
October 2025



The Sentinel

Newsletter of the Rhodesian Services Association

I've been trying to go home my whole life

~ Chelsea Dingman, 'Psychogeography'

FROM OUR INBOX:

Did you know or work with Rhodesian Army recruitment officer, Major Nick Lamprecht? Please contact Jim Murray (email: bxbeaugeste@yahoo.com), if you can help. He is currently researching material for a novel; he'd also like to source a large operational map of Rhodesia.

A Condensed History of the Rhodesian Women's Service [RWS], 1975-1980

~ Sergeant Ilse Strydom 770356

Fifty years ago, the first 35 RWS started their two-week basic training course. This was to be an experiment - however, the success of the trial was astounding. I have written about our history, with references to actual letters, documents, and newspapers clippings. Both Captain Barbara Trow and second in command, Lieutenant Debra King, had input.

While I am willing to answer all questions, kindly do not plagiarise, copy, or use this article in any way, without my permission.

Ilse Strydom Atkins
ilseatkins@gmail.com

Humans are unfortunately warlike creatures, as is evidenced from the history of the world over the centuries. [While] the call to take up arms throughout the world has, in the main, been answered by men ... women have always been prepared to play their part in the defence of their homelands and have fulfilled an ever-increasing military role alongside their male counterparts.

Address by Mrs. P. Maclean to the third Passing Out Commissioning Service of the Rhodesian Women's Service, on 22 August 1979. This article aims to give an accurate record of the establishment and history of the Rhodesian Women's Service and to discuss its functions between the years 1975 and 1980.

History

4th August 1975 - 30th June 1977

In 1975, Army Headquarters suggested to Parliament that, to increase the availability of men being sent into combat areas, a uniformed women's service should be launched. On the 3rd June 1975, Cabinet approved the concept for a pilot scheme of 50 women to serve in administrative roles. Major Freddie Harrison (ASO2) from Army Headquarters was assigned the task of turning this unprecedented pilot into a reality. On 4th August 1975, the first 35 ladies (selected from more than 1,000 applicants for the pilot scheme) began their two-week basic training course, for eventual postings to both the Army and Air Force. Instructions included drill, weapons training, map reading, radio procedures, military structure, and the roles of



the Army and Air Force. The RWS proved to be very popular, with many courses exceeding the initial intake. The women needed a Rhodesian Certificate of Education (RCE), or higher, and to be aged between 17 and 50 years. An exception was made for women over 50 who possessed exceptional skills. With the success of the pilot scheme, the original proposal of 50 women was increased to 300.

These women proved more than capable of operating in fields such as quartermaster stores, military intelligence, medical and veterinary services, radio communications, administration, public relations, and even bomb disposal. It was, however, never the intention to send women into combat. From the outset, all RWS members were badged Staff Corps, wearing the red and green Staff Corps colours. Some women also sported the insignia of the unit to which they were assigned. For basic training, women were issued with men's combat uniforms, but not boots. Black lace-up school shoes replaced the enviable footwear of men, much to the chagrin of the ladies. The very smart 'Number 1' jacket and skirt was the same shade of green as the men, topped with the same shirt and tie. Normal daywear was a cream dress, black handbag, pantyhose, black heeled shoes, and a green hat. Later, the daywear uniform was replaced with a cream-coloured skirt to wear with the shirt, plus the green and red Staff Corps belt. Within the next few years, RWS members would serve in all 25 major divisions of the Rhodesian armed forces, or in units and sub-branches within those divisions. Collectively, the RWS was probably the most experienced of all the Rhodesian non-combat military corps.

