

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 4 ~ Part 2

From Zomba to Dedza



Now began my “fun” for I had come from a large well-organised and efficient police force, equipped with modern wireless communications as well as a whole plethora of armoured vehicles and armaments, and where the police stations were purpose built like little fortresses. Conditions at Dedza could not have been more different. I now found my “police station” to be little more than a cubbyhole on the side of the district prison. Having no office I was allotted a room by the District Commissioner in his block. The only phone in the district was in the DC's office, and phone lines at that time were strung along trees in the bush, so they were often down due to storm or white ant damage. A chair and table were the only pieces of furniture, but in those days empty wooden petrol boxes, with which petrol was transported – two tins to a box – were readily available, and several boxes, stacked on end, became a filing cabinet. (These boxes were very useful in houses too - for example two petrol boxes with a board across the top became a lady's dressing table)

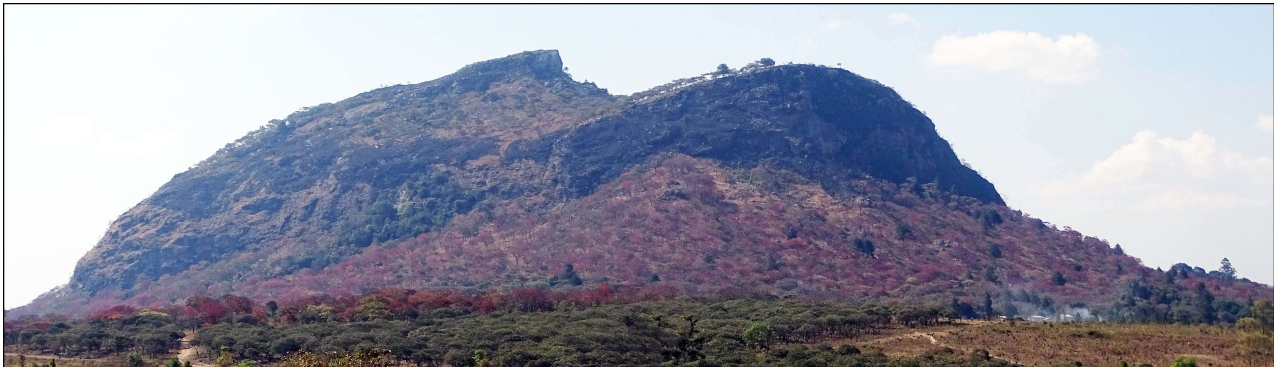
I was the first white senior police officer in the district for until then the DC had also been the officer commanding the police. I also now took over responsibility for prisons and immigration (we were close to the border with Portuguese East Africa). I had a staff of about 15 policemen, various

ranks, at Dedza, the HQ of the district, and several small police stations and posts in the outlying areas. Assistant Inspector Lanzandu was my right-hand man in Dedza. There were two or three policemen in each of the little stations or posts, including Salima, Chipoka and Ntakataka down by the lake. Ncheu also came under Dedza District for policing. There were about 12 policemen at Ncheu and several police posts, with additional strength, including one at Balaka Rail Halt.

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Soon after I arrived at Dedza there was a meeting of the council of local chiefs, which I was asked to address. After I was welcomed, I introduced myself and explained that, as the first white police officer in the district, it was not my job to make any difficulties for

them, but to work with them to ensure that the best results were obtained from all the various exigencies that prevailed. I was gratified to learn later that I had made a positive impression on the chiefs.



I was very pleased to find myself in Dedza, which was a quite delightful place. The Boma was a healthy 5,000 ft above sea level with Dedza Mountain towering 2,500 ft above it. I was especially happy to be there when I met the District Commissioner, Sedley George Williams or "SG" as he was always known, for he was very welcoming and a great companion to me. He had been in Nyasaland since about 1922 but had retired from Government Service due to injury (the cause to be related later) before the Second World War started, and had bought a house and settled down in Dorset. He joined the Air Watch Service before the war and served in that capacity for a while during the war. Then young men in the Colonial Administration Service were called up to the armed forces, so retired colonial officers like SG were called back overseas again. He was still engaged in this capacity when I first met him but was about to retire for a second time but was intending to stay and live in Dedza, which he found a very pleasant spot and was building himself a house. When I arrived Doris, his wife, was away in England and I think he enjoyed my company as much as I did his

