

APPENDIX E

Pat Judson

PAT JUDSON was a Rhodesian-born pioneer of civil aviation in southern Africa and, at the time of his death, had flown more than 300,000 miles (480,000 km). The name Judson has, of course, other pioneer associations and it was Pat's father, Lieutenant-Colonel Dan Judson, who, then a lieutenant, was in charge of the first patrol sent out from Salisbury to help the Alice Mine in the rebellion of 1896. Judson's party joined up with a small relief force under Captain R.C. Nesbitt V.C. to form the famous Mazoe Patrol, an event he commemorated by naming his daughter Mazoe.

Dan Judson settled initially in Bulawayo, where his son Pat, christened Daniel Sievewright, was born on 16 March 1898, and then moved to Kirton Farm out at Heany. Pat attended St. George's but transferred to Milton as soon as it opened, becoming one of the school's first Beit Scholars by winning a junior scholarship in 1912. When war came in 1914, although under age, he was the first Miltonian to join the forces and was posted as a bugler to the 1st Rhodesia Regiment in German South West Africa where, not surprisingly, he was the youngest member of the battalion — and discovered that his father was the second-in-command. He graduated from bugler to motor cycle dispatch rider and, when the campaign had come to a successful conclusion, returned to Milton in 1915 until he had turned eighteen. He then went overseas and was commissioned into the Queen's Westminsters.

Already he had become interested in flying and he managed to arrange a transfer to the Royal Flying Corps; in a short time he was commissioned as a lieutenant and posted to the Western Front where he served as an observer — which he hated — and later as a pilot — which he loved. He was seriously wounded in 1918 but made a good recovery and ended the war with the rank of acting captain in the recently rechristened Royal Air Force.

He returned to Rhodesia in 1919 and went to study forestry at

Potchefstroom on the returned soldiers' scheme but, after trying it out for a spell on his father's farm at Heany, where he planted the magnificent trees that are still a feature of the place, he decided to make flying his career and obtained his commercial "B" pilot's licence at Baragwanath near Johannesburg. He displayed exceptional ability as a pilot and soon became chief pilot, subsequently flying manager, of the Rhodesian Aviation Company, the pioneer air charter company in Bulawayo. He was also the first acknowledged instructor in Rhodesia and amongst his pupils were the Fianders — he successfully learned to fly despite having only one arm and his wife, Audrey, became Rhodesia's first woman pilot.

During 1930 and 1931 Pat Judson made many pioneer flights to places that had never previously seen an aircraft: in July 1930 he surprised Lusaka by making the first ever landing there, using a rugby field and carrying the first commercial passenger to be conveyed to any part of Northern Rhodesia; a month later he made the first ever flight to Nyasaland where the previous air thrill had been Sir Alan Cobham merely passing over the then Protectorate; less than a year later he made pioneer flights to Maun, in Northern Bechuanaland, where every European within miles turned out to greet his arrival, and to Dar-es-Salaam, where, on his return from delivering a passenger, he beat his own postcard to Bulawayo by several days; in the same year he made the first flight to Port Amelia in southern Mozambique and was honoured by the Portuguese Governor on arrival. In October 1930 he made the first night landing in Beira: a Shell Company employee, Mr. Clarkson, had got lost on a hunting safari between the Buzi and Pungwe rivers and was assumed to be in a bad way; a search was mounted and, with no time to be lost, Pat landed on the small Beira aerodrome in the lights from cars — not knowing that Clarkson had already been found in an exhausted condition by a ground search party.

There were also the routine jobs: Pat flew a cabinet minister, W.M. Leggate, round the country and nearly persuaded the government to have a plane of its own as early as 1931; there were tourist trips over the Victoria Falls; government officials were carried to the remoter parts of Northern Rhodesia and doctors to cases in outlying districts. Pat never seems to have lost his boyish delight in flying and often took the opportunity to view game from the air. On one occasion he chased a herd of thousands of buffalo over the Tando plain in Mozambique and on another dived over bewildered elephants and lions — "I must have spent

half-an-hour chasing them”, he wrote, “it was great fun”.

In 1931 he was appointed a member of the Guild of Air Pilots and Air Navigators of the British Empire and it was only a few months later, on 20 November 1931, that he was killed in a crash at Salisbury aerodrome shortly after 8.00 in the morning. He was killed outright and his pupil, A.G.E. — “Jock” — Speight, died of his injuries the same afternoon. The exact cause of the accident was never determined: Speight, who was the son of the Solicitor-General of Southern Rhodesia and captain of the Rhodesian cricket team, already held a pilot’s licence and was merely on a refresher course in the dual-control plane. They had been in the air for less than three minutes when the plane suddenly nose-dived from a height variously estimated as between 50 and 100 feet (15 to 30 metres); the two occupants were thrown out and were found lying some six feet in front of the plane which was wrecked, its back broken, by the impact of the crash.

