A Year in Tanzania – 1967

by Wallace Adam

A relatively new RCAF pilot, I was on staff at the 'Practice Flight' at Uplands (Ottawa) flying C-45 Expeditors and C-47 Dakotas and gaining valuable flying experience. This unit existed primarily to provide flying hours to pilots and navigators in 'ground jobs' in the Ottawa area to enable them to maintain their flying currency and therefore continue collecting their flying pay. After a year and a half of this I requested a posting overseas and too quickly perhaps received a posting message to 115 ATU in El Arish, Egypt. The posting was for one year and I would be flying deHavilland DHC-3 Otters and DHC-4 Caribou for the United Nations Emergency Force that monitored the uneasy peace between Israel and the surrounding Arab countries. I was delighted although it was generally known there was some danger and the living conditions were primitive. This posting complicated my marriage plans because my wife-to-be, Anne, had planned a spring 1967 wedding. But duty calls; we would work it out somehow.

I proceeded on temporary duty to Trenton for the flying conversion courses, 25 hours on the Otter and about 75 hours on the Caribou. On the course ahead of me was Squadron Leader Jack McCann, who was slated to become the Air Wing commander in some exotic-sounding place called Dar Es Salaam, Tanzania, where the same two aircraft types were flown. One evening in the mess (I think he was buying the beer) he asked me if I might be interested in going to Tanzania instead of Egypt. One of my fellow course students was slated for Tanzania, a French Canadian with a heavy accent and, because the Tanzanian posting required pilots to instruct, Jack believed the students might have a tough time understanding him and wanted us to swap. After locating Tanzania on a map and thinking about this for a day or so, and consulting with Anne, I agreed to the switch. I was now Tanzania bound. This swap turned out to be fortunate for me. I not only avoided the heat, dust, bugs and 'gypo-gut' of 115 ATU in El Arish but also missed out on the forced evacuation of El Arish on 29 May 1967, just days before the Six Day War.

After completing the flying courses and returning to Ottawa I had about 2 weeks to get ready. There was the usual paperwork and lots of needles and pills. About 1 week before departure I received a call from NDHQ to make sure I was ready. The caller went into a panic when I replied 'what passport?' No one had warned me to apply for one, so after help from this chap and a rush trip downtown, I had a brand new diplomatic passport in my hand the following day. Persons posted to CAFATTT (Canadian Armed Forces Advisory and Training Team Tanzania) were 'seconded' to the Department of External Affairs and must carry a diplomatic passport. As a bonus, we also travelled first class.

The Journey Overseas. A total greenhorn at international travel, I somehow arrived on schedule in Dar Es Salaam ('harbor of peace') in early January 1967. I flew on an RCAF Yukon to England, then a BOAC super VC-10 to 'Dar' with a stop in Nairobi. Memories of my one night in England are not pleasant; I recall sleeping in the bathtub in the Grosvenor Court hotel to muffle traffic noise, and eating rubber chicken in the hotel restaurant.

Arrival in Dar also sticks in my memory. It was bitterly cold in England the morning of departure so I wore grey flannels with long underwear. I was quite comfortable on the VC-10 so I never thought to change during the flight. At Dar it was like stepping into a humid blast furnace and I had to endure this for a few hours before finding an opportunity to change into shorts. My greeting party had another chuckle. I had packed my golf clubs in the trunk that I was allowed to pre-ship, and all the clubs fit inside except the driver. I hand-carried the driver with me all the way to Africa and on arrival was ribbed about being there to golf, not work.

The CAFATTT Air Wing. Our accommodation was very decent. All unaccompanied personnel were billeted in single rooms in three sprawling three story apartment buildings, officers in one and other ranks in the other two. It was about a 15 minute van ride to the airport where the TPDF (Tanzanian Peoples Defence Force) air wing was located. Accompanied personnel, generally of senior ranks, were provided homes in the Oyster Bay suburb and their tour length was two years. We single types always enjoyed an invitation to dinner with them and a chance to experience some family life. RCAF personnel were roughly equal in numbers to the Canadian Army who assisted the TPDF with training and field manoeuvers.

Our messes for eating and relaxing were in the same buildings and the food was decent. Cooking and laundry were generally well managed by hired Tanzanian staff. Booze was duty free but we missed Canadian beer which arrived only occasionally by RCAF Hercules aircraft. We had European beer but the local beer (Tusker) was surprisingly good thanks to Tanzania's early German colonizers.

