

THE HUNYANI DISASTER

A compilation of newspaper reports

On the evening of 3 September 1978 Rhodesians were shocked by the news that terrorists of Joshua Nkomo's ZIPRA had shot down a Rhodesian Viscount airliner, the "Hunyani", using a Soviet-made Sam-7 missile. The airliner, carrying 52 passengers and 4 crew members vanished from radar screens five minutes after its 5.05 p.m. takeoff from Kariba airport. Almost immediately a distress signal was received to the effect that the engines had failed. The aircraft crashed near the northern border with Zambia in the Urungwe Tribal Trust Land, 40 km south-east of Kariba Dam. Eighteen people survived the crash.

The crash itself was shocking news, but the fate that awaited some of the survivors was to cause a wave of revulsion throughout Rhodesia. The following are newspaper reports of the event and aftermath.

SHOT AT POINT BLANK RANGE

5 September 1978, Herald Reporters

Ten "shocked and numbed" survivors of the Air Rhodesia Viscount disaster were ordered to their feet by terrorists in the vicinity of the crash and shot dead at point blank range, Combined Operations Headquarters said in a statement last night.

Eyewitness reports proved that 18 of the 52 passengers had survived the crash and were alive and well at 5.45 p.m. on Sunday, the report said.

Of these, five left through thick bush to seek help from local tribespeople and 13 remained close to the aircraft. Terrorists later approached the scene and ordered the shocked and numbed survivors to their feet.

The terrorists then opened fire with Communist-made Kalashnikov assault rifles and 10 of the passengers - as yet unnamed, but six known to be women - died in a hail of fire.

The three who survived the massacre were named as Mr. and Mrs. H. Hansen and Mr. A. Hill. They are in Kariba hospital suffering from nothing more serious than numbed feet, following the impact (of the plane as it hit the ground).

Combined Operations Headquarters were unable last night to name the terror victims.

Named

The five who made their way to nearby kraals were named as Mr. and Mrs. Hargreaves, Mrs. Sharon Coles, four-year-old Tracey Coles and Dr. C. MacLaren. They were at the Andrew Fleming Hospital in Salisbury by nightfall yesterday. Dr. MacLaren was discharged soon after arrival. A spokesman for the hospital said it remained to be seen whether the others would spend the night at the hospital.

The Combined Operations statement went on: "Security force members on arriving at the scene of the crash this (yesterday) morning said a starboard engine appeared to have exploded and the starboard external side of the plane was heavily scorched. The terrorists looted the plane."

The wreckage of what appeared to be the missing plane was spotted by the pilot of an Air Force Dakota, who said there was no sign of survivors.

Anxious

At Kariba airport 26-year-old Mr. Andrew Mace anxiously awaited news of the fate of his sister Alison (28), her husband Mr. Ronald Vermeulen, Mr. Vermeulen's parents, Mr. and Mrs. P.K. Vermeulen of Gatooma, and the elder Mrs. Vermeulen's sister and husband who were visiting Rhodesia from Scotland.

After a short discussion with military personnel who had come off one of the Dakotas in search of the wreck Mr. Mace indicated to a reporter he had been told there was little likelihood of any survivors.

His relatives were not among the survivors.

Also keeping vigil at the airport was Mr. Howard Coles, manager of a Kariba hotel, whose wife Sharon and four-year-old daughter Tracey were on the flight. Tracey was discharged from the Andrew Fleming Hospital in Salisbury last night while her mother was detained there. Her condition was said to be satisfactory.

At 12.10 Air Rhodesia announced officially that the wreck had been found and that a helicopter had been sent for a closer look after the plane had been spotted from a fixed-wing aircraft...

The Viscount had been missing since it took off from Kariba for Salisbury at about 5 p.m. on Sunday, carrying 52 passengers and four crew. First eyewitness accounts of the wreck were that it appeared to be completely burnt out. Paratroops and para-medics were dropped on the crash site, which is in an area heavily infested with terrorists.

