



*A grainy picture of one of Fish Air's Rapides flying over Rhodesia's Eastern Highlands on its way to the Mocambique coast.*

*Picture from Jack Malloch's private collection. © Greg Malloch.*

# FISH AIR

## and the six different airlines it started...

**Back in the early 1950's Fish Air was started by two competitive truckers who were lamenting the lack of fresh fish as they dined together at a small-town, landlocked dinner table. From this inauspicious beginning, the idea eventually grew into not just one international airline, but six!**

At the beginning of the 1950's in the small Rhodesian town of Marandellas there were two trucking operations plying commercial goods between Salisbury, the country's capital and the growing towns within the mountainous Eastern Highlands. The two men who ran these businesses

were Jack Malloch and Jamie Marshall. They had both been fighter pilots for the Royal Air Force during the Second World War, so although they competed for freight contracts they had a lot in common and were friends. In addition to his trucks, Jamie also had his own little aircraft. It was an Engineering and Research Corporation (ERCO) Ercoupe. The Ercoupe was a small two-seater aircraft that had an unusual twin-tail, and, much to Jack's envy, Jamie would fly it out of a short grass airstrip right out of his own back yard.

One cold winters evening in early July 1951 Jack and his wife Zoe invited Jamie and Dorothy Marshall over for dinner. After supper they settled down to chat in front of the crackling fire. They always avoided talking about their respective transport businesses. Instead the conversation drifted from one general topic to the next.

Zoe, who was about to go on holiday to the UK, commented how she was looking forward to eating some real fresh fish when she would be in England. Enviously Dorothy lamented the sorry state of what little fish they could get in Marandellas. At the time fresh fish was being trucked up into Rhodesia from South Africa in tubs of melting ice. But as the journey from the sea was well over a thousand miles the fish were usually suspect before they even reached Salisbury, never mind getting to the little agricultural town of Marandellas. Jack and Jamie joined in the conversation. Being 'air minded' they suggested that it would make a lot more sense to fly fresh fish into the country. Theoretically at least, air freight could deliver fish to restaurant tables in Salisbury within hours of being caught.

Jack was enthralled by the idea. It was as if a light had been switch on in his head and he could see the whole business before him. It was a perfect opportunity and was just waiting to be exploited. He had heard of the rich fish harvests being caught off the coasts of Portuguese Angola and suggested that they could fly fish in from Luanda. Jamie, who was also intrigued by the idea took out an atlas. Looking at the distances, he said "let's try Beira, in Portuguese East Africa. It is very much closer...". Looking at the map Jack agreed. Portuguese East Africa (now called Mozambique) was just several hundred miles due east of Marandellas on the other side of the mountains. For the rest of the evening Jack and Jamie discussed the logistics, cost and possible profit of such a venture.<sup>1</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> *'The Inception of Fish Air', recollections by Jamie Marshall.*

Zoe and Dorothy didn't take it too seriously, but the two men were consumed by the idea and really believed it could work. A day or two later Jack and Jamie met again, and this time they broadened the idea into a general air freight and charter business. Based on the business opportunity they had identified, within a few weeks the two men set up a small partnership. To begin with they only had the small two-seater Ercoupe which wouldn't be able to carry more than one passenger and a few fish, so it was clear that they would have to get a bigger aircraft. But in the short term they decided to use the Ercoupe for individual charters to at least get the business off the ground.

At the end of July Jack had his first paying charter. It was to take a passenger from Marandellas to Fort Victoria and back.<sup>2</sup> Jack and Jamie gleefully worked out the profit they would make from the charter and when he got back, having completed the round-trip, Jack felt on top of the world. At last he truly felt that he was beginning to build a real career in aviation.

Having secured several more charters, within a month the business started looking viable and, with an obvious need for more capacity, at the end of August the two entrepreneurs decided to purchase a four-seater Fairchild Argus. Although the aircraft they bought had been made in 1944 it was a brand new 'crated kit' which had never been assembled or flown. The aircraft had been destined for the Far East, but by the end of the Second World War the crates had only got as far as Cape Town where they were left and put up for sale to the public. Jack and Jamie managed buy one of the last remaining kits.

The Fairchild Argus was much bigger than the Ercoupe. It had a huge high wing over the cabin and with its good lift was ideal as a 'bush' plane. It also had a very robust undercarriage that had been specially designed to handle large amounts of shock from 'unimproved grass airfields', This made it an ideal aircraft for the new charter business. After six weeks of careful assembly in the back of Jamie's garage the aircraft was ready and became the second of their little 'fleet.'

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<sup>2</sup> *Jack Malloch's personal flying logbook.*



*A Rhodesian Rapide preparing for take-off from a grass strip. Although the aircraft registration can't be confirmed the strip is very much like the one Fish Air used behind Jamie Marshall's house in Marandellas. © National Archives of Zimbabwe.*

With the Argus they were able to pick up more charters and the business continued to grow through the rest of 1951. Jack was restless though, and in early 1952 he was keen to follow up on the idea of flying in fresh fish that had originally spark the idea for the business.