Movie night was Sunday. Films flown in from Canada were projected onto a blank white outside wall on one of the buildings and we could watch them from our patio. The locals soon picked up on this and several dozen would sit in the courtyard to watch. This was a new experience to most and they got very excited during the action scenes.

The TPDF air wing at the international airport utilized two hangars with a third under construction. As for aircraft, my log book shows trips on Otters 9102, 9103 and 9106 and on Caribou 9001, 9002, 9003 and 9004, so our fleet consisted of seven aircraft, all donated by Canada.

A few brand new Piaggio training aircraft were also at the air wing, an interesting story that I won't go into here. Mostly in crates, one or two had been uncrated and assembled. Before my arrival, two of our RCAF pilots flew one and were badly hurt when it crashed. The cause was determined to be engine failure due to carburetor icing, a constant concern in humid climates, and it didn't help I'm sure that the cockpit instrumentation was in metric and German. We were never allowed to fly them but S/L Jack McCann took me up in one anyway during my last week. I think I can safely rat him out after 46 years.

The Tanzanian TPDF pilots and all or most of the TPDF trades technicians had previously been to Canada for training and our job was to further train them and convert them onto the Otter and Caribou aircraft that were new to them. The flying training portion was broken into two parts: transport operations and traditional flying instruction. I was a bit surprised that at the air wing I was suddenly considered a flying instructor in spite of the fact that I had never instructed on anything nor taken any of the RCAF qualifying courses. Things were done differently there.

I had a regulation flying suit in my gear but I found it to be extremely hot and sweaty. Our sort-of-official- made-by-an-Indian-tailor-downtown CAFATTT air wing uniform consisted of a tan short sleeved shirt with rank on the epaulets, short tan pants, calf length tan socks and black leather shoes. I believe this uniform was unique to CAFATTT. It would have been illegal to fly in this uniform in Canada because of bare arms and legs, but most of the aircrew did so anyway.

I always felt somewhat sorry for the TPDF pilots and more so the technicians. During their Canadian training they were well looked after and received adequate pay allowances. On their return to Tanzania they reverted to the regular low pay for their rank with no consideration for their valuable flying and technical skills. The pilots were all officers and they squeaked by on their pay but the low ranked technicians really suffered. I was told that a few years ago some of the technicians signed a petition of complaint, a no-no in any man's military, and they were all court martialed and banned to an offshore island for life.

Transport Operations. The Caribou in particular were often utilized to transport troops and equipment, often termed 'battalion rotation'. The copilot was almost always a Tanzanian and the aircraft commander an RCAF pilot. I don't recall an all-Tanzanian crew flying a transport flight on the Caribou but I could be wrong. The Tanzanian copilot received valuable experience on these flights and as a bonus to us was always available to translate English into Kiswahili if necessary. I learned several Kiswahili words and even tried reading passenger briefings in Kiswahili but this usually resulted in so much mirth among the passengers that I gave up. I could never keep a straight face saying things like 'matapishi mfuko' (vomit bag).

The most common destinations were Nachingwea, a dirt strip in the south of the country, and the offshore islands of Zanzibar and Pemba. The single engine Otters were used too, but rarely for flights over water to the islands. Other exotic destinations in my log book are Songea, Iringa, Arusha, Tanga, Lake Manyara, Sao Hill, Mtwara, Kilwa, Kiabakari, Tabora, Kondoa, Mikumi, Monduli and Kongwa, many of them small dirt strips. I recall buzzing one strip before landing to chase off the zebra.

Transport trips often proved challenging. Our crew usually included a Tanzanian loadmaster trainee responsible for manifesting passengers and freight. Everyone tried hard but flights to Zanzibar in particular never seemed to go as planned. If say 20 troops were manifested in advance for pickup, it was common to find them accompanied by miscellaneous wives, children, relatives, chickens and goats, all awaiting transport. I don't remember a goat on board but we certainly carried all of the rest including many worried chickens with their heads sticking out of straw baskets. We didn't want to leave anyone behind so sometimes we flew two trips when only one was planned. For safety, it became our practice to insist the troops unload their rifles and place the ammunition in one of our hats before boarding, and we returned it to them at destination.

I recall one trip to Zanzibar where 2 of the waiting passengers were clearly ‘Red Chinese’, as we called them, Canada’s foreign aid ‘competitors’ in Tanzania, complete with ‘Mao Tse Tung’ badges on their straw hats. As the aircraft commander, I seriously considered refusing them passage but to avoid a scene I relented and flew them to Dar. I informed S/L McCann who passed the hot potato up the CAFATTT chain, with it ending up in the lap of our consular staff at the British Embassy. The word back down was to allow them passage if it ever happened again to avoid any possibility of an international incident. It was a lucky guess on my part.

