

CIVIL AVIATION IN COLONIAL ZIMBABWE, 1912-1980

A. S. MLAMBO

Department of Economic History, University of Zimbabwe

THE DEVELOPMENT OF civil aviation in Zimbabwe has not yet received much attention from scholars of Zimbabwean economic history, despite its past and present importance and its influence on the economic development of the country.¹ Apart from providing a fast and convenient form of transport, civil aviation plays a crucial role in assisting the country's lucrative tourist industry. It is also a major employer of both skilled and unskilled workers through its various operations and it benefits the country's economy through its many spin-off enterprises.

This article is the first of a two-part study focusing on the colonial and post-colonial periods, respectively, seeking not only to trace the development of civil aviation in Zimbabwe but also, through the study of this key industry, to stimulate scholarly interest in undertaking detailed industry-specific studies in order to enhance our knowledge of the forces that helped shaped the nation's economy.

Interest in civil aviation in Zimbabwe (hereafter pre-Independence place names are used for the sake of convenience) is of very recent origin, dating from about the time of the First World War.² It was not, however, until many years later that this interest resulted in any concrete action. Rhodesia in 1914 was a country with a very primitive and inefficient transport system. The road network was poor at the best of times but unusable in the rainy season.³ According to Gale, the roads were then mere 'tracks worn by ox-wagons, with a deep rut on either side and a razor back in the middle. When travelling the motorist carried a pick and shovel to trim down the razor back when it was too high for clearance, a couple of sacks to cope with sand and a supply of water, food and drink.'⁴ Gale further informs us that the difficulties of communication at this time can

¹ The only existing study on the subject is S. M. Zhande's 'Towards the History of Commercial Civil Aviation in Zimbabwe' (Harare, Univ. of Zimbabwe, Dept. of History, BA(Hons.) Diss., 1985). Zhande's study provides a good overview of civil aviation but suffers from several stylistic and organizational problems.

² T. Scannell, 'Aviation in Central Africa', *Horizon* (1960), II, 18-22; J. McAdam, 'Early birds in Central Africa: An account of flying activities in the Rhodesias, 1920-1922', *Rhodesiana* (1965), XIII, 38-53.

³ Scannell, 'Aviation in Central Africa', 18.

⁴ W. D. Gale, *The Years Between: 1923-1973: Half a Century of Responsible Government in Rhodesia* (Salisbury, H. C. P. Andersen, 1973), 25.

be gleaned from a report from a correspondent in Chipinga in 1923 stating that 'the new Native Commissioner . . . recently travelled from Umtali to Tanganda by car — about 150 miles — in eight hours', adding that the new road that the Commissioner had used was in excellent condition 'and in many places a speed of 30 miles per hour could be maintained for considerable distances'. The country did not have any navigable waterways which might have offered some relief to its transport problems, although the recently-established railway network had eased the transportation problems somewhat. It was with such problems of communication in mind that people began to investigate the possibility of developing air transport in the country.

One of the first people to promote air-mindedness in the country was C. F. Webb, a member of the Aeronautical Society of Great Britain then living in Salisbury.⁵ Having earlier canvassed a number of eminent people, including the Mayor of Salisbury, and believing that there was enough interest in aeronautical matters in the town, Webb decided to establish a formal organization that would spearhead the development of aviation in the country.

Consequently, on 17 February 1912 he inserted a notice in the local daily newspaper, the *Rhodesia Herald*, calling a meeting for that evening at Tattersall's Club to 'consider the question of forming an aeronautical society for Rhodesia'. The attendance was very poor. Evidently, Webb had been too optimistic about people's interest in aeronautics. The *Rhodesia Herald* of the next day announced that the meeting had been postponed 'sine die on account of the smallness of the attendance'.⁶

Despite this initial setback, Webb did not give up. On 8 March 1912 he called another meeting and this time succeeded in setting up a provisional committee of the Aeronautical Society of Rhodesia with the Administrator of Southern Rhodesia, Sir William Milton, as patron. Other members of the Committee were Col. Burns-Begg, Resident Commissioner, as President; E. W. S. Montagu, the Secretary for Mines and Works, and G. H. Eyre, Postmaster-General, as Vice-Presidents; M. E. Cleveland, Mayor of Salisbury, as Secretary; and Webb himself as Treasurer. Nothing is known of this provisional committee and there is no evidence that it ever met after its

⁵ J. McAdam, 'An early enthusiast for Rhodesian aviation: Mr C. F. Webb in 1912', *Rhodesiana* (1965), XII, 103-10.

Although Webb is generally regarded as the pioneer of civil aviation in Rhodesia, it appears that air-mindedness predated Webb's efforts by 16 years. According to McAdam, Rhodesia's first experiment with flying took place during the Ndebele uprising of 1896 when a Bulawayo engineer, F. G. Issels, designed and constructed a hot-air balloon hoping to put one or two observers aloft to give advance warning to the settlers of a Ndebele attack. The project was abandoned because of leakage of gas from the balloon's seams. See J. McAdam, 'The pioneer birdmen', *Illustrated Life Rhodesia*, 12 Feb. 1970, 20-5.

⁶ *Rhodesia Herald*, 17 Feb. 1912; 18 Feb. 1912.

formation. By mid-1912, Webb appears to have despaired of ever succeeding in promoting air-mindedness in the country and returned to England to join the newly-formed Royal Flying Corps at Farnborough.⁷

The next impetus came from outside the country eight years later. Soon after the First World War a civil air service had been created in Britain and in 1918 the British Air Ministry decided to open an air route to Cape Town, South Africa.⁸ Two years later a converted Vickers Vimy bomber, the *Silver Queen*, piloted by two South African RAF World War I veterans, Lt.-Col. 'Pierre' van Ryneveld and Flt. Lt. C. J. Quinton Brand left England for Cape Town. An engine failure near Wadi Halfa caused the aircraft to crash and a second Vimy had to be flown out as a replacement.

