

Police Service in Kasungu

By Christopher Bean

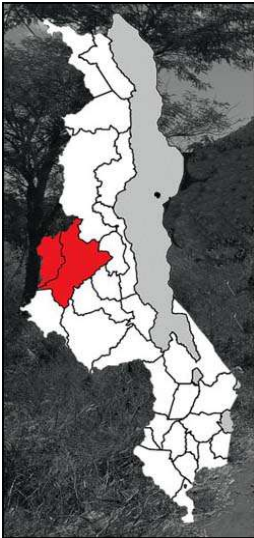
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One day I was called into the Officer in Charge's office and told that I was to be transferred from Mlanje to a command of my own at Kasungu in the Central Province. A couple of weeks later I set off on the drive north followed by a three-ton truck with my belongings piled on the back with Zebio on top of the whole lot.

Although Kasungu was a much larger district than Mlanje, it didn't have anything like the same size population. Large areas formed part of the Kasungu Game Reserve, which was unfenced and there was

quite a lot of large rivers. The whole length of the western of the district side was contiguous with Northern Rhodesia. There was a great deal of game of all kinds including the big five, that is elephant, rhino, lion, leopard and buffalo both within and without the game reserve. Having a smaller population to service, the boma staff was correspondingly smaller than that in Mlanje. There were only seven families, with no children resident, in the boma and the rest of the white population in the district could not have numbered more than a couple of hundred, if that, being tobacco farmers, groundnut farmers and quasi-government marketing board officials.



Topographically it was not too interesting, being composed mainly of mopani bush, and dambos, (vleis or water meadows), a kind of savannah type country. Immediately south of the boma about two miles away a large koppie (a conical pointed hill) dominated the landscape. This was known, fairly kindly as Kasungu Mountain and was in fact one thousand feet above the surrounding land. A pinprick after what I was accustomed to in Mlanje!

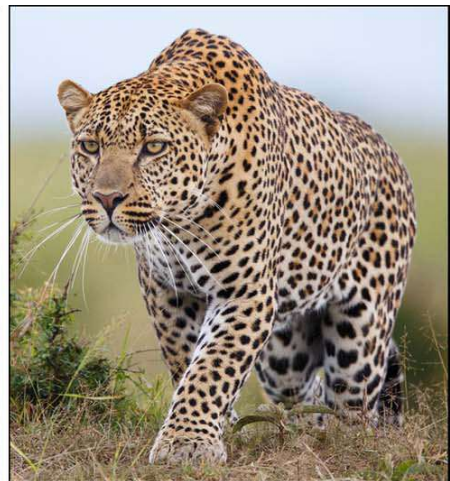
Kasungu's main claim to fame was that it was the birthplace of Hastings Banda and as a result he came there quite often. We were always notified of his intended visits and I met him on a number of occasions. He later had a massive palace constructed on the slopes of the mountain but this was after my time.

Another sidelight on Banda was shown when he ordered the very best Mercedes Benz 600 through the local agents, R.W. Gunston Ltd. I was

fortunate enough to be in Gunstons when the car arrived accompanied by a top mechanic from the factory in Germany. It was the custom of both Mercedes and Rolls Royce at the time when an ordered car such as the top Merc. or a Roller arrived at its destination, for a telegram to be sent to the factory whereupon a mechanic would be dispatched forthwith to unpack the car from its packing case, put it on the road and teach whoever was to take care of the car, how to look after it. The mechanic showed me round the car and it was truly a magnificent vehicle with every possible feature of fitted. When Gunston submitted the bill for payment, however, it was ignored. After repeated requests eventually Banda's office replied that they were not responsible for the payment as Banda considered the car a gift from 'the grateful people of the German Democratic Republic!' They had to write it off and I do not know who eventually met the cost, either Mercedes, Gunston's or the German government.

Whilst on the subject of luxury cars I must recount the tale of the Provincial Education Officer in Dedza in the Central Province. He drove an incredible car considering the roads and terrain he had to traverse. It was a black 1928 Rolls Royce. You could not get the proper tyres for it in Nyasaland and so ran it on a set of tractor front wheel tyres, the kind with longitudinal ribs round them. One time, the P.E.O. decided that his gearbox was whining and wanted to fix it himself. He did maintain the car himself and so wrote to Rolls Royce in England, explaining that he had a 1928 of Roller, chassis and engine number supplied, with then 250,000 miles on the clock and he felt the gearbox was whining. Both the gearbox and the differential were sealed units and he could not get into them. Would Rolls Royce please give him instructions as to how to get into the gearbox and what to do. Their response was brief, to the point and arrogant and he had it framed on the wall of his office afterwards. It said words to the effect 'Dear Sir, if you own a 1928, Rolls Royce with 250,000 miles on the clock, the gearbox and the differential are not whining. Yours faithfully etc.' What confidence!

