

Piracy on the high seas



Game Guards

Early one morning, I received a report from one of my game guards that a boat had been seen in the national park, and it was suspected that poachers had loaded up the meat and were heading for a town in the east.

I rounded up three game guards, and we headed off in the speedboat in pursuit. We caught up with the target boat a little east of our boundary. It was an old wooden boat about forty feet long, laden with sacks and about twenty people. It was being powered by a small outboard engine. The guards called out for them to stop so we could search the boat. They refused. This made us more suspicious and we demanded in the

name of the law that they stop immediately! "Get stuffed," was the equivalent answer in English. I manoeuvred my boat behind theirs and gave their outboard a little tap with the bow. Their motor stopped! There was consternation and fury onboard the pirate ship. "Throw us a line and we'll tow you to shore," we told them. By this time, they had got the motor going again. "Come near us and we will kill you," was their answer. There

were two options: the prudent one was to back off, the other to enforce the law. In hindsight, I somewhat foolishly chose the latter.

This time, they had a spear man in the stern to protect the motor. I told my men to use the life jackets as shields, gave the boat full throttle and rammed their motor. I saw pieces of their boat fall off, and it stopped. Unfortunately, we were still full steam ahead after the impact and sheared off to the port side of their boat. There was a large splinter of wood sticking out from the side, and our windscreen hooked up on it and held us tight. We were now in dire straits; we were faced with people who were thoroughly enraged and intent on killing us. It became a hand-to-hand fight. We were not armed but knew that surrender was not an option. A youth came at me with an axe, but I managed to ward off the blow and gave him a right hook to the jaw, which dropped him, but others were coming at us and we were in a desperate situation caught in a fight we could not possibly win. Just when we thought it was all over, our boat (which was still on full speed ahead), snapped off the splinter, and we raced away. What a relief that was! We were all alright, apart from a few cuts and bruises. We again offered them a tow, which once again, they again refused. By a stroke of luck, the Nyati Police Boat came into view, and because we were now out of the jurisdiction of our area, we handed the matter over to them. We all returned safely after our little adventure.

A few weeks later I was supervising payday. This was a bit of a mission, as a lot of the labourers couldn't read or write. Everyone was listed on a large sheet of paper, and as they were paid, each had to sign a receipt on the right-hand side on the line with their name. Those who couldn't write had to make a fingerprint. Game guards stood behind me, as there was always discontent on how little they were paid. I could do nothing about this, as all wages were determined by government, but things often became heated.

While in the midst of this particular pay, two men arrived wanting to talk to me. They



African lady

demanding I hand over my passport and said that I was going to be arrested for 'Piracy on the high seas'! I told them my passport was the property of Her Majesty the Queen, and it could not on any account be handed to them. They then wanted me to accompany them to Lusaka. By this time, my guards (who were extremely loyal to me), informed the two men that if they didn't leave, they were going to kill them! They left. However, I could see trouble brewing and I was now very close to finishing my three-year tour. I realised there was going to be trouble over the episode and had tried to smooth things over with the boat owner. I was able to source the spare parts he needed to repair his motor, which after all, was his livelihood. I knew there would be a lot of eyewitness accounts that would paint me as the aggressor, despite it being in the line of duty. To cap it all, the search carried out by the police on the boat revealed no evidence of poaching. I was clearly out on a limb, and for all I knew the archaic charge still carried the death penalty! There was still capital punishment in Zambia. It was scary stuff. I decided I had to be proactive, so I went to see the District Commander of Police, who I knew from the Kasama days, and explained the situation to him in detail. "Don't worry David," he said. "They are just throwing their weight around. Nobody will stop you from going home, and good luck." I was still not certain I wouldn't be stopped at the airport, and so when we got on that plane for England, I was mightily relieved!