However, as time passed, dissatisfaction began to grow within the RWS and this did not go unnoticed by Army HQ. A conference, held on the 21st December 1976, was chaired by Major General John Hickman (OLM, MC, Chief of Staff). Present were Lieutenant Colonel P. S. Grobbelaar (Adjutant General) and Major Freddy Harrison, plus 13 RWS members. This conference was destined to change significantly the nature of women's employment in the Rhodesian Army. The lengthy agenda was intended to identify ways to improve the life and function of the RWS. At that time, the RWS was widely perceived to be without direction or centralised command. It was felt that its effectiveness would benefit from bringing all female members under the command of a suitable and capable woman - one with initiative and drive. At the conference, it was mooted that the RWS should have its own directorate, with a female Commandant to oversee the running of the all-female unit. Moreover, no suitable contract existed for career-minded women in terms of length of service, pay structure, medical benefits, long service gratuities, and promotion opportunities. Accordingly, debate surrounded the introduction of a military rank structure for the RWS, increasing women's pay to 80% of the men's earnings and offering 1-year, 3-year or 5-year contracts. The Chief of Staff agreed with these proposals, but he particularly emphasised the need for an incentive to improve recruitment and retention. It was agreed that women should have access to relevant educational courses,

because some RWS members were employed in roles for which they were not formally trained. Additionally, women should be required to hold the same qualifications as men, whereby the minimum qualification had to be O' Level and not the original RCE. It was also felt that future recruitment and training of women would become the responsibility of women. Advanced courses were proposed, as well as an extension of the basic two-week course, to improve the quality of training. In retrospect, the aspirations of women in the Rhodesian Army were being heard and taken seriously. The agreed recommendations were taken by the Chief of Staff to the Treasury where, despite the considerable financial pressures facing the country, many were accepted.

1st July 1977 - 17th April 1980

This period was a major turning point in the history of the RWS. The Air Force and Army separated the training and administration of their new recruits. Those members of the RWS who were worthy of becoming NCOs were promoted. Sixteen RWS officer cadets were selected for the first officers' course that commenced in October 1977. Eleven very proud graduates were appointed lieutenants on the 30 November of that year. Lieutenant Barbara Trow won the Sword of Honour and was appointed Commandant of the RWS, to lead and maintain the Corps. The newly commissioned lieutenants were posted to either brigade or directorate level, as follows:

- Lieutenant Barbara Trow to AHQ and appointed Commandant of RWS and assistant to Army Commander
- Lieutenant Joyce O'Toole to Military Studies
- Lieutenant Alison Miller to G Branch AHQ and appointed GSO3 (SD)
- Lieutenant Pauline Triggoll to ComOps, appointed PSO to Commander ComOps
- Lieutenant Marianne Guerreiro to 5 Signals Son (R. Tp)
- Lieutenant Audrey Sanderson to Q Branch AHQ, appointed QSO3 (Mov)
- Lieutenant Mary De Vries-Wood to HQ 1 Bde, appointed QSO3 - Welfare (Repulse)
- Lieutenant Wanda Ackhurst to A Branch AHQ, appointed ASO3 (Pers)
- Lieutenant Jenny Maclwaine to Services Directorate, appointed STSO3
- Lieutenant Shane Bardo to A Branch AHQ, appointed ASO3 (PS)
- Lieutenant Jessica Brunton to Medical Directorate

Over time, new courses and relevant exams were introduced. The first of these was the RWS Assistant Drill Instructors' Course, in July 1977. Future courses included those in administration, pay, radio operator, and promotions, as well as two further officers' courses. Lance Corporal Ilse Strydom was sent to the South African Women's College in George, South Africa, to attend a three-month leadership course. Later, with Lieutenant



Trow promoted to captain, the RWS Directorate was established, with its own headquarters. Captain Trow appointed 2nd Lieutenant Debra King as her second in command. Newly promoted Sergeant Ilse Strydom became the drill instructor and Staff Sergeant Maggie 'Radar' Finch made up the fourth member of the Directorate. Functions of the new Directorate were to recruit, train and maintain the welfare of the RWS. The Directorate ran the third and last officers' course, presenting many of the lectures themselves, whilst inviting experts to deliver instruction in specific fields. All recruit courses (involving more than 100 women) from Intakes 1/18 (August 1978) to 1/22 (November 1979) were conducted under the auspices of the RWS Directorate. The Directorate also organised weekend training camps for purposes of retraining and familiarisation. It was also important to improve and maintain the general physical fitness of all members of the RWS. With this aim in mind, Lieutenant King and Sergeant Strydom were sent on a physical training instructors' course, where they were put through their paces by the toughest in the country. With most