Crime in the district was much less spectacular and violent than Mlanje and comprised of the usual offences against property, lesser crimes against the person and far fewer murders. The major difference was the incidence of death by wild animals. Herds of elephants roamed the area and at the right time of the year would raid the villagers' maize fields, destroying an entire village's staple food for one year in one evening. In attempting to drive them off it was not unusual for a man to get too close to an elephant and it would turn and kill him, trampling him into the ground, sometimes after tearing him in half! We



used to have to go out and literally pick up the pieces if the hyenas had not got there first. Along the banks of the bigger rivers villagers would get in the way of hippo returning to the water after a night's foraging and is well known how dangerous it is to get between a hippo and water. One snap in passing and the villager would be halved! It is said that hippo are responsible for killing more people than any other animal in Africa. Around the rivers also crocodiles took their usual percentage of life. Marauding lion and leopard were occasionally responsible for killings and we still had the hyena problem, albeit not on the Mlanje scale.

Poaching was also a big problem and as I was the ex officio also the Local Game Control Officer this took up quite a lot of my time, although I enjoyed immensely being out amongst the game. The Africans, quite understandably, could not see why they could not kill wild animals for food. The game belonged to no one, it was roaming on free land, they had always lived on it, there being virtually no beef in the area, only a few sheep, and they thought it was there for the taking, You could in fact buy a Resident's game license for five pounds as I did and with this could shoot an enormous variety and amount of meat, but they didn't see why they should. Five pounds also represented a large percentage of the rural African's income! When we caught them, we had to take them to court and I always felt sorry for them.

One case in particular remains in my mind though, and this was a party which was hunting elephant, for meat. I will digress for a moment and say that it never ceased to amaze me that we could walk for many hours hunting game (legally), and be many miles from the nearest village and, as soon as we shot something, within an hour or so there would be many Africans appearing from the bush, 'to help you cut up and carry the meat back, bwana!' How they knew we had shot something I never learned. Bush telegraph!

So, this group of Africans were hunting elephant for meat, and an elephant would provide food for the large village for a long time. They rarely had proper firearms and often used snares, even for elephant, a very cruel method of hunting, but they did obtain rudimentary and home made guns. These were made of a simple length of piping, a roughly hewn stock and some primitive firing mechanism using black powder. They would pack the barrel (tube) with wadding of some kind, pour in any kind of chunks of metal they could find, nuts and bolts or whatever, pack it again with wadding and set off to look for some prey. The guns had no range and very little hitting power and were obviously extremely dangerous, and illegal. The party in question found their elephant and crept closer to it. The designated gunman had to creep right up to the elephant's side without it seeing him, place the gun against its side and fire it. In this instance, the gun exploded, succeeded in killing the elephant, which promptly fell on the gunman killing him. When we got there, we first had to organise the cutting up of the elephant before we could recover the squashed body of the gunman. Not much problem with a pm there either!

I found that the boma at Kasungu was plagued with hyenas which scavenged around the houses at night. Nothing vaguely edible was left outside the houses by the owners or it would be eaten. Cured skins left over the back of verandah furniture lasted very briefly and dustbins had to be securely fastened down. I volunteered to try and eradicate the



nuisance. It was believed that some of them hung out in the donga (dried up river bed) behind the D.C.'s house, coming out to forage at night. One night I ventured into the donga carrying a twelve bore shot gun and wearing a night-light. This was a hunting lamp attached to the forehead, not unlike a miner's lamp. It picked up dozens of pairs of eyes, night apes, genet cats, buck and others between which I was not that time able to differentiate. Eventually I spotted a pair of eyes which I felt were big enough and bright enough to be those of a hyena. I let go with the shotgun and the eyes disappeared at once. Sure I had it I went closer and found to my dismay that

there, stone dead, was the D.C.'s Siamese cat! I fled the area and when I began to hear stories of the disappearance of the cat, was one of the most concerned! I never told anybody about this of course but I would have been finished with the DC had this become known.

The hyenas continued to raid chicken houses and were an absolute nuisance. During this time I became an avid hunter, there being so much game in Kasungu, and the whole time I lived there, I lived on game meat, there being little more than sheep or chickens to eat. Although hunting is much frowned on these days, one has to remember that this was nearly fifty years ago and there was very abundant game in much of central and east Africa. Hunting, with a licence, was legal and a way of life and I hunted three or four times a week, always for meat. I only once shot anything that could not be eaten, otherwise it was for food or protection of people or livestock.

