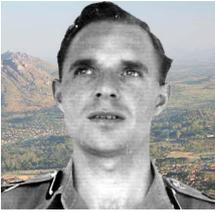


NYASALAND/MALAWI POLICE MEMORIES

By Dick Lancaster

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Indirectly, I can be said to owe my second Colonial Police career to the 'Winds of Change' speech in Ghana and shortly after in South Africa early in 1960 by the then British Prime Minister Harold Macmillan. A by-product of this speech was a minor disturbance outside Ryall's hotel in Blantyre which in turn, resulted in headlines in the Daily Sketch newspaper to the effect that brutal Nyasaland Police had trampled

defenceless African women to the ground. The Press article was accompanied by a photo of a Colonial Police Officer shoe-clad and carrying only an officer's cane, bending to assist an African lady to her feet.

The Officer concerned was a former colleague of mine from the Nigeria Police, Colin Limb. An enquiry ensued headed by the Chief Justice of Nyasaland who concluded that 'the bloodshed in the whole incident would not fill an average mustard spoon'. The photograph accompanying this Press report revealed that the cross belt of the Sam Browne belt in the accompanying photo was over the left and not the right shoulder of the officer. The photo had been reversed. The Express settled out of court. I was offered a posting to Nyasaland having been questioned about this Press report at my Colonial Office interview.

In Nyasaland, I commenced General Duties at Limbe under Superintendent Geoff York, (with the possible significance of our respective surnames) we did not see eye-to-eye and I was soon to become Staff Officer at Police HQ. This was followed by a spell in Special Branch

& finally as the Federal Intelligence and Security Bureau (FISB) representative for Nyasaland - basically the 'private eye' of Federal Government in Nyasaland, with a brief to report events affecting the Federation as a whole (similar situation prevailed in N Rhodesia prior to Independence). I had my own office and secretary in the Nyasaland Police HQ.

There were the occasional interesting situations. When in my office one afternoon, I introduced my own Head of Special Branch (an Assistant Commissioner to the SAPA Reuter reporter from Rhodesia, he appeared to be surprised!

At the time of the Nyasaland General Election, the candidate for the Christian Liberation Party in Nkhata Bay, en route to Mzuzu to register as a candidate, was waylaid in his car; sand put in the petrol tank; beaten and tied to a tree for hours. The facts of this case, as reported in the Nyasaland Police Monthly Report to the UK Government was roughly that 'owing to a vehicle breakdown the CLP candidate was unable to register as a candidate' - so much for unbiased intelligence reports! The Malawi Congress Party of Dr Banda unsurprisingly received over 90% support.

Finally, on Independence, I became Passport Officer in the Immigration Department of the Malawi Police (who took over from the defunct Federal Government). As will be recalled, Dr Banda, not a young man, had strict views on social contact. He was also an Elder of the Church of Scotland.

Macmillan's 'Wind of Change' speech

Britain's empire was slowly dissolving. Ghana (then the Gold Coast) had become independent in 1957. Nigeria would become independent later in 1960. Britain could either hold on to its past glories by force, as France was failing to do, or accept the inevitability of its demise.

Against this background, Conservative Prime Minister, Harold Macmillan, visited South Africa in 1960. On 3rd February he told the South African parliament:

"The wind of change is blowing through this continent, and whether we like it or not, this growth of national consciousness is a political fact. We must all accept it as a fact, and our national policies must take account of it."

BOAC air hostesses were, on arrival at Chileka Airport, required to put on a long skirt - this rule was rigidly imposed throughout the country.

I understand that shortly after its inception, the Railway Club in Limbe held a topless party as an objection!. The length of men's hair was to be above the shoulder and the Immigration Staff at Chileka had scissors to ensure compliance! All went reasonably well until I received a telephone call from the British High Commission one afternoon to proceed forthwith to Chileka airport where a British Government visitor was being refused entry to Nyasaland because of the length of his hair. His job was to visit Colonial Territories and fix their British Government aid for the ensuing year. Dr Banda's law on hair length was conveniently overlooked on this occasion.

We finally left Malawi in 1972 with fond memories of the friends we had made, the opportunity to participate in choral concerts; Gilbert and Sullivan operas and the hope that in some small way we had improved the lives of the people of this beautiful country. We can now remember with joy such times as we join with old colleagues at our annual reunions.



To quote **Mr Justice Southworth** "As far as can be ascertained, the amount of skin lost by both police and demonstrators as a result of injuries received on this occasion would hardly cover the area of one square inch, probably no more than the area of a penny postage stamp; and it does not appear that the amount of blood that was shed would be sufficient to test the capacity of a mustard spoon".