



"In the lives of most nations there comes a moment when a stand has to be made for principle, whatever the consequence. This moment has come for Rhodesia. I pray, and I hope other Rhodesians will pray today, that our Government will be given the wisdom and the strength to bring Rhodesia safely through."

To us has been given the privilege of being the first Western nation in the last two decades to have the determination and fortitude to say: "So far and no further".

"We have struck a blow for the preservation of justice, civilization and Christianity and in the spirit of this belief, we have this day assumed our sovereign independence".

Prime Minister Ian Smith.

11th November 1965.

Flight Lieutenant Ian Smith



Ian Smith was born in the small Rhodesian mining town of Selukwe on April 8th, 1919. During his schooldays, both at Selukwe and later at the senior co-educational boarding school Chaplin, the sporting field was his main attraction. Ian Smith remembers that "I was an absolute lunatic about sport... I think I was captain of every team there was in the school and I think I did overdo this at the expense of my academic career". He invariably won the "Victor Ladorum" award at the annual competitions and in 1937 was captain of the rugby, cricket and tennis teams as well as Head Prefect.

In 1938 he gained entry to Rhodes University at the age of sixteen, 'I came to my senses. I suddenly realised there were other things in life besides sport. So I cut some of it out. I realised I was a man on my own.'

By September, 1941 he was finding it more and more difficult to justify the safe

comfort of university life while WW2 raged. 'It was almost impossible to keep my nose to the grindstone. I just couldn't sit back while I saw everybody else going off to fight. Some of my friends had already joined up and they were training here (in Rhodesia) to become pilots', he recalls 'I couldn't take it any longer'.

The Southern Rhodesian Air Force (SRAF) had been formed in 1937 with a single squadron of six Hawker Harts (1 Squadron) bought from the Royal Air Force. A year later six Hawker Audax biplanes and later still, by three Gloster Gauntlets made up the nucleus of the SRAF. A few days before the outbreak of WW2 in 1939, No 1 Squadron was moved to the Northern Frontier District of Kenya, close to the Abyssinian border. At that time it was the only aerial force at the Imperial Command's disposal in the entire East African theatre.

In June 1940, Southern Rhodesian airmen were absorbed into the RAF and the unit became No 237 (Rhodesia) Squadron. By the November 1941 it had fought with distinction against the Italians in Abyssinia and in the see-saw battles with the Africa Korps in the Western Desert. No 1 Squadron was then transferred to the Persia-Iraq sector of Middle-Eastern Command, in No 214 Group.

The Air Force didn't want Ian Smith when he first applied to join because the Government had exempted students from military duty. 'So I went to the university and told them I was going and I walked out in the middle of the year'. Within a month he had been accepted as a trainee pilot.

Ian Smith completed his initial training at Guinea Fowl and at Thornhill, near Gwelo graduating as a Sergeant Pilot in mid-1942, and refined his new skills in Syria, at an airstrip

close to the magnificent ruins of Balbeck. As a newly promoted Pilot Officer, No 80463, he spent a leisurely few weeks in Palestine before joining No 237 Squadron in Iran.

By the first week in November 1942 Alamein had been fought and won, and by the time No 237 Squadron returned to the desert in March 1943, the chase was almost over. What remained of Rommel's forces were caught between the hammer of Montgomery's Eighth Army and the anvil of the Anglo-American First Army in Tunisia, and they would soon have to surrender. The Hurricanes of the Rhodesian squadron moved west, with the Desert Rats. On June 16th 1943 whilst flying a Hurricane from an airstrip at Bersis he had to force-land six miles north-east of base with a glycol leak. On July 3rd, Flying Officer Smith flew the Hurricane to the maintenance unit at Mersa Matruh returning to Bersis two days later in a Walrus. After a time the Squadron was called back to the Canal Zone for reconnaissance and convoy escort duties.

At Idku, where the squadron was based for much of its term in North Africa, Pilot Officer Smith would fly for two or three hours a day on shipping patrol (the convoys were building up for the invasion of Sicily) and for the rest of the time sit around under canvas, sweltering, swatting at the mosquitoes and the ubiquitous flies, drinking tepid beer, and talking. He recalls vividly 'the long hours together in the desert, in the tents chewing sand and so on, and many hours waiting on standby in case you were scrambled to intercept and so on'.