To explore the possibility of this early one morning in mid-February 1952 Jack and Jamie loaded up the Fairchild and headed off, flying due east, to go and see if there really were fish on the east coast.

After clearing Rhodesian Customs in the town of Umtali they flew over the high, rocky Vumba Mountains and into Mocambiquan airspace. To the north they saw the little town of Vila de Manica, and about twenty minutes later they crossed the village of Vila Pery. Beyond that the landscape beneath them melted in the unbroken dark green of the vast lush Amatonga Forest. From there they flew down across the marshy grasslands of the Pungwe Flats, studded with large herds of wildlife. As they approached the sea the Pungwe river spread out into a vast swamp-land, widening into an island studded delta, which they followed to the open blue ocean. To the

north-eastern side of the river mouth there was a peninsular, on the tip of which perched the port city of Beira.

Beira airport in the early 1950's was a small airstrip adjacent to the golf course, and they landed there at about ten o'clock in the morning. Although early, it was already hot and sticky and Jack and Jamie had an uncomfortable wait for the Portuguese Customs officials who had to come out from their office in town to process the new arrivals. While the obligatory forms were being filled in Jamie asked the officials if fish were caught in Beira. The officials shook their heads. In broken English they said that all the fish sold in the city were actually caught down the coast and were flown in every few days by an enterprising Portuguese pilot.

When they asked about this 'pilot' the officials directed the Rhodesians to the 'Aero Clube de Mocambique' which was a small building at the other end of the runway. Inside Jack and Jamie found a little bar, and over ice-cold drinks asked the barman about this pilot who flew fish into Beira. His name was Lionel da Silva and by coincidence he was due back with his next consignment within the hour. Jack and Jamie decided to wait for him, and halfway through their next round of drinks, the barman pointed out the window.

A little Navium had landed and was taxiing across to the club house. The engine was switched off and as the pilot climbed out of the cockpit a van pulled up and immediately started off loading his cargo. The fresh fish had been carefully stuffed into four gallon paraffin tins that were crammed into every available space in the plane, leaving just a tiny compartment around the pilot's controls.

Walking over, Jack and Jamie introduced themselves, and were pleasantly surprised to find that Lionel could speak English. It turned out that he had been educated at St. Georges College in Salisbury. Having established their commonality, Lionel immediately offered to help, firstly by giving them a lift into town in the back of his 'fish van'. It was a smelly ride, but certainly cheaper than a taxi. They were dropped off outside the 'Savoy' Hotel, which at the time was 'the' hotel in Beira. The arrangement was that Lionel would meet them there later after dinner for a drink to chat about how they could purchase their own fish.

Unlike the towns in Rhodesia, Beira had a distinctly European flavour, with carefully planned streets lined by double-story Portuguese style buildings, many of which had parasoled coffee shops opening out across the neat, flower-boxed pavements. After the long midday siesta the shops and offices started opening up again as the afternoon sea-breeze began to take the burning edge off the tropical heat. The two friends started making enquiries at the various government departments as to what licenses, if any, they needed to export fish from Mocambique.

They immediately ran into a problem. It was not so much about the licenses, but more due to the fact that none of the government officials could speak a word of English. However after going to various offices they were eventually able to get across what they were looking for, and after much more debate and shaking of heads it was decided that as long as the fish could be classified as 'produce of the soil' there would be no need for an export license.

That evening Lionel arrived at the hotel and together they walked a few blocks down the main street to a street-side cafe where they ordered a round of frosted Mocambiquan Laurantina beer.

It turned out that Lionel owned a small property with his own fishing nets at a place called Inhassoro some one hundred and twenty miles south of Beira. He said he would be more than happy to sell fish to Jack and Jamie. They discussed a price, which seemed to be reasonable enough and which would allow a viable profit margin. Having got directions they agreed to fly down to visit Lionel's 'fishing spot' to collect their first consignment on their next trip. But first they needed to check what, if any, import requirements there were on the Rhodesian side.

That night the temperature hardly dropped at all and they had an extremely uncomfortable night, sweating relentlessly, while being eaten alive by swarms of large and voracious mosquitoes. Early the next morning they felt they had seen enough and decided to fly back to cool, comfortable Marandellas, taking one of Lionel's four gallon tins of fish back with them.

That evening over a dinner of real fresh fish fried in batter, Jack, Zoe, Jamie and Dorothy discussed the plan, and it seemed to be a very viable one. It seemed that the men could make money while doing something they loved – flying. Now they need a name for the business. Someone suggested 'JM Air', using Jack and Jamie's common initials, but before the pile of



*An aerial view of Paradise Island (Santa Carolina) lying a few miles off the Mocambique coast.  
Picture from Jack Malloch's private collection. © Greg Malloch.*

fried fish had been finished the name had been decided upon – with remarkable originality everyone agreed the business was to be called 'Fish Air.'<sup>3</sup>

Towards the end of March the Fairchild Argus was granted its Certificate of Airworthiness, and the very next day, after a few more charters in the Ercoupe, Jack and Jamie were back in Beira. They met with Lionel, and again, over a couple of Laurintina's, discussed the plan for flying down to Inhassoro the next morning. Before they got back to the hotel the drinks had evolved into platters of piri-piri spiced prawns.