Although in Kasungu area there was virtually every kind of game animal to be found, some were more rare than others. Sable antelope, now fully protected and quite rare, as are roan antelope, were very common and I shot quite a few, Eland, the biggest of all antelope, often larger than cows were not common and ran in herds varying in size from

twenty or thirty to over a hundred. They made superb eating. I was there for some time before I got my first eland and when I did, its horns and skullcap were mounted on a wooden plaque to adorn the walls of my khonde alongside previous kills. Not pc today I know but the norm in those days. Not long after I proudly mounted the horns on my

khonde walls I was having my breakfast one day when I noticed that the horns were no longer there. Instead were two large muddy paw marks. The mfisi (hyena) had pinched them. I was furious. The fact that they were so green and hadn't cured had attracted the mfisi. I decided to set up a trap gun on my khonde and bait it with a sheep's head. This consisted simply of lashing a loaded, cocked shotgun to a framework I erected outside my front door and securing the sheep head to the muzzle of the shotgun. From the sheep's head ran a cord, around the back of the trigger guard and then tied to both triggers of the shotgun. The theory being that when the mfisi pulled



the head off the gun, it would pull the string thus discharging both barrels into the mfisi's head and killing it. The thing worked usually although it was my first attempt.

However, I had just gone to bed and sleep when I was awoken by a load knocking on my front door. Thinking this was hardly likely to be the hyena knocking I screamed. 'Don't



move an inch' and ran down my passage to the front door. Standing there was another police officer, one David Searle, travelling to the north and looking for a shelter for the night. I lighted a lantern, all the while adjuring him not to move and carefully let him in. Once in I disarmed the shotgun and showed him what a narrow escape he had had. I must say we were both somewhat pale by the thought of what might have happened. Never before or again did somebody

come to my door in the night and it was a one off, but what a tragedy it could have been.

It can be seen that the mfisi were winning this battle and I was determined they wouldn't so I developed another ploy. I went to the market and purchased a whole ox head. In the evening I tied it with a rope to the tailgate of the Police Land Rover and dragged it all round the boma making trails which always led back to my front garden. With some huge stakes I fastened the head down on my front lawn and about ten at night, once the boma had bedded down, wrapped myself in a blanket on the roof of the khonde, armed with a large headlamp and my shotgun. I was sure that the mfisi would come and I was close enough to let him have a full blast from the shotgun. Well, I sat there from about ten at night until four the next morning and not a thing moved. Tired disappointed I climbed down and went to bed for a couple of hours. I was up just after six and lo and behold, score yet again to the mfisi. The head was totally gone, not a shred of bone or meat left. I had done my best, it was not good enough and the mfisi won the final battle. I gave up after this!



Hunting was my major occupation in Kasungu, whatever the season, and I walked many miles. I would get up at about four o'clock, drive to a known hunting area, pick up one or two hunting boys who knew the area and walk out from the village. Sometimes we would walk a whole day, perhaps ten or twelve hours, without seeing anything, maybe twenty or thirty miles, others, we would walk, perhaps only an hour and shoot something. This we would butcher, carry back to the village and the Land Rover the meat I wanted, i.e the hind quarters

and the fillets, putting the rest up a tree away from the fisi and under cover so the vultures could not see it. The villagers would then return to collect the balance of the meat, really the major portion, for their own use. My policemen used to get a good share and my friends and I also shared the rest. I once shot three kudu one morning and I counted that 84 people eat from them.

One of my favourite areas was a village called Linyangwa and this was the closest village to the reserve. The boundary of the reserve was a dambo (water meadow) stretching several miles called Lisitu. The game of course didn't know it represented the edge of the area where they were safe so it was a good hunting area. The Africans used to burn off the grass in the dry season and, about ten days after the burning, green shoots used to come through, and this attracted game. On Christmas Eve 1959 I promised my policemen that I would shoot a couple of buck for their Christmas dinner and off I went to Linyangwa. My hunting boys were Richard Shaba and Sikh Banda, both employed as game guards by the Game Dept. and, as they patrolled every day, they knew where we were most likely to find game. In the middle of the afternoon we were following fresh tracks of a herd of hartebeest when we walked into a dense thicket. In the middle of which war had broken out! There was a large explosion of sound and disturbance of the bush and my main impression was of this huge black backside disappearing out of the far side of the thicket. We had walked right on top of a resting black rhino and were very lucky it left in the direction it did, not our direction! No meat for the polisi that Christmas! We left discreetly.

