

= Military service of Ian Smith =

The future Rhodesian Prime Minister Ian Smith served in the British Royal Air Force (RAF) during the Second World War , interrupting his studies at Rhodes University in South Africa to join up in 1941 . Following a year 's pilot instruction in Rhodesia under the Empire Air Training Scheme , he was posted to No. 237 (Rhodesia) Squadron , then stationed in the Middle East , in late 1942 . Smith received six weeks ' operational training in the Levant , then entered active service as a pilot officer in Iran and Iraq . No. 237 Squadron , which had operated in the Western Desert from 1941 to early 1942 , returned to that front in March 1943 . Smith flew in the Western Desert until October that year , when a crash during a night takeoff resulted in a number of serious injuries , including facial disfigurements and a broken jaw . Following reconstructive plastic surgery to his face , other operations and five months ' convalescence , Smith rejoined No. 237 Squadron in Corsica in May 1944 . While there , he attained his highest rank , flight lieutenant .

In late June 1944 , during a strafing attack on a railway yard in the Po Valley in northern Italy , Smith was shot down by flak . Parachuting from his aircraft , he landed without serious injury in the Ligurian Alps , in an area that was behind German lines , but largely under the control of anti @-@ German Italian partisans . Smith spent three months working with the local resistance movement before trekking westwards , across the Maritime Alps , with three other Allied personnel , hoping to join up with the Allied forces that had just invaded southern France . After 23 days ' hiking , he and his companions were recovered by American troops and repatriated .

Smith was briefly stationed in Britain before he was posted to No. 130 (Punjab) Squadron in western Germany in April 1945 . He flew combat missions there until Germany surrendered in May . He remained with No. 130 Squadron for the rest of his service , and returned home at the end of 1945 . After completing his studies at Rhodes , he was elected Member of Parliament for his birthplace , Selukwe , in 1948 . Becoming Prime Minister in 1964 amid his country 's dispute with Britain regarding the terms for independence , he was influenced as a politician by his wartime experiences . Rhodesia 's military record on the mother country 's behalf became central to his sense of betrayal by post @-@ war British governments , which partly motivated his administration 's Unilateral Declaration of Independence in 1965 . His status as a Second World War RAF veteran thereafter helped him win support , both domestically and internationally .

= = Background = =

Ian Smith was born in 1919 , the son of British settlers in Selukwe , Southern Rhodesia . He attended Chaplin School in Gwelo , where he was head prefect , recipient of the Victor Ludorum in athletics , captain of the school teams in cricket , rugby and tennis , and successful academically . After graduating in 1937 , he attended Rhodes University College , in Grahamstown , South Africa , which was often attended by Rhodesian students , partly because Rhodesia then had no university of its own . Enrolling at the start of 1938 , Smith read for a Bachelor of Commerce degree . He was about halfway through his course when the Second World War broke out in September 1939 .

= = Enlisting and training in Rhodesia = =

Smith was fascinated by the idea of being a fighter pilot , and particularly excited by the prospect of flying a Spitfire . He wanted to leave Rhodes immediately to join the Southern Rhodesian Air Force , but did not because military recruiters in the colony had been told not to accept university students until after they graduated . As in the First World War , white Rhodesians in general were very keen to enlist ; because it was feared that the absence of these men might adversely affect the strategically important mines , manpower controls were introduced to keep certain whites out of the military and in their civilian occupations . One of Southern Rhodesia 's main contributions to the Allied war effort proved to be its participation , from 1940 , in the Empire Air Training Scheme . The Southern Rhodesian Air Force was absorbed into the British Royal Air Force (RAF) in April 1940 , becoming No. 237 (Rhodesia) Squadron RAF . Two more RAF squadrons , No. 44 and No. 266 ,

were subsequently also designated " Rhodesian " formations .