At Idku, No 237 Squadron formed part of the air defence umbrella over Alexandria. The Italian fleet surrendered in September 1943, and was on its way into harbour, so enemy activity (submarine and air) was expected to intensify. The squadron had just been equipped with new Hurricane II's.

Patrols were increased, and security was tightened. The pilots were under instruction to maintain radio silence and to keep their navigation lights switched off, which made night-flying, particularly in that blackest hour before dawn, a hazardous operation.

'It was difficult to keep together when you were taking off,' recalls Pilot Officer Alan Smith (one of Ian Smith's fellow pilots), 'so we used to take off on each side of a flare-path. On the morning of October 4th I took off with Ian. Suddenly the glow of his exhaust disappeared. I went on with my mission, and when I got back four hours later I saw four hundred yards of wreckage – radio set, guns and engine. I assumed I would be going to a funeral that afternoon'.

An air gunner, George Barclay was coming off duty when he saw the Hurricane's wheels scrape the top of a bank of sandbags built to shield parked aircraft. 'I remember thinking', he says. 'The poor basket in that has had it.' Barclay shrugged his shoulders and turned away. 'There was a fire engine and an ambulance on the way and people were running to help, but I was sure there was nothing I could do'.

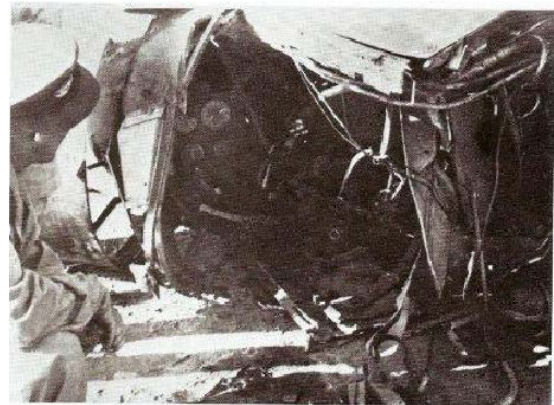
When they got to Ian Smith they found him lying half in, half out of his machine, almost unconscious.

Rescue crews dragged Ian Smith from the wreckage with his right eye almost out of its socket, the bottom half of his face mangled and one of his legs badly injured. He had snapped his harness, which was designed to take a one-ton stress, and his face had smashed into the plane's instrument panel.



Left: The wreckage of Hurricane K2179 upside-down on the aerodrome at Idcu. Oct. 4th 1943.

Right: The cockpit from which Flying Officer Smith was rescued.



Vaguely, he recalls hearing someone say: 'He'll be cold meat in a few seconds'. But when they lifted him out the 'cold meat' galvanised into action and began flailing its rescuers with its fists. He was in severe shock and, he says, 'I don't remember a great deal about it'.

Ian Smith's injuries were critical. The squadron MO later told him that had it not been for his exceptional fitness he would probably have been killed.

A few days after the smash he was transferred to the impressive, new 15th Scottish Hospital situated on the banks of the Nile opposite Cairo's Zamalek Island. There he underwent a series of complex orthopaedic and plastic surgical operations, and the slow process of healing began. He had a tough body, and he was a determined patient.

At the end of 1943 the squadron had been transferred to the Mediterranean island of Corsica, and was now operating against the German forces in Northern Italy and Southern France. It was under American command, and its principal task was to cover USAF Mitchells and Marauder medium bombers on their daily missions over occupied territory. But when the spitfires weren't on escort duty, says Pilot Officer Alan Smith, they would 'strafe right in the German backyard. We began to chalk up a score against them. The Luftwaffe was not serious opposition at this time'. In fact the German Air Force did strike back once and very hard. 'We were bombed to hell in Corsica,' one of the squadron's air controllers, Alec Hasaan remembers. 'It was on a little field at Poretta, south of Hastia. Fifty percent of our aircraft were destroyed on the ground by Ju 52's.

Ian Smith turned up at the Poretta squadron headquarters on May 10th 1944, after a quite remarkable recovery from his injuries. The Rhodesians welcomed him back and there was a

celebration. On May 12th Alan Smith was 'given the job of showing him Italy' now flying a superior Spitfire Mk IX.

