

## BLANTYRE AND LIMBE POLICE STATIONS 1962-1963

After my time as Camp Commandant at Police Headquarters in Zomba, I was posted to Blantyre as a uniformed station officer. Blantyre Police Station was fairly large when compared with other stations in the country, and comprised six or seven British officers and more than twenty African constables and sergeants. A real character among the British officers was Fred Dale, who was what might be called a typical 'old style London bobby', and was one of the British police officers who were brought out to Nyasaland at the time of the Emergency, when Dr. Banda and other leading Malawi Politicians were arrested. Some, including Dr. Banda were sent out of the country and imprisoned in Gwelo, Southern Rhodesia, while others remained in prison in Nyasaland.



Fred stayed on after the Emergency had ended, and one of his traits identifying him as an ex-Met bobby was the way he smoked a cigarette, not between his fingers but cupped in his hand with the hot end towards the palm so that when he drew on it, any glow was shielded, and was a method favoured while on the beat and not wanting to be seen having a 'quick drag' should the Station Sergeant happen to be in the vicinity. One day, a call came into the station that there was a riot going on in a small village out in the bush, about four miles away. Fred gathered a sergeant, a driver and a constable and set off in the duty Land Rover, but by the time they had arrived

at the village it was dark, and to his surprise everything was absolutely quiet, with no sign of anybody about at all.

However, having been called out and being a good copper, he decided nonetheless to investigate and find out what had happened. Leaving the driver with the vehicle, he sent the sergeant around the side of the village while he set off between the huts with the other constable. Suddenly, and before the constable could warn him, a villager leapt out of one of the huts and thrust a short stabbing spear into Fred's back. Although a big man, the blow knocked Fred down to the ground, with the spear sticking out between his shoulder blades. But the assailant stood in awe when Fred stood up with the spear still sticking out of his back, took hold of the man and said 'you're nicked mate'.

The Land Rover returned to the police station, and having dropped off the prisoner and the constable, Fred was persuaded to go to the hospital where he was rushed into the operating theatre to have the spear removed. The doctors were concerned about any infection that may have been caused, but Fred had been extremely lucky that the spear had not hit any vital organs and he survived not only to tell the story, but to carry on with normal duty only a few days later as if nothing had happened.

In 1963, in the lead up to full Independence, Nyasaland was given internal self government and the Malawi Congress Party, being the leading political party at the time, made it clear that on gaining full independence the name of the country would be changed to Malawi. The leader of the party, Dr. Hastings Banda, known to the people as Ngwazi, or leader, became Prime Minister, and a number

of events took place to celebrate this development. I was on duty at one important dinner, to which many foreign and local dignitaries had been invited and was stood at the door inside the hall, checking that no intruders got in. The guest of honour was Mr Mennen Williams, who was the USA's roving ambassador to Africa at a time when many countries in the continent were gaining independence. In those days, the United States was in the forefront of



*G. Mennen Williams (left) with Dr Banda and President Kennedy*

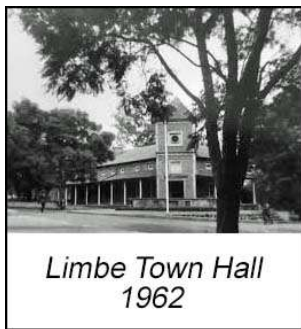
the anti-colonial movement, and was keen to see the end of all empires whether they were British, French, Portuguese or Dutch. Generous aid was provided to many of these newly independent countries, much of which was decided on and under the direction of Mennen Williams himself. He was invited to give the keynote speech, and spoke at length about Malawi, together with other

African countries, freeing itself from the shackles and yoke of colonialism, and compared this to his own country which had freed itself from the same oppressive control of Britain. He went on in this vein for some twenty minutes, causing me a great deal of inner anger at the unfairness and unbalanced nature of the speech, but my feelings were much assuaged by what followed. At the finish of his speech, he sat down to polite applause and looked duly pleased with himself and positively beamed when Dr. Banda stood up, raised his glass of Fanta orangeade (Banda never touched alcohol), looked around the hall and then at Mennen Williams, and said 'Ladies and gentlemen, I wish to propose a toast, please be upstanding'. But the smugness disappeared from the visitor's face as the Prime Minister continued, 'Ladies and gentlemen, her Majesty the Queen'. In doing so, the ultra-conservative Banda was correct in acknowledging that the Queen was still Head of State of Nyasaland, but in addition to this he was no revolutionary and was always uncomfortable with the type of rhetoric spouted by his guest. And it was clear that Mennen Williams would have benefited from a better briefing on Banda, who throughout his life was no great reformer and although no 'lover of the empire', had no compunction in declaring his admiration for the good parts of what he knew of the Colonial Government, and insisted on keeping in the country many British civil servants, army and police, well after full independence was achieved, in order to maintain continuity and ample time for his own people to acquire sufficient knowledge and experience before taking over completely. His own pet hate was the Federation which had been set up some years before when the British Government had felt Nyasaland would benefit from union with Northern and Southern Rhodesia.