Coming from a landlocked country Jack had never had prawns before and although the taste was unfamiliar, he liked them. A few hours later he realised that he was allergic to shellfish. He was violently ill for the rest of the night. Next morning he was still extreme weak, but insisted that they stick to the plan. Although he agreed not to pilot the aircraft, and instead curled up against the perspex, groaning with every bit of turbulence.

Lionel's directions were thin at best; "Take off from Beira and fly down the coast on a course due magnetic south. After one hundred miles you will see the beach again and very beautiful coloured water, which is Bartolomeu Diaz. The peninsular runs right down for about twenty five miles, then you will see some red sand cliffs and just past the cliffs you will see a little store near the beach. About two miles past the store you will see the landing field a couple of hundred yards from the beach sand dunes."

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<sup>3</sup> 'The Inception of Fish Air', recollections by Jamie Marshall.

Apart from the store there were no other landmarks, except for the endless unspoilt beaches that stretched for hundreds of miles down the length of the country's largely uninhabited coastline. If they missed the store, apparently thirty five miles south of Inhassoro, slightly north-west of the mangroved 'Ponta San Sebastiao' was the little fishing village of Vilanculos. As there was no road connecting Inhassoro to Vilanculos if they got that far they would have to turn back.

Setting off due south Jamie flew on a course that took them out over the warm Indian Ocean across a huge gently arched bay. Jamie noted, "...the route took us well out to sea, much to Jack's discomfort. After about fifty minutes we arrived at the mouth of the Sabi River, and flying over it we could see the water gradually clearing. Just as Lionel had said, we suddenly saw the most beautiful clear and incredibly coloured water that I have ever seen in my life. It was every colour imaginable, and was so clean and clear the sand under the water appeared to be exposed. On the seaward side it was sort of soapy Reckitts Blue, whilst on the lagoon side it was slightly darker, gradually turning to a sort of clear brown as the dye from the mangrove swamps stained the water."

With the remarkable scenery Jack had started to feel better, and by the time they had passed the Bartolomeu Diaz peninsular and had come across the 'red cliffs' and little store that Lionel had described he had almost fully recovered. Just beyond the store they saw a solitary wind-sock standing in an open patch of dried-out sand-vlei. This was presumably the 'air strip'. They made a couple of low passes to check the surface and to make sure that all was clear before they landed, bouncing to a halt near the wind-sock. As they opened the cabin door a beautiful cool sea-breeze washed into the hot aircraft, and the two men emerged, revitalised by the fresh ocean air.

As there was no sign of anyone they walked across to the beach where they found a little thatched shelter full of tubs of brine, presumably waiting for the day's catch. To the left and right there was nothing but miles of beautiful sandy beach with the calm blue sea lapping at the low tide line. There was not a soul to be seen anywhere and it really did seem to be a deserted tropical paradise.





*A massive 560 lb rock cod that was flowing into Salisbury by Fish Air in the mid-1950's when fish of this size were common along Africa's east coast. © The Rhodesia Herald.*

Looking straight out over the sea to the east they could see the long low outline of an island which they were later to discover was called Bazuruto. At its northern tip there was a slight rise, that was known as 'Ponta do Carlos'. This rise was surmounted by a lighthouse. To the south, between Bazuruto and the mainland was another little island, which was called Santa Carolina.

After about half an hour they heard the sound of an approaching engine and saw a battered old Ford half-tonner coming roaring down the beach. It was being driven along the sand as if it was on a main road. It squealed to a halt nearby and a burley figure climbed out. Jack and Jamie greeted the tanned European in their best broken Portuguese, but discovered to their surprise that he spoke English well, and was in fact not Portuguese at all, but German.

He introduced himself as Irvine von Eling.

How would a German ever get to discover

such a remote place as this, Jack thought to himself.

Irvine, who seemed to be in his late thirties, knew everything about the area, and certainly seemed to have been there for a long time. With his curiosity getting the better of him, Jack asked what Irvine was doing in Inhassoro and how long he had been there. Apart from the idyllic beaches which were only used for a bit of fishing, there didn't seem to be any commercial activity at all. Irvine considered the question for a moment. Then he said that he was researching the potential for commercial fishing in the area. Apparently he was studying the tonnage of fish

caught in comparison with the surf temperature, the wind, the time of year and the various other factors that might have a bearing on possible commercial fishing.