An Air Force pilot who flew over the wreck said that the only identifiable part of the plane was its tail. His impression was that the pilot had tried to land in a 400 m. patch of comparatively open bush and that, while attempting to put the plane down, hit a gully. The Viscount apparently broke up on impact.

The man in charge of operations was Karoi Police Superintendent Paul Bedingham, working from an airfield about 12 km. south of Karoi. Before noon six small Police Reserve planes, two Air Force planes and four helicopters operated from this base.

THREE DESCRIBE A NIGHT OF TERROR

Herald Reporter, Gavin Lindsell-Stewart, Kariba

Survivors of the Air Rhodesia Viscount crash told journalists in Kariba yesterday of their night of terror in the remote Urungwe Tribal Trust Land. Mr. Anthony Hill (39), Mr. H. Hansen (35) and his wife, Diana (31), three of the survivors who are recovering from lacerations and bruises in Kariba hospital, described their escape from the aircraft wreckage and how they and 15 others who survived were faced by about nine terrorists.

Mr. Hill said the first signs of anything wrong was a big explosion in the plane. "The whole plane shook" he said. Flames from the starboard engine were pouring past the windows immediately the aircraft started a deep dive.

Last Words

He said passengers were instructed to fasten their seat belts and put their heads between their knees.

The last words from Captain Hood were to tell the passengers to brace themselves for impact.

"Then we hit the deck. The plane broke up." The survivors said that only the tail section of the aircraft remained relatively intact but that the front section "virtually disintegrated."

Mr. Hill said he saw a bit of daylight through a hole in the tail section in which he and a few other passengers were trapped.

"I enlarged the hole. This is where I got most of my cuts We started getting everyone out. We moved everyone about 100 metres away. The section we were in was alright."

Later three of them went back to the plane to collect clothing and blankets for the more seriously injured.

Then they heard the voices of Africans talking. They turned round to find themselves face to face with a group of terrorists.

The terrorists told the survivors that they would bring them help and water. They then instructed the survivors to assemble at a point a few metres away from the wreckage.

The terrorists were told that some of the injured were unable to walk whereupon the terrorists told the able-bodied men to carry those who could not move.

A few moments later one of the terrorists said: "You have taken our land." They then opened fire from about 15 metres. The terrorists were speaking to the survivors and among themselves in English.

"We ran," said Mr. Hill. "They kept firing at us until we ducked behind a ridge."

In Hiding

The survivors stayed in hiding for about two hours. Then the terrorists came back. They raided the aircraft wreckage, looting suitcases that were strewn around while the survivors, hidden in the nearby bush, watched in horror as the terrorists made off "with their hands full", said Mrs. Hansen.

Mr. Hansen is sure he heard a terrorist's bayonet as he drove it several times into the body of a seriously injured survivor who was killed in the first sustained burst of automatic gunfire two hours previously.

Mrs. Hansen said: "They were terribly brutal. They took everything." She added that the survivors had spent an extremely cold night in the bush.

Among the survivors was Dr. C. MacLaren who led a group of survivors in the direction of a nearby village to get water. Most of them were not seriously injured.

A security force spokesman who was a member of an aircraft crew first on the scene said that it seemed

that the group of survivors that were shot were in an area of about 10 metres square.

Girls shot

He said that one of the survivors had torn off her dress to make bandages for the more seriously injured. Among the survivors shot dead were two young girls aged 11 and 4. The shooting took place at 5.45 p.m. The spokesman described the terrorist action as "completely nonsensical."

Neither the Department of Civil Aviation nor the Air Force have ruled out the possibility that the airliner was hit by a heat-seeking missile. The bush fire started by the crash travelled for about 9 kilometres before burning itself out.

Survivors estimate it was about five minutes between the explosion and impact with the ground. "It felt as if the plane would break up before we hit. It was going at a hell of a speed." Mr. Hill said.

CAPTAIN AND CREW

The Viscount was commanded by Captain John Eric Courtenay Hood (36), who was born in Bulawayo and educated at Allan Wilson School. Captain Hood, who has two daughters, aged 10 and three, from a previous marriage, recently remarried. His wife's name is Diana.