During my first weekend I went for a walk to familiarise myself with the locality and decided to have a look at the house SG was building. I found him there with some African helpers, attempting to install a water system. He was using dies to cut the thread on the pipes and as I watched I noticed that there was only one thread being cut. "You have got the die on the wrong way round," I remarked. "I can't have," he replied. "The Brother at the mission put them together so they must be right." "Well the brother at the mission knows no more than you then", I observed. He reluctantly let me change them over and then he began to make some progress. I reassured him by explaining that I had learnt about such things as stocks and dies at my technical school and reassured, he asked me if I could help him the following weekend.

SG was a great character - one of the best sort of the old school - and had many tales to tell, some quite extraordinary, which I must relate here. He had been a member of the Royal Flying Corps during the First World War and had twice been captured by the Germans and twice he escaped. The first occasion he was in France where he escaped from a column of prisoners making its way to Germany. The prisoners were marching along a twisting section of the route and were watched as the column went round a bend. At one point SG thought he might be able to run into the woodland, after the leading guard had gone round the next bend and before the following guard had come round the previous one, and get away unnoticed. This he was able to do and successfully made his escape to Holland, then a neutral country, and finally crossed over the Channel to the London Docks. By then he had been sleeping rough for several days, so was rather scruffily dressed, and when he reported to a young lieutenant in some Army HQ, he was told off in no uncertain terms for appearing in the state he was in. SG explained that he had just escaped and the instructions were that escaped prisoners were to report,

immediately to the nearest British Military Authority. On the second occasion he found himself in Germany and made his way to the Swiss border. He was on the point of starvation so he broke into a German farmhouse where he found a bowl of eggs in a pantry. As he quietly left the pantry carrying the bowl he encountered the farmer in his nightshirt. The man was so startled that he was unable to act quickly enough. SG took advantage of the situation and after running into the yard, cleared a wall that stood about six feet high, carefully carrying the bowl of eggs. He concluded his story by saying that not one egg was broken during the incident.

Getting About the District

At that time I had no car and it was very difficult to obtain one so recently after the war. I had put my name on a waiting list with the car dealers but it took some months to work one's way up the list. Unable to travel any distance around my area, S.G. suggested to me that I should go out with him on some of his business trips. In this way I got to know the district roads and tracks quite well and was introduced to many of the people – including native Africans, white settlers, missionaries and other government servants, such as the agricultural and forestry officers.

Much of Dedza district included the 5,000 ft high plateau that surrounded Dedza Mountain, but some of the area comprised the lakeshore plain, about 3,500 ft down the escarpment. On one occasion SG and I went down to an Indian (Asian) trading settlement at Ntakataka down by the lake one day where we heard how, two days before, a lion had been attacked by a tribe of baboons. The creature had been so badly mauled that it appeared to have lost its reason. It had wandered into the trading settlement and then walked into one of the shops where it lay down to rest in the cool and dark. The shopkeeper and his customers had hurriedly left through the doors and windows, leaving the lion in charge of the shop. After about half an hour the lion seems to have recovered his senses, for he arose, bruised and still bleeding, and made his way out of the shop and disappeared into the bush.

This visit was followed by a curtsey call to a mission station, where we took some refreshments with the Father Superior and had a discussion on local affairs. On leaving, SG told me a story about a white lay brother who had been at the mission and had had an affair with a local native girl, who, in consequence, had found herself pregnant. The lay brother, after agonising over the matter for some days, decided that the best thing he could do would be to confess his sin to the Father Superior and throw himself on his mercy. The Father told him the young man that he was only human and could receive forgiveness, but he was not sufficiently mature to stay on at the Mission and it would be better if he left. With a sad heart the young brother left and obtained a job at a local sawmill. Some months after this, SG met the young man at the sawmill and enquired after his health and well-being. The ex-lay brother replied that he was fine and enjoying his work in the outside world, but added, "I was a fool to have confessed to the Father Superior for the girl had a miscarriage." Obviously *he* thought that "honesty was not always the best policy".

.....*To be continued*