

Matey's Memoirs

By Robin (Matey) Martin

In his above titled book Robin Martin includes the time he spent in the Nyasaland Police in chapters 3, 4 and 5. Courtesy of his daughter, Anne Blackman, these chapters are available on the Nypol website. They are broken down into a number of parts and appear in serial form from month to month until fully available.

Chapter 3 ~ Part 2

Slow Boat to Beira

Approaching Cape Town

Soon after leaving St Helena we encountered the beginnings of the Cape Rollers. Two powerful ocean currents flow from opposite directions towards the southern tip of Africa and meet at the Cape – the wide Benguela Current which sweeps from the south Atlantic and then turns northwards up the West African Coast and the narrow, fast-flowing Agulhas Current which sweeps southwards down the East African coast before turning east. This causes dramatic oceanic disturbance and upwellings of water which also generate these distinctive waves. At the latitude off St Helena the waves are still quite small but could be seen extending from horizon to horizon, moving from west to east and would eventually break on the coast of South West Africa. As we progressed southwards the rollers gradually increased in size and the ship began to roll from side to side – not violently but steadily, through 30 or 40 degrees. On one occasion I saw a passenger seated in a dining chair roll completely backwards onto the floor. Luckily he was not hurt. After about four



days of this we reached Cape Town. There, towering over the city was the giant Table Mountain, with the Lion's Head standing guard at one end and the Devils Tooth rising to a pinnacle at the other: while away to the south stood the 12 Apostles stretching to the Cape of Good Hope. Truly it is, as was described by the circumnavigator Sir Francis Drake, "*The most stately thing and the fairest cape we saw in the whole circumference of the earth.*" I found it immensely impressive and thoroughly enjoyed the four days we spent in Cape Town.

Generally, I found the white South Africans I came into contact with very helpful and friendly. One young man suggested I take a bus trip to Haut Bay, which I duly did. I much enjoyed the beautiful scenery and was very glad I had acted on his recommendation. And often when I was out walking and sightseeing, people stopped their cars and offered me lifts or advice. But I also have a memory of a procession of African Scouts, Guides and Youth Brigades, with a very striking lack of happiness expressed on their faces, indicating to me frustration and inner apprehension. The policy of apartheid had been declared the year before and I wondered then what the final outcome of South Africa's racial policy would be. I am very glad that, though a lot of blood has been shed and some people have suffered terrible vindictive violence in opposing the policy, things have eventually resolved a lot more peacefully than might have been the case. The white people came to appreciate that they were in the minority and could not hold their privileged position forever.

Port Elizabeth and East London

From Cape Town we travelled on to Port Elizabeth, where we stayed a couple of days while cargo was being unloaded and loaded. By now those of us who had not disembarked had been on board this ship for more than three weeks, and still we lingered in the ports. There was, at that time, a popular song entitled, "I'd love to get you on a slow boat to China" and this seemed to become the passengers' song, as many of them were impatiently awaiting their arrivals at their final destinations. I, however, was happy for the journey to continue for as long as it took. The ship was a very comfortable little vessel and I thoroughly appreciated the opportunity to explore each port, where there was always something new to see. Port Elizabeth was quite an attractive little town but what I remembered most was the really delightful walk in a park along the banks of a stream, just outside the town. There were stately blue gums and a profusion of flowering shrubs and other plants growing through a little valley, and I felt that if this was typical of Africa, I was going to enjoy it. The next port of call was East London and my main memory of this little seaport was the aquarium. It was very well arranged, with fish tanks on both sides of the walkways. One tank, I particularly remember, contained a fair sized grey nurse shark, a most sinister looking creature with an evil, leering expression, but superbly graceful in movement.



On to Durban

Two more days from East London and we were in Durban, which to my mind was the finest city in Africa that I had yet seen, with beautiful buildings, clean wide streets, and a seafront promenade beside the Indian Ocean. Here we stayed for five days, being delayed a little, this time, by a labour strike in the docks. I never found out why there was a strike or who exactly was on strike. I was struck by the Zulu dock workers and the carefree way these huge Africans ran about with trolleys, skipping, laughing and dancing like youngsters in a playground. Perhaps some demands had been met and they were celebrating? A huge, middle-aged Zulu constable was stationed on our gangway armed with a big knobkerrie. I asked, jokingly, what it was for and he replied, "In case communist, he come." I suppose that was my first introduction of the communist menace in Africa. I was to hear much more of it in the next fifteen years.