Captain Hood joined Central African Airways in 1961 as a traffic assistant and became a pilot in 1966 when he gained his commercial licence. In 1967 he gained his airline transport pilot's licence and in 1968 converted to Viscounts.

He was put in temporary command of DC-3s in 1969 and in 1970 was put in command of Viscounts. He also served with the Rhodesian Air Force on a voluntary basis. He had clocked about 8,000 flying hours.

First Officer Garth George Beaumont (31) was born in Florida, South Africa and was educated in Rhodesia at Plumtree School. He was single. In 1947 he joined Air Rhodesia with a commercial pilot's licence and converted to Viscounts. The same year he gained his airline transport pilot's licence. First Officer Beaumont had clocked about 4,000 hours.

Air Hostess Miss Dulcie Esterhuizen (21), was born in Bulawayo and attended Northlea School. She previously worked for Rhodesia Railways and a finance house in Bulawayo. The other air hostess, Miss Brenda-Ann Louise Pearson (23) was born in Salisbury and went to Marandellas High School.

NEWLYWEDS TELL OF CRASH NIGHTMARE

Herald Reporter Clare Platts

The newlyweds who escaped Sunday night's aircrash yesterday told how people panicked on the plane as it started to crash, and how one man rushed around shouting for a fire extinguisher.

Shannon and Robert Hargreaves, who have been married for just over a week and come from Hunter's Road, spent their honeymoon in Kariba. Mr. Hargreaves (28) works for Risco.

Mr. Hargreaves described yesterday the events leading to the crash landing and their subsequent rescue.

"I had ordered a vodka and tonic from the hostess and she was about to serve the people in the seats in front of us. I told Shannon (18) to take a last look at Kariba and suddenly there was a noise as if we had dropped into an air pocket."

In Flames

"The engine on our side, nearest the plane, burst into flames, and bits of metal were flying past the windows. We could feel the heat of the flames. Shannon was staring at the flames in horror, so I drew the curtain closed and told her to put her head between her knees and hold her ankles.

People were panicking on the plane and one man rushed past me shouting for a fire extinguisher. I felt the impact and the sand all over me and saw the plane break up. After that I remember nothing until I got outside."

Mrs. Hargreaves said her husband had been flung out of his seat and was screaming for her. She shouted to him to get out and found she herself was trapped between two seats and could not move.

"It was only when I heard Dr. MacLaren shouting at Mrs. Cole to release her seat belt that I realised this was why I could not get out. Dr. MacLaren helped me out and Robert crawled out."

With Dr. MacLaren, Mrs. Cole, and her daughter Tracey, the Hargreaves walked to a nearby village where they were, after some hesitation, given water.

Tracers

Just as they were about to return to the crash site with water for the other survivors they saw tracer bullets go over the village and heard gunfire.

"I thought it was the ammunition from peoples' personal weapons in the plane exploding in the heat," said Mrs. Hargreaves. Not realising what had happened, they continued towards the plane until, after shouting out to the other survivors, only an African voice replied, saying "Come here."

"They then opened up on us," said Mr. Hargreaves. "I grabbed Shannon and we ran to a ditch where we spent the night. The ditch was damp and we were frozen all night, and our injuries started to ache," said Mrs. Hargreaves.

She is suffering from very bad bruising and one of her knuckles was protruding through the skin. Mr. Hargreaves hurt his neck in the crash and could not move it. He also had bad cuts and scratches, especially on his feet.

"In the morning," he said, "we moved up to a higher point where we hid between rocks and slept for a while. At 10.30 a.m. we decided to take our chances and find help."

Mrs. Hargreaves said they passed a school which had a signpost towards the road, and on the way met a lot of tribespeople who did not want to help them. "Only one old man showed us a short cut to the road," she said.

"When we could not go any further because our bare feet hurt too much," said Mr. Hargreaves, "we sat down beside the road to try and make grass shoes for my wife and I. That was when the PATU trucks found us and we were lifted out by helicopter. We had seen planes, paratroopers and helicopters before and waved to them, but they did not see us," he said.