of the proposals of the conference having been met, the RWS were approaching parity with men. As agreed, the basic course was extended beyond two weeks. Discipline improved and on 18th June 1978, the RWS opened its own mess for 'prayer meetings'. Camaraderie and pride grew within the service, which persists in the RWS diaspora to this day. The RWS were never intended to become involved in combat situations. There were however, some remarkable exceptions that will be chronicled in future writings. Lieutenant Audrey Sanderson was awarded the Defence Force Medal For Meritorious Service. Captain Nora Seear and Senior Aircraftman Edy Bennati (Rhodesian Air Force) were awarded the Military Forces' Commendation - Non-Operational.



By mid-June 1979, political and military pressures were being felt throughout the Rhodesian security forces. The RWS

Captains Joyce O'Toole, Marianne Guereiro, Alison Miller, and Audrey Sanderson

Directorate had promulgated all regulations and had standardised systems of appointment, and all promotions and postings had been accomplished. The Directorate was, however, now required to submit a service paper to Army HQ confirming the full integration of RWS members into their respective units. This implied the permanent assignment of all RWS women to the units to which they had been posted, thus making those units responsible for all matters affecting those female soldiers. In effect, such a move would place all RWS under the control of the men commanding all Rhodesian forces. The Directorate suggested that the RWS Corps become a branch of AHQ Admin again, with a staff officer in command. It was not long after that the RWS Directorate was disbanded and the administration was overseen by now Major Joyce O'Toole (ASO2) who had taken over from Major Freddy Harrison at Army HQ.

Independence

By 18th April 1980, it was all over. Rhodesia became Zimbabwe. The ZIPRA and ZANLA armies integrated into the new Zimbabwean Armed Forces. Like so many other Corps, the RWS ceased to exist. The unique spirit, pride and history, however, remains to the present day, inclusive of a love for a country that no longer exists. What started as an experiment of 50 women performing administrative work, turned out to be extraordinary chapter in the history of the Rhodesian Army. The RWS Corps and Directorate produced 36 officers from over 700 female soldiers. The women broadened their scope beyond the realms of traditional 'women's work', by becoming landmine experts, field medics, signallers, providers of pastoral care (via the Chaplains Corps), mechanics, and much more. They were all remarkable in their own right, creating an impressive, and unique history in the space of a few years.

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WAR AND REMEMBRANCE

RAF Bomber Command Memorial, London

The Royal Air Force Bomber Command Memorial is a memorial in Green Park, London, commemorating the crews of RAF Bomber Command who embarked on missions during the Second World War. The memorial, on the south side of Piccadilly, facing Hyde Park Corner, was built to mark the sacrifice of 55,573 aircrew from Britain, Canada, Australia, New Zealand, Poland, Czechoslovakia and other allied countries, as well as civilians of all

nations killed during raids. Queen Elizabeth II unveiled the memorial on 28 June 2012, in the year of her Diamond Jubilee.

History

Following World War II the legacy of Bomber Command proved controversial, with both legal and ethical arguments highlighting the indiscriminate nature of strategic bombing. During World War II, many military strategists of air power believed that air forces could win major victories by attacking industrial and political infrastructure, rather than purely military targets. Strategic bombing often involved bombing areas inhabited by civilians, and some campaigns were deliberately designed to target civilian populations in order to terrorise them or to weaken their morale. Although international law at the outset of World War II did not specifically forbid the aerial bombardment of cities, the scale of the destruction and of civilian casualties



proved to be a distasteful memory of the conflict. The controversy meant that an official memorial to the aircrews was not erected until nearly 70 years after the war.