The game guards were very confident with wild animals, being in contact with them every day and were armed with only .303 rifles, really quite useless for game. I was walking one morning with Richard Shaba on Lisitu again when we came round a corner we saw seven

lion about twenty yards from us! It was my first encounter with lion and I was riveted to the spot. Not so Richard Shaba. He instantly pulled off his hat and waving it ran straight at the lion shouting 'Ndili mantu'. Literally 'I am a man'. The lion straight away all turned tail and ran away as fast as they could. I was filled



with admiration but never tried that stunt myself. The lion of course weren't hungry, are very idle, and perceived Richard as a threat. The best bet for them was to run!

Lion were not that common in Kasungu although I saw quite a few over my time there, but I used to see them often on the back of a Landrover when I went to Lilongwe, our provincial capital, for shopping. Lilongwe was about seventy miles from Ford Manning on the Northern Rhodesia border. On the other side of the border was Ford Jameson. Fort Jameson was on the edge of what was and still is one of the best game reserves in Africa, the Luangwa Valley. The residents of the Ford Jameson area also used to come to Lilongwe to do their shopping and amongst them was a chap called Norman Carr, a game ranger in Luangwa. He had picked up two abandoned male lion cubs when they were very young and adopted them and brought them up. They went everywhere with him but when he came to Lilongwe they had to be confined. He had a kind of cage built onto the back of his Landrover and used to leave these two lion, named Big Boy and Little Boy, who are very big by the time I saw them, in the back of the Landrover whilst he did his shopping. Nobody of course went near his vehicle and the lion just lazed and slept in the back. He probably did the same to job as George Adamson in Kenya, but didn't enjoy, and probably didn't want, the same publicity.

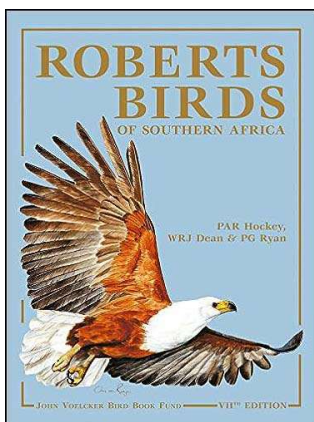
Kasungu had joint border with Northern Rhodesia and I was told that just over the border at a place called Lundazi, level with Kasungu was a full-scale castle on a lake where it was possible to get a very good meal and to fish in the lake. I got a local African to guide me along small tracks and eventually emerged on a road which led to this castle. What an incongruous sight it was, stuck there in the middle of the bush. In fact, it was just a government rest house built by the local D.C. who happen to have a flair for the exotic. It

was very authentic and beautiful and set on the side of a large dam full bream and, as one fished game was constantly coming down to drink on the far side of the dam. I took the opportunity to visit the Lundazi boma and introduce myself to a very surprised white Police inspector who was my oppo, albeit a hundred miles or so away.



An interesting event for the Nyasaland Police occurred, whilst I was at Kasungu. Following discussion between the government of Nyasaland and the British Government it was realised, as a result of the emergency, that the practice of having only one white police officer on most stations, with the black police maybe not being 100% reliable, was not good for security. The situation was changed immediately in the short term by drafting in a number of white assistant inspectors from the Northern Rhodesian Police. one was sent to me in Kasungu. I have to confess that he was not much use at all, and in conference with my colleagues we found we all felt the same. The feeling was that the NRP had sent along the chaps they could most easily do without because they were no good. There was not much support from them and the one I had with me managed to lose my dog on the mountain in the end!

However this situation changed dramatically when we received a large contingent, about seventy, I think, of British police officers on secondment for a year. They were mainly sergeants from forces all over Britain with a few inspectors thrown in for weight. The sgts became temporary Inspectors and Inspectors became temporary Superintendents. They were a great bunch of chops and, although their experience of Africa was totally nil, their police experience was invaluable. I received a Metropolitan Police sgt named Dennis Watson. He was very huge man and strangely for those days, was a white Mohammedan. there was a mosque in Kasungu and he asked me for permission each Friday to change into civilian clothes and attend midday service. He looked so strange, trotting off down the main (the only) road to the mosque wearing his little round white hat. Our black police and locals were intensely intrigued by the whole situation.



Dennis was a lovely man though and he stayed with me in my house and we had a lot of fun together. He was also an avid-birdwatcher, accustomed to the Essex marshes. The bird life in Nyasaland was and is stupendous and he thought he was in heaven. He had thought to provide himself with Roberts Book on Birds of Southern Africa, the bible in Africa for bird watchers, and so well prepared for identification.