"None of us realised how bad our injuries were until we were rescued," said Mrs. Hargreaves, "but Sharon Cole was obviously the most badly injured."

Her husband said he would like to see the crew of the aircraft awarded medals posthumously as "they were fantastic and more worried about our lives than theirs."

PLANE 'YES'; MASSACRE 'NO' - NKOMO

Lusaka

Rhodesian terrorist leader Mr. Joshua Nkomo said yesterday his men brought down the Rhodesian airliner near Kariba at the weekend, but denied that his men killed 10 survivors on the ground.

Mr. Nkomo, co-leader of the Patriotic Front alliance with Mr. Robert Mugabe, said the Air Rhodesia Viscount aircraft was brought down because the planes flying to Kariba on ostensibly civilian flights were being used for ferrying troops and military supplies to the Kariba lakeside area, on the border with Zambia where Mr. Nkomo is based, Iana-Reuter reports.

Mr. Nkomo declined to say how the aircraft had been brought down. Only eight of the 56 people aboard survived.

"We brought that plane down, but it is not true that we killed any survivors," Mr. Nkomo said. "The Rhodesians have been ferrying military personnel and equipment in Viscounts and we had no reason to believe that this was anything different," he said.

He said his ZIPRA (Zimbabwe People's Revolutionary Army) was "not interested in killing civilians, but when people start using civilian aircraft how do you know when the plane is up there? The Rhodesians should know this is a military zone," he said.

Mr. Nkomo said it was tragic that there had been a massive outcry in the West because white civilians had been killed.

Different?

"You forget that the regime kills 30 of our people a day. So the life of a black person is different from a white person? Any European child is supposed to be worth a million blacks," Mr. Nkomo said. "As far as we are concerned we were bringing down an aircraft that's being used to ferry military personnel and equipment," he continued.

Asked if the reported downing of the plane marked a turning-point in the six-year-old war he said: "We have said that it is going to be intensified every day, we will make it much more bitter."

PILOTS HORRIFIED BY 'INHUMANITY'

Herald Correspondent, Cape Town

Airline pilots throughout the world are horrified by the "barbarism and inhumanity" of the terrorist

attack on the survivors of the Rhodesian air crash on Sunday, according to Captain J. Hippert, regional vice-president of the International Federation of Airline Pilots' Associations.

"No matter what its political leanings, no country can condone such uncivilised behaviour," he said. "To subject passengers to the horror of machine-gun fire after the trauma of a crash is inhuman."

Captain Hippert said IFALPA was the representative body for 70,000 airline pilots throughout the world and was dedicated to the fight for increased safety of crews and passengers. Rhodesia was a founder-member of the organisation. He said he had not been told the cause of the Rhodesian crash, but would travel to Salisbury to attend part of the inquiry into it...

(Headline missing)

From Political reporter Ronald Golden:

There was no evidence at present to suggest that the Viscount airliner which crashed on Sunday was downed by hostile action, Air Rhodesia said yesterday following a claim by Mr. Joshua Nkomo that his terrorists "brought down" the aircraft.

The airline's general manager, Captain Pat Travers, also denied Mr. Nkomo's allegation that planes flying to Kariba on ostensibly civilian flights were being used to ferry troops and military supplies.

He told a press conference Air Rhodesia aircraft had never been commandeered or chartered by the Government to carry troops, arms of war or ammunition. He said Mr. Nkomo's claim, which was made yesterday in an interview in Lusaka, that the Viscount which crashed was being used for military purposes was a "downright, deliberate lie."

Forty-eight people died in the crash, 38 of them killed when the plane plunged into the ground and 10 who were slaughtered afterwards by terrorists. There were only eight survivors. Mr. Nkomo denied his men were responsible for the butchery of the survivors.

Apart from the crew of two pilots and two air hostesses, the aircraft passengers were 17 males, 24 females and 11 children, and the cargo manifest showed that no freight of any kind was carried. Air Rhodesia operates in the same way as civilian airlines the world over. It is not engaged in any military operations, neither does it carry troops, arms, ammunition or supplies for this purpose.