Occasionally we transported VIPs. I never carried President Julius Nyerere, but I carried his wife, and on more than one occasion, the Vice President, Kawawa. On one such trip we crew accompanied the VIP party into a small town for a political rally and the promise of lunch. It was the only time in my life I ate goat meat and beer for lunch; it was basically eat or go hungry and we knew from experience at least the beer was safe.

I had the privilege of landing the first aircraft, a Caribou, at a new airfield called the Masai Military airport. Canadian Army personnel and the TPDF ‘built’ it on the flat Serengeti in the middle of nowhere. There was a small wooden platform and a sign with the airfield name. The runway was a flat stretch on the plain with a few simple markers. The landing and takeoff were bouncy but no problem for the sturdy Caribou. It was built as a training exercise and I have no idea if the Masai Military airport was ever used again.

Once we were tasked to fly to Songea in the southern part of the country to use up an aging cache of aviation gas at the airport. The cache turned out to be a stack of rusting 4 gallon gas cans. We obtained an extension ladder and passed the cans up a human chain to the top of the Caribou wing where the flight engineer poured the gas into a large funnel inserted into the wing-top fuel tank ports. The funnel was lined with chamois cloth to separate out any water in the fuel. Everyone was thankful the engines continued to run normally.

On one stop in Zanzibar we had a few hours to kill so the crew headed downtown for some sightseeing. The taxi could take us only so far because the streets became very narrow towards city center. Walking, we were soon latched onto by an English speaking guide who showed us around. I stopped at one small shop and watched the famous Zanzibar chests being made. The mahogany and brass chests were beautiful and I couldn’t resist the chance to buy one (at about $80 USD I think). They took it to the airport for me by cart and our Caribou took it back to Dar where I lashed it to the luggage carrier on the back of my MGA for transport home. It took some finagling to forward it on to Canada but it eventually went via Hercules to Trenton. We still have it in our home today.

WW1 Artifact. About 30 minutes flying time south of Dar lays the Rufiji River delta, a large area of river channels, forest and mangrove swamp. In 1915, British ships chased the German light cruiser Koeningsberg into the delta and shelled it. The German crew ended up scuttling it and making their way overland to safety. Also trapped was the Somalia, a 'coaler' accompanying the coal-burning Koeningsberg. In 1967 the Koeningsberg was nowhere to be found but the Somalia was clearly visible. I took photographs of the Somalia from the air and today they are posted with commentary in Panoramio on Google Earth. Today the Somalia is almost entirely covered by mangrove.

Flying Instruction. The transport trips were a great help but the Tanzanian pilots still had to learn basic flying skills on their new aircraft. Some had no mechanical background and barely scraped through the training in Canada and this was reflected in their slow progress on the Otter and Caribou. Fortunately the local weather always allowed visual flight so most of the training could be done almost anytime at Dar. The airport was not busy and we usually had the sky to ourselves.

We followed a syllabus that included lots of 'circuits and bumps', basic navigation procedures, instrument flying, night flying, map reading, emergency procedures etc. It was a difficult grind for all concerned but progress was made and some of the Tanzanian pilots achieved their captaincy.

The year round weather at Dar was so good that the only airport approach aid provided was a non-directional beacon. For the Caribou, we were required to teach ILS (instrument landing system) procedures and for that we flew to Nairobi, Kenya, about a 3 hour flight north. This was an enjoyable outing, partly because the scenic route passed close to snow-capped Mount Kilimanjaro and if we were lucky the peak would be visible, and because the climate was so much drier and cooler at mile-high Nairobi. We spent the night there, toured the tower and control center, and flew many ILSs.

