

# Trapped by the Gubernatorial Sword

by Eric Bult

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'Guard of Honour, stand at ease!' The words of command by the Parade Commander rang out in the stillness of the sweltering midday heat, and the triple ranks of the King's African Rifles on parade at Chileka airport crashed their boots in perfect unison on the only concrete area in the whole airport. It would be difficult to imagine how anyone could be at ease under such conditions. The temperature in the shade of the lounge at the terminal building had reached above 90 degrees F and the prospect of a further hour on parade in their full ceremony dress was sufficient to daunt the most sun baked soldier.



The Viscount aircraft carrying the British Secretary of State for the Colonies was on its final approach, and His Excellency the Governor, Sir Geoffrey Colby, accompanied by his Aide de Camp, and His Honour the Chief Justice of Nyasaland moved out from the veranda into the glare of the noonday sun, in preparation for the official greeting of the VIP. Despite the protection of his white helmet adorned with ostrich feathers, the Governor was clearly uncomfortable in his full ceremony address. The Chief Justice was sweating profusely under his long wig and his gold-edged Scarlet robe seemed to absorb the heat.

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It was the year 1953 and three Central African territories - Southern and Northern Rhodesia and Nyasaland - were soon to be joined in a federation. It was to prepare for that momentous event that the Secretary of State had arrived for discussions with senior officials and members of the Legislative Council.

When at last the welcome was over and the inevitable inspection of the parade had ended, several officials and notables were introduced before the entire body of thankful and thirsty people moved into the terminal building and made for the refreshment lounge. Some time later, as the Chief Justice accompanied the group to the exit, he was heard to remark 'That's two points lost and two points replaced'.

The Governor's Rolls Royce with his standard mounted on the gleaming bodywork, was awaiting him and his guest outside the terminal building. The Guard of Honour was once again drawn up on the far side. As they approached the car the Aide de Camp opened the door to allow the Secretary of State to enter. He was followed by the Governor, an imposing man well over six feet in height, who needed to stoop low to clear his feathered

helmet beneath the car's roof. Before he seated himself, the A de C closed the door - onto the the ceremonial sword in its scabbard on the belt of his Excellency.

The pageant which followed is indelibly etched in my memory. H.E was unable to move from his stooped position within the saloon car, despite obvious attempts to pull himself free. The A de C frantically tugged at the door to release the entrapped sword but was spectacularly unsuccessful. Clearly, the quality of the Rolls Royce bodywork was more than a



match for the decorative sword held fast by the door. The troops of the K.A.R, manfully attempted to contain their amusement until the motorcade disappeared in clouds of dust on the road to Blantyre.

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Perhaps this episode appropriately presaged the eventual demise of the Central African Federation.