An appeal was made for £5.6 million (equivalent to £8.4 million in 2023) to build the memorial, and funding came from donations made by the public. Musicians Robin Gibb (The Bee Gees) and Jim Dooley (The Dooleys) became key figures behind the appeal, working to raise funds and have the memorial built.

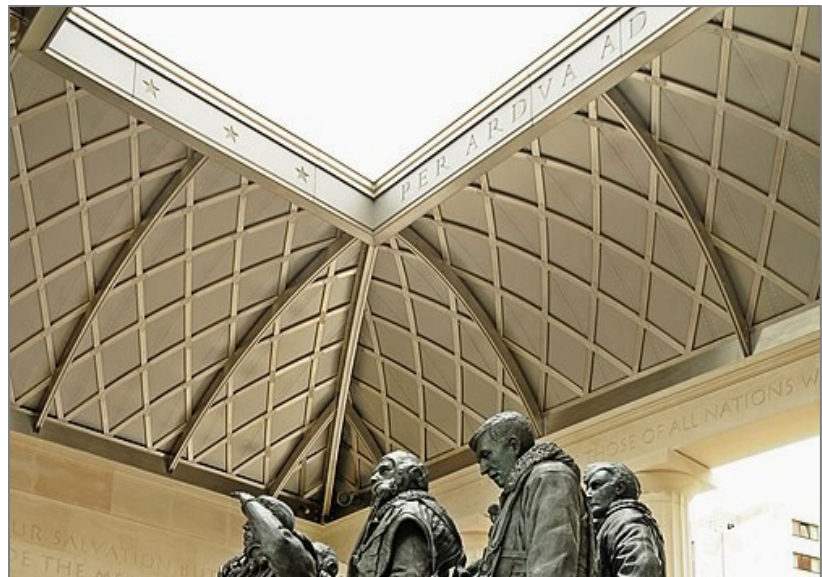
Design

Liam O'Connor designed the memorial, built of Portland stone, which features a bronze 9-foot (2.7 m) sculpture of seven aircrew, designed by the sculptor Philip Jackson to look as though they have just returned from a bombing mission and left their aircraft.

Aluminium from a Royal Canadian Air Force Handley Page Halifax of No. 426 Squadron that had crashed in Schendelbeke in Belgium in May 1944 was used to build the roof of the memorial, which was designed to evoke the geodetic structure of the Vickers Wellington. The Halifax, LW682 OW/M, had been removed from a swamp in 1997 with three of the crew found still at their posts. They were buried with full military honours in Geraardsbergen and the remains of the aircraft were sent to Canada. Some of the metal was used for the restoration of a Halifax in Trenton, Ontario, and the rest was melted down by the Bomber Command Museum of Canada in Nanton, Alberta. The Museum provided ingots for the memorial to commemorate the 10,659



Exterior of the memorial



Interior view of the memorial's aluminium roof

Canadians out of a total of 55,573 Bomber Command aircrew killed during the war. Furthermore, some of this aluminium was supplied to the International Bomber Command Centre, which opened in Lincoln, England in 2018, and forms the rear plate of its 'Additions Panel'.

On both walls inside the monument there are inscriptions that read:

THIS MEMORIAL IS DEDICATED TO THE 55,573 AIRMEN FROM THE UNITED KINGDOM, BRITISH COMMONWEALTH & ALLIED NATIONS WHO SERVED IN RAF BOMBER COMMAND & LOST THEIR LIVES OVER THE COURSE OF THE SECOND WORLD WAR

and on the opposite wall:

THE FIGHTERS ARE OUR SALVATION BUT THE BOMBERS ALONE PROVIDE THE MEANS OF VICTORY - WINSTON CHURCHILL SEPTEMBER 1940

The inside face of the architrave to the rear of the statues carries the inscription:

THIS MEMORIAL ALSO COMMEMORATES THOSE OF ALL NATIONS WHO LOST THEIR LIVES IN THE BOMBING OF 1939–1945

The large plinth carrying the statues bears the inscription:

HM QUEEN ELIZABETH II UNVEILED THIS MEMORIAL 28 JUNE IN THE YEAR OF HER DIAMOND JUBILEE 2012

The rear face has a quotation from Pericles's Funeral Oration:

FREEDOM IS THE SURE POSSESSION OF THOSE ALONE WHO HAVE THE COURAGE TO DEFEND IT - PERICLES

Source: Wikipedia

ROLL OF HONOUR

RAF Squadron Leader Ioannis

Agorastos 'Johnny' Plagis

DSO, DFC, Bar DFC (Netherlands)

~John Mansolas & Angelos Dalassenos*

John Agorastos Plagis was born in Hartley, Southern Rhodesia, on the 10th of March 1919. At the outbreak of World War 2 he tried to join the Rhodesian Air Force but was rejected since, because his parents were Greek, officially he was under Greek citizenship. The RAF at the time,



Photo: Greeksinforeigncockpits via Jill Plagis, colourised by Markos Danezis

desperately in need of pilots, could not be bothered with such minor details. He was accepted as a Greek citizen in 1940. He completed his training in January 1942 and transferred to No 249 Squadron, stationed on the besieged island of Malta. His Spitfire MkVb "GN-K" AB346, which left the deck of the aircraft carrier 'Eagle' on March 6th 1942 - four days before Plagis's 23rd birthday - was one of the first 15 aircraft of that type delivered to the island. During the next two months he would score the bulk of his victories in the savage dogfights raging over Malta.

He was awarded the DFC, following a transfer to another Malta Squadron, No. 185. He only had enough time to score one more victory before being evacuated to England for rest and recuperation due to a mental and physical breakdown. He resumed operational duties in September 1943, leading a flight in No. 64 Squadron, this time in Coltshall, southern England. Escorting bombers and flying armed reconnaissance patrols over occupied Europe, he succeeded in shooting down an Me-109 and a FW-190 from the cockpit of his Spitfire V "SH-B" BL734. In July 1944, he commanded No. 126 Squadron in his Spitfire IX "5J-K" ML214, with which he scored four more victories during July and August. In September, during the ill-fated Operation Market-Garden, he was shot down by flak over Arnhem. He crashed his Spitfire at high speed, but survived with only minor injuries.

In 1944, No. 126 Squadron was equipped with Mustang IIIs. He flew these until the end of the war, performing bomber-escort duties.

He continued to serve in the RAF and after a long period of rest in mid-April, he was posted to his home country, Rhodesia, taking command of a squadron until October of that year. Returning to England, he commanded two jet-equipped units, flying Gloster Meteors and other relevant types of the jet-era, until his retirement in May 1948. He then returned to Hartley, this time as a Rhodesian citizen, running a company of his own in Salisbury. There he built a house on a street that would come to bear his name, John Plagis Avenue.

Tragically, a few years later, John Plagis, the Greek / Rhodesian Ace who flew at least four different types of aircraft in combat, served in two theaters of operation with distinction, and earned the respect and admiration of his men, committed suicide. Another sad ending to a man no longer able to bear the burden of a war decided.

**John Mansolas & Angelos Dalassenos, former writers for the Greek magazines, Military History, Aviation History, and History Subjects*



THE LION & TUSK MUSEUM

~ Hugh Bomford

The Lion and Tusk Museum is now the only publicly accessible museum in the world covering the history of Rhodesia from 1890 to 1980.

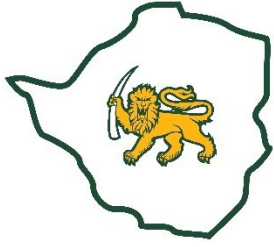
Our principal source of income is through Financial Memberships at NZD 25 per person per year. We currently have 1,030 Financial Members – if you are not one of those 1,030 you can join immediately by paying with credit/debit card through this link:

<https://thelionandtusk.org/home/membership/> or if you email theeditor@rhodesianservices.org Hugh can discuss other payment options. We have bank accounts in New Zealand, Australia, UK, Euro applicable, Singapore and we can manually process credit/debit cards. Maintaining and expanding The Lion and Tusk Museum is in everyone's interests, if this history is to be protected.

