to Kalvi, on the north-west side of the island, brought a change of operations from Italy to Southern France. By this time the squadron no longer consisted entirely of Rhodesian personnel and difficulty was experienced in replacing those who had completed their tour of operations. The squadron eventually moved to France, and then to Italy, where it disbanded in late 1945.

During 1941 two other R.A.F. squadrons with a majority of Rhodesian personnel on their strength were designated "Rhodesia" squadrons: Nos. 44 and 266. No. 44 (Bomber) Squadron was retitled

No. 44 (Rhodesia) Squadron in September 1941 and at the time was based at Waddington and equipped with Handley Page Hampdens. Early in 1942 the squadron became the first to convert completely to the Avro Lancaster heavy bomber, and it was soon after that, on 17th April 1942, that the squadron carried out an unescorted daylight raid on the M.A.N. works at Augsburg. Leading a combined force with No. 97 Squadron, also equipped with Lancasters, S/Ldr. J. D. Nettleton was awarded the Victoria Cross for his determination in carrying out the raid when all aircraft of the force were shot down with the exception of his aircraft and one other.

The squadron moved to Dunholme

The newest R.R.A.F. unit is No. 7 Squadron which was formed in 1962 with eight Sud Alouette IIIs. It is based at New Sarum, Salisbury





Harvard IIs, from the F.T.S. at Cranborne, served with the S.R.A.F. until the 1950s; two have been preserved



The Harvard's duties have since been taken over by Hunting Provost T.52s, which can also be armed with guns and rockets

R. Rhodesian A.F. . . .

Lodge in June 1943, from where it continued its attacks on enemy industrial installations and communications. As the war came to a close the squadron moved to various bases and in August 1946 found itself at Wyton, where it re-equipped with the Avro Lincoln in 1947, and it was with these aircraft that No. 44 paid a visit to Rhodesia in 1948.

A move to Marham in January 1951, to convert to the Boeing Washington, was soon followed by a move to Coningsby, where it again re-equipped, this time with the Canberra. May 1954 brought another move, this time to Cottesmore and again in February 1955, to Honington, where the squadron remained until its disbandment in July 1957. Before this, however, the squadron had sent a detachment to take part in the Suez campaign in late 1956.

No. 44 Squadron was re-formed in August 1960 as a V-bomber unit and equipped with Avro Vulcans, and is currently based at Waddington. The squadron's association with Rhodesia is preserved in its squadron badge, which depicts an African elephant.

No. 266 Squadron was formed at Sutton Bridge in October 1939, and equipped with Fairey Battle day bombers. These were soon replaced by Spitfires and the squadron moved to Wittering for Battle of Britain operations. In January

1940 the decision was made that Rhodesians would be progressively posted to the squadron and by August of that year it was officially known as 266 (Rhodesia) Squadron. During 1942 the squadron was re-equipped with Typhoons and operated from Duxford and Warmwell, mainly on night intruder patrols over enemy-occupied France.

The following year the squadron moved to Harrowbeer, in Devon, from where its duties changed to fighter sweeps over the Channel and Northern France. Later, as part of the 2nd T.A.F., No. 266 took part in the D-Day operations, moving to France as the Allies advanced. The squadron continued to provide close support for the Army and by the winter of 1944 had moved to Antwerp. After the end of hostilities the squadron returned to England for a short period, spending three weeks at Fairwood Common on an armament refresher course, at the end of which it returned to Europe. At Hildesheim, Germany, No. 266 took up duties with the British Army of Occupation, but was disbanded in August 1945.

Post-war build-up

After the war the Rhodesian Air Training Group closed down, and the Air Unit was re-formed with a small regular element and one active auxiliary squadron (No. 1), and was once again given the title "Southern Rhodesian Air Force". Training continued on Tiger Moths and

Harvards, and communications and army co-operation work were carried out by a variety of types, including Rapides, Leopard Moths, Ansons and Austers. In 1951 twenty-two Spitfires were flown out from England to form two fighter squadrons as Rhodesia's contribution to Commonwealth defence.