Before Jack could probe any further, a couple of tribesmen appeared out of the line of coconut palms just other side the line of beach dunes and approached the vehicle. Irvine quickly changed the subject announcing that Lionel would be landing soon so they needed to prepare the fish that where in the back of his truck. The men carried the fish to the tubs of brine where they washed and gutted them before rewashing them and carefully packing them into the four gallon tins. These were the same tins that Jack and Jamie had seen in Beira on their first trip.

Once the fish had been prepared and packed Irvine suggested that Jack and Jamie go with him to the store to meet the owner John Portella. There over a round of cold Laurintina they discussed the business of buying local fish. It turned out that John and Lionel were in partnership in the store and to a lesser extent in the fishing business. After a while Lionel arrived to collect the next consignment of fish and joined them for another round and more discussion. It was agreed that they would stay the night and take their first 'samples' back to Rhodesia with them the next day. The idea was to see how the consignment, which would be caught fresh in the morning, would travel. Jack and Jamie's plan was to have a large fish-feast for all their friends to check the quality of the fish and get some real 'consumer feed-back' to gauge the viability of the business. The next day the fish was caught, packed and flown back to Maradellas and served to the eager throng of 'testers.' They all agree, the fish was outstanding. The trip was a resounding success.

Between their regular charter work Jack and Jamie spent the next month gathering orders from several large hotels and restaurants in Salisbury. In mid-April once they had, what they considered to be a confirmed plane load, Jack went to collect their first commercial consignment.

Leaving early in the morning he flew from Marandellas to Grand Reef, where he cleared Customs. Then he headed out over the Vumba and across to Beira before heading south down to Inhassoro. The next morning after the fishing nets were cleared and the fish had been packed into their tins John and Lionel loaded as many as they could into the little aircraft. Jack paid for them with the escoudos he had exchanged in Beira and headed back for home. By the end of that afternoon Jack and Jamie had delivered all the fish to their various 'customers'.



*Fish Air's very first paying passengers, Margaret Geddes and her two sons, about to board the war-surplus Dragon Rapide 'Dog Fox,' at the start of their tropical island adventure.  
Picture provided by Guy Geddes. © Guy Geddes.*

It was a good feeling having made their first delivery but they had learnt a few lessons, the main one being that even the Fairchild was too small to make the service commercially viable, especially considering the distances involved. They needed a bigger aircraft. When they had been negotiating for the Fairchild they had heard about a couple of Rapide's which were on the market. They were at least twice as big as the Fairchild, and better still, Jack had recently qualified on the aircraft type through his Auxiliary Air Force flying so there would be no cost of conversion and training.

At the end of April Jack and Jamie found, and bought, an old DH89 De Havilland Rapide from the national airline, Central African Airways. It was a 'Dominie 1' model and was registered as VP-YDF which Jack and Jamie christened 'Dog Fox'.

Less than a month later Jack took it on its first flight to Inhassoro. After two nights camping on the beach waiting for the full consignment, Jack and Jamie returned to Salisbury where they delivered their fish, before flying back home. The customers were pleased. The fish was good,

fresh and affordable, and quickly the orders started picking up. In June Jack did three more flights to Inhassoro in the Rapide. The flight, which was on Friday the thirteen he managed to do the whole thing, including the delivery of the fish in Salisbury, all in just one day. It was more than seven hours of flying, plus all the stops, the refuelling and the loading and unloading.<sup>4</sup> But it showed that it was possible and it made a big difference to the profitability of the 'fish' flights.

The sea was a novelty for Jack and on the overnight flights Lionel invite him onto his boat to try catching some of his own fish. According to one of Jack's employees who commented on this later: "Jack Malloch would take-off late in the afternoon, fly down to Vilanculos in Portuguese East Africa and go out in a boat with a Portuguese helper to fish all night. In the morning he would load the aircraft and fly up to the old Salisbury Airport at Belvedere and sell his fish to hotels and other businesses. Then he would fly back to Marandellas, do any maintenance or servicing and sleep until late evening. Then he would fly down to Vilanculos to repeat the whole process."<sup>5</sup> While Jack didn't really do all the fishing himself, the hectic schedule and unconventional working hours were true.

To make up for it on a couple of the overnight trips Jack and Jamie took their wives along and soon the stories of their adventures in this undiscovered 'paradise' spread. Everyone they knew wanted to come along to see the place as well. With the extra passenger space in the Rapide they could take passengers, but accommodation was a challenge as there were no facilities at all at Inhassoro. So they decided to build some.

There was a grove of shady coconut palms just beyond the sand dunes south of John's store which was an ideal setting for some rustic palm-thatched chalets. Yet Jack was fascinated by the islands, particularly Santa Carolina which he had visited on a couple of his fishing trips. Covered with coconut palms and mangrove forest it had wide golden beaches and a little lagoon surrounded by rich coral reefs.

The long thin island was about two miles in length and on its eastern tip it rose up several metres above sea level to a rocky outcrop that looked out across the sparkling blue Indian Ocean.