This was especially useful for me because I used to do a lot of duck shooting at Kasungu. We had two large rivers, the Buwa and the Rusa which merged on a huge wetland, about thirty miles from the boma and we used to go down before dawn, get ourselves

hidden in the reeds on the edge of the river and wait for dawn to come. Prolific is an inadequate word to describe the wealth of bird life there, and Dennis was in paradise. With his large binoculars he was able to see a bunch of this or that coming down the river about two hundred yards away and I could be prepared. Although I offered him a gun he would not shoot. We could easily bring back up to a hundred birds for a morning's shooting and

the cook boy and his friends had a busy time, plucking, gutting and preparing the birds for the deep freeze. We soon got through them because if we had people for dinner and cooked duck for them, we always cooked twice as much as we needed because one never knew how many 'rubber' ducks one had. When you are shooting at a flight of duck, you can't tell which are the young ones and which ones the old tough 'uns. Likewise you don't have time to pick out the pretty ones! The excess birds never went to waste, as they

were good to eat cold, and of course the cookboy got his share! One problem with shooting duck there was that the rivers were full of crocodiles and if you knocked a bird down in the water, it stayed there. For a short while only when with a rush it would disappear under the water grabbed by some foraging croc. We could not use dogs of



course because the crocs would have got the dogs. We tried therefore to knock them down over the land. The shooting as a whole in Kasungu was great but the duck shooting would make almost any English duck shooter totally green with envy.

One experience I had at Kasungu, whilst I am sure was not unique for a police officer, was certainly unusual. Normally we come in on the scene of suicide or attempted suicide after the event but in this case I actually witnessed the attempt. We had In Nyasaland a number of Farmers' Marketing Boards which purchased produce from farmers, often at a controlled price, and sold the produce on. In Kasungu the Farmers Marketing Board, (FMB) handled tobacco and groundnuts grown by the local Africans. Elsewhere it might be cotton or coffee. There are two main types of tobacco produced, flue cured where the picked tobacco leaves are cured in huge tall barns in a controlled temperature and humidity



and sun-dried, used by the Africans where the tobacco leaves are simply laid out on racks in the sun left to dry naturally. The latter is purchased by the FMB whilst the former was sold directly on the auction floors in Limbe. When the tobacco and groundnut seasons come round, the local offices of the FMB carry very large amounts of money. Often on an open three ton truck they would transport from Lilongwe to Kasungu several hundred thousand pounds in cash so the FMB could buy the produce. It was a lot of money then and is even now. I often marvelled that nobody ever thought to knock it off! The border was not far away and with the poor communications then existing a thief could very easily be out of the country before the theft was discovered. I never heard of it happening though but I would give it a life span of five minutes on the road now! The local manager was a great friend of mine

called George Perry and he was assisted by a nice little chap called Cecil Stone. One day George came to my office and told me he discovered during the course of a random audit that several thousand pounds had been embezzled from their funds by very primitive means, and it was obvious that Cecil Stone had done it. He had tackled him and Cecil had admitted the theft and had retired to his house and was drinking. George and I then drove down to Cecil's house where we found him knocking back brandies and coke steadily. I discussed the situation with him and he was very morose. He kept getting up and refurbishing his drink and after one such visit to his bar, he sat down and said something to the effect that he was done for now and would end his life. Saying which he took another swig of his drink, emptying the glass. I said 'Don't be silly Cecil, we'll sort something out' and he said 'Too late, I've done it' I asked him what he had done and he said the glass he had just drunk contain poison. He wouldn't tell us what it was so we looked around and found an empty tube of rat poison containing phosphorus. We asked him if this was what he had taken and he said he had put the whole tube in his last drink. I dashed back to the local hospital and found that the doctor, the district commissioner's wife, was away

shopping in Lilongwe. The black medical aid at the hospital told us that the best we could do was to stomach-pump poor Cecil. He wouldn't attempt the job himself, but gave us the equipment and a large quantity of permanganate of potash, purple in colour, which he said was an antidote to phosphorus. I took this back to Cecil's house by which time he had lost consciousness, although I believe this was due to the alcohol rather than poison. Anyway, George and I had to force the tube down his throat until we thought we had reached his stomach and then pump gallons, or so it seemed, of this purple liquid down him. It immediately all came back up, presumably, with the phosphorus and he regained a very shaky consciousness. A couple of hours later we took him through to the bigger hospital in Lilongwe from where he was discharged the next day. FMB did not prosecute him, and he paid back the money which was missing and that was an end to the matter. I found it rather bizarre at the time though, to have witnessed him actually trying to take his own life.