Remaining at Rhodes during the 1940 academic year , Smith secretly made plans to leave for military service in spite of his instructions to finish studying . In June 1940 , during the mid @-@ year break from studies , he quietly travelled to the Southern Rhodesian capital , Salisbury , to tell the colony 's director of manpower , William Addison , that he wanted to join the air force ; to avoid being barred from enlistment , Smith did not mention his university attendance , and gave his Selukwe address . During his Christmas vacation at the end of 1940 , Smith went to Salisbury again , and was successful in a second interview with an air force official and a physical examination . Early in 1941 , having received his pilot course call @-@ up papers , Smith underwent a final interview , during which it emerged that he was a university student ; the interviewer briefly demurred , but accepted Smith when he insisted that he wanted to sign up .

In September 1941 Smith formally enlisted in the Royal Air Force . He began his instruction with Initial Training Wing in Bulawayo , Southern Rhodesia 's second city , and after six weeks there transferred to Elementary Flying Training School at Guinea Fowl , just outside Gwelo . The majority of the men he trained alongside were Australians , and many others were British . Smith was glad to find himself in a course that would ultimately lead to flying fighters as opposed to bombers ? at Guinea Fowl , he learned to pilot Tiger Moths , then Harvards ? and was also pleased to have been posted only a half @-@ hour car ride from Selukwe . Late in the course he was picked out to undergo instruction as an officer cadet , which meant he was transferred to Thornhill , another Gwelo airbase . He passed out in September 1942 with the rank of pilot officer ; his training in Southern Rhodesia had taken a year in all .

= = Service = =

= = Middle East and North Africa = =

Smith hoped to be posted to Britain at the end of his training , and was initially told that this was going to happen , but he was ultimately sent to the Middle East . He was despatched to Idku , a small RAF base near Cairo , in late 1942 , from where he was posted to an operational training unit based at Baalbek , in Lebanon . He spent six weeks there , flying over much of the Levant in a Hawker Hurricane fighter , before being posted to No. 237 (Rhodesia) Squadron to begin active service , again piloting Hurricanes . The squadron was stationed near the Iranian capital of Tehran when Smith joined it , but it almost immediately transferred to Kirkuk , in Iraq , to help guard the oil wells and pipelines there . In March 1943 , it was again committed to the Western Desert Campaign in North Africa , having previously served there during 1941 ? 1942 , and Smith proceeded to serve on this front as a Hurricane pilot . He was promoted to flying officer on 25 March 1943 .

On 4 October 1943 , Smith took off from Idku at dawn in a Hurricane Mk IIC to escort a shipping convoy . Light was extremely poor , and Smith 's throttle malfunctioned ; he failed to take off quickly enough to clear a blast wall at the end of the runway . The undercarriage of the aircraft scraped against some sandbags on the wall , causing Smith to lose control of the plane and crash . The shoulder straps on his harness , built to withstand stress of up to 1 @, @ 000 kilograms (2 @, @ 200 lb) , snapped , and his face was smashed against the Hurricane 's gyrosight . Smith suffered serious facial injuries , and broke his jaw , a leg and a shoulder . Doctors thought at first that his back had also been broken , but it had actually only been buckled .

A team of doctors and surgeons at the Fifteenth Scottish Hospital in Cairo worked extensively on Smith , putting his jaw back together with a complicated assembly of bandage , plaster , nuts , bolts and wire , and rebuilt his face through skin grafts and other plastic surgery . In March 1944 , after about five months ' convalescence , he was passed fit for flying . He turned down the offer of a posting home to Southern Rhodesia as an instructor and , after a refresher course in Egypt , travelled to Corsica to rejoin No. 237 Squadron , which was by now flying Spitfire Mk IXs .

= = Italy = =

Smith reported for duty with No. 237 Squadron in Corsica on 10 May 1944 , and resumed operational flying two days later . Soon after , he was promoted in the field to flight lieutenant . At this time the unit was attached to an American bomber group , and assigned to cover it during attacks on northern Italian cities such as Genoa . The fighters also embarked on strafing raids into the Po Valley , attacking railway traffic and heavy vehicles . Smith flew ten sorties with the squadron over the next month , and during the last of these , on 22 June , led a strafing raid against a large railway yard . Having destroyed a number of engines and fuel tanks , Smith went back for a second run , and his aircraft was hit by flak . He shouted over the radio to the other pilots , telling them not to attempt a second pass on the railway yard , and turned towards the coast , hoping to ditch in the sea . Smith 's wingman , Alan Douglas , then told him by radio first that black smoke was emanating from the aircraft , then that the engine was ablaze . Realising his fighter would explode if the fire reached the fuel tanks , Smith decided to bail out . He had never parachuted before , but had been often been through relevant drills . He turned his Spitfire upside down , thrust the stick forward , released the cockpit 's canopy , fell out of the plane and opened his parachute . He landed without serious injuries on the side of a mountain .