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<sup>4</sup> *Jack Malloch's personal flying logbook entries.*

<sup>5</sup> *Personal correspondence with Alan Clements, 8 September 2001.*



*The first campsite on the Santa Carolina beach that Margaret Geddes set up with her two young boys.*

*Picture provided by Guy Geddes. © Guy Geddes.*

On the huge weather-worn granite boulders Jack found ancient Portuguese inscriptions carved deeply into the rock. These engravings were arranged around a large medieval cross and the points of the compass. It was a perfect story-book tropical island, with all the 'Treasure Island' charm and mystery that you could hope for. Best of all it was just a short boat-ride away and apart from a few passing fishermen no-one lived on the island at all.

So far Jack and Jamie had only taken their friends and family to Mocambique, concentrating instead on importing fish to cover their costs. But with all the stories of this beach paradise soon there was a growing demand for paying passengers.

At Salisbury's Belvedere airport there was an attractive young ground hostess by the name of Margaret Geddes who worked for Central African Airways. She had got to hear the stories of the unspoilt Mocambiquean beaches that Jack and Jamie had discovered. Just before the start



*Jack Malloch (left) with members of the Central African Deep Sea Angling Society appraising the suitability of Paradise Island for surf fishing. © Geoff Cartwright.*

of the school holidays she asked Jack what the options would be for her and her two young boys to spend a few weeks camping out on those Mocambiquean beaches.

Jack strongly recommended Santa Carolina and worked out a good price for the trip, which Margaret readily accepted. Suddenly the 'holiday' business started to look really viable as well. They could still get their profit from the fish, but it seemed that passengers would be prepared to pay for their fuel to get to Inhassoro to collect the precious cargo.

Early one morning a week or two later Margaret Geddes and her two boys set off for Santa Carolina where they planned to camp for the next three weeks. Exploring the island in the warm morning sun Margaret found a flat hard bank overlooking the unspoilt beach where they made camp. Guy Geddes, who was just a young boy at the time, described their stay on the island; "The temperature must have averaged around thirty degrees (Celcius) every day, and we spent

our time swimming, fishing, collecting coconuts and water. I was always the outdoor type and supplied all the fish. I never used bait of any sort, just a bright silver hook and line. The abundance of fish was absolutely amazing. I sat on the coral reef and watched them investigate the hook. Our main diet was 'Parrot Fish'. They were a beautiful turquoise blue colour and were fantastic eating."

News of the Geddes' adventure spread quickly and within a few weeks the Rhodesian Herald ran an article about Margaret, who they named 'Mrs Robinson Crusoe', and her adventures on Paradise Island. The article mentioned Jack's Fish Air service and it sparked a wave of interest. Fish Air suddenly had a long list of people who wanted exotic beach and island holidays. Quickly Fish Air shifted their focus to the much more profitable passenger and holiday charter business.

In addition to family holiday-makers who were so eager for seaside holidays with their children, there was also a huge market from fishermen who wanted to try their hand at deep sea fishing. To cater to this sudden and massive demand Jack and Jamie, with the help of their willing local contacts, quickly establishing a permanent campsite on Santa Carolina, built a string of beach side chalets at Inhassoro and chartered a large fishing boat for deep sea fishing from Joaquim Alvis the hotel owner from Vilancoulos.

With the increasing numbers of tourists arriving in the area Alves was soon able to expand his hotel and retail business into boat hire, camping trips and deep sea fishing, all of which did well as Fish Air continued to bring in more and more visitors. In fact to help keep up with the demand Jack and Jamie also decided to buy their own boat. It was a large 'cabin cruiser' with a comfortable inner deck and a broad open area at the back which was ideal for fishing.

In early May 1953 Jack and Jamie decided to increase their fleet by buying a second Rapide. With their growing fleet and growing repayments they decided it was time to get some media promotion. They couldn't afford advertising but they remembered how much business the 'Mrs Robinson Crusoe' article had generated, so they decided to give the 'editorial' route a try. They went to Salisbury to see the editor of the national weekly newspaper, the Sunday Mail. Jack and Jamie proposed that the newspaper sent a reporter and photographer to Santa Carolina to 'write the island up.' The editor turned to his lead journalist Flash Seaton and asked "Would you

like to go?” Flash jumped at the opportunity and within less than a week, with his trusted photographer Johnnie Rau, they were on their way.

Once they had landed in Inhassoro John Portella prepared a special dinner for the reporters. It was a traditional Portuguese dish of “...succulent, highly spiced fish, very oily, very hot but very tasty, washed down with Portuguese beer.” The next day Flash, Johnnie, Jack and Jamie took the cabin cruiser out to Santa Carolina, fishing along the way. According to Flash, “...we landed on the silvery shore, beneath the waving palms, and immediately put up the tent which was to be our home for two days as we braved the mysteries of the island. They were two lovely days, in which we walked and ate and slept, then walked again, then slept again, then opened the bottle for an evening chat around the camp fire, with the endless expanse of the Indian Ocean, stretching away for literally thousands of miles beneath the fabulous African night sky.”