The two took off and crossed the Italian coast late in the afternoon. Alan recalls, 'I soon saw that we were back to the same old Ian Smith. He wasn't prepared to just have a look; he wanted to break things as well. He saw a Mercedes staff car going along with five magnificently dressed staff officers in it. They were wearing those peaked hats of theirs and looked as if they were going to a party. He shot them up with pretty terrible results. The car turned upside down, caught fire, and nothing moved again. On the way back we saw a tugboat with five barges. I warned him on the radio that the barges were not as innocuous as they seemed. But by this time he was giving them a beat-up and a squirt. Suddenly they covers came off and their guns started up and the two Smiths very nearly ended up in the drink'

Bomber escort duties and strafing missions followed as the 237 Operations Book records:

May 13th, 1500 Hours: Two aircraft, flown by the CO and F/O I.D. Smith (MH532) with six other aircraft of 251 Squadron wing were airborne on bomber escort.

May 16th, 1445 hours: Four aircraft, led by F.O I.D. Smith (MK412) escorted 24 B.26s with eight aircraft of 451 Squadron to bomb target at Pontedera.

May 20th 0825 hours: F/O I.D. Smith (MJ943) and P/O Douglas strafed M.T. (Military Transport) on roads north of Lucca. F.O Smith strafed electric powered train with six coaches, which was moving out of station. His first burst caused the engine to blow up. Both pilots then strafed three of the coaches, which were full of passengers and F/O Smith strafed a 5-ton truck which went into a ditch and caught fire. He also obtained hits on a red 3-ton bowser which poured liquid but did not ignite. A staff car containing four army types was also badly damaged.

May 26th, 1550 hours: Eight aircraft led by the CO escorted 20 B.25s attacking bridges at Incisa. Heavy, intense and accurate flak was encountered near the target. F/O I.D. Smith (MK227) and his No 2 P/O I.L. de Wet were detached to investigate an unidentified aircraft. They lost sight of it, but saw two 5-ton trucks which they strafed and damaged. P/O de Wet turned into attack again when he reported that he was hit by flak and was force-landing. He made a successful landing and spoke to his No 1 over the R/T saying that German soldiers were approaching him.

May 27th 1750 hours: Eight aircraft, led by F/O/ I.D. Smith (MK412) escorted 24 B.26s to bomb road and railway bridges at Ficulle.

June 5th: (MK412) Obtained three flamers and two damaged

June 9th: A staff car and 15-cwt lorry were destroyed by F/O/ Ian Smith and P/O Aylward, They also damaged another 15-cwt lorry.

June 13th, 0930 hours: I. Smith (MK227) destroyed a staff car and also a lorry,

June 14: F/O Moubray and F/O/ Smith, I. (MK227) were hit by flak but returned safely.

On June 22nd, two weeks after the Normandy landings and the fall of Rome, Flying Officer Smith took off from Serragia on a strafing mission over Northern Italy. 'We were strafing trains' he explains, 'blowing up trains in the Po Valley, and this was our job. It was not very flamboyant – the attraction was always for the chap who managed to shoot down another aeroplane, but that seemed comparatively safe to the people who used to have to do the

strafing, because you were right down near the flak on the ground. Most of our work was train-busting and convoy-busting and that sort of thing. So we were strafing trains and I collected flak, a shell from an ack-ack gun, very near the ground. Well, you see, you were comparatively safe if you were up on top. So I had to bail out – it hit my oil sump and my oil went, and I could see my temperature going up, and the chap who was flying as my Number Two (Alan Douglas) eventually said to me; “Your plane's on fire.....” So there was only one thing I could do. I stepped out of the thing and landed in the mountains.’

When Squadron Leader J. Walmisley, leading the twelve-plane mission over the Alessandra area returned, he filed his report:



Ian Smith in the Ops Room of 237 Squadron.

June 22nd, 1630-1830 hours: One electric tram and two vehicles were destroyed and four electric trains, three railway trucks and seven vehicles were damaged. P/O I. Smith said that his aircraft was hit by flak. His aircraft was seen to turn onto its back and burst into flames. The pilot was seen to bail out and land safely, in the mountains north of Spezia.