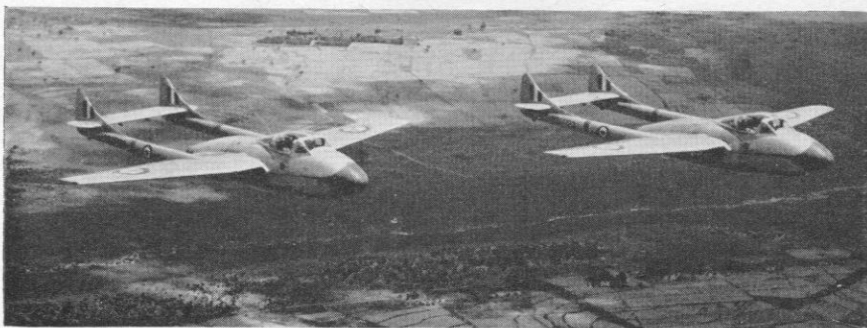
In 1952 the Southern Rhodesian Air Force moved from Cranborne to Salisbury Airport, where the New Sarum Air Station was established, and under Air Vice-Marshal E. W. S. Jacklin, C.B.E., A.F.C., then Commander of the Force, considerable expansion took place. Re-equipping with more modern aircraft began, and in early 1954 the first of thirty-two Vampire FB.9s and T.11s and sixteen Hunting Provosts were delivered. Seven additional Dakotas and two Pembrokes were acquired to replace the ageing Ansons and Rapides. Additional aircrew and technical personnel were recruited and by the end of 1955 four squadrons had been formed: Nos. 1 and 2 (Fighter) Squadrons with Vampires; No. 3 (Transport) Squadron with Dakotas and Pembrokes; and No. 4 (Flying Training) Squadron equipped with Provosts.

When the Federation of Rhodesia and Nyasaland was formed in 1953, defence became a Federal responsibility and on 15th October 1954 the title was changed to the "Rhodesian Air Force". At about this time Her Majesty Queen Elizabeth II conferred the title "Royal" on the Force, which thus became the "Royal Rhodesian Air Force".

In April 1956 Thornhill Airfield, Gwelo, was re-opened and work at once began on the reconstruction of the runways and the installation of the latest Radar GCA systems. Today this airfield is the main operational base of the Air Force. Further aircraft were acquired during 1959-1960: three Canadair C.4 transports were added to the strength of No. 3 Squadron and two more squadrons, Nos. 5 and 6 (Bomber) were formed with fifteen Canberra B.2s and three Canberra T.4s.

During 1961 No. 3 Squadron's aircraft provided considerable assistance to the R.A.F. during the Kuwait crisis, when

Advanced training is carried out on Vampire T.11s which, with FB.9 fighter-bombers, form the equipment of No. 2 Squadron, based at Thornhill



the Canadairs were used to transport British troops; and again later in the year when Dakotas of the squadron transported some 213 tons of food and supplies to flood-stricken tribesmen in Kenya and Somalia, most of it free-dropped in hilly, inaccessible country under poor weather conditions.

At the end of July 1961 Air Vice-Marshal E. W. S. Jacklin retired from the Air Force and was succeeded by Air Vice-Marshal A. M. Bentley, C.B.E., A.F.C.

No. 7 (Helicopter) Squadron was formed in 1962, when eight Alouette IIIs were delivered. The following year No. 1 (Fighter) Squadron was re-equipped with twelve Hunter FGA.9 ground-attack fighters.

Federation dissolved

The dissolution of the Federation in 1963 left the R.R.A.F. with a reduced area of responsibility, and therefore it was no longer necessary to retain such a large force. As a result the Canadair and Pembroke were disposed of through the Liquidating Agency and a number of Vampires and Canberras placed in storage.