The *Silver Queen* eventually landed in Bulawayo on 5 March 1920, the first aeroplane to land on Rhodesian soil.⁹ The whole population of Bulawayo, most of whom had never seen an aeroplane before, gathered at the racecourse to see the *Silver Queen* land. The plane's pilots were fêted like royalty and their presence in Rhodesia did more to foster interest in aviation than all Webb's efforts eight years earlier.¹⁰

When the pilots and crew were ready to resume their flight to Cape Town all the townsfolk turned out once again to bid them farewell. The *Silver Queen* was, however, destined to remain in Rhodesia, for it crashed immediately after take-off. Scannell described the scene as follows:

The whole town turned out again to cheer the *Silver Queen* off. The two men climbed back in, waved farewell and the *Silver Queen*, its motors giving an occasional splutter, taxied down the racecourse and rose into the air — but not for long. In view of thousands, it lost height almost immediately and crashed in the bush between the town and Hillside. The *Silver Queen* was a complete wreck but . . . neither of the men was badly hurt.¹¹

⁷ McAdam, 'An early enthusiast', 109.

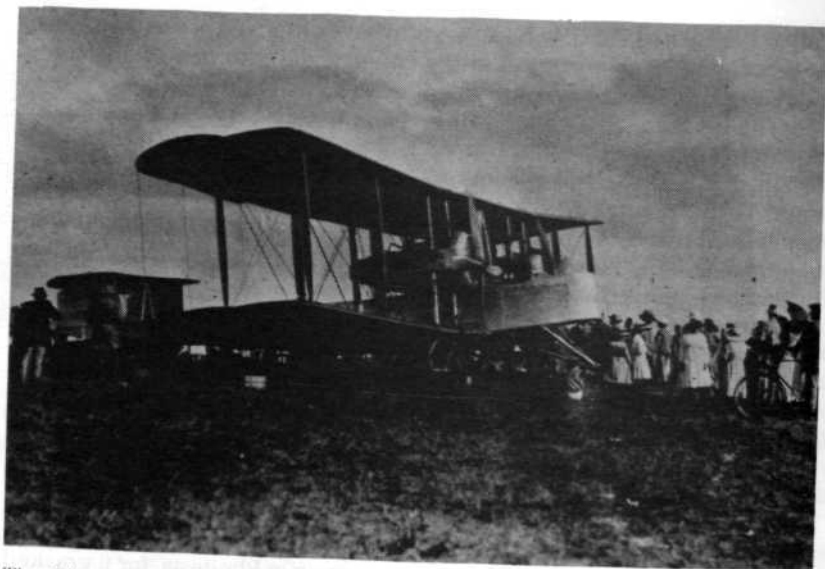
⁸ McAdam, 'Early birds in Central Africa', 38.

⁹ Ibid.; Scannell, 'Aviation in Central Africa', 19; P. McNamara, 'The Administration of Civil Aviation in Southern Rhodesia, 1920-1961' (Salisbury, unpubl., 1970), 1.

The two airmen faced a number of problems on their flight from Britain. When landing at Kurusku (sic) about 80 miles north of Wadi Halfa, the aircraft ran into a pile of large boulders and the fuselage was irreparably damaged but the crew miraculously escaped injury. The engine from the original *Silver Queen* was fitted on to another Vimy (also called *Silver Queen*) supplied by the RAF in Cairo. The flight was further delayed when on 22 February at Wadi Halfa the airmen had to drain the entire fuel system because of a careless mistake in which a fuel tank was inadvertently filled with water. See T. Oliver, *The World's Great Pioneer Flights* (London, Bodley Head, 1975), 63-71, and McAdam, 'Early Birds in Central Africa'.

¹⁰ McAdam, 'Early birds in Central Africa', 47-50.

¹¹ Scannell, 'Aviation in Central Africa', 19. According to the *Rhodesia Herald* of 12 Sept. 1947, for many years the *Silver Queen*'s fuselage hung in the Drill Hall at Bulawayo as a reminder of that momentous event in the early history of Rhodesian aviation while some of the aeroplane's other parts were kept in individual homes as mementos or were re-shaped into various domestic utensils.



The *Silver Queen* at Bulawayo Racecourse 3 March 1920

Source: National Archives of Zimbabwe.

The two pilots were eventually picked up by an Aircro DH 9 light aircraft, the *Voortrekker*, sent up to Bulawayo from South Africa so that van Ryneveld and Quinton Brand could continue their journey.

Despite its ignominious end, the *Silver Queen* had stimulated a great deal of interest in aviation in the country. Evidence of this was the fact that a few days after the departure of the *Voortrekker*, on 8 April 1920, the first local aviation company, Air Road Motors Limited, was established in Bulawayo. There is, however, no record of the company ever owning any aircraft or ever taking off from the ground. Indeed, the company soon went into liquidation.¹²

In spite of the collapse of Air Road Motors Limited, interest in aviation continued to grow, more so after the arrival of yet another light aircraft, the *Rhodesian Queen*, later in the same year. The *Rhodesian Queen* was a converted military aircraft, an Avro 504 K, owned by the South African General Transport Company of Johannesburg. It toured the country, providing joy-rides at £3.3s. per ride to aviation enthusiasts in Bulawayo, Que Que, Gatooma, Salisbury, Rusape and Umtali. The *Rhodesian Queen* left the country after a four-and-a-half-month tour during which hundreds of

¹² McAdam, 'Early birds in Central Africa', 45.

Rhodesians saw an aeroplane for the first time and enjoyed their very first flying experience.¹³

Another local aviation company, Rhodesia Aerial Tours Company, was born in 1922. Founded by one Major Miller, the Rhodesia Aerial Tours Company started flying its one aircraft, an old AVRO, on 16 May 1922. The aircraft's life was to be very short, however, for it crashed at Rusape a few months later. Apparently when trying to take off it careered into the trees at the side of the runway and damaged its right wing. The plane never flew again. After this disaster, Rhodesia Aerial Tours went into liquidation in November 1922 and Major Miller emigrated to South Africa where he was later instrumental in the establishment of Union Airways, the forerunner of South African Airways.¹⁴ After the collapse of Major Miller's venture, aviation in Rhodesia remained dormant for the next five years.