He said no words of his could adequately portray the sense of complete horror and deep-rooted revulsion which was felt by the whole of Air Rhodesia "at the wanton, brutal and bloody massacre of 10 innocent and unarmed survivors, mostly women and children, who were bludgeoned, shot and bayoneted to death by a gang of unspeakable thugs."

Captain Travers said that while the investigation by the Department of Civil Aviation would finally determine the cause of the crash "there is at present no evidence to suggest the aircraft was brought down by hostile action."...

MISSILE WAS THE CAUSE OF CRASH

8 September, 1978

Sunday night's Viscount crash was clearly caused by a heat-seeking missile hitting the inner starboard engine, the co-Minister of Transport and Power, Mr. Bill Irvine, said in the House of Assembly yesterday.

Mr. Irvine said in a special statement to the House that this had become clear as a result of a preliminary investigation brought to his attention yesterday afternoon, reports Iana.

The Minister expressed his "utter disgust at the vile action of the Patriotic Front in shooting down an unarmed aircraft carrying civilian passengers, many of them women and children. The subsequent slaughter by the Patriotic Front killers of the injured and dazed survivors, who included defenceless women and children, was an action more barbaric than anything that can be read in the annals of Ghengis Khan."

Mr. Irvine told silent, grim-faced MPs: "The people of this country will not let these innocents go unavenged. Our security forces, black and white together, are at present hunting down the murder gang and I can promise the leaders of the Patriotic Front skulking in Lusaka and elsewhere that those who seek to ride the wind will reap the whirlwind."

HUNDREDS MOURN CRASH VICTIMS

Emotional scenes at services

9 September, 1978

It was an emotional, tearful occasion. About 2,000 people packed into Salisbury Anglican Cathedral of St. Mary and All Saints at lunch-time yesterday for a memorial service to the 48 victims of Sunday's Viscount air disaster and the subsequent terrorist murders.

Outside at least 500 thronged the cathedral steps and pavement and spilled into the road, standing in silent tribute to the dead, many of them listening to the radio broadcast of the service inside. The city was showing its grief. And its anger.

Attending the service were large contingents of uniformed Air Rhodesia pilots, hostesses and staff, South African Airways personnel, camouflage-clad members of the elite Special Air Service, and senior officers from most of the branches of Rhodesia's armed forces.

Also there were the Prime Minister, Mr. Ian Smith and Mrs. Smith, the co-Minister of Foreign Affairs, Mr. P.K. van der Byl, the co-Minister of Transport and Power, Mr. Bill Irvine, Salisbury's Mayor, Councillor Arthur Wilkins, and Air Rhodesia's general manager, Captain Pat Travers.

As the service ended, a white man outside lifted a poster above his head. It read: "PM Smith - Give Nkomo a message when next you meet him secretly: 'Go to hell, you murdering bastard'." Joined moments later by another man with a similar poster, their actions were loudly applauded.

When Mr. Smith emerged from the cathedral, he ignored the poster. As his car drove away, Bishop Burrough and the Dean asked the two demonstrators to remove their posters. The Bishop pulled one of the posters to the ground. The crowd's applause switched to booing.

"We want Smith to stand down," one of the white demonstrators shouted. "If he hasn't the guts to

stand up and fight, we have." There was more applause.

In spite of the Dean's efforts, the man shouted on. "I've been fighting for this country for a long time and I'm proud of it. I'm sick and tired and there's a lot of us who feel the same way. Let's get in there and bloody well fight!"

Alternating with the applause, there were boos from many in the crowd, mainly women.

THE SILENCE IS DEAFENING

9 September, 1978

Attacking those responsible for the Viscount crash, the Very Rev. John da Costa, Anglican Dean of Salisbury, angrily told the memorial service congregation yesterday: "This bestiality, worse than anything in recent history, stinks in the nostrils of Heaven."

The Dean said: "The ghastliness of this ill-fated flight from Kariba will be burnt upon our memories for years to come."

[This is the full text of his address:](#)