As soon as he hit ground he hid his parachute in the undergrowth, removed his Wings and badges of rank ('I thought that was the first thing to do') and found a large clump of bushes to lie in 'until I cooled off and got my senses. Then I got out and strolled around, and I could see a little boy with some sheep moving along just down in the valley'.

After a while it occurred to him that the Germans would have found his downed Spitfire and would be looking for him, and that his clump of bushes, the biggest on the hillside, was too obvious a hiding place. He crossed to a smaller bush some fifty yards further along. The move almost certainly saved his life. Late in the afternoon he heard dogs barking and saw a German search party coming up the slope towards him. When the soldiers reached his first sanctuary they stopped, challenged and sprayed it with automatic fire.

Nor was this his only piece of luck that day: a local civilian had found and buried his discarded parachute and harness. Had the Germans got to the parachute first, Smith says

‘they might have been able to get my scent. They never did, so the dogs had no scent and they went past me, within a hundred yards...’

Meanwhile, the shepherd boy on the slope below had spotted Ian Smith and was watching the drama. When the soldiers had gone he took Smith to his family, ‘very poor peasants who lived down in the valley; Vallescura it was called.’ They hid him in a cave for a few days until the Germans gave up the hunt, clothed him fed him.

Shortly afterwards he met a Senor Pesce and his wife, who ran a prosperous millinery business in Genoa and who could afford to maintain a retreat at San Pietro d’Alba, in the mountains above the city. The Pesces offered to take Smith in, but he refused. ‘They were already sheltering an escapee, a British Army captain, and I thought they were running too big a risk because their house was almost next door to a German military establishment. So I continued to live in the valley but visited the Pesces occasionally, for short periods. Then one day a group of *partigani* (partisans) passed through Vallescura and I decided to move on with them. I wanted to do something positive, to help their cause; The group was part of a particularly active anti-Nazi partisan organisation which operated from the nearby village of Moretti Piancastagna’.

Ian Smith made contact with the Piancastagna leaders through Fr. Don Belve, the village priest, who took him to the partisan commandante Mingo. Delighted to have an Allied officer with them (‘I was like a prize elephant in a circus, you see, explains Ian Smith ‘If you could have an *Inglese Maggiore* along you were a bit better than a gang who didn’t’). Mingo immediately promoted him to the rank of major.

The partisan movement was organised along orthodox military lines. Ian Smith’s unit, was the Piancastagna Company of the Division Garibaldi ‘Ligure-Alessandra’ – From October, 1944 it became known as the Division ‘Mingo’ of the Sixth Operative Force.

The next five months were, he says, ‘among the most interesting of my life...’ His job was to help plan hit-and-run strikes and sabotage operations against German military installations, and, of course, to take part in them as well. For supplies, weapons and ammunition they relied on the Germans. Smith’s unit was ‘very self-contained. We lived in this little village up in the hills and every now and again we would go along to one of the main roads that ran down over the hills inside the Po Valley, and the Germans used to run these convoys backwards and forwards. Of course, when there was a big convoy there was nothing we could do. But they couldn’t always run convoys, and they were supposed to be controlling that country, so now and again there would be an odd, isolated van or truck, and whenever one of these came along we used to stop it.

‘We would throw a tree or something similar across the road, and just bump off the driver and his mate and drive the truck back into the hills, and whatever was in it was ours. One day it would be a load of wine, the next day a load of soap, and the next a load of material. I remember on one occasion we got a lot of material – grey, pin-striped material – and we all had nice new suits made, and we were walking around in these pin-striped suits’.

For transport, Ian Smith used a captured German Army staff car. ‘We just used to drive around in it...It was amazing.’

But when the first snow appeared on the lower slopes of the Alps away to the north, Smith decided that he had had enough. He was ‘looking for something new, I think, and I was keen to get out’. He knew that if he didn’t make a move soon, he would have to remain at

Piancastagna for the whole of the winter, and winter would bring real deprivation. Food had never been plentiful, it would become even less so in the cold months, and the fewer mouths there were to feed the better.