The only interesting development in this period was the attempt of Mr Gino Sacchi of Makwiro, 50 miles south-west of Salisbury, to design and build a pedal-powered helicopter or 'sky-bike' in which he hoped to survey his farm. According to McAdam, Mr Sacchi reported that he had succeeded in pedalling the machine into the air for a few moments but had then landed exhausted. He had then asked 'his African servant, Masumo, to try, but the servant "promptly ran it into a hedge, and that was that!"'¹⁵

Interest in civil aviation was revived in 1927 with the formation of the Rhodesian Aviation Syndicate in Bulawayo by a Filabusi mine-owner and rancher, Harry L. Stewart. The other board members of the company were A. G. Hay and Captain J. D. Mail. M. A. Redrup and J. Coghlan were the company's legal advisers. The Syndicate's fleet consisted of one six-seater wartime De Havilland 6B (DH6B) aircraft and a three-seater Cirrus Moth Mk. II.¹⁶ The Rhodesian Aviation Syndicate was later to be incorporated in a new company, the Rhodesia Aviation Company, which was established by local and foreign capital in 1929. Two British companies, Cobham-Blackburn Airlines Limited and Imperial Airways (Africa) Limited, had an interest in the Rhodesia Aviation Company. Cobham-Blackburn Air Lines Limited supplied the company with an aeroplane in return for its value in shares and Imperial Airways was appointed technical adviser.¹⁷

The Company was registered with a capital of £7 500 on 17 April 1929.

¹³ Ibid., 47-50.

¹⁴ Ibid., 52-3. According to McAdam, Miller's aeroplane had had a bad time from the start. When it first arrived in the country and landed at Bulawayo it was immediately grounded because of punctured tyres caused by thorns on the landing ground. A total of 84 holes were discovered in the tubes, *ibid.*, 45.

¹⁵ McAdam, 'The pioneer birdmen', 20-5.

¹⁶ Zhande, 'Towards the History of Commercial Civil Aviation in Zimbabwe', 3.

¹⁷ Rhodesian Aviation Company, *First Annual Report of the Rhodesian Aviation Company for the Year Ended 30 April 1930* (Bulawayo, Rhodesian Aviation Company, 1932).

Among its initial assets were six aeroplanes: one Blackburn Bluebird, two Avros Mk. II, two De Havilland Moths Mk. II, and one De Havilland DH6 RASI. The company's prospectus announced that it was committed to 'stimulate interest in aviation in Rhodesia and generally to create a spirit of air-mindedness by establishing an organisation to provide Rhodesia with an air travelling system',¹⁸ and in 1931 began a weekly service between Bulawayo and Salisbury.

Despite increasing interest in air travel in the country the Rhodesia Aviation Company was not a commercial success. The smallness of the local market, coupled with the negative effects of the Great Depression, adversely affected the airline's operations. As a result the company incurred a loss of £2 217 12s. 9d. in its first year of operation (1930). In spite of a subsidy from the government the company continued to suffer losses, losing £675 13s. 2d. in 1931 and £2 372 10s. 8d. in 1932.¹⁹

In the meantime the government had begun to show an interest in promoting civil aviation in the country. Until 1929 attempts to develop an aviation industry had been undertaken mainly by private individuals and companies. In 1929, however, the government took the first step in regulating and actively participating in aviation by passing the Aviation Act (No. 555 of 1929) which came into force in April 1930. The government also created a Department of Civil Aviation within the Department of Defence. Col. Parsons, Commandant of the Southern Rhodesian Territorial Forces, was appointed Director of Civil Aviation.²⁰ In the 1930 financial year, the government voted £5 660 for the Department with the proviso that £3 760 of this sum was to be used for the preparation of emergency landing-grounds on the Cape-to-Cairo air route, and for the salary of the supervisor of aerodrome construction in the country. The government also voted the standing sum of £750 per year as a subsidy for the instruction of seven pilots a year.²¹

Civil Aviation received a further boost from a grant of £50 000 provided by the Beit Trust in 1932. In presenting the grant Sir Henry Birchenough stated that, on the recommendation of Sir Alfred Beit, the trustees had agreed to set aside this sum for two years commencing in 1933 with the object of improving the ground service along the Imperial Airways route in

¹⁸ Ibid.

¹⁹ Rhodesia Aviation Company, *Second Ann. Rep. 1931* (Bulawayo, Rhodesia Aviation Company, 1931); Rhodesia Aviation Company, *Third Ann. Rep. 1932* (Bulawayo, Rhodesia Aviation Company, 1932).

²⁰ Dir[ector of] Civil Aviation, *Rep. [on Civil and Military Aviation for the Year] 1930* (Salisbury, Govt. Printer, 1931); McNamara, 'The Administration of Civil Aviation in Southern Rhodesia', 3.

²¹ Dir. Civil Aviation, *Rep. 1930*.

Rhodesia.²² In January 1932 Imperial Airways (Africa) Limited inaugurated a mail service to England and two months later they had started a passenger service.

In 1931 a road transport contractor in Nyasaland, C. J. Christowitz, had set up Christowitz Air Services Limited and had started regular flights between Blantyre and Beira and Blantyre and Salisbury.²³ In October 1933 this company was merged with the Rhodesia Aviation Company to produce Rhodesia and Nyasaland Airways (RANA), the largest air-service venture in Central Africa up to that time.