According to Smith 's account , he initially hid in a large bush , but soon decided this was too obvious , and so moved to a smaller piece of foliage . A German patrol came to the area after about an hour , examined the bush in which Smith had originally hidden , and attacked it with bursts of automatic gunfire before leaving . " Somebody was keeping an eye on me when I thought I 'd better get out of that bush ... " he later told biographer Philippa Berlyn . Luckily for Smith , the area in which he had landed was predominantly anti @-@ German , and largely under the control of pro @-@ Allied Italian partisans ; one of these saw the Rhodesian 's descent and retrieved his parachute to stop the Germans from finding it . Smith hid for a while longer before coming out to greet a boy of about 12 who had passed by his hiding place with some livestock . The boy , whose name was Leo , knew no English ; using sign language , he told Smith to sit and wait , then went off and shortly returned with his elder brother , Lorenzo . Again using sign language , Lorenzo proposed that Smith come to their home to eat . The Rhodesian gratefully accepted . The boys ' parents , peasant farmers named Zunino , happily took Smith in , but decided it was too risky to keep him at the house so soon after the crash , and so hid him in a cave on the mountain . The next day , the Germans came to the Zunino house , looking for Smith . After about a week , the danger had subsided , and the Zuninos gave Smith a room in the house .

Smith worked on the Zuninos ' farm and began rigorously studying the Italian language , which he realised he would need to learn if he was to travel through enemy territory to the Allied lines . After a month , the local partisan commander , Antonio Bozzano (nicknamed " Barbetta " because of his beard) , came to the house to meet him , and asked him to join his ranks . Smith said he would more than happy to , and went with Barbetta to his headquarters , about 10 miles (16 km) away in a village called Piancastagna . When Barbetta asked the Rhodesian his rank , Smith , deciding it would be too complicated to explain the air force ranks , said he was a captain . " Oh well , " Barbetta replied , tapping the Rhodesian on the shoulder ; " you are now a major . I make you a major . " It quickly became clear to Smith that Barbetta had given him this " promotion " in the hope of elevating his own reputation in the resistance movement ? " none of the other regiments in the area could boast an Inglesi pilote and a majore to boot " , he explained in his memoirs . The pilot got on well with Barbetta , and took part in his partisans ' sabotage operations for about three months during late 1944 . Meanwhile , he became proficient in Italian . After the Germans pulled out of their local garrison at Sassello in October 1944 , Smith told Barbetta that he was going to attempt to return to the Allied lines . The partisans tried to talk him out of it , telling him it was too risky , but when Smith insisted , they gave him letters to take with him , endorsing him to other Italian partisan groups he might encounter on his way . A British Army corporal known to Smith as " Bill " , who had been hiding in a nearby village , asked if he could come as well , and the Rhodesian agreed .

Smith resolved to head west , across the Ligurian Alps , towards southern France , which he knew had just been invaded by Allied troops , principally Americans , Free French and British . He and Bill were assisted along the way by Italian partisan groups and other friendly locals . After ten days on

the road , three other Allied personnel ? a Frenchman , an Austrian and a Pole ? joined the trek , having met Smith and Bill at a partisan camp . The lingua franca of the group having changed to Italian , the five men hiked to the border , where they were taken in by an old farmer , Jean Batiste Chambrin , who gave them instructions on how to pass the German sentries guarding the border with France . The soldiers decided that because it would be too risky to try to cross all together , Smith and Bill would go first , with the Frenchman , Austrian and Pole following the next day .

