



Service History of  
**1016 (RRhodaF) SAA GASSNER. A J (Tony)**

7<sup>th</sup> May 1956 to 30<sup>th</sup> November 1964



1956-1959	RAF Halton	Technical Training Command	Apprentice Training (Instrument Fitter)
1959-1961	New Sarum	Royal Rhodesian Air Force Salisbury, Rhodesia	Instruments General - line servicing and calibration in instrument section. Worked on DC3, DH Vampire, Percival Pembroke, Percival Provost and English Electric Canberra. During 1959 to 1960 under NATO, included time with RAF at Aden - Vampires and RAF Akrotiri - Canberras.
1961-1962	Thornhill	Gwelo, Rhodesia	18 month (fast track) pilot training - Provost and Vampire. Graduated as Pilot Officer (substantive in RRhodaF)
1962-1963	New Sarum	Salisbury, Rhodesia	Percival Provost flying duties - recce and light support.

**RANK ON COMPLETION OF SERVICE**

Flying Officer



See following pages for more information.

## CIVILIAN CAREER AND ADDITIONAL STORIES

After the bust-up of the Federation of Central Africa resulted in negotiation of all Federal Government contracts; Tony was among those that departed, not due to any foresight concerning the future but as a new adventure into civil aviation which saw him mostly flying the HS 125 in various places, some not to be repeated such as Nigeria and Saudi Arabia, including a substantial amount of free lance - out of England (the best ATC in the world). There was a surprising amount of antipathy toward those who elected to leave, which of course had the opposite effect to that desired. Tony wonders; if he had known, would he have stayed put. Phil Pile was among those who remained including in the post Rhodesian scenario, and who, with some others suffered brutally savage beatings at the hands of the infamous Zimbabwe Army 5th Brigade trained by North Koreans, for the suspected destruction of BAe Hawks in hangars - you may recall the incident.



Left: Tony as a young Pilot Officer



Right: A recent self-portrait for comparison!

Tony had a spell in the local airline and left after 9 months due to boredom. A friend who took his slot was later the skipper of a Vickers Viscount that was downed after take - off from Kariba by a SAM. Tony says, "I guess there was someone looking after this undeserving character, eternally grateful".

Tony has since spent several years in China teaching English to schoolchildren. Most recently, in 2009, he is just back from three months in Mozambique for a review and further preparation before returning mid - September, if all goes according to plan.

He is rather sad he couldn't make it to the 50<sup>th</sup> Anniversary Reunion because finances have not allowed. Tony says this is neither a boast nor a complaint; it is exciting and challenging to readjust ones values. We don't retire, we just get retreaded - an attitude I'm sure you agree with. Tony promised a short newsletter on Moz. He writes:

I have a bit more time on hand than anticipated as my visa will now be annually, for which a police clearance is required, this takes one to two months - much needed as I have now been informed that the teaching venues have been increased from two to six, and care of the medicinal plants garden as an additional bonus - sure going to be fun trying!

### **MISSION TO MOZAMBIQUE.**

This will be as brief as possible an account of my initial three months in Mozambique from late May 2009, for establishing our church programme for teaching English.

The location of the mission station is in the village of Milange close to the eastern Malawi border where Mulange Mountain, a magnificent granite massif rises precipitously to ten thousand feet, seven thousand feet above the plains below. The lower south eastern slopes are covered in manicured tea plantations, greenery that must be close to perfection, nurtured by summer rains and, gentle localized rain in the winter caused by winds from that quarter meeting the rising ground. We have proper housing here, all the necessities – away from there, in the 'bush,' it's a tent, shower with a bucket, long drop with a view, magnificent night skies and no pollution – until the bush fires start before the rains.

Fifteen years ago at the close of twenty years<sup>th</sup> of war, our first returning missionaries were greeted with devastation: land mines especially on road verges were being cleared by international teams using in some cases, very effectively, trained rats which are too light to trigger the detonators. Visitors remarked on the absence of bird life; doubtless many had been eaten, and others traumatized into leaving populated areas. Happily return is now very evident.

Progress to normality has moved fast, particularly in the last few years, at least along the main roads, otherwise life continues pretty much as it has for decades at a subsistence level in the bush, which is a form of protection as “civilization” has brought attendant problems, to name one: AIDS, this by courtesy of truck drivers passing through from the east and south mostly in 22 wheel rigs that traverse the country largely on narrow unpaved roads that become quagmires in the rains. It has been reported that HIV infection in towns along these ‘arterial’ roads is in the order of 70% with full blown AIDS at 50%.

The people are very pleasant and open ('seems that war often does that) with all the must-have paraphernalia – cell phones, (though these can only be used in line of sight of larger towns), 50cc motorbikes, reasonable clothes, and the inevitable fat – cats. In the bush however, only the fortunate own battered bicycles and from appearances, many have only one set of tattered clothes.

The English teaching has been well received – nothing like teaching the willing – unlike the nonetheless likeable brats in China where I was learning to teach in 2003. There is no text book available it's all being invented as we progress; with a bit borrowed here and there, emphasis being on simplicity, grammar by osmosis, as we all learned at mother's knee, (My ma had two) and an invaluable Portuguese / English dictionary. These people are born musicians, their singing is amazing, all harmonising from kiddies to adults; I don't even try when they are on a roll.

Initially one venue was in Milange (see opening paragraph), then another was included about 300 km to the east in the bush, thirty plus km from the town of Erego.

A different tribe here, the Lomwe, with their own language. Fortunately, enough speak Portuguese to get by with the use of a good dictionary, but it has to be a priority to get competency in that language. Now, after my return to South Africa another 4 venues have been added as well as tenure of the medicinal plants garden in Milange – right up my street with my horticultural leaning. It will be interesting to see if it can all be handled by one oldish but keen optimist - what the heck, nothing ventured nothing gained.

To get from Milange to Erego is a life shaping experience, the state of the roads and condition of most transport is such that one trip of 200 km took eight hours with passengers emerging looking like Red Indians from the dust coating. Another trip on the back of a covered truck crammed shoulder to shoulder among sacks and luggage with a four year old boy asleep on my lap - despite lurching through potholes – and a section of angle iron jabbing intermittently into my pelvis, had a different point of interest / humour: some distance along the route a sack of oranges gave up the struggle, yellow juice dripping off the front of the canopy to the passengers below: “Orange juice” I shouted in my rudimentary Portuguese to the wry - looking unfortunates. Not long after another sack seeped juice from a different spot of the canopy, soon followed by hammering on the cab roof; the canopy was pulled aside, revealing a large black goat swinging by a leg: I should have shouted: “goat juice”. ‘Grateful I was, sitting half way back – honest!

At the mission we have two Argentinean doctors whose English is not too fluent: they asked me to help with getting some lemons off the tree for: “constipao”, somewhat puzzled by the use of lemons for that condition – what do they teach in medical school in South America? - I consulted my dictionary to learn that it is not constipation, but congestion, or just a plain old head cold!

Here in South Africa preparing to return: waiting for a police clearance for the annual visa and all the other necessary details, compiling new course material, I am more than keen to get back to organic food, intermittent electricity, no electricity, and humongous thunderstorms during the rains; much like the old Northern Rhodesia where I was privileged to grow up – in the British Empire! Them were the days.

Hope you enjoyed the journey and the photos.



Above: Mozambique Tea Estate  
Left: It's Grass – not for smoking!



Above: No Cross!  
Below: Laundry Day  
Bottom Left: 22 Wheeler



Right: Making maize flour  
Below Right: Live Chooks!  
Bottom Right: Kitchen Slave