Back in Salisbury he thought again of those gentle beaches with their silvery sand and the waving palms that edged the island. He recalled the myserteous old ruins, the shimmering ocean beyond the mooring line of the boat and the pink flamingoes standing motionless on the Bazaruto spit in the distance. His final article started with the words, “This is Paradise Island...” and it truly fired the imagination of the Rhodesian public. Business boomed and it seemed that everyone wanted to fly to paradise.

With the consistent demand Fish Air was able to establish a regular passenger service between Salisbury and Inhassoro while maintaining their domestic charter business. Inevitably they had to drop flying in fresh fish altogether. Jack gave up his trucking business and focused exclusively on building the airline and Alves was able to invest in more boats and equipment. It seemed that the tourism market had, quite literally, been established in a flash and the name Paradise Island, with all of its romantic appeal, stuck.<sup>6</sup>

By early 1954 Fish Air’s second Rapide, VP-YKJ, was getting a bit old and needed constant attention. In May of that year, when the ageing aircraft was being serviced yet again, Jamie had to charter another Rapide to fill the gap. It was a younger model, seemed to be in good shape and handled well. Best of all the owner was looking to sell it. A deal was agreed and in June Jack

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<sup>6</sup> *‘How I named Paradise Island’ by Flash Seaton, published by the Sunday Mail.*





***Ancient Portuguese graves on the tip of Paradise Island. Some dating back to the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries.***

*Picture provided by Guy Geddes. © Guy Geddes*

and Jamie bought the aircraft. It was registered as VP-YLF, which they christened 'Love Fox' after the last two letters of its registration. Fish Air now had a fleet of five aircraft. Yet they still only had two pilots. The truckers were becoming collectors and even though they were very busy they were losing sight of the cost of having unused aircraft sitting on the ground.

Reluctantly they decided it was time to start employing more pilots and to take their business beyond the little grass strip 'at the bottom of the garden'. There were many ex-RAF pilots in Rhodesia but not a great deal of job opportunities for them, so it wasn't difficult for Fish Air to find qualified and experienced pilots to choose from.

Quickly the increased capacity of the business led to increased demand. The almost daily flights to Mocambique and the charters around the booming Federation were keeping everyone busy. Yet many of the domestic charters were for just one or two passengers being either government officials or businessmen. It was expensive to use the Rapide's for this type of work so at the be-

ginning of October Jack and Jamie bought a second Fairchild Argus. That was aircraft number six.

With more pilots and planes, Fish Air had by now established itself as a recognised domestic charter airline and its Mocambique route to Vilanculos and Inhassoro had become a regular scheduled service. They were now flying the route several times a week, and with the ever increasing popularity of the destination Jack started to think about adding a route to and from Johannesburg to tap into the much greater tourism potential of South Africa.

With their growing success Jack and Jamie also felt they could afford to buy an old Tiger Moth biplane. It was not part of their commercial fleet, but was based at Jamie's 'Grasslands' strip in Marandelles just for their own use. The truth was they couldn't afford it and this all just added to their expenses which were beginning to accumulate.

Rhodesia's Central African Airways, who had initially ignored Fish Air, now began to regard the operation as competitive. They worried about how the little 'two-man' business had becoming an internationally viable service, within just a few years. Yet this wasn't enough for Jack. He wasn't content with just having Mocambique as his sole international route. He was planning for an inter-continental passenger and cargo service. In the mid-1950's many people still travelled from one continent to the other by ship, but it was slow. CAA and South African Airways were running an air service to and from London using their Vickers Viscounts. But Jack was interested in opening up a route from Southern Africa to the Far East.

One thing about Jack was that lack of money or resources never stopped him thinking big, and it was this ability that often enabled him to achieve big things. Things which most other people wouldn't even have considered.

The constraint was Fish Air's cash flow. Jack felt that if he could open up bigger routes he could make more money. The problem was having the money to open up new routes in the first place. This problem was compounded by the amount that they already owed. One of the biggest debts Fish Air had was their fuel account with Shell, which by mid-1954 was nearing half a million pounds. This was a massive amount of money at the time, and, quite likely an impossibility to pay off.

As Jack was becoming ever more ambitious his partner Jamie Marshall was becoming less. Jamie had always enjoyed flying and loved the adventurous holiday trips to the coast. But he

## TOURIST CLASS services



### HUNTING-CLAN AFRICAN AIRWAYS



## ON ALL HUNTING-CLAN AFRICAN AIRWAYS ROUTES

## It's paradise at *Paradise Island*



*Coconut palms and dazzling white beaches, perfect bathing and wonderful goggle - fishing in crystal-clear waters protected by coral reefs.*

*Outside the reefs, in the Mocambique Channel, big-game fish abound. It's an enchanting holiday for all the family at Santa Carolina (Paradise Island), Inhassoro, Vilanculos, Bazeruto and Magaruque.*

### Weekly flights from SALISBURY and JOHANNESBURG

by

## HUNTING-CLAN AFRICAN AIRWAYS

As seen in this late 1950's leaflet Hunting Clan continued to operate and promote Fish Air's old Paradise Island route after they had merged with Jack Malloch's regional service.

had his own well established business which he did not want to compromise for Fish Air. Jack had already closed down his other business. Fish Air was therefore his entire livelihood, and knowing the potential of the business he wasn't content to just work the Mocambique route, especially with the debt to Shell hanging over their heads.