The Beit Trust, Rhodesia Railways and Imperial Airways were all financially involved in the company. The Beit Trust had a controlling interest while Imperial Airways (Africa) Limited and Rhodesia Railways were both subscribers and technical advisers. Salisbury was chosen as the airline's headquarters.²⁴ By 1935 RANA was providing a regular mail and passenger service to Nyasaland, Northern Rhodesia and Mozambique.²⁵

Three other developments promoted civil aviation during this period. The first was the introduction of flying scholarships in 1936. The two leading newspapers in the country, the *Rhodesia Herald* and the *Bulawayo Chronicle* introduced three annual flying scholarships in order to foster air-mindedness in the country. They received 211 applications from Salisbury and 153 from Bulawayo residents — a testimony to the wide interest in aviation in the country. Two scholarships were awarded to applicants from Salisbury while one went to Bulawayo.²⁶ The second propitious development was the government's decision in 1937 to use RANA to operate the regular airmail services within Southern Rhodesia and between Southern Rhodesia and neighbouring countries. This arrangement was to remain in force until June 1939. As part of the arrangement, the government undertook to subsidize RANA to the tune of \$7 500 per year. A further \$600 was to be provided for a travelling flying school which would train pilots in various parts of the country, while another \$500 was to be set aside for the instruction of Class A pilots.²⁷ The third development was the withdrawal of Imperial Airways from the mail and passenger service to Southern Rhodesia in 1937, which resulted in RANA's

²² Dir. Civil Aviation, *Rep. 1932* (Salisbury, Govt. Printer, 1933), 1; National Archives of Zimbabwe, Harare, S482/101/39 (Prime Minister of Southern Rhodesia: Correspondence: Aviation/Air services), Rep. of the Meeting Held at the Offices of the Beit Railway Trustees, London, 3 Mar. 1932.

²³ McNamara, 'The Administration of Civil Aviation in Southern Rhodesia', 4-5.

²⁴ Dir. Civil Aviation, *Rep. 1933* (Salisbury, Govt. Printer, 1934).

²⁵ *Ibid.*

²⁶ Dir. Civil Aviation, *Ann. Rep., Civil Aviation, 1935* (Salisbury, Defence Headquarters, 1936).

²⁷ Dir. Civil Aviation, *Rep. on the Progress of Civil Aviation for the Year 1938* (Salisbury, Govt. Printer, 1939).

being appointed to maintain a twice-weekly mail service between Salisbury and Beira, Blantyre and Lusaka.²⁸

In the early years, while the airlines were struggling to establish themselves, a number of companies and private individuals operated small aircraft for charter flights and other business. One of the earliest private aircraft operators was Major Wynne-Eyton, a former Royal Flying Corps pilot, who imported a Moth aircraft from England in March 1928 and operated it from his farm in Ruwa. He was one of the founder members of the Salisbury Light Plane Club in 1929.²⁹ A few other entrepreneurs soon followed suit, as can be seen in the 1930 report of the Director of Civil and Military Aviation which stated that the total number of aircraft in the country was eight, four of which were owned by the Rhodesian Aviation Company and four by private owners, one of whom lived in Salisbury.³⁰

Among the first private companies to operate private aeroplanes in the country were the following: the De Havilland Aircraft Company; the London and Rhodesian Mining and Land Company Limited (Lonrho); and Spencer's Garage at Victoria Falls. The De Havilland Company was established in the country in April 1934 with a staff of two and it operated two DH Moth Major aircraft both for charter and for its flying school. It also repaired and serviced all types of aircraft in the country. For its part, Lonrho provided charter services with its American WACO UIC model aircraft, while E. H. Spencer of Spencer's Garage operated a DH Puss Moth aircraft from July 1935 providing charter flights around Victoria Falls.³¹ There were five registered private-aircraft owners in the territory in 1937.³²

By 1946 the number of private companies providing charter services had increased considerably. Among the companies listed in the 1946 report of the Director of Civil Aviation were the following:

- a) Rhodesia Aircraft Maintenance and Services Limited based at Belvedere airport in Salisbury, using two Auster aircraft and three De Havilland Tiger Moths for both charter and instruction purposes;
- b) Spencer's Airways, Victoria Falls, using one Avro Anson, one De Havilland Fox Moth, one Tiger Moth and one Fairchild UC.61A to provide short pleasure flights over the Victoria Falls;

²⁸ Natl. Arch., S482/101/39, Agreement between Government and RANA in regard to operations of air services, dated 23 December 1937.

²⁹ McAdam, 'Pioneer birdmen', 28.

³⁰ Dir. Civil Aviation, *Rep. 1930*.

³¹ Dir. Civil Aviation, *Ann. Rep., Civil Aviation, 1935*.

³² Dir. Civil Aviation, *Civil Aviation, Ann. Rep., 1937* (Salisbury, Defence Headquarters, 1938).

- c) Commercial Air Services Limited, Kumalo Airport, Bulawayo with one Fairchild UC.61K for charter flights;
- d) Flyers Limited, Kumalo Airport, offering charters and flying instructors with its 2 Piper JCC65 and 2 Tiger Moth aircraft; and
- e) Aero Limited, Mount Hampden, Salisbury, with one Piper JCC65 which was used for instruction.

The number of privately-owned aircraft steadily increased from four in 1930 to 31 in 1946.³³ The number of privately-owned aerodromes was reported to be 25 in 1951.³⁴

From the early 1930s onwards a number of flying clubs were established in the country, beginning with the Bulawayo Light Plane Club in July 1936, the Umtali Gliding Club in August 1936 and the Salisbury Flying Club in January 1937.³⁵ Smaller flying clubs were also established in the various towns across the country.

Another interesting development during the inter-War period was the British Airline (BOAC)'s introduction of a Flying Boat service from England to South Africa in June 1937. The flying boat made its maiden flight from Southampton to Durban in that year. Construction of a terminal building (to serve up to 70 passengers), a landing stage and a road linking the terminal building with the Victoria Falls village were completed in late 1947, enabling a Sunderland aircraft, the first flying boat to use this route, to land at Victoria Falls on 11 December 1947.³⁶

During the Second World War the government of Southern Rhodesia took over RANA in order to meet national wartime transport requirements. The Southern Rhodesian authorities had contemplated taking over RANA as early as 30 September 1939. In a letter to the Southern Rhodesian Prime Minister the Secretary for the Department of Justice and Defence announced that his Department was considering 'taking over RANA for the duration of the war and placing it on a military basis'.³⁷ Ten days later the Prime Minister informed the Governor of Southern Rhodesia of the government's intention to take over RANA as from 1 January 1940.³⁸ On 5 January 1940 the Southern Rhodesian Prime Minister announced to J. C. Smuts, South

³³ Dir. Civil Aviation, *Rep. 1946* (Salisbury, Govt. Stationery Office, 1947).