But first he would have to learn Italian. He already had a smattering of the language, enough to make himself understood in the village, but it wouldn't get him through the German lines. His accent was appalling. His vocabulary was limited and his grammar was virtually non-existent. Moreover, his colleagues were loath to see him go, and they did their best to delay his departure. Unless he could pass for a local, they said, 'It will be *pericolosissime* – the Germans would catch me and string me up'. So he borrowed textbooks and a dictionary, and by November he was fluent enough, he believed, to get by.

Smith had since met up with an English corporal, a youngster known locally as 'Angelo'. Angelo had escaped from a prison-of-war camp two years before, and together the two of them planned their escape to trek north over the alps to the American army in the south of France.

The two of them began to walk north. Halfway to the border they were joined by three other young escapees – a Frenchman, an Austrian and a Pole.

The group split when they reached the strong German defensive line at the foot of the mountains. There was a viaduct, a railway line and a main road to be crossed, the place was swarming with troops, and a party of five, Smith thought, would be far too conspicuous. He told the three newcomers to lie low and follow on the next day. He and Angelo waited for a German foot patrol to pass and then crossed the barriers and made their way above the snow-line.

Only two of the men they left behind soon caught up with them – the young Pole, 'who only looked about eighteen or nineteen', had lost his nerve and turned back. The cosmopolitan little party now embarked on the last and most difficult leg of its journey.

Smith almost failed to complete the journey. Temperatures were sub-zero, he was poorly equipped for the expedition and he did 'a very silly thing,' he recalls. 'My feet were so cold and wet that I took my boots off. We just had to lie down as we were then, and we were only dressed in trousers and shirt, and we tried to sleep – just on ice. It was nothing else but a block of ice. And when it got light the next morning, we woke up and decided to move off before it got really light, and I couldn't put my boots on. Of course they were blocks of ice. I should never have taken them off. So I had to walk in my socks and my socks wore out, and if it hadn't been for that I might not have got frostbite'.

But four of them survived and on the twenty-third day of their journey they stumbled down the last French Alpine slopes and into the American lines. Within hours they were in Cannes – bathed, fed, and savouring the exquisite luxury of clean clothes. The ones they had arrived in, says Smith, 'could have walked off us by that stage.'



Although Flight Lieutenant Smith could have returned to Rhodesia, he was determined to see the war through and within a very short time he was flying again. There was a refresher course at an RAF base in Shropshire, followed by missions over Germany and Denmark. He was posted to 130 Squadron. This squadron was the first into Norway with the British Liberation Army.

Although hostilities formally ceased on May 8th 1945, there was still a little work to be done. The BLA were methodically cleaning out stubborn pockets of resistance during the rest of the month and 'we used to help them. Whenever the British troops went into a German camp we would fly in over them at roof-top level'.

Finally, the guns fell silent, and Ian Smith spent a 'fabulous' four months in Norway before making the long voyage home to Rhodesia.

The following year Ian Smith was back at Rhodes University to finish his commerce degree. In 1946 he completed his final year at Rhodes where he was also elected chairman of the students' representative council.

Two years later he bought his farm, Gwenoro, in the plains of Selukwe and married Janet Watts. In elections in July he became the Liberal Party MP for Selukwe, the youngest MP ever in the Southern Rhodesian Parliament.



Fundamental change shook southern African politics in 1960, when he was chief whip of the ruling Federal Party in the Parliament of the Rhodesia and Nyasaland Federation. Harold Macmillan's tour of Africa ended with his "winds of change" speech in the South African Parliament in Cape Town. Rhodesian whites saw from close up the bloody aftermath of Congo independence. The federation was breaking up and independence was inevitable for Northern Rhodesia (Zambia) and Nyasaland (Malawi), but to Ian Smith's bitter resentment, not for Southern Rhodesia.

At home, the voice of Joshua Nkomo was blowing a tide of black resistance with the hitherto unheard of demand for "black majority rule now". White opinion hardened. Ian Smith was behind the formation in 1962 of the Rhodesian Front, which easily won elections in December the next year, with Ian Smith Deputy Prime Minister and Minister of Finance.

He first encountered the Foreign Office at a meeting with Rab Butler, the UK Foreign Secretary at Victoria Falls in December 1963. Butler grandly declared that Britain was "very happy to agree" to independence for Southern Rhodesia, at least at the same time as Zambia and Malawi.