The accident caused immense shock throughout Rhodesia; not only was it the first in the country in which Rhodesians had been killed¹, but both Judson and Speight had been widely known and very popular figures. Tributes poured in and all activities, both sporting and social, planned for the weekend (the accident happened on a Friday) were summarily cancelled. The Bulawayo Chronicle referred to

two able and promising young men who, had they been spared, might have served their land, though in different spheres, in the same sound way as their fathers have done.

And in the Bulawayo High Court on the Monday morning, Mr. Justice McIlwaine asked for two minutes’ silence and remarked:

Tragic happenings such as these lead some to question the inscrutable ways of Providence; but the road of progress is only trod at the price of suffering and sacrifice. While we deeply regret the loss of these very fine young men, we rejoice to know that the rising generation of Rhodesians is worthy of the traditions of their race.

At Pat’s funeral in Bulawayo, the turn-out was said to have been the biggest ever seen and the same was true of Jock Speight’s in Salisbury.

After Pat’s death, there were many schemes for a memorial to his part in Rhodesian aviation, the most ambitious being a series of beacon lights to aid night flying. A cup for an annual air race on the Schneider Cup lines was also suggested but eventually it was agreed that a Pat Judson Memorial Cup should be awarded annually for achievement in

civil aviation. The Trophy awards were controlled initially by the Department of Civil Aviation until the outbreak of World War II, when they ceased. The presentation was not reinstated after the war due to a lack of competition and interest in civil flying. As a result Mrs. Judson, Pat's mother, approached Milton in 1951, and, as she put it, in order to keep alive some interest in the Trophy, offered to present it and a cheque for £225, the balance of the money in the Memorial Fund, to the school on the understanding that an annual essay or some other form of competition on flying would be arranged. Eventually the Trophy and money were made available to the Matabeleland Model Aircraft Club for inter-school competition although this arrangement did not long survive, and the Trophy then went to the Milton pupil constructing the best model aircraft each year, although in 1960 a special "Golden Jubilee Pat Judson Memorial Essay Competition" was held. Whatever the Trophy was presented for, the winner did not hold on to it, for it had been valued at £300 in 1951 and the solid silver cup, its top surmounted by a model of Pat's Puss Moth with turning propellor, remained in the Headmaster's study at Milton.

In 1963 the Rhodesia Division of the Royal Aeronautical Society began an attempt to reinstate the award on its original terms, for "Meritorious Flights" by pilots of either sex living in Southern Rhodesia. The Secretary, Stanley Guy, admitted that this might "present some difficulties, as what was regarded as a Meritorious Flight in the early 30s is now common place. However, certain flights have been made recently that could easily fall into this category". The Society contacted Pat's sister, Mrs. Mazoe Bovell, just a week, as it happened, after their mother had died, aged 88; as Mrs. Bovell remarked, "it would have given her great happiness . . . to have the cup handed to the Aeronautical Society and used for its original purpose". She was in complete agreement with the idea but, although Mr. Messiter-Tooze was willing to co-operate, he pointed out that, by the arrangement of 1952, the Trophy was now School, and therefore Government, property, and that he could not simply hand it over to the Royal Aeronautical Society. Finally, it was agreed that the cup would be loaned for the presentation ceremony each year and then returned immediately to Milton; the winner would keep a miniature, and this was to be manufactured by the original firm, Deakin and Francis of Birmingham, working from Milton's miniature; unfortunately this proved too costly and the R.A.S. settled for plain cups surmounted by a copy of the Puss Moth.

There the matter rested for nearly ten years until the R.A.S. made a new attempt to secure custody of the Trophy, by now awarded for “the outstanding contribution to aviation flying” in Rhodesia. The President of the Rhodesia Division, Mr. G. Pullan, wrote to Mr. Gracie in January 1974 that, “it is considered that, under current conditions, where the trophies² are in private custody for the entire year and make one brief appearance on a single night to an invited audience only, that this diminishes the intrinsic value of two extremely important awards to an unacceptable degree.” Mr. Gracie was sympathetic, but still bound by the Trust Fund set up in 1952 although, as the Trophy’s value was now in excess of \$5000, it was as he pointed out, too valuable for either school use or display and kept under permanent lock and key in the school’s strongroom. Correspondence with the Ministry and legal opinion finally cleared the way for the cup to be handed over to the R.A.S. on “semi-permanent loan basis” and, when it was presented in November 1974, it left Milton for the last time since agreement had been reached that it should be displayed in a specially constructed case in the International Terminal at Salisbury Airport. The arrangement still stands and the Pat Judson Memorial Trophy can be seen by all who fly into or out of Zimbabwe whilst Milton retains in its museum the original miniature — and the propeller still turns!

¹The only previous fatal air crash in the country had occurred some years earlier when two members of an R.A.F. flight, on their return from Cairo to the Cape, crashed and were killed at Gwelo.

²The Rolls Royce Trophy for outstanding achievement in aviation engineering was also held privately at this time.