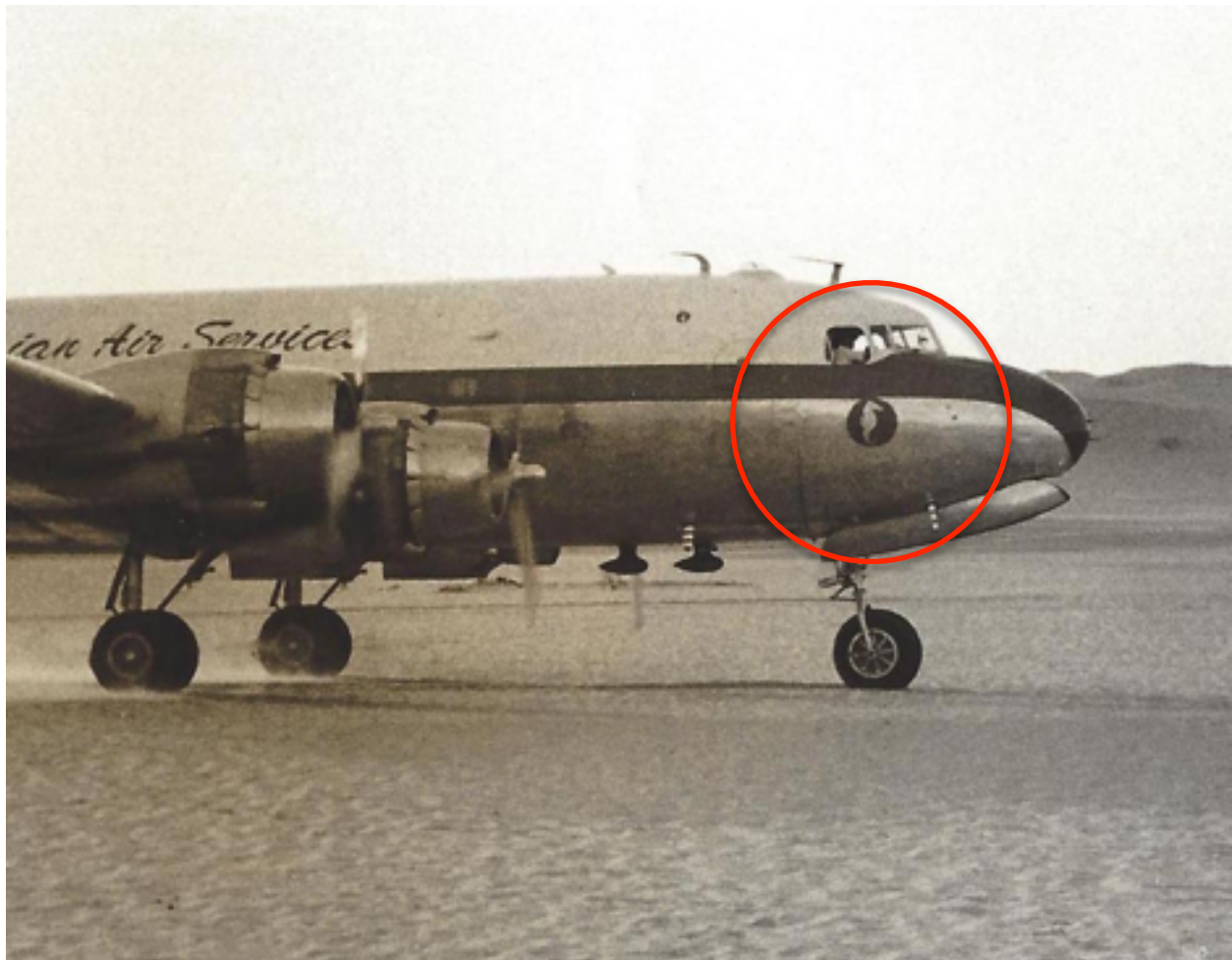
In August 1955 the two partners started discussing the problem so they could find the best solution that would work for both of them. Jamie was prepared to sell the business to Jack, but Jack just didn't have the money to afford it. He had spent the first year paying back his transport company debts and hadn't managed to save up enough to buy a fleet of aircraft, never mind the substantial good-will that Fish Air had gained.

Then an interesting opportunity arose.

