

Mission Accomplished

(Apologies for the size of file but the article had to include photos.”

Eddy Norris

Finding The Canberra R 2514 Crash Site

By Bob Manser

The crash sites of Canberra R 5203 of Peinke/Strydom and the Hunter 1821 of Brian Gordon had been found in 2007 by Barry Meikle and me which most Air Force folks would have read or heard about via the Air Force e-mail network (ORAFs).

I had one more site I wished to find, namely of Canberra R 2514 but the logistics of the trip were a bit daunting as the site was at Malvernia (now named Chicualacuala) which is about 750 kms from Chimoio where I live. The prime problem was finding someone to go with me and more importantly one who had a reliable 4x4 bakkie as my vehicles were long in the tooth and not up to a long distance trip over unknown terrain. I had a year of frustration in planning this particular trip as on numerous occasions' plans and dates had been set only to be cancelled owing to various factors, a tad depressing at times.

In early October 2008 my good friend Alastair MacCrimmon popped in to see me and I mentioned my despair at not being able to crack the final Canberra search. He immediately expressed a keen interest, not only in the previous searches but also to be involved in the Chicualacuala trip and offered his newish Ford Ranger as transport.

Hope at last, we set a date for the 14th of November and started planning the route. He also suggested we collect his brother Malcolm from Chipinge to join us.

Thankfully no last minute cancellations and we set off from Chimoio mid morning on Friday the 14th as planned and headed for Chipinge. We decided to cross the border at Espungabera/Mt Selinda as it was hopefully far quieter than the Forbes/Machipanda border which was nowadays always extremely busy due to the enormous influx of Zimbabwean shoppers.

The road to Espungabera was fairly easy with a one hand winched Pont crossing at the Lucite River. We encountered no problems at the Espungabera border crossing as we were the only ones there; a few more km and we reached Chipinge and spent the night with Malcolm and his wife Jane.

I must mention here that the broadcast by Eddy Norris through "ORAFs" of the previous exploits by Barry Meikle and myself had aroused the interest of Rick van Malsen ex RLI and he had mentioned to Prop Geldenhuys that he had come across the remains of R 2514 about 8 months after the crash during a skirmish in the area with Frelimo forces. He offered willingly to join the search, albeit having to travel all the way from Francistown in Botswana and this was indeed a tremendous boost as we hoped Rick would be able to give us a fair idea as to the approximate spot and thus greatly reduce our search area .

After numerous e-mails between Rick and me he affirmed that the date set was fine with him and we then planned to join up at Sango (Vila Salazar) on the Zimbabwe border at approximately 12 noon on the Saturday give or take an hour or two.

Saturday morning we set off from Chipinge and our route was Chiredzi, Triangle, and Mbizi, following the railway line through the bottom end of the Gonarezhou National Park and past

Boli, Nyala and onto Sango.



Type of Bush the team had to contend with

The roads were no problem as the rains had not yet started and we made good time and wondered how long we would have to wait at Sango for Rick and his Durban mate Kevin Jones. Approximately 10kms out of Boli and with 60 kms to go to Sango a white bakkie drew up beside us and shouted "are you Bob?". It was by Rick and Kevin! The timing of this meet was unbelievable, considering we had trekked from Chipinge and Rick from Francistown and would have both reached Sango within minutes of each other if we had not met on the road, and within a hair of 12-noon, our planned rendezvous time.



**Meeting in the Bush. Perfect timing - hallmark of Rhodesian Forces working together.
Malcolm Mc Crimmon, Kevin Jones, Rick, Alastair Mc Crimmon & Bob Manser**

It was all going smoothly until we arrived at the untidy Zimbabwe border post at Sango. The gate guard refused us entry to customs and immigration as he insisted our vehicle engine and chassis numbers be checked by CID first. The "best laid plans of mice and men" came to mind as there was no sign of CID; they had gone across to Mozambique presumably for a bit of liquid

refreshment. This delay caused us concern as we had hoped to get across to Chicualacuala and have a good few hours of searching before we returned to Zimbabwe and of course be in time for the 6-pm border closure dead-line.

After an annoying hour wait we eventually asked a kindly policewoman to send a runner; and shortly after the two CID chaps arrived dressed in scruffy 'T' shirts. They poked around under the bonnets and semi-reluctantly allowed us to proceed.

No further problems were encountered, except it took us a while to arouse the sleeping Mozambique border officials but by just after 1-pm we were through and headed for Chicualacuala which luckily was less than 1-km from the border post.

It was agreed that we first visit the Police station and advise them of our plans, as to have a band of white men bumbling around the bush would have looked rather suspicious. We found the station with ease and then Malcolm used his best Shona describing the reason for our exploit. It worked and the junior chap called his superior who turned out to be a most polite and helpful fellow who spoke perfect English. He not only gave us permission to continue but ordered his underling to go with us and seek out the local Regulo (Chief) of that area. Unfortunately the chief was in Maputo but his stand -in knew roughly the spot we wanted and willingly offered to show us.

Then we squeezed the police junior and the Chief's assistant in to the bakkies and set off in a southerly direction for about 4 kms. There we turned east and drove around in circles following ox-cart tracks, footpaths and at times just Bundu bashing. After 30 minutes or so our guide could not pin point the site in the scrubby bush as every place looked the same, an easy place to get lost in. I personally began to fret and felt rather depressed as we had come so far and it seemed the crash site was going to elude us.

Then the guide had a flash of inspiration, he would collect the local kraal head as he assured us he knew the place having lived in the area since 1957. We did just that and loaded another body into our already cramped bakkies. Within a few minutes of more Bundu bashing and scratching the hell out of Alastair's paintwork the kraal head called a stop. We debussed and walked for about another 100 meters.