Looking for N.E. Chase

We have a Rhodesian General Service Medal that was rescued from a shop by one of our members. The medal is named to Rifleman N.E. Chase and we have a service record of Private N.E. Chase serving in a maintenance company, who is clearly the same person, as the service numbers match. The medal is damaged, and we are taking steps to repair it. We would like to find N.E. Chase, or his family, so that we can return the medal.

Please email theeditor@rhodesianservices.org, if you can assist.



THE CQ STORE

This photo shows some of the many lines of goods in the CQ Store and Reception area of The Lion and Tusk Museum. Trading through our CQ Store helps to fund The Lion and Tusk Museum, because ALL profits from our CQ Store go to the museum.



We predominantly sell goods that are made and sourced in New Zealand, Australia and the USA. We supply quality goods that are unique, and we strive to produce new products, so we recommend that you visit our website regularly when you are looking for something for yourself, or someone else. This is the entry portal from use the various links at the top of your page: <https://www.rhodesianservices.org/cq-store.htm> Take time and look through each link and we are sure that you will find interesting and desirable products.

To order from the CQ Store please email thecqstore@rhodesianservices.org or, if you can, come in and see what's on offer.

When you buy from the Rhodesian Services Association CQ Store, you are supporting the preservation of Rhodesian history through The Lion and Tusk Museum.

Rhodesian Fashion



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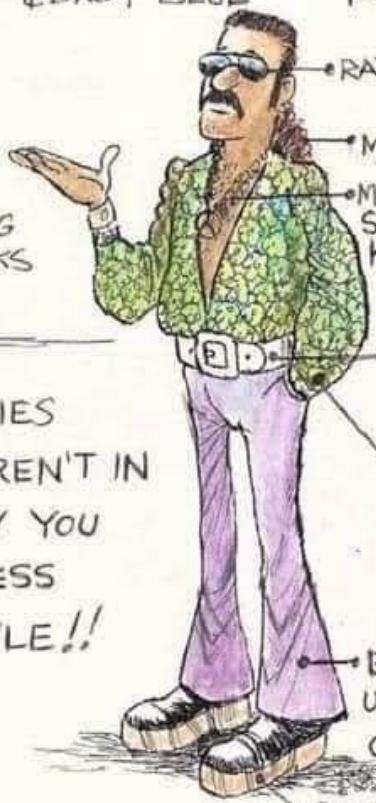
SCARF FOR SPECIAL OCCASIONS

PASTEL COLORS
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BATA BESTIES

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RAYBANS

MULLET

MR.T. STARTER KIT

WIDE BELT

FLORAL SHIRT WITH PUFFY SLEEVEES

BELL BOTTOMS USUALLY IN RED OR BRIGHT GREEN

PLATFORM SHOES



CLOTH HAT



SHORT BACK & SIDES

MADISONS

T-SHIRT

RUSAPE BOAT RACE 1976

LEATHER WATCH GUARD SHORT SHORTS

NO SOCKS

VELSKOENS

VIC KEMBLE 2013

This newsletter is compiled by Jackie Jackson for the Rhodesian Services Association,
jackie@rhodesianservices.org

To view previous newsletters, go to our [Archives](#)

Views, language, and information expressed in *The Sentinel* may not reflect current understanding, they are provided in a historical context.

The Lion and Tusk Museum is a collection of historical, cultural, artistic, and scientific information displays, videos, photos, and writings. These depict Rhodesia and Rhodesians of all races, from the late 19th century until the country's transition to Zimbabwe in 1980. Neither the museum management, nor its team of volunteers, have political, racial, or gender-specific agendas, and they unreservedly condemn any scandal-mongering misconceptions to the contrary.



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Postal: PO Box 13003, Tauranga 3141, New Zealand

Physical: Unit 10, 14 Portside Drive, Mount Maunganui, New Zealand

Web: www.rhodesianservices.org and www.thelionandtusk.org