Chambrin did not speak English , and so summoned his brother , an anglophone hotelier from across the border , to ascertain that Smith and Bill were really British , and not Germans testing his sympathies . At Bill 's suggestion , Smith produced his RAF rank insignia as proof of his identity . Smith and Bill duly made their way to the border crossing , guided by Chambrin , who told them that his brother would meet them on the other side of the border . There was only one way over : a bridge , manned by German sentries , who occasionally stopped people for interrogation . The pilot observed the checkpoint for a while from behind cover , and noticed that pedestrians crossing alone or in pairs were rarely stopped , while larger groups generally were . Smith decided that it might be possible for them to simply walk across , and told Bill to " just look straight ahead and walk quietly on " . Fortunately for them , they were not challenged , and they met up with Chambrin 's brother a few miles away . The Austrian and Frenchman joined them the next day ; the Polish soldier , who had appeared to Smith to be underage , had lost his nerve on seeing the Germans and had gone back .

They had now crossed the border into France , but there was still the matter of finding friendly troops . They decided that to do so without being discovered they would have to bypass the German positions by crossing the Maritime Alps . They found a local guide , and crossed the mountains , doing so over the course of two days . They were without the proper equipment and clothing for mountaineering . Shivering in the snow during the night , Smith took off his shoes , and found in the morning that they had frozen and that he could not put them on . He continued in his socks , which soon wore through , forcing him to finish the journey walking barefoot on the ice and snow . As they made their way downhill , they saw a group of soldiers in American uniforms . It had been 23 days since Smith and Bill set off from Piancastagna . They called to the soldiers and , once the Americans had been satisfied that they were who they claimed , Smith and his comrades were taken to a local base camp , where they were split up and sent back to their respective forces . The Americans took Smith to Marseille , from where he was flown to the RAF transit camp at Naples . On arriving in late November 1944 , Smith sent a brief telegram home to Selukwe : " Alive and well . Love to you all ? Ian . "

= = = Late war and demobilisation = = =

It was well known to British servicemen that spending three months or more missing behind enemy lines resulted in an automatic posting back home , which Smith did not want ; he was therefore wary as he entered his interview at the Naples transit base . When passage back to Rhodesia via Egypt was offered , Smith successfully requested permission to go to Britain instead , saying that he had many relatives there and considered it a second home . He thereupon travelled to England , where he was posted to a six @-@ week refresher course in Shropshire , flying Spitfires . Smith performed very strongly in the exercises and , at his own request , was posted back to active service after only three weeks in the course . He was attached to No. 130 (Punjab) Squadron , part of No. 125 Wing , which was commanded by Group Captain (later Air Vice Marshal) Johnnie Johnson , one of the most successful RAF flying aces of the war . Reporting for duty with No. 130 Squadron at Celle , in western Germany , on 23 April 1945 , he flew combat missions there , " [having] a little bit of fun shooting up odd things " , he recalled , until the European war ended on 7 May with Germany 's surrender .

Smith remained with No. 130 Squadron for the rest of his service , flying with it to Copenhagen , and then , via Britain , to Norway . The Rhodesian spent around five months in Norway as part of the post @-@ war occupation forces , but did not learn Norwegian , later telling Berlyn that it seemed much harder to him than Italian , " and they all spoke English , you see " . After No. 130

Squadron returned to Britain in November 1945 , Smith was demobilised and sent home . He was met at RAF Kumalo in Bulawayo by his family , with whom he drove back to Selukwe .

= = War wounds = =

The plastic surgery used to reconstruct Smith 's face following his crash in the Western Desert in 1943 left his face somewhat lopsided , with partial paralysis . In her 1978 biography of Smith , Berlyn writes that the grafted skin on his face " almost hides the injuries even today , though it has left him with a slightly blank expression " . This was often commented on by observers , and when Smith died in 2007 , it was prominent in many of his obituaries . " It was Ian Smith 's war @-@ damaged left eye that drew people 's attention first , " began the report printed in the London Times : " wide open , heavy @-@ lidded and impassive from experimental plastic surgery , it hinted at a dull , characterless nature . The other was narrow , slanting and slightly hooded . Being watched by it was an uncomfortable experience . Each eye could have belonged to a different person . " The Daily Telegraph took a similar line , reporting that the operation to reconstruct Smith 's face had " left him with a somewhat menacing stare " .