³⁴ Dir. Civil Aviation, *Rep. 1951* (Salisbury, Govt. Printer, 1953).

³⁵ Dir. Civil Aviation, *Ann. Rep., Civil Aviation, 1936* (Salisbury, Defence Headquarters, 1937); Dir. Civil Aviation, *Civil Aviation, Ann. Rep., 1937*.

³⁶ Dir. Civil Aviation, *Civil Aviation, Ann. Rep., 1937*; Dir. Civil Aviation, *Rep. 1947* (Salisbury, Govt. Stationery Office, 1948).

³⁷ Natl. Arch., S482/451/39 (Prime Minister of Southern Rhodesia: Rhodesia and Nyasaland Airways: Appropriation for Duration of War). Secretary Department of Justice and Defence to PM, 20 Sept. 1939.

³⁸ *Ibid.*, Herbert Stanley to the Governor 30 Sept. 1939.

African Minister of External Affairs, that 'Rhodesia and Nyasaland Airways Limited has been taken over and is being operated by this government'.³⁹ For the duration of the war RANA, now renamed Southern Rhodesia Air Services (SRAS), was run by the Southern Rhodesian Air Force as an adjunct to the country's defence system.⁴⁰

After the war the government relinquished control of SRAS and handed the airline over to a new civil aviation venture known as the Central African Airways Corporation (CAAC).⁴¹ The creation of CAAC was the result of a growing interest among the three Central African countries — Southern Rhodesia, Northern Rhodesia and Nyasaland — to establish a regional airline which would be administered by one central authority and which would provide services to the three member states. Regional co-operation had in fact begun before the War when an agreement had been drawn up providing for the combined control of civil aviation in the three territories. The Southern Rhodesian Director of Civil Aviation was entrusted with overseeing airworthiness standards, recruitment and training of personnel and aircraft licensing, among other issues.⁴² This arrangement formed the basis for the argument of the Southern Rhodesian Minister of Internal Affairs for a regional aviation authority on 21 January 1946:

Ever since August 1933, the air services of the three territories have been operated by one organisation . . . demonstrating beyond any doubt the desirability of operating these services conjointly instead of each territory operating its own services . . . [such an organization] will be more economical than if separate services were operated.⁴³

In early 1949, therefore, each of the three territories passed legislation establishing the Central African Airways Corporation (CAAC) to be administered by a Central African Airways Authority (CAAA).⁴⁴ CAAC was subsequently incorporated on 1 June 1946 with a capital of £500 000. Of this sum, 50 per cent came from Southern Rhodesia, 35 per cent from Northern Rhodesia and 15 per cent from Nyasaland: £182 300 of the capital went towards the purchase of all the assets held by SRAS.⁴⁵

The Central African Airways Authority consisted of four members: a chairman appointed by the three governments jointly, and one represent-

³⁹ Ibid., G. Martin, PM to J. C. Smuts, Minister of External Affairs, S. Africa, 5 Jan. 1940.

⁴⁰ McNamara, 'The Administration of Civil Aviation in Southern Rhodesia', 10.

⁴¹ Ibid., 11.

⁴² Ibid., 7.

⁴³ [Southern Rhodesia], *Debates in the Legislative Assembly. Seventh Session, Fifth Parliament 17th April to 26th July, 30th October to 1st November, 1945, 15th January to 8th February, 1946*, XXV, 21 Jan. 1946, 3217-3226.

⁴⁴ McNamara, 'The Administration of Civil Aviation in Southern Rhodesia', 11.

⁴⁵ Natl. Arch., ME5/1/2/1 (Meredith (Chairman of CAA): CAA Correspondence and Other Papers: General: 1947-1949), Internal memorandum, 31 May 1949.

ative of each of the three governments appointed by each government independently. The functions of the Authority were to review and promote the development of air services in the three territories, to perform the duties of the licensing authority and to control and supervise the Central African Airways Corporation.⁴⁶ By 1947 the CAAC was not only servicing the regional market but had also successfully negotiated with the British Government to permit it to run a twice-monthly end-to-end passenger service between Salisbury and London.⁴⁷

In its second year of operation CAAC came under severe and unfavourable scrutiny from some sections of the Southern Rhodesian Government who accused the management of corruption, nepotism and gross mismanagement. Spearheading the attack in the Southern Rhodesian Parliament, Mr Keller, the MP for Raylton, accused the CAAC officials of squandering airline funds by going on numerous 'joy-rides', the chairman of CAAC being singled out as one who particularly enjoyed 'this form of recreation'. Keller further charged the officials with denying travel facilities to Members of Parliament, firing airline personnel arbitrarily and unfairly, appointing personal friends regardless of qualifications and hiring personnel from overseas at the expense of locally available expertise. He demanded the setting up of a commission of inquiry to look into the 'operation of Central African Airways Corporation with special reference to its administrative and executive functions and any other matters concerning its activities'.⁴⁸ A commission of inquiry was subsequently set up in August 1948 but found little to criticize in the management and operations of the airline.⁴⁹

The findings of the 1948 Commission of Inquiry notwithstanding, criticism of CAAC continued, especially in the Southern Rhodesian Parliament. Criticism focused particularly on the airline's continuing financial losses. According to one source, CAAC had incurred the following deficits since its foundation in June 1946:⁵⁰

1 June 1946	-	31 March 1947	£1 262
1 April 1947	-	31 March 1948	£55 759
1 April 1948	-	31 March 1949	£240 000
TOTAL LOSSES			<u>£297 021</u>

⁴⁶ McNamara, 'The Administration of Civil Aviation in Southern Rhodesia', 12-13.

⁴⁷ Dir. Civil Aviation, *Rep.* 1947.