Ian Smith asked Butler for the undertaking in writing. Butler balked with: "There is trust between members of the British Commonwealth." Ian Smith wagged his finger at Butler, and said: "If you break that, you will live to regret it." The expression "perfidious Albion" was fixed in his vocabulary from that day onwards.

In April 1964, Ian Smith became the Rhodesian Front's leader and Prime Minister. Almost immediately he imprisoned the leadership of the black-nationalist movement, paralysing it for a decade.

Harold Wilson's Labour victory in October 1964 was a drastic setback to Ian Smith's hopes. He rebuffed Wilson's opening approaches. It took Winston Churchill's funeral in January 1965 to bring them together.

Ian Smith attended the funeral, but did not receive an invitation to the lunch afterwards at Buckingham Palace. He was at his hotel when the Queen's Equerry arrived, and expressed Her Majesty's surprise at his absence. Ian Smith explained he had not received an invitation. He was assured by the Queen's Equerry one had been issued.

Ian Smith left immediately and was warmly received by the Queen and Duke of Edinburgh. Wilson also buttonholed him there and asked him to come to 10 Downing Street that afternoon. Both men surprised each other at the absence of personal animosity, but their discussions were the first in 15 years of missed chances.

When Ian Smith returned to his hotel room that evening the missing invitation had materialized and was on his pillow.



It was becoming increasingly clear that Rhodesia was heading for a unilateral declaration of independence (UDI). Ian Smith, reinforced by a clean sweep by the Rhodesian Front in an election in May, held that illegal independence and "the maintenance of civilised standards" was better than the chaos that white Rhodesia believed would follow an African government.

The Government was fully organised for the likelihood of sanctions. Fuel stocks were built up and other essential commodities distributed. Ian Smith had secured the support of Hendrik Verwoerd, the South African Prime Minister and Antonio Salazar, the Portuguese President for the continuity of Rhodesia's trade routes through South Africa and Mozambique.

There followed a series of last-ditch shuttles. Ian Smith went to London on October 5 1965, but his talks with Wilson ended with a communique concluding that their positions were "irreconcilable". Wilson went on television with his grave appeal to Smith: "Prime Minister, think again."

Ten days later Wilson was in Salisbury, with fresh proposals, which Ian Smith rejected. There was an unexpected personal understanding between the two men. They were on first-name terms, and Ian Smith remarked afterwards: "He was closer to us than he was to them" (Nkomo and Sithole). Wilson also betrayed his sympathies with Smith's remark, "I don't think Rhodesia is in a position to have one-man, one-vote tomorrow."

On November 5, Ian Smith declared a state of emergency. His cabinet met on November 10 to discuss final arrangements for UDI. At 7.30 pm British high commissioner Jack Johnstone was allowed to present the meeting with an appeal from Wilson. Wilson telephoned Ian Smith at 8.30 the next morning, when the cabinet was about to take the final vote. For 30 minutes, Wilson pleaded quietly. Ian Smith told him it had already gone too far.

The declaration was signed in a nearby conference room, beneath a portrait of the young Queen Elizabeth, and for the first time since American independence in 1776, a British colony was in rebellion. Ian Smith delivered his radio address, telling a stunned and frightened nation, "so far and no further." Then he went home to bed.



It was Ian Smith's war-damaged left eye that drew people's attention first: 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.

A Foreign Office official, in a biographical note to the Prime Minister Sir Alec Douglas-Home in 1964, caught the same contradictory appearances: "His pedestrian and humourless

manner often conceals a shrewder assessment of a particular situation than at first appears on the surface, and he should not be underrated.”

The advice was not heeded. He held the attention of a fascinated world for more than 15 years with an outrageous rebellion against the British Crown; created a booming economy in the face of United Nations sanctions; and on a shoestring fought a counterinsurgency war that he came close to winning.

His ordinariness and lack of artifice helped to make him an extraordinary leader. A farmer, sportsman and quiet-spoken, churchgoing Presbyterian, he saw the world in neat packets of wonderful chaps, terrorists, communists and traitors.