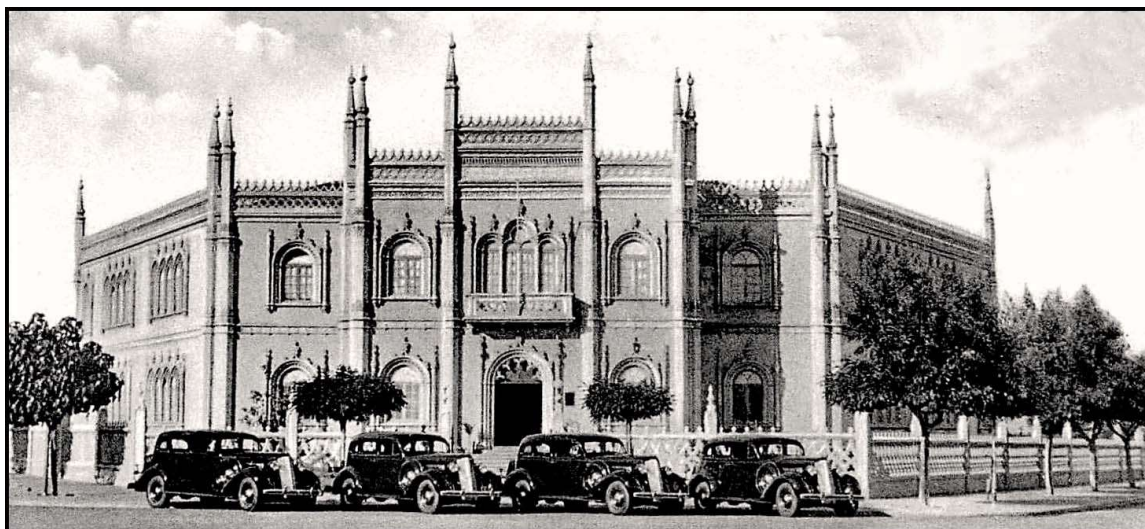
The ship's purser invited me to join the *Llandoverly* cricket team for the day, as they were to play against the crew of another ship in port, and the captains were old cricketing rivals. They did not often manage to be in port together but when they did they loved to have a cricket match. I was very glad of the opportunity of a game which I much enjoyed and a particular incident ensured that the event would stay in my mind. During the interval the purser discovered that he had lost his keys, including the key to the ship's safe. Some of us spread out to search the outfield and the expression on the purser's face when I found them was truly memorable.

Here at Durban I had to say farewell to Elsie, this being her disembarkation point. At the time we both wondered if we would ever see each other again, but Elsie later agreed to come up to Nyasaland so we could meet once more and we were married on 5th November that year.

Lourenço Marques

A few days later we were in the city of Lourenço_Marques (now Maputo) in Portuguese East Africa (Mozambique). This was a fine city and quite a contrast to those just visited, for there was a different system of segregation between the races – more like a “class system”. There was an *asimilado* status which allowed Africans who had reached a certain level of education and living standard to become full citizens of Portugal, with the same rights and privileges as the white races: consequently there were a number of black citizens in the cafes and nightclubs enjoying the facilities. This seemed a good system allowing ambitious men to get on in the world and reach the top in any walk of life they chose to follow. However, like the rest of colonial Africa, Portuguese East had to endure a guerrilla war. After the military coup in Portugal the Portuguese Government eventually left Mozambique in 1974 and the Marxist Front for the liberation of Mozambique (FRELIMO) took over.

I much enjoyed the wonderful museum in Lourenço Marques and I do hope that subsequent regimes have been able to maintain what I felt was a fascinating aid to the education of the people. There were models and actual artefacts on display showing every aspect of village history and life – pottery, spears, fishing equipment and wildlife. One display I particularly remember was of the seven stages of pre-natal development in an elephant, which included the very small embryo, the size of a chicken's egg - a perfect miniature elephant complete with trunk.



The Museum ~ Lourenço Marques

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