⁴⁸ *Debates in the Legislative Assembly, Second Session, Sixth Parliament, 7th and 8th April, 22nd April to 9th July, 1947, 20th January to 5th February, 1948*, XXVII, 25 June 1947, 2113-2123.

⁴⁹ Southern Rhodesia, *Report of a Commission of Inquiry into the Conduct and Management of the Central African Airways Corporation* [Chairman: E. I. G. Unsworth] (Salisbury, Govt. Printer, 1948).

⁵⁰ Natl. Arch., ME5/1/2/1, Internal memorandum dated 9 May 1949.

Addressing the Northern Rhodesia Legislative Council, the Governor of Northern Rhodesia expressed his misgivings about the situation in CAAC, stating that 'losses of this scale are a matter of serious concern and . . . immediate and effective steps must be taken to see that they do not continue'.⁵¹ In their report of 4 February 1949 the airline's internal auditors, Denny, Ellman-Brown and Fraser, attributed the losses to: a) Over-equipment of aircraft in relation to operating services and revenue potential; b) employment of uneconomic aircraft; c) expansion of routes and services without due regard to the financial aspect; d) faulty estimating; and e) lack of sound budgetary control.⁵²

On 9 February 1949 the authority also expressed concern over the operating losses at CAAC and resolved to invite experts from BOAC to conduct an independent enquiry into CAAC's activities and to make recommendations on how best to improve the performance of the airline in the future.⁵³ BOAC officials subsequently submitted a very critical report on CAAC's management. This report criticized the management's poor financial control and stated that the technical staff lacked appreciation of the complexities of modern aircraft and that the Engineering Department had failed to keep pace with the 'technical advances of the last few years'. The report further pointed out that the purchase of aircraft had been 'unrealistic' with the fleet growing 'without due regard to the suitability of the type for the operating conditions or the commercial requirements'.⁵⁴ Such shortcomings, the report continued, were the direct result of a 'lack of foresight and forward planning'. With regard to the technical operations of CAAC, the report recommended that the 'present Chief Engineer should be sent to the United Kingdom for a period of three to six months for attachment to an operating line to learn modern technical practices'.

Needless to say, the BOAC report was not well received at CAAC where the Chairman pointed out that the BOAC officials had conducted a very superficial enquiry and had arrived at hasty and unfounded conclusions. He complained that 'at no stage was I or any member of the Board consulted in regard to verifying any impressions they had formed'. He was of the opinion that the BOAC officials had an ulterior motive in painting such a negative picture of the CAAC management. Although he never said so in as many words, the evidence suggests that he thought

⁵¹ Northern Rhodesia, *Legislative Council Debates, First Session of the Ninth Council, 16 March to 1st April, 16 Mar. 1949*, 5.

⁵² Natl. Arch., ME5/1/2/1, Report of Auditors Denny, Ellman-Brown and Fraser dated 4 Feb. 1949.

⁵³ Natl. Arch., ME5/1/2/2 (Chairman's Personal Correspondence with Board Members), Memorandum dated 8 Feb. 1949.

⁵⁴ British Overseas Airways Corporation, *Central African Airways Corporation Investigation Report* (Brentford, BOAC, 1949).

that BOAC wanted to discredit the CAAC in the hope that BOAC would be asked to manage the Corporation, for he stated that 'their report is an ex-parte statement drawn by people who are judges in their own cause'.⁵⁵ He also noted that the BOAC officials had spent a total of 18 days in the country of which only 11 were actually devoted to an examination of the internal administration of CAAC and pointed out that this was a 'remarkably short time in which to have gleaned adequate information on which to base some very sweeping statements'.⁵⁶

For its part, the *Rhodesia Herald* questioned the appointment of BOAC officials as the investigating team, as BOAC's own operations over the years had not been very impressive either. As the editor stated:

Since BOAC's accumulative loss from June 1946 to March 1949 of some £20 000 000 is a higher loss than of CAA for the same period proportionately for the capital employed, there would appear to be more justification for the United Kingdom calling on CAA officials than there is for the three Central African governments to call on BOAC 'experts'.⁵⁷

Despite such criticism of the BOAC investigation, its report was accepted without reservation by the three governments and became the basis of subsequent attacks on CAAC management by various Members of Parliament, particularly in the Southern Rhodesian Parliament. Continued criticism of the management eventually led to the resignation of the entire management team of the CAAC in May 1949 and the appointment of a new Board.⁵⁸

CAAC was also criticized for its policy regarding the transport of African and Asian passengers. The airline's original policy was that African and Asian passengers could be carried 'if clean and respectable and providing that no European passengers objected'. At a meeting of the CAAA held in Salisbury on 19 and 20 December 1949 delegates from Northern Rhodesia and Nyasaland severely criticized this policy, making it clear that they would not continue to support it. After much debate the meeting agreed that 'no passenger should be refused carriage on purely racial grounds and the policy of the airline should be revised accordingly'.⁵⁹ An outraged member of the Southern Rhodesian Parliament denounced the ruling as an unwarranted attempt by the CAAA to 'dictate our native

⁵⁵ Nat. Arch., ME5/1/2/1, Letter dated 1 June 1949 addressed to the Rt. Hon. Sir Godfrey Huggins, PM.

⁵⁶ Ibid.

⁵⁷ *Rhodesia Herald*, 23 Mar. 1949.

⁵⁸ Dir. Civil Aviation, *Rep. 1949* (Salisbury, Govt. Printer, 1951); McNamara, 'The Administration of Civil Aviation in Southern Rhodesia'.

⁵⁹ *Debates of the Legislative Assembly. Second Session, Seventh Parliament, 26th April to 8th July, 18th October to 2nd November, 1949*, XXX, 25 May 1949, 976-977.

policy in this country'.⁶⁰ Nevertheless, henceforth the airline complied with the Authority's ruling.