At the present time the main operational bases of the Royal Rhodesian Air Force are New Sarum, Salisbury, and Thornhill, near Gwelo. The former not only houses the Administration and three resident squadrons—No. 3 (Transport), No. 5 (Bomber), and No. 7 (Helicopter) Squadrons—but also the Photographic Establishment, an Air Movements Section, the Aircrew Selection Centre and Apprentice Training School, and a Parachute Training Section, operated on behalf of the Army.

Thornhill also has three resident squadrons, Nos. 1 and 2 (Fighter), and No. 4 (Flying Training). The Provosts of the latter squadron form the basic training element of the Air Force, pilots progressing to the Vampire T.11 for jet conversion and on to the Vampire FB.9, on which they carry out armament practice and operational training before being posted to a squadron, where they convert to the particular aircraft being operated.



First combat type to be received by the S.R.A.F. after W.W.II was the Spitfire Mk. 22, twenty-two of which were delivered in 1951

The R.R.A.F. now has a strength of ninety-one aircraft, 1,158 regular personnel, plus 420 Territorials and 340 volunteer reservists.

Air Vice-Marshal Bentley, who had been Commander of the Royal Rhodesian Air Force since July 1961, retired in April 1965. He was succeeded by Air Vice-Marshal Harold Hawkins, C.B.E., A.F.C. Born in Australia, A.V.-M. Hawkins joined the Royal Australian Air Force on the outbreak of war and served in the U.K., Middle East and Far East theatres before coming to the Air Training Group in 1944. Since joining the Federal Air Arm in 1946 he has held a succession of senior staff and command appointments, culminating in the post of Group Commander, No. 1 Group, R.R.A.F. He was appointed D.C.A.S. and also Additional Air A.D.C. to Her Majesty the Queen on 1st August 1961, until his appointment as Chief of Air Staff, R.R.A.F., with the rank of Air Vice-Marshal, on 13th April 1965.

From its beginnings, some thirty years ago, the Royal Rhodesian Air Force has grown steadily into the efficient and effective force which today, despite the recent reduction in size, remains quite capable of answering any emergency or challenge that may arise.

Representative aircraft

| | | |
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| 1937 | Hawker Hart | K3025 |
| | Hawker Hart (dual) | K3888 (SR-2) |
| 1939 | Gloster Gauntlet | K5347 |
| | Hawker Audax | SR-13 |
| 1940 | Hawker Hardy | K5921 |
| | DH Rapide | SR-8 |
| | | (VP-YBU) |
| 1943 | Tiger Moth | SR-34 |
| 1945 | Harvard | SR-49 |
| 1951 | Spitfire 22 | SR-82 |
| 1953 | Auster J-5 | SR-55 |
| 1954 | Vampire FB.9 | SRAF 107 |
| | Vampire T.11 | SRAF 130 |
| 1955 | Provost T.52 | RRAF 141 |
| | Dakota | RRAF 153 |
| 1959 | Canadair C.4 | RRAF 179 |
| | Canberra B.2 | RRAF 164 |
| | Canberra T.4 | RRAF 176 |
| 1962 | Alouette III | RRAF 503 |
| 1963 | Hunter FGA.9 | RRAF 118 |

Present equipment

| | |
|--------------|----------|
| Hunter FGA.9 | RRAF 121 |
| Vampire FB.9 | RRAF 107 |
| Canberra B.2 | RRAF 206 |
| Canberra T.4 | RRAF 217 |
| Provost T.52 | RRAF 303 |
| Vampire T.11 | RRAF 407 |
| Alouette III | RRAF 504 |
| Dakota | RRAF 708 |



LEFT: In the foreground, helping with the maintenance of Audax SR-13 in 1938, is E. W. S. Jacklin, later C.A.S. of the R.R.A.F.

RIGHT: Many Commonwealth pilots were trained in Rhodesia during W.W.II on Tiger Moths and the type continued in use with the S.R.A.F. for some years afterwards. This post-war shot shows F.T.S. machines from Cranborne