An Exciting Air Test. I have told this story before and it's always a touch embarrassing. After major maintenance work it is standard practice to take an aircraft up on an air test before it is released for flying duties. I was assigned to fly an airtest on a Caribou along with a Tanzanian copilot, a flight engineer and some technicians who had worked on the aircraft during its overhaul. The air test checklist called for a complete workout of all systems and all went well until it came time to test the feathering of each propeller, a procedure that would normally only be done to reduce drag after an engine failure. There is a big red button for each propeller; push in to feather, push in again to unfeather. On a piston engine aircraft, such as the Caribou, the propeller is connected directly to the engine therefore the engine is forced to stop when the propeller feathers. So I feathered the port propeller and the engine stopped. So far so good, but then I received a call from the control tower I had to answer. After this distraction I went to push the button again to unfeather the propeller and allow the spinning propeller to restart the engine, but I pushed the other feathering button by mistake. Call it a brain cramp if you wish but suddenly I was flying a very heavy glider with both propellers feathered and both engines stopped. I trimmed the aircraft into a glide and pushed both feathering buttons hoping at least one would unfeather but the safety altitude we use on air tests was quickly being eaten up, there was no open area to land in, and the trees were getting bigger. Believing we were soon to hit the trees below and with no hydraulic pressure showing, I signaled the flight engineer to pull the emergency landing gear handle and sure enough, gravity and airflow did their thing and the main gear locked down. I was counting on the landing gear to take some of the impact.

At about 100 feet above the trees my copilot pointed to a twitching engine rpm needle indicating the propeller might be unfeathering, so I eased that throttle forward. The engine caught, I firewalled the throttle and the engine revved up to full power. What a wonderful noise! But the excitement wasn't over; we were now flying on a single engine at tree-top level with the landing gear extended, not a happy predicament. Now having hydraulic pressure back, I selected the gear up to reduce drag but it cycled up and down near its up position and made loud banging noises. (I later found out that after an emergency extension, the gear up-locks and not reset open to accept the retracting gear). With the drag reduced somewhat because of the partially retracted gear, I kept us in the air and we got the second engine running. Once we gained some altitude and airspeed I selected the gear down and returned to the airport and landed. We were all shaken up but there was no damage to the aircraft and we completed the air test! This was my most scary incident ever in an aircraft. But it was a lesson learned; I did many air tests later in my career and on different aircraft and you can be sure I triple checked before pushing any buttons.

Married Life. Mid way during the one year posting to CAFATTT, personnel were allowed four weeks off and most returned to Canada. In June, I returned to Canada and married Anne as originally scheduled and after visiting Expo 67 and camping in Algonquin Park we flew back to Tanzania together. My tour remained 'unaccompanied' so as a married couple we were on our own.

I earlier purchased a car, an old beat up MGA, so transport was not a problem. Anne and I sublet the top floor of the Girl Guide HQ from an expat Brit who was closing his business and that became our home for six months. The flat came with a delightful dog Bobby, half beagle and half dachshund we think, and also a houseboy and his wife and children, who lived in a 'shamba' on the property. The houseboy did most of the cleaning, cooking and laundry for which we paid him a small salary that sustained him and his family. We weren't too thrilled about inheriting this crowd but it was expected of us. There are many stories about this combination that I will not go into here.

On days off, Anne and I often drove about in the MGA. There was shopping and golf and beaches, and we enjoyed more than one trip to Bagamoyo, a small Arab community just north of Dar, at the deepest indentation of the Indian Ocean into the east coast of Africa, where the infamous slave route ended. Stanley and Livingston passed through Bagamoyo. The Gloria restaurant had a kerosene operated refrigerator, so we often stopped for a cold Tusker. There were many spectacular Baobab trees in that area. As a couple, we were well accepted by the Canadian community and enjoyed many social activities. Anne was eventually hired by the International school as a French teacher.

On one group outing to a beach, Anne took off her rings and gave them to me while swimming. I slipped them into the back pocket of my shorts and then changed into my swim suit. The engagement ring was missing when the time came to leave and we figured it was somewhere in the sand inside or outside the thatched shack we had changed in. Perhaps a week later, I borrowed a shovel and a window screen from Jack McCann, and Anne and I returned to the beach. I think it took about eight shovels of sand through the screen and there was the ring. Disaster averted.

Operating the MGA was a challenge. It had wire-spoked wheels that often warped when hitting a pothole. There was one garage in Dar that carried a supply of the spokes and I purchased all they had. A small bicycle shop in Dar became very proficient at replacing spokes for me as long as I supplied them but I often had to drive without a spare because a wheel was in being re-spoked.

The Landrover Trip. Some of the Canadian techs purchased an old landrover and fixed it up hoping to use it or rent it out. There was room to sleep two in the back and it was well rigged for travelling with a double tropical roof and special strong screen doors on the back, and brackets on the front bumper that would hold 4 large gas cans. I think it would probably have blown up if struck in the front end. I was their first customer.