Meanwhile the Southern Rhodesian government was devoting a great deal of its attention to establishing a new and better situated airport for Salisbury, realizing that the existing airport at Belvedere was not only inconveniently sited but was also incapable of handling the increasing air traffic. According to the 1950 report of the Director of Civil Aviation the Belvedere Airport had to be abandoned for the following reasons: a) the runway was some 45 degrees out of alignment, given that approaching aircraft had to enter through a gap in Warren Hills; b) because of the skewed alignment aircraft were forced to take off over the city centre which posed a real danger of accidents; c) the growing number of high-rise buildings in the city, particularly Milton Building, posed a risk to aircraft; and d) because Belvedere Airport had been built to accommodate the RAF Elementary Flying Training School, the layout and design of the buildings were not particularly suitable for commercial aviation.⁶¹ For these reasons a site had to be found for the construction of an airport that would be safer and more suitable for commercial activities.

The Southern Rhodesia government had appointed a Southern Rhodesia Aerodrome Board as early as January 1947 whose task was to advise the government 'on the selection, acquisition, construction and maintenance of government aerodromes and landing grounds in Southern Rhodesia'.⁶² Later the same year, an Airfield Construction Unit was formed to undertake an extensive search for a suitable site for a national airport.⁶³ In 1949 the government purchased Kentucky and Adair farms east of Salisbury (2 700 acres at a cost of £54 000) for the construction of the new airport.⁶⁴ Also in 1949 the Minister of Mines and Transport set up an Airport Panel to co-ordinate the construction of the airport. The Panel comprised representatives of the interested government departments, the Municipality of Salisbury and Rhodesia Railways.⁶⁵

In 1951 the government announced that the airport would be developed as a joint user aerodrome for both civil aviation and the Southern Rhodesian Air Force. Construction of the airport began soon afterwards and by September 1951 an 8 400-foot runway had been completed, enabling the first aircraft, an SRAF Anson, to land at the new airport. Originally it was anticipated that the airport would be completed by 1954.⁶⁶ It was, however, not completed until two years later because the government ran out of

⁶⁰ Ibid.

⁶¹ Dir. Civil Aviation, *Rep. 1950* (Salisbury, Govt. Printer, 1951).

⁶² Dir. Civil Aviation, *Rep. 1947*.

⁶³ Ibid.

⁶⁴ Natl. Arch., S483/4/26 (Prime Minister of Southern Rhodesia: Correspondence: Land, Acquisition of Land for Salisbury Airport, 1948-1951).

⁶⁵ Dir. Civil Aviation, *Rep. 1950*.

⁶⁶ Ibid.

funds in October 1952 and had to suspend the project temporarily. The new Salisbury Airport was finally commissioned on 1 July, 1956. The cost of constructing the airport was \$924 000. In late 1956 work began on the construction of a new airport at Woodvale in Bulawayo to replace the Khumalo airport which was no longer capable of handling the increasing traffic. It was completed in 1958.⁶⁷ Now fully committed to promoting civil aviation in the country, the Southern Rhodesian Government established a Technical School and an Air Traffic School in Salisbury in 1956 and 1958, respectively.⁶⁸

In the meantime CAAC was expanding its operations both domestically and internationally but the financial losses which had plagued the airline since its birth continued until 1956 when it recorded its first profit.⁶⁹ The airline introduced a number of cost-cutting measures including the leasing of some of its routes to BOAC and the reduction of employees from 1 322 to 1 168. CAAC also introduced package travel tours to holiday resorts such as Lake Nyasa, Victoria Falls and Wankie and later to Durban which proved to be very popular and very profitable.⁷⁰ In 1961 the airline recruited its first four African air-hostesses to work on the Skybus service between Salisbury, Blantyre, Lilongwe, Fort Jameson, Kitwe and Kasama.⁷¹

CAAC operated as a regional airline until the breakup of the Central African Federation in December 1963 when the three governments signed the Dissolution Order-in-Council reconstituting the airline as a corporate body jointly owned by Southern Rhodesia and the now-independent countries of Zambia and Malawi. The reconstituted airline was to be run by a newly-created Higher Authority for Civil Air Transport, consisting of a minister from each of the three governments. The Authority's task was to exercise certain controls over the new corporation and to regulate air transport, among other functions.⁷² In 1964 the three governments agreed to separate their air operations and set up three territorially-based subsidiaries: Air Rhodesia, Air Malawi and Zambia Airways. Three years later, the three governments agreed to dissolve the Higher Authority and to devolve the airline's functions to the individual national airlines. After Rhodesia's declaration of UDI, Zambia withdrew from the partnership. The CAAC was dissolved and ceased operations on 31 December 1967.⁷³

In anticipation of the imminent collapse of CAAC, the Southern

⁶⁷ McNamara, 'The Administration of Civil Aviation in Southern Rhodesia', 23.

⁶⁸ *Ibid.*, 22.

⁶⁹ *Ibid.*

⁷⁰ Zhande, 'Towards the History of Commercial Civil Aviation in Zimbabwe', 20.

⁷¹ Natl. Arch., ME/5/1/2/1, CAAC Press release on 19 Sept. 1961.

⁷² C. N. Wetmore and A. F. Mason, 'Transport and power', in G. M. E. Leistner (ed.), *Rhodesia: Economic Structure and Change* (Pretoria, Africa Institute, 1976), 171.

⁷³ Rhodesia, *Parliamentary Debates, Fourth Session, Eleventh Parliament comprising the period from 13th August, 1968 to 27th September, 1968*, LXXII, 3 Sept. 1968, 985-986.