There in a shady glade formed by the branches of large Pod Mahogany tree (*afzalia quansensis*) was a small pile of metal bits and pieces, we found the last remains of Canberra R2514.



Not much remains

The kraal head said that there were definitely no graves in the area and as far as he knew, the bodies and the bulk of the Canberra were removed over 30 years ago by Frelimo. He did however mention that the engines had been there until a few years ago, then scrap collectors had used oxy-acetylene equipment to cut them up and carted them away.

Once we were all gathered at the site I said a small prayer similar to the one Barry Meikle had used at the other Canberra and Hunter sites:

" With thanksgiving let us remember Ian Donaldson, David Hawkes and Rob Warracker who sacrificed their lives so that we may live on in peace, and in appreciation we now dedicate this cross to their memories. Help us to keep them in our thoughts and never forget what they gave for us."



**" They shall not grow old as we that are left grow old\
Age shall not weary them, nor the years condemn
At the going down of the sun and in the morning
We will remember them"**

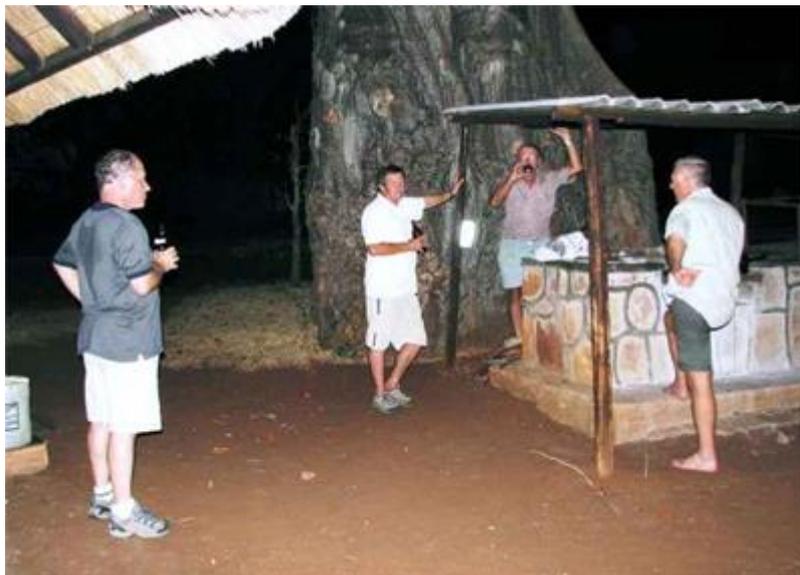
Then photographs were taken and I collected a bag of metal scraps for Prop to add to the memorial exhibit at the Shamwari Club in Durban.

Time was running short so we trooped back to the vehicles, dropped off the kraal head and the two other helpers and headed for the border.

We encountered no hassles at either border post and after passing through we drove direct to our planned night-stop in the Swimuwini camp adjacent to Mabalahuta airstrip in Gonarezhou National Park and arrived there just after 5-pm. We booked in and then got our lives sorted out made our base for the night in the very clean National Park lodges surrounded by the most magnificent Baobab trees.

Around the camp fire we at last relaxed, there was plenty of good humoured banter and I was out numbered as it was three browns to one blue job. Rick as RLI, Malcolm SAS, Alastair 4th

Battalion Rhodesia Regiment and myself the Air Force representative. As the cold beers were poured in many interesting military anecdotes poured out, a great evening was had and a fitting and pleasant end to our mission.



The Team in Deep Thought

Sunday morning saw us part ways and Rick and Kevin headed for Botswana and the remainder of us drove on to our next night stop at Chipinge where we would drop off Malcolm. From there Alastair and I drove for home via Mutare and through the Forbes/Machipanda borders and on to Chimoio. All-in-all a round trip from Chimoio and back of approx 1500 kms but for Alastair it must have been nearer 2300 kms as his forestry bush camp was a further 400 kms past Chimoio.

We had successfully completed our mission and sincere thanks must go to Rick van Malsen for aiding us in the search and driving all the way from Botswana; also to Rick's buddy Kevin Jones who had flown schedule flight from Durban to join up with Rick in Francistown.

Thanks also to Malcolm MacCrimmon for joining the team and he and his wife Jane's night-stop hospitality given to us at their home in Chipinge and finally a monster amount or thanks to my friend Alastair MacCrimmon without whose help the mission would still be in the pending basket.

Bob Manser - Chimoio November 2008

Footnotes:

1. The grid references for the site are as follows: UTM UPS 0361101 - 7554009.

Degrees and minutes and seconds: South 22 06 48.2, East 031 39 12.1

Degrees and minutes: South 22 06 803, East 031 39 202.

Prop I am not sure which one is suitable, leave the choice to you and delete what is not needed in grid refs [ORAFs has made no changes].

2. Malvernia, a village and customs post on the Mozambique side of the border where the Rhodesia Railways line to Lourenco Marques (Maputo) crosses into Mozambique and meets the C.F.M. line. It was named after Lord Malvern (Godfrey Huggins) in 1955 when the railway link was opened. The customs post on the Rhodesian side of the border was named Vila Salazar after the Portuguese Prime Minister of the time.

Malvernia is now renamed Chicualacuala and Vila Salazar renamed Sango.

3. Rick van Malsen also hopes to revisit the area around Mapai in search of the wreckage of the Puma helicopter that was shot down taking the lives of many of his comrades [4 September 1979 - Operation Uric].

4. "At the going down of the sun and in the morning" This oft used verse is part of a 7-verse poem by Laurence Binyon called "For the Fallen" and was first published in the 'Times' in 1914 (Collins dictionary of Military Quotations).