

The Government House Police Guard

By Christopher Bean

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In January 1958 I had a brief closer encounter with H.E. (Sir Robert Armitage) and Government House. The guard for the house and grounds was provided by the Kings African Rifles, of which one battalion was stationed in Lusaka and one in Zomba. Every three years they rotated and when this rotation took place they were too busy to provide the Government House guard and at which time the Police Mobile Force took over the responsibility. This involved much serious practising and a number of teams were selected and trained. Apart from having to patrol the grounds of Government House, they also provided the Guard of Honour at the main entrance. As one of the officers charged with being Officer-in-Charge of the Guard, I was shown the interior of the house in order to be able to quickly get to the seat of any incident so I saw a lot more of the house than many of my colleagues.



From a point of view of show, the Guard of Honour was the most important and we spent many hours practising the turnout and salute. The way this worked was that when the Governor was about to leave the house (left), somebody telephoned down to the guard house and said he was leaving shortly. The sergeant on duty would keep his eyes sharply open and as the Rolls-Royce came round the last bend of trees and hove into

view, a quick order and out would tumble the guard, dress smartly from the right and as the car passed, they would present arms. Afterwards it was slope arms and back into the guard house until his return.

A very simple little ceremony but our OC, Jeoff York, insisted it had to be perfect in every respect. So we rehearsed and rehearsed at one of the Police Camp guard houses and I usually took part of the Governor and drove my little Ford Consul past the guard. I would sit about two hundred yards back when they were ready to turn out, York would wave his swagger stick and leather gloves (he always dressed for the part) at me and I would sedately approach and out would turn the guard. The Ford Consul started with a button under the centre of the fascia which one pulled to start the motor. On one occasion, I pulled the button on York's signal, and 'it came off in me and Guv'. I was left with a button and about a yard of thin steel cable and a stationary car. York, who was pretty choleric at the best of times, was virtually frothing at the mouth and waving frantically. Eventually a runner was dispatched to ascertain the problem and shortly afterwards, four strong constables came to give me a push. A not very auspicious start to the event but in fact it all went swimmingly.

Christopher Bean 2008



Christopher reviews the Guard



H.E. Sir Robert Armitage