Rhodesian Government had created its own civil aviation company, Air Rhodesia Corporation, which started operations on 1 September 1967. It commenced operations with a fleet of five Vickers Viscount 700D aircraft and three Douglas DC 3 aircraft. In the first ten months of its operation from 1 September 1967 to 30 June 1968, the new airline introduced six return services between South Africa and Rhodesia, one of these being a new direct service linking Johannesburg and Victoria Falls. It also introduced an additional service linking Salisbury and Blantyre.⁷⁴

From its formation until 1980 when Zimbabwe attained independence, Air Rhodesia operated under very difficult conditions. As a result of the 1965 Unilateral Declaration of Independence the international community ostracized, and imposed sanctions on, Rhodesia. Therefore, acquiring new aircraft and spare parts became difficult. As a result the airline, like other sections of the Rhodesian industrial economy, had to rely on sanctions-busting to keep operating.⁷⁵ Furthermore, some of the more profitable routes were closed as part of the anti-UDI campaign. Notable among these were the routes to East Africa, Zambia and Mauritius. Air Rhodesia was restricted to domestic routes and routes to countries remaining friendly to Rhodesia: Malawi, South Africa, Mozambique and Angola. Many airlines which had used Salisbury airport prior to UDI, among them BOAC, BEA and Alitalia, stopped their flights to Rhodesia in early 1966 as part of the sanctions campaign. Only South African Airways (SAA) and the Portuguese airline *Transportes Aereos Portuguese* (TAP) continued to fly into Rhodesia.⁷⁶ The airline was also adversely affected by the shortage of aviation fuel which now also had to be obtained through clandestine means. This shortage was worsened after 1973 when the oil-producing countries (OPEC) artificially raised the price of crude oil, increasing Rhodesia's oil import bill sharply. In 1975 Air Rhodesia lost its routes to Mozambique when the FRELIMO government took over after the withdrawal of the Portuguese colonial authorities and decided to enforce sanctions against Rhodesia fully. In the 1970s, the airline was further adversely affected by the escalating war of liberation, particularly by the loss of two Viscount aeroplanes on 3 September 1978 and 12 February 1979 to guerrilla firepower. Furthermore, the unsatisfactory security situation discouraged tourism which led to a decline in the volume of tourist traffic and, therefore, of airline revenue. Indeed, according to Zhande, some Air Rhodesia offices in South Africa had to be closed because

⁷⁴ Air Rhodesia, *First Ann. Rep., 1968: Rep. for the Year 1st July 1967 to 30th June 1968* (Salisbury, Air Rhodesia, 1968).

⁷⁵ For the events surrounding UDI, the imposition of sanctions and their impact, see Ministry of Finance, *Economic Survey of Rhodesia, 1965-1979* (Salisbury, Govt. Printer, 1979) and E. Schmidt, 'Sanctions Fact Sheet: Lessons from Rhodesia' (Harare, unpubl., 1986).

⁷⁶ Wetmore and Mason, 'Transport and power', 173.

of the lack of business and some domestic routes were closed because of the deteriorating security situation.⁷⁷

In view of the above problems it is remarkable that the airline managed to remain a profitable concern. The revenue and expenditure figures of Air Rhodesia shown in Table 1 indicate that the airline operated profitably despite the constrained circumstances within which it had to function.

Table 1

AIR RHODESIA: REVENUE AND EXPENDITURE, 1968-74

Period	Revenue (R\$'000)	Expenditure (R\$'000)	Operational profit (R\$'000)
1968	3 942	3 632	310
1969	5 079	4 499	580
1970	6 182	4 824	1 358
1971	6 522	5 429	1 093
1972	7 127	6 068	1 059
1973	7 375	6 869	506
1974	9 446	9 050	396
1975	13 670	13 327	343
1976	14 309	14 114	195
1977	16 548	15 865	683
1978	17 420	16 936	484
1979	19 196	19 887	-691

Source: Compiled from Air Rhodesia, *Ann. Repts* (Salisbury, Air Rhodesia, 1968 to 1979), and Air Zimbabwe, *Twelfth Ann. Rep. 1979* (Salisbury, Air Zimbabwe, [1980]).

In April 1973 the airline added three large, fuel-efficient Boeing 720s to its fleet, increasing the seating capacity of its fleet by 15.6 per cent.⁷⁸ In 1977 Air Rhodesia recorded a profit of \$194 550, a figure higher than that of 1968 before the security situation and sanctions had had a significant impact on the aviation industry.⁷⁹ This remarkable performance was made possible by aggressive advertising by the airline to drum up tourist business in South Africa and other places, by the expansion of holiday package tours such as the Flame Lily, Skycoast and Fiesta tours, and because of the absence of any competition as most other airlines had ceased flying into Rhodesia soon after UDI.⁸⁰

During this period the government invested large amounts of money into improving airport and aerodrome facilities throughout the country.

⁷⁷ Zhande, 'Towards the History of Commercial Civil Aviation in Zimbabwe', 22.

⁷⁸ Wetmore and Mason, 'Transport and power', 173, and Zhande, 'Towards the History of Commercial Civil Aviation in Zimbabwe', 20.

⁷⁹ Zhande, 'Towards the History of Commercial Civil Aviation in Zimbabwe', 21.

⁸⁰ *Ibid.*, 20.



One of Air Rhodesia's Boeing 720s

Source: Bill Sykes.

New aerodromes were constructed at Buffalo Range, Victoria Falls and Wankie National Park while the runway at Fort Victoria aerodrome was lengthened. The runway at Salisbury airport was extended, making it one of the longest civil airport runways in the world. The runway at Bulawayo airport was also extended.⁸¹ To accommodate the rapidly increasing passenger traffic at Salisbury airport, the government constructed a separate domestic terminal, reserving the old terminal for international passengers. The transit lounge in the international terminal was expanded, increasing the capacity of the lounge from 250 to 500 passengers.⁸²

Despite these praiseworthy efforts, by the end of the 1970s the airline was suffering from the combined effects of sanctions, the liberation war and the higher fuel costs. In 1979 the airline recorded its first operational loss since its creation in 1967.⁸³ It is likely that the airline would have had to face even more severe problems in the future if the Lancaster House Agreement had not ended the war in 1979 and prepared the way for the independence of Zimbabwe in 1980. With the ending of sanctions and the liberation war the reconstituted airline, now renamed Air Zimbabwe, entered a new phase in its development.

⁸¹ Wetmore and Mason, 'Transport and power', 173.

⁸² *Ibid.*, 176.

⁸³ Air Zimbabwe, *Twelfth Ann. Rep.* 1979, 1.