



### **Don Hargreaves**

Don served in the Nyasaland Police from 1960 to 1962 and was mainly employed in Special Branch. However, whilst a member of the Northern Rhodesia Police he was detached to Nyasaland for some six months with a Platoon of the Mobile Unit during the emergency in 1959. Deployed to the Lilongwe District the following are extracts from his Memoirs.

#### **Security Operation in the Lilongwe area**

During the 1959 State of Emergency, we carried out a very successful intelligence led operation against anti-government extremists in the Lilongwe area. A few days later one of the African villagers asked to see me and complained that his cash savings had been stolen from his hut during the operation. After questioning the complainant at length, I concluded he was telling the truth. In view of the fact that the Platoon was heavily committed to carry out further important operations, I summoned Sergeant Ali, my excellent Platoon Sergeant, who was a Zanzibari, and ex KAR. I briefed him on what the complainant said and told him that I wanted the money returned and put in an envelope and placed in the glove compartment of my Land Rover by 0600 hrs the following morning, failing which a robust criminal investigation would be launched involving all members of the platoon to identify the perpetrators. When I checked my vehicle the following morning, I was pleased to find an envelope with the money in it which was returned to a very grateful complainant. While an unorthodox solution to the problem it served its purpose and allowed the platoon to complete the important operations assigned to it successfully and I think it served to improve the honesty and integrity of all members of the platoon.



Shortly afterwards, it was Ramadan, so I gave Sergeant Ali and other Muslim members of the platoon three days leave to celebrate Eid al Fattah. I bought them a goat and other Islamic fare which they appreciated. They subsequently returned on time, refreshed and full of vigour for new tasks ahead.

#### **Invitation to a wedding in Salisbury**

During this period, I received an invitation, via Pearl my future wife, to a close friend's wedding, which was to take place in Salisbury, Rhodesia. I sounded out my Divisional Commander in Lilongwe and to my surprise he kindly gave me a weekend's leave, on the understanding that I would be back on duty the following Monday.

In those days it was not easy to get a last-minute flight to Salisbury. However, a friend who was an officer in the Royal Rhodesian Airforce (RRAF) and operating in Lilongwe in support of the State of Emergency, kindly arranged for me to get a seat on a RRAF flight going to Salisbury that Friday. However, he could not guarantee a return flight from Salisbury to Lilongwe. Nevertheless, I attended the wedding and had a wonderful weekend in Salisbury. On the Monday morning I telephoned the RRAF Headquarters in Salisbury and was told that the only flight going to Nyasaland was to Blantyre on the Wednesday. Being desperate to get back, I turned up at RRAF Transport Command, Salisbury unannounced and joined the group of military personnel waiting to board the RRAF flight to Nyasaland. When it was my turn, I was asked my name by an air force officer. When he said I was not on his list, I explained that I was returning to my platoon which was operational in Lilongwe, which seemed to satisfy him.

On arrival at Blantyre Airport, I discovered that a Beaver Aircraft was about to Leave for Lilongwe. I paid £20 for a ticket and we took off and some 200 miles later I arrived at Lilongwe. My deputy, who had been covering for me, picked me up at the airport and to my surprise told me that nobody had been enquiring about me! While I was away, he had continued to carry out patrols of the tobacco estates and everything had passed off without incident. When I eventually met the Divisional Commander a few days later in the Officers Mess, he invited me and others to have a game of snooker during which he asked "by the way how was the wedding in Salisbury". I quickly responded with " It was a great success, thank you sir, your shot"

### **Liaison trips to Mbeya, Tanganyika**

Every three months, during my service in the Nyasaland Police, I used to fly by Beaver Aircraft from Karonga to Mbeya for liaison meetings with my British opposite number in the Tanganyika Police Special Branch. Mbeya was an attractive colonial high altitude town set in the midst of pine forests with a pleasant climate. During such flights some areas below were teeming with game so the CAA pilot, who became a good friend, would fly low over herds of elephant, zebra and buck. We would spend the night at the Railway Hotel, an excellent old colonial hotel in the town centre.

On one return flight to Karonga it started to rain very heavily and as we came into land at Karonga, the grass runway was awash with rain water making it difficult for the pilot to slow the aircraft down. Everything happened at speed. We soon ran out of grass runway and suddenly approached a road with moving vehicles. The pilot muttered something rude and managed to rev up the engine which lifted the plane over the road and some stores before the engine cut out and we crashed nose down into a swamp. By the



grace of God, we were unhurt except for a few bruises. I was covered in potatoes which I had bought in Mbeya.

A CAA enquiry followed and the crash was put down to bad weather conditions. After a short suspension, my pilot friend was back and we resumed our visits to Mbeya.

#### *Notes:*

- (a) See also "Galleries" - The Donald Hargreaves Collection.*
- (b) See also "Then & Now" - Hargreaves, Donald.*