His cold reserve served him both as a Spitfire pilot and in the face of a bawling Harold Wilson. His obstinacy led his personal secretary, Gerald Clarke, to pass on to him a British complaint that “once you have stated your position, they are unable to get you to move”. Henry Kissinger perceived honour and courage in Ian Smith when he delivered what were effectively the terms of Rhodesia’s surrender, and he wept. He was modest to a fault. He refused to press for the DSO and DFC he deserved after the war, but had not been awarded through oversight.

Throughout most of his tenure at Independence, his official residence, anyone could walk down the driveway and knock on the front door. He was the world’s perfect rebel. Wilson was warned that there was a strong likelihood of a mutiny in the British Armed Forces if he ordered a military suppression of the unilateral declaration of independence. Pik Botha, the former South African Foreign Minister, said that Ian Smith could have won an election in South Africa in 1976 while Pretoria was secretly forcing him to accept black rule.

Prime Minister Ian Smith



Ian Smith will struggle to lose the image of the arch white racist. But black Zimbabweans after independence admired him for his unbending, blunt criticism of President Mugabe — giving voice to opinions that they dared not utter. As economic decay set in, Mugabe would be haunted by the words of fellow blacks: “It was better under Smith.”

To dismiss his UDI as an attempt to impose a crude white supremacist State is a serious oversimplification. He never evinced the coarse racism of many of his colleagues. His was an anachronistic vision of a sovereign Rhodesia that embodied the traditions and values of

an unchanging Empire: he saw UDI as a short-term measure that would quickly be resolved, with Rhodesia independent but still tied to Britain through the Commonwealth.

The winds of change shattered his vision. By the time he became Prime Minister, he was up against a Britain that wanted not merely to introduce black rule, but to strip his Government of the powers of self-rule granted by Whitehall in 1923.

With the brutality of post-independence Africa vivid in the minds of white Rhodesians, he persisted with "evolutionary, not revolutionary, change".

More than four decades after UDI, the racist bogey is less clear. But he remains condemned for ignoring the extreme disparities between blacks and whites, and his refusal to change the situation.

In December 1966, with Wilson's forecast of UDI being "a matter of weeks rather than months" firmly buried, Ian Smith flew to Gibraltar for the first contact with Wilson in more than a year. The meeting was on board the frigate HMS Tiger.

On board HMS Tiger Wilson tried to humiliate Ian Smith. He took the admiral's cabin and put the Rhodesians in non-commissioned quarters with a shared toilet. In their first meeting, he shouted at Ian Smith, who rose, stared at the Mediterranean for interminable minutes and then told Wilson to behave himself. Back in Salisbury, his Cabinet rejected the proposals.

Wilson and Ian Smith next met in October 1968 on board HMS Fearless. This time Wilson, on the advice of his secretary, Marcia Falkender, treated Ian Smith hospitably, but resolution remained elusive. Edward Heath's Conservative Government in 1970 made far more progress with Ian Smith and an agreement was ready for conclusion, pending only the approval of the black population. Unrest and resistance greeted Lord Pearce's mission to assess black opinion, and the bid failed.

The 1970s ended the complacency of booming, peaceful UDI Rhodesia. Guerrilla forces opened their long war against Ian Smith in December 1972. In October 1974 John Vorster, the South African Prime Minister, launched his policy of "detente" with black Africa. He demanded that Ian Smith release the black-nationalist leaders in detention. Ian Smith gave in and agreed, and the relationship with his most important ally was suddenly undermined.

Without warning Ian Smith, Vorster removed the contingent of South African police guarding the northern border against guerrilla incursions. Ian Smith was shocked. One could expect this from the British, he said, but now with the South Africans, "there was obvious deceit". Vorster kept on squeezing Ian Smith. The supply from South Africa of fuel, munitions and aircraft spares for what was now a substantial war began to dry up. The Rhodesian war effort was severely curtailed.

Ian Smith's impotent anger was clear in his remark then: "I longed for those carefree days when I was flying around the skies in my Spitfire, saying to myself, 'Let anyone cross my path and he will have to take what comes his way'." Vorster's first attempt to bring Ian Smith and the black nationalists together was in August 1975.

Ian Smith laid down his position, the nationalists barked demands and they broke up in a muddle after about an hour. His trip to Pretoria on September 18, 1976, to meet Henry Kissinger, the US Secretary of State, signalled the final stage of his rebellion. A few months before, he had made his famously regrettable statement: "I don't believe in black majority rule ever in Rhodesia, not in a thousand years."

