

OBITUARY

DONALD CHARLES HALEY

1960-2017

Charlie Haley was a good friend, but he was that to just about everyone he ever met – apart from ivory and rhino poachers.

Born in Mozambique where his father was stationed with Customs and Excise, Charlie grew up and was educated in the then Rhodesia, graduating from Churchill School, where he had excelled in shooting and track and field; it was also here that he learned to play one of his lifelong pleasures, the bagpipes, and he was active in a supporting role when the school's pipe band set the Guinness world record for the longest piping hours – 100 - in 1976.

Following high school, Charlie joined the British South Africa Police on the second of January, 1979, where he would serve with distinction for twenty two years, eventually retiring from the Criminal Investigation Division as officer commanding, forensic ballistics, with the rank of Superintendent.

There was a bush war on at the time, and Charlie initially passed selection into the elite Police Anti-Terrorist Unit (PATU), and it was while serving as the MAG-gunner for his patrol that he was seriously injured in a firefight north of the capitol, Salisbury. Charlie's wounds, which nearly proved fatal at the time, cost him the use of his right leg, and in later life he would have it amputated in favour of a prosthesis.

Following a lengthy recovery, Charlie transferred to CID in a technical capacity, where he was trained in forensic ballistics. During his long career there he investigated firearms-related crimes from the crime scene to the autopsy, and was also called upon to deal with crimes involving explosives and related offences. His unflappable and expert courtroom testimony was decisive in a number of high-profile cases. During most of his tenure in the police, Zimbabwe had exceptionally good laboratory facilities and the police also did forensic investigations for neighbouring countries. Charlie was very proud of the letter of commendation he received from the Chief Justice of the Botswana Supreme Court for services rendered.

It was during his police service that Charlie Haley became involved with National Parks' Chief Warden Glenn Tatham, and Warden Steve Edwards in an anti-poaching operation that, in the late 1980s, literally stemmed the tide of rhino poachers coming across the Zambezi River from Zambia, and gave National Parks the chance it needed to use Operation Stronghold to its best advantage and secure the remaining black rhinos in Intensive Protection Zones. Zimbabwe had a shoot-on-sight policy that had been introduced in 1984, and this three-man team would identify poachers' campsites from observation posts on high

ground and then move in on a compass bearing with night-vision optics, and engage and eliminate the poachers in brief but spirited firefights.

Stemming from a similar operation – code-named Operation Uncle, and described in detail in Mike Bromwich’s book *National Parks and Wildlife Management, Rhodesia and Zimbabwe, 1928-1990* – Charlie dispatched an AK-47-wielding poacher who was subsequently found in possession of six rhino horns. But he was also related to a politician, and Charlie, Glenn and Steve found themselves arrested for murder. The charges were soon dropped, but one evening, sitting at his bar with an 8 x 10 of his mugshot proudly displayed on the wall, Charlie gave me some sage advice. “If you are ever arrested, make sure it’s for murder. Top of the pecking order!” The arrest of the three had more far-ranging consequences, because as a direct consequence National Parks’ Chief Investigation Officer Graham Nott drafted and had passed into law the Zimbabwe (Parks and Wildlife) Indemnity Act in 1989, which precludes the arrest of law enforcement personnel in similar operations.

In 2003, Charlie left the Zimbabwe Republic Police to take on the post of security officer for the British Embassy in Harare, which he held until his retirement in 2016. At the Embassy he was responsible for the security of the embassy itself and the official residences, and also liaison with private security contractors and government security elements.

Outside of the office, Charlie was very active in his local community – his church and various clubs and associations. He was for a time a member of the Mountain Club of Zimbabwe, and regularly played the bagpipes for their annual Burns Night celebrations at Nyanga until the tradition was discontinued.

But it was sport shooting that really held Charlie’s attention. He served at various times on the committees of Cleveland Pistol Club, the Zimbabwe Pistol and Smallbore Association and the Zimbabwe Shooting Sport Federation. He was unquestionably Zimbabwe’s pre-eminent firearms authority and instructor, and together with the late Dr Don Heath he developed the syllabus for civilian small arms training used in Zimbabwe. Don and Charlie also collaborated on two other projects: the course of fire for the National Parks firearms shooting proficiency test – which Charlie ran twice a year until his death – and the book *Hunter’s Guide to Classic African Cartridges*. Charlie was a prolific writer with a lively style and a keen sense of humour, and he also wrote for *MAN Magnum* magazine in South Africa and *African Hunter* in Zimbabwe.

Charlie Haley held Zimbabwe national colours for Bisley Service Rifle, and was a past Zimbabwe national champion in Olympic 50m Free Pistol, Olympic Air Pistol, and Olympic Centre-Fire Pistol. He was, despite the constraints of his bad leg, active on the local circuit in IPSC Practical Pistol for a time, and he also occasionally competed in Metallic Silhouettes events. He was an active member of the Zimbabwe Antique Firearms, Ammunition and Memorabilia Collectors’ Association from its inception.

Charlie was always the first one to offer help and assistance to anyone whenever he could, and he will be sorely missed by all who knew him. He is survived by his wife Sue Brooks-Haley and son Keith, and his daughter Claire in Australia from his first marriage, to Carol Nott.

Rest in peace old friend.

Ira Larivers for *MAN Magnum* magazine in South Africa and *African Hunter*