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 5 ~ Part 5

Dedza continued

Missionary Mishap

Back in Dedza, and on hearing of how Mo Williams had come to our rescue, my friend Alex Shand, now settled into his job at the bus company, told me a lovely story about a visitor that Mo had from America, one of the leading lights of the "Assemblies of God". The mission had purchased an old wartime Liberator airplane and the visitor had flown out to Africa in it. He had wanted to visit all the mission stations, including the mission at Dedza. As he was about to travel south he offered Alex a lift but mentioned that he wanted to call at a village en route and give a talk and hoped that Alex would not mind waiting a bit.

While at the village a table was brought forth for the missionary's use, a typical village table and a bit rickety, and the missionary stood behind it with his various papers upon it. He then began to preach a real "hell fire" sermon, dwelling upon the words of the Bible, emphasising that the the Bible was the Word of God. He worked himself up into a frenzy and shouted out, "The Word of God is solid – it is as solid as a rock." Not being content with The Word being as solid as a rock, he went on to proclaim that, "His Word is as solid as this table," and brought down his fist with an almighty smash on the table top - which crumbled and collapsed in a heap on the ground.

Wilfred and some Ngoni History

Wilfred was a delightful little Tax clerk who worked in the DC's Office in Dedza. He was quite old but it was difficult to guess how old he might be. I met him out on the road to Ncheu one day and stopped for a chat. He told me that he could remember, as a young lad, taking part in a big battle which raged for three days along the high plateau country, between the Ngoni tribesmen - who were an offshoot of the Zulu nation - and the Yao men. Certainly the tribes and clans of tribes were still raiding in the 1870s and 1880s but the missionary Donald Frazer tells us that by the time of the 1890s, when he went to the country, the national raids had ceased *(Note 1)*. During the three days the Ngoni gradually drove back the Yaos towards the east until they withdrew down the escarpment towards the Lake and Chipoka. Wilfred, himself, had been wounded by a spear and he gave me a graphic description of the battlefield scene and the ritual observed when dealing with soldiers wounded with embedded spears. Wilfred had been speared through the thigh and while two warriors prepared to withdraw the weapon, six more had gathered around with their spears raised and pointed directly at his chest. Wilfred had to maintain absolute silence while the spear was withdrawn, for if he uttered a cry six spears would have immediately plunged into him. He explained the reason for this was that if a wounded warrior cried out the others could become demoralised and fearful, and the enemy could seize the opportunity to embolden and encourage their warriors. This practice had become battle conduct among the Ngoni, who were a very disciplined people.

At the time of Chaka, the Zulu Chief, in the 1830s, two of his ambitious generals, Mzilikazi

(also written as Mungwara) and Zwangendaba (some say Zongwendaba), deserted Chaka with their warriors and families and headed north, raiding weaker tribes, fusing with them or wiping them out. They had certain advantages over every tribe they conquered – the

Zulu stabbing spear and hide shield; and they were disciplined, under a central authority. Mzilikazi stayed south of the Zambezi in what is now Zimbabwe, while Zwangendaba had crossed the Zambezi close to where the Luangwa River joins the Zambezi and, over a period of many years journeyed north, past the northern tip of Lake Nyasa, on up past Lake Tanganyika, on as far as Lake Victoria, before being driven back south again by famine and internal dissentions, until the main body, under the leadership of Mombera arrived on the plateau, west of the Lake, where they remained. They built villages on the hills but sent out their *impis* every year to the Tonga on the lake shore, the Chewa in the south (the Southern province of what is now Malawi), the Senga in the west (now the province of Tete in Mozambique) and the Henga in the north. The *impis* returned with tribute of ivory or cattle, or a train of captives. The captives were incorporated into the tribe and their ear lobes bored in the manner of the Ngoni. The young men were drilled for the regiments and in this way the Northern Ngoni grew from a few 1000 to more than 120,000. The Yao came form Mozambique in the latter half of the 19th Century, and began attacking the Chewa and the Ngoni and selling them as slaves to the Arab traders.

The African National Congress

Back to the 1950s and at this time African Nationalism was just beginning to make itself felt and a political party, the African National Congress, was forming from amongst the educated Africans, to enhance nationalism, its primary aim being independence. As a counter to this H.M. Government in the UK introduced the idea of a Central African Federation of Southern Rhodesia, Northern Rhodesia and Nyasaland, which in size made a dominion larger than the area of South Africa. The idea was to create a large and powerful economic unit which would include the well developed colony of Southern Rhodesia with a large white population; the less developed and settled protectorate of Northern Rhodesia but with very rich copper mineral deposits;

and the protectorate of Nyasaland with very few natural resources, very small white population and large native population. The most developed and economically powerful region, Southern Rhodesia, would assume the dominant ruling position. When the idea was first announced it seemed to be well received by many of the leading Africans in Dedza, but soon ambitious African politicians poured scorn on the idea, averring that it would ensure that the native people would remain second class subject people for ever. The propaganda spread and soon the idea of Federation was an anathema among the native people and when the African Chiefs took against the idea, it was doomed before it started. The Chief's were thinking about their grandchildren who they did not want to condemn to conditions similar to those in South Africa. They were wise old men, thinking of their grandchildren; do the politician in England have the same concerns for their grandchildren?

In mid 1950 Alex was called to the Police HQ in Zomba and came back to tell me that he had been accepted into the Nyasaland Police as an Assistant Superintendent and also

brought the news for me that I was to be promoted to full Inspector. This was a bit of a disappointment as I had hoped I might jump that rank, but that was not to be. Then, out of the blue, I received a telegram instructing me to proceed on UK leave the following month. I was not expecting this as I had only completed 30 months and the usual tour was for three years. Nonetheless there was nothing for it and I had to go. It meant a winter leave and going from the tropics to arrive in England at the end of October, for a six-month stay, is not exactly ideal. Also, while on leave I was to attend a police-training course at the Police Training Centre at Wakefield for about 10 weeks and that was not my idea of leave. It would have been foolish to object so I did the course and achieved a good report, for I knew most of the syllabus from precious experience and training. We spent the rest of the time visiting relatives and getting to know our new relatives, in Hull and in Kent, and then towards the end of March our son Michael was born, in Yorkshire. Four weeks later Elsie and I and the two children were waiting at the quayside in Tilbury to board the *SS Rhodesia Castle*. "Babes-in-arms, head of the queue," called the baggage men who were also controlling the passengers and Elsie was glad to take advantage of the privilege. Once on board I remember Elsie saying how glad she was to be going back to her own house.

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Note 1: *Frazer, Donald (1914) p41 ~ Winning a primitive people*
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