Smith 's injuries also made him permanently unable to sit for long periods without pain , so when he attended conferences as a politician , he would briefly rise from his seat from time to time . During his talks with British Prime Minister Harold Wilson aboard HMS Tiger in 1966 , Smith regularly got up and looked out of a porthole ; the British incorrectly interpreted this as Smith feeling intimidated by Wilson , or seasick .

= = Influence on political career = =

Smith completed his studies at Rhodes during 1946 , and entered politics in 1948 , when he successfully contested the Selukwe seat on behalf of the Liberal Party , becoming his home town 's Member of Parliament at the age of 29 . He rose through the political ranks with the United Federal Party during the 1950s , and in 1962 helped to form the Rhodesian Front , a right @-@ wing party whose avowed goal was full independence from Britain without an immediate transfer to black majority rule . He became Deputy Prime Minister in December that year when the new party , led by Winston Field , surprised most observers by winning that month 's election . After the Cabinet forced Field to resign in April 1964 , following his failure to gain independence from Britain , they chose Smith as the new Prime Minister .

Smith , Southern Rhodesia 's first native @-@ born head of government , was strongly influenced as premier by his wartime experiences . Southern Rhodesia 's military contributions during the two World Wars , the Malayan Emergency and other conflicts , combined with memories of his own travails for Britain with the Royal Air Force ? " undoubtedly the central experience of his life " , R W Johnson wrote ? caused Smith to feel profoundly betrayed when the British government proved one of his main adversaries as Prime Minister . The UK government 's objection to continued white minority rule , based on moral and geopolitical factors , clashed with Smith 's refusal to establish a set timetable for the progressive introduction of majority rule in Southern Rhodesia . After talks repeatedly broke down , Smith 's government unilaterally declared independence on 11 November 1965 . In 1970 , following the results of a referendum , he declared Rhodesia a republic . He argued that Britain was to blame for all of this ? " Rhodesia did not want to seize independence from Britain . It was forced upon us , " he said .

For many in Britain during this time , attitudes towards the breakaway colony were complicated by the fact that " Plucky Little Rhodesia " , often described as " more British than the British " , had given so much for the mother country in its fight against Nazi Germany . Smith 's own military service and reputation for bravery gave rise to similar sentiments regarding him personally . White Rhodesians widely hailed him a war hero , as did many overseas commentators . In 1966 , Smith supporters in Britain sent him a painting " on behalf of many British people who remained true despite the misguidance of government " , depicting two Spitfires taking off for a dawn raid . Smith retained his affection for the Spitfire for the rest of his life ; in his memoirs he described the fighter as

" the most beautiful aircraft ever made . " He also remained some proficiency in the Italian language , though according to one Italian visitor his accent was " atrocious " .

Smith 's years as an RAF pilot were often alluded to in political rhetoric and popular culture . In the phrase of Martin Francis , " no white Rhodesian kitchen in the 1960s and 1970s was complete without an illustrated dishcloth featuring ' Good Old Smithy ' and his trusty Spitfire " . The Rhodesian Front 's election strategy of emphasising Smith 's reputation as a war hero was criticised by the journalist Peter Niesewand , who was deported from Rhodesia in 1973 ; according to Niesewand , Smith 's contribution to the Allied war effort had been " to crash two perfectly good Hurricane planes [sic] for the loss of no Germans " . Smith won decisive election victories in 1970 , 1974 and 1977 , and remained in office until the country was reconstituted under majority rule as Zimbabwe Rhodesia in 1979 . He continued to wear his RAF Spitfire pilot 's tie well into old age , including on the final day before Zimbabwe Rhodesia 's formal establishment on 1 June 1979 ? " a final gesture of defiance " , Bill Schwarz writes , " symbolising an entire lost world . "