Hunting-Clan, who had mostly passed through Salisbury with their York Freighters, wanted to increase their passenger services and their routes within Southern and Central Africa. To do this they establish a local operation based out of Salisbury. To get the local route licenses that they needed they approached Jack and Jamie and offered to buy Fish Air, along with all their licenses, their aircraft and their established business. Jamie was keen to cash out, and while Jack also agreed to the sale, for him it wasn't just about the money. He wanted it to be a stepping-stone to achieving his own vision of running a successful regional, or better still, international airline.

Hunting Clan were also more than happy to keep Jack on. He was a well known and reputable person and they wanted him to look after his old Fish Air routes for them. As they planned to service these routes with DC3's Jack saw the opportunity to get the aircraft conversions that he was wanting. It was a win-win for everyone, and in October 1955 the sale agreement was signed. Hunting Clan bought Fish Air. It was a 'lock, stock and barrel' sale for all the Fish Air's assets – and all of its debt, much to Shell's relief.

And so Fish Air was absorbed into Hunting Clan African Airways. Jamie Marshall went back to his trucking business and Jack Malloch joined Hunting Clan. He started on the pilot roster but within eighteen months transferred to their head office to learn the nuances of running an airline. There he learnt the intricacies of costing, scheduling and marketing before returning to flying



*Jack Malloch's Rhodesian Air Services DC-4 seen landing in the Yemeni desert in 1963 delivering weapons to Bob Denard and his Foreign Legion mercenaries who were fighting on behalf of the ousted King of Aden. Note the Fish Air seahorse logo painted on the nose of the aircraft. Picture from Jack Malloch's private collection. © Greg Malloch.*

duties as a DC-3 Captain. By about that time Hunting Clan decided to sell off the remaining old Fish Air aircraft. They were a pair of Rapides and a pair of Argus's and all four were bought by Air Brousse, a subsidiary of Air Congo. In June 1958 Jack led a long formation flight of his old aircraft across the vastness of the unchartered Congo delivering them up to Leopoldville (now Kinshasa) and Libreville in Gabon. There they continued to operate until well after Congo's independence.

At the end of 1959 Central African Airways, who was under severe threat from Hunting-Clan African Airways' popular and growing operation, lobbied the government and were eventually

able to have Hunting Clan's licenses revoked. This essentially killed the airline who formally ceased operations at the end of December '59 and relocated back to the United Kingdom.

At that point Jack Malloch found himself unemployed and, with little choice, decided to buy himself an aircraft and try to reestablish his old Fish Air routes to Inhassoro and Vilanculos. His friends at Hunting Clan gave him a very good deal on an old battle damaged World War Two Dakota, and that was the beginning of Rhodesian Air Services. Jack new air operation did well with both the Mocambique holiday business and charters for Katanga in the Congo. In 1965 after the imposition of sanctions again Rhodesia and the cancelation of their UK, Mauritius and Seychelles routes Rhodesian Air Services was forced to liquidate.

Saved at the last minute by an angel investor Jack established a new airline called Air Trans Africa and after a rocky start the business did exceptionally well, becoming the primary arms provider for the break-away state of Biafra in their war against Nigeria. After the defeat of Biafra Jack was interested in getting back into the passenger business so established Afro-Continental Airways and operated a regular scheduled service between Salisbury and Windhoek in South West Africa (now Namibia) until the middle of 1974 (see the article detailing the story of Afro-Continent Airways on my blog).

As Britain and the United Nations had flagged Air Trans Africa as a Rhodesia operation and were beginning to constrain its international operations, in 1975 Malloch established a new cargo airline based out of Libreville in Gabon called Affretair. This became his highly successful 'flagship' airline, though was followed by two others, Air Gabon Cargo and Cargoman, which was established in Muscat in 1977.

For all of these other airlines that Malloch established long after Fish Air had ceased to exist, it appears that he always acknowledge the importance of Fish Air as the genesis of his remarkable career in aviation. We see this in how he took every opportunity he could to integrate the Fish Air seahorse logo into all his airlines that followed.

Jack knew more than anyone just how significant that original dinner-table conversation was back in July 1951 and he continued to pay homage to it for the rest of his life. Considering that he had dropped out of school with no qualifications at the age of fourteen with nothing by a





*In the late 1970's Jack Malloch renovate a rare Mk.XXII Spitfire. This picture was taken early on the morning of Saturday 29th March 1980 as the crowd gathered to watch Jack's first test flight in the 1945-era aircraft. What many people missed was the Fish Air seahorse logo painted on the tail of one of Jack's Air Trans Africa DC-7's in the background. This was a full twenty-five years after Fish Air had formally ceased to exist.*

*© Rhodesian Air Force Photographic Section, New Sarum.*

deep, burning desire to become a pilot, his story reminds us of just what can be achieved with passion, dedication and a single-mind will to succeed.

Alan Brough has recently published Jack Malloch's biography which includes details of Fish Air and all six other airlines that Jack established. This book, 'Legend of the African Skies' is available on Amazon or directly from the publisher:

# JACK MALLOCH

## LEGEND OF THE AFRICAN SKIES



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