

# It was that Strip of Water that did It

By Terry Young

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Sixty years ago, there was no Internet, TV was in its infancy, communications were at the very best primitive. Africa to many was still the Dark Continent, the earth had not shrunk to the size it is now. It was there on the school atlas, it was a colourful addition to any globe, but Nyasaland was such a small part of it that it was barely noticeable in the general pink colouring of the then British Empire. My journey there had its roots in childhood when, during the war and shortly afterwards, from about 1940 until 1947, I was lucky enough to living in a fine

mansion on a country estate in Monmouthshire set in the hills above the Wye Valley. My mother was lucky enough to be caretaking the place for the owner, namely Brig. Gen (Retd.) C. J. Hobkirk, CMG, DSO, who had served in the South African War and then in India as well as being Military Attaché in Rome and Bern. Consequently the place was a veritable museum with a multitude of artefacts, pictures, books and much more to impress and intrigue the young, inquisitive mind.



It was there, then, that the seeds of adventure were surely sown. They began to sprout whilst reading the diaries of Scott of the Antarctic, but his privations and being cut off for some months during the severe winter of 1946/1947 dampened any desire to spend time in such a cold, icy climate.

Formal education at Monmouth School kept one's ambitions at a high level and it was whilst there that I read Van der Post's *Venture to the Interior*. However, on leaving school,

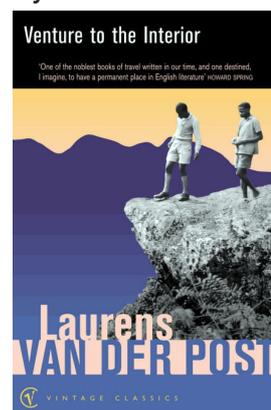


my main concern became how I could best spend my two years National Service service with any sort of interest and by opting for the Royal Marines I may or may not have done the right thing but serving in 45 Commando RM in Malta, Cyprus, Libya and Algeria only increased the desire for further travel and, indeed, adventure.

On demobilisation and having been trained as a radio operator in the Marines I considered similar in the Merchant Navy but took a job in radio navigation and it was then, bored beyond belief and ready to rejoin the Marines, that like a bolt from the blue I saw the advert for the Colonial Police - Bermuda, Hong Kong and, there it was, Nyasaland.

*Venture to the Interior* immediately came to mind. However, what about Bermuda and Hong Kong? Bermuda, surely an island paradise but far too civilised, I thought, and it looked like very routine police work and Hong Kong - just a big town and no place for a country boy. So, what about Nyasaland? It seemed to tick the right boxes, surely it was a post demanding something more than routine coppering and then there was the lake.

That, I thought, had to be worth seeing and if anything it was that stretch of water that tipped the balance - and it was never to disappoint me.



At no time, as a single man, did I consider family implications; my parents were fit and able, they had no daughter-in-law and not any prospect of one, no grandchildren for them to spoil and, aware that I would be back for leave from time to time, they were entirely supportive of my decision to leave the Welsh countryside. Although in retrospect, *Venture to the Interior* left me with an impression of Nyasaland that was nothing like it proved to be in reality, my memories of that country and its pleasant, likeable people remain among my most treasured memories.

