

Fred Dale

by Barry Thorne

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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 the other leading Malawi Politicians were arrested.

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 up in his hand with a hot end towards the palm so when he drew on it, any glow was shielded, and was a method favoured while on the beat 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 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 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 week later as if nothing had happened.