The meeting in the American Embassy in Pretoria was an event of great emotion for both the Rhodesian farmer and the world's most powerful diplomat. Kissinger proposed black majority rule in two years, and any subsequent proposals would be infinitely worse. As he spelt out the situation, Kissinger was wiping tears away from his eyes. "This is the first time in my life I have asked anyone to commit political suicide," he told Ian Smith. "You have no alternative. I feel for you."

The South African Government had made clear its intention to close its border, completely isolating land-locked Rhodesia, if Ian Smith rejected the Kissinger proposals.

Ian Smith was sunk in despair, but awed by Kissinger. "He spoke with obvious sincerity and there was great emotion in his voice. For a while words escaped him," Ian Smith recalled. Kissinger's ultimatum was "the coup de grâce," he said. "We were rudderless after that."

The Geneva conference between the Rhodesian delegation and the African parties followed in late October. Under Ivor Richard's ineffectual chairmanship, it fizzled out after two months. In September 1977, Ian Smith did the unthinkable. Without consulting his cabinet, he flew to Lusaka in the private jet of Tiny Rowland, the Lonrho chairman, for a day's talks with Kenneth Kaunda, a few kilometres from a major guerrilla base. The Zambian President "couldn't have been kinder", but the initiative failed.

Ian Smith again tried to settle without the rest of the world and pursued a settlement outside the military alliance between Nkomo's and Mugabe's Patriotic Front. On March 1978, he signed the "internal agreement" with Bishop Abel Muzorewa, the Rev Ndabaningi Sithole and two tribal leaders. The country's first one-man, one-vote election in April 1979 drew a 63 per cent turnout and was won by Muzorewa's United African National Council. The country became Zimbabwe Rhodesia. Nearly no one recognised it. The world was hell-bent on installing a communist regime and the war continued.

Margaret Thatcher's Conservative victory in May that year resulted in the Lancaster House constitutional conference in London under Lord Carrington, the Foreign Secretary.

Ian Smith was irrelevant at Lancaster House, raging fruitlessly against the "treachery" of almost everyone from Carrington to members of his own delegation. When they voted in November on the proposed constitution, Ian Smith was the only dissenter. He boycotted the post-agreement party, and went to dinner instead with his former RAF colleagues and Douglas Bader. He refused to attend the "nauseating" signing ceremony on December 19.

On March 2, 1980, near the end of vote counting in the just-ended election, it was clear that Zanu(PF) was heading for an overwhelming victory. Ian Smith was surprised to receive a call to meet Mugabe at his house. Mugabe assured Ian Smith that he would adhere to a private enterprise economy to retain whites' confidence. He referred to the country as "this jewel of Africa".

Ian Smith went home in astonishment and told his wife he hoped that he had not been hallucinating. Mugabe "behaved like a balanced Western gentleman, the antithesis of the communist gangster I had expected," he said.

Zanu(PF) won 57 out of the 80 black seats created by the new constitution, but the (Rhodesian) Front won all 20 white seats, with Ian Smith still the party leader.

He met Mugabe several times, until 1981 when Ian Smith criticised Mugabe's plans for a one-party-state. Mugabe stopped the meetings. In December 1982 Ian Smith was briefly arrested and he was forced to surrender his passport.

To Mugabe's chagrin, Ian Smith was returned to parliament in the 1985 elections, but a year later was suspended for denouncing black majority rule, and again in 1987 for dismissing Mugabe's threats of sanctions against South Africa as "a waste of time". Before he could return, the constitutional provision for 20 reserved white seats was abolished.

He continued to farm and to speak out at home and on tours abroad, against Mugabe and his "terrorists". In early 2000, a small contingent of so-called guerrilla war veterans occupied part of the farm, as part of a mass invasion of white-owned land.

In March that year, he appeared with Muzorewa and Sithole to launch a new political party. To the relief of his friends and family, it was never heard of again. Thereafter he slipped out of the public eye. Ian Smith's wife and son, Alec, predeceased him.



Ian Smith died in Cape Town on November 20, 2007, aged 88 and the curtain came down on the last great statesman of the 20th Century.