Anne and I lumbered out of Dar with a full gas load on a potholed dirt road that passed as the main road north. It was Christmas season and our special food boxes sent to Canadians abroad were aboard. We lived well on canned turkey, ham, puddings, sauces etc. We passed through Moshi and Arusha in northern Tanzania before crossing into Kenya. Approaching Nairobi we were flagged down by three armed soldiers. I thought it best to stop but it turned out they were just trying to hitch a ride to Nairobi. We obliged but it was a bit of a squeeze inside.

In Nairobi, while refueling, I asked a fellow motorist if he knew where there might be a campground we could spend the night at. He had no idea but said we could park in his driveway if we wished. We followed him there and found him and his wife to be very nice people. I recall they may have been British diplomatic staff. We were invited in for dinner and, having no wine, took along a full 40 ounce bottle of cc which we all drained. My head was a bit fuzzy when we drove off the next morning.

Heading back south to re-enter Tanzania, we were waved into a yard at the border. An official asked for our re-entry permit and of course we didn't have one. Apparently we were supposed to stop and obtain one when leaving Tanzania a day earlier, but I must have missed the poorly marked border and driven right by. The official wasn't going to let us back into Tanzania. His English wasn't good but I managed to explain I was an officer in the TPDF and showed him my TPDF ID card. He saluted and waved us on our way.

We drove to Arusha and then west to the beautiful Lake Manyara National Park. The park is located at the bottom of the Great Rift valley and there is no shortage of spring water for the forest and wildlife. We drove around to look at wildlife and stopped to watch an elephant. Suddenly a large herd of his friends emerged from the bush and they literally surrounded as they ambled by. All were absolutely filthy having just enjoyed a mud wallow. We spent the night in the campground keeping a wary eye on our neighbors, a troop of baboons.

Next we drove among the thousands of animals on the Serengeti plains, spending our nights in the landrover, safe from the night predators. We celebrated New Year's eve 1967/1968 camped on the rim of the Ngorongoro Crater, an amazing game park. There was a lodge nearby but it was too pricey for us. Visitors to the crater were not allowed down into the crater without a park ranger, so we hired one but he was required to drive. The crater floor was about 10 miles across and rich with wildlife. It was an amazing experience until our ancient vehicle developed a serious clutch problem. I don't think it was our driver's fault but the clutch would not disengage and shifting gears was next to impossible. We crawled back up the rim in first gear and the guide departed. We found it necessary to preselect second or third gear and then start the engine and the landrover would lurch to a start and carry on. We drove all the way back to Arusha in this fashion.

There was a decent garage in Arusha but the whole town was shut down for the Ramadan religious holiday and it took 2 or 3 days for a mechanic to show up. During the wait we stayed in our landrover in a small campground right in town and often relaxed on the patio of the New Arusha hotel, a location previously scouted out by Canadian aircrew. Arusha is a pleasant town; it was home base for the John Wayne African movies, 'Hatari' for example. The problem with the clutch was a disconnected linkage, a fairly easy fix with the venerable landrover, so we were finally on our way.

The landrover had one more trick to play on us. About an hour from Dar, the engine started dying when the rpm was low. I poked around under the hood to no avail. It became worse as I drove into Dar and I had to keep the engine screaming at high rpm. I managed to reach quarters and hand it back to the owners. I was told it never started again until they took the engine apart and replaced the head gasket.

<u>The Trip Home</u>. Our trip back to Canada was not without its challenges. I elected to downgrade to 2nd class on BOAC's super VC-10 so Anne and I could sit together. My ticket was paid by External Affairs but there was no way we could afford to buy Anne a 1st class ticket. This was a mistake that cost us most of the cash we had with us. Our luggage was found to be overweight on boarding, not a problem had I remained a 1st class passenger, but both of us now being 2nd class we were forced to pay about $100 USD in overweight charges.

During the usual stop in Nairobi, the VC-10 blew a tire on takeoff and a piece of it flew into one of the tail-mounted engines and damaged it. After flying in circles to burn off fuel, the VC-10 landed safely on one less tire and one less engine back in Nairobi. A long wait saw us off again on an Alitalia flight to London with a stop in Athens. We arrived late in London for our scheduled one night stopover only to find most of our luggage was missing. We were booked out next day on an RCAF flight so we feared we would never see our luggage again. The next morning, just before checking out of the hotel, the missing luggage was delivered to our door. We were very lucky and arrived back in wintery Canada in good spirits.

Anne and I will always fondly remember 1967. In addition to being Canada's centennial, it was the year of a great flying posting and an exotic six month honeymoon.