Nyasaland was undoubtedly the poor relation, but certainly a source of labour for both copper rich Northern Rhodesia, and the economically and commercially powerful Southern Rhodesia, with its highly successful agricultural and commercial sectors. But the policy was hated by Banda and other politically minded Malawians, and when given the opportunity Banda often spoke out in public about 'the stupid Federation'. And when he obtained full power, his first action was to take Malawi out of the Federation, which in effect brought about its demise.

After only a few months at Blantyre, I was posted to Limbe Police Station where I fulfilled much the same duties. I again shared accommodation with a couple of fellow officers, in a small, old bungalow. As we were all on shift work our single cook/houseboy looked after us by having a permanent curry bubbling away all day on the wood burning stove, which he regularly 'topped up' with beef or chicken and added more spices as and when necessary; fortunately, we all loved the dish especially served hot and fiery! And he had no problem with dessert, and simply served up bananas and custard every day!

On one sunny Saturday afternoon in Limbe, the station was relatively empty, with myself being the only British officer on duty, and with most constables out on patrol, the station was very lightly manned. I was enjoying the quiet when suddenly was disturbed by a lot of noise outside. I went to investigate and found two of my constables facing an angry mob which grew in numbers and hostility as I stood there. It wasn't clear what they were angry about but there was a lot of shouting and waving of sticks, and it looked as if they were about to do some damage. A small van was parked at the entrance to the station, and I climbed up



onto its roof, which when seen by the mob caused a momentary lull while they tried to work out what this white police officer was up to, especially as I had no backing, and clearly was unarmed. (We didn't carry guns in those days, as we found it unnecessary, and as mentioned earlier, my own revolver was kept in an unlocked sock drawer.) The one thing I had learned in my time in Nyasaland was that a smile and a joke often worked much better than any threats and the use of force, so I used the opportunity of this brief respite to point to an obvious leader of this growing mob, a fellow who was agitating the people around him to do something more than just stand there and shout. He had on a very bright but ragged red shirt, and I pointed to this and in my barely adequate Chinyanja (now known as Chichewa) said that I rather liked his shirt and would like to buy it off him. This caused everybody to look towards the man and to quickly realise that there was humour in my remark and that the joke was on this fellow, resulting in a potentially ugly situation turning to laughter. After everything had quietened down, I later found out that the man at the centre of the mob's anger had been discovered stealing from a store-holder in the market, and was being brought to the police station when more and more people had gathered round and got very excited. As they were dragging the fellow out of the market, some started beating him and soon the crowd turned into a mob, and was further agitated by the troublemaker out to do damage. But once the thief was handed over to the two constables and taken to a cell, everything returned to normal. Not a great event in the life of a colonial police officer but one which lent strength to the argument that sometimes a smile is more effective than a gun!

Shortly after this, I was offered the chance of acquiring more 'modern' accommodation, which had been empty for a few months. Prior to moving in, I visited the flat, but on leaving after spending some ten minutes inspecting the rooms, felt something itching on my legs and on looking down saw that my long uniform socks were covered in fleas, which had bred and multiplied in the parquet flooring! I quickly arranged to have the place thoroughly fumigated. I was soon joined by two other officers to share the flat, one of whom had been posted from

Karonga in the north of the country and brought with him his three year old female mongrel, named 'Manganjeza' (meaning 'ankle bells' in the local language) who prior to being neutered had spent most of its life pregnant. Although pleasant and friendly enough, the dog was quite useless, but had taught one trick; when told 'Zomba ladies' the animal would immediately lay on its back with its legs wide open!

During my time in Limbe, I befriended Brian Blatch, a young Nyasaland Civil Service Officer, and we spent much time in his well appointed bungalow listening to his fine collection of modern jazz records and talking politics. On one memorable afternoon while playing pokey-die, we were joined by Nadine, the rather attractive wife of a local magistrate who having just finished playing tennis was still wearing her very revealing shorts and top. And perhaps because she was French and had less qualms about such matters, soon made it clear that she was up for another sort of game, and proposed that the two of us should play a



game of pokey-die to see who would be the 'winner' of her favours. Being two lonely bachelors, we did so with enthusiasm - and I won, whereupon Brian claimed that house rules would apply, meaning that we would have to play the best of three! The next two games were won by Brian, but as the pair of them set off for his bedroom, the lady glanced back over her shoulder with a shrug and a look

which said 'perhaps another time' (which never occurred as shortly after I was posted to Zomba). But the incident certainly had no adverse affect on my friendship with Brian, and although we remained in contact throughout my time in the country, after my move from Limbe we were able to meet less often, and the last I heard of him was that he had married the famous and very attractive 'baby doll', the unobtainable object of desire for the vast majority of young police inspectors in Zomba!

Before I leave Brian I must record just one more, albeit rather small memory of him. After he became District Commissioner in Mulanje, a small town on the Mozambique border and the centre of the country's tea industry, he would have to travel some forty miles to visit the Blantyre Club in order to watch the films shown on a Saturday night. One night, after viewing the film 'Psycho', which was all the rage at the time, Brian returned to his isolated bungalow, but on arriving home after midnight and having a couple of drinks to recover from the famous 'shower scene', refused his servant's offer to run him a bath!